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# The Anglican Clergy in the Novels of Barbara Pym

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To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Isabel Ashe Bonnyman Stanley entitled "The Anglican Clergy in the Novels of Barbara Pym." I have examined the final electronic copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in English.

Norman J. Sanders, Major Professor

We have read this dissertation and recommend its acceptance:

Richard Penner, B. J. Leggett, Martha L. Osborne

Accepted for the Council:

Carolyn R. Hodges

Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

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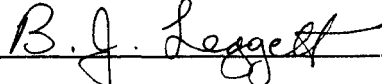
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THE ANGLICAN CLERGY IN THE  
NOVELS OF BARBARA PYM

A Dissertation  
Presented for the  
Doctor of Philosophy  
Degree  
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Isabel Ashe Bonnyman Stanley

December 1990

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DEDICATION  
for Brooke

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I should like to thank the members of my committee-- Dr. Norman Sanders, Dr. Richard Penner, Dr. B. J. Leggett, and Dr. Martha L. Osborne. Dr. Penner's suggestions concerning structure, Dr. Leggett's expertise on Philip Larkin and Dr. Osborne's perspective as a professor of women's studies were all most helpful.

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I hereby acknowledge with thanks the permission granted by Hazel Holt, Literary Executrix of Barbara Pym, and by the Bodleian Library, Oxford, to quote from Barbara Pym's unpublished letters, journals and papers.

## ABSTRACT

Barbara Pym, a mid twentieth-century British novelist of manners, peoples her twelve novels and shorter works with Anglican clergymen and the "excellent women" of a certain age who are their parishoners. This study examines the development of clerical types in her novels, shows how these types are descended from earlier writers such as Jane Austen, the Brontës and Anthony Trollope and traces the fortunes of the mid twentieth-century Anglican Church in her work.

My research was facilitated by having access to Barbara Pym's letters, journals and personal papers in the Bodleian Library, Oxford, and by having the opportunity to interview her sister, Hilary Pym Walton, in Oxford.

In her earliest novels Pym depicts the Anglican clergy as ineffectual and humorous but central to community life. In her middle and later work she traces the decline of the Anglican Church and the rise of the Welfare State, which does not fill the void left by the Church. Pym examines the question, what creates a sense of community and purpose in the modern world? Pym's friend, the poet Philip Larkin, who looks at some of the same issues in his work, shared ideas with her over the years via a large collection of letters, which shed light on the methods both writers were employing.



Barbara Pym finds that the Anglican Church has lost much vigor but does still serve in a modest way as a state church and source of cohesion.

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## INTRODUCTION

Barbara Pym, a mid twentieth-century British novelist of manners, does not conform to modern notions of popularity and taste but has an enormous and devoted following. She developed a readership in England in the 1950's, yet her books did not cross the Atlantic to America at that time because they were considered too British and parochial for supposed American readers. Then as the Beatles and the swinging sixties hit England, Pym's publisher, Jonathan Cape, decided she was too old-fashioned for the times, and her books went out of print in Britain. A publishing hiatus of sixteen years sent Pym into a dark night of the soul, although she continued to write.

In January of 1977 when The Times Literary Supplement published a list compiled by eminent authors of under-rated writers, Pym was cited by both the poet Philip Larkin and by Lord David Cecil (A Very Private Eye 293). Pym was rediscovered, her old works were re-issued in Britain and exported to America, and new works were published for the first time. Lo and behold, Americans loved Barbara Pym. Indeed, Pym's sister Hilary Pym Walton opined in a July 3, 1987, interview that her books were more popular in America than in Britain. People either admire Pym extravagantly or will not read her at all; and, although she is not a feminist, her clear-eyed view of relationships between men

and women have made her popular with progressive twentieth-century men and women.

Since the Pym revival in 1977 and the author's death in 1980, there has been a flurry of scholarly work on her writing on both sides of the Atlantic. Scholars have been aided by the large collection of her diaries, literary journals, letters, manuscripts and other papers now in the Bodleian Library at Oxford. This collection is a large trove of both wheat and chaff, as Pym saved nearly every scrap of paper which fell into her hands. Scholars of the poet Philip Larkin also find the Pym collection interesting because she preserved all the letters he sent her over a nineteen-year period. Since Larkin destroyed all of his own letters and papers, the Pym-Larkin correspondence in the Bodleian's Pym collection is especially valuable.

As stated above, literary scholars and buffs have created something of a Pym industry. There were two early dissertations on Pym, "The Trivial Round, The Common Task" Barbara Pym: The Development of a Writer written by Glynn- Ellen M. Fisichelli at SUNY, Stony Brook in 1984 and Communities of Imaginative Participation: The Novels of Barbara Pym written by Kathleen Browder Heberlein at the University of Washington, also in 1984. Fisichelli's work correlates some of Pym's Bodleian manuscripts with several of her novels, while Heberlein's study uses similar material to

make sociological observations about post-World War II England.

In 1985 A Very Private Eye: An Autobiography in Diaries & Letters edited by Hilary Pym and Hazel Holt, Pym's literary executor, was compiled from the Bodleian material to provide a biography of Pym. In addition, Holt is working on a more conventional biography of Pym to be published in the 1990's.

Also published in 1985 was Barbara Pym by Jane Nardin, a book in the Twayne series on noted authors. Nardin provides a useful overview of Pym's novels which is flawed by Nardin's arbitrary decision to exclude discussion of No Fond Return of Love and An Unsuitable Attachment because she finds them to be inferior works.

Another general study, Barbara Pym by Robert Emmet Long, was published in 1986 as part of the Ungar series, "Literature and Life: British Writers." While Long's book discusses all of Pym's work extant at that time (excluding An Academic Question and Civil to Strangers which had not been published), Long seems not to have consulted the Bodleian manuscripts and makes some slightly off-target observations based on reviews in secondary sources such as The New Republic. Another 1986 work is Diana Benet's Something to Love (Missouri), volume 27 of a Literary Frontiers series. Benet provides a good introduction to Pym's work and some study of her view of various manifestations of love.

Three books on Barbara Pym were published in 1987. The Pleasure of Miss Pym by Charles Burkhart (Texas) is chiefly a volume of appreciation. More substantial are The Life and Work of Barbara Pym (Iowa), a collection of essays edited by Dale Salwak and The World of Barbara Pym (St. Martin's) by Janice Rossen. Salwak includes essays by Pym friends such as Philip Larkin, Robert Smith, Robert Liddell and Hazel Holt as well as other literary figures like Joyce Carol Oates, Penelope Lively and A.C. Rouse; chiefly introductory and appreciative, these essays do cover a spectrum of Pym's life and work. Janice Rossen, who has an essay in Salwak's book, has probably penned the most substantive book on Pym to date in The World of Barbara Pym.<sup>1</sup> Rossen's book gives an introduction to Pym's views on the Church, anthropology and spinsterhood which would be helpful to those unfamiliar with Pym. Most usefully, Rossen identifies A Few Green Leaves as an apologia and affirmation of Pym's life and work.

Also edited by Janice Rossen is Independent Women: The Function of Gender in the Novels of Barbara Pym, a collection of essays published in 1988 by St. Martin's. Despite the title, the collection is varied in subject matter. It contains reminiscences by Robert Smith and Roger Till and an account of Pym's post-college years in her home town of Oswestry by Hazel Holt. The most substantive essays are one

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<sup>1</sup>Rossen also published a 1989 book Philip Larkin: His Life's Work (Iowa) which relies on Pym material from the Bodleian.

by Rossen linking Pym to Charlotte Brontë and another by Jan Fergus which discusses Pym and Jane Austen.

For the Pym devotée extraordinaire is The Barbara Pym Cookbook (Dutton, 1988) by her sister Hilary Pym and good friend Honor Wyatt; the book attempts to duplicate food mentioned in Pym's novels.

Like the books written in the 1980's about Barbara Pym's work, the articles about her are chiefly introductions or appreciations. Beginning with Philip Larkin's 1977 Times Literary Supplement piece "The World of Barbara Pym," now collected in Larkin's Required Writing (1983), a number of literary figures have written about Barbara Pym. Of note is John Updike's "Lem and Pym, Stead and Jones," originally in the New Yorker and now in Updike's Hugging the Shore (Knopf, 1983), which is his review of Excellent Women, Quartet in Autumn, and a novel by Stanislaw Lem.

The American Scholar carried a "reappraisal" of Pym by Isa Kapp in 1983, "Out of the Swim with Barbara Pym," notable mainly because the periodical had carried no previous appraisal of Pym. "'What Shall We Do with Our Old Maids?' Barbara Pym and the 'Woman Question'" by Margaret J. M. Ezell in the November/December 1984 issue of the International Journal of Women's Studies discusses Pym in relation to Charlotte Brontë, while "Barbara Pym Herself and Jane Austen" by Frederick M. Keener in Twentieth Century Literature in the Spring 1985 issue studies her connection to Austen. Neither

of these articles is as substantive as the essays previously mentioned in Rossen's Independent Women.

The spring 1986 issue of Twentieth Century Literature carried two articles on Pym, a general introduction, "The Short Fiction of Barbara Pym" by Anthony Kaufman, and "The Sweet Dove Died: The Sexual Politics of Narcissism" by Mason Cooley, who also wrote a feature on Pym for the 1987 Dictionary of Literary Biography.

The May 21-28, 1986 issue of Christian Century has an appealing blazon to Pym, "Pym's Cup: Anglicans and Anthropologistis" by Jean Coffey Lyles. Jill Rubenstein applies speech act theory to Pym in "'for the Ovaltine Had Loosened Her Tongue': Failures of Speech in Barbara Pym's Less Than Angels" in the Winter 1986 issue of Modern Fiction Studies. Lynn Veach Sadler treats "The Pathos of Every Day Living in the Novels of Barbara Pym" in the 1986 issue of The West Virginia Philological Papers, while the 1987 issue carries "Irony from a Female Perspective: A Study of the Early Novels of Barbara Pym" by Doreen Alvarez Saar. A July 1986 piece in Commentary by Joseph Epstein discusses Pym and Larkin, while articles by C.A.R. Hills in Encounter (May 1987) and Meera Tamaya in The Common Wealth Review (January 1988) discuss her literary reputation, as does a 3 March 1988 retrospective by Stephen Wall in The London Review of Books. There will likely be more in-depth studies of Pym as more



scholars become interested in her work and have access to her papers.

A stimulus to Pym scholarship is sure to be The Barbara Pym Newsletter which began publication in June 1986 and is currently housed at St. Bonaventure University in New York and edited by Mary Anne Schofield and Doreen Alvarez Saar. The newsletter is published twice yearly and carries reviews of works on Pym, articles on teaching Pym as well as short pieces on other Pym topics.

As may be seen from the above commentary, much of the work done on Barbara Pym to date is introductory and appreciative. The time has now arrived for more in-depth study.

Many of Pym's novels are centered around the doings of Anglican churches where pompous and ineffectual clergy engage in elaborate pas de deux with the "excellent women" who are their parishoners and do most of the work of the Church. As Pym said in her 1950 journal, "The Church brings together such a very odd collection of people" (Ms. Pym 41: II, 13). This odd collection and their spiritual leaders the clergy, who are also peculiar, are wonderful material for Pym's novels of manners; these church-goers exhibit all the foibles of human nature in miniature. The very pettiness of their concerns renders Pym's pen more witty and her novels more humorous. As her style matures, we see through her

anthropologist's eyes the pathos at the edge of her humor and the sad commentary on modern Britain present in her work.

Although women are always at the center of Pym's novels, the clergy are the single most important other grouping of characters in her work. To be sure, the clergy sometimes resemble other Pymian men, but none of her desiccated anthropologists and quirky professors can match her clergy for vividness of character. In the Pym novel, the Church and clergy have become caricatures of themselves; ironically, as they become less relevant to the modern world, they become bizarre and colorful exemplars of that lack of relevance.

Pym's clergy are worth studying for their own sakes and for their importance to her work, but they also help to secure her place in the British tradition of authors writing about the English Church. Pym was acutely aware of that tradition from Langland and Chaucer to Austen and Trollope; just as these giants of literature captured the Church of their own era in their work, so too Pym encapsulates the Anglican Church of the mid-twentieth century in her novels. The shift in the sensibilities of the Church from Trollope to Pym is remarkable and reflects the fortunes of Great Britain in the wake of World Wars I and II. Pym chronicles this shift in taste and decline of prospects in her many clerical figures.

## CHAPTER I

## THE ANGLICAN TRADITION

When Barbara Pym began writing novels and short stories after taking her degree in English Literature at St. Hilda's College, Oxford, she was steeped in the classics of the English tradition and was especially attracted to some of the authors who wrote about the Anglican Church and its clergy, most notably Jane Austen, the Brontës and Anthony Trollope. In addition, Pym was a life-long avid reader of literature that we might term "first-class writing of the second rank," which teemed with Anglican figures and happenings.

Pym's upbringing and education give us some clues to her literary tastes. Raised in the small Shropshire village of Oswestry, Pym and her sister Hilary stood out as brainy types as children and as "those Pym girls who went to Oxford and got too much education" after taking their degrees (Ms. Pym 103-106, *passim*). Imaginative and intelligent as a small child, Barbara Pym was sent to Liverpool College, Huyton, when she was twelve. Huyton was a very strict religious school, and Pym excelled chiefly as chair of the Literary Society (*A Very Private Eye* 4). When she went to Oxford in 1931, much of her first year was spent making up deficits in Latin and Old English and passing exams in those subjects. She apparently failed the Old English exam once and was

relieved to pass it in February of 1933 (Ms. Pym 101, 14). Anne Wyatt-Brown correctly notes that Pym was frustrated by the rigidity of the requirements for the English degree in her time; she had no interest in Old Norse or Old English linguistics, both of which were large components of the curriculum during her era (39).

Pym was an eager reader of what she repeatedly termed "our greater and lesser English poets" in her diary. Although she was well versed in works from the Medieval and early Renaissance periods, her greatest interest lay in works from the seventeenth to the twentieth centuries. Her personal library contained poetry from every period, including Old English, collections of minor poets, and even a book of bad verse, as well as standard editions of every major author (Ms. Pym 175).

When writing about the English clergy, Pym was certainly aware that she was working with a long tradition of clerical portraits, both comical and serious, rendered by British authors over the centuries. While the question of influence is always a difficult one to ascertain, Barbara Pym's diaries, journals and letters show that she consciously alluded to other writers in her own work. In her literary journal for 1952-1953, she admits to having a number of loose ends to be knit together at the close of Jane and Prudence and makes a note to herself to "read some of Miss Austen's last chapters and find out how she manages all the loose

ends" (Ms. Pym 43: IV, 7). Jane and Prudence does not, in fact, end in the tidy manner of an Austen novel with all the strands accounted for; the fate of Prudence is open-ended and yet the knitting together of Jane's and her husband's lives is distinctly Austenian. Perhaps it would be safe to say that Pym was influenced by Austen and other English writers, but she always puts her own spin on any ideas she gleans from others.

Perhaps Pym's earliest models were Chaucer's Canterbury Tales and Langland's Piers Plowman. Chaucer's wanton and merry friar, his monk out of his cloister, as well as his conscientious parson who wrought before he taught were all old friends to Pym, as were Piers Plowman's pilgrims and palmers and hermits with their wenches. These satiric portrayals of the clergy were a strong part of Pym's background, although her own clergy are more banal and less conspicuously awful than these fourteenth-century clerics. In fact, she names a kindly Anglo-Catholic clergyman, the Rev. Edward Plowman, of Some Tame Gazelle for Langland's visionary dreamer.

The writings of seventeenth-century antiquarian Anthony à Wood were always on Pym's bookshelf, and she turned to these "quaint and curious volume of forgotten lore" throughout her life. Wood's Athenae Oxonienses and History and Antiquities of Oxford, both published in the late 1600's, are depicted by Pym as the favorite books of Rev. Thomas

Dagnall in A Few Green Leaves; in fact Wood has become an obsession to Dagnall as has attempting to track down places Wood describes. Pym's relationship to Wood in her own reading and in her fiction is typical of the use she makes of other obscure English authors: while she enjoys Wood herself, she recognizes that a modern-day clergyman (or anyone else for that matter) should not be wrapped up in Wood to the neglect of other duties. Wood's writing traces the fates of Oxford clergy and other notables from the time of Charles I to the accession of William and Mary, turbulent times indeed. In a 1977 interview, Pym talked about her method of using material she gleaned from observing people and reading odd bits of folk history like Anthony à Wood: "I boiled it all up and reduced it, like making chutney" (Ms. Pym 98, fol. 24). Wood's place in the chutney of A Few Green Leaves is secure in the obsessions of Rev. Thomas Dagnall concerning a deserted Medieval village described by Wood and in odd bits about regulations requiring people to be buried in wool. Throughout her fiction, Pym shows that when her characters are interested in Anthony à Wood, they are invariably people taken up with minutiae.

Closely allied to Anthony à Wood in its sweep of turbulent seventeenth-century English history if not its tone is the satirical anonymous poem "The Vicar of Bray" which first appeared in The British Musical Miscellany of 1734. The good vicar, who manages to keep his preferment by

changing from high church to low church to crypto-Jesuit to Whig as the times alter, is certainly the progenitor of the denizens of Trollope's Barchester novels and was a delightful inspiration to Barbara Pym as well.

Of premier importance to the history of the clergy in English literature of the eighteenth century is Parson Abraham Adams of Henry Fielding's Joseph Andrews published in 1742 as an answer to Samuel Richardson's Pamela. While Fielding acknowledged his debt to Cervantes' Don Quixote, perhaps even the author himself did not realize initially that Parson Adams would overshadow his title character and become a quixotic archetype of heroic comic proportions. A good-hearted naif who will not suffer his foot to be moved from the path of righteousness, Adams receives many blows at the hands of those who wish his protégé Joseph ill, but finally triumphs despite the wiles of Lady Booby and her lascivious maid "the accomplished Mrs. Slipslop," and in the face of his own ineptitude. Adams is a walking exemplar of the adage "the Lord protects his own," because the good parson has not the wit to accomplish anything in his own behalf; in his stubborn, ineffectual goodness, Adams is certainly the father of the Rev. Josiah Crawley of Trollope's Last Chronicle of Barchester. While Barbara Pym's metier was not the ribald picaresque of Joseph Andrews, she clearly employs some of the ineffectuality of Parson Adams in her own scaled-down portraits.

Always a great eighteenth-century favorite with Barbara Pym for casual reading in search of unconsciously amusing lore was Thomas Woodeforde's Diary of a Country Parson which he kept faithfully for forty-five years. Woodeford vouchsafes to his reader much about his eating habits, collecting tithes and dealing with the parishioners, and is at his best when unwittingly appearing pompous, righteous, or even kind. Using sources like Anthony à Wood and Thomas Woodeforde put Pym in the habit of looking for raw materials for novels in unlikely places such as The Church Times and Crockford's Clerical Dictionary.

The author that Barbara Pym is most often compared to in the popular press is Jane Austen; "a modern Jane Austen" is the phrase often employed by Pym's reviewers. While the assessment is a compliment to Pym, it is more a casual observation about the genre of the novel of manners than a critical assessment of the two authors. Certainly, both writers were great ironists and appreciated comedy as well as economy of language, and Pym was a devotee of Austen. In a February 1978 B.B.C. interview, Pym addresses frequent comparisons to Austen and Anthony Trollope:

Critics discussing my work sometimes tentatively mention these great names, mainly, I think, because I tend to write about the same kind of people and society as they did, although, of course, the ones I write about live in the twentieth century. But what novelist of today would dare to claim that she was influenced by such masters of our craft? Certainly all who read and love Jane Austen may try to write with the same economy of language, even try to look at



their characters with her kind of detachment, but that is as far as any "influence" could go. (Civil to Strangers 384-5)

Perhaps it would be safe to say that Austen was a great mentor to Pym rather than a great influence on her. There are certainly many allusions to Austen in Pym's novels, and she often gives herself stage directions in her literary notebooks to consult Austen. The advice she gives herself when attempting to finish Jane and Prudence, "Read some of Miss Austen's last chapters and find out how she manages all the loose ends" (Ms. Pym 43, 7), is a good example of her reliance on Austen for inspiration.

David Kubal and Jan Fergus have written articles comparing Pym's A Glass of Blessing to Austen's Emma, and Robert Long and Jane Nardin have touched on this comparison in their book-length studies of Pym. Pym's Wilmet Forsythe is likened to Austen's Emma Woodhouse, and Mary Beamish to Jane Fairfax or Harriet Smith; other characters and plot happenings are similarly paired (Rossen 110-11). While interesting, these correspondences can sometimes become procrustean and do not, in any case, get to the true role of Austen in Pym's work, that of inspirer or guardian angel.

The obsequious Rev. Mr. Collins of Pride and Prejudice must have been a delight to Pym as well as a model for her clerics such as Archdeacon Hoccleve of Some Tame Gazelle and Father Thames of A Glass of Blessings; it is also likely that Pym remembered Collins's obnoxious epistles when writing

Hoccleve's and Thames's obtuse letters to their congregations. Austen says of Collins (who may have been the grandfather of Dickens's Uriah Heap):

Mr. Collins was not a sensible man, and the deficiency of nature had been but little assisted by education or society. . . . The subjection in which his father had brought him up, had given him originally great humility of manner but now it was a good deal counteracted by self-conceit of a weak head, living in retirement, and consequential feelings of early and unexpected prosperity. (Austen 64)

Collins's letter of condolence to Mr. Bennett upon the elopement of his daughter Lydia is a model of nonconsolation in which he opines that Lydia would be better off dead, must have been poorly raised by her parents and have had an evil nature to begin with, and concludes that he was fortunate indeed not to have blighted his life with the sins of Lydia by marrying her sister Elizabeth. Pym's letters from Hoccleve and Thames to their congregations are like Collins's in that they convict their unwitting authors of being insensitive nincompoops.

