

THE PROBLEM OF CLOSURE  
IN THE NOVELS OF BARBARA PYM

by

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## ABSTRACT

Periodically narrative undergoes a crisis of closure as authors strive to define the boundaries of the novel's form. One such occurrence took place during the mid-Twentieth century. Novelists began to play various narrative games with the texts they were creating, and these games opened up the possibilities of the text's boundaries. In order to understand true closure it has become necessary to examine the entirety of an author's output to understand the relationship of the works to each other.

This dissertation is the first in-depth study of the problem of closure in the novels of Barbara Pym and investigates the use of crossover characters as a device for expanding the narrative boundaries of the novels. In addition to the investigation of crossover characters, the dissertation explores the influence that comic ploys and intertextuality have on the novels. Barbara Pym experimented with various narrative forms in order to create her comic novels. However, she often reinforced the comic nature of one novel by including its characters in other novels. Her use of crossover characters expands the narrative boundaries of one text by having it spill over into the world of another novel.

Since Pym expands the narrative world of her novels, it becomes important to examine each novel to discover how it relates to the other novels. This examination is important because readers may not read the novels in the order that they were published and may miss how Pym plays with narrative boundaries. Therefore, the relationship between the novels might not become apparent. The dissertation focuses on these relationships and uncovers subtle aspects of the texts that, then, reveal their interrelationships. These subtle relationships lead me to the conclusion that true closure

can only be achieved by spatial readings of texts that uncovers how authors like Pym transcend typical narrative boundaries and magnify their textual space.

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

This present study evolved out of work done in the summer of 1998 that serendipitously saw the joining together of three diverse strains of thought: comic theory, closure theory, and intertextuality theory.<sup>1</sup> The catalyst for unifying all three was my rereading of the published works of Barbara Pym and the realization that a significant problem existed for examining her literary output. The initial problem as I saw it was Pym's employment of crossover characters as a narrative game, which led me to wonder about the nature of the narrative structure of the novels and to ponder why she enjoyed, as a writer, revisiting old characters. For the purpose of this study, crossover characters are defined as characters who appear in more than one of the novels and call to mind a relationship between two or more of the novels. Of course, for the average reader the delight is in finding out just a bit more about a beloved character; however, for readers interested in critical study of the novels the question of why the crossover characters appear dominates.<sup>2</sup> It dominates because it implies that texts exist in a form outside the reality of their linear form. Crossover characters imply a particular relationship between text and reader based on the assumption that readers *will* catch the reference.

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<sup>1</sup> For an excellent study on the relationship between comedy and narrative closure, see Peter Kramer, "Derailing the Honeymoon Express: Comicality and Narrative Closure in Buster Keaton's *The Blacksmith*." *The Velvet Light Trap* 23 (1989): 101-116. Although Kramer's article focuses on silent comedy, he argues that a narrative's beginning prefigures endings.

<sup>2</sup> For a pertinent foray into the nature of comedy and its relationship to narrative, see Patrick O'Neill. *The Comedy of Entropy: Humour/Narrative/Reading* (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1990) 69-102. O'Neill asserts quite effectively that humor (and thereby comic narrative) require what he terms "nesting." O'Neill defines the term "nesting" to mean the embedded qualities of the text that the reader uncovers. I would argue that Pym's crossover characters extend the boundaries of one text by embedding themselves in another, and thereby, exist in a spatial relationship to each other.

The assumption about readers' attention to details of the text fascinated me because Pym chose to incorporate the crossover characters in such brief form, usually less than a page for each reference. Pym's crossover characters seem to be sprinkled into the text to add a bit more flavoring and to call to mind that the reading process is an internal act that relies on readers' skill in maintaining an encyclopedic ability to store references to other texts, stories, and novels. The specific use of crossover characters, then, becomes a species of narrative play,<sup>3</sup> albeit the play of a novelist who admires the art of the miniaturist. Furthermore, the term miniaturist must be seen as a positive term because it depends upon the skill of the reader in decoding the text, and *because* it relies on readers' skill it is a compliment from the author, who believes that her readers will catch the reference.

In comparison, Pym's literary touchstone, Margaret Drabble,<sup>4</sup> opts for trilogies, not because she thinks readers will fail to understand the significance of a character, but because she underscores the political reality that sets the foundation of her greatest novels. While I do not intend to engage in a lengthy argument about the nature of Drabble's narratives, it is important to mention it because the manner in which Drabble exploded her narrative structure influenced Pym greatly. What is necessary for understanding Drabble and her influence on Pym is the imaginative pull that the two novels, *Realms of Gold* and *The Ice Age*, had on the novels that Pym wrote in the 1970's.

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<sup>3</sup> James F. English argues for an understanding of how readers in the post-modern era approach any given text. He points out that readers expect games and pastiche as an aesthetic of textuality. His argument apropos reader's expectations of the text underscores the expectations of Pym's experienced readers who delight in finding the references to crossover characters. See James F. English, *Comic Transactions: Literature, Humor, and the Politics of Community in Twentieth-Century Britain* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1994) 191-205.

Rather than select the massive narrative structure of the trilogy format, Pym opted to investigate the nature of character, thereby reinforcing the need for critics to explore her use of crossover characters.

Additionally, when one examines the work of Pym's contemporary, the comic novelist David Lodge, one finds another solid source for comparison. Lodge, like Drabble, employed the trilogy format to fully develop characterization, particularly in his novels *Changing Places*, *Small World*, and *Nice Work*, which all parody the academic world. However, Lodge's importance to this study concerns his brilliant use of intertextuality to explore the boundaries of the narrative structure of the novel. In the novel *The British Museum is Falling Down*, Lodge explores the problems confronting Adam Appleby as he dashes about London trying to discover whether or not his wife might be pregnant with their fourth child. The political nature of the humor, birth control and the Roman Catholic Church of the early 1960's, relates well to the themes of the early novels of Margaret Drabble and to the overall theme of sexual and romantic love that dominates Pym's work. Of most importance, though, is his intertextual game of parodying various authors' style and challenging readers to spot the parody. This particular aspect of his work most closely approaches Pym's style.<sup>5</sup> Subtlety is the hallmark of these three writers.

What makes the relationship among the three novelists important when examining Pym's work is the fact that she went unpublished for over a decade, and during that

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<sup>4</sup> See Lynn Veach Sadler, "Drabbling in Pym's Garden of the Critic's: Asserting One's World." *The Barbara Pym Newsletter* 3.1 (1988): 1-4. Sadler asserts that both Pym and Drabble create their narratives to resist efforts by critics to define and to evaluate the nature of their fictional worlds.

decade, Pym explored and parodied Drabble's style.<sup>6</sup> Lodge's significance is that he furnishes an example of a comic writer who published throughout the 1960's. This relationship, then, provides critics of Pym novels with a method of exploring the novels published in the 1970's, after Pym's career was revived, and for understanding how her editor, Hazel Holt, managed to recreate Pym's voice in the posthumously published novels and stories. Therefore, to reiterate the rather complex relationship between the three novelists, Lodge revels in intertextual games, and his use of conscious intertextuality calls to mind the reading process where readers unconsciously refer to their knowledge of texts to process any particular narrative. Drabble's explosive narrative structures open up a multitude of narrative possibilities for Pym.<sup>7</sup>

Before exploring the problem that exists with closure and Pym's narrative structures, it is necessary to gain some background on her life and work, particularly since Pym studies are such a new area of academic studies. For example, the poet Phillip Larkin asserted that Barbara Pym (1913-1980) was one of the most underrated writers of the century, an assertion that critics are beginning to address. Since Pym's death in 1980 of breast cancer, her novels have generated commentary as critics try to define Pym's place in contemporary British literature. While the early 1980's saw a sprinkling of articles and books, the last decade has ushered in a significant advancement in the

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<sup>5</sup> For an excellent argument on the nature of narratology, see David Herman, "Scripts, Sequences, and Stories: Elements of a Postclassical Narratology." *PMLA* 112.5 (1997): 1046-1059. Herman demonstrates that any reading event takes into account all past reading experiences in order to make sense of a text.

<sup>6</sup> Drabble is not the only connection critics have seen as an influence on Pym. Kate Herberlein sees a connection between Pym and Anthony Trollope. Her argument is particularly insightful because Trollope also employed crossover characters to people his comic novels. See Kate Browder Herberlein, "Barbara Pym and Anthony Trollope: Communities of Imaginative Participation." *Pacific Coast Philology* 19.1-2 (1984): 95-100.

<sup>7</sup> For a solid argument on the nature of feminist narratology, see Susan S. Lancer, "Sexing the Narrative: Propriety, Desire, and the Engendering of Narratology." *Narrative* 3.1 (1995): 85-94.

amount of Pym criticism, indicating that Pym studies are becoming an important academic area.

As a perusal of the MLA bibliography in 1998 demonstrated, the growing amount of Pym criticism reflects scholarly debate concerning her novels.<sup>8</sup> The ninety-four works (sixteen dissertations, nine books, twenty-two book articles, and forty-seven journal articles) focusing on Pym criticism recorded in the MLA bibliography can be divided into three main categories: gender identity, romance and marriage, and social satire.

Additionally, several new books and articles are being published this year, all of which indicates a healthy academic area that argues favorably for further serious criticism.

Pym published eight novels during her lifetime, with an additional four novels, a short story collection, and an autobiography produced posthumously. Although Pym began her career in the 1950s, her publishers began to reject her manuscripts in the early 1960s as being too old fashioned. Fourteen years passed before she published her last three novels—*Sweet Dove Died*, *A Quartet in Autumn*, and the posthumously published *A Few Green Leaves*. During her forced hiatus from publishing, while still hoping to find a publisher for her work, Pym continued to revise her novels although she found it difficult to bring them to closure, most probably because she felt her *voice* was being compromised. As she writes in a letter to Phillip Larkin, dated 24 February 1963, and concerning the novel *An Unsuitable Attachment*: “It can hardly come up to *Catch 22* or *The Passion Flower Hotel* for selling qualities, but I hope they [her publishers] will realise that it is necessary for a good publisher’s list to have something milder” (*A Very Private Eye* 210). Throughout the 1960’s Pym struggled to balance publishers’ desire for

liberated sexuality with her more idealized view of British villages containing a host of eccentric characters.

Indeed, understanding character is one method for understanding Pym's fey comic world. Upon a close examination of the novels, for example, readers will find that Pym continually revised scenes and characters from her early novels in an attempt to find some degree of narrative closure. She comprehended an essential fact of the reading process—readers interpret based on their experiences with the world and with their experiences with other narrative structures. For instance, in the last novel that her publisher accepted, *No Fond Return of Love*, Pym re-adapts scenes from her fifth novel, *A Glass of Blessings*. What is important with these revisions is their comment on true closure of a narrative. Pym realizes that readers remember texts and that their memories re-member future texts. Interpretation evolves from any particular readers' skill in piecing together various textual fabrics. Since these revisions occur in almost all the published novels and a in goodly portion of the unpublished work, the issue of Pym's disruption of closure is one that deserves serious exploration.

Along with an examination of Pym's disruption of closure, I also argue for an understanding of the earlier two mentioned authors: Margaret Drabble (1939-present) and David Lodge (1935-present) because these two writers provide a necessary narrative comparison for approaching Pym's work. These two authors are important for understanding Pym because one possible cause for her difficulty in achieving closure may be the fact that two significant literary movements, Modernism and Post-Modernism, frame her creative life. As a perusal of either Drabble or Lodge will reveal,

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<sup>8</sup> An excellent reference tool exists for students of Pym's work. See Dale Salwark, *Barbara Pym: A*

both quite successfully made the transition, while Pym struggled to maintain her early literary voice. In fact, Pym's diaries demonstrate that she was aware of the prevailing literary fashions and that she struggled to adapt to them. Therefore, both Drabble and Lodge, who have never been unsuccessful in publishing their work, provide a point of departure for discussing Pym's narrative structures. Although equally as important as Lodge, Drabble's work serves a more subtle purpose. She is the writer who Pym most admired and wanted to imitate.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, reading Drabble opened up narrative possibilities for Pym; therefore Drabble's novels exemplify a notion about narrative structure that provides a counterpoint to Pym's ideas.

While Drabble provides narrative examples that Pym admired, particularly *Realms of Gold* and *The Ice Age*, David Lodge furnishes solid examples of contemporary comedic form. Additionally, Lodge's narrative work also serves to illustrate the obstacles that writers of modern comic tales encounter. As his explanation in the introduction to his novel *The British Museum is Falling Down* verifies, Lodge found it difficult to bring the novel to a close until he hit upon the idea of parodying James Joyce's novel *Ulysses*. *British Museum* concerns graduate student Adam Appleby's need to finish his thesis on the long sentence in English prose and the closing chapter mimics Joyce's novel by having Adam's wife, much like Molly Bloom, end the novel with a lengthy interior monologue. Thus, both Drabble and Lodge become touchstones for understanding Pym's problems with narrative as she struggled to find a publisher during the 1960s.

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*Critical Reference* (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1991).

<sup>9</sup> See Pym's letter to Phillip Larkin dated 22 June 1971. Barbara Pym. *A Very Private Eye: An Autobiography in Diaries and Letters*. Eds. Hazel Holt and Hilary Pym. New York: Vintage Books, 1984.

However, with the beginning of the 1970s Pym's novels became fashionable once again, and in what is now a cliché, Pym's life began to mirror her novels. The publication of the three novels of the 1970s, vindicated Pym, and readers find her last novel, *A Few Green Leaves*, returning somewhat to the format of the novels of the 1950's. Therein lies the interesting problem with Pym and closure. As a writer, she clearly supported the idea of a writer's individual voice (a concept that her editor Hazel Holt picked up on in her work on the posthumously published novels). At the same time, Pym's use of crossover characters implies a belief that novels exist spatially, not just in a linear reality. The tension between these two points—spatial reality and linear reality—fuels the energy of the novels and indicates a new area of study for Pym's novels. For instance, in his article concerning the use of crossover characters, Alan Bellringer points out the spatial reality of Pym's use of the types of characters: "The ease with which the narrator imagines the titles of novels points the reader in two directions, to the previous Pym novel and to the next one awaited" (200). As Bellringer demonstrates, there exists a relationship between the works of the novelist that she takes pains to create, thereby enriching her narrative structure while engaging the reader's imagination in spatial reality and linear reality. Spatial reality occurs because the characters transcend the boundaries of the particular texts they inhabit, and readers may read the novels in an order other than the one in which they were written. Linear reality exists because of the progression of the novels as they *are* published—thereby giving readers of Pym a lovely paradox to grapple with.

Aside from the work done by Bellringer, there also exists a significant, if concentrated, body of critical work on Pym.<sup>10</sup> As discussed above, three basic areas of Pym studies currently hold sway. While it is the purpose of this particular study to expand the nature of discussion about Pym, it is also important to grasp the previous critical work in order to understand where this argument expands Pym studies. No critic of Pym's work can ignore the brilliant work done by two women: Hazel Holt and Janice Rosen. Holt served as Pym's editor and prepared the final works for publication after Pym's death. In addition to her excellent work as editor, Holt also wrote a significant biography of Pym that is a powerful starting point for any critic of Pym's novels.

The biography, *A Lot to Ask: A Life of Barbara Pym*, expands on the information that Holt provided in the autobiographical work, *A Very Private Eye*. Apart from revealing wonderfully delightful insights into Pym's personality, the autobiography points out that Pym engaged the world as a writer. Her imaginative inner life structured the world as a narrative. In the introduction to the biography, for example, Holt points out that Phillip Larkin "half expected to find a letter from [Pym] describing [her funeral]" (*A Lot to Ask* x). Holt additionally reveals one of Pym's greatest assets as a writer—her excellent sense of comic timing. Concerning the publication of *Quartet in Autumn*, Holt asserts, "[t]he timing had been exactly right" (258). What does this information mean for the present study? It demonstrates, first, that critics should be aware of the burgeoning legend surrounding Pym, the happy fact of her rediscovery as a writer. Caution should be used when approaching this fact because the narratives and the pains Pym took with them

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<sup>10</sup> Robert Long argues that Pym's narrative art evolves from the tension she felt for the tradition of British literature and her need to express her distinctive comic voice. See Robert Emmet Long, *Barbara Pym* (New York: Ungar, 1986) 24.

can be overshadowed by a happy accident of fate. However, Pym's sense of timing is of extreme importance because it does color her narrative. That is to say, the fact that her novels tend to close on an upbeat note is significant because individual novels take on comic tones, and therefore, an upbeat ending is appropriate. Moreover, the fact that crossover characters tend to expand the nature of the original comic tone creates a *space* of interpretation that becomes the center of the present argument. Holt provides biographical details that give some insight into the reasons why the tension between linear form and spatial structure exist, particularly in her exploration of the decade of enforced silence.

In addition to Holt's work, Janice Rosen's critical work powerfully expands the academic discourse concerning Pym. Rosen produced two critical studies. The first, *The World of Barbara Pym*, ranks as one of the most significant works of Pym scholarship. In the study, Rosen points out that Pym placed herself more in line with contemporary writers than with writers such as Jane Austen and Charlotte M. Yonge. However, Rosen goes on to demonstrate that two problems exist when comparing two or more author's styles and voices. First, Rosen argues that writers want readers to respond to the "unique style" (9) of the individual author. Second, concerning Pym's use of literary quotations to spice her narratives, Rosen argues that this characteristic shows "deference to masters of the past" (9). I argue for a further dimension to these two ideas and assert that Pym is working in both directions simultaneously and purposefully. That is to say, Pym pays homage to masters of the past because she is a reader and has gained skill in interpreting the great works of Britain's past. Her novels exist in Bahktinian dialogical relationship to the works of the past.

Furthermore, Pym situates her novels in the development of character types who then, as Rosen points out, drive the comic structure of the novels. As Rosen demonstrates, Pym is “in her element as a social satirist” (154). Therefore, when examining the novels and their narrative structure, it is essential that critics keep in mind the fact that Pym wrote as a satirist, and that fact colors to some degree the development of closure in her texts. As Chapter II explores the nature of comic structure and the problem of closure, it will become apparent that Holt seized upon the comic ideas structuring Pym’s narratives in her editing of the novels and stories prepared for posthumous publication. Both Holt and Rosen clearly understand that Pym’s narrative voice carries with it an ironic look at the absurdities of daily life, albeit an ironic stance moderated by compassion for human nature.

In addition to her individual work, Rosen edited a consequential book of essays focused on various aspects of Pym’s writings. In the “Introduction,” Rosen points out that “[Pym’s] insight remains subtle yet shrewd” (2). This combination of subtlety and shrewdness drives the fascination with the author; there is always more to be discovered in the pages of her novels, and that fact delights readers and places Pym in good company with a panoply of British writers. Rosen goes on to argue that “fascinating and intriguing discoveries can result from further study of Pym’s life and work” (2-3). The essays in *Independent Women: The Function of Gender in the Novels of Barbara Pym* analyze the novels from four specific positions: Pym’s creative process, new approaches to the novels with a focus on characterization, the literary heritage surrounding Pym’s works, and finally, reminiscences. What both Holt and Rosen provide the modern critic of Pym’s oeuvre is the assertion that the novels “are hugely funny” (Rosen 1).

Apart from Holt and Rosen, several other essential works deserve mention in any study of Pym and her technique. First of these is Annette Weld's 1992 book *Barbara Pym and the Novel of Manners*. Weld divides her study of the novels into commentary on the novels combined with a serious study of Pym's life. While Weld's work helps to solidify my own ideas concerning the comic narrative technique used by Pym, this present study seeks to investigate the problems that exist with the specific narratological problem of how the novels close. However, that having been said, Weld provides one necessary idea for approaching the novels. Weld argues:

As in all comedy, domestic history explains the past and the generational conflicts provide the source of much of the action. It is expected that true love will overcome most social obstacles. Wealth and family position mean both power and prestige; tradition and stability are valued over innovation and mutability. (14-15)

The important ideas here relate to the purpose of comedy as a tool of social analysis and criticism. First, the idea of comedy as a stabilizing force that upholds the prevailing societal ideology may strike some readers as strange, particularly since comedy loves disruption. However, at the same time as it disrupts societal boundaries, comedy tends to reinforce the norms of society, and in this particular aspect of comedy, Weld's notions carry weight for critics who seek to analyze Pym's comic narrative. This present study investigates how comic structure shapes Pym's narrative choices and how Pym, herself, tends to disrupt comic structure by spatially creating her novels. That is to say, Pym may end individual novels on an upbeat tone, but she resists total comic closure by recycling characters and changing their fate, or by reinforcing their fate in later novels. The satire

of one novel spills over into the satire of other novels, and I argue that characteristic of Pym's writing deserves to be explored.

Second, Weld focuses on the domestic and quotidian nature of Pym's comedy. Since that aspect of the novels has been fully investigated, it falls outside the scope of this argument. Suffice it to say, without the solid work of previous critics that contribute to building a foundation, later studies would be lacking. What is important is Weld's focus on the domestic because that consumes a major portion of Pym's novels. Pym, however, distorts the domestic world of mid-twentieth-century Britain by declaring it to be a life of perpetual Lent, as she does in the novel *Excellent Women*.

A further study on the quotidian and trivial can be found in Ellen M. Tsagaris' study *The Subversion of Romance in the Novels of Barbara Pym*. Tsagaris focuses on Pym's noted fascination with the minutia of daily life but shows how this aspect of the fiction subverts the traditional romance genre. While Tsagaris gives a detailed account of the history of romance fiction, she also highlights the fact that Pym eschews traditional marriage as an acceptable fate for women. Additionally, Tsagaris' work begins to define the manner in which Pym "subverts" standard tropes and so provides an understanding of the complexity of the novels. This understanding of Pym's subversion of "romantic discourse" (Tsagaris 52) reveals that the somewhat innocuous first impression that the novels give readers is false. There is more to the world of Barbara Pym than meets the eye.

The narrative world of Barbara Pym merits study because it is more complex than it first appears. I would argue that the novels present a major field of study particularly in the three areas that this present examination explores. First, investigating the relationship

between comic structure and closure allows for a clearer understanding of how Pym plays with the endings of her novels. One of the most fascinating aspects of the comic world that she creates as a writer is the recycling of characters that then stretch the boundary of one novel into the world of another. This use of crossover characters produces a spatial relationship between the novels because it revises the standard linear reading experience that most people experience when engaged in the act of deciphering a text. What makes the use of crossover characters so intriguing is the fact that the relationship exists between the novels even if the reader initially misses it.

Since readers may be unfamiliar with the various novels when they begin to read Pym's work for the first time, it is possible that they may miss the characters and the implication of their reappearance. However, once they have encountered the entire series of novels, it becomes easier to spot the relationship between the works. That recognition of plastic boundaries is one of the most delightful aspects of reading Pym's comic novels because one begins to see the skill in weaving together all the strands of the novels into a whole. Chapter II of this work explores the relationship between the nature of comic structure and the method Pym employed to create her fictive world. The essence of the chapter investigates how Pym's editor, Hazel Holt, prepared the posthumously published novels for publication and how she managed to imitate Pym's voice so clearly.

Furthermore, as readers become more adept at interpreting Pym's narrative structure, they realize that a carefully crafted relationship exists between the novels of Barbara Pym and those of other writers that she admired, specifically the works of Margaret Drabble. The intertextual relationship that exists between the works of the two women is difficult to spot at first because Pym does not directly cite the texts of Drabble.

The relationship exists through a subtle expansion of character and theme. Pym is clear to point out in her journals that reading Drabble's novels help to expand her own concept of the narrative arts. Therefore, an understanding of Drabble's *Realms of Gold* and *The Ice Age*, the two specific novels mentioned, aids in an understanding Pym's later novels. The third chapter of this study explores how Drabble's narrative structure influenced Pym's ideas on the nature of the novel. After she read Drabble, Pym saw that her own novels could be enriched through the further development of character and the exploration of the interior world of the psyche.

Along with an understanding of the influence of comic structure on closure and of the importance of the intertextual relationship with Drabble comes a need to discern the spatial nature of closure. Chapter IV investigates the idea that true closure occurs spatially and not just when a reader comes to the end of the narrative. Spatial closure evolves from the interpretive act that takes into account not only a specific text, but also takes into account that fact that novels exist in relationship to each other and to any particular reader's skill in explicating meaning. The explication of meaning cannot occur in a vacuum since a reader must have some previous knowledge of texts and must internalize genres and their structure.