While there are many minor allusions to Austen throughout Pym's novels, perhaps the most telling one occurs in Less than Angels when, speaking of a minor character who was being neglected by her fiancée, Pym quotes Anne Elliot of Persuasion:

She might, if she had come upon them, have copied out Anne Elliot's words, especially as she was the same age as Miss Austen's heroine: "We certainly do not forget you as soon as you forget us. It is perhaps our fate rather than our merit. We cannot help ourselves. We live at home, quiet, confined,

and our feelings prey upon us. You are forced on exertion. You have always business of some sort or other to take you back into the world immediately, and continual occupation and change soon weaken impressions." (Less Than Angels 186)

Anne Elliot's words surely typify the fate of most of Pym's Heroines (and of Pym herself) in their dealings with men. The Austen quotation is also poignant because in Persuasion Anne Elliot does marry Captain Wentworth in the end despite her lament, while Pym's women usually end up alone. Therein lies one large difference between Austen and Pym: marriage of the heroine constitutes a happy ending in all of Austen's novels, whereas Pym's excellent women are, in the words of Mildred Lathbury of Excellent Women "for being unmarried . . . and by that I mean a positive rather than a negative state" (190). The ideal of happiness in Austen's day is found in married bliss; Pym and her characters agree with a quotation from V.S. Pritchett found in Pym's journal, "The secret of happiness is to find a congenial monotony" (Ms. Pym 73, 6). Many of Pym's single women find happiness in the congenial monotony of the "trivial round, the common task."

Barbara Pym found inspiration for many of her clerical portraits in the works of nineteenth-century British authors. An appreciative reader of the three Brontë sisters all her life, Pym was especially taken with Charlotte Brontë. She told Philip Larkin in a 1969 letter, "I get comfort from a re-reading of Anthony Powell and Charlotte Brontë (not Jane Eyre)" (A Very Private Eye 248). Janice Rossen has written

on the differences between Pym's heroines and Jane Eyre; according to Rossen, Pym sees Eyre as the quintessential Romantic heroine and her own heroines as examples of a sort of "negative capability" in that they can live with uncertainties and doubts in a congenial monotony (154-55).

More interesting than Pym's non-attachment to Jane Eyre is her affection for Shirley. A novel that is little read in the late twentieth century, Shirley was a favorite with bright young girls earlier in the century, including Virginia Woolf, Vera Brittain, and Pym. Charlotte Brontë calls her attractive, independent heroine Shirley Keeldar "the first blue-stocking." Shirley is the complete mistress of her fate, refuses to marry "good catches," and finally chooses her own husband, all the while managing her large fortune which she will continue to control after her marriage. One can easily see how Shirley would appeal to young ladies of slender means and limited opportunity, beginning with Charlotte Brontë herself.

Also important to the formation of Pym's aesthetic consciousness were the clerical portraits she found in Shirley. Brontë turned all of her satiric wit on the Rev. Mr. Helstone, the rector of Briarfield, and his three curates, Mr. Donne, Mr. Malone, and Mr. Sweeting. Brontë terms Helstone "a clerical Cossack . . . who show[ed] partiality in friendship and bitterness in enmity . . . who was equally attached to principles, and adherent to

prejudices" (Brontë, Shirley 35). Helstone's curates are certainly models for Pym's curates, especially the Rev. Donne who is the progenitor of the Rev. Edgar Donne in Some Tame Gazelle and the Rev. Stephen Latimer of Crampton Hodnet. Brontë says of Donne:

He was troublesome, exasperating. He had a stock of small-talk on hand, at once the most trite and perverse that can well be imagined: abuse of the people of Briarfield; the natives of Yorkshire generally; complaints of the want of high society; of the backward state of civilization in these districts; murmurings against the disrespectful conduct of the lower orders in the north toward their betters; silly ridicule of the manner of living of these parts,--the want of style, the absence of elegance, as if he, Donne, had been accustomed to very great doings indeed: an insinuation which his somewhat underbred manner and aspect failed to bear out. (117)

In his dislike of local people, especially northerners, Donne is also very much like the Rev. David Lyell of Pym's Quartet in Autumn. Donne's peers, Malone (described as "besottedly arrogant") and Sweeting (who is made over by ladies of a certain age), can also be seen from time to time in Pym's clergy. These men spend most of their time visiting each other and discoursing "on minute points of ecclesiastical discipline, frivolities which seemed empty as bubbles to all save themselves" (5). On a conscious level Pym admired Shirley for the character of its heroine, but unconsciously perhaps she absorbed a great deal of the personalities of Brontë's clerics, who seem more like Pym's than either Austen's or Trollope's.

Like most discriminating readers, Barbara Pym was an admirer of the inimitable Boz, Charles Dickens. Clerical portraits are usually grace notes in Dickens except in the case of his unfinished Mystery of Edwin Drood, which is set in the close of Cloisterham Cathedral. The Pickwick Papers features a "prim-faced, red-nosed" clergyman in threadbare clothes who drinks rather more than he should. Mr. Chadband of Bleak House, who moves "softly and cumbrously, not unlike a bear who has been taught to walk upright" (271), is more fully developed than the Pickwickian clergyman. Chadband, who "glows with humility and train oil," constantly tangles himself in his own words; a simple blessing before eating turns into a lament for the fact that man cannot fly and a query as to why he cannot. Mr. Snagsby's sensible answer "No wings" is frowned down as Chadband continues,

Why can we not fly? Is it because we are calculated to walk? It is. Could we walk, my friends, without strength? We could not. What should we do without strength, my friends? Our legs would refuse to bear us, our knees would double up, our ankles would turn over, and we should come to the ground. (Dickens, Bleak House 273)

Chadband goes on to identify food as the source of this much-needed strength leading Dickens to note that Mr. Chadband's persecutors "denied that there was any particular gift in Mr. Chadband's piling verbose flights of stairs, one upon another, after this fashion" (273). The possibilities in a Chadband sermon boggle the imagination and may have been

partly explored in Archdeacon Hoccleve's sermons in Some Tame Gazelle.

Dickens's Little Dorrit gives us a brief glimpse of the "Bishop Magnates" who are part of the government bureaucracy and are constantly trying to attract money to slush funds like the "Combined Additional Endowment Dignitaries Committee." It was his last novel The Mystery of Edwin Drood, however, as mentioned above, in which Dickens employed a clerical setting. The most fully-drawn cleric in Cloisterham is the Rev. Septimus Crisparkle, so-named because he was a seventh son. Dickens must have had in mind Trollope's Rev. Septimus Harding, who was created fifteen years earlier than Crisparkle; however, the reverend messieurs Septimus differ greatly. While both are kindly gentlemen, Harding is an elderly cello-playing church mouse, while Crisparkle is a muscular Christian of the Kingsley school. The confines of Cloisterham (Rochester in disguise) with its Nun's House and cathedral are a good setting for a mystery, even an incomplete one; in addition, Dickens's clergy, from Chadband to Crisparkle, are a delight, although perhaps not a great influence on Barbara Pym.

William Makepeace Thackeray creates another clerical classic in the Rev. Bute Crawley, the rector of Queen's Crawley in Vanity Fair. His chief occupations are riding to the hounds, running up gambling debts, and reading the sermons his virago wife writes for him. Mrs. Crawley, surely

the sister of Trollope's Mrs. Proudie, is the prototype of the capable wife of a lazy clergyman so often seen in literature. Pym's Agatha Hoccleve of Some Tame Gazelle, while not assertive like Mrs. Crawley and Mrs. Proudie, certainly belongs in this tradition.

Another unappealing clergy figure is to be found in Thackeray's Henry Esmond in the person of the Rev. Dr. Tusher who proves to his own satisfaction that he need not visit small pox victims because "where the life of a parish priest in the midst of his flock is highly valuable to them, he is not called upon to risk it . . . for the sake of a single person who is not very likely in a condition even to understand the religious message whereof the priest is the bringer--being uneducated, and likewise stupified or delirious by disease" (Thackeray, Henry Esmond 66). Also satirized by Thackeray are the creature comforts of the Rev. Charles Honeyman, a Mayfair vicar depicted in The Newcomes. Like Barbara Pym's vicars, Honeyman is made over by women and cossetted with gourmet treats and handmade slippers, handkerchiefs, braces, and other furbelows.

Next to Jane Austen, Anthony Trollope is the author most often compared to Barbara Pym. The ecclesiastical subject of the Barsetshire novels is likened to the Anglican parishes depicted in Pym's work. Of course, the Church has receded in religious and political importance in the hundred years between the work of Trollope and Pym, but there are



correspondences between their characters and concerns. It is hard not to feel an affinity between Archdeacon Grantly, who appears first in The Warden and periodically throughout the other five Barsetshire novels, and Pym's Archdeacon Hoccleve in Some Tame Gazelle. Trollope's comment on Grantly is certainly true of Hoccleve: "His great fault was an overbearing assurance of the virtues and claims of his order, and his great foible an equally strong confidence in the dignity of his own manner and the eloquence of his own words" (Trollope, The Warden 21). The chief differences between the two archdeacons lie in the laziness that Hoccleve brings to his very light duties and the industry with which Grantly pursues his archdeaconal chores and prerogatives; the disparity is both one of temperament and altered times. There was simply more for an archdeacon to do in Grantly's era than in Hoccleve's, as well as more willingness on Grantly's part to work than on Hoccleve's.

A more important influence on Pym may have been the Rev. Francis Arabin, who first appears in Barchester Towers and thereafter in the remaining four books of the series. Trollope's earliest description of Arabin would serve well for Julian Malory of Excellent Women, Neville Forbes of No Fond Return of Love, and Tom Dagnall of A Few Green Leaves:

Mr. Arabin was a popular man among women, but more so as a general than as a special favorite . . . . Though belonging to a church in which celibacy is not the required lot of its ministers, he had come to regard himself as one of those clergymen to whom to be a bachelor is almost

a necessity . . . . He looked on women, therefore, in the same light that one sees them regarded by many Romish priests. He liked to have near him that which was pretty and amusing, but women generally were little more to him than children. He talked to them without putting out all his powers, and listened to them without any idea that what he should hear from them could either actuate his conduct or influence his opinion. (Trollope, Barchester Towers 177)

Arabin does marry Eleanor Harding Bold at the end of the novel, but Trollope leaves him "sifting and editing old ecclesiastical literature, and . . . producing the same articles new," an activity for which he is regarded by Oxford as "the most promising clerical ornament of his age" (508). The Rev. Thomas Dagnall of A Few Green Leaves spends his time much like Arabin, but there is no longer a strong Oxford high-church connection to admire his work, and the modern age requires that its clergy be relevant not ornamental, a requirement Dagnall and other Pym clergy find hard to meet.

Some of Trollope's more extreme ecclesiastical figures, such as Bishop and Mrs. Proudie, Mr. Slope, Josiah Crawley, and Mr. Quiverful, father of twelve, seem more Dickensian than Pymian; Pym loved these creatures but did not use them as models for her more realistic view of the twentieth-century Church.

Trollope and Pym share a stylistic device which contributes to the irony and comedy of their writing, the use of a narrator with a divided voice. Barbara Bowman has discussed Pym's subversive subtext in which she often undercuts her narrator's statements with an ironic

contradiction (Bowman 82-83). A good example of this technique is found in Excellent Women when the narrator Mildred Lathbury observes:

Surely wives shouldn't be too busy to cook for their husbands? I thought in astonishment, taking a thick piece of bread and jam from the plate offered to me. But perhaps Rockingham with his love of Victoriana also enjoyed cooking, for I had observed that men did not usually do things unless they liked doing them. (Excellent Women 9)

The conventional idea that women should always be glad to cook for their husbands is subverted by the observation that men will undertake tasks like cooking only if they enjoy them.

Trollope's description of Dr. John Bold in The Warden has this same double-edged quality:

Now I will not say that the archdeacon is strictly correct in stigmatizing John Bold as a demagogue, for I hardly know how extreme must be a man's opinions before he can be justly so called; but Bold is a strong reformer . . . . Bold is thoroughly sincere in his patriotic endeavors to mend mankind, and there is something to be admired in the energy with which he devotes himself to remedying evil and stopping injustice; but I fear that he is too much imbued with the idea that he has a special mission for reforming. (Trollope, The Warden 15)

Trollope's narrator may admire Bold's energy, but that is faint praise indeed for one he has suggested might be a demagogue, an overzealous reformer, and finally "a Dantan."

Pym's narrator is less dramatic than Trollope's, but just as deadly in turning the table on her reader with undercutting wit. In addition, Mildred Lathbury and other Pym narrators often say one thing but think another, a device

sometimes used by Trollope's characters but not by his narrators.

George Eliot's early work Scenes of Clerical Life was a book that Barbara Pym turned to throughout her life. A very slight work, Eliot's Scenes contains vignettes of divines such as Mr. Crewe, "who was allowed to enjoy his avarice in comfort"; the Rev. Mr. Horn, who was "given to tippling and quarrelling with his wife"; the Rev. Mr. Tryon, the curate at "the chapel-of-ease on Paddiford Common." A more important clerical model for Pym can be seen in the Rev. Edward Casaubon of Middlemarch. Casaubon, the first husband of the heroine Dorothea Brooke, is engaged in a ludicrous life-long project, assembling the Key to All Mythologies. Casaubon, whose name suggests casuistry, attempts to bend the will of Dorothea to the advancement of his comforts and life work, much the same way some of Pym's excellent women are forced into servitude by her clergy.

A minor Victorian who was a life-long influence on Pym was Charlotte Mary Yonge, author of The Heir of Redclyffe and The Daisy Chain, great favorites of Pym. The latter work, which contains scenes of clerical life, is a good example of the way an inferior book can have an impact on much better writing. In seven hundred tedious pages the excessively worthy May family of twelve children and their good country doctor father attempt to become better Christians by overcoming hardships and rooting out small flaws like

flightiness and stubbornness (one flaw per child) from their personalities. The heroine Ethel and the other girls of the family are applauded by Yonge for subordinating their personalities and talents to the advancement of their brothers. The modern reader is not charmed by the final portrait of spunky Ethel broken on the wheel of the Victorian family and coming "to understand that the unmarried woman must not seek undivided return of affection, and must not set her love with exclusive eagerness on aught below, but must be ready to cease in turn to be first with any" (Yonge 667). Pym reread this childhood favorite throughout her life, and perhaps there is some of Ethel in her excellent women, all of whom are content with their lives; however, there is none of Pym's wit, irony or charm in Charlotte M. Yonge.

The late Victorian period contains many witty favorites of Barbara Pym from the plays of Gilbert and Sullivan to those of Oscar Wilde. The Mikado's Pooh Bah (the Lord High Everything Else) is particularly pompous in his role of Archbishop of Titipu; but perhaps a greater influence on Pym is to be found in Canon Chasuble of Wilde's The Importance of Being Earnest. Chasuble flirts with the estimable Miss Prism by employing slightly risqué classical allusions, then denying their import; like Chasuble, Archdeacon Hoccleve of Some Tame Gazelle employs literary allusions which allow him to get away with saying things he could not voice in a more straight-forward manner. Hoccleve's allusions do not have

sexual overtones, but are used to hector his congregation and its women. Wilde's delightful name choice for Canon Chasuble is also typical of Pym's interest in peculiar clergy names. She even kept a list in her journal entitled "Gems from Crockford's Clerical Dictionary" which included "the Rev. de Blogue (formerly Blogg)" and the organist of Bristol Cathedral, "A. Surplice Esq" (Ms. Pym 44: V, 1). The Wilde whimsey can be seen in Pym clergy names like Father Thames, Father Gemini, and Father Gellibrand.

A darker clerical model than The Importance of Being Earnest was available to Pym in her own library in Samuel Butler's The Way of All Flesh. The Rev. Theobald Pontifex, father of the book's hero Ernest Pontifex, was forced into the ministry by his father who delighted in playing his children against each other; Theobald continues this pattern in his own children, whom he attempts to squelch and put at odds with each other. Possessing very little religious conviction, Theobald's chief activity is cutting and pasting snips of the Bible to make "a Harmony of the Old and New Testaments," an activity Butler drolly terms "doubtless valuable" (65). Theobald and his father are masters of the awful letter designed to evoke guilt in the reader which we noted earlier in Mr. Collins's missives in Pride and Prejudice and which we see in Pym's clergymen's letters to their congregations. Pym's satire never becomes as sharp as Butler's, but she was a great admirer of his wicked pen.

Some of Barbara Pym's Oxford-educated clerics doubtless took their inspiration from the dotty Warden of Judas College depicted in Max Beerbohm's Zuleika Dobson, published in 1911. The Warden, who is the grandfather of the femme fatale Zuleika, is so out of touch with reality that he does not even miss the entire student population of his college who have drowned themselves for the love of Zuleika. A wildly improbable and delightful satire, Zuleika Dobson was a great favorite of Pym's.

Another hardy perennial with Pym was E.F. Benson, the author of the six-book Lucia series. Lucia is the queen bee of the tiny hamlet of Tilling and marshals all its inhabitants to participate in her Elizabethan fêtes, evening soirées, and other social doings. One of her minions is the Rev. Mr. Kenneth Bartlett who is a native of Birmingham but affects a thick and archaic Scottish brogue.<sup>2</sup> Bartlett and his "wee wifey" spend most of their time playing bridge, an activity which allows Bartlett to win considerable lucre from his parishoners. He claims to give his winnings to charity, which Benson suggests usually began at home with Bartlett. The machinations of Benson's Tillingites are more flamboyant than the activities in Pym's villages but both authors render their small worlds with great wit and charm.

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<sup>2</sup>Mr. Bartlett's Scottish lilt may be likened to those of many Presbyterian clergymen from East Tennessee who visit Edinburgh for one week early in their careers and thenceforth speak in the accents of Robert Burns addressing a wee tim'rous beastie.

Also in the line of witty humor which Pym enjoyed is Aldous Huxley's Crome Yellow, which she first read when she was sixteen. Although her own writing developed along paths other than Huxley's, Pym always said that reading Crome Yellow made her decide to become a novelist herself (Civil to Strangers 382).

A life-long favorite of Pym's was the pseudonymous author "Elizabeth," Mary Annette Beauchamp, Lady Russell, the sometime mistress of H.G. Wells. Her 1914 novel The Pastor's Wife is Hardy-esque in tone and contains several devastatingly bleak clerical portraits. The heroine Ingeborg Bullivant is the daughter of a bossy bishop and has the misfortune to marry a Prussian pastor, Robert Dremmel, who spends all of his time on agronomy experiments. When the good pastor forces Ingeborg to have six children in seven years--only two of whom live--and insists on continued yearly pledges of affection, Ingeborg runs off with an artist to Venice but does not go through with the affair. When she returns home, her husband has not even missed her, and her dreary life continues. Ingeborg's father and husband go well beyond the selfishness displayed in any Pym clergyman; that Barbara Pym owned The Pastor's Wife and reread it several times is a tribute to stamina not possessed by many modern readers.

A more probable influence on Pym is Elizabeth's The Enchanted April, published in 1923, which relates the story of four women who rent a house together in Italy for a month.



The women, three of whom are very much like Pym's excellent women, do not know each other before the trip but come to interact in unexpected ways. The four-character structure of The Enchanted April is much like Pym's Quartet in Autumn, although the former book is lighter and more optimistic than the latter. The voice of the narrator in The Enchanted April is also similar to Pym's in its humor and ironic detachment. In a 1978 B.B.C. radio interview Pym mentions her debt to Elizabeth:

Such novels as The Enchanted April and The Pastor's Wife were a revelation in their wit and delicate irony, and the dry, unsentimental treatment of the relationship between men and women which touched some echoing chord in me at that time. (Civil to Strangers 383)

Pym retained a life-long affection for the work of her fellow Oxonian Vera Brittain, who is best known for her autobiographical account of World War I, Testament of Youth. More important to Pym may have been Brittain's best novel, Honourable Estate, which contains both the feminist and pacifist themes for which she was famous. One character, Janet Rutherford, is crushed by her insensitive clergyman husband who expects her to have a baby every year against her wishes; in this affliction she is much like Elizabeth's Ingeborg of The Pastor's Wife,<sup>3</sup> even though Janet is unique

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<sup>3</sup>Elizabeth's and Brittain's depictions of women who do not think anatomy should be destiny in the matter of bearing children certainly speak to the actual conditions of the early twentieth century when the average American woman had seven pregnancies; allowing for women who had no children, this average is very high.

in her desire to be an activist for women's rights. Although nothing good ever happens to Janet, her son learns her feminist principles and finally marries Ruth Alleyndene, an Oxford-educated woman who seems much like Brittain and Pym. Pym did not share Brittain's interest in politics, but her tastes were certainly shaped by Brittain's writing.

In the B.B.C. interview cited above Pym mentions her debt to Ivy Compton-Burnett:

Another author I came across at this time was Ivy Compton-Burnett. . . . Of course I couldn't help being influenced by her dialogue, that precise, formal conversation which seemed so stilted when I first read it--though when I got used to it, a friend and I took to writing each other entirely in that style. (Civil to Strangers 383)

Pym had all of Compton-Burnett's novels in her personal library and may have been influenced not only by her clipped dialogue but by the pompous and insensitive clergyman, the Rev. Dr. Chaucer of Daughters and Sons; Chaucer makes much of his doctorate, which he barely managed to secure, and proposes to no fewer than three women before securing a helpmeet in the bossy Hetta Ponsonby. In Chaucer we see a bit of Pym's Stephen Latimer of Crampton Hodnet and a bit of Father Thames of A Glass of Blessings.

A glance at Barbara Pym's reading habits and personal library reveals that she was very conscious of writing in a long tradition of authors who depicted the English clergy in their works from Langland and Chaucer to Austen and Trollope to twentieth-century writers like Bensen and Compton-Burnett.

Aside from Pym's own acknowledgement of these guardian spirits, she also had in her library other books which bespeak an interest in the Church. One peculiar little book that she loved to joke about was The Ritual Reason Why by Charles Walker, published in 1950, which offers reasons for various Anglican customs and answers to questions of religious punctillio surely not asked by very many of the faithful. Another literary curio is Margaret Watts' History of the Parson's Wife, published in 1943. While Watts does survey portraits of clerical wives in English literature, she also betrays many quaint prejudices including the thought that the challenge of securing good servants is the hardest problem besetting modern clergy wives (93). She also castigates Samuel Butler for his unflattering view of the clergy and suggests that "a Celtic strain in Butler's ancestry" accounted for his lack of charity towards the clergy (126). As was mentioned earlier, Pym was an avid reader of Crockford's Clerical Dictionary, which contains much unintentionally humorous clerical minutiae. Pym delighted in peculiar religious books and turned them all to good account in her own novels.

Certainly Pym's depiction of the twentieth-century Anglican Church was filtered through her own wry sensibility, but she was always aware of the many great English writers who wrote about the Church. A glance at the eminent authors who were her mentors can only help us to appreciate the

excellence of Barbara Pym's gift and the uniqueness of her voice.

## CHAPTER II

## THE ANGLICAN MILIEU

We have seen that Barbara Pym is working in a long tradition within English literature in her depiction of the Anglican clergy. But, just as Chaucer is writing about one Christian world, Henry Fielding another, and Anthony Trollope yet another, Pym creates her own milieu out of the materials of the twentieth-century Anglican Church. The Anglican frame of reference, however, does not remain static in her work but evolves considerably as her own style and thought mature.

As Pym began her writing career she seemed interested in contrasting the nineteenth-century Anglican Church with the diminished twentieth-century Church. While involved in this endeavor, she began to see the importance of the changing education and class membership of the clergy as well as the rise of the role of women in the Church. As she continued to write and try new ideas she saw connections between the anthropologists at the International Africa Institute where she worked and the Anglican clergy; both seemed parasitic and at a remove from actual life experience. Finally, late in her career she evaluates the welfare state as a substitute for the Church in the modern world.

Pym's first three novels create her early world: Some Tame Gazelle, written in 1934 and revised substantially for

publication in 1950; Civil to Strangers, written in 1936 and published in 1987 after her death in 1980; and Crampton Hodnet, written in 1939 and revised slightly for publication in 1985. The Anglican milieu which is the backdrop of Some Tame Gazelle has an Arcadian quality reminiscent of the Barsetshire novels of Anthony Trollope whom Pym read and admired.<sup>4</sup> Despite irritating people and happenstances both Trollope and Pym assume a "best of all possible worlds" Anglican frame of reference.

Like Trollope's Barsetshire novels, Some Tame Gazelle is undergirded by church geography which can be mapped out. Trollope's Bishop and Mrs. Proudie hold sway in Barchester surrounded by toadying minions like Mr. Thumble, Mr. Slope and Mr. Quiverful, father of fourteen, sometime curate of Puddingdale, and rector of Hiram's Hospital after the saintly Mr. Septemus Harding; below Bishop Proudie in the hierarchy, but never cowed in his struggle with Proudie's eminence gris and help meet, Mrs. Proudie, we see Archdeacon Grantly of Plumstead Episcopi who has his own circle of clerical supporters. In Barchester Towers Trollope develops a power struggle between the low-church party of the Proudies and the Oxford-connected high church devotees represented by Dr. Arabin and Grantly. Later novels continue in this framework

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<sup>4</sup>Pym said of Some Tame Gazelle in her 1948 journal, "This is a quiet novel but one which the discriminating reader will enjoy for its comic situation, pointed dialogue and its carrying on of a tradition of fiction that is peculiarly English" (Ms. Pym 40, 14).

until the untimely death of Mrs. Proudie in a fit of righteous pique in The Last Chronicle of Barset. The physical geography of Barsetshire corresponds to the politico-spiritual geography; Barsetshire is a self-contained microcosm despite occasional contact with the larger world of London.

Some Tame Gazelle has the strongest sense of church geography of any of the Pym novels. The major-domo of Pym's unnamed rural village is Archdeacon Henry Hoccleve, who is supported by a new curate, the Rev. Edgar Donne. Within the area are the kindly Romish priest Edward Plowman, who is doted on by his parishoners; Canon Harvey, who is seen by Archdeacon Hoccleve (that most difficult of men) to be a most difficult man; and Canon Kendrich, who is despised by the Hoccleve camp for being a shocking but arresting speaker. Entering this milieu briefly is the Rev. Theo Grote, Bishop of the African see of Mbawawa. The clerical world of Some Tame Gazelle is both a crystallization and a debilitation of the Barsetshire world of Trollope. Archdeacon Hoccleve is an Archdeacon Grantly without energy or purpose, and the lesser clerical lights have neither the drive and malice of a Slope nor the complete dereliction of duty of Trollope's absentee rector Dr. Vesey Stanhope. In short, Pym's clerical world is both more and less than Trollope's; her clergy are neither as shiftless nor as energetic as Trollope's and perhaps mirror

the differences between the nineteenth-century and twentieth-century Anglican Churches.

Contemporary sociological studies of the Anglican Church trace the decline of the vigor of the Church which we see reflected in Pym's work. Anthony Russell makes the following observations in his 1980 study The Clerical Profession:

The vigour and energy of the late-nineteenth-century parochial clergy in a sense masked their gradual removal from the mainstream of public life as, in an age of increasing skepticism and secularization, men looked elsewhere and to other institutions for those things the Church had formerly provided. The Church itself, in an increasingly differentiated society, progressively took on the nature of a voluntary, and in a sense optional or at least less socially prescribed, leisure activity. . . . Whereas, in the nineteenth century, the Church's place in society was accepted, understood, and for the most part unquestioned, today the Church is regarded as an ambivalent institution, the role and function of which are far from clear . . . . Above all else, in contemporary society the clergyman's role is characterized by marginality to the main stream concerns of ordinary people. The knowledge to which the clergyman has access and which he seeks to impart is seen as irrelevant to the day-to-day decisions which people and groups face. (250, 261, 262)

In the face of such a diminished role in the large spheres of life Pym's clergy "are inclined to hold fast to the old certainties" (262) and preside over church jumble sales and harvest festivals rather than tackle modern problems of divorce, abortion, urban blight. Dean Matthews of St. Paul's, London, compared his fellow bishops in 1947 to "a man who occupied himself in rearranging the furniture when the house was on fire" (Welsby 42). Pym's clergy figures are so



busy with the ecclesiastical furniture they do not even smell smoke; yet in an age when the brushfires of Western Civilization blaze up ever around us Pym's thurifers and jumble sorters are a reassuring reminder of an Arcadian yesterday which may exist only in her books.

The Anglican world in Pym's second work, the short novel Civil to Strangers, is constricted yet pervasive perhaps because the setting is a microdot of a village, Up Callow in Shropshire. The Rector Rockingham Wilmot and his curate Mr. Paladin, dull, worthy types, provide many of the activities in the novel, but are not vital to the action of the plot as the clergy are in Some Tame Gazelle.

Crampton Hodnet, set in Oxford, presumes an Anglican presence and takes its title from the lying ways of a handsome young curate, Stephen Latimer. A number of situations are not what they seem in the novel, and the fictitious village church of Crampton Hodnet sets the tone for the rest of this comic story.

In a few years, then, Pym has moved from a fairly Trollopean milieu in Some Tame Gazelle to a more Pymly view of the church in Crampton Hodnet. What accounts for this shift? Three areas of at least slight commonality in Pym and Trollope trace the change: the extent of Anglican sovereignty over the secular world, the Oxford connection to the church, and the role of women in the church.

Trollope's Barsetshire is a very small world, but it constantly looks to the larger clerical and political world of London for decisions which will affect the area in major ways. In Barchester Towers the fall of a Tory government snatches a bishopric from Archdeacon Grantly and bestows it instead on the Whiggish Bishop Proudie and his virago wife. An act of Parliament turns the Rev. Mr. Harding's beloved Hiram's Hospital for indigent old men into a nursing home for men and women and creates a matron to share the living with its warden. The civil law injects itself into church matters as the Rev. Josiah Crawley is hauled before the quarterly assizes in The Last Chronicle of Barset. The city injects itself into the country in Trollope from Mr. Harding's Gethsemane in Westminster Abbey in The Warden to the city lawyer Mr. Toogood's urban efforts in behalf of the rural Mr. Crawley in The Last Chronicle of Barset. In Trollope, then, there is always a resonance between the larger world of politics and religion and the Barsetshire world, between the city and the country.

In contrast to Trollope, the Anglican world of Pym seems to bear no relation to the larger world of national and ecclesiastical politics. Some machinations must have been involved in the elevation of Hoccleve to the archdeaconate, Grote to the bishopric, and the various canons and rectors to their places in Some Tame Gazelle, but these matters do not seem to interest Pym. Her clerical functionaries are in

stasis from beginning to end of the novel. Granted, in Some Tame Gazelle, Civil to Strangers, and Crampton Hodnet, a new curate is sent into the Pym world at the beginning of each novel, but these men are at the bottom of the clerical totem pole and might be expected to come and go with regularity in the Anglican Church without being the object of the political maneuvering seen in Trollope. What accounts for Pym's apparent lack of interest in the larger world that Trollope seemed to find so necessary to his work? A reading of Pym's personal and literary papers in the Bodleian Library reveals very little attention to national and greater-church politics except for one instance in which her own church was about to be designated "redundant" and closed by the higher powers (Ms. Pym 151, fol. 78-79). Pym's sister Hilary Pym Walton confirms her sister's lack of interest in big-world politics; Barbara Pym always thought the real action was in the back waters, not in the main channels of power (Walton, Interview).

When the small world of Trollope is not looking to Lambeth for direction, it looks to Oxford whence many of its clergy sprang. In Barchester Towers at the first sign of trouble between the latitudinarian Bishop Proudie and the Anglo-Catholic Archdeacon Grantly, the latter sends to Oxford for re-enforcement, which arrives in the form of the Rev. Francis Arabin, a noted theologian and clever speaker. In all of the Barsetshire novels there is constant parrying for

position between the Proudie camp and the Grantly redoubt, which is in constant consultation with Oxford divines on matters theological and temporal.

Barbara Pym, herself an alumna of St. Hilda's College, Oxford, also uses Oxford to good effect in her novels but in quite a different manner from Trollope. In Trollope all clergy are presumed to have attended either Oxford or Cambridge; whereas in Pym the clergy have devised an elaborate pecking order based on whether a man went to Oxford or not and how good a degree he received. This snobbish preoccupation on the part of Pym's clergy with number and kind of Oxford degrees reflects the actual experience of the Anglican Church in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in that the education of the clergy has declined considerably over that period and modern-day preferment is often based on an Oxbridge education. By the 1870's and 1880's, twenty-five years after the publication of Trollope's The Warden, the numbers of priests with university degrees was below 75 percent and by Pym's era of the 1960's and 1970's the number fell below 40 percent. In the higher ranks, 43% of the Bishops held doctorates in 1930 while only 7% did in 1973 (Towler and Coxon 33). During this same period theological colleges sprang up to provide two to three years of post-secondary education for the clergy, but many complained of the high-church and upper-class snobbishness of these institutions, and a number of more egalitarian schools

were opened in the early twentieth century (20, 26). These differences in clergy education and indeed the classes from which the clergy spring in the twentieth century are amply illustrated in Pym's clergy. One marker of the Oxbridge clergy in Pym's novels is their ability to stupify their congregations with obscure literary quotations; the aim of these flights of pedantry is not to instruct or delight but to tell listeners that the speaker went to Oxford in order to acquire literary allusions not known to the hoi polloi.<sup>5</sup>

Another shift between Trollope and Pym and perhaps between nineteenth- and twentieth-century practice concerns the role of women in the church. Allowing for aberrations like Mrs. Proudie, the overbearing wife of the Bishop in the *Barsetshire* novels, Trollope's women are merely faithful churchgoers and occasional Sunday school teachers; they sometimes do good works in the village but these ministrations to the needy do not seem to be church-connected. In Pym's world the women are the church and comprise virtually the entire congregation in each parish. Thus we see a rector and perhaps a curate clucked over by large groups of female parishoners, many of them single or widowed gentlewomen with little to do. A handful of men function as over-age-in-grade acolytes, but one sees very few children, couples, or families in the church. The faithful

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<sup>5</sup>Chapter III will discuss the Oxford snobbery of the clergy, *passim*.

have dwindled to spoiled clergy and their harem of marginal women who cater to the men while mocking them behind their backs. Lest this sound too depressing, it should be noted that Pym renders this diminished Anglican world with affection and amused tolerance, as well as dry wit.

Pym's middle work, beginning with Excellent Women, contains the most faithful portraits of her typical Anglican milieu. The story is set in London in a small Anglo-Catholic parish in which the church has reduced a large, impersonal world to a small, caring, but sometimes claustrophobic one. If Pym did not tell us we were in London we might think we were in a small village; urban and national events do not intrude themselves into Excellent Women. The first-person narrator Mildred Lathbury relates the goings-on in the parish which revolves around its handsome, vain rector Julian Malory and the "excellent women" like his spinster sister Winifred and her friend Mildred who do most of the work of the parish.

Jane and Prudence, set in an unimportant Oxford parish, is the conscious antithesis of the world of Trollope and other nineteenth-century clerical writers including Charlotte M. Yonge. Jane Bold Cleveland, one of the title characters and wife of Nicholas Cleveland, a mousy rector, contrasts her experience with that of Trollope's clergy wives, notably Eleanor Bold Arabin:

When she and Nicholas were engaged Jane had taken great pleasure in imagining herself as a

clergyman's wife, starting with Trollope and working through the Victorian novelists to the present-day gallant, cheerful wives, who ran large houses and families on far too little money and sometimes wrote articles about it in the Church Times. But she had been quickly disillusioned. Nicholas's first curacy had been in a town where she had found very little in common with the elderly and middle-aged women who made up the greater part of the congregation. Jane's outspokenness and her fantastic turn of mind were not appreciated; other qualities which she did not possess and which seemed impossible to acquire were apparently necessary. And then, as the years passed and she realized that Flora was to be her only child, she was again conscious of failure, for her picture of herself as a clergyman's wife had included a large Victorian family like those in the novels of Miss Charlotte M. Yonge. (Jane and Prudence, 8)

By the end of the novel the humdrum pettiness of parish affairs has discouraged Jane's Trollope-inspired notion of the role of the clergy wife even further, but her more realistic husband laughs gently at her earlier romantic ideas:

"My poor Jane,"--he put his arm around her shoulders and they gazed down together at the remains of their supper--"what can any of us do with these people?"

"We can only go blundering along in that state of life unto which it shall please God to call us," said Jane. "I was going to be such a splendid clergyman's wife when I married you but somehow it hasn't turned out like The Daisy Chain or The Last Chronicle of Barset."

"How you would have stood by me if I had been accused of stealing a cheque," said Nicholas. "I can just imagine you." (Jane and Prudence 212)

Jane's flamboyant nature would have made her a fine helpmeet to the peculiar Rev. Mr. Josiah Crawley of The Last Chronicle of Barset; Crawley goes through dramatic public humiliation and is succored by his long-suffering wife before his final vindication. Jane, who reminded Pym of her own mother (Ms. Pym 98, 117), feels she could have risen to such great

need but the drab vicissitudes of a small parish and a very ordinary husband provide no scope for her expansive personality. In The Daisy Chain the excessively worthy May family patiently confronts death, illness, and poverty while improving their individual characters in exemplary fashion. Pym's use of irony invites the reader to realize that Jane's view of the rose-colored worlds of Trollope and Yonge perhaps never existed in the nineteenth century outside the pages of novels and certainly does not pertain to the middle twentieth century. Trollope's and Yonge's idylls serve as counterpoints to Pym's clerical milieu in Jane and Prudence.

Pym's sixth book Less than Angels substitutes a group of anthropologists and linguists for the Anglican Church as the social glue which holds together a group of Londoners and indeed Pym's novel. Pym hints at this substitution as early as Excellent Women when she introduces the anthropologist Everard Bone:

He was certainly very clever and handsome, too, in his own way, but there was no warmth or charm about his personality. I began imagining him as a clergyman and decided that he would make a good one. His rather forbidding manner would be useful to him. I realized that one might love him secretly with no hope of encouragement, which can be very enjoyable for the young or inexperienced. (Excellent Women 92)

Ironically, the speaker Mildred Lathbury is said to have married this cool, charmless anthropologist in Jane and Prudence. Less Than Angels makes explicit the linkage between the clergy and anthropologists suggested in Excellent



Women in the conversation between anthropologist Miss Esther Clovis and two anthropology students:

"Do you believe in the celibacy of the clergy?" rapped out Miss Clovis suddenly.

"I don't know. I'm afraid I've never thought about it," said Digby.

"Well, then, what about the celibacy of the anthropologist in the field?"

"Oh, surely a man needs a companion out there," said Digby warmly.

"A woman can be such a great help in his work," said Vanessa in her soft tones, "and men do need loving after all." She seemed to enfold Professor Mainwaring, as well as Mark and Digby, in a glance from her melting eyes.

"Then you don't regard the anthropologist as a dedicated being very much like a priest?" went on Miss Clovis.

The young men did not answer immediately, for although they regarded themselves in their role of anthropologists as superior to most other men and certainly to priests, they did not consider that it was necessary for them to forego any of the pleasures enjoyed by these lesser men. (Less Than Angels 204-205).

Although the anthropology students consider themselves superior to the clergy, Pym suggests in Less Than Angels that anthropology, which purports to study human behavior, is a rather sterile, desiccated enterprise which does not provide the sense of social cohesion which the Anglican Church provided to the nineteenth century and which may still be found in a small way in the twentieth-century Church.

A Glass of Blessings goes back to the Anglican Church for a setting, specifically the very high Anglo-Catholic Church of St. Luke's in London. Pym is not retreading the ground of Excellent Women, however. Her first-person narrator Wilmet Forsyth, named for the Charlotte M. Yonge

heroine in Pillars of the House (Ms. Pym 98, 113), is a married woman with little to do who flirts with Anglo-Catholicism while resisting efforts by the grasping clergy to make her into an "excellent woman" to serve their needs. Wilmet also flirts with the new priest, Father Ransome; Harry Talbot, her good friend's husband; and Piers Longridge, a homosexual teacher of Portugese. Wilmet becomes involved with the Church while staving off the clergy, who would tether her to good works; in the end her husband, who has also been involved with a flirtation in his office, and she turn toward each other and away from the distractions of other people and the Church. Pym portrays the concerns of the Church as being minute, the most microscopic being the 1947 tempest in a teapot over the validity of the priestly orders in the Anglican Church of South India. The clergy in the novel are in continual high dudgeon over the Church of South India question and offer courses in the subject to their parishoners by way of spiritual enlightenment; Father Sainsbury, named no doubt for the grocery store chain, even goes over to Rome over the matter. Pym invites the reader to see the concerns of the church as very small beer indeed.

No Fond Return of Love, set in London, merges the worlds of the anthropologist and the Church. Its heroine, Dulcie Mainwaring, is a cataloguer for anthropologists and has the kind of curiosity about people that Pym herself possessed; although she is not a religious person, she spends her lunch

hour looking up the clergy and anthropologists in Who's Who and Crockford's Clerical Dictionary. Also like Pym, Dulcie likes to follow people and track down their haunts, even going so far as to spend a holiday tracking down the vacation guest house run by the mother of the Rev. Neville Forbes. In No Fond Return of Love Pym seems to be experimenting with the Anglican milieu, stretching it as thin as possible and rendering it particularly unhelpful to the characters in the story. Dulcie is fascinated by Church mavins, but nervous about any attempt to draw her into a religious world. When she and a friend travel to Taviscombe in the West Country on the trail of Forbes, they encounter a Christian guest house:

"The Anchorage--"bright Christian atmosphere"--should we try that?"

"We might," said Viola doubtfully.

"Yes," Dulcie agreed, equally doubtful. "Why is it that one suspects a place that actually claims to have a bright Christian atmosphere? What is one afraid of?"

"A certain amount of discomfort--and that the Christianity will manifest itself in unpleasant and embarrassing ways," said Viola.