The genesis of the idea of true closure being spatial evolved from my reading of two significant works: E. M. Forster's *Aspects of the Novel* and Peter J. Rabinowitz's *Before Reading: Narrative Conventions and the Politics of Interpretation*. While Forster's work may seem a bit dated, he does present readers with one very clear idea that writing, and therefore reading, occurs synchronically. His image of a large room filled with the great novelists and of their characters strolling into other works reveals an

understanding that a wide experience in the processing of narratives and their conventions aids in the interpretive act (Forster 9). Although strange combinations might happen as characters travel from one novel to another, the basic image is true because readers keep a metaphorical room in their minds where characters do mix as Forster predicts. That ability to keep all characters and plots in mind while reading defines the act of constructing closure spatially.

Rabinowitz builds on the idea of Forster's large room, but his study of how readers read clearly point out that certain expectations occur while reading and the expectations (or predictions) are based on a reader's skill. While Rabinowitz points out that certain interpretations are more valid than others are, he also demonstrates that interpretation occurs as the reader reconstructs the text in the mental space of the mind. His series of rules—notice, signification, configuration, and coherence—all point to a spatial construction of closure. Both men's theories help when confronting the problem of closure in the novels of Barbara Pym because they provide a method for analyzing the problematic issue of where Pym's narrative boundaries exist.

One of the great delights of Pym's novels is the pleasure that they give the thinking reader. Twenty years after her death, the novels still present a rich field of study because they offer problems to be explored. While this study focuses on the problem of closure in the novels, many others areas of potential investigation exist and it is hoped that readers will indulge themselves in the pleasures that Pym offers her readers. Each reading or rereading of one of her novels enriches the reader's mind and present a look at human nature that is gentle, satirical, compassionate, and most of all just plain fun.

CHAPTER II  
COMIC STRUCTURE, PARODY, AND THE  
PROBLEM OF CLOSURE

Comedy transgresses boundaries with great delight.<sup>11</sup> The comic novelist Barbara Pym especially delights in transgressing the boundaries of the comic, and from her resistance to boundaries evolves a particular problem with closure in her fictive world. While she ends her fictional worlds on an upbeat note (except for *Sweet Dove Died*), she also revisits characters and scenes from one novel and employs them in another for the specific use of creating a tragicomic effect. This narrative vision of Pym's, that a fictive world is not contained within the cover of one novel solely, leads to provocative readings of her work. Comedy as an art form presents readers with a multitude of problems, and the fiction of Barbara Pym presents readers with a multiplicity of problematic issues because she plays with the closings of her novels. An important question faces readers of her work. Do they see her novels as individual works of art, or is there a more troublesome quality to the relationship created by the totality of the fictive world she creates? I would argue that the second question carries more weight in the consideration of her oeuvre, a point demonstrated by a close look at two posthumously published

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<sup>11</sup> For the seminal work on comedy and comic structure, particularly the relationship between tendentious and innocent comedy, see Sigmund Freud, *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1989) 107-121. Freud points out that two forms of comedy exist: tendentious and innocent. Tendentious comedy most clearly relates to the sense of anger and of powerlessness that humans experience. That which is tendentious can be seen to be anger reflected both in the sense of being turned away and in the sense of being a mirror of human relations and the life force. Innocent comedy calls to mind the sheer joy in the technique of a comic situation or of a comic structure. In its relationship to Pym's comic structure, the tendentious/innocent relationship can be seen in the recycling of the crossover characters. While the characters may appear as major characters in one novel, in another they appear only as minor characters. However, as minor characters, they are subjected to frustration, which reveals Pym's

works: *Crompton Hodnet* and *An Academic Question*. Before turning to these readings, however, it is first important to understand how the comic and, often ironic, structure of the novels underpins the basic Pymian narrative structure.<sup>12</sup>

In his significant work on comic theory, *Comedy High and Low*, Maurice Charney points out the importance of the ironic stance of a comic artist. He argues:

Irony may be a survival technique, but it is comic because of the gross disproportion between subject and object. There is no corresponding magnitude, weight, or gravity, and it looks as if the ironic fool will, through a cunning display of meekness, inherit the earth. Winner take all, but how can you cope with a winner who looks like a loser? The confusion is deliberate. (12)

What Charney demonstrates about irony in this passage becomes vitally important when considering Pym's novels because she is a supreme ironist in her approach toward human nature. This sense of irony that she displays becomes doubly important when examining how she reverses the closings of specific novels.

Initially readers will believe that the heroines do indeed resemble "a winner who looks like a loser," but closer readings reveal that the heroines look like losers because they are destined to lose in the game of life, a "deliberate" confusion of the genre's goals by Pym. While comic heroines may well end their particular novel on top of the world, they often face dismal lives in other novels, calling into doubt the joy of their earlier experience.<sup>13</sup> However, there is a double impact of this type of ironic confusion. On the

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tendentious comic structure. Readers' delight in finding a reappearance of a character often relates to their joy in the technique of the use of crossover characters, and therefore, reflects a more innocent enjoyment.

<sup>12</sup> For a discussion on the modernist aspects of Pym style, see Margaret Diane Stetz, "Quartet in Autumn: New Light on Barbara Pym as a Modernist." *Arizona Quarterly* 41.1 (1985): 24-37.

<sup>13</sup> See Glen Cavaliero, *The Alchemy of Laughter: Comedy in English Fiction* (New York: St. Martin's, 2000). While he does not focus on Pym specifically, Cavaliero thoroughly discusses the aspects of ironic comedy and provides, therefore, a method of approaching Pym's work. Irony quite clearly colors Pym's outlook and is one characteristic of Pym's comic form that should not be overlooked.

one hand, Pym reverses the comic *jouissance* that specific heroines' experience at the close of their particular novels—one thinks of Mildred Lathbury who confronts a depressing fate in two later novels. While on the other hand, in the entirety of her comic work, Pym embraces the idea that “losers” do win—one thinks of Emma in *A Few Green Leaves*. Therefore, the problematic issue of just how to read these works remains.

Although the problematic issue of closure reveals Pym's talent as a comic novelist, it emphatically does evolve out of the nature of the comic. Charney points out that it is the nature of the comic to be patterned, and this tendency toward highly constructed patterns explains to some degree the structure of Pym's comic narratives. Charney asserts: “The art of comedy is highly patterned. Comedies begin with type characters and traditionally comic situations and develop these characters and situations in unconventional and sometimes wild and frenzied ways” (75). Furthermore, Charney reveals that the comic is optimistic: “Comic structure also depends on a prevailing optimistic tone” (76). These two issues are of paramount importance when examining the comic world of Barbara Pym. She does begin with comic “types” such as the bumbling Anglican priest, the nosy spinster, and the garishly made-up London sophisticate; then she takes these characters on an “unconventional” journey. Thus, she upholds traditional comic structures while undermining these very same structures. How does she achieve this feat? First, her novels end happily and optimistically (except for the unusual *Sweet Dove Died*). As we will see in the two novels discussed later in this chapter, Pym demonstrates a tendency toward the upbeat—as Hazel Holt, Pym's literary

editor, is so admirably able to parody.<sup>14</sup> However, as we shall see in Chapter III, Pym often undermines the optimism of her novels by creating sad fates for her favorite heroines when they appear in other novels.

The fate of the comic hero or heroine is a significant factor to examine when looking into comic structure. Edward L. Galligan points out the central importance of the comic hero or heroine. He asserts: "Comedy's heroes are not men of action who can impose their will upon circumstance; at most, they are men and women, frequently somewhat the worse for wear, who have the wit to keep circumstances from imposing on them" (32). Galligan's assertion relates well to Pym's comic structure. Her heroines (for there are not any comic heroes in Pym's world) demonstrate "wit" in its truest sense of perceptive intelligence. This perception does not always save them from a morose existence as a crossover character in another novel. However, it is this characteristic of witty heroines and stock comic types that allows Hazel Holt to parody Pym's style and create an entirely new world in the novel *An Academic Question* from the few scraps and notes that make up the manuscript.

Furthermore, the heroines of the main novels do not permit "circumstances" to invade and color their lives. In this characteristic they truly are "comedy's heroes." For example, while she is only a bored wife of an anthropology professor, Caroline Grimstone serves as the catalyst for the comic action of *An Academic Question* because she unknowingly aids in the theft of an important manuscript. Once she realizes that her husband has stolen the manuscript, she uses her wit to bring about a resolution to the

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<sup>14</sup> The difference between imitation and parody exists primarily in the attitude with which one writer approaches another's work. For the purposes of this study, imitation will be seen as a willful act of one

problem. What makes *An Academic Question* so fascinating for scholars of Pym's comic work is the very fact that Hazel Holt, Pym's editor, created the book out of the pieces of the manuscript and out of her understanding of and reading of the other novels. Editing the comic manuscript becomes, then, a readerly act of interpreting how Pym would have proceeded to create the story. Holt interpreted Pym's style and developed a credible novel. In other words, as a comparison of both *An Academic Question* and *Crampton Hodnet* will show, Holt was more successful as an editor when she was able to pull together fragments rather than when she had a full novel to edit.

One of the problems facing Holt was the fact that Pym had a complete manuscript of *Crampton Hodnet* but had not fully revised the work.<sup>15</sup> While several problems exist with the text, the main problem seems to be the fact that there is no true comic heroine to center the novel. Jessie Morrow comes close, but Barbara Bird appears to be the character that Pym was focusing on the most. Barbara Bird, as created, simply cannot carry the power of the comic thrust of the novel. She does not have what Galligan would call a "notself" in his seminal study of comedy and literature, *The Comic Vision in Literature*. He argues that the comic self does not take itself too seriously: "[F]ictional heroes and heroines, not to mention uncelebrated people who live their lives in the light of the comic vision, have responded to a comic imperative to take self as means, not end, as less interesting than the notself" (135). Galligan presents a powerfully provocative term with the idea of the "notself" and one that deserves a bit more examination. The

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writer taking on another author's literary voice for the purpose of creating a believable counterfeit. Parody, as I argue, is an act of paying homage to a particular author's voice.

<sup>15</sup> Robert E. Long believes *Crampton Hodnet* to be a successful work that expresses a "fresh" comic style. See Robert Emmet Long, *Barbara Pym* (New York: Ungar, 1986): 61-92. Long points out that a

“notself” revels in the comic journey and in its response to the absurd situation of life. It focuses on the totality of the experience rather than on how the experience relates to the individual. It laughs at itself and at others. Jessie Morrow and Caroline Grimstone are “notselves” while Barbara Bird is most definitely all self. Therein lies the problem for Holt as editor of the two novels. She must deal with the fact that Pym tried to make Barbara Bird the heroine but could not overcome the powerful influence that Jessie Morrow makes on the text. The tension created by two opposite heroines destroys the comic focus. Caroline Grimstone succeeds as comic heroine because she is the focus.

In order to clarify the problem that the characters created for Holt, it is best to take a moment to define the nature of the comic, albeit a somewhat impossible task. Elder Olson has produced a workable definition of the genre. He defines comedy as “an imitation of a valueless action” (36) that then goes on to neutralize “pity and fear” (37). For Olson, then, comedy does not so much oppose seriousness as much as act contrary to the nature of the serious. As he argues, “The comic action does not consist wholly in comic incidents; it is comic not in virtue of each and every part being comic but in virtue of its being comic *as a whole*” (40). As Olson points out here, the entirety of the effect must engage the reader for the comic effect to work. Having humorous parts within a whole that is not humorous will not lead to a comic effect. Therefore, Holt has a better chance of success in creating a novel in the manner of Pym than on editing one manuscript that Pym was never satisfied with as a comic novel.

Moreover, when they examine the comic effects most favored by Pym, readers will find that she preferred to write in a comic-romantic vein—one that addresses the

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comparison between *Crampton Hodnet* and *Jane and Prudence* is valuable because it reveals the revisions

humor and absurdity of human sexuality. The romantic nature of the comedy, then, places certain burdens and boundaries on the author. Jerry Palmer has demonstrated this important fact in his criticism of comic structure and literature:

Similarly, 'romantic comedy' would be a style where it is erotic complications that are made funny, in other words where the humour derives from our sense of the characters' investment in a particular valuation of each other in combination with a particular set of frustrations, deriving from the complexities of the relationship. (118)

Palmer's point about romantic comedy relates well to the structure that Pym placed on her novels, since she most concerns herself with the strange nature of romantic liaisons that can occur. Perhaps Wilmet from *A Glass of Blessings* best embodies this absurd nature of romantic relationships because she never realizes that the man she loves is in love with his male roommate, who happens to be a model. However, Wilmet is not the only heroine in the novels attracted to an unsuitable mate. Most characters in Pym's novels express similar desires for the person least likely to make them happy. One of the great comic effects of most of the novels is specifically this romantic "investment" and the "complexities" that arise from misplaced romantic investments.

Thus, working from this knowledge of her mentor's comic world, Holt is able to coalesce the fragments of *An Academic Question* into a whole, but unable to develop the complete, yet unsatisfactory, manuscript of *Crampton Hodnet*. The nature of the comic whole, as Olson calls it, evolves out of the handling of the various parts. In addition to the parts functioning together harmoniously, the nature of the specific type of comic effect desired also makes demands on the author (or editor). Pulling the parts together to achieve a solid comic effect forces the editor to understand the complete fictional work of

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that Pym made to the novel of village life. His work provides a solid insight into Pym's narrative world.

the author because she must understand and imitate the types of effects favored in order to create a believable whole. This believable whole must reflect the original nature of the author's fictional world, and therein exists the problem for Holt as editor of both *An Academic Question* and *Crampton Hodnet*. She has to recreate the original nature of Pym's comic voice and develop a believably whole comic novel that harmonizes with the whole series of novels.

It is best at this point to turn from examining the general nature of the comic to the more specific nature of Pym's comic novels and from there to the problems that Holt faced parodying Pym's subtle and ironic style. One critic of the comic, Suzanne Langer, has discussed the nature of the comic form, and her discussion bears looking into because it reveals important characteristics that are also relevant to the discussion presented in this argument. Langer asserts that all living things share a "life rhythm" (68) and that this rhythm conditions organisms to particular patterns. When these patterns are disturbed, a form of anxiety sets in and the creature attempts to regain equilibrium. For humans, comedy evolves out of this disturbance of equilibrium. Furthermore, Langer argues:

This ineluctable future—ineluctable because its countless factors are beyond human knowledge and control—is Fortune. Destiny in the guise of Fortune is the fabric of comedy; it is developed by comic action, which is the upset and recovery of the protagonist's equilibrium, his contest with the world and his triumph by wit, luck, personal power, or even humorous, or ironical, or philosophical acceptance of mischance. (70)

The interconnection, then, between these two aspects of comedy—the life rhythm and the need for equilibrium—underscore all of Pym's comic novels and, in particular, the idea of an inescapable future colors her style of closure. The comic hero described in Langer's argument applies quite pointedly to the typical state of the heroines at the close

of Pym's novels. All are going forward into an unknown future after having been tried on the vagaries of fate for one hundred or so pages. While these heroines face an unknown future, they also express the survival skills addressed in Langer's argument. They tend to triumph by this exceptionally "humorous, or ironical, or philosophical acceptance of mischance," a mischance that colors most of the novels and becomes a standard feature of the comic world that Holt must parody.

Langer goes on to argue that "humor, then, is not the essence of comedy, but only one of its most useful and natural elements" (80). This assertion has profound importance when looking into the comic nature of Pym's narrative. First, she does not always seek to be funny, in the sense of provoking gut-wrenching laughter. Her novels do employ humor but combine it with a gentle wistfulness that colors the reading of her work and gives her work its individual voice. Do not mistake the fact that her novels are funny, but their comedy is always underscored by a sense of sadness that quite clearly marks the novels in a tragicomic (albeit gently tragicomic) manner. What is tragicomedy, and why is it important to a study of Pym's narrative structure? Robert W. Corrigan asserts that tragicomedy comes into its own in times of social upheaval. He argues: "[Tragicomedy] combines some of the qualities of tragedy and some of those of comedy. In tragicomedy, the serious merges with the ridiculous; helplessness is cast in a humorous vein; pain and despair are transcended or are miraculously overcome" (222). He also asserts: "Tragicomedy seems to thrive in a society in a state of flux" (222). What is important here is the idea that societies in turmoil, as England was after World War II, start to see that there are not such definite boundaries between genres. Their writers begin to see the subtle connection between the vagaries of their lives and the ups and

downs of the fictional world. They become victims, as it were, of ruptured boundaries, and the comic novelist can exploit this rupturing in her own fictional world. Blurring the boundaries becomes a powerful artistic choice and one that Pym delights in making.

Apart from the blurring of boundaries, tragicomedy also compels its audience to confront the nature of the self. Understanding the nature of the self underscores the nature of the comic since comedy seeks to reveal the absurdities behind the complexities of the human condition. Certainly after World War II, comic writers had enough fodder to justify the annihilation of any argument that human nature was rational. In the aftermath of the war, the possibility of rational knowledge came into question, even if only unconsciously. Corrigan points out that tragicomedy is related to the loss of empire: “English tragicomedy was born out of two parallel movements, a native renaissance after Suez and the impact of the modernist renewal taking place elsewhere in Europe. It was the age of the loss of Empire” (72).

Tragicomedy evolves out of this questioning of the human condition at mid-century; it conjoins the nobility of tragic suffering with the ridiculousness of comedy. Indeed, Corrigan goes on to argue that tragicomedy emerges from society’s questioning of its situation, particularly when notions of the self come under examination. He asserts that “Tragicomedy forces us to question the certainty of the self at the same time as it forces us in general to question the certainty of knowledge” (4). Corrigan’s idea, here, that tragicomedy “forces” its audience to “question” the nature of their knowledge of the world relates directly to the nature of Pym’s comic vision in two significant ways. First, it underscores the tendency of her heroines to question their place in the world and to question the value of their existence. They often wonder if they contribute more than

they consume. Second, they allow the reader to laugh at the ludicrousness of their lives. However, a sad irony tints the laughter because readers recognize their doubles in the heroines. This recognition is important since laughter is a form of distancing oneself from that which is too uncomfortable to face.

In fact, Corrigan demonstrates how tragicomic laughter disturbs readers. He states:

Laughter, after all, will distance us from the bewildering objects of our gaze and the reversals of fortune they do not understand, which seem to go round in circles and lead nowhere. But the laughter here is not really a laughing away of human folly, because it is shadowed by the darkness of human downfall which cannot be exhausted by rational explanation. We laugh at the folly of their [the characters'] failure to recognize their fate and yet that fate does not go away. (8)

Corrigan's assertion about "distance" is important because it underscores one vital characteristic of tragicomedy that is also important when approaching a study of Pym's comic structure. The "distance" created by typical comedy allows the reader to experience feelings of superiority over the characters—feelings that permit the reader to laugh at his or her own absurdities safely.<sup>16</sup> Tragicomedy destroys that distance and obliges readers to confront the fact that they too are trapped by a particular "fate" and, therefore, are powerless over the outcome of their own life. By disordering her novel's boundaries, Pym eradicates the "distance" between the characters and the readers. She closes this gap by disturbing the boundaries of her novels. While she creates pleasant experiences for characters in one novel, she overturns this sense of well being for the same characters by having them face the denigration of their humanity in another novel. As readers cannot escape "fate," neither can the characters in the novels—no matter how

much readers may want to experience only pleasant memories in association with their reading of Pym's works. For instance, readers may enjoy Mildred Lathbury's independence in *Excellent Women*, but they cannot escape the fact that by *An Unsuitable Attachment* all the spunk has been drained from her character.

Thus, Pym's use of crossover characters creates the sense of tragicomedy that her novels express. Another good example of the tragicomic nature of a crossover character is that of Jessie Morrow who evolves from an independent spinster in *Crampton Hodnet* to a scheming, somewhat negative character in *Jane and Prudence* who sacrifices integrity to gain a husband of little worth. Jessie, as will be demonstrated below, carries the comic focus of *Crampton Hodnet* because she is the one character who sees and points out the absurdities of the world of 1930's Oxford. She is the one character who is not fooled by the pious mask of her companions and of her neighbors, yet she does not condemn their human failings as much as she embraces the odd aspects of life. By embracing the life she observes around her, Jessie becomes the perfect comic heroine. Her life reflects the life affirming aspects of comedy.

The tragicomic aspects, however, become more apparent to readers of both *Crampton Hodnet* and *Jane and Prudence*. In *Jane and Prudence*, Jessie runs from life and schemes to find security with a husband who is unworthy of her intelligent nature. Her actions reject life rather than embrace it. The characterization of Jessie in *Jane and Prudence* reveals the depressing nature of a failure. Whereas the Jessie of *Crampton Hodnet* laughs at the marriage proposal of Mr. Latimer who wants to marry her so other

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<sup>16</sup> For a particularly powerful work on the nature of narrator and narrative distance as it relates to comic structure, see Patrick O'Neill, *The Comedy of Entropy: Humour, Narrative, Reading* (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1990): 86-102.

women will leave him alone, the Jessie of *Jane and Prudence* accepts the proposal of Fabian Driver who was unfaithful to his first wife, Constance. Fabian does not value Jessie any more than Mr. Latimer does, and Jessie's scheming to get him seems all the more depressing because she has allowed life to crush her spirit.

Jessie's character, then, serves as a good example of the tragicomic nature of Pym's narrative style. While she may focus the comedy on one character in a particular novel, she then disrupts the readers' perception of the character by advancing a more tragic fate in a later novel. This characteristic of the entire series of novel would go unnoticed if readers ignore or do not catch onto what Pym is doing. She does not confine her characters to any one particular novel and consider them fully drawn; instead, she reflects the nature of the world by having her heroines face the complexities of life and the possibility of failure. The interesting feature of this characteristic is, however, that Pym does not combine the two opposing views of the heroines in one tale. Her novels create a continuum that subverts the accepted view of closure as an ending to a particular narrative. For Pym, closure serves to disrupt the comic structure of a novel and bring the characters closer to confronting the tragicomic nature of modern life. Additionally, Pym complicates this sense of closure by returning to her earlier style of comic writings that end on an upbeat note.

The complexities of how Pym creates and complicates closure might best be seen in the two posthumously published novels—*Crampton Hodnet* and *An Academic Question*. Hazel Holt, Pym's literary agent and advisor, prepared the two novels for publication, since Pym left the manuscripts in varying states of completion. *Crampton Hodnet* is a full manuscript, while *An Academic Question* exists in portions and

incomplete drafts. These two manuscripts present a problem for scholars of Pym's work because they cannot be sure of the final direction that the author would have focused on. However, the manuscripts also present scholars with some intriguing speculations on the narrative structure of the novels and on how Pym saw closure. Would she have taken the novels in the tragic direction of *Sweet Dove Died* and *Quartet in Autumn*? Or would she have returned to the more comic direction of *A Few Green Leaves*? How scholars attempt to answer these questions depends on how they believe the direction would have gone. At any rate, by examining the two posthumously published novels, some significant proposals can be set forth.

Before delving into the two novels, however, it would be valuable to explore the nature of parody and how, as editor, Holt parodied the author's voice. Parody, itself, presents difficulties to the unwary reader because he or she may miss the simple fact that the text is a parody and, therefore, misunderstand the central purpose of the text. For example, readers of Pym's novels may not be aware of the fact that Holt actually composed the final novel, *An Academic Question*, from various manuscripts. Although she states in the preface that she pulled together two drafts, Holt does not inform her readers completely of the nature of those particular drafts. *An Academic Question* exists as three fragmented manuscripts (mss 22, 23, and 35) and that the manuscripts consist of a total of 232 folio leaves of heavily amended typescript. *Crampton Hodnet*, however, exists as a fairly clean typed manuscript (ms 10, 295 folio leaves) with several sections lined through and other sections set off with a long horizontal squiggled line. The lined sections appear to be parts that Pym wanted to reconsider or to amend in some way.

Just before she died of cancer, in one of her final letters to Hazel Holt, Pym expressed a belief that Holt would indeed be capable of seeing *A Few Green Leaves* through the final stages of the publication process. She relied on the fact that she thought Holt understood clearly of what the Pym voice consisted. In effect, Pym believed that Holt could parody her narrative voice.

The issue of parody is central to the study of late twentieth-century literature because it has been a means of creating new literary works as well as completing those works left unfinished—as in the case of Pym’s last two novels. The premier critic of the art of parody, Linda Hutcheon asserts, “there must be certain codes shared between the encoder and the decoder” (27). This act of “sharing” becomes the central readerly act that underscores both an approach to parody and to the specific parodies of Pym created by Holt. Readers must bring to the interpretive process an engaged mind that can understand (“decode”) the text and can recognize the text as belonging to a particular school or writer. For instance, when reading *An Academic Question*, readers do not consciously think that Holt writes the text. They become involved in the world that they recognize as belonging to the narrative world of Barbara Pym. They hear her literary voice, not the voice of the editor. As Hutcheon points out, “The encoder, then the decoder, must effect a structural superimposition of texts that incorporates the old into the new” (33). Thus, when reading *An Academic Question*, readers “superimpose” their knowledge of earlier Pym texts onto the new narrative created by Holt, and they understand that they are to recognize Pym’s voice by actively engaging the text—looking as it were for the clues and features typical to one of her novels.

Furthermore, Hutcheon argues that “parody acts as a consciousness-raising device” (103) and that the text targeted for parody “is respected and used as model” (103). These two issues are of significance when examining how Holt created her parodies because of the success of one of the two texts published posthumously to mirror Pym’s narrative and of the failure of the other to completely succeed as a comic Pymian narrative. Ironically, it is the more fragmented of the two texts, *An Academic Question*, that most truly mimics the typical Pym novel. Because Holt “respected” the text of *Crampton Hodnet* to the point of publishing as it appeared in manuscript, it does not truly work as a comic Pym novel normally would. In other words, Pym herself had not been able to revise the novel to her satisfaction by the time she died and, therefore, its narrative problems were never solved. However, Holt had it published as it was written.

*An Academic Question*, consequently, does work as a solid comic novel in the Pym manner because Holt had to pull together the various threads of text, and to do so, she had to rely on her understanding, or decoding, of the characteristics of Pym’s fictive world.<sup>17</sup> Both these novels present an interesting take, then, on how readers approach closure. On the one hand, they understand what characteristics are usual in any particular writer’s work. On the other, closure does not occur until they interpret the text while reading and after the reading process has finished; in effect, readers parody the text in their minds, and this parody is then an act of interpretation. That is to say, reading involves what Hutcheon terms “encoding” on the writer’s part and “decoding” on the reader’s part. The reader must, however, “encode” the narrative discourse in his or her

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<sup>17</sup> However, Anne M. Wyatt-Brown argues that *An Academic Question* fails to succeed as a novel because Pym relied too heavily on Drabble’s influence rather than on personal experience. See Anne M. Wyatt-Brown *Barbara Pym: A Critical Biography* (Columbia: U of Missouri P, 1992): 120-123.

mind while, paradoxically, “decoding” the printed text that exists on the page. Thus, a successful reading event creates a mini parody of the writer’s original text—carrying out what Hutcheon names “the power to renew” (115).

Concern about the relationship between “decoding” and “encoding” or “renewing” underscores another significant critic of parody, Margaret Rose. Rose examines the importance of the “implied” reader in her study, and points out several substantial ideas concerning the reading act and parody. First, she argues that the reader interprets by comparing texts and by using his or her knowledge of texts. She asserts that “the reader will compare readings of the target text” (121). Furthermore, she argues that “we may see the author-parodist as also playing the role of reader in decoding the text of another” (121). What is important in Rose’s argument is the fact that both the reader and the parodist (in this case Holt) are actively involved in the deciphering of a particular text or even of a particular group of texts. As Rose explains, “the parodist is to be seen in the dual role of reader and writer” (69). In other words, there exists a readerly activity of interpretation based on expectations of what should be in any singular text by any individual author, and that the parodist can employ those expectations to guide readers through the parodied text. In effect, this activity is exactly what Holt does with *An Academic Question*. She understands what individual markers should be in a typical novel by Pym. By placing these markers (or codes) into the novel, she is able to create a recognizable narrative. Her emendations structure the text but are not the focus of attention.

Therefore, parody relies on its reception by the audience of readers who make sense out of the text. However, there occurs a problem with the idea of parody and the

posthumously published novels. At the very least Holt had some textual portions that she could piece together, so her parody is more of a reconstruction than an imitation. Her emendations parody the existing body of novels and, thus, can be seen structurally parodying the earlier novels. This idea can be clarified by examining Martin Kuester's work on parody. Kuester defines parody in two basic ways. First, he points out that parody can be conservative that "rejects the changes it invokes" (7) and, second, as progressive parody that will "encourage" change. Holt's work must be seen to be part of the former because she is relying on the structural elements of Pym's earlier narratives to complete a novel left unfinished at the author's death. Her parody, then, does not seek as much to create a new form based on the work of another author as it seeks to imitate or parody the voice and style of the author.

To clarify the issue of conservative nature of Holt's parody, it will help to turn to a contemporary of Barbara Pym, David Lodge. Lodge is one of the supreme parodists of the twentieth-century novel. His novel *The British Museum is Falling Down* (BMFD) parodies the style of the major writers of the late nineteenth-century and of the modernist movement of the early twentieth-century. Lodge's novel concerns the plight of Adam Appleby as he spends one day worrying about whether his wife is pregnant or not. The political message of the novel's satire focuses on the problems Catholics had regarding birth control in the early 1960's. The novel contains parodies most of the major writers of the period, but the main focus of the parody is the work of James Joyce—in particular, his novel *Ulysses*.

Lodge sets up the parody by confining the action of his novel to the events of one day, just as Joyce does. Additionally, Lodge has Adam working on his thesis concerning

the long sentence in English, and the last chapter of *The British Museum is Falling Down* develops a parody of Molly Bloom's interior dialogue at the end of *Ulysses*. Lodge's effort works because it clearly sets up the needed markers (or codes) for the reader to follow. Adam spends the day racing around London on his scooter, bumping into such characters as Clarissa Dalloway. The concentration of the action of the novel to one day mirrors the action of *Ulysses*. Moreover, the aura of sexual tension that Adam experiences is modeled on the sexual tension of the original work. What also succeeds well is the parody of Molly Bloom's interior monologue because, not only do readers see into the workings of Barbara Appleby's mind, they also read a solid parody of one of the longest sentences in the English language.

Therefore, Lodge's parody works on three different levels. First, he calls attention to the various writers that a student of English literature would read. He places markers in the text to guide his readers. For example, in Chapter Seven, there is a brilliant use of Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises*:

'You are an *aficionado*?' the hairy man said.  
'I beg your pardon?'  
'You follow the bulls?'  
'I've never been to a bull-fight.'  
'Who is he?' one of the men at the table said. The thumb was missing from his left hand.  
'Who are you?' the hairy man said to Adam.  
'He's from the café,' the third man said. The man's left hand was in a sling. (109)

The conversation follows both the thematic issues raised by Hemingway, such as the bull fight, and the stylistic structures created by him, such as the short declarative sentence structure. Lodge has carefully placed the necessary codes in the text to facilitate the reader's decoding of the discourse. What strikes the reader as most clever is the fact that

at the opening of the chapter, Adam is hunting for a grant to help sustain his family while he works on his doctoral thesis. Not only has Lodge pulled in the right codes from Hemingway's texts, he has also pulled in the correct codes from Hemingway's life.

Second, the parody succeeds because it respects its targeted texts. It values the voices of the writers and brings to the forefront funny examples of how individual authors created their texts while using these "voices" to create a new novel. This second issue carries importance when considering how and why Holt produced the texts of *Crampton Hodnet* and *An Academic Question*. She, too, values the individual voice of her targeted author and focuses her attempts on recreating that voice so that it might again bring readers pleasure. That is to say, she writes as if she *were* Pym, and not just Pym's editor and friend.

Third, and most significant, Lodge slips his parodies quietly into the text and uses them to comment on the action of the novel. This sense of seamless insertion colors the novel's tone because it does not jar the unknowing reader, who can pass over the parodies without losing too much of the sense of the novel. At the same time, it delights the reader who does catch onto the parodies and gains, perhaps, a deeper appreciation of the text. The seamlessness of the textual insertions works on another more profound level. They begin to redefine what critics mean by the term closure. Because Lodge applies the narrative reality of one text to the story he creates in *The British Museum is Falling Down*, he stretches the idea of the boundaries of the first text. It no longer exists as a solitary document. It now stands in relationship to another work, and that relationship must on some level redefine the original work because readers' sense of interpretation has been expanded. This sense of expansion does not, however, imply that the first text

(or for that matter, even the second or successive texts) have been physically changed. What has changed is the act of interpretation. Even if readers do not read or do not know either text, the potential for expanded interpretation exists, and this issues of potentiality influences the reading act itself.

In discussing, therefore, the two posthumously published novels and in grappling with the problems in closure that they present readers, it is necessary to evaluate how successful the texts are at recreating Pym's voice. Paradoxically, the nature of the manuscripts aids in the interpretation of their success or lack of success in achieving closure. The paradox occurs because one of the manuscripts, *Crampton Hodnet*, is more or less complete and clear to read. The main amendments that Pym made to the manuscripts before she died concern sections that she removed and sections that were still under consideration. Holt, for the most part, published the text as it stood, and therein, materializes the problem. It is clear from a perusal of the manuscript that the author was not yet satisfied with the final version; she still wanted to rework the text. The problem evolves from the manuscript, not from the editing. Holt does a solid job preparing the manuscript for publication, since she was faithful to the manuscript. However, because in this particular case the author still desired revision, the problems with the manuscript were carried over to the published narrative. Pym's dissatisfaction colors the comic nature of the text, and it falls just short of truly succeeding as a comedy. Fans will enjoy it, but the general reader may find it a bit flat.

Unlike *Crampton Hodnet*, however, *An Academic Question* does succeed as a novel because Holt had to parody Pym's voice, which she manages to do by filling in the gaps in the manuscript with Pymian touches, such as the excellent woman. Thus, while

the manuscript is in a more fragmentary form than *Crampton Hodnet*, it allows the editor more freedom in developing an arrangement faithful to the other published novels. It also works as comedy because Pym's focal point in the narrative stays directed at one character, Caroline Grimstone (while the focal point in *Crampton Hodnet* wavers between Barbara Bird and Jessie Morrow).

The nature of the problems with *Crampton Hodnet* is twofold. First, as stated above, the central tension of the novel fails because it is split between two unequally drawn female characters: Jessie Morrow, the more compelling of the two, and Barbara Bird, an Oxford undergraduate. When the novel focuses on Jessie, it succeeds because her comments underscore the essential comic nature of the society of Oxford. She directs readers attention toward the absurd quality that the self-respecting bourgeoisie who inhabit the city express. Her reactions to respectable society cause us to laugh, particularly since she is the outsider and inhabits the borderland of respectability. It is through Jessie's jaundiced eye that the most comical moments attain delightful commentary. Indeed, the title of the novel relates to a farcical episode early in the story when Jessie and Mr. Latimer get caught in the rain coming back from a walk. Jessie's attitude dominates the novel and brings its comic structure to life.

While Jessie's attitude delights the reader, Barbara Bird cannot seem to rise above her pathetic nature. This inability highlights the essential problem with the character; she does not attain the tragicomic nature that would make her inclusion in the novel seem logical. If Jessie inhabits the borderland of respectability in the novel, then Barbara inhabits the borderland of the narrative. Unfortunately Pym was not able to develop the tragicomic nature of Barbara's character completely. If she had done so, the character

would have added emotional depth to what is essentially a farcical comedy of manners. It is clear from evaluating Pym's troubles with Barbara, as a character, in the manuscript that she thought of going in the direction of the tragicomic at one time. Most of the sections of the manuscript that still were to be revised concern the character of Barbara.

Consider several key sections. A perusal of the manuscript reveals that Pym cut a scene from Chapter Six (ms 10 folio 80) that gives insight into Barbara's characteristic reserve around men:

But oh, she thought, sinking down among those same cushions, how lucky I am, the luckiest girl in Oxford! She longed to shout it out loud to the whole college, but she had an inner reserve, which always held her back from those intimate confidences in which so many of the women she knew indulged. She always kept a great deal to herself.

The scene imparts significant information about the character that would make her motivation clearer when she abandons Francis. Barbara abandons Francis when they are forced to spend a night in a hotel so that they can catch the ferry across to France, where they had planned to elope. By removing the characterization from the manuscript, Pym destroys much of Barbara's reserve, making her appear petulant and silly. The scene also reveals how Barbara sees other women as too freely giving away their secrets. Pym could have exploited this sense of superiority along with the sense of isolation to demonstrate modern anxiety about a place in a rapidly changing society. Furthermore, by reducing Barbara's status within the novel to that of a secondary story line to the one concerning Jessie, Pym destroys a chance at creating a character strong enough to counterbalance the characterization of Jessie.

Another episode that troubled Pym shows Barbara with her colleagues. In the manuscript the scene is marked with a squiggled line in the margin, indicating that the

author would come back to revise the section or even to cut it. In the novel it appears on page 69:

‘I said “*Bloody* old Beowulf”, and she must have heard because she turned round and gave me such a look. . . .’

‘I shall cut Bogart-Smith’s lecture today. He hasn’t said anything so far that’s not in the *Cambridge History*. . . .’

‘Sir Stafford Cripps is speaking at the Labour Club tonight, you ought to come. . . .’

‘I’m going to spend the *whole morning* at the Bodleian.’  
This in a full, resolute tone, which promised four hours of concentrated work.

‘Why Birdy’s got a new suit!’ exclaimed somebody, suddenly noticing her. ‘Isn’t it a pretty green? Oh, Birdy, wasn’t the Modern English paper *bloody*?’

The above dialogue reveals a typical interchange between students and could provide insight into Barbara’s character, but Pym clearly thought it problematic. Her instincts were correct because the scene interrupts the movement of the novel and does not relate any seemingly important details, particularly in light of what was definitely cut from the manuscript. There is a sense of the camaraderie between the women that Barbara is excluded from, yet it is not clear why she is “suddenly noticed.” Readers are not sure whether she has been in the room for awhile or whether she has just entered. Thus, it appears that Pym thought that the character was problematic yet did not know how to revise her.

When revising the character of Barbara, Pym did cut several scenes that provide the reader with information that illuminates the character. Consider one further piece of evidence from Folio 186 of the manuscript. Barbara is meditating on what it should be like to kiss Francis and on her reaction to what it was like:

Barbara closed her eyes. Our first kiss, she thought, Our First Kiss. She knew so exactly how she ought to feel. The first kiss from someone one

had loved for a long time ought surely to be an occasion, a wonderful moment in which one would willingly die from sheer happiness. One ought surely not to feel faintly relieved that it was over. Of course she hadn't really had much

Since the manuscript breaks off suddenly, it causes a sense of curiosity as to how the author would finish the thought. It also reveals that Pym thought that the idea was unfruitful in the context of the novel. However, it does give insight into the working of Barbara's mind. She is quite an inexperienced woman and a bit terrified of the act of sex. Her inexperience causes her to over romanticize the nature of a first kiss. By deleting this information, Pym changes the nature of Barbara's character and makes her appear to be sexually frigid. The charm of a young woman being confused over her first kiss with a very much older man is erased. Removing the scene also allows for Jessie's misadventures with romance take a more prominent place in the novel.

The problems with the characterization of Barbara color the reaction to the novel, particularly when played out against the romance experience by Francis's daughter Althea. Althea, like Barbara before editing, presents an innocent idea of sex and romance. That interplay may be the reason Pym decided to revise the character of Barbara. Take one final piece of evidence of the innocence of the character into account. The passage has been cut from Folio 207:

Barbara was glad when Francis asked her to come back to supper with him. She had not seen very much of him in the last few weeks: there had been one or two walks, and only occasional kisses. It had all been very pleasant and idyllic really just as it used to be in the early days of their friendship. They had had one or two long, serious talks and Barbara had decided that if it ever became necessary she would be brave and tell Mrs. Cleveland the truth, how she and Francis loved each other, and how they were willing to

Several characteristics jump out at the reader, particularly the innocence of the statements. Barbara believes that she will be capable of confronting Francis's wife, Margaret. Also it is possible to see the dreamy quality of the character as she thinks about the "idyllic" nature of the friendship. All in all, the problems that Pym saw may have evolved out of this characterization because it creates a very different context for the farce that Pym envisions for the novel. It is also telling that Pym did not finish this passage or the one cited above. She may have thought that she was traveling into too serious a theme with the addition of an adulterous affair. However the problem is viewed, it creates interesting speculations on the nature of closure in this particular novel. Can an editor remove the Barbara Bird episodes and maintain the structural integrity of the novel? Francis plays an important secondary role in the novel, so the question may raise more problems that it can answer. Indeed, the reality may be that Pym was unsure how to proceed with the character.

Although the character of Barbara Bird presents problems for both the author and for the critic, one character, Jessie Morrow, is a triumphant and joyous creation. In fact, the power of her character may be one reason that Pym stumbled over the character of Barbara. Jessie draws all attention to herself, and no other character can truly compete. Take the most significant scene in the novel, the one that gives the title. Jessie and Mr. Latimer have been out for a walk and have been caught in an unexpected rain shower. Mr. Latimer, a curate, cannot bring himself to tell the truth about the day, so he makes up a lie that he had been to visit a friend in Crampton Hodnet. The scene truly reveals the comic genius in Pym's works:

'I wonder what I ought to tell him,' said Mr. Latimer thoughtfully.

“Why the truth, of course,” said Miss Morrow, as if the possibility of a clergyman’s doing anything else had not occurred to her.

‘The truth?’ said Mr. Latimer doubtfully.

‘Yes, I think he’d understand. Say you took advantage of Miss Doggett’s being away from home to go for a walk on Shotover. That you walked right over the other side and then discovered that you couldn’t possibly get back by half past six, even if you got a bus straight away. And then no buses seemed to come and it started to rain and it was seven o’clock before you were back in Oxford,’ Miss Morrow finished up triumphantly.

‘But it sounds so silly. It makes me out to be such a feeble, inefficient sort of creature. (39)

The passage reveals the essential focus of the comedy of the novel: the strange contortions people will endure in order to keep the mask of respectability intact. What is important here is the fact that Jessie Morrow is able through her thoughts and dialogue to call attention to the bizarre behavior that she observes around her. Of course, a curate should tell the truth, but Mr. Latimer’s position is made more difficult by the fact that he depends on the good will of others, who tend to be judgmental and harsh toward the behavior of others. Jessie also reveals a cynical understanding of the situation as is evidenced by the fact that Pym writes “as if the possibility of a clergyman’s” lying existed. She knows quite well that it does and that they do. She is no misty-eyed romantic like Althea or like the initial portrayal of Barbara Bird. A few pages later, Miss Morrow is indeed shocked to hear Mr. Latimer lie about his whereabouts and assert that he had been the Crampton Hodnet—a fictional village of course.

Pym further employs the interaction between Jessie Morrow and Stephen Latimer to intensify the satiric nature of the comedy, and this use helps to strengthen Jessie’s character as a commentator on the odd mores of respectable Oxford society. For instance, toward the end of the novel, Mr. Latimer once again is thrown together with

Jessie when they seek shelter from a rainstorm, and he informs her that he has important news to share. Jessie thinks that he will propose marriage again, as do the readers. However, he just wishes to tell her that he has purchased a car. The scene is ripe with satiric commentary on the material focus of the clergyman:

‘Oh, it’s you,’ said a voice from among the lawn-mowers and rakes and spades.

Miss Morrow peered into the gloom and made out the red hair and clerical collar of Mr. Latimer. ‘I didn’t follow you,’ she said ingenuously. ‘It seemed the nearest place to shelter.’

Quite,’ said Mr. Latimer.

‘Conversation in a tool shed,’ went on Miss Morrow, in a pleasant, babbling tone. ‘That would be a nice title for a poem, wouldn’t it? A modern one, I think, something rather obscure. Mr. Auden or Mr. MacNeice might be equal to it.’

‘You do talk a lot of nonsense,’ said Mr. Latimer quite kindly.

‘Well I thought nonsense was better than nothing. I feel there’s something awkward about a silence in a tool shed, and I hate silences if they’re awkward.’

‘I’ve got something to tell you,’ Mr. Latimer said. ‘I’ve bought a car.’

They looked at each other. It was as if he had announced his return to sanity after the proposal. (114-15)

The scene returns the comic thrust of the novel back into a more gentle form while also allowing Pym to show how incredibly boring Mr. Latimer can be. His life revolves around the traditional aspects of pleasure—things, an acceptable wife, and a stable position in a church. At this moment Jessie realizes that he would not have been a good choice of a husband, and her sense of control over her life returns. What is striking in the scene is the repetition of the earlier marriage proposal. Thus with the character of Jessie, Pym can create a solid romantic farce and have her character comment on the inane people who populate the town. Jessie provides the distance necessary for the readers to be able to laugh at the comic scenes. Indeed, Jessie’s reassurance that she did not pursue

Mr. Latimer into the shed calls to mind his vanity in thinking that all women are out to snare him into marriage. Pym employs the traditional comic trope of marriage and the marriage game in the scenes where Jessie appears, and this may explain her reluctance to use Barbara and an adulterous affair as a counterbalance to Jessie Morrow, especially since Jessie Morrow reflects the qualities of one of Pym's excellent women. Whatever the reason, the character of Jessie is clearly the comic focus of the novel, and her scenes in the manuscript reveal evidence of thoughtful consideration on Pym's part as well satisfaction with the character since the scenes are not heavily edited. Pym clearly thought through the nature of this character and saw the strengths she provided to narrative. The problem with the character of Jessie is that she overwhelms the other characters, and this problem leads to the uneven development of the text.

If *Crampton Hodnet*, which is a fairly clean typescript, presents problems to the reader, then the text of *An Academic Question* should have been impossible to bring to publication. However, Holt does an admirable job in composing the text from the various manuscript sections. The problem with the manuscripts is that Pym heavily edits them, although several sections do demonstrate evidence of having been complete. Although the manuscripts are heavily edited, there still exists a discernible structure to the narrative, and this structure must have aided Holt when she tried to make decisions about the text. For example, when trying to decide how to open the text, Pym discusses a possibility in her journal:

You can always alter the beginning, I thought, as I wondered where to start. At what point to plunge in and get going. Perhaps I should begin with Coco's anxious voice asking his mother what gown shall you wear tonight mother and what jewels (ms 23, Folio 17)

What becomes apparent in the journals is a thoughtful consideration of the structure of the text. Pym realizes that she must begin at some point, and Holt decided to use this suggestion from the journals as her beginning. The novel opens with a scene introducing the main character, Caroline, and Coco and his mother who are significant secondary characters. The opening also helps preserve the standard Pym narrative voice by opening in the middle of a conversation that reveals the characters rather than a description of the characters:

‘What jewels will you be wearing tonight, Mother?’

The question was typical of Coco and it was equally characteristic of Kitty Jeffreys that she should take it seriously.

‘I’d thought of the topaz necklace,’ she said, ‘but perhaps it’s a *little* too much. . . pearls might be better—the ones your father gave me when we were engaged.’

‘Not your *black* pearls, then?’ Coco sounded disappointed, excessively so for a man of forty-two...’ (1)

The dialogue between the mother and son reveal that they are essentially shallow characters whose major delight revolves around parties and dressing up. It also has the advantage of leaving the reader to wonder at what is coming next, and it does work as a typical Pym opening.

However, the manuscripts also reveal that she also thought about starting with either Caroline speaking of her frustration as wife of an academic or with a focus on an affair in a Drabblesque type opening. In the same journal as mentioned above, Pym writes a note to herself to model the text after Margaret Drabble: “You could do it in the style of The Garrick Year!” (ms 23, folio 21). Additionally, she considers the point of view: “You could write it in the first person either from the point of view of the frustrated graduate wife or the sociologist sister. Perhaps the former, as being more on the spot”

(ms 23, folio21). The journals reveal that Pym experimented with several openings and had not decided on any particular one, but still she demonstrates a concern with narrative structure. One of the openings rejected by Holt appears later in this manuscript fragment and relates the story from the frustrated wife's view:

The sociology department was full of attractive young women, yet I felt that Alan had the kind of old-fashioned concern for his career that would prevent him from having an affair with any of them. As if anybody could tell what went on these days. (ms 23, folio 27)

What all these entries demonstrate is a crisis of confidence experienced by Pym during the sixteen years that she remained unpublished. The concern over voice and point of view become all the more poignant because it is possible to hear her own literary voice being stifled. Most importantly, though, it is possible to see a concern over structure in relationship to other contemporary writers' work. With all the segments of the text and all their editing (as most of the manuscripts are hand written or have numerous handwritten notes glued over them), the question occurs concerning how Holt pulled all the parts together. In a note penned to Pym and concerning style, Holt wrote, "try to preserve an author's voice if he is an author and has a style" (ms 168, folio16). Therefore, even though she was faced with a difficult task, Holt knew enough of her friend's particular literary style to be able to parody it closely enough to create a believable narrative.