"And that one will have to endure the company of those who call themselves Christians." (No Fond Return of Love 173-174)

Dulcie is fascinated by the anthropological aspect of the Church but resists its actual manifestations. The original draft of No Fond Return of Love made Dulcie out to be somewhat religious and contained more about the Church, but Pym made a conscious decision to pare this material severely, thereby rendering the novel sparer and more taut

intellectually and making clearer the anthropological nature of the Church (Ms. Pym 18, 1-3).

An Unsuitable Attachment takes place in the unfashionable London church of St. Basil's and is the only Pym book to contain a love story with a happy ending; but, as is typical of Pym, the love story is understated and unglamorous. Ianthe Broome, the daughter of a deceased minor canon, works as a cataloguer in an office, functions as an "excellent woman" in St. Basil's parish, takes a parish trip to Rome, then marries an unprepossessing co-worker John Challow. In this novel we see both the diminished role of the Church and a humorous implicit comparison of the Anglican Church and the Roman Catholic Church. There is talk of moribund parishes and the rise of the welfare state at the expense of the Church. Ianthe visits John when he is sick, and the narrator notes,

Although from her upbringing it might have been thought that 'visiting the sick' would be a part of her daily life she had hardly ever--thanks to the Welfare State--had to perform this duty, and then only with her mother or father. (An Unsuitable Attachment 114)

The Church, it would seem, has very little to do beyond sponsoring trips to the Eternal City, an activity taken up by two separate clergymen in the novel. The Church functions as an arbiter of class and taste, as the characters note in detail Ianthe's inherited eighteenth-century antiques and the exact place in the social pecking order of every church and

priest mentioned, but the Anglican milieu displays no real vigor.

An Unsuitable Attachment, which was written between 1960-65 but not published until 1981, marks a watershed in the Pym canon. In 1963 Pym's long-time publisher Jonathan Cape rejected the novel, which was subsequently rejected by many other publishing houses, thereby sending Barbara Pym into a dark night of obscurity for fourteen years. In the swinging sixties publishers felt Pym's novel was "not the kind to which people are turning" (Pym, A Very Private Eye 213). Pym lamented in her journal entry of 24 March 1963,

To receive a bitter blow on an early spring evening (such as that Cape don't want to publish An Unsuitable Attachment--but it might be that someone doesn't love you any more)--is it worse than on an Autumn or Winter evening? (Ms. Pym 57, 6)

Rejection led to attempts to adapt her writing to a more modern idiom in The Sweet Dove Died and An Academic Question, not wholly successful efforts but interesting as variations on her style.

The Sweet Dove Died, written between 1963-9 and revised in 1977, chronicles the vicissitudes of a soigné middle-aged woman Leonora Eyre who is attracted to a 24-year-old antique dealer but is thrown over for a homosexual lover. As in An Unsuitable Attachment, the characters are engrossed with antique furniture and objets d'art; indeed Leonora is said to have "always cared as much for inanimate objects as for people and . . . spent hours looking after her possessions"

(The Sweet Dove Died 182). There is no Church presence in The Sweet Dove Died, and, while Pym is well able to capture Leonora's sterile world and the brittle ambiance of the London homosexual subculture, the novel lacks the Pym charm and wit.

An Academic Question, written in 1970-71, presents special problems because Pym herself did not approve the final draft which her literary executor, Hazel Holt, put together from first-person and third-person original drafts. Holt says,

In preparing this novel for publication I have amalgamated these two drafts, also making use of some notes that she made and consulting the original handwritten version, trying to "smooth" them (to use Barbara's word) into a coherent whole. (Holt, "Note," An Academic Question N.P.)

The problem immediately arises that we can not know how much of the "smoothing" is Pym's and how much Holt's. In any case, the Church is not important to this novel which, once again, takes the world of anthropology as its framework. The book's protagonist, Caroline Grimstone, is not religious but is fascinated by the question, what provides a sense of community in the modern world? She says of a sociologist:

The subject had promised to be interesting--for what could be more fascinating than the study of a community one actually knew?--and at first I tried hard to listen. But after a very few minutes it became apparent that the dead hand of the sociologist had been at work and as soon as I heard the words 'interacting,' 'in-depth' and 'grass-roots,' I knew that this lecture wasn't going to be any more compelling than the other two had been. . . .

"Marvellous lecture," I murmured as she [Iris] brushed past Alan at her side. Heather Armitage came up to me, followed by Evan Cranton.

"In my day," he remarked, "behaviour of neighbors over the garden fence would hardly have been deemed worthy of serious academic study. The trouble is we're running out of primitive peoples so we're driven back on ourselves." (An Academic Question 77, 79)

In An Academic Question the characters are "driven back on [themselves]" and the anthropological study of themselves; the Anglican Church has faded away as a framework for the novel.

While writing An Academic Question, Pym continued to try to publish The Sweet Dove Died with no success. After a cancer operation, she and her sister began to contemplate retirement and so purchased Barn Cottage in the Village of Finstock just outside of Oxford where Pym spent her weekends after the work week in the city. There she contemplates the rejection of her work and her retirement:

Being told that it is 'virtually impossible' for a novel like The Sweet Dove to be published now (by Constable)--what is the future for my kind of writing? What can my notebooks contain except the usual kind of bits and pieces that can never (?) now be worked into fiction.

Perhaps in retirement, and even in the year before, a quieter narrower kind of life can be worked out and adopted. Bound by English literature and the Anglican Church and small pleasures. . . . (Ms. Pym 70, 2)

And yet in just a few days she has the inkling of perhaps her best novel, Quartet in Autumn:

Have thought of an idea for a new novel based on our own move--all old crabby characters, petty and obsessive. Bad tempered--how easily one could have a false breast. 'But I'd better not write it

till I have time to concentrate on it (look what happened to the last.) (Ms. Pym 70, 2)

The safety net of social services rather than the Anglican Church comprises the milieu of Quartet in Autumn. Of the four main characters, two aging men and two retired women, only one, Edwin, lives in a world compassed about by the Christian year and feast days of obscure saints. Pym stresses repeatedly that government services have not taken up the slack the Church has relinquished to them:

The net of the welfare state and the social services was closing in around them even being pulled rather tightly. Yet in a curious way, since a net, however tightly drawn still had holes, Letty and Marcia were to fall through it. (Ms. Pym 72, 3)

Marcia's neighbors and a social worker try to help her, but she rebuffs them, while her former co-workers dislike getting involved with her; she ultimately dies of starvation in a nice house with a well-stocked larder. The four lead characters of the book as well as the Anglican priest, Father Gellibrand, have forgotten E.M. Forster's motto: "Only connect." The quartet are isolated, scared of involvement, and distrustful of warmth when it is offered to them. Throughout the novel the metaphor "falling through the net" exemplifies the failure of community in modern London society. These elderly characters are disconnected and lack the institutional church as social glue; only Edwin has a support system, but his brand of Christianity includes very little outreach toward others.



Pym's last novel, A Few Green Leaves, returns to the idyll of the country parish, but she is not back in the world of Some Tame Gazelle; while the book is more optimistic than Quartet in Autumn, Pym's sensibility has been tempered by the experiences which made Quartet possible. A Few Green Leaves takes a bemused look at the Church and its ministers, one of whom is caught up in useless antiquarian research and another of whom has gone over to Rome and become a restaurant critic. The Anglican milieu remains but is a gossamer veil of social custom not an underpinning of village life. Pym's notebooks reveal that she has been weighing the role of the Church in society long before starting her last book. In the summer of 1977 she observes:

Sunday Evensong. Awful sermon--about people burying their heads in the welfare state. And that dreadful hymn--"Thy Way Not Mine Oh Lord!" (Ms. Pym 78, 2)

Clearly Pym is not taken with churchly calls to obedience and takes umbrage at a groveling hymn "Thy Way Not Mine Oh Lord" which asks God to choose the singer's friends, health, and "path." It is hard to imagine a Pym heroine or Pym herself asking God or lesser folk like the clergy for guidance "in things great or small." In the original draft of No Fond Return of Love Dulcie too takes issue with the words to the hymn "All Things Bright and Beautiful":

Dulcie waits for the lines, "The rich man in his castle, the poor man at his gate / God made them high or lowly and ordered their estate," but it never came. Then she saw that the verse had

been left out. She sat down feeling cheated out of her indignation. (Ms. Pym 18: I, 23)

Putting God in charge of the fortunes of people does not appeal to Pym, and she is not too sure of the Church's actual willingness to help its parishoners in their several estates. She notes in her 1978 notebook:

First Sunday after Epiphany. . . . In the sermon--helping your neighbor. Could you ask the vicar to clean your windows? (Ms. Pym 79, 3)

Pym obviously thinks not, as does her heroine Emma Howick in A Few Green Leaves, who says of her rector, the Rev. Tom Dagnall:

He was an essentially good person. As well as preaching about heaven he had also given them a sermon about helping one's neighbour, and she was sure that he meant it. But to get down to practical details or brass tacks, could Tom really help her if she asked him? Would he, for example, be capable of cleaning her top windows, which was what she really needed? (A Few Green Leaves 101)

Emma, an anthropologist who has moved to a small west Oxfordshire village (similar to Finstock in which Pym lived) in order to study it, categorizes the people and doings of the town, before marrying the kindly, ineffectual rector Tom Dagnall in the end. Pym wrote this book in the sure knowledge of her own impending death and worked very hard both to finish the novel and to make it a final statement of her world view. She says in her notebook of February 14, 1979:

In the afternoon I finished my novel in its first very imperfect draft. May I be spared to retype and revise it, loading every rift with ore. (Ms. Pym 80, 26)

She died January 11, 1980, having loaded her last novel with the rich ore of her wit and commentary on the human condition.

Pym's protagonist the anthropologist Emma makes lists of all the people in their village and their significance to communal life. During Emma's sojourn all the typical non-religious activities of the Church occur: the Jumble Sale, the Bring-and-Buy sale, the Flower Festival, the Hunger Lunch in aid of Oxfam. Indeed, these activities seem to constitute the real life of the Church and include those who do not attend church, from Mrs. Broome, who always does the flowers, to Adam Prince, who has left the ministry and the Church because he has come to doubt Anglican orders but donates a bottle of wine to the Bring-and-Buy sale nonetheless. At the end of a local funeral, when several women discuss going on to a Tupperware party, one feels both the ritual nature of the Tupperware party and the concomitant secularity of the funeral. The Anglican world of A Few Green Leaves is very thin soup, but as Pym herself said in 1962:

To make my (literary) soup I don't need cream and eggs and Nave Well fish, but just this old cod's head, the discarded outer leaves of a cabbage, water and seasoning. (Ms. Pym 6, 3)

Pym uses this idea of a little being enough in the title of the book. A small drab woman, Miss Grundy, is arranging the altar flowers in the church by sprucing up some tired roses with "a few green leaves," declaring "A few green leaves can make such a difference," which sentiment the minister decides

to use for a sermon. The importance of "a few green leaves" can be seen as Barbara Pym's credo and a key to understanding her view of the Church. Late in her life Pym said:

What I hope readers will find in my novels? First of all, pleasure and enjoyment. I should like to feel that they were in some ways comforting, what a friend and I used to call "good books for bad days." Important influences, English literature and the Church of England (should I have put that the other way around? --I'm not sure!) I suppose I criticize and mock at the clergy and the Church of England because I'm fond of them, and the same might be said about my attitude towards men. (Ms. Pym 98, fol. 84)

Pym was very fond of the Anglican Church even though she knew it was full of the pettiness and peculiarities of humanity. She liked to joke with her sister, Hilary Pym Walton, that the Church was constantly losing people to "Rome, Death and Umbrage" and that umbrage was more deadly than death and more seductive than Rome (Interview). Although Pym was a believer and her good friend Philip Larkin the poet was not, perhaps the closing of his poem "Church Going" also expresses her view of the Church:

A serious house on serious earth it is,  
In whose blent air all our compulsions meet,  
Are recognized, and robed as destinies.  
And that much never can be obsolete,  
Since someone will forever be surprising  
A hunger in himself to be more serious,  
And gravitating with it to this ground,  
Which, he once heard, was proper to grow wise in,  
If only that so many dead lie round. (Larkin 29)

In Pym's novels from Some Tame Gazelle to A Few Green Leaves we see an Anglican Church peopled by spinsters, widows, aging acolytes and thurifers, whose compulsions seem mainly focused

on jumble sales, flower arranging, and which brand of incense to buy, or, as Pym liked to quote from the Keble hymn, "The trivial round, the common task"; but for Pym's characters, as for Keble, "the trivial round, the common task will furnish all we need to ask." Pym's Church has receded to the edges of relevance in twentieth-century England: martyrs are not burned and governments do not fall on its behalf, but it does remain with its dead lying round as a source of community to the few it serves. For Pym such imperfect service does, in the end, suffice.

## CHAPTER III

## THE DEVELOPMENT OF CLERGY TYPES IN PYM'S EARLY NOVELS

If the twentieth-century Anglican Church depicted by Barbara Pym is debilitated, ineffectual, yet muddling through, what of the clergy who are the hierophants of the Church's rites? From her earliest days as a writer Pym develops distinct clergy types which recur with certain refinements in her later novels.

Archdeacon Henry Hoccleve of Some Tame Gazelle, who was patterned on Pym's own heartless Oxford lovers, Henry Harvey, is certainly the prototype and progenitor of the clergy in her later novels.

Harvey, whom Pym met in 1933 at Oxford, was two years ahead of her in college and therefore struck her as her intellectual superior, at least when they were both young (Holt 10). Harvey affected Oscar Wildish clothing and airs on occasion, and Pym was immediately smitten with him, so much so that she began to chase him. Unfortunately, the more she pursued him, the more he took advantage of her and indulged in petty cruelties designed to hurt her feelings and belittle her (M.S. Pym 102, passim). Before giving her papers to the Bodleian Library, Pym expurgated much of her October 1933-June 1934 diary which contains details of her

affair with Harvey, but she preserved enough details to show the flawed and degrading nature of their relationship.<sup>6</sup>

Pym's affair with Harvey set up a bad pattern that recurred in many of her later romances; she would fall madly in love, chase the man, then not have the sense to break off when he got tired of being chased or became abusive. When I interviewed Pym's sister, Hilary Pym Walton, in July of 1987, I asked her if her sister more or less gave up men when she was about thirty-six and took up the Church in their place. Mrs. Walton laughed and said she thought that was probably the truth (Interview). The Church, with all its faults, was likely a healthy substitute for men in Barbara Pym's case, as she seemed unable to relate to them romantically in a mutually satisfying manner. Henry Harvey was the first in a succession of unsatisfactory lovers who let Pym down, but who became models for her characters and especially for her clergy figures.

In July of 1934 she began writing Some Tame Gazelle and very consciously cast Henry Harvey as Archdeacon Hoccleve and other friends as minor characters. It is a tribute to Pym's skill as a very young writer that she was able to render Harvey's traits into a convincing fictional persona at a time when she had no control over her emotions when dealing with

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<sup>6</sup>Many people would have chosen to delete even more personal details than Pym did, not merely because of sexual explicitness, but because of the unattractive victim she appears to be in her own diary.

Harvey in her own life. The two spinster sisters, Belinda and Harriet Bede, the main characters of the novel who are modeled on Pym and her sister Hilary, are divided in their opinion of Hoccleve; Belinda retains a life-long crush on him, but acknowledges a few of his faults, while Harriet sees him for the more or less harmless humbug he is. Hoccleve, who has the good fortune to look the part of an archdeacon, leaves all the work of the parish to his curate and the women; he rises late, retires early, and professes himself exhausted by his duties, which seem to consist chiefly of badgering his cowed wife, Agatha, and criticizing the neighboring clergy. And yet Hoccleve is not entirely idle; his forte, at least according to his own lights, is the sermon. His lethargic temperament, more often than not, induces him to crib a sermon from John Donne or Sir Thomas Browne's Hydriotaphia, Urn Burial. In addition to Donne's last sermon Death's Duell, Hoccleve reads Sermon III, which speaks of a dead body being devoured by worms in a particularly repugnant metaphysical conceit. Harriet complains in an early draft of Some Tame Gazelle,

"I never heard anything so disgusting in my life as that horrid sermon he preached last Sunday; all about worms, and such stilted language."

"But Harriet dear," said Belinda gently, "Henry was reading a sermon of Donne's. . . . Of course the real truth of the matter was that poor Henry was too lazy to write sermons of his own, and perhaps, but only perhaps . . . he wasn't really clever in a theological sort of way." (Ms. Pym 2: I, 33)



Not only is Hoccleve rusty on his theology, he never chooses topics appropriate to his listeners but rather ones which allow him to show off his literary knowledge and send his congregation into drowsing naps with obscure explications of etymology and Anglo-Saxon phrases. Hoccleve lards sermons with quotations from deservedly forgotten poets like Thomas Flatman, who is represented by thirty-four lines beginning,

'Tis not far off; me thinks I see  
 Among the stars some dimmer be;  
 Some tremble as their lamps did fear  
 A neighboring extinguisher . . .

(Some Tame Gazelle 110)

A dim star in the ecclesiastical firmament, Hoccleve saves himself the labor of writing a genuine sermon by quoting the likes of Flatman, although his parishoners doze through such inappropriate material.

Hoccleve even uses the Sunday School children as foils for his displays of erudition. He teaches one class Beowulf and another, "The Battle of Malden" so that he may explain unusual words in the poems. In the early manuscript of Some Tame Gazelle, Pym has Belinda note that "dear Henry's campaign for trying to interest the more intelligent Sunday school children, in the Early English Text Society was ridiculous" (Ms. Pym 222). The final version is more explicit in its exposé of Hoccleve's use of the children for his own means:

In the meantime, a child was reciting, rather  
 too fast, but Belinda caught one or two lines.  
 In Dingles deep and mountains hoar  
 They combatted the tusky boar.

She tried to remember why the Archdeacon had been anxious to include this, for it was not a particularly suitable poem. Then she realized that it was in order that he might explain to an audience not really interested in such linguistic niceties, the history of the rare word dingle. How it is first known in the twelfth or thirteenth century in a work called Sawles Warde: then it is revived by the Elizabethans, who gave it to Milton--you remember it in Comus, of course . . . (Some Tame Gazelle 41-42)

Aside from the fact that etymology and literary lore are not the usual stuff of Sunday school classes, Hoccleve's preoccupation with showing off his knowledge to his congregation bespeaks his interest in superficial ornamentation rather than the fundamentals of religion in everyday life. Belinda notes that "the Archdeacon had a hankering after the picturesque and would have liked a ha-ha, a ruined temple, grottoes, waterfalls and gloomily overhanging trees. He fancied himself to be rather like one of those eighteenth-century clergymen suffering from the spleen" (Some Tame Gazelle 22).

A picturesque representation of his duties and persona is always uppermost in the Archdeacon's priorities although his posturing impresses only himself. Montaigne's observation that people are seldom admired by their own households certainly applies to the Archdeacon, whose servants call him "the venerable Hoccleve" behind his back, capturing perfectly his martyred, self-important air in their epithet.

Hoccleve, then, is a lily of the field who toils not, neither does he spin, but has constantly to be humored out of peevish moods, which occasions Belinda to observe, "Archdeacons ought not to need humouring . . . supposing Henry were a bishop, could one still expect no improvement?" (Some Tame Gazelle 38). Pym obviously thinks not.

Hoccleve's only sermon of his own fashioning which Pym quotes at length is one on the terrors of the Last Judgment which he thunders at a collection of mousy spinsters, children, and a drab bank manager, who hardly fit Hoccleve's descriptive of being "so sunk in lethargy that they do not know their own wickedness" (Some Tame Gazelle, 98). After trying to frighten these pallid souls out of their meek sins, Hoccleve moves on to his usual inappropriate literary allusions before ending with a coup de grâce from Young's Night Thoughts in which he accuses the congregation of "call[ing] aloud for ev'ry bauble drivell'd o'er by sense" (Some Tame Gazelle 112). Is Hoccleve really worried about the souls of these church mice? Probably not, but the Last Judgment is wonderful theatre and a grand opportunity for a pyrotechnic display of Dantesque punishments which the archdeacon cannot resist.

Hoccleve seems to have no empathy for his flock or, indeed, any spiritual life. One wonders why he became a priest at all until one considers the real Anglican clergy of the twentieth century. While there is diversity in the

clergy, class-consciousness imbues the group as it does the English school system. Some proportion of the clergy of the first half of the twentieth century seem to have been recruited at young ages from the ranks of public school students with little regard for spiritual qualities or suitability for the ministry. Being a clergyman is a genteel occupation which may be safely chosen without regard for an interior call to care for others (Towler and Coxon 58-59, 81, 83). Hoccleve seems to fall into this worldly group, an impression which is heightened when one considers that his character was based on Henry Harvey, who consistently exhibited churlish rather than spiritual qualities.

Hoccleve's curate, the Rev. Edgar Donne, who is partially modeled on Charlotte Brontë's Rev. Donne in her novel Shirley, represents the mature clergy in embryo: he is spoiled, made over by older women and seems to have acquired a patronizing, martyred demeanor with his systematic theology. Hoccleve introduces him to the people in the parish magazine:

The Reverend Edgar Donne--The name is of course pronounced Dunne--will be with us by the time you read these words . . . Nobody will be more glad to welcome him than I, myself, for whom these last few weeks have been more trying than any of you can possibly imagine. Without a curate it has been impossible for me to take the holiday I so badly need and I have been forced to cancel some of the services because I have not felt equal to taking them, as the ready help I looked for from fellow priests in the neighboring parishes has not been forth coming . . . (Some Tame Gazelle 8-9).

The Rev. Mr. Donne, who does not in fact pronounce his name Dunne but who will soon learn to do so, one is certain, takes up where his superior leaves off and begins his duties complaining of fatigue and overwork; he dreads the church garden party, for which the women will do all the work. "I shall be almost glad when it is over. These functions are always very tiring for us" (Some Tame Gazelle 18), he says.

Pym shows that Donne has a firm grip on the platitudinous as he opines, "Ah, well, we ought to share what we have with others" with "rather disagreeable unctuousness"; "we cannot all have the same gifts," with "an insufferably patronizing air"; and "few of us are true theologians . . . . But after all, the real knowledge comes from within and not from books" spoken "sententiously" (Some Tame Gazelle 15, 68, 124). One feels Donne is well on his way to becoming a clone of his mentor, Hoccleve. The curate also foreshadows the Rev. Julian Malory of Excellent Women in his dedication to the Boys' Club and the Scouts as havens from complex interaction with women.

Archdeacon Hoccleve and his curate Donne are the titular heads of the small society depicted in Some Tame Gazelle, but their power is illusory. Belinda and Harriet Bede, Hoccleve's wife Agatha, and the "splendid" Miss Liversidge do all the planning and work that is accomplished in the parish, while both mocking and deferring to Hoccleve and Donne. Belinda had vied with Agatha when they were both in college

for the hand of the Archdeacon; both women are brighter than the cleric, and Agatha is said to have made him an archdeacon by her scheming (Some Tame Gazelle 11). Although the archdeacon cannot find or do anything without his wife, she allows him to bully her. Belinda wishes she had nabbed Hoccleve herself but seems to intuit that she may be better off as his ardent admirer than as his wife; she maintains control of her life, while Agatha must grovel and scheme.

Harriet, an aging flirt, falls in love with each new curate including Donne, while keeping an old suitor, Count Bianco, on a string. Where men are concerned, Belinda and Harriet seem to have decided that "heard melodies are sweet but those unheard are sweeter." In the slow time of Some Tame Gazelle, Archdeacon Hoccleve never fades as a romantic focus for Belinda, even though she realizes objectively what a pompous bore he has become and may have always been.

The end of Some Tame Gazelle sees Mr. Donne married off to a Miss Berridge, a woman vastly smarter than he and one very much like Agatha Hoccleve. Like Keats's Grecian Urn, Some Tame Gazelle is a static idyll. The only ripples in this placid scene are the brief visits of Mr. Mold, a librarian, and the Rt. Rev. Theo Grote, who both propose to Belinda, hoping to secure an Agatha Hoccleve type, and are turned down. Grote, the missionary bishop of Mbawawa, Africa, is another clergy type who emerges in Pym's early canon for a brief appearance in Some Tame Gazelle. Grote,

who constantly quotes Mbawawa proverbs and lore, is clearly the prototype of the anthropologists of Pym's later books as well as the clergyman anthropologist Father Gemini of Less Than Angels. One of the great comic set pieces of Some Tame Gazelle is Bishop Grote's slide show of African natives, notable for stereotypical photography and commentary and livened up by the Bishop's rendering of a Mbawawa wedding song of epic length and peculiar timbre causing Belinda to chastise herself, "And yet, perhaps the Mbawawa did have voices like that and it was wrong to feel that one wanted to laugh" (Some Tame Gazelle 179). Grote gives a minute explanation of a musical instrument called a HMWOQ ("pronounced HMWOQ"), then discovers the slide is upside down so his explanation does not fit. The show ends with Grote's donning of a native mask with a hinged beak and flowing mane, which spectacle coaxes from the audience a promise of discarded clothing for the flower-clad Africans who appear quite contented in their garlands.<sup>7</sup>

At the end of Some Tame Gazelle, Belinda has rejected Grote's proposal and Harriet has turned down Count Bianco yet again. Belinda and Harriet know that they should not marry, but remain the real social powers behind the likes of

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<sup>7</sup>In the published version of Some Tame Gazelle, Bishop Grote and his African parishoners have replaced "thousand of unfortunate Nazis in exile in Africa" who appeared as objects of charity in the 1934 draft of the book. Pym, who admired German culture, was naive about the Nazis at twenty-one but came to loath them and excised them from Some Tame Gazelle (Ms. Pym 2: I, 456).

Hoccleve and Donne. In Some Tame Gazelle Pym shows the true nature of all social structures: the powers that be, ordained-of-God or other wise, often have no power and must be propped up by the unseen hands of helpmeets she comes to call "excellent women."

Very much a descendant of the Rev. Edgar Donne in Some Tame Gazelle is the Rev. Stephen Latimer of Crampton Hodnet, which was written within a few years of the earlier work.<sup>8</sup> Just as Donne's name suggests the seventeenth-century Anglican divine and poet John Donne, Latimer's name naturally recalls the Anglican martyr Hugh Latimer, who was burned at the stake in Oxford, where Pym's character lives, and the first Christian martyr, St. Stephen. Latimer accepts the attentions of women as his due. Pym tells us,

Women usually gushed with delight when they met him . . . Of course, Miss Doggett made a fuss of him, as all women did, but he rather liked this, as long as he wasn't expected to give anything in return except the politeness and charm which came to him without effort. (Crampton Hodnet 21, 27)

Latimer's facile charm and youthful good looks are the ideal qualifications for the priests of the Pym world in which middle-aged women gush over the clergy, helping them to grow

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<sup>8</sup>Barbara Pym wrote Crampton Hodnet in 1939-40 as World War II was heating up and her own war work became more intense. She did not try to publish the book after the war. As her own death from cancer approached in the late 1970's Pym made notes for revision of the work; after her death in January 1980, her friend Hazel Holt edited the book according to Pym's notes. Unlike An Academic Question, Crampton Hodnet, published in 1985, contains few Holt emendations and is still very much a work of Pym's youth.



into gargoyles like Archdeacon Hoccleve. Nevertheless, many Pym heroines are clear-eyed rather than gushy, and prone to catching out feeble liars like Latimer, who plays hooky from his Evensong duties then fibs that he has been helping the Vicar of the fictitious village of Crampton Hodnet in the Cotswolds. The typical Pym "excellent woman" Jessie Morrow, who also appears in Jane and Prudence, catches Latimer in his lie, making him very nervous, so much so that he actually proposes to her in self-defense. Jessie Morrow laughs off the proposal but mischievously calls all future fishy goings on in Oxford "Crampton Hodnet," thus making Latimer very edgy. Latimer's strong suit is his glib charm which is insufficient to enable him to cope with a shrewd, witty woman like Jessie who delights in calling his bluff. By the end of the novel, Latimer has fallen for a nubile nineteen-year-old who won't ask as many questions as Jessie and who has the good sense to have a Lord for a father; Latimer's charm and future marital connections virtually assure him a snug harbor in the Church.

The story of the charming, bumbling Stephen Latimer and his vagaries act as a counterpoint to the main narrative line in Crampton Hodnet, in which an attractive, lazy, middle-aged Oxford don, Francis Cleveland, has a brief flirtation with a young student, Barbara Byrd. Cleveland ultimately goes off on an abortive weekend with Miss Bird, but is such a poor candidate for adultery that even his own wife does not think

him capable of it. As she says, "Francis simply hadn't got it in him to fall in love with someone else and break up a comfortable home" (Crampton Hodnet 146). Cleveland is offended that his wife Margaret does not find the possibility of his infidelity much of a threat. He thinks to himself, "She probably thought it impossible that he should have a love-affair . . . feeling suddenly aggrieved" (Crampton Hodnet 163). His bossy aunt, Miss Doggett, Stephen Latimer's land-lady, sees raging fires of passion in her nephew's inept flirtation and stirs up a lot of gossip in Oxford on the subject.

The shrewd Jesse Morrow makes explicit the parallel between the Rev. Latimer's lying and Mr. Cleveland's dalliance when she says,

All the same, the whole affair seemed a little suspicious--rather Crampton Hodnet, was how she put it to herself. Oh, yes, distinctly Crampton Hodnet. (Crampton Hodnet 181)

The Latimer and Cleveland strands of the novel are further woven together at the end when Latimer gives Cleveland a ride from Dover to Oxford when the latter's car breaks down. Latimer is exuberant over his forthcoming marriage, while Cleveland is relieved to be clear of his romantic entanglement, and yet still somewhat aggrieved that his wife correctly predicted his inability to be unfaithful. Cleveland says to himself,

If only Margaret had been a little more reasonable, all this would never have happened. It hardly occurred to him how lucky he was to have

a wife who, besides being a wife, could also be held responsible for everything that had happened to him! (Crampton Hodnet 194)

In Crampton Hodnet the women are clearly in charge of arranging a world where inept men like Latimer and Cleveland can ply their charm and perform a few churchly duties poorly, in the case of Latimer, or spend another twenty years writing an unreadable book in the case of Cleveland. While Cleveland is not a clergyman, his personality type definitely reappears in later Pym priests, such as Julian Malory of Excellent Women, Neville Forbes in No Fond Return of Love and Tom Dagnall of A Few Green Leaves, just as Margaret Cleveland and Jesse Morrow evolve into "excellent women" in her later work. As in Some Tame Gazelle, the women of Crampton Hodnet are the powers behind self-important men who acknowledge neither their own ineptitude nor the women's competence.

Pym's short novel Civil to Strangers contains a rector, the Rev. Rockingham Wilmot, and a curate, Mr. Paladin, who are not descendants of Hoccleve or of Donne and Latimer. Dull, conscientious types, these clerical denizens of Up Callow are content with a very "trivial round." Wilmot, who is described as having "limited intelligence," is chiefly concerned with monitoring the reading and dinner-table conversations of his daughters to prevent contamination of their delicate minds. His description of a trendy young neighbor, Miss Gay, is representative:

"We must remember that Miss Gay hasn't had the advantages of a good upbringing and a healthy

family life. Also she has lived in France . . ." Here the rector made a sweeping gesture with his hand for he had just remembered that Janie [his daughter] was at the table, and he judged that a sweep of the hand was the wisest conclusion to his sentence. (Civil to Strangers 84)

France is clearly dangerous territory to Wilmot; one can imagine the opium dens and Apache dancers racing through his mind.

Wilmot's curate Paladin is terrified of the flirtatious Miss Gay and even hides in his dark study to escape her attentions. Although he has a first in theology from Oxford, one feels his timidity and preoccupation with odd bits of theology will not help him to rise in the Church. Wilmot and Paladin will probably be tedious toilers in Up Callow the rest of their worthy lives.

There is a Hoccleve type in Civil to Strangers,<sup>9</sup> however, in the person of writer Adam Marsh-Gibbon, who is spoiled by his attentive, patient wife Cassandra. As the book opens, Adam is at work on what he describes as "a contemplative novel" with one character, a gardener, who never speaks but is said by Adam to be "affected by what Wordsworth calls 'the beautiful and permanent forms of Nature'" (Civil To Strangers 37). After abandoning the

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<sup>9</sup>Civil to Strangers is the title novella in a slight posthumous collection edited by Hazel Holt and published in 1987. Pym wrote the work in 1936 after Some Tame Gazelle and before Crampton Hodnet. Pym chose not to publish either Civil to Strangers or An Academic Question, but, after her death, Holt, her literary executor, went against her wishes and published these unfinished works.

project and making paper boats out of the last chapter of the novel (which activity his wife describes as "much the best thing"), Adam goes to work on an epic which she notes is "nearly as bad" as the novel. Despite Cassandra's critical facility, which may not be notably acute, given the manifest awfulness of her husband's oeuvres, she allows her husband to bully her and demand the goods and services due a pasha. Marsh-Gibbon is indeed a Hoccleve in his self-conscious affectations of culture and martyrdom. Although Marsh-Gibbon is a writer, not a clergyman, he belongs in the hierarchy of Pym clergy because he is the quintessential high priest of his own arty aspirations, laziness and slenderness of talent.

In her early novels Barbara Pym develops the clergy types which will recur in her middle and later works with refinements and further developments of character. Archdeacon Hoccleve of Some Tame Gazelle is clearly the progenitor of all of her later clergymen. No later clergy are as outrageously funny as Hoccleve but this lack of humor is more than compensated for by subtlety and depth as Pym's vision and style mature. However, one retains the affection for Hoccleve one feels for Fielding's Joseph Andrews or Trollope's Mrs. Proudie. An impossible character whether loveable or irritating, who is nevertheless convincingly created, is always a delight.

Very much in the Hoccleve line of descent, although not a clergyman, is Adam Marsh-Gibbon of Civil to Strangers, who

is as pompous and selfish as Hoccleve but not as amusing. The curates Edgar Donne of Some Tame Gazelle and Stephen Latimer of Crampton Hodnet are certainly the progenitors of the younger clergy in Pym's later novels and display the genetic markings which will flower into some of the clerical horrors like Father Thames of A Glass of Blessings and Father Benger of No Fond Return of Love.

The Oxford don Francis Cleveland of Crampton Hodnet appears to have taken orders and metamorphosed into Julian Malory in Excellent Women, Neville Forbes in No Fond Return of Love and Tom Dagnall of A Few Green Leaves. Rockingham Wilmot and Mr. Paladin of Civil to Strangers evolve into minor clerical figures like "mild dumpy" Father Bode in A Glass of Blessings. Bishop Grote of Some Tame Gazelle is later re-incarnated in Pym's anthropologists and clergymen like Father Gemini of Less Than Angels.

By the end of Pym's third novel, Civil to Strangers, all of her clergy types are present in embryo. As her skill as a writer grows and her vision sharpens, she will render these Anglican divines with greater complexity and wit.

## CHAPTER IV

PYM'S "EXCELLENT WOMEN" AND  
THE CLERGYMEN OF HER MIDDLE PERIOD

Pym's early work, Some Tame Gazelle, Civil to Strangers and Crampton Hodnet, reflect her efforts to learn her craft; each novel was reworked substantially over long periods of time before publication. After the publication of Some Tame Gazelle in 1950 Pym was able to strike out confidently as a recognized author and create Excellent Women, published in 1952, which is typical of her fully mature style. In this book Pym develops the idea of the "excellent woman" personified in the main character Mildred Lathbury. As early as her unfinished "Home Front Novel" written and abandoned in 1939 Pym shows a clergyman, Canon Palfrey, observing the women of his church rolling bandages and musing, "Excellent women... always busy doing something. At present they were busy preparing for the war that everyone prayed would not come" (Civil To Strangers 220). This refrain "excellent women" becomes the leitmotif of the novel of the same name, and Pym gradually brings us to understand just who these women are and their special relationship to the Church and clergy.

Mildred Lathbury, the first-person narrator, is the thirtyish daughter of a deceased clergymen who works part-

time for an organization which aids impoverished gentle women, lives in a tiny flat, and spends much of her time on church work. Father Julian Malory, the rector of her church which is modeled on St. Gabriel's, Warwick Square, London (Ms. Pym 162, fol. 22), refers to his flock of dotting spinsters including Mildred as "excellent women" and is always glad to see them arranging flowers, sorting jumble, or doing other good works. Mildred says of excellent women that "they are not for marrying. . . . They are for being unmarried and by that I mean a positive rather than a negative state" (Excellent Women 189-90). They are to be accorded "respect and esteem" by men and eschew romantic involvements. Pym implies that men are not often romantically attracted to excellent women in any case; men sense that while excellent women may make good cataloguers or church workers and may even make a show of kow-towing to men, they will not relinquish the core of their personality to a masculine view of the world. This defiant act of non servium is disquieting to Pym's men because they do not know how to categorize these independent women except in the catchall phrase of "excellent women." In the Pym world, an excellent woman may appear to be mousy but she is fundamentally self-defined even if the definition is only that of jumble sorter.

The Rev. Julian Malory, rector of St. Mary's Anglo-Catholic Church, has a retinue of excellent women to serve as his parishoners and train bearers. Malory's character is



much more complex and sophisticated than Pym's earlier clergy types like Hoccleve, Donne, and Grote, who are essentially delightful stereotypes. A good-looking, ascetic man of forty, Malory tends to his ritualistic duties in a kindly, vague way, hardly noticing the flock of excellent women who cluck over him and harbor mild romantic notions about him, while his spinster sister Winifred "makes a home" for him. In Malory Pym has drawn a type very common in the Roman Catholic and Anglo-Catholic clergy, the homme manqué, who does not understand women and who is not strongly attracted to them and so retreats into an approved world of celibacy. Because he has so little experience of women, Malory falls for Allegra Gray, a clergyman's widow whom he mistakenly takes for an excellent woman. Allegra shows a "sweet nature" to Malory, but as Mildred says "Men are sometimes taken in. They don't even quite see the terrible depths that we do. The Dog beneath the skin . . . ." (Excellent Women 207). When Allegra tries to run Winifred out of the house by suggesting she join a convent or go to a home for the elderly at age 42, Winifred finally leaves in a storm causing Malory to see Mrs. Gray's true colors, saying, "I obviously had no idea of her true character. You see, I thought her such a fine person " (Excellent Women 211). Mildred notes to herself that Mrs. Gray was, at any rate, very pretty. The maid Mrs. Morris reports Mrs. Gray's parting words,

"She said she'd had quite enough being married to one clergyman, and something about them not

knowing how to treat women and no wonder." Mrs. Morris paused, a little puzzled. "I don't know what it was no wonder about, Mrs. Jubb didn't say. And then she went on about Miss Winifield, oh, it was shocking the things she said." (Excellent Women 214)

In typical Pym fashion, the phrase "no wonder" conveys a world of implied meaning. While Mrs. Gray is rather brutal to Winifred, she does understand Julian Malory, who is spoiled by his sister and his religious retinue of excellent women and has only to give in return, "The politeness and charm which came to him with out effort" like those of his fellow clergyman Stephen Latimer in Crampton Hodnet.

Malory is not bad-tempered like Hoccleve, but does very little work and patronizes the women who do such work as gets done in the parish. The women recognize his pretensions and laziness, but take the usual revenge of the perceived inferior: they roll their eyes and snipe at him behind his back. When the women decorate the church for Whit-Sunday, Malory bestows fulsome praise on the lilies sent by the absent Lady Farmer, the only titled member of the church, expecting the women who have come to work to be impressed with absent nobility. They are less than awed. One woman suggests that Father Malory may help, causing another to say,

Father Malory help with the decorating! Those men never do anything. I expect they'll slink off and have a cup of coffee once the work starts.  
(Excellent Women 117)

Lady Farmer's lilies receive the place of honor on the altar by priestly decree while said priest "wander[s] round giving

encouragement, though no practical help, to all" (Excellent Women 118). He bestows a "splendid" on Mildred for sticking a bunch of flowers in a potted-meat jar, which prompts her to observe,

I did not feel that there was anything particularly splendid about what I was doing and Sister Blatt and I exchanged smiles as he passed on to Miss Statham and Miss Enders at the pulpit. (Excellent Women 118)

Like the "no wonder," the exchanged smile is the secret handshake of the sorority of women who can see through the empty praise of Malory to his laziness. The smile says, "He thinks we're impressed with his little dollops of praise but we know better."

Malory's instincts about women are always off-key--probably an innate tendency made worse by years of being catered to by women in his ministry. We learn that Malory spends much of his time with the Boys' Club and the Boy Scouts, havens from interaction with women. But what is a man to do who is uncomfortable with women except in superficial relationships but who finds all of his parishoners are "excellent woman"? Hide out at the Boy's Club, of course.

Malory's most off-cue conversation with a woman occurs when he tells Mildred that he plans to marry Allegra Gray; he seems to think Mildred wants to marry him and blunders through their talk in a manner both pompous and pathetic:

"It's so splendid of you to understand like this. I know it must have been a shock to you,

though I dare say you weren't entirely unprepared. Still, it must have been a shock, a blow almost, I might say," he labored on, heavy and humourless, not at all like his usual self. Did love always make men like this? I wondered."

"I was never in love with you, if that's what you mean," I said, thinking it was time to be blunt. "I never expected that you would marry me."

"Dear Mildred," he smiled, "you are not the kind of person to expect things as your right even though they may be."

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 . . . "Allegra is a very sweet person and she has had a hard life."

I murmured that yes, I supposed she had.

"The fatherless and widow," said Julian in what seemed a rather fatuous way.

"Is she fatherless too?"

"Yes, she is an orphan," he said solemnly.

"Well, of course, a lot of people over thirty are orphans. I am myself," I said briefly. "In fact I was an orphan in my twenties. But I hope I shan't ever be a widow. I'd better hurry up if I'm going to be even that."

"And I had better hurry into Evensong," said Julian, for the bell had now stopped. "Are you coming or do you feel it would upset you?"