The text of *An Academic Question* works quite well as a comic novel because Holt focuses the action around Caroline and not around the sister. By choosing Caroline to be the protagonist, Holt imitate the standard form that Pym's published novels took, with the exception of *Quartet in Autumn* and *Sweet Dove Died*. The novels focus on a

excellent woman figure who spends most of her time doing good for others but still has enough sense to see the world with its warts exposed. The action of *An Academic Question* centers around Alan Grimestone's theft of a manuscript written by an African missionary that a rival scholar was trying to examine. The comic nature of the novel satirizes the academic world (somewhat along the lines of David Lodge's novels). Because his wife Caroline has taken a job reading to an old missionary who is confined to the town's nursing home, Alan gains the chance to steal the novel, revealing that he does not feel too constrained by academic ethics.

Holt's choice of focus is wise because it reflects typical patterns in Pym writings, which generally create gentle comedy instead of harsh satire. The jettisoning of the adultery theme is clever because Holt realizes that it is Drabble's voice that Pym is parodying rather than employing her own voice. Thus, by bringing Caroline to the foreground and toning down the frustration she feels as an academic's wife, Holt is aligning the narrative of *An Academic Question* with such novels as *Excellent Women* and *No Fond Return of Love*. This choice is meaningful since it helps to bring about a successful closing to the fragmented and heavily edited manuscripts.

It also demonstrates that by understanding the entirety of a writer's work, a winning formula can be developed for parodying a writer's style. The critic Annette Weld points out that the first eight novels Pym published can be seen to have a gentle ironic touch: "The eight novels comprising the first two groups share a lightness of spirit and tone and inhabit such similar comic worlds that they can be examined together as Pym's earliest efforts in the novel of manners" (16). Although other critics may disagree with Weld's categorizing the novels in three periods and joining the first two groups

together, it makes sense in light of the fact that Pym, herself, returned to the lighter tone of the earlier works for her last published novel, *A Few Green Leaves*. Thus, Holt's choice to compose *An Academic Question* along the same lines makes literary sense. The problematic novels of the early 1970's add dimension to the canon, but they do not subsume it in the darker tone of the later novels.

By not allowing the darker mood of the novels published in the 1970's to dominate the work she does on the posthumously published novels, Holt is able to compose a novel, *An Academic Question*, that reflects the early light-hearted tone of the majority of Pym's comic novels. The work on the unpublished novels demonstrates two important characteristics of the delayed reality of the reading process. First, Pym herself was unsure of how to proceed with the two novels and this sense of floundering was to some degree intensified by her reading of the work of Margaret Drabble. She internalized the main components of Drabble's narrative structure and attempted to incorporate these aspects into her own work. Thus, one of the characteristic of the reading act includes the proficiency with which readers approach texts in general and the manner in which they interpret these texts and use these texts to predict the structure of other narratives they encounter.

Second, the reading act includes the development of sophisticated internal mental structures that allow readers to recognize the "voice" of any particular writer and to use this recognition to reconstruct and to interpret textual worlds created by that specific writer (or, indeed any writer they encounter). Using this ability to delay interpretation until the narrative has ended allows readers the potential of seeing the entirety of any given author's fictive creations. This ability also implies that the act of closure relies on

readers maintaining a series of internal mental pictures of the text that hold together varying aspects of the narrative world that readers then tie together after they have finished the reading act and the novel has “ended.” For instance, Holt’s work on the fragmented and heavily edited manuscript of *An Academic Question* demonstrates this process. As she constructed the fragments for publication, Holt had to rely on her knowledge of Pym’s entire output of novels, on her conversations with Pym, and on her ability as a reader to predict what would work to imitate the nature of Pym’s literary voice so that readers would recognize the novel as belonging to the fictional world that Pym had created by the time she died. Holt also had to recreate the comic tone of the works by parodying the tone that Pym had created in her early novels, and additionally, Holt had to rely on Pym’s comments to friends that she trusted Holt to be able to reconstruct an acceptable Pymian voice. Therefore, as the editor of the last novel, Holt had Pym’s comments about *A Few Green Leaves*, which she could use to guide her. She also could rely on the fact that Pym returned to her earlier more light-hearted tone to create the world of the last novel, making the darker novels of the seventies a fascinating complement to the early novels. Holt’s sense of closure, then, evolved out of her ability to postpone final interpretation of Pym’s works and her ability to see the works in their entirety.

Although she died before it was published, an examination of *A Few Green Leaves*, the last novel that Pym saw through a majority of the publishing process, will reveal her strengths as a comic writer. It also underscores the fact that Pym could allow her writing to be enriched by the work of other writers while focusing on her particular comic vision. The novel is important for another reason as well. It reinforces Pym’s

comic vision of narrative by re-engaging the types of characters and the themes that give her novels such delightful whimsy. However, by returning to the narrative structures that clearly reveal her strengths, Pym creates a problematic interpretative strategy. That is to say, the publication of *A Few Green Leaves* just after her death in 1980 focuses attention on the two novels published in the 1970's: *Sweet Dove Died* and *Quartet in Autumn*, which are discussed in greater detail in the next chapter. Thus an examination of how Pym's comic structure and narrative choices reveal themselves in *A Few Green Leaves*, while problematic in terms of interpreting the evolution of her work through time, demonstrates the particular strengths that Holt focused on in her successful recreation (recompilation) of *An Academic Question*.

The significant issue with *A Few Green Leaves* is the fact that Pym returned to the narrative practices of her early novels when she wrote her final published novel. Therefore, it reveals to a degree her comic vision, while also revealing the manner in which Drabble had opened narrative structure for Pym. Consider the fact that Pym has both a male and a female protagonist. After reading Drabble, Pym began to explore the male psyche in relationship to that of the female. Both Tom and Emma seem to be characters who can accept the other's wholeness. However, Pym does not let the pair find true love, only the possibility of a relationship that does not go sour. In so doing, Pym affirms the narrative strategies of her earlier works while revealing that her later works have been amplified by her contact with the novels of Drabble.

For instance, consider the final line of the novel: "*She* could write a novel and even, embark on a love affair which need not necessarily be an unhappy one" (250). Two important images occur here. First, the novel ends on a positive note that expresses belief

in possibilities, as do most of Pym's novels. However, this positive image is colored by a degree of sadness since Pym knew she was dying at the time she wrote the novel. The nature of the sadness, though, also provides typical Pymian strength. Thus, the closing images of the novel reaffirm Pym's views toward fictional worlds—a little sadness, and a little joy thrown together. Drabble's influence is seen in the closing images of Tom, who has spent the novel much like Drabble's character from *Realms of Gold*, Frances Wingate, searching through the archeological remains of deserted medieval villages. Indeed, even Emma, like Frances, sends a letter to her former lover in a moment of uninhibited freedom.

Second, the ending reaffirms Pym, who could stand in for the “*she*” of the last line. The novel is a resounding yes to Pym's comic talents. Gentle, subtle, ironic attributes all meld to create a joyous read that truly affirms the life force. In fact, Pym realized that she would be dead before the novel was published. As she wrote in her diary for August 5, 1979: “I feel awful on waking but a bit better now sitting in the sun writing this, trying to finish off my novel” (*A Very Private Eye* 331). Even in the face of death, Pym exhibited the grace and optimism that her heroines usually did. In fact, the last lines of the novel not only reaffirm the life impulse, as a good comic piece should do, it also reaffirms the author's own life and the triumph that she enjoyed after years of neglect. The novel *A Few Green Leaves*, then, is important as an indicator of the structure of Pym's comic world, and in seeing it through publication after Pym's death in January 1980, Holt herself gained valuable insight into Pym's narrative voice that help direct her recreation of the posthumously published novels.

CHAPTER III  
INTERTEXTUALITY AND CLOSURE  
IN PYM'S LATER NOVELS

Two of Pym's later novels—*The Sweet Dove Died* and *Quartet in Autumn*—provide the reader with a chance to see how intertextual influence colored how she saw closure. Both novels were published after a lengthy silence on Pym's part, a silence enforced by her publisher who no longer accepted her manuscripts. In response to this enforced silence, Pym sought out models of novels that publishers did seem to want to see published. One of the novelists who influenced her was the writer Margaret Drabble whose work symbolized for Pym the best that mid-century English narrative could attain. Two particular novels—*Realms of Gold* and *The Ice Age*—carry the most importance for readers examining the nature of intertextuality and closure in the Pym canon because these novels express both narrative qualities and thematic issues that Pym wished to explore.<sup>18</sup> As Pym wrote in her diary of 3 June 1979,

The enrichment of my own novels may be suggested by my reading of the two latest Margaret Drabble novels (*The Ice Age* and *Realms of Gold*). She gives one almost *too* much—but I give too little—laziness and unwillingness to do 'research', which doesn't seem to fit my kind of novels. (*A Very Private Eye* 328-29)

Along with admiration, however, some degree of anxiety about influence also exists. Both *Realms of Gold* and *The Ice Age* offer "enrichment" or a sense of amplitude to the readers of *The Sweet Dove Died* and *Quartet in Autumn*. The contrast between giving

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<sup>18</sup> Both Pym and Drabble reflect the long tradition of British literature. For a discussion on the nature of Romantic influence on Drabble, see Judy Little, "Margaret Drabble and the romantic Imagination: *The Realms of Gold*." *Prairie Schooner* 55.1-2 (1981): 241-252.

“too much” and giving “too little” in the competing narrative styles demonstrates that a tension between the two exists in Pym’s mind and that the intertextual relationship carries with it a sense of ambivalence.

The tension that exists for Pym must, to some degree, evolve out of the opening up of her narrative format that came as a response to the powerful fictive structures that Drabble experimented with in *Realms of Gold*. On the one hand, in *Realms of Gold*, Drabble decentralizes the action of the text by constructing an organic form for the novel that mirrors the ambiguities of real life action with its seeming randomness. On the other hand, Pym’s great strength originates from her carefully crafted narratives that lead readers to a positive realization of life’s potential to bestow blessings on individuals. However, the above quotation reveals a crucial piece of evidence about the power of intertextuality as an interpretive tool for readers. Pym clearly thought that her reading of Drabble’s *Realms of Gold* offered possibilities as a model of a new form of novel that could “enrich” both reader and writer. That is to say, the act of reading creates narrative possibilities because it illuminates previously hidden opportunities. Pym’s reading of Drabble exploded the carefully constructed narrative world of her early comic novels and revealed potentialities for a new type of novel.

Understanding, then, this new type of Pymian novel requires an understanding of its intertextual relationship to the work of Drabble in a significant ways. An understanding of intertextuality aids in the interpretative process, particularly of the two later novels by Pym, since both novels present readers with anomalous narrative realities. For instance, the action of *The Sweet Dove Died*, the darker of the two novels, revolves around the internal worlds of two protagonists—James and Leonora. Neither protagonist

finds happiness nor do they find even the potential for happiness that had been a hallmark of Pym's narrative structure. The novel is bleak. In *Quartet in Autumn*, Pym creates four competing protagonists—Letty, Marcia, Norman, and Edwin—whose individual worlds crisscross much like the characters in *Realms of Gold*. Thus, the question arises of how to interpret these strange forays into narrative experimentation, and it is here that an understanding of the intertextual relationship to Drabble reveals its potential as an interpretive guide, and therefore, as a method of achieving closure. Once readers understand *how* Drabble's narrative experiments affected Pym's novels, they can then fully appreciate the "enrichment" that occurs when one novel carries on a dialogue with another.

Julia Kristeva explores the sense of ambivalence that intertextuality creates in her essay "Word, Dialogue, and Novel." She argues, "two texts meet, contradict, and relativize each other" (78). In other words, in their "meeting" two texts cannot help but influence each other. What becomes important, then, is how this influence interacts. Does one text threaten to overwhelm another? Does one narrative strategy become dominate at the expense of another? These are two significant questions to examine when looking into how Drabble's more experimental and successful narrative strategies affected Pym's choices, particularly in the novels published in the early 1970's.

As Kristeva demonstrates, the interaction of the two texts carries with it "contradiction" or a degree of opposition. Two or more texts resist each other while also being defined by each other. The ambivalence created sets into motion tension, which then goes on to "relativize" or to influence the development of future narrative choices. In the case of *The Sweet Dove Died* and *Quartet in Autumn* this relativizing process

becomes apparent and necessary to understand. Both novels occupy a rather odd place in the Pym canon. They are anomalies because of their dark outlook, but at the same time, reflect a genuine Pym quality—albeit more so in the later novel, *Quartet in Autumn*. *The Sweet Dove Died* has the strange status of being the only novel in the canon that has an unhappy, indeed almost vicious, ending. Additionally, the odd quality of *Quartet in Autumn* comes from the fact that a major character dies, something completely unusual for Pym. However, both novels mirror an intertextual relationship with *Realms of Gold* and *The Ice Age*, and therefore, necessitate the need to explore how intertextuality influences narrative choices in order to understand how closure operates for Pym.

To grasp the consequences of intertextuality and narrative options for Pym, consider one famous example of intertextuality, Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*. In this novel Rhys revises Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* and gives a voice to a once silent character, Bertha. In "Burning Down the House," Caroline Rody argues that Rhys "recapitulates the process by which a person reads a text, interprets it in her own terms, and set out to rewrite it" (302), in order to address what Rody calls "an injustice in English literary history" (302). A more succinct version of Pym's own intertextual relationship to Drabble cannot be imagined. One important difference exists, however. In Pym's revisioning of *Realms of Gold* and *The Ice Age* is not so much the reworking of a particular novel as the addressing of a particular style or mood. The ramifications of such an action are twofold.

First, as Rody points out, "the 'intertextual' revision takes place, after all, in our own readerly memories" (301). This assertion demonstrates that intertextuality and its effects primarily evolve out of the reader's actions during the process of reading and,

later, during the process of interpreting or closing the text. Interpretation and its sisterly act of closure occur, then, in the reader's mind as she processes the text. The act of reading begins to encourage certain reading strategies that then begin to become interpretive strategies in the reader's mind. Readers then apply the various interpretations to predict how a text will evolve or construct itself, interpretations related to the reader's previous experiences with any particular narrative.

Second, and perhaps more tricky, intertextuality carries with it the notion of resistance. Resistance, as I define it for this argument, means both opposing a canonical interpretation of a text as well as challenging what readers see as ordinary textual boundaries. Resistance, then, revises textual space. This definition becomes important when examining exactly how Drabble's *Realms of Gold* and *The Ice Age* influenced Pym's *The Sweet Dove Died* and *Quartet in Autumn*. As the above citation from Pym's diary demonstrates, she admired Drabble's narrative choices so much that she tried to imitate them. What she found to be the case, however, was that her own narrative vision faced becoming lost. Thus, while Pym found herself admiring Drabble's narrative style and using this style to experiment with, she also struggled to keep her own vision viable. Therefore, we see her return to a recognizable Pym style in her last novel, *A Few Green Leaves*. In order to understand, then, the two novels—*The Sweet Dove Died* and *Quartet in Autumn*—we need to examine how Drabble influenced Pym so that we can understand how these two anomalous novels relate to the other works.

Both Drabble and Pym allude to previous literary works in their writing, either as epigraphs or as direct citations in their texts.<sup>19</sup> It seems clear that both women respect the long tradition of British narrative. What becomes fascinating is to uncover the indirect intertextual relationships because Pym does not directly cite Drabble in either *The Sweet Dove Died* or *Quartet in Autumn*. Both novels, however, demonstrate the influence that Drabble had on Pym. Drabble's *Realms of Gold* perhaps had the most profound impact on Pym simply because, as a narrative, it strikes out into new directions that open up narrative possibilities while staying grounded in the dynamic tradition of British narrative.

Concerning *Realms of Gold*, David Leon Higdon asserts that the novel "immerses itself, its characters, and its readers in a consideration of the uses of the past and the uses of tradition while demonstrating that Drabble's opinion of both has noticeably changed" (28). It is the novel's immersion in a great literary past that most likely attracted Pym to it in the first place. As Higdon points out, the novel is at a crossroads of sorts. The structure of the novel plays with readers' expectations of what a narrative should do. Drabble employs an archeological motif to allow readers to uncover hidden treasures much like the finds might be brought forth during a real dig. Treasures like the tragic story of Janet Bird lie hidden within the larger narrative. These gems highlight the predicament of modern life and must have surely attracted Pym's attention since they are fraught with overtones of the types of stories that appealed to her.

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<sup>19</sup> In particular, Pym delights in including quotations from seventeenth-century metaphysical poets. For a discussion of Pym's use of seventeenth-century poetry, see Marlene San Miguel Groner, "Barbara Pym's Allusions to Seventeenth-Century Poets." *Cross-bias: The Newsletter of Friends of Bemerton* 11 (1987): 5-7.

Moreover, in his important study of contemporary British fiction, *Shadows of the Past*, Higdon points out the significance of the archeological motif in *RG*: “*The Realms of Gold* is a story of discovery, reclamation, and reconstruction” (156). The three terms used here to describe the nature of Drabble’s novel strike with powerful force—particularly in a discussion of the intertextual nature of closure. Reading, itself, is an act of “discovery” and “reclamation” since readers undergo those exact processes when engaging a novel. Additionally, interpretation is an act of “reconstruction” of details held in the mind while reading. This act of “reconstruction” can occur only after the novel has ended and the reader is in possession of the totality of the narrative. Thus, on one level, Drabble’s text is a story of achieving closure by delving into the fragments of the past just as an archeologist reconstructs the past from fragments left by vanished civilizations. Closure happens when the reader, like the archeologist, pulls together the bits and pieces of the narrative and can claim a whole structure.

Furthermore, the narrative structure of *Realms of Gold* offers a glimpse into how intertextuality serves as a vehicle of closure. Higdon argues that, much like the novel *Mrs. Dalloway*, Drabble’s novel contains both characters whose paths crisscross as well as two suicides that end up liberating the female protagonists of the respective novels:

Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway* partially defines Drabble’s method. Janet, David, Stephen, and Constance stand in relationship to Frances as Septimus Smith stands in relationship to Clarissa Dalloway. For fully two-thirds of the novel, these characters cross and recross one another’s path. (162)

And later Higdon points out: “[Stephen’s suicide] has freed her [Frances] just as Septimus Smith’s suicide freed Clarissa Dalloway” (163). Although it maybe only a “partial” connection that exists between the two novels, it is, nonetheless, a connection;

and one that demonstrates the powerful influence that one writer can have over another. Readers who can understand and interpret this intertextual influence are capable of opening up texts to compelling (and valid) new meanings; closure exists, then, as a state of mind of the reader, more than as a sum of typed pages to be read. Intertextuality also frees writers to open up radical new forms of narrative.

Drabble's novel also breaks new ground in the construction of narrative.<sup>20</sup> If one considers Freytag's Pyramid as a standard explication of narrative structure, then readers of Drabble might want to take into account the octopus that inhabits the opening pages of *Realms of Gold*. Freytag's Pyramid, of course, delineates the standard structure of narrative form: introduction, inciting moment, rising action, climax, falling action, and dénouement. Drabble's octopus metaphor, however, creates a more organic structure to narrative format. Rather than being linear in its trajectory, Drabble's narrative becomes encompassing and relational. That is to say, the relationship of the parts of the narrative carries as important a meaning as the story of any one character.

Consider the opening image from the novel:

The octopus lived in a square plastic box with holes for his arms. He had touched her with his gray wet hand, and had shrunk quickly from the contact. Back into his box he went, as she into this rather nice hotel room. He had suckers all the way along his arms. She thought of them with affection and amusement. He was the very best thing she had seen for some time, better than the view of the bay. (3)

This image works on two significant levels, both as a marker of Frances Wingate and her life and as an image of the type of narrative we are about to read. Several interlocking stories exist: the story of Frances, the story of Janet, and the story of the hapless Stephen.

Each aspect of the novel relates to a counter aspect much like the arms of the octopus interconnect with the body. A further piece of evidence joining the octopus metaphor to Drabble's narrative technique occurs toward the opening of the novel. In thinking of the octopus, Frances decides that "[t]he male octopus hadn't known his limitations. He thought he could have a full, active, healthy life in that box, or surely he would have sat down and died?" (7). Thus, the octopus functions like Drabble's narrative structure since neither "know" their "limitations," and if Drabble's narrative structure knew its limitations, then it might also cease. The option of growing and changing gives *Realms of Gold* significant power. The power of the narration, therefore, exists in its stretching of literary boundaries in order to reconceive how a narrative functions.<sup>21</sup> Drabble presses beyond linear story lines and into a more organic form where relationships matter more than placement on a linear surface structure.

In addition to the organic structure, the octopus metaphor has two further functions. One, it symbolizes to some degree Stephen's fate since he is unable to accept the boundaries of his life and commits suicide. Two, it reveals on a deeply psychological plane the fact that narrative must also push beyond its limits when it can no longer accept the restrictions placed on it by prevailing strategies. The octopus metaphor, then, becomes a powerful tool for analyzing the organic nature of Drabble's fiction.

Along with the octopus metaphor, one other metaphor functions in the text as a narrative form: that of archeology. Frances Wingate is an archeologist and, therefore,

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<sup>20</sup> See Mary M. Lay, "Temporal Ordering in the Fiction of Margaret Drabble." *Critique: Studies in Modern Fiction* 21.3 (1980): 79. Lay points out that Drabble constructs the narrative of *Realms of Gold* thematically around "place, illness, and death."

<sup>21</sup> Like Pym, Drabble quite often revises and expands her narrative to further develop a character. Unlike Pym, Drabble tends to produce full-length novels to explore these changes. See Roberta Rubenstein,

digs through pieces of the past to find information. The readers of *Realms of Gold* also have to work with the delicate dexterity of an archeologist to uncover meaning. Like the archeologist, they must piece together fragments to make a whole, and extrapolate from chunks of text the whole. For instance, Frances finds herself returning to her past both mentally and literally. From the opening pages of the novel, she expends energy thinking of Karel, her former lover. However, the reader is only given bits of the text and must shift through the opening pages to find out both who Karel is and what he means to Frances. Indeed, Frances, herself, is not named until six pages into the text. This fragmentation of narrative and the puzzling out of meaning lends itself to a dynamic text that seduces the reader into turning the pages.<sup>22</sup> One can see that this particular novel's structure seduced Pym as a reader, and then, as a writer. The novel is a kaleidoscope of shifting stories and images, eternally fascinating because it continually reveals some new as yet unplumbed depth.

Consider, for example, the manner in which Janet Bird is brought into the story. As she retires for the night, Frances begins to think of Stephen and of family history. The stories that Frances remembers seem more like horror stories than pleasant family tales. She meditates about a "great-uncle who had hanged the cat" (98) and about "the cousin who had thrown himself under a train" (99). However, these are just a few of the wretched members of her family, and Frances drifts off to the thought "morbid, morbid" (99). Drabble has set the stage for the entry of Janet whose story is as sorrowful as any

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Severed Heads, Primal Crimes, Narrative Revisions: Margaret Drabble's *A Natural Curiosity*." *Critique* 33.2 (1992): 95-105.

<sup>22</sup> For a discussion of Drabble's narrative technique, see Pamela S. Bromberg. "The Development of Narrative Technique in Margaret Drabble's Novels." *Journal of Narrative Technique* 16.3 (1986): 179-191.

other member of the family. There is a bit of a trick though in the manner of Janet's introduction. She is mentioned but not explored as a character:

As Frances Wingate sat in a first-class carriage (her car was in service) on the way to Tockley, her second cousin Janet Bird (née Ollerenshaw) pushed her baby and her pram along Tockley High Street. They had never met, and were not yet to meet. (99)

Drabble gives just enough taste of Janet to intrigue the reader, especially since we have seen how odd other members have been portrayed in Frances' memory. However, Drabble moves forward with Frances' story line. When we get to page 121, Drabble returns to Janet:

Janet Bird née Ollerenshaw was pushing her pram along Tockley High Street. The fact that she was doing this, as she was some 23 pages ago, does not indicate that no time has passed since that last brief encounter. Nor does it indicate a desire on the part of the narrator to impose an arbitrary order or significance upon events. (121-22)

This passage contains one of the supreme metafictional moments in the text and probably represents for Pym the audacious giving of "*too much*" that she saw as characteristic of Drabble's writing. There is one further important aspect to this passage, apart from the fey ironic humor that is used to describe Janet's hellish life. Readers immediately think back to the first mention of Janet on page 99 and count back through the preceding text to find the passage. In essence, then, the second mention of Janet has the effect of folding the text over on itself, of blending the two stories without using a linear narrative. At the same time, the narrator can disavow any pre-planned structure or purpose on the part of the author.

Janet also calls to mind the octopus metaphor from the opening pages of the novel. Drabble writes Janet as a resisting character to the negative aura that surrounds

her life: “She had dedicated her life to resistance, but her resistance must be both total and secret” (123). Because she is a resisting character, Janet can function also as a symbol of the narrative itself when it resists linear reality or traditional narrative structure. Therefore, the passages concerning Janet play an important part in the narrative structure of the novel.