"Upset me?" I saw that it was no use trying to convince Julian that I was not heartbroken at the news of his engagement. "No, I don't think it will upset me." (Excellent Women 133-4)

An essentially kind man, Malory's vanity and weak understanding of women play him false every time, making avoidance his most successful tactic. When Allegra runs Malory's sister out of their home behind Malory's back, Mildred partially blames Malory's unwillingness to tackle the problem of how the three adults will live together,

. . . This may sound a cynical thing to say, but don't you think men sometimes leave difficulties to be solved by other people or to solve themselves? (Excellent Women 206)

Because he will not take his life into his own hands, Malory's engagement is broken off and he returns to the status quo with his sister. One feels he will be spending even more time at the Boys' Club, however, because he agrees in the wake of Allegra's departure to let bossy, flat-footed Sister Blatt move into his ex-fiancée's flat in his home. Mildred professes herself to be "a little sorry for him, surrounded as he would be by excellent women. But at least he would be safe from people like Mrs. Gray; Sister Blatt would defend him fiercely against all such perils, [she] knew" (Excellent Women 217). Mildred even wonders whether it might be her duty to marry him "if only to save him from being too well protected." (217). It appears that Malory must have one ruler, a wife like Chaucer's Wife of Bath who expects the "maistrie," or many, in the excellent women of his parish who will fuss over him while giving him advice which he will largely fail to hear while living in his own world of birettas, copes, and incense. The end of Excellent Women finds the Rev. Father Julian Malory, the keeper of the Anglican flame at St. Mary's, and the excellent women of St. Mary's, the keepers of Father Malory.

Barbara Pym introduces the anthropologist Everard Bone into Excellent Women as a foil for Malory and a beginning of her comparison of the clergy and anthropologists as purveyors of antiquated rites and cultures. Both groups also absorb the energies of excellent women and take these helpmeets for

granted. Bone says of the wives of anthropologists who index or proofread their husband's books, "After all, it's what wives are for" (94), causing Mildred to say to herself, "I remembered my Lenten resolution to try to like him. It was getting a little easier but I felt that at any moment I might have a setback (94)." Mildred warms to Bone, however, and by the end of Excellent Women, he has annexed her from Malory's circle and enlisted her help correcting proofs and indexing his book. Like Malory, he thinks he has conned her with his manipulative comment, "Reading proofs for a long stretch gets a little boring. The index would make a nice change for you" (255). But, while Mildred agrees with his version of the job, she thinks to herself,

And before long I should be certain to find myself at his sink peeling potatoes and washing up; that would be a nice change when both proof-reading and indexing began to pall. Was any man worth this burden? Probably not, but one shouldered it bravely and cheerfully and in the end it might turn out to be not so heavy after all. (255)

The end of Excellent Women finds Mildred serving both Bone and Malory as an excellent woman and declaring herself to have "a full life." As Diana Benet points out in her study Something to Love, having men to fuss over or "something to love," either "some tame gazelle, some gentle dove, or a poodle dog" is central to the full life of the excellent women who people Pym's novels (1). Excellent Women sets the Pym pattern for both the women of her title and the

clergy and anthropologists who are the objects of their devotion.

Mildred, like Jesse Morrow in Crampton Hodnet and Harriet and Belinda Bede in Some Tame Gazelle, is a clever woman living a life affording very little scope for the exercise of her talents. They are from a generation of women who were expected to marry and keep a comfortable home, but two world wars closed off these options, leaving them to take marginal jobs in the world of work where women were not really wanted or accepted.<sup>10</sup> These women, including Pym's characters, discovered the Anglican Church as a place to exercise their considerable organizational talents by running jumble sales, flower fêtes and tea parties. Pym's novels depict the interaction between "excellent" women and the debilitated and often precious high church clergy and their male minions who are wardens, acolytes and sidesmen. Pym's churches, then, are mélanges of unlike types whose struggles for mastery she renders comic. Are her church women and clergy realistic? Just visit a few Anglo-Catholic churches and you will see Hoccleve, Malory and their excellent women to the life.

The Rev. Nicholas Cleveland, the husband of the title character Jane in Jane and Prudence, is one of the most

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<sup>10</sup>Barbara Pym herself was of the generation she depicts in her characters and struggled for years with an ill-paying, unchallenging job to pay the rent so she could write at night.

decent men in Pym's rogue's gallery of Anglican clergymen. Buried in a country parish, perhaps because of his quiet ways and modest speaking gifts, Cleveland is a foil for his flamboyant wife, whose Oxford degree and zany sense of humor do not equip her to be the ideal country vicar's helpmeet. Yet Cleveland chafes too as he conscientiously goes about his work; he observes to Jane,

Yes, one does rather long for the talk of intelligent people sometimes--people of one's own kind, I mean. (Jane and Prudence 66)

Jane replies to this lament, "Oh, that would be too much! Besides, we might not be equal to it now" (66). Jane's friend Prudence observes of Cleveland,

He used to be so attractive, she thought, but being a clergyman and a husband had done their worst for him, rubbed off the bloom, if that was the right word. (Jane and Prudence 80)

Pym conveys a portrait of Cleveland as an attractive, bright Oxonian, whose father was a don and an atheist, but who turned to the ministry himself and then proceeded to have all the energy and attractiveness leached out of him by the Church. It is a wistful picture of a good man worn down by circumstances which also serve to make his wife quirkier and less likely to fit into a country parish. Luckily Cleveland has the grace to laugh at his aspirations to a snug berth at Oxford and his wife's desire to live in a Trollope or Yonge novel. Nicholas Cleveland is perhaps Pym's most appealing major clergy figure.



Cleveland's wife Jane is the friend and former teacher of the other title character, twenty-nine-year old Prudence who works for a "vague cultural organisation" and has a crush on her married boss, Arthur Grampian. Jane invites Prudence for an extended visit in the country, hoping to marry her off to an attractive widower Fabian Driver. Prudence is outmaneuvered in her quest for Driver by Jesse Morrow, the companion to Miss Doggett, both of whom also appear in Crampton Hodnet. Nicholas Cleveland's church serves as the social background for the machinations of Jane, Prudence and Jesse. While the women scheme, Cleveland quietly goes about his duties. The end of Jane and Prudence finds Jane and Nicholas puttering about their parish and Prudence developing another crush on an office worker.

As mentioned earlier, Pym injects into Jane and Prudence as a grace note the fact that Mildred Lathbury and Everard Bone of Excellent Women have married. A gossiping woman discussing the marriage describes Bone as an "anthrophagist," which is corrected to "an anthropologist" when another woman tells her an anthrophagist is a cannibal who eats human flesh (Jane and Prudence 126). Pym is continuing a motif found in Excellent Women which reverberates through the rest of her novels: the idea that the anthropologist's study of cannibals and ritual eaters of human flesh is similar to the ritual consecration and consumption of Christ's flesh by the Anglican clergy in the communion service. Pym never makes

this comparison explicit, but she repeats the juxtaposition several times as if to say, "Notice this if you have the wit to."

By the end of Jane and Prudence, Pym has made explicit the connection between the clergy and anthropologists and made clear her attitude towards the clergy and men in general. In a Times Literary Supplement interview of January 1, 1978 she amplifies her views:

I've been asked before about my attitude towards men--after Jane and Prudence somebody said to me, "You don't think much of men, do you, but that isn't really my attitude at all." . . . Certainly I've observed and studied men and their behavior very closely, perhaps because I used to work with anthropologists and got used to analyzing people's behavior. I think I'd say that when you make a close study of something or somebody you do tend to become fond of it. In the same way that I joke about the Anglican church and I'm very fond of that. (Ms. Pym. 98, fol. 32)

Less than Angels, published in 1955, revolves around the world of anthropology more than that of the Church, but occasionally the two intersect. If Less than Angels were a Royal Stuart tartan, the women would be the red fibers, as they are in all Pym novels, the anthropologists the black threads and the clergy the less-frequently-occurring yellow; yet all of the strands are essential to the fabric of the book just as they are to the tartan.

Catherine Oliphant is the sometime mistress of the anthropologist Tom Mallow, who spends much of his time on research trips to Africa and is angling to add the other principle character of the book Deirdre Swan to his list of

conquests. Deirdre's mother and aunt, Mabel Swan and Rhoda Wellcome, live together and seem to be based on Hilary Pym Walton and Barbara Pym. By the time Mallow returns to Africa, where he is killed in a riot, he has dumped Catherine and annexed Deirdre; ironically, his death devastates Catherine but hardly moves Deirdre, who has moved on to another anthropologist.

Less than Angels depicts the rivalries among anthropologists, which are usually trivial and often humorous in the same way Pym's squabbles among the clergy amuse by their pettiness. The roles of clergyman and anthropologist merge in the minor figure of Father Gemini, a Roman Catholic missionary and linguistic expert of bushy beard and mercurial temperament. Father Gemini has his own "excellent woman" in Miss Gertrude Lydgate, a fellow anthropologist, with whom he practices the guttural sounds of primitive languages. One of these languages is spoken by only five people in the world, and the only speaker willing to be interviewed and taped has no teeth. As Father Gemini and Miss Lydgate rumble and gurgle this "lost" language, Pym invites the reader to laugh at the esoteric exercise.

Another minor character in Less than Angels is the high church clergyman Father Tulliver, a Hoccleve clone, who advertises in his church magazine for a good woman who will volunteer to wash his vestments. He notes:

"Perhaps it would not have come well from the pulpit," he added thoughtfully, "but something had

to be done. I hadn't a clean alb left and I'm not much of a hand at laundering," he laughed, with the confidence of one who has never tried and does not intend to. (Less Than Angels 145)

Later while instructing the excellent woman Rhoda Wellcome who has agreed to do his laundry he speculates on becoming a missionary,

"Oddly enough," he said thoughtfully, as if it were a matter a surprise to him or even some kind of oversight on somebody's part, "I have not had the call to the Mission field. I have felt strongly perhaps, though I cannot judge that, that my work lay here."

"Oh, you couldn't leave us, Father, not when you've got everything so nice, the services and all that," said Rhoda confusedly. "Whatever should we do?"

"It might be just what you needed," said Father Tulliver on a stern note. "It might prove a testing time to show what you were made of." Rhoda, thinking of the heavy wash she was about to undertake for him, felt that he was being a little unfair. Surely he could not feel that she had been found wanting in any way? (Less Than Angels 148-149)

Of course the last thing Father Tulliver intends to do himself is to give up his sinecure for a "testing time," but he fancies that discussing possible calls to the mission fields will redound to his credit with his parishoners. Rhoda is unimpressed. Like other Pym excellent women Rhoda will do the priest's laundry, but she will not buy his pious blather.

While the Church and the clergy are not central to Less than Angels, Father Gemini manages to stage a coup in the anthropological world when he inveigles a large grant, which others were promised, from a rich old lady. The end of the

novel finds his non-clerical colleagues shaking their fists at him in envy as he trots off to track down the toothless lisper of a forgotten language.

A Glass of Blessing (1958) returns to a tight little Anglican island, St Luke's Anglo-Catholic parish, and its vicar, a Hoccleve type, Father Thames.<sup>11</sup> Thames, a white-maned social lion, collects Fabergé eggs, other bibelots<sup>12</sup> and holds forth in the parish magazine in a "troubled and confused" manner in which "spiritual and material matters jostle each in a most inartistic manner" (A Glass of Blessing 25). Pym's narrator and protagonist Wilmet Forsythe notes that,

In one sentence we were urged not to forget that All Saints' Day was a day of obligation and that it was therefore our duty to hear Mass, while in the next, without even a new paragraph, we were plunged into a domestic rigamarole about unfurnished Rooms or a flat ("not necessarily self-contained") for the new assistant priest. "He would of course, want free use of the bathroom, "but could have meals at the clergy house except for breakfast which could be "light"--even "continental"--he would not require more than that. This seemed to be rather presumptuous, for the new curate might well have a hearty appetite and would surely deserve more than a light breakfast after saying an early Mass. The letter then returned to spiritual matters--The attendances at Solemn Evensong and Devotions were

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<sup>11</sup>An Unsuitable Attachment tells us Father Thames' first name is Ossie--Ossian, perhaps? The name of the characters in Barbara Pym's novels are a delight and worthy of Dickens, Trollope, and Kipling.

<sup>12</sup>Father Thames' appetite for collecting expensive curios reminds us of E.F. Benson's character Georgie Pilson, who has a similar acquisitive hobby, and appears in Benson's Lucia novels which Barbara Pym loved.

lamentably poor, it was really hardly worthwhile for Mr. Fasnidge the organist to come all the way from Peckham--and ended with hopes for better things in the Church's New Year. But then an agitated postscript had been added. "Oh dear me, Mrs. Greenhill, our housekeeper, has just come to my study and told me that she will have to leave--she has been finding the work too much, and then there is her fibrositis. Well, perhaps we are all finding the work too much for us. Now we are really in the soup! Prayers, please, and practical help. Isn't there some good woman (or man) who would feel drawn to do really Christian work and look after Father Bode and myself? We can just about boil an egg between us! (25-26)

Thames' plea in the church magazine is a vintage Pym portrait of clergy insensitivity and banality from the jostling of the spiritual and material, to the indelicate discussion of the female problems of the housekeeper, to a misreading of Christian values in which services are not worth holding if only a few are there, prayers are of no practical help, and services rendered to oneself become "really Christian work". This selfishness causes Wilmet to wonder "whether many men, perhaps the clergy especially, went about cajoling or bullying women into being the answer to prayer" (27).

Thames leads a celibate life sharing a capacious clergy house with his assistant, "mild dumpy" Father Bode, and their housekeeper. When another assistant, handsome young Father Ransome who is reminiscent of the Rev. Edgar Donne in Some Tame Gazelle, is assigned to the parish, Thames will not allow him to move into the clergy house although there is plenty of room, hence the plea in the parish magazine for a flat and light breakfast for Father Ransome. The new

housekeeper, Mr. Bason, divines the real reason for this lack of hospitality on Thames' part which he shares with Wilmet:

"He and Father Thames are in some ways too much alike--they would have vied with each other."

I smiled at the quaintness of the expression and imagined the two priests feverishly amassing Fabergé objects and Dresden china. I had not, of course, seen Father Ransome's rooms at the Beamishes', but from what I had seen of him I guessed that Mr. Bason would not be far wrong. (A Glass of Blessings 111)

As Thames and Ransome vie with one another throughout the novel, it becomes clear that dumpy Father Bode is the only clergyman with any practical help to offer the people of St. Luke's. Thames and Ransome instead become interested in the Church of South India problem, which concerned the union of three churches in India: the Anglican, the Methodist, and the Presbyterian. Hairsplitters worried that the Presbyterian ministers had not been validly ordained and might taint the Anglican communion; the ensuing brouhaha caused some Anglicans to go over to Rome (Welsby 89-90). Father Ransome almost leaves the Church over the South India problem, but Father Thames keeps promising "to go very thoroughly into the South India business" (A Glass of Blessings 8) to allay the supposed fears of his parishoners on the subject. Once again Thames is out of sync with his flock; Pym makes clear that none of them are particularly concerned about the Church of South India. The people seem to want solace for their everyday problems but are offered

instead the unedifying quarrel over the Church of South India.<sup>13</sup>

The Church of South India problem often appears in the Church Times, which, together with Thames' parish magazine, forms a journalistic leitmotif which runs throughout A Glass of Blessings. Like Thames' magazines, the Church Times seems to be chock full of ill-assorted, irrelevant material: peculiar ads for church vestments, admonitions to priests to be clean-shaven when they perform services, pleas for people "of gentle birth and education" to share a home or a holiday, and queries to the question box, including,

"Is there any liturgical objection to eating hot cross buns on Maundy Thursday?" . . .

[answer] "We know of none, though we should not care to do so ourselves."<sup>14</sup>

(A Glass of Blessings 147)

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<sup>13</sup>In a July 15, 1987, interview with the Rev. Paul King, vicar of St. Mary Magdalen's Anglo-Catholic Church in Oxford, we discussed the Church of South India question. He said that the Church of South India problem had been serious but had now largely been solved ("fortunately") by the deaths of the improperly-ordained priests. In 1989 Father King came to doubt Anglican orders like Adam Prince in A Few Green Leaves and joined the Roman Catholic Church, thereby throwing the support of himself and five children onto the shoulders of his wife who now works in a daycare center. Paul King is now studying for the Roman Catholic priesthood.

<sup>14</sup>Pym sprinkles wonderful questions to the Church Times throughout her books. I regret that she never saw the perennial favorite in the Roman Catholic My Sunday Messenger of the 1950's:

- Q. Is it all right to eat mincemeat pie on Fridays?  
 A. We have answered this question repeatedly and see no reason why it should keep coming up; mince meat, as everyone knows, contains suet, and therefore can never be eaten on Friday.



The Anglican Church of A Glass of Blessings is all trivia from hot cross buns to fits of pique over elderly acolytes who will steal another server's favorite cassock. The spoiled clergy are bogged down in this "trivial round" and try very hard to find excellent women to perform the "common task[s]." Father Ransome succeeds in capturing the excessively worthy Mary Beamish to be his wife; one feels he will never have to do a day's work again after this felicitous marriage. Wilmet, however, eludes Father Thames' yoke of servitude in churchly good works and begins to spend more time with her husband. The novel closes with Thames' retirement to the Villa Cenerentola (Cinderella) in Siena, Italy; in his last sermon he jokingly says that he hopes he will not be thought a Dr. Vesey Stanhope of Barchester Towers. His comparison receives very little response from a congregation which has not read the book save for one elderly chorister who laughs too much for Thames' comfort. Pym implies that his taste for luxury, elegant objects, and foreign travel, and his aversion to work render him very similar to Stanhope.

Wilmet Forsyth, her mother-in-law Sybil, and good friends Rowena Talbot and Mary Beamish are the women whose concerns undergird A Glass of Blessings. Rowena is the wife of Harry Talbot and the sister of Piers Longridge both of whom have brief flirtations with Wilmet. In essence Wilmet flirts with Talbot and Longridge and toys with becoming one

of Father Thames's excellent women at St. Luke's Church before deciding that her comfortable husband suits her quite well. Wilmet has a mid-life crisis, Pym style, which does not include flaming affairs or rushing off to become a missionary in Africa, but merely a few lunches and Portugese classes with men not her husband and collecting jumble for St. Luke's.

As was mentioned previously, No Fond Return of Love offers a story about anthropologists within a very thin Anglican matrix. The book opens at the annual conference of a learned society which is being held in a bleak girls' boarding school. At the meeting, Dulcie, who has just broken off an engagement, meets Aylwin Forbes, who has just separated from his wife. There is very little interaction between them throughout the book, as Dulcie becomes interested in tracking down his clergyman brother Neville Forbes, but a possible future romance between Dulcie and Aylwin is suggested at the end of the book.

Dulcie Mainwaring, an anthropological bibliographer, studies the clergy in the same manner that her profession studies societies. The two clergymen who fall under her gaze are surely among the least relevant priests in the Pym canon. Appearing briefly is Father Benger in his blue-rinsed coiffure and pearly dentures; Benger, whom Dulcie sees as "slightly phoney," runs a church that "welcomes pets." It turns out that his church is really an "upperroom" near

Harrods and that the service features incense, candles, and cocktails with Father Benger, all no doubt accompanied by the howl of dogs and the whine of cats. Benger seems to have a very good thing going with the owners (mostly female) of spoiled pets.

More central to the plot of No Fond Return of Love than Benger, however, is the Anglo-Catholic clergyman, the Rev. Neville Forbes, brother of Aylwin Forbes. When Dulcie learns of Father Forbes' existence, she looks him up in Crockford's Clerical Dictionary; his vitae contains much that reflects the tenor of his ministry and personality. Perhaps the most telling credential is his degree from Kelham Theological College in Nottinghamshire. Kelham, which closed in 1972, was one of the few Anglican Colleges of Theology to follow a strict monastic rule. The school was run like a spiritual boot camp in which men were deliberately separated from their family, friends, and all support systems, the better to mortify the flesh and mold the personality. In The Fate of the Anglican Clergy Towler and Coxon explain the rigor of Kelham and places like it, noting,

. . . this kind of training takes place in isolation from the wider society, and in a wholly different environment, because the ministry is conceived as being something set apart, exercised by men with a very special identity which marks them off from the general run of humanity. (126)

Neville Forbes certainly typifies a likely alumnus of Kelham in that he wears a cassock all the time and flees from his London parish to the safe haven of his mother's home when a

mousy female parishioner falls in love with him. His housekeeper notes to Dulcie that he has left the church in the lurch during the busy Easter season and that he ought to be used to women getting a crush on him, adding,

"But he's a celibate, of course." Here her tone took on a sterner, more vigorous note. "And anyone can see that. It sticks out a mile."

Dulcie caught Viola's eye and she wanted to laugh, though one could see what she meant. Celibacy so often did stick out a mile, and not only among the clergy. (No Fond Return of Love 148)

Like Julian Malory in Excellent Women Forbes is unable to interact with women and deflect unwanted attention gracefully. Perhaps he has not learned from Oscar Wilde's Miss Prism "that by persistently remaining single a man converts himself into a permanent public temptation. . . . This very celibacy leads weaker vessels astray" (Wilde 448) or from Pym's own Rev. Rockingham Wilmot in Civil to Strangers: "A single clergyman is the prey of every spinster in the parish. He should marry for safety, if for no other reason" (83).

Forbes is clearly too shy of women to marry or even get to know one well for any reason. He is happiest in the snug harbor of his mother's guest house or as the celebrant of a high church service in which the vestments and atmosphere lend him "a peculiar grace and dignity." Not a pastor in any real sense, Forbes' "proper setting" is a safe, formulaic sacerdotal one. In No fond Return of Love, then, we have a particularly un nourishing Anglican setting in which

churchgoers may choose between an insincere pet minister and a shy aloof priest bent on incense and ritual rather than people.