Along with the passages that focus on Janet, there are passages that detail Stephen and other members of Frances’ family. These story lines have the effect of complicating the overall narrative pattern of *Realms of Gold*. Furthermore, Higdon points out that the narrative pattern of *Realms of Gold* is “more complex” and “quite different” from Drabble’s earlier works because it contains four interconnected stories. The complexity of four interlocking stories reminds one of the four interconnected stories of Pym’s novel *Quartet in Autumn*. However, it is necessary to return back to the character of Stephen and his relationship to the metaphor of the octopus to see how one strand of the interwoven tales plays out. Stephen pays the price for membership in the fragmented family that structures the text. To some degree, Stephen also represents the older narrative structures that ended in death for those who could not achieve social success. Stephen’s story concludes the text, and its position pays homage to an older tradition of British narrative forms that Drabble certainly knew. It is appropriate, then, that his death occupies so much of the emotional space of the end of the novel.

Using Stephen to structure the concluding sections (sections since *Realms of Gold* has no chapters) becomes one more method of creating complex narrative patterns. Since Drabble has not felt compelled to focus solely on Frances, Stephen’s death by suicide is itself a narrative event, one more complex addition to the novel. Examine the manner in

which Drabble uses his suicide to comment on the text: “Stephen had taken it all away with him” (348). The only connection left to Stephen is his suicide note; he becomes a narrative rather than a person—a narrative that can be defined, confined, and reread:

Reperusing his last words, in a tearless calm, months later, it occurred to Frances that perhaps it was not so bad. Perhaps, in some way, it was all right. With a certain admirable determination, he had faced his own nature, and the terms of life and death. (348)

Stephen’s action brings closure to Frances since he reflects the male octopus of the opening pages.<sup>23</sup> Drabble has brilliantly bound the two images together and found a way to employ the metaphor as complex narrative device. Two images strike the reader. First, Stephen becomes the defining character of the closing pages rather than a strict focus on Frances. She is not abandoned, merely expanded. Frances’ story escapes linear narrative and evolves into a more complex structure that mirrors the organic structure of the octopus. Second, Stephen will now be confined to the narrative of his suicide note; the characters in *Realms of Gold* are confined to the pages of the text. Nonetheless, Stephen takes on heroic dimensions.

Another Drabble character, Anthony Keating, from *The Ice Age* reflects Stephen’s heroic dimensions. However, the structure of *The Ice Age* does not completely mirror the organic structure of *Realms of Gold*. What we have instead is a tripartite structure that induces the reader to experience three mini-endings so that the narrative still manages to avoid a strict linear format. Instead, Drabble manipulates the character of Anthony Keating and his perceptions and experiences to construct the narrative format. This use of one character does not imply, however, that Drabble resists

experimenting with the text. Indeed, the use of the main character to control the narrative structure works to disrupt readers' perception of and predictions about what will occur in the novel. One other image works to ground the novel: that of imprisonment. Each section (again Drabble eschews chapters) plays with the motif of imprisonment. In Part One, Anthony's friend, Len, is incarcerated throughout the text, but Anthony is also confined to his home because he has a bad heart. Part Two explores the issues raised when Anthony's stepdaughter is jailed in Walachia. The use of prisons amplifies the structure of the novel as one character's prison story takes the place of another. Anthony's heroism reveals itself when Anthony takes Jane's place in the Walachian jail in Part Three.

The use of prisons and imprisonment makes a witty, if somewhat subtle, comment on narrative practices. Drabble pushing against the boundaries of standard narrative practices. She sifts the residue of mid-twentieth-century writing and produces new forms. While Drabble has gone on to devise some provocative fictive forms—particularly *Gates of Ivory*—the two novels under discussion here do reveal the beginnings of those challenging forms. She battles against the bounds of old, dying forms and traditions.

In order to see how Drabble plays with the theme of prisons and imprisonment, we should turn our attention to the character of Jane and, then, to that of Anthony Keating. Jane fascinates the reader because she is a petulant child who mouths platitudes and does not even understand the reality of the Marxist slogans she shouts at her mother. To some degree, Jane is that part of all readers that resists change and clings to old form,

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<sup>23</sup> For a discussion on the nature of Drabble's endings, see Nora Foster Stovel. "A Feminine Ending?:"

all the while believing them to be new and radical. She is the voice of irony in the novel. Consider the evidence presented by her interaction with her mother, Alison. Alison has come to Walachia to see Jane, and the visit has been disastrous. Neither woman has been able to get past the scars of their relationship as mother and daughter:

A hardened heart is as painful as a soft one, thought Alison. Intense waves of emotion poured through her. It was the kind of confrontation she had tried, for years, to avoid.  
‘I can’t split myself in two,’ she said.  
‘You never tried,’ said Jane, speaking almost reasonably. ‘You always put her first, didn’t you? You never gave a fuck about me.’ (154)

Jane is incapable of seeing past her resentment of her sister, Molly, who is retarded and understanding that her mother has traveled across Europe to be with her. Jane has no concept of Alison’s sufferings. Neither woman can penetrate the other’s consciousness and bring about some form of reconciliation. Drabble engages the reader on two levels here. First, the reference to “hardened” and “soft” hearts brings to mind Anthony and, thereby, develops a sense of unity to the section. Additionally, it foreshadows Anthony’s “soft-hearted” rescue of Jane—a rescue that entraps him in Jane’s place. It is a subtle reminder, but one that works quite effectively. Second, Drabble is able to play upon the theme of mother/daughter antagonism that demonstrates the need to move beyond repeated emotional scripts into an area where growth can take place. Jane cannot grow because she cannot escape her “narrative.”

The theme of escaping internal narratives is carried one step further when Alison leaves in disgust:

‘Jane, you’ve got yourself into an awful mess, but just you remember that *you got yourself* in it. There’s no appeal, you know. There’s no way you

can be excused. You have to pay your own penalty. I can't pay it for you.' (155)

Drabble forcibly drives the idea into the reader's consciousness of Jane's responsibility for her predicament. Jane cannot escape the internal narrative that colors her outlook, so she repeats the old mental text that defines her personality, and as long as she repeats the same internal stories, no freedom will come. One thinks of her thoughts about the Walachian officials: "Jane could not understand why the Walachian authorities were not more friendly towards her.... They must surely see that she was a victim of Western Europe" (118). Later, in the same passage, she thinks, "How could anyone not forgive anything to a person who has a mother like mine" (118). The passage, of course, drips with poisonous irony, but it highlights the fact that Jane responds to the interior resentments that form the basis for her actions.

Furthermore, it is not until Anthony comes to rescue her that Jane can escape this internal narrative, a fact underscored by her escape from the Walachian prison. Jane's departure from the Walachian prison figures quite closely, paradoxically, with Anthony's capture. Jane's freedom allows her to enter a new narrative as it were, and indeed, she plays an insignificant part through the rest of *The Ice Age*. However, even though she fades from consequence in the novel, her imprisonment plays an important role in the overall narrative structure because she binds the first two sections of the novel together by haunting its form.

Anthony who is imprisoned after helping Jane to get free operates along the same lines as Jane does in the text. Anthony can move about, but he is still captured by his own internal narrative. In effect, like Jane, his internal narrative traps him. Drabble

creates a dichotomy between a major character and a minor one that then brilliantly organizes the novel's structure. Anthony and Jane complete one another, not Anthony and his wife Alison as might be expected. Anthony's story, which grounds all three sections of the text, moves continually toward the moment of capture in Walachia. Consider the fact that he first has to go visit Len in prison to gain the knowledge that his partner, Giles, is trying to trick him out of a substantial amount of money. Prison becomes for Anthony the place of enlightenment, an idea that structures the third section.

Moreover, it is in Section Three that we see that *The Ice Age* is to some degree a novel about the liberatory aspects of reading. Anthony copes with his situation by reading. Of course, the novels he reads also form a metafictional commentary on the text. For instance, the John Le Carré novel induces the reader to laugh at the silly spy-thriller aspects of his plight that land Anthony in jail in the first place, particularly the fracas over pro-China and pro-Stalinist agendas. Drabble's narrative mimics wonderfully the elements of spy novels, but she does not stop there. Two other books play a role in Anthony's literary life: *Pickwick Papers* and *The Consolation of Philosophy*. These two books unite the narrative as they direct the reader back to the epigraphs of the novel, one from Milton's *Areopagitica* and one from Wordsworth. Thus, what we have is a narrative about the function of narrative in daily life. Additionally, just so the reader does not miss the point, Drabble adds the tragic-comic character of Linton to the mix.

Linton moves through the text commenting on the lack of understanding of classics. Along with his comments, Linton colors the intertextual structure of *The Ice Age* because astute readers must call to mind the woefully inadequate Linton from Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*—itself a book composed of two interrelated parts. He

represents the old school that *The Ice Age* is beginning to overthrow. Take into account two passages. First, we observe Linton early in the text where he rails against pupils.

Drabble characterizes him as a man failing to keep up, a fossil of sorts:

Unable to adapt, unable to learn new skills, obstinately committed to justifying the old ones—and alas, as so often happens, ruining quite unnecessary and disconnected parts of himself in his willed, forced, unnatural, retrogressive justification. (77)

If we look at the characteristics here, we begin to see a pattern operating that resonates through the text. Words like “obstinate” and “retrogressive” suggest that the old ways of constructing reality, and by default narrative patterns, will no longer maintain their capability of projecting meaning. There is no center in the former world; it has become “disconnected” and unable to provide a strategy for meaning to occur.

Second, consider a passage toward the end of Part Three. Anthony has been left behind as Jane escapes. He has a copy of Sophocles’ plays that he found in Jane’s backpack. Upon opening the book, he sees that Linton has translated it. All in all an excellent textual move on Drabble’s part because Anthony reads Linton’s ideas about Antigone’s sacrifice and comes to understand that he would be completely unable to die “for either of his two disagreeable brothers” (285). Furthermore, Linton discusses the play “in terms of endogamy and exogamy” (285), which is another method Drabble employs to turn the text back on itself. Anthony has married Alison and sacrificed himself for another man’s daughter, so it appears that family relationships undergo as radical a change a narrative.

Both novels by Drabble exhibit several experimental narrative forms that must have appealed to Pym, while also causing her anxiety. As we shall see, the two novels

that Pym published in the 1970s (*The Sweet Dove Died* and *Quartet in Autumn*) reflect Drabble's influence, not so much because there are direct allusions to *Realms of Gold* or *The Ice Age*, but, rather, there exists an intertextuality of form and mood. That is to say, Pym's two early 1970s novels mirror several narrative structures that Drabble utilizes—multiple stories, condition of England, and a more darkly constructed fictive world—as well as being willing to address the negative aspect of life. Before the 1970s, Pym's novels created a mythos of England where all was happy or all was at least fundamentally acceptable and even when problems existed, there was always a sense that everything would work out for the best. After being silenced for most of the 1960s, Pym struggled to find a form of narrative that would once again bring her work before the public.<sup>24</sup> The two novels she wrote stand out as anomalies in Pym's canon. The intriguing question exists: why?

Turning to *The Sweet Dove Died*, the first novel to be published after a fourteen-year silence, we find that Pym has created a darker vision than her earlier works. Leonora is not sympathetic as a heroine; the novel ends unhappily; and, Pym deals with sexuality for the first time without couching it in terms of matrimony. A perusal of the manuscripts housed in the Bodleian Library, Oxford, demonstrates that Pym toyed with the concept behind *The Sweet Dove Died* for several years. From 1961 until 1965, she structured and restructured the novel looking for a method of making it relevant to the modern reading public.

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<sup>24</sup> See Anne M. Wyatt-Brown. "Late Style in the Novels of Barbara Pym and Penelope Mortimer." *The Gerontologist* 28.6 (1988): 835-839. Wyatt-Brown uses gerontology to base her discussion of the later novels and see aging as an important influence on the writers.

The first working out of the idea revolved around “a novel about a middled-aged female novelist (like me) whose books become fashionable” (MS 54 folio 4). Pym’s original idea evolved through several stages to give us the character of Leonora, certainly one of the coldest of Pym’s creations. I argue that the impetus for changing the character relates to Pym’s reading of Frances Wingate who seems so distant from her own creator. It appears that Pym, writing under the influence of her reading of *Realms of Gold*, began to see that a much more complex character could be created and that she did not have to rely on autobiographical sketches to build a believable character. She wrote in her diary for 27 May 1969, “If only one could write could write about Margaret Drabble-like characters” (*A Very Private Eye* 250). Although *Realms of Gold* was published in 1976, what this entry demonstrates is that as early as 1969 when *The Sweet Dove Died* was going through yet another series of revisions, Pym was turning her thoughts to the style of the more successful writer, Drabble. She was to wait another nine years, however, before *The Sweet Dove Died* made it to publication.

While the published text of *The Sweet Dove Died* appears as Pym wished it to be, several earlier manuscripts point out some illuminating facts about how she wanted to compose the novel. First, she toyed with the character of James as Manuscript 61 reveals:

Lenora gets the young man (Edward) to read the menu for her and then the programme rather than put on her glasses. He reads out the plot of Tosca perhaps his uncle could be called Humphrey?

Aside from the fact that she did not pay too careful attention to the punctuation in some of her manuscripts, Pym did jot down possible scenarios for the novel. Of course,

Edward becomes James, but the character of the young man was becoming set in Pym's mind by this time. James turns out to be a silly sort of youth with an ambiguous sexual identity. However, even in this early manuscript, his fate revolves around the uses that Leonora makes of him. In Manuscript 65 Pym explores several titles which point out the fact that she thought of focusing the novel on James' experiences with Lenora:

James Engaged  
A Gilded Cage  
His Feet Were Tied  
James in Prison  
Liberty Freedom  
Bird in a Gilded  
[A Summer Bird Cage]  
A Delightful Prison  
A Charming Prison  
The Sweet Dove Died  
[A Marble Object]

The title that strikes one is the title to a novel Drabble published early in her career—*A Summer Bird-Cage*—that might be read as a Bildungsroman. However, the title that eventually won was the tenth choice. The title she finally selects for her novel is significant because it is a reference to a poem by Keats that forms the epigraph. Pym's use of the epigraph and the intertextual reference remind one of Drabble's use of such devices. Therefore, we see that Pym cites a title to one of Drabble's books as well as using similar narrative techniques.

Before delving into the text proper of *The Sweet Dove Died* it will be useful to examine the epigraph and the dedication. The novel is dedicated "To R." who was a young man named Richard who had been the focus of Pym's romantic interests. Keats'

poem, “The Dove,” forms the heart of the novel in the sense that the narrative structure focuses on how imprisoning people robs them of their vitality:

I had a dove, and the sweet dove died;  
    And I have thought it died of grieving;  
O, what could it grieve for? Its feet were tied  
    With a single thread of my own hand’s weaving (1-4)

Thus, as the quoted stanza demonstrates, people create, or “weave,” the various “threads” of their personal narratives—narratives that entrap and destroy the very things that are most valued. The issue of the destructive nature of entrapment plays a significant role in the thematic structure of the novel. Not only do Leonora and Phoebe try to trap James with emotional blackmail, their histrionics end up destroying the solid friendship that existed between them and James. Therefore, the epigraph holds power as a thematic map to the novel.

Additionally, the epigraph serves as a solid reference point for readers interested in the intertextual nature of closure. When first reading the epigraph, readers will call Keats to mind and, perhaps, also call to mind his tragic love for Fanny Price. The epigraph will to some degree direct their expectations toward the love interest in the novel—particularly after the opening scene where both Leonora and a strange man are attracted to James. Whether or not readers actually look up the source of the poem will depend on their need for interpretive information and, to some degree, on how much they believe in what Peter Rabinowitz has termed “privileged positions.” However, the fact remains that a piece of information exists that can direct a reading of the novel.

Therefore, Rabinowitz’s argument that writers utilized various positions of the text to call attention to ideas carries weight in the present argument. Under the terms of

Rabinowitz's argument, epigraphs carry heavy interpretive significance because they come to the reader directly from the writer. They are pure bits of information that can be used in the interpretive game of reading. It is important to realize, though, that the epigraph must be interpreted as the reading process occurs. Its true importance becomes clear as the novel unfolds, and readers begin to bind the bits of information together. That is to say, at the opening of the reading process, perceptive readers will catch onto the epigraph and wonder at its relationship to the novel. Then, as they engage the text, they will be able to understand the relationship that exists between the text and the epigraph. Thus, the delayed aspect of closure that evolves as the reader gains insight into the narrative world being created also becomes a form of intertextuality. It is intertextual and spatial because it is an understanding, on the reader's part, of the relationship of one narrative structure to another and his or her ability to create a space in the mind where all the fragments of narrative as a whole.

Furthermore, a subtle intertextual relationship exists between the epigraph of *The Sweet Dove Died* and Drabble's narrative *Realms of Gold*. The title of *Realms of Gold* must certainly call to mind another Keats' poem: "On First Looking into Chapman's Homer." An intertextual relationship exists from Pym's novel to that of Drabble's back to the poetry of Keats. The complexities developed by the tripartite nature of this particular intertextual relationship express profoundly how the reader's interiority comes into play when striving for closure. Consider, for example, the opening lines of Keats' poem: "Much have I traveled in the realms of gold, / and many goodly states and kingdoms seen" (1-2). The "realms" cited here quite clearly refer to the books that the poet persona has read. From the experience gained by reading widely (the "much

traveled” of the poem), the poet persona has developed the ability to discern what is valuable (“gold”) from books. The poem, then, is a paean to reading and to readers’ ability to use their knowledge for interpretive practices. In other words, the experience of reading has given the poet persona the capability of interpreting and valuing the reading process: “Yet did I never breathe its pure serene / Till I heard Chapman speak out loud and bold” (7-8). Clearly, the poet expresses the ability to rate Chapman’s translation highly because of a wide reading experience. Reading, then, opens the world outward and initiates a relationship between the reader’s interior world and the exterior world of the text—albeit a world that is created via the reading process.

Therefore, an important intertextual relationship that exists between the novels of Drabble and those of Pym revolves around a central focus on Keats’ poetic vision as a controlling metaphor. Although the exact nature between the titles of the respective authors’ work (and epigraphs) may not become clear to readers until the reading process has ended, the intertextual nature of the reference to Keats demonstrates that both authors believed that their readers would understand the connection of their novels to the poetry of Keats and to employ this intertextual knowledge to interpret ( or bring to closure) the novels.

An additional purpose behind the epigraph relates to Pym’s love of English literature and the methods she employed when alluding to famous poets. She sprinkles her texts with quotations and generally allows characters to speak lines of poetry that amplify their emotions. For the purposes of this argument, allusions and direct citations will be called conscious intertextuality because they direct readers to works outside the text that also stand in relationship with the text. More problematic allusions or mimicry

of mood, tone, and style will be named unconscious intertextuality because they work on a deeper psychological level in the reader.

*The Sweet Dove Died* operates on both conscious and unconscious levels since it alludes to Keats as an epigraph, and because it calls to mind the mood and characters of Drabble's texts—as well as Drabble's use of Keats. However, the main difference in the narratives concerns Pym's manner of evoking Drabble's multidimensional characters, which occurs on an unconscious level. That is to say, for example, a character like Leonora does not appear to be directly related to any character in Drabble's novels, but she begins to reveal multiple layers and deeper complexities—more so than any other Pym character. Leonora's complexities resemble the types of complexities developed by Drabble.

Throughout *The Sweet Dove Died* Pym employs the multidimensional aspects of Lenora's character to propel the narrative. For instance, Leonora continually manipulates James and the manuscripts reveal this aspect of her character to be one that Pym settled on early in the drafting process. Compare the opening of the novel with the ideas mentioned in Manuscript 61 quoted above with the actual opening of the novel:

‘The sale room is no place for a woman,’ declared Humphrey Boyce, as he and his nephew James sat having lunch with the attractive stranger they had picked up at a Bond Street sale room half an hour ago. ‘Now you're scolding me,’ said Leonora, with mock humility. (7)

While the scene has been amplified from the original sketch, it still reveals Lenora to be something of a poseur. The opening of the novel allows Pym to get the three main characters together and to create a plausible reason for them to maintain contact. From this simple beginning, then, Pym will draw James ever more tightly into Leonora's

control. The relationship between the two advances the dramatic tension of the text. The focus of the tension will rest on James. As Manuscript 61, folio 3 and 4 reveal, Pym decided to create some problems around James: “James something Ambivalent about him at the beginning.” The ambivalent “something” turns out to be James’ sexual identity, which evolves from heterosexual to homosexual to asexual as the novel progresses. Manuscript 61 further discloses that Pym decided to focus on James and the complexities surrounding his character: “Ch 1 James Humphrey at the saleroom—the man—Leonora the his meeting Phoebe How complicated life was becoming for James” (folio 4). The “man” mentioned becomes “[a] tall man with a slightly raffish air” (*The Sweet Dove Died* 8) in the text, and one who admires James in an obviously sexual manner.

Therefore, with a few opening developments, Pym creates a narrative format that pushes past the boundaries of her earlier novels in which no one seems to feel sexual passion. If we compare this opening with the opening in *Realms of Gold* then we begin to see that Pym is indeed beginning to delve into more complex emotional issues. The problem that arises for her, though, becomes how to create more emotionally complex situations without losing her own literary voice.

Manuscript 66 documents Pym’s problems. She writes, “Trying to think how to go on with Lenora, James and Ned” (folio 2), and on folio 3 of the same manuscript we find that Pym includes a visit to Keats house as a possible strategy for complicating the text: “Next visit to Keat’s house and Lenora’s sadness Then James and Ned alone.” Ned is a young gay man attracted to James. With his character, we see Pym exploring a host of social topics that held relevant importance in the 1970’s. She is also using a Drabble-like motif (particularly if we think in terms of *The Millstone*) of social issues to

ground the text. Ned complicates the narrative structure because he becomes Lenora's rival for James' affection. His affair with James causes Leonora pain, and she is unable to take James back, leading to Pym's only sad ending. Thus, we see Drabble's influence operating on several levels. First, intertextuality becomes a narrative structure in the working out of the Keats' epigraph to thematically structure the text. This type of intertextuality is a new strategy for Pym. Indeed, the only novel that approaches such a use of intertextuality as a basis for the text is *Excellent Women*, which uses Dante's "Inferno" as a device. However, such formats are not standard Pym tropes. Second, Pym explores the vagaries of modern life in a manner previously untried. She looks into physical/ sexual aspect of life in a way she has not done before. James not only has an affair with Ned, but he also engages in a relationship with Phoebe, the earnest student. Readers do not normally connect bisexuality with Pym's work. These complexities mirror the ones set forth in *The Ice Age*, for example, particularly where we see Anthony becoming involved with Maureen and read of Giles' various affairs. Sex and sexuality enhance the possibilities of the narrative since they add conflict.

Moreover, the character of James offers insight into the manner that Drabble's texts "enrich" the narrative strategies of Pym's later works. First, his character almost shares a position as a dual protagonist in the novel with the character of Leonora. This relationship is unique in the fictive world created by Pym. Her other protagonists fall clearly into the excellent woman category; indeed, the novels published during the 1950's all focus on the tribulations that face individual women as they go about their daily life in London. Thus, the character of James holds an important place in the novels. Whereas most male characters in the novels tend to be comic types—the fumbling Anglican priest,

the raffish naval officer, the bumbling Anthropology professor and so forth—James reveals a rich interior life that demonstrates his emotional development through the narrative. Furthermore, the most significant fact concerning James *is* exactly that he has an interior emotional life that takes up a major portion of the novel. In Pym's fictive world, other male characters only momentarily reveal their inner selves.

To understand this momentary nature of male consciousness, consider the character of Piers Longridge from the novel *A Glass of Blessings* published in the 1950's. Piers is the focal point for the amorous fantasies of the heroine, Wilmet Forsyth. He is the brother of Wilmet's closest friend, Rowena, and has become something of a disappointment to his family because he has never reached his full potential. When he makes his first appearance in the novel Wilmet wonders what exactly is the trouble with him: "Was this it? I wondered—Piers's trouble? *Drink?*" (45). For a majority of the novel, Wilmet never succeeds in recognizing that Piers is gay and lives a life that falls outside the boundaries of the type of middle-class life that she has experienced. She does not understand Piers's bohemian life nor does Pym give readers a glimpse of this life from Piers's point-of-view.

As a character, Piers serves to highlight Wilmet's naiveté, and thereby, the comic structure of the novel. For example, throughout the first half of the novel, Wilmet can perceive of Piers in only the most general terms, mostly in response to thoughts about the supposed drinking problem. Indeed, Pym shies away from giving the reader any access into the psyche of Piers apart from Wilmet's musings and fantasies about his potential as a lover. The comedy evolves from this one-sided view. During the last third of the

novel, Wilmet discovers that Piers has a flat-mate but, at first, does not recognize the fact that the two men are involved in a romantic relationship:

Piers had gone over into a corner where a small dark young man wearing black jeans and a blue tartan shirt, whom I had not noticed before, was peering into some biscuit tins.

‘Wilmet, this is Keith—I don’t think you’ve met before,’ said Piers in a rather jolly tone which did not seem quite natural to him. (192)

It is during this first meeting that Wilmet observes Keith fussing over the type of bacon that Piers likes and discussing whether or not to make a custard from a box mix. It is clear from the dialogue that the two men are involved, but Pym does not give the reader much access into their interior lives. After leaving the men’s flat, where Keith has “tidied and cleaned” (196) in order to serve tea, Wilmet discusses the relationship with Piers as they walk toward a taxi stand:

‘But Piers, why did you choose him of all people? I shouldn’t have thought you had anything in common.’

‘This having things in common,’ said Piers impatiently, ‘how overrated it is! Long dreary intellectual conversations, capping each other’s obscure quotations—it’s so exhausting. It’s much more agreeable to come home to some different remarks from the ones one’s been hearing all day.’ (198-9)

Piers’s comments tease the reader with the idea that there is more to his character that has been revealed, but Pym does not lose track of the focus on Wilmet. Just after the scene with Piers and Keith, Wilmet falls into a reverie about Piers’s life with Keith. The intriguing possibilities raised by the visit are abandoned as a narrative focus, and Pym returns the attention of the reader to Wilmet’s interior world.

Although in *A Glass of Blessings*, she maintained focus strictly on her heroine, after reading Drabble and seeing the possibilities raised by the narrative experiments in

*Realms of Gold* and *The Ice Age*, Pym began to experiment with her narrative structures. Indeed, she returns in *The Sweet Dove Died* to a similar theme of a sophisticated woman intrigued by a handsome man who also happens to be gay. The difference, however, is that in *The Sweet Dove Died*, Pym reveals more of the interior life of James than she did for Piers. Consider three key scenes from the novel. While the opening scenes appear to be in the typical ironical and absurdist view of her earlier novels, in progressive scenes, Pym intensifies James's emotional life and complicates the narrative structure by centering the novel, for all intense and purpose, around two competing protagonists. First, readers encounter James at the book auction where he rescues Leonora who is overcome by the competitive bidding. After seeing her to a taxi stand (a scene reminiscent of the one between Piers and Wilmet), James returns to the antique shop where he works for his uncle. There he finishes out "a boringly predictable" day (12). However, readers are given a glimpse into James's interior world that reveals his somewhat bland personality:

The door would open, the surge of music and voices would overwhelm him, and he would find himself stuck in a corner with a girl who couldn't hear what he was saying. Not that he could think of anything particularly interesting to say on these occasions, anyway; having been so much with his mother he still found older women easier to talk to. (12)

What is intriguing in this passage is the fact that Pym directs the narrative toward James and not toward Leonora, as readers might expect. Additionally, she reveals the oedipal nature of the relationship between Leonora and James; he is initially drawn to her as a mother figure, while her attraction to him is clearly sexual. Such a clear and serious depiction of the dark side of sexual attraction is unusual in Pym's earlier work. In the

earlier novels, sexuality is always treated cavalierly and as an object of the novel's comic structure.

However, in *The Sweet Dove Died* unlike the early novels, readers find the ambiguities of sex and romantic longings portrayed from a male perspective. This change of perspective that explores both masculine and feminine interior emotional lives represents a new narrative formula for Pym. It demonstrates that the enrichment she experienced after reading the novels of Drabble gave her the confidence to investigate the complexities of the male persona and to communicate these intricacies to her readers. The novel *The Sweet Dove Died* demarcates the boundary between the early lighthearted comical works of Pym and her later more darkly introspective novels.

Readers can experience this movement into a more introspective mood in the emotional changes that affect James as he develops in the novel. Take the second key scene in *The Sweet Dove Died* where James and Phoebe have an awkward sexual encounter. After having observed the mess that clutters Phoebe's flat, James is surprised to hear Phoebe make fastidious comments about items at an estate sale:

James looked at her in surprise. It was the sort of comment that Leonora might have made, with her fastidiousness and feeling for atmosphere. He had always imagined from the untidiness, almost squalor, of her cottage that Phoebe was incapable of noticing muddy footmarks on tiled floors. It gave him an uneasy feeling, as if the two women in his life were merging together in some curious way. (59-60)

The significant image that emerges here concerns the union of the two female characters in James's mind. First, before having read Drabble, Pym did not focus on the interior workings of the male mind. She tended to delve into how the female characters experienced romantic and sexual longings (one thinks of Mildred Lathbury and her

fantasies about Rocky Napier and Everard Bone.) Here, however, readers encounter sexual anxiety from the male perspective as the objects of his desire begin to “merge.”

James has been wondering about the nature of his sexual encounters with Phoebe:

James hardly knew whether his visit to Phoebe had been a success or not. Their awkward love-making in the cottage bedroom seemed very far removed from the world of Humphrey and Leonora, and while he was not particularly anxious to repeat the experience he liked to think that he could if he wanted to. (59)

Something new has occurred in the fictive world that Pym creates. It has been expanded both by the inclusion a male perspective and by the addition of real, anxiety producing sexuality. This moment in the novel creates richness in the narrative because it complements Pym early work that explored sexuality from a female perspective. In *The Sweet Dove Died*, Pym unifies the female and male experience into a powerful narrative structure.

One further episode points out the male perspective about sexuality in Pym’s novel and echoes her earlier comic tone. James returns to Leonora’s home (reinforcing the connection Pym makes between the two women) to take her to a cat show. As the conversation turns toward the evening’s event and Pym uses the dialogue to reinforce the previous anxiety that James has been feeling. It is a pivotal scene in the text and underscores the problem between Leonora and James: an inability to see each other as sexual while also experiencing a strong sexual tension. It also calls to mind Pym’s strength as a comic writer:

‘Just kittens and neuter cats,’ said Leonora, reading from the program, ‘that sounds so cosy, doesn’t it?’

‘Shall I be the only grown-up male thing there, then?’ James asked, not altogether joking.

‘Probably, darling—though one doesn’t think of you as male, exactly. Not all tweedy and pipe-smoking and doing carpentry at weekends.’

‘No. . .’ James could appreciate the accuracy of her distinction but there were other, more attractive, aspects of maleness, he felt, that Leonora might have mentioned. (65)

The comparisons between “neuter” animals and “tweedy” “pipe-smoking” men highlights the anxiety that James feels surrounding his adult “maleness.” Additionally, the passage reveals the essential tension that will eventually destroy the two characters. Leonora cannot respond to James as a “male” only as some sort of “neuter” pet; however, she undergoes a powerful sexual attraction that she cannot express. She is trapped by her sophisticated façade. James, however, is unsure of his own sexuality, as is evidenced by his relation with Leonora and his awkward sexual encounters with Phoebe.

In this passage, Pym brings to bear two competing narrative strategies. First, elements of the earlier ironical voice appear in the passage—particularly in the references to “neuter” beings. Second, the passage reveals the complexities that humans face as they try to control and influence others. It is around this second sense, control, that the third key episode with James revolves. James meets an American, Ned, while traveling in Portugal. They become lovers, and Ned adds an element of villainy to the narrative. What become fascinating about Ned, as a character, is precisely that he is one of the few characters in Pym’s fictive world who is *not* neuter. While he is the character who ties the narrative to the epigraph by Keats since he is working on a thesis concerning Keats, Ned also exudes a profound and compelling sexual presence in the text. From his entrance into the narrative until the last chapters, Ned exercises the most powerful control over the shape of the narrative and the characters’ lives. Under his influence, the novel

takes on its tragic overtones as each character he engages is driven to manipulation in order to maintain control over James. It is as if Pym could not turn away from such a provocative character and the possibilities he raised for redefining narrative structure.

With the character of Ned, Pym takes her readers into a world where sex and sexuality are no longer seen in an ironical and lighthearted manner that laughs at human foibles. For the first time in a Pym novel, readers see that sex can be devastating and disruptive. Indeed, Ned is the catalyst for one of the most emotionally violent scenes in Pym's fictional world. After he has successfully seduced James and come between James and Leonora, Ned decides to leave for America in order to end the relationship with James. A scene ensues, and James hurls "a heavy Venetian glass paperweight" (204) at Ned's head. The significant issue here is that James has been moved to violence and, then, to feel "rather a fool" (204) in light of the various infidelities and "terrible scenes" (204) that had played out during the relationship. Love, romance, and sexuality all reveal their dark sides in the novel. Interestingly enough, it is through the character of James that these standard light-hearted Pymian tropes evolve to the darker version that they display in *The Sweet Dove Died*. The intervening occurrence between the early ironical novel and the later darker ones is the experience that Pym had reading Drabble and seeing how narrative structure could be expanded.

Along with *The Sweet Dove Died*, Pym's other novel published in the 1970's *Quartet in Autumn* reveals influences from Drabble's narratives. The striking feature of *Quartet in Autumn* is that it contains four plot lines based on the lives of four ordinary men and women, and therefore, seems to reflect the multiple story lines of *Realms of Gold*. Drabble's novel follows Frances and other members of her family as discussed

above. Its narrative structure strongly influences Pym's choice to open her novel to more than one plot sequence. *Quartet in Autumn* follows four aging workers as they plan their retirement from civil service. One of the delightful qualities of the novel is its jumping back and forth as one character or another becomes the focus. Pym works against linear narrative structure in the development of the story. The novel opens with the four main characters going to the library; each has a different purpose for being there. Marcia, the most eccentric of Pym's creations, goes to deposit bottles on the shelves since they cannot be classified as "rubbish" (3). Nonetheless, Pym makes it clear from the opening that these four characters belong together:

That day the four of them went to the library, though at different times. The library assistant, if he noticed them at all, would have seen them as people who belonged together in some way. They each in their turn noticed him; with his shoulder-length golden hair. (1)

The opening then sets up that there will be four narrative lines and that they are related but that they will each take their own time and direction. This four part structure occurs only in *Quartet in Autumn* and in no other Pym novel. The diary for 1977 reveals that Pym thought about and decided on the title while at lunch on 3 March 1977. Such a light occasion for deciding something so serious seems to be in line with Pym's character. Furthermore, she lists twenty title choices, with fifteen of them structured like a poem to age and dying. The titles and the opening demonstrate that Pym thought about dividing the plot of her novel into complimentary but separate structures.

While the manuscript of *Quartet in Autumn* exists in three typescript copies, it is apparent that of the four story sequences the ones concerning Marcia and Letty will dominate the novel. The two women and their narrative sequences revolve around each

other and, at moments, pull the men's stories into the narrative. What is most captivating about the two women is that they represent two type of Pym characters: Letty the more traditional type and Marcia the more experimental type.

Letty functions in the text as the positive pole around which Marcia's negative influence circles. Throughout the text, Letty reflects the qualities of earlier Pym heroines, so, in effect, her story validates Pym earlier narrative choices. For instance, when Letty finds that she must leave her apartment and move into a furnished room and share amenities with a nosy neighbor, she plugs along as a Pym heroine should. Pym complicates the matter, though. The fact that the new landlord will be Nigerian comments on the issue of Britain's shrinking empire, Pym can explore the social problems facing England in the 1970s and use those problems to build an experimental narrative. Letty's situation with its overtones of racial strife resembles some of the issues raised in Drabble's two novels. Both sets of novels tackle social issues, but Drabble's work influences that done by Pym.

Pym uses Marcia's plot sequence to examine the problems facing the aging in Britain's socialist government of the 1970s. Again, we see her opening up her novels to controversial topics that are not dealt with in her early novels. She appears to be moving in a more socially realistic direction and giving up on creating comfortable domestic comedies of manners. Marcia's character underscores this fact. That is not to say that Pym is abandoning the earlier themes and structure altogether, but she is amplifying her range, and she is achieving that amplification with a Pym like eccentric character. Marcia continually counts her tins of food, which she hoards, while starving herself. She also spends most of the text hiding from social workers and following her surgeon.

While Pym does have other eccentric cat ladies in her stories (one thinks of Daisy in *An Unsuitable Attachment*), none portray sheer obstinacy like Marcia. She is heroic in her stubborn refusal to accept society's definition of her as a fluffy old lady; no characteristic could be further from Marcia's reality. Her neighbor Priscilla finds out quite quickly about Marcia's strangeness when she invites her to celebrate Christmas. The scene reaffirms Pym comic touch:

Priscilla thought she might at least have had the manners to make a show of eating when so much trouble had been taken. But then that was what Janice had warned her about—these people weren't necessarily rewarding, one had to plod on. Perhaps it would have been easier if Marcia had been older, really *ancient*. (86)

Marcia resists the falseness of a holiday she no longer celebrates. Priscilla does not realize, of course, that Marcia is dying, and so, like the old year only serves to remind people of the unpleasant aspects of life.

The relationship that existed between Drabble's and Pym's narrative covers two main aspects of intertextuality: what I name as conscious (allusive) and unconscious (atmospheric). Both types of intertextual referencing systems are apparent in Pym's novels. She alludes to writers of the long tradition of British narrative, much as Drabble does, with epigraphs, quotations, and thematic structures. Additionally, Pym evidences unconscious intertextual references in her adaptation of Drabble's narrative style. We see that *Quartet in Autumn* revises Drabble's use of multiple narratives and interconnected stories to complicate the plot and to create more modern styled novels. Pym's novel *The Sweet Dove Died* explores various social issues that were coming to the forefront in the 1970's and begins to create a heroine who is not necessarily likable as characters such as

Mildred Lathbury are. The evolution in Pym's narrative patterns evolves out of her reading of Drabble's successful novels: *Realms of Gold* and *The Ice Age*. Both novels inspired her to reexamine the pattern of her fiction and to seek a method of complicating it and bringing it in line with the prevailing norms of the 1970's. Part of her rationale was to regain a lost audience for her novels but, more so, Pym admired what she had read. She did not, however, change her style lightly. Evidence from her diaries and manuscripts reveal that the process was a painful and difficult one for Pym. Nonetheless, her two major novels from the 1970's retain their power to fascinate readers who are able to enter into a more dynamic narrative world.

The two novels also reveal how an understanding of intertextual references can help in the interpretive process. For instance, sophisticated readers are able to postpone constantly the interpretive act of closure until the reading act is concluded. These acts of interpretation and postponement require readers to engage the linear reality of the text while keeping in mind important episodes, significant character changes, and evolving mood in order to predict a logical outcome for the novel. The facility that experienced readers have for holding in their minds all the threads of a narrative guides them in achieving closure. Additionally important, as seen by the influence Drabble's narrative choices had on Pym, is the fact that readers' familiarity with genres and the expectations created by encountering a particular genre guide their interpretation.

Readers recognize and expect certain occurrences in novel—conflict, change, and dramatic action. However, it is their understanding of how a particular genre works that aids in the development of valid interpretations. Therefore, when readers engage a text, it is their intertextual (previous experience) knowledge that guides their interpretation. As

seen in the interplay created by the use of Keats in both authors' work, intertextuality becomes a powerful vehicle for interpretation because it allows readers to ask why a particular reference occurs as well as asking what that reference means. But that is not the only reason that intertextuality guides closure. Intertextuality becomes interaction: interaction between author, reader, and genre. It allows for a validation of interpretation, especially when experienced readers can pull together, in their minds, the competing components of narrative.

It is possible to see this interconnectedness of author, text, and reader in the novels of Pym's later period. The use of the epigraph by Keats along with her assertions about how Drabble's narrative experiments "enriched" her writing reveal an intertextual relationship that can be employed by readers wondering about the strangeness of characters like James and Ned and by readers curious about the reasoning behind both *The Sweet Dove Died* and *Quartet in Autumn*. Understanding how Drabble's novels opened up narrative possibilities can lead readers into speculations concerning the placements of these two very powerful novels in the canon of Pym works. Additionally, realizing the intertextual nature of all reading—the holding in the mind of experience with other novels—reveals the spatial nature of closure that will be explored further in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE SPATIAL ASPECT OF CLOSURE

Full narrative closure occurs spatially, not temporally.<sup>25</sup> That is to say, although novels end at a particular point in time, complete closure of the narrative results after readers have had time to meditate on the elements of the text. Part of the essential element of achieving narrative closure requires readers to interpret a piece of writing that they have consumed in sections. Retrospection is necessary for full closure to occur. It is only after the reading experience has finished that readers can then interpret the whole of the narrative to achieve a coherent vision of its meaning. In other words, the clues revealed during the temporal experience of reading direct readers' ability to construct the story's meaning but only after having completed the text and seeing it in its entirety.<sup>26</sup>

One critic in particular, Peter Rabinowitz, has intelligently provided a solid narrative map for exploring how readers accomplish closure. Although Rabinowitz has postulated a diverse set of rules concerning the reading event, for the purpose of this argument, I will focus on the relationship between the rules of notice and the rules of coherence. Concerning the rules of notice, especially that privileged positions, Rabinowitz points out, "A text, then, has hierarchical organization of details" (53). These "details" are the clues authors structure into the novel in order to guide the reader through the text, or as Rabinowitz asserts, "rules of notice tell us where to concentrate our

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<sup>25</sup> Susan S. Friedman has created an effective paradigm for analyzing literature spatially based on her readings of Julia Kristeva's and Mikhail Bakhtin's theoretical work on intertextuality. She argues that two reading axes exist: the horizontal and the vertical. The horizontal axis consists of the action of the linear text. The vertical axis includes the context that readers and writers bring to a given text. See Susan Stanford Friedman, "Spatialization: A Strategy for Reading Narrative." *Narrative* 1.1 (1993): 12-23.

<sup>26</sup> For further discussion on the contextual aspect of reading and interpretation, see Claes Scharr, "Linear Sequence, Spatial Structure, Complex sign, and Vertical Context System." *Poetics* 7 (1978): 377-388.

attention” (53). This concentration of “attention” exists temporally, however. Therefore, readers must pull together all the “details” to complete the text, and they can resolve this problem only after seeing the totality of the “details.”

Furthermore, Rabinowitz goes on to argue that “the stressed features in a text serve as a basic structure on which to build interpretation” (53). The important idea to keep in mind is that Rabinowitz highlights the interrelationship between the clues, or “stressed features,” in the narrative and the manner in which an attentive reader can construct “interpretation.” Both aspects of the narrative, the clues that the author supplies along with the interpretation that the reader devises, are mutually dependent on one another. What does this mutual interdependence mean? First, the reader notices the emphasized features of the text that the author creates. The features then lead to an interpretation on the reader’s part that occurs after the entire narrative has been examined.<sup>27</sup> Second, although readers rely on their predictive skills while reading, the predictions are subject to reversals or “undermining.” Therefore, it is important to realize that interpretation cannot be complete until the entire text has been read, since the reader can only then understand how the stressed features relate to one another and create a valid interpretation—what Rabinowitz would name an “authorial” reading.

After the text is read and some degree of coherence has been achieved, then the reader can employ authorial clues given throughout the text to produce a conclusion to the narrative. In fact, Rabinowitz argues that the close of a novel carries enough significance to fall under the rules of notice. Rabinowitz asserts:

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<sup>27</sup> W.J.T. Mitchell argues that spatial context is essential to interpreting a text, and he goes on to point out that notions of space and time are necessary for interpretation. See W.J.T. Mitchell, “Spatial Form in Literature: Towards a General Theory.” *Critical Inquiry* (1980): 539-567.

The ending of a text is not only to be noticed; there is a widely applicable interpretive convention that permits us to read it in a special way, as conclusion, as a summing up of the work's meaning. (160)

Therefore, by occupying a privileged position at the end of a narrative, an ending can bridge the gap between rules of notice and rules of coherence. It manages this feat by allowing the reader to engage in a "summing up" process that ties the various threads of the text together, leading to a sense of closure.

Rabinowitz points out one further important feature of the relationship between the rules of notice and a text's closure: "Thematizing a text's conclusion is more complex still when a convention is undermined not by overthrowing it, but rather by following it in such a ostentatious way that it looks absurd" (167). Several ideas are important here. First, Rabinowitz implies that when reading and internalizing the stressed features of a text's narrative structure, experienced readers tend to expect the author to undermine the "conventions" presented in order to create a sense of complexity and interplay. Second, however, as Rabinowitz points out, comedic narrative is suited to an intense reliance on the "excessive" maintenance of convention, from beginning to closure, in order to create meaning—particularly in its more "absurd" incarnations. To uncover this authorial intent, though, the reader must allow space to exist between the final words of the story and the beginning of the interpretative process so that the text can be evaluated as a complete entity. Thus, when evaluating how a narrative closes, the reader must escape the tyranny of the chronological reality of the unfolding text enter into a spatial form of interpretive activity.

The underlying spatiality of closure finds further explication in the work of another scholar, Frank Kermode. Kermode's seminal work *The Sense of an Ending* highlights two important components necessary for this discussion of closure. First, Kermode points out that "in every plot there is an escape from chronicity" (50). That is to say, "plot" implies some sense of value based in the interaction of human relationships that carry more importance than the simple "chronicity" of a particular text. Or, as another insightful critic, E.M. Forster, demonstrates, "plot is a narrative of events, the emphasis falling on causality" (86). As we shall see, an understanding of "causality" underscores the relationship between closure and interpretation because the reader must not only interpret the significant plot point in the text, to some degree he or she must be aware of how a particular author violates those plot points. This sense of violation colors quite profoundly Pym's narrative strategies since she regularly "negates" the ending of one book by giving further hints of characters' lives in another novel—thereby extending the closure of the text.

The importance of Kermode's work in *Sense* becomes apparent particularly if we keep this sense of violation or negation of the ending of a novel in mind. He wrote *Sense* during the Sixties, a time of disruption of narrative conventions, and his theory concerning closure has power for modern narratologists because he was able to see that one view toward closure was ending while another was evolving to take its place. *Sense* truly appeared at a crossroad in narrative studies, and its argument validly demonstrates the main problem in understanding and in achieving closure. Modern readers' viewpoints toward the world have changed profoundly from that of seeing the world in discrete units of time with a definite end to a more skeptical view that doubts the

possibility of meaning or change. The traditional view (what Kermode call the six-day view) has given way to the postmodern unstructured view of the meaninglessness of texts. Readers can no longer rely on Forster's "death or marriage" to end a novel because the modern view sees that life, and therefore narratives, are unstructured and open-ended. This view toward endings highlights the significant problem with Pym's texts. At first reading they appear to be traditional comedies of manners dealing with the foibles of marriage in the modern era. However, since Pym violates the ending of her texts, it behooves the reader to approach her novels with some degree of caution.<sup>28</sup>

The problem with closure in Pym's novels can be traced to the problem with closure that narrative has experienced in the twentieth-century. In order to understand how this problem evolved, readers can again turn to Kermode's *Sense*. Kermode explores fully how closure has become so problematic in modern novels. The problem with closure is related to how modern readers have begun to see the world. Modern life is intricate, not simple, and this sense of intricacy colors narrative structure. Kermode argues:

The new novel 'repeats itself, bisects itself, modifies itself, contradicts itself, without even accumulating enough bulk to constitute a past—and thus a 'story' in the traditional sense of the word. The reader is not offered easy satisfactions, but a challenge to creative co-operation. (19)

Kermode identifies the main issue facing modern narrative here. Readers are "challenged" to interact with the text, to "create" the text by tying together the multiple aspects of its narrative structure. Furthermore, modern texts, such as those by Pym, do

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<sup>28</sup> For a discussion on the problems with contextualization and interpretation, see Michael Hollister, "Spatial Cognition in Literature: Text-Centered Contextualization." *Mosaic* 28.2 (1995): 1-21.

not have the “bulk” of previous texts. When compared to the standard novel of the eighteen- or nineteenth-century, modern British texts barely seem to take much shelf space at all.<sup>29</sup> They do not have the sense of amplitude that a novel by Dickens or Fielding may appear to have, simply by the virtue of their relative size. Therefore, two problems exist here. First, modern novels call for a high degree of interaction between the reader and the text. Second, the texts themselves are problematic in that they have begun to resist linearity. While Pym’s novels read with some degree of linear structure, they also tend to violate that structure by the use of crossover characters and themes, as we will see later in this discussion.