Father Forbes does try to interest Dulcie in church work, but she realizes how sterile a life revolving around his church would be,

"I don't think I should be much of an asset," she said. "I've never done any parish work or ever been to church very much."

"Oh, we'd soon have you in the thick of things," said Neville, with rather alarming heartiness. And Dulcie could see how it would be. Apart from the occasional kind word and fair distribution of favors he would be impersonal and aloof--as a celibate priest must be. And might she not find herself falling in love with him--unlikely though it seemed at the moment? All that church work, with so little reward, might well become an intolerable burden--a thankless task, indeed. (No Fond Return of Love 258)

Dulcie evades Father Forbes' meagre church work only to end up with his anthropologist brother Aylwin indexing his books. Pym shows that the clergy and anthropologists are very similar in the way they take advantage of women: the clergy get the women to do their work for them "for the greater glory of God," and the anthropologists turn all women into indexers and proof readers for the greater glory of themselves.

An Unsuitable Attachment, which was rejected repeatedly by publishers, as mentioned above, is a book Pym devotees and scholars would not want to be without because its view of the Anglican clergy and Church is the missing link between No Fond Return of Love (1961) and Quartet in Autumn (1977). I

should like to suggest that An Unsuitable Attachment is in fact the child of No Fond Return of Love and the mother of Quartet in Autumn and that The Sweet Dove Died and An Academic Question which intervene are works outside the main evolutionary line of Pym's fiction. To assert this phylogeny is not to dismiss The Sweet Dove Died and An Academic Question as uninteresting but rather to attempt to discover direct lines of descent. The Anglican Church and clergy are ideal genetic markers for tracing Pymian ancestry in An Unsuitable Attachment, which is from Pym's middle period, and Quartet in Autumn, a late work.

The chief clergyman of An Unsuitable Attachment is the Rev. Mark Ainger, the vicar of St. Basil's Church, a shrinking high-church parish in an unfashionable section of London. Ainger and his wife, Sophia, have the pleasant, patronizing air of those who have washed up in a neighborhood unworthy of their talents and social pretensions. Pym says of them,

Sophia had, in a sense, married beneath her, for although Mark came of a good clerical family he was without private means. Sophia's mother spoke in hushed tones of her son-in-law's parish --much too near the Harrow Road and North Kensington to be the kind of a district one liked to think of one's daughter living in, though of course a vicarage was different. The clergy had to go to these rather dreadful places, but it was a pity Mark couldn't have got something "better," like a Knightsbridge or South Kensington church, or even a good country living. (An Unsuitable Attachment 19-20)

The Aingers' response to this come-down in circumstances is to seek out the few people of their social rank in their parish, including Ianthe Broome the shabby-but-genteel daughter of a minor canon, whose inherited Hepplewhite chairs immediately identify her as "their sort." Mark does try to reach out to some of his "exotic parishoners" from the West Indies, but feels doubtful of reaching them, a self-assessment which seems well-founded considering Pym's description of him:

Although invariably kind and courteous he had the air of seeming not to be particularly interested in human beings--a somewhat doubtful quality in a parish priest, though it had its advantages. (An Unsuitable Attachment 17)

As the novel progresses, Ainger emerges as a decent man who even turns down the offer of a better living because he feels there is more "scope" for his ministry at St. Basil's, but like an archaic life form, he does not have the genetic flexibility to evolve into the type of minister who could turn the West Indians into parishoners.

Ainger finally falls back on the marginal clerical activity of taking a group of his parishoners (presumably those with ample funds) to Rome. There the group runs into the Rev. Basil Branche, one of Ianthe's father's curates, who is escorting two elderly Misses Bede<sup>15</sup> around the city. We learn that his "health broke down and [he] was ordered to

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<sup>15</sup>Belinda and Harriet Bede of Some Tame Gazelle perhaps?

take a long holiday in the South of France or Italy,"<sup>16</sup> which caused him to respond to a Church Times advertisement for "a curate in poor health . . . to accompany two elderly ladies on an Italian tour, all expenses paid" (149-50). Branche's duties, which seem to be slight, do include following the Bedes about meekly, causing one character to say, "A tame donkey--that's what he's like, letting himself be led about like that" (170), while another observes,

He was like some tame animal being led away.  
. . . She didn't see how anyone could take him seriously, not even a clergyman's daughter, who might be thought to have to make do with her father's curates. (168)

Later, Father Branche succeeds to the living of an "almost moribund" London church, St. Barbara-in-the-Precinct." One feels he will be just the man to finish poor St. Barbara off.

Mark Ainger and Basil Branch seem positively relevant compared to An Unsuitable Attachment's third clergyman, Ianthe's uncle, the Rev. Randolph Burden, the rector of a posh Mayfair church which closes for the month of August so that Burden and his parishoners can rest from their slight labors on the Riviera.<sup>17</sup> Burden and his wife have adopted

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<sup>16</sup>One of the great tragedies of modern medicine is the substitution of tranquilizers and other pills for more congenial remedies like cruises and trips to Italy. No wonder so many sick people fail to improve; they should be sent to Florence to recuperate.

<sup>17</sup>Burden seems to have been modeled after Dr. Holmes Dudden, once Vicar of Holy Trinity, Sloane Street and Vice-Chancellor of Oxford in 1931; Pym quotes Dudden in her journal as saying it is "an advantage to have a parish with no poor" (Ms. Pym 66, 5).



the philosophy that "somebody must minister to the rich" (91), although Father Burden cultivates the insincere notion that he would have been "called" to work in a poor parish but for his wife's health:

Randolph sighed. "If only I had that opportunity--such a rewarding experience working among people of that type. . . .  
Ah well, it was not meant that I should work in such a parish," said Randolph. "Bertha's health wouldn't have stood any district but W1 or SW1. Anything near the Harrow Road, or the canal or Kensal Green cemetery had to be avoided at all costs. My particular cross is to be a 'fashionable preacher,' as they say. Bertha is quite right when she says that somebody must minister to the rich." (92)

The Rev. Burden is possibly Barbara Pym's most irritating clergyman because of his self-serving blather about wishing he had been "called" to serve the poor; one feels such a call would never be heard by his massively insensitive ears. In addition, his wife does not seem to be genuinely ill but merely enjoying vague, unspecified complaints which chiefly cause her to have to eat expensive delicacies, take lovely trips, and live at a fancy address.

An Unsuitable Attachment finds the Anglican Church and its clergy in a nadir of ineffectuality. The only activity which seems to interest Aigner, Branche, and Burden is "going over to Rome" with a few fellow Anglicans, a double entendre cleverly devised by Pym. The book closes with the marriage of Ianthe to an "unsuitable" young man, unsuitable that is by the lights of the Aigners, Burdens, and Branche; in truth, he seems a decent sort and perhaps just the man to rescue Ianthe

from her stifling Anglican family and friends. Whatever the eventual fate of Ianthe may be, the fate of the clergy and the Church appears unpromising at the end of An Unsuitable Attachment.

Barbara Pym, in the middle period of her writing career, has moved from the busy Anglican community in Excellent Women to the arid churches depicted in A Glass of Blessings, No Fond Return of Love and An Unsuitable Attachment, churches in which Philip Larkin would say "There's nothing going on" (97). Certainly Father Julian Malory of Excellent Women is lazy, but the excellent women of the church take up the slack, insuring that some sense of Anglican community continues. In the six years that elapsed between the publication of Excellent Women and A Glass of Blessings Pym published two other books with an Anglican milieu, but by 1958 and A Glass of Blessings, the clergy depicted seem to have deteriorated even further and the women do not seem as willing to rally round and become excellent women. By 1961 and No Fond Return of Love anthropologists seem to have annexed the services of the excellent women in the book, while the feeble clergyman Neville Forbes does not seem to note their absence or his short-comings. An Unsuitable Attachment, written in the early 1960's, shows the Anglican clergy in almost total eclipse; it seems unable to hold its old constituents or attract the new immigrant groups like the West Indians who came to England in increasing numbers during

this period. The center of this unstable mixture of old church, modern English women and exotic newcomers cannot hold; the falconer and the falcon have lost the power of speech and hearing; and, if there is anything slouching toward London to be born, it is only the beast of urban development. "Having grown up in shade of church and state" like Philip Larkin (229), Barbara Pym rues this decline of both civil and religious community, a decline she chronicles faithfully in her novels of the late 1950's and early 1960's.

## CHAPTER V

## THE FINAL NOVELS

The student of Barbara Pym's work closes the cover of An Unsuitable Attachment with many unanswered questions, most of them beginning "What if?" What if the book had been published in 1963 rather than in 1981? What if she had continued to write according to her own preferences rather than attempting to adapt to the supposed preferences of "modern readers"? What if she had had the economic security to give up her job with the International Africa Institute and write full time? These questions have no answers. All we know is that Pym continued to write, but possibly not according to her own affinities. When Pym's long-time publisher Jonathan Cape rejected An Unsuitable Attachment in 1965, she sent the book to many other publishers, all of whom felt the work was too old-fashioned and out-of-date for the swinging sixties. Fortunately she had begun a correspondence with the poet Philip Larkin in 1961; he read the rejected book, liked it very much and encouraged her to go on with her writing (Ms. Pym 151, fol. 3). Larkin continued to serve as an emotional mainstay to Pym during the dark period from 1963 to 1977, when none of her work was published. He praised her published works, calling Some Tame Gazelle her Pride and Prejudice--"Rich and untroubled and confident and very funny"

(Ms. Pym 151, fol. 23) and read each new manuscript as she finished it.

Meanwhile, she continued her editing work at the International Africa Institute and experimented with different forms which she thought might interest modern readers. The Sweet Dove Died, written in 1967-68 and based on Pym's affair with a younger man, is unlike Pym's other books in its study of a bitchy middle-aged woman, but still found no publisher. An Academic Question, which Pym abandoned in 1972 when she started Quartet in Autumn, features a young housewife with trendy concerns, subject matter alien to Pym's talent and a twentieth-century novelist of manners. Pym's Anglican world seems to have lain dormant from 1963 until 1972, when she began Quartet in Autumn, but perhaps the dormancy was a fruitful one because Quartet and A Few Green Leaves reflect both the changes going on in England during the period and alterations in health and circumstance which influenced her sensibilities and world view. In May of 1971, Pym underwent an operation for breast cancer, seemed to recover nicely, then suffered a stroke in 1974, which caused a sort of temporary dyslexia. She retired from the Africa Institute and moved to Finstock, a village near Oxford, to live with her sister. Thus she began writing Quartet in Autumn very much aware of her failure to publish her work for over a decade and acutely cognizant of her own mortality. The sixties and early seventies contained many setbacks for

Barbara Pym, but, unbeknownst to her at the time, she was preparing for a great leap forward.

When Barbara Pym began her book about "old crabby characters, petty and obsessive--bad-tempered" (Ms. Pym 70, 1) in the summer of 1972 she knew something about those characteristics from her own illnesses, stays in nursing homes and impending sixtieth birthday. Additionally, she had been observing people like the quartet of retirees in Quartet in Autumn for years in the low-cost Kardomah cafeteria where she often ate lunch and in the Anglican churches which she attended regularly. The quartet, Letty, Marcia, Norman and Edwin, work in an obscure London office performing modest unnamed services, so modest in fact that they are not even replaced when they retire.

Letty lives in a "bed-sitter," an accommodation in which she has one room and shares a bathroom and the kitchen with other lodgers and the owner of the house. She plans to live with her old school friend Marjorie in the country when she retires, an arrangement which is upset when Marjorie becomes engaged to, then breaks up with a much younger clergyman, David Lyell. At one point in the novel Letty moves to new quarters when her home is bought by a Mr. Olatunde, the priest of an African sect; although the Olatundes and their followers are very friendly, Letty is put off by their exuberance and joi de vivre, much as Rev. Mark Ainger is by his relationship to the West Indians in An Unsuitable

Attachment. Letty realizes that she may be missing out on a relationship which might render her life less lonely, but she is too reserved and conventional to adjust to new people and ideas.

Also living in a bed-sitter is the bachelor Norman, a small, spiteful man whose only human contact is his deceased sister's husband Ken. Norman grudgingly visits his brother-in-law in the hospital when the latter is sick and goes to his home for Christmas dinner in a Scrooge-like spirit: "'Might as well help them get through their turkey,' was the way Norman regarded the invitation" (Quartet in Autumn 83). Ken and his fiancée try to include Norman, but he is a thorough-going misanthrope and remains remote from them and everyone else.

The other male member of the quartet is Edwin, a widower, who owns his own home and is very active in the Anglican Church. He is wrapped up in the greater and lesser feasts of the Church year and enjoys participating in services with his friend Father Gellibrand, services which never seem to attract more than a handful of worshippers. Although Edwin's religion is largely ceremonial, he is more connected to other people than the other members of the quartet and ultimately takes Marcia to the hospital and stands in as her next-of-kin.

Marcia, the catalyst for most of the action in the novel, is unmarried like Letty but has the good fortune to

own a nice house which she has let run down. Always peculiar and cut off from other people, Marcia completely withdraws from humanity after her retirement. She obsessively saves hundreds of milk bottles in her garden shed, remembering wartime shortage when the rule was "No bottle, no milk." Prepared against such a recurrence, Marcia angrily leaves bottles from dairies other than her own in the British Museum and the library, causing librarians to stare at this peculiar woman with bags of bottles to strew in inappropriate places. Marcia also hoards canned food but eats very little, usually only her deceased cat's leftover food, preferring to save her own tins against a future shortage such as her envisaged milk bottle dearth. Pym depicts a woman seriously out of touch with reality who is slowly starving herself to death; she also takes us inside Marcia's mind so we can see her confused motivations and her indignation at offers of help.<sup>18</sup>

What offers of help does Marcia receive? How do the other members of the quartet, the welfare state, and the Church respond to Marcia's plight? The chief common trait of the quartet is their isolation from other people in their community. The four shared an office for years but are very

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<sup>18</sup>In his letter of 27 Sept. 1976 Philip Larkin says of Marcia and the other characters in Quartet: "The book brings out more clearly the courage that all your characters can call on and have to call on, at some point or other in their stories. I think the tales of both Letty and Marcia are brilliantly told, and sad almost beyond bearing. Marcia's battiness is splendidly caught, quite devastating. . . ."

(Ms. Pym 151, fol. 114-115)



distant from each other and seem to feel little mutual responsibility. Edwin is the most outgoing and has the Church and his married daughter as anchors, but even his efforts to help Marcia are sporadic and dulled by an instinct not to get involved. He engineers a lunch get-together of the four several months after the women's retirement and notes Marcia's thinness and weak appetite but presumes the welfare state is taking care of her via social workers. Letty makes a few gestures toward Marcia which the latter rebuffs, so Letty's natural reticence reasserts itself. Norman and Marcia are said to have felt a brief attraction in earlier years which was never acted upon. Norman does nothing for Marcia except walk by her house one day then hurriedly pass by on the other side when he catches her eye as she wanders around her garden looking a fright with half white, half shoe-bottle brown hair and a ragged dress. (As might be expected from the bottles and tins, she has a closet and dresser of never-worn clothing which she "saves" in her house.) Ironically, Marcia leaves Norman her house in her will, but the book closes with his preparing to sell it and stay in his old bed-sitter. Like Gregor Samsa in Kafka's Metamorphosis, Norman has no will to change his life and elects to stay in his reduced state: once a cockroach, always a cockroach.

Marcia's co-workers fail to help her, and she has no friends. What of the welfare state? When Marcia and Letty

retire, their fellow workers absolve themselves of responsibility for the two by relying on the state and imagined private means:

. . . The state would provide for their basic needs which could not be all that great. . . . people like Letty and Marcia probably had either private means or savings, a nest egg in the Post Office or a Building Society. It was comforting to think on these lines, and even if they had nothing extra, the social services were so much better now, there was no need for anyone to starve or freeze. And if governments failed in their duty there were always the media--continual goadings on television programmes, upsetting articles in the Sunday papers and disturbing pictures in the colour supplements. There was no need to worry about Miss Crowe and Miss Ivory. (Quartet in Autumn 101)

Indeed, the state does try to provide help in the form of a perky young social worker, Janice Brabner, who keeps popping in to see Marcia, who resents her visits. Marcia's neighbors Priscilla and Nigel also volunteer to help repeatedly but are rebuffed; Nigel offers to cut her lawn, but she prefers its jungle-like state, and Priscilla says ruefully, "One had to cling to the hope that she knew what she was doing" (Quartet in Autumn 141). When Janice Brabner and Norman find Marcia collapsed in her house, Miss Brabner thinks to herself,

It was impossible to help some people, to guide them in the way they should go for their own good, and Miss Ivory had certainly been one of those. . . . The only trouble was that there might possibly have been a lack of liaison, that Miss Ivory might be said to have fallen through the net, that dreaded phrase . . . . (Quartet in Autumn 187)

Janice Brabner correctly observes that it is very hard for a safety net to save someone like Marcia, who is determined to

isolate herself and dies as a by-product of her isolation and delusion.

Where are the Church and the Anglican clergy during Marcia's illness and death? Early in the novel when Marcia is in the hospital for a mastectomy several months before her retirement, she accepts the ministrations of the Anglican chaplain because she desires to be unlike most of her fellow patients who reject him:

The other patients criticized his crumpled surplice and wondered why he didn't get a nylon or terylene one, and recalled their own vicars refusing to marry people in their churches or to christen kiddies because their parents didn't go to church, and other such instances of unreasonable and unchristian behaviour. (Quartet in Autumn 20)

The Church has become marginal in the lives of the people, a state of affairs which has actually occurred in the late twentieth-century Anglican Church (Welsby 226-233). Is it the fault of the people for refusing to come to church or that of the Church for strictly refusing to marry and christen non-Church goers? Pym does not opine but merely reports this puzzling chicken-and-egg cycle: which came first, decline in churchmanship or withdrawal of clergy services? And what can be done to restore these broken connections? These questions embody the challenge the Church faced at the time Pym was writing Quartet in the 1970's and indeed in the 1980's.

Marcia's stay in the hospital is enlivened by her association with her surgeon, a substitute for the clergy

made clearer in A Few Green Leaves. Pym even rates the surgeon as "God" and the chaplains as "his ministers" (19). Throughout the book Marcia dotes on her brief encounters with her surgeon, although he clearly sees her as just another case and not a particularly interesting one at that.

Although Marcia connects with the Church in the hospital, she rebuffs her local parish's efforts to entice her to take a bus trip to the sea shore: "She didn't seem to want to go and of course they couldn't force her" (Quartet in Autumn 46-47). There seems to be something chummy about Marcia's neighborhood church which does not suit her prickly-pear nature. Indeed, bus trips to tourist traps by the sea might not suit many natures; the Church has substituted activities akin to square dancing at the Senior Citizens Center for its traditional role of spiritual and emotional nurture.

When Edwin rouses his friend Father Gellibrand to accompany him to check on Marcia, "Father G." briefly resists this errand of charity:

"Of course she's not in my parish," said Father G., with a hint of impatience. "You know what these parish boundaries are--one road's in, the next one isn't."

"I know that," said Edwin. "I was just going to stroll along that way and I thought you might like to come too--after all, it's a nice evening for a walk. She's a funny sort of woman, as I told you, we may not even be invited in."

"Who is my neighbor?" Father G. mused, as he and Edwin came to the road where Marcia lived. "Surely one has preached often enough on that text? Perhaps that's where we go wrong--obviously it is--when my reaction to your

suggestion is that the person in question isn't in my parish," "Well, she must be in somebody's parish," Edwin pointed out.

"She certainly is," said Father G. promptly, and he named a well-known local vicar, "but I don't think he goes in much for parochial visiting. Trendy Tony," he added, unable to resist the uncharitable comment. "Rock-and-roll and extempore prayers." (Quartet in Autumn 162)

Father Gellibrand seems to have some notion of his shortcomings when he realizes he ought not to care which parish Marcia is in, but he goes on to presume others, especially women, will take up the slack of caring for shut-ins:

"What about this other woman you were telling me about, there was another who worked with you, wasn't there? I should have thought . . ." Father G. suggested, with the comfortable assumption of so much that could be left to the women. (Quartet in Autumn 163)

"So much . . . left to the women" could be the motto of many of Pym's books and the Anglican Church she depicts, but there are no excellent women in Quartet in Autumn as there are in Pym's earlier books. Father Gellibrand putters around his shrinking church hobnobbing with Edwin and other male buddies vaguely supposing that the women are doing good works; somewhat like the Warden of Judas College in Zuleika Dobson, who does not notice that all of his students have committed suicide for love of Zuleika, Gellibrand does not realize that all his excellent women of earlier years have departed to the world of work, their families or other pursuits. The Church depicted in Quartet in Autumn seems akin to a patient who bleeds to death because no one notices he has been wounded.

When Edwin and Father G. find Marcia unconscious, Father G. is relieved: "indeed he preferred this type of situation to normal parish visiting, with its awkward conversation and the inevitable cups of tea and sweet biscuits" (164). Although one can sympathize with Father G.'s desire to avoid awkward conversations, one wonders how much his own detached manner contributes to the awkwardness. Father G. does not seem to be equipped to meet Marcia's needs, but then "Trendy Tony's" rock-and-roll services are not her cup of tea either.

As a counterpoint to Father G., Pym depicts the Rev. David Lyell, a country priest who is briefly Letty's friend Marjorie's fiancé. Lyell is unhappy with his parish and yearns for the company of "gentlewomen" (presumably those same gentlewomen who Father G. thinks are taking care of Marcia). Lyell is fastidious and snobbish:

Any attempts he had made to "improve" the church services had met with scorn and hostility and when he tried to visit the cottages he was forced to look at television programmes which they hadn't even the good manners to turn off. He found it shocking that such people should have no running water or indoor sanitation and yet be slaves to the box. Even the old women, who might have been the backbone of the congregation in earlier times, seemed disinclined to attend church, even if conveyed there and back by car. (Quartet in Autumn 42)

It seems as if Father Lyell and Father Gellibrand long for the mythical parishoners depicted in Trollope's *Barsetshire* novels or Charlotte Yonge's Daisy Chain but are stuck with real people like Lyell's telly-watching yokels and the quirky recluse Marcia. Both men are partially at fault for their

irrelevance to the needs of people, and yet Barbara Pym makes clear that modern people won't stand for "old time religion," in which hymns depict them as "sunk in sin and whelmed with strife" (16). Instead the Church offers hymns "that might seem to have been specially written so as not to offend the most militant agnostic or atheist, set to . . . tune[s] that nobody seemed to know" (96). The latter agnostic and atheist hymns set to tunes that nobody seems to know are a perfect metaphor for the Anglican Church Pym depicts: it offends no one because it promulgates no beliefs weightier than the general proposition that a bus trip to the beach might be good for you, and offers no recognizable tune to keep modern Englishmen on key emotionally and spiritually. In the words of Philip Larkin in "Church Going," "there's nothing going on" in the Anglican Church of Quartet in Autumn.

After the publication of Quartet in Autumn in 1977 and its nomination for the Booker Prize, Barbara Pym drew back from the abyss of loneliness depicted in Quartet and turned to the writing of her last novel A Few Green Leaves. In this book she returns to a country setting in which everyone knows each other's business, and it is much harder for people to "fall through the net" than in London.

Emma Howick, the book's protagonist, an anthropologist who has been named for the Jane Austen heroine by her English professor mother, comes to a West Oxfordshire village to study the vagaries and happenings of village life. A Few

Green Leaves is not Some Tame Gazelle, however. In Pym's first novel, due to the pre-eminent position of the Church, Archdeacon Hoccleve was, for all his shortcomings, the nerve center of his small town; in Pym's last work, Tom Dagnall, the town's rector must compete with the two physicians who minister to the bodies of the people as well as their emotional needs. Pym makes clear the rivalry between the clergy and the doctors throughout the book.

In her notes for A Few Green Leaves, Pym sets up a tension between corporal and spiritual ministers:

The theme could be the rivalry between the doctor and vicar brought out in various ways . . . A woman who has retired and is bored with life and feels useless--might get spiritual consolation from the vicar, but instead she gets pills from the doctor and the vicar gives her typing to do. (Ms. Pym 35, 8-9)

The physicians engaged in this power struggle for the heart and mind of the village are an elderly doctor, Luke Gellibrand (said to be the brother of Father Gellibrand in Quartet in Autumn),<sup>19</sup> and the young doctor, Martin Shrubsole, who seems to have been named for the eighteenth-century hymn composer Shrubsole, who wrote "All Hail the

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<sup>19</sup>Philip Larkin mentions in one of his letters to Pym that he feels she should curtail the use of recurring and related characters in her books: "My feeling is that Angela Thirkall, for instance vitiated her later books by mentioning everyone in every one, and I think it is a device needing very sharp control if this danger is to be avoided. I realize of course you are using a different method--coincidence rather than Barchester--but it has pitfalls to my mind all the same. I hope this doesn't sound presumptuous." (Ms. Pym. 151, fol. 2)



Power of Jesus' Name." Shrubsole takes a more prominent role in the book than Gellibrand and tries to manipulate his patients in much the same manner that Pym's clergymen attempt to manipulate their excellent women parishoners. Emma Howick describes him in her anthropological notes as a "nice young man, not particularly bright but well-meaning" (A Few Green Leaves 39). All the women in the village, including Rev. Thomas Dagnall's sister Daphne, admire Shrubsole's solicitous bedside manner and queue up at his surgery every day hoping to secure a few kind words and a prescription for illnesses real and imagined. A prescription for medication is a source of validation to these women in the same way church services may have been to their forbears. Daphne Dagnall says of Dr. Shrubsole,

"I find Dr. Shrubsole so sympathetic. . . . He knew just what my trouble was. I do think it's so important in a village to have a good doctor you have confidence in--The doctor's really the most important person, isn't he?"

Emma expressed surprise. If there was no active Lord of the Manor, surely the rector was the most important person rather than the doctor. (A Few Green Leaves 49)

The rivalry between Shrubsole and the clergy is further underscored by the Shrubsoles' desire to move into the Rectory, the prettiest house in town. Shrubsole's pushy wife Avice is constantly telling The Rev. Thomas Dagnall that the Rectory is too large for him and should have children (hers, of course) to run around its halls and gardens. The Shrubsoles never manage to turn Dagnall out of the rectory,

but they try their best in many subtle and not-so-subtle ways to supplant the Rector in his house, activities which are mirrored in Shrubsole's rivalry with Rev. Dagnall in the village.

Vying with the doctors for the allegiance of the villagers is Tom Dagnall, often referred to by his sister and others as "Poor Tom." Emma Howick says of him in her journal,

The rector--The Rev. Thomas Dagnall. Poor Tom. 'Tom's a-cold'--King Lear, wasn't it? Now why should something like that come to her mind when she thought of the Rector? Perhaps because he was a widower and lived with his sister? House probably much too big and cold. (A Few Green Leaves 38)

Poor Tom Dagnall does lead a life of chilled emotions, just as Edgar in King Lear is locked into his wise madness. Dagnall was married briefly but cannot even remember what his wife looked like many years after her death. His sister Daphne is said to have "made a home" for her widower brother, but the siblings are detached and merely co-exist under the same cold rectory roof. Daphne Dagnall is an interesting reworking of Winifred Malory in Excellent Women. Both women "make a home" for their detached, ineffectual clergyman brothers; their only relevance in society is their position as sister to the clergy. Neither woman is particularly congenial with her brother, and each has to vie with fawning excellent women for any position in her brother's life. Tom is irritated by Daphne's constant visits to the village

doctors; he pays little attention to her himself but resents her attachment to his rivals, the doctors. Unlike Winifred Malory, Daphne escapes the narrow clerical world by moving to Birmingham with an old friend so she can have a dog. Oddly enough, she has not felt free to have a dog living with her brother in the country but is glad to put up with the inconvenience of one in a city. Daphne's dog is symbolic of her relationship with her brother: he hardly notices whether she has a dog or not or whether she moves or stays. The fiction of "making a home" becomes too much for Daphne causing her to desert the ranks of Dagnall's excellent women; when she returns for a visit to her cold brother and his rectory, he is glad only to see her so she can make coffee for the church's ladies' group and she longs for the relative warmth of a bleak Birmingham winter. Pym says of Dagnall in her notebook on A Few Green Leaves, "The vicar has taken refuge in the past, in the works of Hearne and Anthony à Wood" (Ms. Pym 35, 8). Wood, who is Rev. Dagnall's chief pre-occupation, apparently described a deserted medieval village in his Athenae Oxonienses: An Exact History of All the Writers and Bishops Who Have Had Their Education in . . . Oxford from 1500, to the End of the Year 1690 published in 1691-2, and Dagnall is attempting to harness the energies of the women in his parish to search for the Deserted Medieval Village or "D.M.V." as he calls it. Poaching on his rival's territory, as it were, he even enlists the help of Dr.

Shrubsole's elderly mother-in-law in the search and soon has her crawling around clammy cemeteries copying tombstone inscriptions which may give clues to the whereabouts of the D.M.V. Dr. Shrubsole is annoyed by his mother-in-law's activities, which he sees as "most unsuitable."

Dagnall's Deserted Medieval Village can be seen as a metaphor for the Anglican Church over which he presides, "a vast moth-eaten musical brocade created to pretend we never die" in the words of Philip Larkin in "Aubade" (Larkin 208). Ironically, the D.M.V. is stumbled upon quite by accident by Miss Vereker, a former governess at the manor house, who takes a walk in the woods and collapses near the old ruins. Miss Vereker is taken to the Shrubsoles' house to recuperate under the doctor's care; Mrs. Shrubsole is not delighted by the Rector's visit to check on Miss Vereker and thinks to herself,

It would be just like him to be more interested in his wretched deserted medieval village than the problems of an elderly person in trouble. "I think Miss Vereker should rest now," she said firmly, "after all this excitement," so of course Tom could not in all decency pursue the question of the stones. (A Few Green Leaves 225)

This polite sparring between the Shrubsoles and Dagnall runs throughout the book. Shrubsole usually comes out ahead in dealing with the living and Dagnall in coping with the dead. The elderly Miss Lickerish's death temporarily gives Tom Dagnall the upper hand,

With Miss Lickerish's death, Tom felt that he came into his own. If he had been conscious of

inadequacy in the matter of Miss Vereker, it was now obvious that there were some situations that only the clergy could manage properly. The doctors had done their part and it was now over to Tom. He reflected that had Miss Vereker been found dead, instead of merely resting on a stone, the doctors would have left him to it, with Miss Vereker beyond the need even of psychiatric help. (A Few Green Leaves 229)

Like Father Gellibrand in Quartet in Autumn, Rev. Dagnall seems to deal better with the dead than the living. Poor Tom's a-cold indeed.

Another metaphor for the debilitated nature of the Church in the modern world is the cottage across from the church which has many derelict automobiles in its yard. Emma Howick notes this correspondence and asks, "was there not something significant and appropriate about this particular kind of mingling of two religious faiths, the ancient and the modern?" (A Few Green Leaves 120) Later Dr. Shrubsole wonders if Dagnall equates himself with "a worn-out and dumped old motorcar" in his job as the rector of a country parish.

To emphasize Dagnall's inadequacies and those of the modern church, Pym introduces the former Anglican priest Adam Prince. Prince began to doubt the validity of Anglican orders several years before the time of the book and went over to Rome. He has become a restaurant critic and general fussbudget; his tedious pronouncements about food and wine are enough to make his listeners lose their appetites. Prince's advice on how to run a parish is gall and wormwood

to Dagnall and shows how small a loss Prince is to the Anglican Church. We learn that he always tried to miss special events run by the women such as flower festivals and jumble sales; he also identifies watching women arrange flowers as "one of the aspects of my calling that [he] most enjoyed" (A Few Green Leaves 76). Pym records Dagnall's reaction to Prince's comment,

Tom thought this an unusual way of looking on the duties of a parish priest, but made no comment. After all, his own most enjoyable aspect was concerned with delving into parish registers, which seemed little better than watching ladies arranging flowers. (A Few Green Leaves 76)

Dagnall realizes his own antiquarian interests are hardly the real stuff of a spiritual life any more than flower arranging, but he does not withdraw altogether from the quest for relevance as does Prince. He cannot imagine "arranging to be in Italy" for the flower festival as Prince suggests and doggedly visits the hospital regularly, "not his favourite occupation or one in which he felt he did much good to anyone" (A Few Green Leaves 161). "Arranging to be in Italy" is a Trollopean metaphor for clergy dereliction of duty which we saw previously in the comparison of Father Thames of A Glass of Blessings to the Rev. Vesey Stanhope of Barchester Towers and which reappears in the predilections of Adam Prince who has arranged to be in Italy permanently, having joined the Roman Catholic Church.

Emma Howich, the anthropologist, chronicles all of the doings of Dagnall, the Church, and the villagers in her

"field notes"; like the anthropologist Evan Cranton in An Academic Question, she perhaps feels "the trouble is we're running out of primitive people so we're driven back on ourselves [to study]" (79). "Driven back on [themselves]" is also a good description of the interactions of the small village and the church depicted in A Few Green Leaves. The small activities of jumble sales, Bring-and-Buy sales, flower festivals, and Tupperware parties are the stuff of village and church life, and Emma records them all with an ironic eye that seems more Austenian than anthropological. She engages in a brief flirtation with an old beau, Graham Pettifer, before deciding at the end of the novel that "Poor Tom" Dagnall might be a suitable mate for her. Like most Pym heroines, she is motivated by his need for her tact and understanding of people, which he clearly lacks being prone to "[drop] a brick in the way he knew the clergy sometimes did" (A Few Green Leaves 249). The end of the novel finds Emma, Tom, and the village in possession of "a few green leaves," a few signs of life and connection, and Pym implies that these few touchstones "can make such a difference."

If George Eliot could read A Few Green Leaves, she would probably describe it as "not optimistic but melioristic"; a more modern reader might see Pym's last novel as minimalistic because the few green leaves, the tentative signs of hope and community in the novel are very slight. Philip Larkin might ask, as he did in "Vers de Societé":

Are, then, these routines  
Playing at goodness, like going to church?  
Something that bores us, something we don't do  
    well . . .  
But try to feel, because, however crudely,  
It shows us what should be? (Larkin 181)

Larkin goes on to answer his own question, "Too subtle, that. Too decent, too." Subtle and decent--perhaps that is the final vision Barbara Pym gives us in her last novel A Few Green Leaves. The Anglican Church is being edged aside by the modern science of medicine but it remains "a serious house or serious earth," that Pym's characters gravitate to much as Dagnall is attracted to the deserted medieval village which is itself a metaphor for the modern church.



## CONCLUSION

When assessing the role of the Anglican Church and clergy in Barbara Pym's novels, we must always examine Pym's own statement, "The Anglican Church and English literature--these are the two important things in my life" (Ms. Pym 98, fol. 24). When I was examining Pym's papers in the Bodleian Library, Robert Hosmer of Mount Holyoke College, who was looking at some of her papers chiefly in connection with Philip Larkin, asked me if I thought Pym was an agnostic like Larkin. My answer then and now is, absolutely not. Certainly an agnostic could write successfully about the Anglican Church, but I do not believe she could capture the critical yet affectionate attitude that Pym has towards her clergymen and the Church.

Virginia Woolf, in her essay on Archbishop Thompson, asks the question, "Is it easy, is it possible, for a good man to be an Archbishop?" (Woolf 205). In her clerical portraits, Pym seems to be asking, is it easy or possible for a clergyman to be a good man, and, even if he is, does it matter much in the modern world? Pym wants it to be possible and to matter, but she is open to a negative outcome to her inquiry.

Archdeacon Hoccleve of Some Tame Gazelle is a vain, lazy clergyman who is not particularly good, but he does matter to the world of the novel in which he appears. The position of

the Church in his community invests him with the relevance he does not innately possess. Because the people look to him, he has an important role, but, unlike Graham Greene's "whiskey priest" in The Power and the Glory, Hoccleve does not grow morally because of his position. He merely presides. His curate Donne is equally fatuous and assures that the next generation of priests will be as ineffectual as Hoccleve's. Although Some Tame Gazelle is humorous, Barbara Pym seems to be saying that the Anglican Church really cannot survive many generations of the Hoccleve type or many of the type in any one generation.

Theo Grote, the Bishop of Mbawawa, acts as a counterpoint to Hoccleve and Donne. Just as Britain is losing her empire due to the emerging aspirations of former colonies, the national church is still sending friendly idiots like Bishop Grote out to convert the heathens. The clergymen of Some Tame Gazelle presage the nadir of Anglicanism found in No Fond Return of Love, An Unsuitable Attachment and Quartet in Autumn.

Julian Malory of Excellent Women is a better man than Hoccleve, Donne or Grote, but he is too ascetic and detached to matter much to the community he is supposed to serve. Malory's church functions only due to the ministrations of the excellent women in the parish; however, as Pym's novels progress, these women withdraw their services to the Church, beginning with Wilmet Forsyth in A Glass of Blessings, who

refuses to be drawn into the role of helpmeet to Father Thames. Malory and his spiritual brothers, Neville Forbes of No Fond Return of Love and Tom Dagnall of A Few Green Leaves, mean well, but live in their own worlds of ritual, incense and deserted medieval villages, as does the detached Rev. Mark Ainger of An Unsuitable Attachment, who is said to be "not particularly interested in human beings" (17).

The priests of Pym's middle work, Father Tulliver of Less Than Angels, who badgers the women into serving him; Father Thames and Father Ransome of A Glass of Blessings, who collect luxuries and command the women; Father Bengier, the pet-welcoming minister of No Fond Return of Love; and Basil Branche and Randolph Burden of An Unsuitable Attachment, who cater to the rich, represent the Anglican clergy at their worst. Even the hard-working clergy are drab like Rockingham Wilmot and Mr. Paladin in Civil to Strangers or tired and burned out like Nicolas Cleveland in Jane and Prudence. These clerical figures have prepared us for the sad urban world of Quartet in Autumn, where elderly pensioners like Marcia and Letty have no connection to the Church and "fall through the net" of social services. Father Gellibrand seems to have no time for women, and Marcia and Letty have no time and perhaps no inclination to be excellent women during their working years. Social services try to fill the gap, but they do not provide the world of activity and the point of reference which the Church used to represent. Quartet in Autumn has no

social or religious matrix; indeed, the title is ironic as, once they leave their office, the four main characters do not function as a quartet.

Coming after Quartet in Autumn, A Few Green Leaves is Barbara Pym's more hopeful farewell to her readers. Pym has left the urban landscape and retreated to a small backwater where there are still signs of Anglican life. Granted, Tom Dagnall, as was mentioned above, is detached and taken up with antiquarian research, but he and the two doctors do provide a nerve center for village life. The search by Dagnall and his parishoners for the deserted medieval village and the quest by these same parishoners for a prescription and attention from the doctors are meagre activities, but they do confer meaning on life. These few green leaves imply hope and continuity.

In one of her journals, Barbara Pym asks poignantly,

Can we only love something created by our own imagination? Are we in fact unloving and unlovable? Then one is alone, and if one is alone then lover and beloved are equally unreal.  
(Ms. Pym 43: IV, 10)

Barbara Pym's Anglican Church and clergy are both portraits of a debilitated tradition and necessary love objects to the excellent women of her early and middle work. The women define the Church because they love it, serve it and are willing to cater to its clergy; they see the flaws but love the idea of the clergymen the way a mother loves a disappointing child.

In Pym's last novel, A Few Green Leaves, the excellent women are a dwindling few, harnessed to the Rev. Tom Dagnall's antiquarian research. The object of this research, the deserted medieval village, is an essential love object to Dagnall, just as he and Pym's other clergymen are to the excellent women and to Pym herself. Pym's intelligence and honesty compel her to admit the shortcomings of the Church, but she loves "that vast moth-eaten musical brocade" and realizes that it is necessary to her sense of reality.

Barbara Pym's clergymen are objects of affection created by the imagination of the many capable but wistful excellent women in her novels. Pym's women need something to batten onto in the mid-twentieth-century world which finds them redundant; many of them cling to the Church, an increasingly less relevant institution. And who should we expect to find running this decaying institution--Hugh Latimer and Nicolas Ridley? Most likely, Julian Malory and Tom Dagnall.

Pym's last book, A Few Green Leaves, ends with the meeting of the parish historical society in the rectory. Most of the villagers are there as is Adam Prince, the former rector, who has gone over to Rome because he doubts Anglican orders. Dr. Gellibrand is to give a lecture on seventeenth-century medicine, but the talk turns into "a harking back to the 'good old days' of the nineteen thirties before the introduction of the National Health Service" (243). He rambles into the benefits of long walks in the fresh air and

jogging, noting, "ladies could do it too, no harm in that, but under medical supervision, of course. We couldn't have ladies dropping down dead, could we. . . ?" (243) Dr. Gellibrand, the high priest of medicine, is no more relevant than the Anglican clergy, it would seem.

Tom Dagnall says of the talk, "' Not quite all I'd hoped for, but I think people enjoyed it and I suppose that's the main thing. Isn't that what life's all about' he added, hardly expecting an answer" (244). "Not quite all [anyone had] hoped for" but enjoyable is a good description of the Church and clergy in Pym's novels. Her clergy are humorous, maddening, tuned out of the world and tuned into incense and birettas; they are vain and selfish, but sometimes warm-hearted and absent-mindedly kind. In fact, Pym's clergy figures are exemplars of all her male characters writ churchly and exotic. As Pym states in her Jan. 1, 1978, interview in the Times Literary Supplement, she was a close observer of both men and the Anglican Church, and "when you make a close study of something or somebody you do tend to become fond of it" (Ms. Pym 98, fol.32). She goes on to say that she pokes fun at men and the Church because of her affection for them.

For an author with the comic and ironic gifts of Barbara Pym, the Church and its clergymen are not only objects of affection, but also humorous and sometimes frustrating mirrors of both the absurdity of the human condition and its

potential for connectedness and meaning. A serious house on serious earth and the meeting house of all our compulsions, the Anglican Church of Barbara Pym robes its ineffectual clergy in antiquated trappings that used to command belief and awe. In a twentieth-century world much in need of belief and awe, Barbara Pym finds the Anglican Church and clergy's search for meaning and community often ridiculous but never obsolete.

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