Kermode further reveals that modern readers themselves maintain awareness toward the problematic structures of modern prose narratives:

We cannot, of course, be denied an end; it is one of the charms of books that they have to end. But unless we are extremely naïve. . .we do not ask that they progress towards that end precisely as we have been given to believe. In fact we should expect only the most trivial work to conform to pre-existent types. (24)

Here, Kermode understands closure to be a readerly act of interpretation based on the skill with which a particular reader approaches the subject of the narrative. Since “trivial” works do not experiment with the structure of the text, rather merely follow older models, they lose status as works that are worthy of critical appreciation. As the earlier quotation demonstrates, Kermode sees modern literature as playfully complex; here he demands that readers engage in this sense of complexity in order to reach closure. The important idea here is that skillful readers are the ones engage in the act of achieving

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<sup>29</sup> Elrud Ibsch discusses the historical changes in the development of spatialization and its relationship to various literary schools, such as Naturalism and Modernism. See Elrud Ibsch, “Historical Changes in the

closure with sophisticated narrative strategies. “Naïve” readers are doomed to be left behind. They do not have the skill to see how slippage occurs between their world-view and that of the text.

Skillful readers are tuned to the fact that closure means making sense of a work’s structure, much like they make sense of the random chaos of daily life. For Kermode, readers relate the end of novels much like they perceive of endings to life. Closure is tied to their world-view. As Kermode further argues:

And among all the other changing fictions, literary fictions take their place. They find out about the changing world on our behalf; they arrange our complementarities. . . . It is not that we are connoisseurs of chaos, but that we are surrounded by it, and equipped for coexistence with it only by our fictive powers. (64)

Kermode’s assertion, here, that we, as readers, make sense of the chaos that constructs the reality of our world informs the spatial aspect of closure because it reveals that readers practice a daily ordering or spatialization of competing information (“chaos”) and from this mass of competing information, they create meaning. That is to say, they interpret the various clues coming into the mind and then process these clues into an orderly vision of the world—what Kermode terms “changing fictions.” Readers’ daily lives make them adept at creating spatial meaning. Kermode’s work in *Sense* set the foundation for examining how people make sense by the use of fictional modes. Reality is “chaos,” while fiction is order. Or, as Kermode points out, “Novels, then, have beginnings, ends, and potentiality even if the world has not” (138). In other words, in fiction we create a sense of order and meaning that is absent from real day-to-day life, but this sense of meaning and order is related to our view of reality (that which Kermode defines as “the

patterns of apocalypse”). When readers interpret a text, they are engaging in a “potentiality” of possible meanings that are open-ended until they process the clues of the text and establish the range of possible meanings. Life, however, is always open-ended until it stops.

While Kermode’s work clarified the relationship between a person’s worldview (apocalypse) and that person’s view of closure, another critic writing during the sixties also produced a seminal work that still has resonance for modern students of closure. Alan Friedman’s *The Turn of the Novel* succinctly defined the major difference between the traditional novelistic view of closure and that of the modernist view. Friedman demonstrates that the more modern outlook was toward open-ended narratives that mirrored life’s complexities. Although Friedman’s work, like Kermode’s was written thirty plus years ago, its importance stems from Friedman’s clear definitions. Friedman reveals that open-ended narratives are those that do not confine the “the stream of conscience” at the work’s end. Friedman argues that, “The flux of experience—a process both inward and outward—is the novel’s underlying form” (15). He means that a novel is a process of events or “flux” that can be contained by the text (marriage for the socially successful or death for the social failures) or one in which the action or “flux” extends beyond the ending, an “outward” form.

Friedman’s view of the novel’s open-ended nature in the twentieth-century carries implications for spatial aspect of closure because, as Friedman argues, there is a space outside the finite boundaries of the text where the action of the novel continues. Friedman states, “The specific moral and emotional disturbances raised in the climax to a pitch of complexity and intensity are not put to rest: they are further expanded by the

ending” (29). What Friedman is arguing for here is a spatial boundary for the modern novel, and this argument has implications for Pym’s construction of closure, as we shall see later. The spatial boundary of the open-ended novel is in Friedman’s terms infinite.

Concerning the structure of the novel, Friedman asserts:

To put it structurally: in the underlying flux of experience, the unfolding of smaller structures (events) within the larger, gradually expanding design of conscience (the inwardly responsive moral relationships of people to each other, to society, to nature) finds no tapering relief and often no possible limit. Endlessness has become an end in itself. (30)

While Friedman’s “endlessness” asserts that the “experience” of the novel exists beyond the finite boundaries of the text itself, it also argues for the realization that readers hold an infinite amount of possible endings in their minds, and these various, sometimes competing, endings exist spatially in relation to the text. They are endless because they are based on the shifting clues held within the text, and because, modern novels tend to reflect the open-ended nature of life that continually offers possibilities.

Traditional paradigms for the creation of an ending posit that endings (and thereby the tale itself) must express some sense of linear reality in which are handed out based on social success or on social failure. This sense of a tale moving through time in one direction from a beginning to some kind of an ending resists revealing in the chaotic joy that constitutes the reality of life.<sup>30</sup> Humans experience life in multilateral directions. It is this sense of multitudinousness that gives life its meaningfulness: a meaningfulness that is ecstatic, tragic, and absurd all at the same time. The writings of Barbara Pym engage this dynamic aspect of life, and in so doing, the writings resist closure. Although

some readers of Pym's novels will oppose this viewpoint of closure, I argue that closure does not occur in Pym's writing; yes, the novels end, but they withstand being *closed*. A close reading of Pym's novels will reveal that the tales she inscribes can be approached from numerous avenues. Pym's resistance to closure becomes a method of celebrating the small victories of daily life reflects clearly the open-endedness of Friedman's paradigm.

Furthermore, the spatial theorist Ronald Foust demonstrates that readers' abilities to recognize the main features of a text evolves based on a recognition of "the essential rhythmic impulse" (199) of the texts repeated structures. Therefore, what we see is a movement in fictive construction in the twentieth-century that tends toward openness and that the logical conclusion of this trend is an openness that extends beyond the concluding imagery of the text. The recognition of structures during the reading process (as readers have become more sophisticated) helps then in extending the boundaries of the novel past its covers. Foust goes on to argue:

Spatial form is primarily a theory of perception that focuses on the reading process. Its prime rule. . . is that the reader must engage the text on its own terms in a strenuously participatory reading that attempts to re-create the experience embodied in it. Meaning, as Frank implies, resides somewhere between the past activity of the author and the present activity of the engaged reader. (199)

Foust succinctly reveals the main importance of understanding spatial theory here. It is an activity that "engages" the reader in an involvement with the text that goes beyond the mere consumption of the narrative (a naïve reading of the story) and the "activity" of the

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<sup>30</sup> David Kaufman argues that texts provide experiential reality that relates to a reader's worldview. See David Kaufman, "Closure as Covenant: The Means Justify the End." *Religion and Literature* 20.3 (1988): 89-108.

writing process. Readers have to hold in their mind a totality of structures that are interrelated: openings, endings, and the signs in-between. This relationship then aids the reader in the reconstruction of the totality of the text after the reading process is finished and he or she can begin to interpret the whole. These activities are important to keep in mind when examining closure in Pym because she habitually recreates endings for one novel in another. She views her fictive world as a totality. Each novel stands in relation to all the other works, demanding that “engaged” readers search out clues to close one novel by reading another.

This interrelated activity between the linear text on one hand and the reading process on the other becomes the basis for understanding the spatial aspect of closure. Joseph Frank, the founding father of spatial theory, understands quite clearly how the process works. In his reexamination of the ideas first set forth more than thirty years ago, Frank asserts that “all through the history of the novel a tension has existed between the linear-temporal nature of its medium (language) and the spatial elements required by its nature as a work of art” (235). Frank has revealed the important, but little understood, process here of the diverse elements of the narrative process.<sup>31</sup> Language, and thereby, narrative must exist in “linear-temporal” reality. One image after another follows as the novel runs its course. Page after page is turned as the reader progresses through the text. Paradoxically, the text begins to have a life in the mind of the reader as it is being read. Memory and anticipation work together to create a complex web of structures whose

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<sup>31</sup> For a solid discussion on the influence of Frank’s work, see Wendell V. Harris, “The Space of Criticism.” *University of Toronto Quarterly* 53.3 (1984): 248-263.

delicate interdependence relies on the reader for life. The reader holds the strands of the text together and pulls out all the necessary clues to achieve closure.<sup>32</sup>

John Gerlach has demonstrated this delicate relationship in his work with spatial theory. He argues that “there are aspects of the story that draw it back together against the centrifugal pull of a plot whose moment-to-moment sequence is tangential” (150). This “tangential” relationship is too important not to be highlighted. There are a variety of existing threads of text during the reading process and the reader must hold all them together, regardless of the direction they pull toward or against. Totality is achieved through an understanding of the “tangential” relationships that are present in the text. David Herman points out that successful reading depends on our manipulation of these “plurality of scripts” (1048).

In understanding the nature of the “plurality” of the reading process and how it affects closure, the work of Susan Friedman offers invaluable work. As she points out, reading is the ability to see “representations of moments in space and time” (12). It is the idea of “movement” here that is so vital to understanding the spatial aspect of closure. Friedman has delved into the ideas posited by Mikhail Bakhtin and by Julia Kristeva concerning space-time and textuality.

Friedman argues that readers juggle their knowledge of two different axes and this knowledge aids in the reading process. As readers engage the text, they maintain a functioning ability to process various interrelated concepts. She further demonstrates the extremely important point that it is not possible to have a “full” reading of a “bounded”

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<sup>32</sup> John Gerlach asserts that the ending of a narrative may not be necessarily the main avenue to achieving closure. He further argues that various elements of the text may be used to interpret the narrative’s

text. Readers must be aware of the interrelations as they read. As Friedman argues: “A ‘full’ reading of narrative axes is not possible in a bounded text because. . . the text’s dialogism is unbounded”(20). What is important here is the idea that a series of related images exists, and the readers’ job is to meld them into a whole. However, these images and ideas take place in a space outside the text as the reader begins to combine all the necessary elements into a whole. Friedman further reveals this is a needed activity. She states: “Spatialized readings also allow us as readers to construct a ‘story’ of the fluidly interactive relationship between the surface and palimpsestic depths of a given text” (20). Thus, in spatial readings sophisticated readers hold together two competing but also complimentary axes—a vertical one revealing the author’s reality and a horizontal one revealing the text’s reality. At the intersection of these diverse strands of text, readers create meaning.

To gain an understanding of these intersecting axes, we can turn to an examination of problems in Pym’ narratives. In 1963, Hilary Pym noted that Barbara Pym’s long standing publisher began rejecting her novels because they were not “contemporary” enough. What is particularly interesting here is precisely that Pym’s publishers misread her work and failed to see how contemporary Pym’s novels were because they concerned themselves more with profit than with engaged reading strategies. Pym’s novels reflect the true messiness of daily lived experience. The publishers blundered because they did not examine Pym’s entire work. They saw her as the writer of fluffy women’s novel and not as the insightful commentator on modern life that she was. While Pym’s individual novels seem to close with upbeat open endings, the

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meaning. See John Gerlach, “Closure in Modern Short Fiction: Cheever’s ‘The Enormous Radio’ and

works as a whole demonstrate that Pym saw multiple endings and interconnectedness as the true endings to her novels. Minor characters from one novel become major characters in another, and thereby, reveal Pym's artistic belief that any narrative can only be understood when its multitude of nuances and voices are understood. It is exactly this calling forth of an array of voices that help the novels reject being closed off and to resist closure.

Within the masculinist paradigm of the Cape publishers, closure for women's literary work is being *closed off* from any avenue to the public domain.<sup>33</sup> We most clearly see how this paradigm operates by examining Virginia Woolf's attitude toward closure and women's literary voices. In *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf calls for the creation of women's experience and viewpoint. Woolf asserts that closure has worked against women by denying them any place to call their own since men close off the world to women in an effort to maintain privilege. Therefore, to engage in closure can be a form of acquiescence to the prevailing privileged structures. Woolf and Pym demonstrate that the power of exploring other dimensions of literary closure opens up a space for women that allows them to re-construct constriction/restrictions that limit and devalue women's narrative experiences.<sup>34</sup>

When asked to discuss "women and Fiction," Virginia Woolf found herself meditating on the various women writers who the literary establishment had deemed worthy of study. Fanny Burney, Jane Austen, the Brontës, and George Eliot made up the

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'Artemis, the Honest Well Digger.'" *Modern Fiction Studies* 28.1 (1982): 145-152.

<sup>33</sup> Armine K. Mortimer believes it is a characteristic of modern fiction to reject "closed-off" narratives. While she focuses on the literary work of Simone de Beauvoir, the argument is apropos of the work of Barbara Pym, since her use of crossover characters resists closed form texts. See Armine Kotin Mortimer, "Narrative Finality." *STCL* 5.2 (1981): 175-195.

majority of the list. However, Woolf came to the realization that if she began to compare the varying aspects of women's fiction then she would never find a place to stop: "I should never be able to come to a conclusion" (3). Here an important idea makes its appearance within the first paragraphs of *A Room of One's Own*. Conclusions, conclusions, and closures operate not only as methods of endings to narrative structures; in Woolf's and Pym's world, they operate as formulas of *ex-clusion* also.

In the 1920s when Woolf found herself barred from entering the library at Oxford, she rebelled. Her act of resisting the limitations placed on her by a patriarchal society evolved into her feminist treatise on women's writing, *A Room of One's Own*. The sally on the Oxford library along with the textual *sortie* directed against masculinist control of women's language became the core of Woolf's argument. Not only do edifices, such as publishing houses, function as obstacles limiting women's literary freedom; they inscribe the landscape with definite boundaries that constrain women's physical, intellectual, and artistic freedom. Woolf clearly articulates this idea of exclusion in the opening pages of her famous text:

It was thus that I found myself walking with extreme rapidity across a grass plot. Instantly a man's figure arose to intercept me. . . .His face expressed horror and indignation. Instinct rather than reason came to my help; he was a Beadle; I was a woman. This was the turf; there was the path. Only the Fellows and Scholars were allowed here. (6)

As Woolf demonstrates, such defined cultural boundaries have worked against women throughout history. The language of the passage also calls to mind the limitations placed on women. Woolf clearly constructs the standard binary oppositions that have operated

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<sup>34</sup> See Susan Knutson, "For Feminist Narratology." *Tessera* 7 (1989): 10-14. Knutson argues for a view of narrative formation that resists masculinist structures in favor of more gynocentric text.

against women. The irony of Woolf's statement is evident; patriarchal society inscribes women as "instinct rather than reason," and therefore, unable to walk the true "path" of scholarly activity. Woolf's foray into the masculine sphere of the university, which so aroused the Beadle's "horror and indignation," underscores her view toward the reception of women's literary work. When women attempt to produce quality work that reflects the daily reality of their lives, some masculinist critic, like the Beadle, appears to silence them.

The same sense of being silenced affected Pym's novels, particularly at the beginning of the 1960's when her work was seen as dated and commercially unviable.

On February 24, 1961, Pym wrote to her long time friend, Philip Larkin:

I sent my novel to Cape last week but don't know what they will think of it. I feel it can hardly come up to Catch-22 or the Passion Flower Hotel for selling qualities, but I hope that they will realize that it is necessary for a good publisher's list to have something milder. (MS 192)

The letter reveals several significant ideas about narrative and who has power to speak. First, Pym faced silencing because her novels did not appear to have the capacity to generate potential income for her long time publisher. The connection between commodity and artistic voice appears to be another form of Woolf's "beadle" seeking to set up further boundaries to prevent women's work from finding whatever audience it could. In a letter to her friend Bob Smith, Pym reveals her anxiety at being silenced because she was not commercial:

I asked Wren Howard [at Cape] about paperbacks and Penguins and he said they had tried but without success to get my books done so perhaps it is true what I heard that you must have sold ten thousand in hard covers before the paperback people will consider taking a book. (AVPE 207)

Although her publisher, Cape, tried to some extent to find another publishing house for her novels, they still rejected work from a client who had been with them from the start of her career. Pym's writing did not fit into the prevailing fashions and was abandoned.

Second, by endeavoring to create a fictive world where women and women's vision were valued, Pym mirrored the type of writing about women that Woolf had supported. There is some sense of Woolfian independence to Pym's work. For instance, concerning literature, Woolf asserts: "Literature is open to everybody. I refuse to allow you, Beadle though you are, to turn me off the grass. Lock up your libraries if you like; but there is no gate, no lock, no bolt that you can set upon the freedom of my mind" (76). This same sense of artistic and intellectual freedom appears in Pym's work. Even the lack of a publisher did not deter Pym from setting her own literary course. Pym did not allow her self to be close off from literary expression. On the contrary, she worked steadily at her art and refused to bow to the opinion of the literary "Beadles" who deemed her novels unsuitable for the reading public.

Third, the joy that Pym derived from writing has a strong Cixousian quality. Although Pym's novels had gone out of print by the mid-1960s, and we have no evidence that Hélène Cixous ever read Pym's novels, Cixous's ideas about closure and the structure of women's writing relate well to Pym's literary output. Cixous asserts, "Woman must write herself: must write about women" (320). Pym, herself, tends to focus on the ordinary daily lives of her main characters, the majority of whom are female characters. She brings their bodily reality—that is to say, their perceptions of their bodies as physical bodies in **space**—to her texts. The act of creating these textual versions of female bodies gives a sense of value not only to the daily existence of women, but also to

the narrative world that they inhabit. Pym creates this sense of value by demonstrating how intricately the balance of a smooth functioning society depends on the work done by women. Unfortunately it is work that is habitually undervalued by a society that privileges the masculine over the feminine. However, Pym's act of creating a space that expresses her own sense of Cixousian "jouissance" begins to chip away at the boundaries that confine narrative's space to that which exists between the covers of an individual novel.

In addition to chipping away at the literary (and even literal) boundaries that surrounded her, Pym resists societal definitions of closure, and thereby, closely approaches Cixous' attitude toward closure. Cixous declares that closure is a foreign concept to women writers:

A female textual body is recognized by the fact that it is always endless, without ending: there's no closure, it doesn't stop, and it's this that very often makes the feminine text difficult to read. For we've learned to read books that basically pose the word "end." (324)

This sense of endlessness is closely related to the multitudinousness of Pym's narrative world. Any one tale can always be seen from a multitude of angles, and therefore, to only focus on one aspect or one character's knowledge deletes a sense of reality from the texts. Cixous' perception of endlessness evolves out of her belief in "libidinal economy." That is to say, "libidinal economy" or an array of endings caught up in the host of female sources of pleasure seeks to nullify phallogocentric language that privileges the "end" at the expense of the entire tale. Unlike the narrow literary constructions of a phallogocentric focused world, a world of "libidinal economy" sustains multiple endings by resisting the privileging of linguistic and artistic systems that attempt to constrain

narrative worlds to a series of singular texts rather than embracing the spatial reality that exists between texts and genres.

This of opening texts to a spatial relationship can also be seen in Cixous' "The Newly Born Woman." In this work, Cixous asserts: "Writing is working: being worked: questioning (in) the between" (86). It is Cixous' vision of the in-between spaces that comes forward so clearly in Pym's own narrative strategies. Indeed, it is only when we, as readers, enter this in-between space that we can leave off traditional modes of reading that constrict our view of the text's totality. A text does not exist in a vacuum; it also situates itself in context with other works. When we enter the in-betweenness of texts, we begin to see that an ending is, in fact, merely another beginning. The in-between area of text relates then to the spatial aspect of narrative structure because it is the space or area that exists "between" the reader, the text, and the interpretive act of constructing the narrative during the reading process. The relationship between texts that I argue for here can best be seen in the fictive world that Pym creates since she spills the action of one novel into the action of another. Consider the series of early novels: *Excellent Women*, *A Glass of Blessings*, *No Fond Return of Love*, *Jane and Prudence*, and *An Unsuitable Attachment*. To varying degrees, each of these novels expands the narrative reality of at least one of the other novels, and in so doing creates a degree of "in-between space" that must be taken into account when interpreting how the individual novels reach closure. That is to say, when reading these novels, one needs to take into account how Pym rewrites or reinvents characters and scenes from one novel and how she readapts and changes the meaning of the novels.

Consider, for example, the relationship between *Excellent Women* and *A Glass of Blessings*. While both novels end on an upbeat tone and the heroines are sympathetic, a careful examination of the narrative reveals that readers cannot simply rely on an interpretation of one text without understanding its relationship to the other. The heroine of *Excellent Women*, Mildred Lathbury, is a plain woman much too interested in the lives of her neighbors, Helena and Rocky Napier. On the surface, the novel seems to be proposing the idea that women do, in fact, exist for gossiping and snooping. While these characteristics do indeed drive the comic irony of the text, Pym turns 1950's sexism back upon itself in a critique of the limitations that acceptable gender identities entail for women. Women can be "excellent" (Mildred) or they can be "sluts" (Helena). In the first chapter, when Mildred and Helena unexpectedly meet at the trash bins, readers see the definitions of their main character traits. Mildred is excellent because she keeps a tidy house and helps at the local church. Helena, a career woman and anthropologist, is a slut because her house is filthy, and she does not put her husband's needs before her own. She flaunts her rejection of society's rules. As the women's friendship develops, the dichotomy of the excellent woman/slut becomes complicated. We begin to see that Helena's mind and mental acumen is exceptionally tidy and, therefore, excellent. Mildred's interior world, however, tends to be chaotic and often occupied with lascivious thoughts about Helena's husband, Rocky. Readers who only focus on *EW* might miss the implications of the deadly and seductive charm that Rocky's character expresses toward women.

Mildred, a plain woman as Pym repeatedly points out, meets Rocky suddenly one afternoon: "It was a good thing he began talking, for I am not used to meeting

handsome men. . . . Yet it was his manner that charmed me rather than his looks” (30).

From the beginning, Pym plays with the readers’ expectations and predictions about the relationship between men and women, particularly where the roles of women are concerned. Clues about illicit romance continually fall, yet nothing happens. Rocky coasts along becoming friends with Mildred and delighting her with his charm. Mildred, pulled between her fascination for Rocky and her developing friendship for Helena, hides her attraction. Mildred overcomes her sexual attraction to Rocky by continually reminding herself that he charmed WRNS who were stationed with him in Italy during the war. On a trip to her college reunion, Mildred accidentally meets one of the WRNS:

‘Oh yes,’ she said gaily. ‘People used to fall in love with him. . . .He used to take people up for a week or two and then drop them. We Wren officers used to call ourselves the Playthings.’ (114)

This episode appears briefly in the last pages of Chapter Eleven. It is the one time readers hear the voice of one of the WRNS that Mildred has obsessed about throughout the novel. It is also the moment that she realizes that she has been one of the “Playthings.” Rocky has used her for comfort and amusement but has never seriously seen her as a friend. Mildred has functioned to make food and drink for Rocky when Helena is at the anthropological society; she fills the gaps in his time much like the WRNS did in Italy.

However, the solitary WRNS voice in *Excellent Women* becomes amplified in *A Glass of Blessings*. Wilmet, the beautiful and sophisticated heroine, spends a weekend with her closest friend, Rowena. During the episode readers find out that the two women

were in service in Italy during WWII. As they reminisce, readers find out that both women had been in love with Rocky while they were stationed in Italy:

‘My *dear*,’ Rowena leaned forward. . . ‘talking of the unexpected, *who* do you think that I met in Piccadilly when I was in town last week? Rocky!’

‘Not Rocky *Napier*?’

‘Yes. Our darling Rocky.’

We paused in a kind of rapturously reminiscent silence. (36)

The scene further develops the interplay between Mildred and the WRNS that she imagined Rocky loved while he served in Italy. It also should call readers’ attention to the fact that the story of *Excellent Women* is not closed at the end of that novel. It spills over into the pages of the second novel *A Glass of Blessings*, which was published six years after *Excellent Women*. Thus, a definite spatial quality needs to enter into the interpretive practice of readers encountering the novels. The story of the imagined WRNS is brought to fulfillment in the pages of the novel *A Glass of Blessings*: particularly since readers encounter at first hand the fully developed characters of Rowena and Wilmet, two of the WRNS that occupied so much of Mildred’s thoughts. Additionally, while readers find out that Rowena’s hands are chapped from housework, and she appears to be something of the plain WRNS that Mildred imagined, readers also find out that Wilmet is beautiful and the focus of men’s sexual attention. Therefore, the characters of Mildred’s imagination are seen to be real women in the later novel. Furthermore, the character development of the WRNS in *A Glass of Blessings* makes a strong comment on the character of Mildred. By seeing the WRNS in their full personhood, readers are able to understand that Mildred’s imaginative ramblings have

more to do with her insecurities than with the reality of the women that she enjoys imagining.

The conversation between the two women in *A Glass of Blessings* serves another purpose, however. If comedy can be said to sustain and affirm the life force, or at least to affirm societal values, then the conversation between Rowena and Wilmet functions as a form of closure for the novel *Excellent Women* in one significant way. Readers also discover that Helena and Rocky, after their tumultuous relationship and near divorce in *EW* have settled down and began a family: “‘I don’t supposed Rocky remembered the letter,’ I said. . . ‘No, that’s rather a comfort. . . . Now he lives the country with that rather formidable wife, and they have a child” (36). Thus, with one short scene in *A Glass of Blessings*, Pym is able to bring a traditional ending to one aspect of her previous novel. Indeed, readers should think of the words of E. M. Forster concerning closure: “If it were not for deaths and marriage I do not know how the average novelist would conclude” (95). However, Pym supplies an ironic twist to the idea of “deaths and marriage” being suitable endings. She has already given readers the marriage (indeed *Excellent Women* begins with Rocky and Helena married); with *A Glass of Blessings* Pym gives readers the fairy-tale, albeit a cynical one. Rocky and Helena have solved the problems of the first novel at least long enough to produce a child. Therefore, their tale extends beyond the artificial boundaries of the novel *Excellent Women*, and Pym is able to weave old characters and old scenes into the warp of a new tale. There is always another nuance to observe in her work as she stretches the boundaries of closure. Bits and pieces from one novel become the themes for other novels. By reinterpreting familiar scenes and familiar characters, Pym enriches her literary world. This sense of enrichment helps to create a

literary viewpoint that strives to approach a closer representation of life: a representation that communicates the sense of spatial coexisting voices that resist closure (in the sense of a tale being confined to the covers of its original novel). By resisting a standard view of closure (Friedman's open endings or Forster's marriage and death imagery), Pym's literary art points out that each story, novel, or tale exists as part of another narrative, and therefore, inhabits a **space** where a multitude of readings and tellings converge. In other words, sections of *Excellent Women* concerning Mildred appear within the narrative structure of *A Glass of Blessings*, and because they are situated within the context of another novel, they create a space that must be taken into account before true closure can occur. The lack of closure in Pym's writings invites readers to engage in spatial readings: readings that confront the false paradigm of linear literary reality and reveal that true closure occurs once a reader has examine the totality of a text's fictive world. That is to say, readers may conclude any one of Pym's novels by reaching its ending pages; however, they do not appreciate its true nature nor do they achieve true closure until they have experienced all the reality that the characters express.

Pym's literary world always supports a multitude of readings. Like the free flowing libidinal energy that Cixous claims for writing, Pym engages in an art form that calls its readers to wallow in the complexity of narrative richness. For Pym, narratives do not have to be confined to the pages of a singular novel; they have the freedom to range over a space of novels and construct dialogues with other novels. Consider, for instance, the relationship between *A Glass of Blessings* and *No Fond Return of Love*. In *A Glass of Blessings*, Pym focuses on the elegant but rather cold Wilmet Forsyth and her relationships with Piers Longridge and his lover Keith. However, the characters are not

confined to the pages of one novel solely. When readers encounter the trio again, they are on vacation in the West Country of Britain. Ironically, they have also traveled into the pages of *No Fond Return of Love*. Their appearance in the text of another story helps to create what E. M. Forster defines, in *Aspects of the Novel*, as synchronic reality. Forster imagines a room in which all writers sit creating their various narratives. In this room characters get up and wander into the pages of other works—in other words, a spatial reality exists for novels and novelists. Their reality is so closely aligned that the narratives have the potential to spill over into each. One, of course, can think up all manner of strange combinations. However, regardless of the strangeness of Forster's synchronic interactions, the potential that his image expresses for understanding how closure works spatially is overwhelming: particularly when it is observed in the writings of Pym.

To return, then, to *No Fond Return of Love* and its delightful vacationers, we will find this idea of synchronic reality worked out. Wilmet, Keith, and Piers have traveled to the west and are seen by Dulcie, the heroine of *No Fond Return of Love*, and her friend Viola as they all tour through the rooms of a large manor house. The scene is valuable enough to be included in its entirety:

It was when they were leaning over the red cord to study a particularly striking arrangement of pressed seaweed that Dulcie's attention was caught by a rather interesting-looking couple, who had come close enough for their conversation to be overheard. They were a tall elegantly-dressed woman of about thirty-five, with a fur stole draped casually over her grey suit and a frivolous little pink velvet hat, and a younger, smaller man, with dark hair cut in a medieval style, who was oddly dressed in tight fitting blue jeans and a orange heavy-knitted cardigan. He had a flat, rather common little voice, which kept up a non-stop flow of conversation.

‘But, Wilmet,’ they heard him say, ‘how do they keep them *clean*? Those yellow curtains must be ever so dusty if they’re never taken down. That guide said the brocade was over a hundred years old. I call it disgusting.’

‘Yes, specially woven in Lyons,’ said his companion. ‘Don’t you think it’s a beautiful design?’

‘I’d rather have something contemporary that could be sent to the cleaners, or you could wash in Tide. Then you’d know it was *really* clean,’ said the young man smugly.

‘Oh, Keith, you really are absurd!’ The young woman laughed. ‘You’re quite obsessed with things being clean—like those people in television advertisements.’

‘Well, *I* think that it’s important,’ he said defiantly. ‘How can you have a really nice home if things are dirty and dusty?’

‘I suppose that the answer is that one couldn’t imagine this place being described as a “really nice home”,’ said the young woman. (191-92)

The passage is significant for three reasons. First, it creates a recursive relationship between the two novels that allows for amplified readings. That is to say, when a reader reads *A Glass of Blessings* and then *No Fond Return of Love*, he or she will recall the action of the first novel and to some degree be made to reflect back on the action and characters of the earlier novel. Additionally, readers will see that the characters from the earlier novel reinforce the characterization that Pym creates. Wilmet is still cool and elegant; Keith is still common and obsesses with cleanliness in a most bourgeois manner. However, the addition of the scene also requires readers to reflect on the current action of *No Fond Return of Love*. Both Dulcie and Viola travel to the West Country because they are obsessed with Alwin Forbes and his birthplace. Therefore, the interpolation of Wilmet and Keith direct the meaning of the later half of the novel. After reading both novels, attentive readers will recall the earlier novel and engage in a spatial reconstruction of the two texts and the dialogue that has been created between them.

Second, after creating a recursive relationship between the two novels, Pym goes on to restructure the distance of the narrative voice. Wayne Booth's seminal work, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, defines clearly how distance functions in a text.<sup>35</sup> Of particular importance to this discussion is the method that Pym uses to comment on Wilmet. In *A Glass of Blessings*, Wilmet tells her own story and creates a sense of immediacy for the reader—an immediacy that creates the sense that the reader and Wilmet are engaged in a conversation. There is a friendly closeness developed. In *No Fond Return of Love*, readers observe Wilmet through the eyes of the rather inelegant, but warm-hearted, Dulcie Mainwaring. In the later appearance of Wilmet, Pym distances readers from the character and, thereby, accentuates her persona, specifically the carefully crafted upper-class characteristics that seem so absurd in this novel. By mocking the characteristics that she developed for Wilmet and Keith, Pym allows her readers to see the more negative nuances of their characters that she downplays in *A Glass of Blessings*.

It is no accident that Wilmet mentions “television” in the passage. If we imagine the method that television produces images, then we can see that Pym is creating a spatial relationship for the novels. Wilmet and Keith have been tele-ported from one novel to another. This movement from one novel to another allows the reader to maintain a more critical distance from the characters and to see their negative qualities more clearly. It is a truly inspired move on Pym's part. She can distance her readers from a beloved heroine. By so doing, she is able to manipulate readers' emotions much like a television program does. In the earlier novel she brings readers into sympathy with Wilmet; in the

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<sup>35</sup> Booth points out that “distance” can be emotional, intellectual, spiritual, or physical. The term “distance” refers to the readers' engagement in the text both in their feelings of connection to the text and

later novel, she helps readers to distance themselves from the character. This distancing of emotional connections also affects closure. By her bringing Wilmet into Dulcie's world, Pym causes her readers to question the values and action of the earlier novel—thereby opening up readers' interpretation of a novel they thought closed and finished.

Third, and perhaps most important, the effect of opening the novels to further interpretation causes readers to redefine how they see closure. In his work on closure, as I discuss above, Alan Friedman argues that ending to novels became open in response to a view of life that saw the world in terms of an ongoing reality that does not end. There is always another point of view, another way to tell a story. Pym has taken that viewpoint further. Not only do her individual novel tend to end on an upbeat, open note, they now carry that sense of openness forward into other novels. They truly open themselves to Friedman's sense of "endlessness." Perhaps a consideration of one of Pym's most beloved characters can make this point clear. Mildred Lathbury, the heroine from *Excellent Women*, appears in two other novels. What Pym does brilliantly here is to play with the old view of employing the marriage trope as a form of closure. Most novels before the twentieth-century, as Forster points out tend to use death or marriage to end the narrative. When employing marriage to end novels, writers tend to allude to a state of perpetual happiness. What Pym does with Mildred is to overturn this myth of happiness and show that marriage can be just as tedious as any other human state of being. The sense of tediousness that she produces carries a profound spatial quality, literally. Mildred is drastically reduced in textual space as she moves from one novel to another, an action that allows Pym to comment comically on the state of marriage in the

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in their feelings of alienation from the text. See Wayne Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (Chicago: The U of

twentieth-century. In *Excellent Women*, she inhabits the majority of the novel's pages. In *Jane and Prudence*, she is reduced to two pages, and in *An Unsuitable Attachment*, she is given a few sentences.

At the end of *Excellent Women*, as Mildred is walking toward Everard Bone's flat to have dinner, she is lost in a reverie of what her life will be like now that she has made a new set of friends who are not connected with her church. Mildred seems to have the potential to evolve from her status as an "excellent woman" who gives all her life to the activities of the church into a woman who will make her own way in the world. The ending most clearly approaches the typical open ending of twentieth-century novels. Pym plays with the idea of marriage at the end of the novel, as we see Mildred meditating on marriage, particularly on the marriage of the President of the Learned Society:

She [the President's wife] was asleep, but it didn't matter. Nobody thought anything of it or even noticed when her head jerked up again and she looked about her with unseeing eyes wondering for the moment where she was. After all, she was only the President's wife, and she always fell asleep anyway. (255)

Of course, the important image here is "sleep" because it alludes to both death, another favorite method for ending narratives, and to unconsciousness, a state in which many people approach marriage. Pym will have her joke. However, as Mildred and Everard prepare to correct the proofs to his book, Mildred goes on to wonder about her future:

And then another picture came into my mind. Julian Malory, standing by an electric fire, wearing his speckled mackintosh, holding a couple of ping-pong bats and quoting a not very appropriate bit of Keats. He might need to be protected from the women who were going to live in his house. So, what with my duty there and the work that I was going to do for Everard, it seemed as if I might be going to have what Helena called "a full life" after all. (256)

The ironic structure of the close of the novel calls to mind the ending of traditional novel endings that focused on marriage. However, Pym changes the structure of the focus by discussing marriage rather than by having the lead characters get married. Indeed, Mildred's thoughts about "protecting" Julian bring to mind the machinations of Allegra Grey who spends the early chapters of the novel trying to manipulate Julian into marriage. Thus, what Pym gives her readers at the end of *Excellent Women* is an ironic twist on the theme of marriage. That is not to say that Everard and Mildred do not get married.

The delightful prospect of Everard and Mildred's marriage appears in two later novels: *Jane and Prudence* and *An Unsuitable Attachment*. Moreover, it is the textual space that the marriage occupies that fulfills the rather cynical and ironic attitude of *Excellent Women*. From being the focus of a novel, Mildred is reduced to two pages in *Jane and Prudence* and to nine sentences in *An Unsuitable Attachment*. The reduction in textual space underscores two significant points concerning spatial closure, and therefore, interpretation. First, it reinforces the negative view toward marriage that *Excellent Women* raises. Second, it causes the closing of the original novel to spill over into two different texts creating again a recursive relationship like the one established by *Excellent Women* and *A Glass of Blessings*. One cannot read *Excellent Women* without thinking of the images raised in the later two novels. Consider the appearance of Mildred in *Jane and Prudence*. She is a textual creature in the novel because she only occurs as a wedding announcement. Her appearance in as a character in Miss Doggett's letter increases her spatial quality fourfold—as a character in a novel, as an announcement, as a

wife whose husband leaves her to attend a party, and as the character that melds all of the first three appearances into a whole.

Mildred's appearance in *Jane and Prudence* also reinforces the negative concept of marriage first raised in *Excellent Women*. Consider the movement of the conversation as readers find out about Mildred:

‘Oh, that reminds me,’ said Miss Doggett. ‘I had a letter from Mrs. Bonner who works at the Aged Gentlewoman’s headquarters and she told me a piece of interesting news. That nice Miss Lathbury has got married—what do you think of that?’

‘Well, I never knew her,’ said Jane. ‘Did she work for the gentlewomen? And ought one to feel surprised at her marrying?’ (125)

The critical idea here is Jane's wondering whether a person should be “surprised” at the Mildred's marriage. By including the information in a different novel than the one in which Mildred is the heroine, Pym undercuts the issue of marriage as a suitable ending. At the same time, she uses marriage as a seemingly suitable ending for the character of Mildred, particularly for readers who may have wondered about her fate. However, later in the passage concerning Mildred's marriage, Jessie Morrow comments on the appropriateness of the match:

‘He's a brilliant man,’ said Miss Doggett. ‘She helped him a great deal in his work, I think. Mrs. Bonner says that she learned to type so that she could type his manuscripts for him.’

‘Oh, then he had to marry her,’ said Miss Morrow sharply. ‘That kind of devotion is worse than blackmail—a man has no escape from that.’ (126)

Jessie Morrow's comments concerning the “blackmail” by “devotion” add to the overall comic nature of the issue of marriage in *Jane and Prudence*, but it also puts a spin on the ending of *Excellent Women* by supporting the negative commentary about marriage in

that novel. Indeed, Jessie Morrow's comments call to the reader's mind the actions of Allegra Grey who tried to use emotional blackmail to trap Julian Malory into marriage. Moreover, Pym's use of Mildred's marriage in *Jane and Prudence* begins to stretch the boundaries of both novels, since the storyline of the first novel spills over into the story line of the second novel, and both novels tend to dismiss any possibility that marriage can be a positive experience.

The spatial aspect of closure is further increased by the third appearance of Mildred and Everard. In *An Unsuitable Attachment*, Mildred has been reduced to a few sentences. In fact, readers find out that she is ill and Everard leaves her in the care his eccentric and somewhat mentally unstable mother:

‘Oh, *I shall be coming,*’ said Everard. ‘I only rang to say that Mildred can’t.’

‘But can you leave her? Will she be all right?’ As a bachelor it seemed slightly shocking to Rupert that a colleague, even an anthropologist, should think nothing of abandoning his wife when she was ill. (120)

The issue of “abandonment” clearly underscores the negative ideas of marriage that the novels raise. Indeed, the appearance of Mildred in the two later novels pointedly reveals the fact that she does not have a “full life” as she thought she might at the end of *Excellent Women*. Therefore, what readers find when examining the relationship between the three novels is the fact that Pym subtly and cleverly toys in two significant ways with readers' notions of what constitutes closure. First, she employs a standard trope of closure, marriage. However, she does not engage in the standard practice of that image. Marriage comes not at the end of a novel, but rather, as a minor interlude in another novel. That fact speaks volumes about the spatial quality that Pym employs

when constructing her fictive worlds. Novels need to be read in conjunction with other novels in the order published to achieve a true understanding of closure.

Second, while her novels gain by being read dialogically, the novels also reveal that any singular narrative does not truly exist as a linear reality, particularly when the author manipulates the artificial construction of beginning, middle, and end. By embedding narrative details from one story in the details from another, Pym creates a fictional world that begins to approach a close imitation of the real world. What details are emphasized depend on who tells the tale. Therefore, one novel may relate recursively to another, and to understand what the author wants to do with a particular text, readers must explore all the details provided.

One of the exciting aspects of the narrative art of Barbara Pym is the relationship she develops between her novels. Rather than relate the fictional worlds to each other in a linear fashion, by creating trilogies or other such narrative structures, Pym creates a spatial relationship between her works where parts of one work are embedded within the narrative framework of another work. This act of embedding calls to mind the fact that texts relate to one another in a spatial manner, and for Pym, that means both in how the texts relate to each other in space, as on a shelf, and in the fact that to understand truly how to interpret one novel, readers must know where to find the complete text.

Pym's playfulness when it comes to the act of closure demonstrates that one method of addressing the periodic problem of closure is to align narrative spatially, rather than linear. The spatial organization of a text most closely mirrors the reality of life that novels seek to imitate. By organizing a narrative along spatial relationships, an author, like Pym, is able to transcend the artificial boundaries of a text and begin to wallow in the

complexity of real life. Pym's spatial constructions also reveal the changing attitude toward closure that has evolved during the twentieth-century. Frank Kermode's assertion that closure mirrors world-view helps readers to understand Pym's playfulness when it comes to closure in her novels. As open endings became prevalent during the century, narrative began to undergo a change that reflected the new world-view. This new vision of closure brought with it anxiety over how to create a text that truly reflected life. Pym also addresses this problem of narrative structure and of closure. However, she chooses to play with the boundaries of the text in such a way as to call to mind the fact that readers keep an internal mental space where they maintain all the necessary tools for concluding the interpretive act. Pym puckishly stretches the boundaries of her fictional worlds to include her entire work. To enter into the pages of one of Pym's novels is to enter into the pages of them all.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION

The interconnectedness of Pym's fictive world, while delighting readers, also presents them with the problem of interpretation, particularly when readers take into account the fact that her work suffered a substantial interruption in publication. This interruption, however, allows readers to classify the novels into periods. In her significant work on the novels, Jane Nardin divides the narratives into early and late periods, while also pointing out that the novels' structure tends toward thematic issues that aid in classifying them. Nardin's schema aligns the novels published in the 1950s in the early period and those of the 1970s in the later period. In addition Nardin argues that the thematic issues change with the period of the individual novel's classification:

For many of the decent characters in Pym's early novels a commitment to Christianity, or the knowledge of morals and the vicarious human experience that great literature can provide, controls and redeems their mild eccentricities. The road away from egotism is a clear and alluring one, marked by the signposts that the Christian churches and English literature have been erecting for hundreds of years. In Pym's late novels, this road is so overgrown that it has become little more than a path, hard to locate and frequently ignored. (62)

The "road" metaphor here strikes at the heart of the problem with Pym's fictional narratives. The reader moves through the novels expecting, as Peter Rabinowitz points out, certain "signposts" that direct interpretation; however, as Nardin clearly reveals, the "signs" become less easily recognized and "located" because Pym's later narratives react in an organic mode much like Drabble's "octopus" does in *Realms of Gold*. In this organic mode, then, exists the problem for students of closure and of Pym's novels.

Standard practices in reading that are based solely on knowledge of religious ideas or of the history of English literature produce incomplete endings. Readers have to hack through the “overgrowth” to find the connections that will lead them to an understanding of Pym’s world.

Part of the problem achieving closure with the novels occurs because of the enrichment of possibilities that the organic structure of the novels bestows on readers.<sup>36</sup> Indeed, concerning closure and endings in Pym’s work, Nardin argues that, “Pym’s distinctive endings also contribute to the sense of life’s irresolvable complexity” (33). Quite significantly Nardin relates the endings of the novels to life’s organic and evolving nature. Finding these connections in the narratives does not mean that readers have to abandon all the ‘signposts’ that they have internalized, however. Rather they need to see that the complexities of Pymian narrative structure present the new guiding signs once readers have spatially reconstructed the novels. That is to say, once readers have woven together the comic and the intertextual elements that the narratives create as they unfold, a mental space occurs where the various threads of narrative reality are reconstructed to find meaning. This meaning is contingent on the reader’s understanding of the complex signs presented by the text and on the skill the reader has in avoiding the “overgrowth” that can ensnare unsuspecting readers.

In his brilliant study of language in Pym’s novels, Michael Cotsell points out the nature of the problem of readers becoming ensnared in the novels, particularly when they see them as mere mirrors of reality. Cotsell argues that the novels have an ordinary conversational flow that does not, however, relate to a fixed point of reference:

[A] novel by Barbara Pym does not fix us at this point: in its conversational mode—the product of a certain style and attendance on the experience of a central character—it does not in any strict sense ‘represent’ a world. Rather it introduces aspects of the world within the context of particular human needs and activities as such elements are introduced into conversation. (117)

Thus, both Nardin and Cotsell reveal that there exists a viable organic quality to the writings, but Cotsell admirably points out that the organic nature of the narrative evolves as would a typical conversation between friends. It is in this conversational mode that the spatial elements of the novels take place because Pym obscures the standard components of literary reality while presenting the readers with a novel that appears realistic.

Because the novels carry on a “conversation” between reader and text, and because the texts create allusive “conversation” with other works, Cotsell goes on to underscore the fact that Pym’s narratives express language and, by default, reality as a “limit” (118).

The “limit” of the fictional world that Pym creates rarefies and purifies the real world by concentrating experience into a succinct moment that corresponds to a variety of other moments. That is to say, the boundaries of one narrative world spill over into the world of another fictional world, both by Pym reintroducing characters from one novel into the pages of another and by her introducing the world of other novelists into the textual reality of her novels. Paradoxically, then, the limits of one text become expansions, and it is these expansions that concern the argument here.

The expansions that Pym creates also reveal a further delightful paradox. While her novels tend to avoid the traditional method of employing marriage as an ending, they do beget a form of marriage to other narrative forms—poems, hymns, and novels. Thus,

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<sup>36</sup> Indeed, Bruce Robbins points out that the need to create texts relates to the need to seek “legitimization.”

while its covers may bound the individual fictional world of any one particular novel, the novels, as a whole, open themselves to expansive interaction with other texts. In their expansion of limits, the novels require readers to familiarize themselves with fiction in general: thus the need to reconstruct the novels spatially. In order that they can mentally reassemble the texts, readers need an understanding of the complexities of Pym's world. These complexities, as this study points out, concern three basic areas: the nature of Pym's comic structure, the nature of her intertextual structure, and the nature of spatially as a method for understanding the true aspect of closure in the novels.

First, the comic fabric of the novels cannot be denied. The novels amuse readers. However, the amusement carries with it a haunting quality that reveals, on one hand, the subversion of laughter and, on the other hand, supports society's status quo. This paradox is typical of comic novels that Pym writes because they tend to end on an upbeat note that focuses on life's promise after taking the heroines through the vagaries of life's reality. In their function as satirical comedies, the novels serve to reinforce the prevailing societal ideology, while at the same time allowing for some degree of autonomy. As Susan Purdie demonstrates in *Comedy: The Mastery of Discourse*, this dual aspect of comic form creates its own set of problems:

Since this discourse of exchange forms the constituting base of any 'society', while particular societies definitions of how and what it is proper to 'exchange' are highly contingent, comedy appears as a potent force for establishing a given society's conventions as internalized norms—as forms whose observance is entailed with full subjectivity. (98)

Purdie reveals a significant characteristic of the nature of comic reality that also highlights the problem with the essence of Pym's typical endings. As Purdie points out,

comedy works because it knows the boundaries of any given society and uses these boundaries to make comments on the nature of the norms that society promulgates. Therefore, when examining the ending of any particular comic writer, in this case Pym, critics can focus on how the end “reestablishes” normal behavior. The problem that exists is how to define the “conventions” of any specific society. Another important idea discussed above is Purdie’s notion of “exchange,” which she borrows from Lévi-Strauss. While it is not the purpose of this argument to explore in full the implications of Lévi-Strauss’s argument, it should suffice to point out that the argument concerns the exchange of women between clans. In comedy, however, identities and words can be “exchanged” in like manner, and therefore, what Purdie argues for is that comedy operates in much the same manner by using types of “exchange”—identity, gender roles, masks—to create stability.

Stability becomes the operative word, since comic novels, Pym’s included, achieve stability by creating disequilibrium. The problem with the disequilibrium of Pym’s novels occurs after the ending of any particular novel because Pym sees the need to recycle characters, and therefore, expands the boundaries of any given text. In Pym’s novels, the end extends beyond the ending. This expanded ending operates as a type of exchange since one novel becomes “married” to another and both must be considered when attempting to reach closure. Thus, paradoxically, there tends to be a marriage in Pym’s novels, just not the expected marriage at the end of the novel, and some readers may miss the implications of marriage altogether.

The metaphor of marriage can be employed in another manner, also. While they search for an acceptable idea of closure for the novels, readers need to take in account the

reality of intertextuality that underscores Pym's narrative structure, both the intratextual references and the extratextual references. The extratextual references occur when Pym cites another author directly. These extratextual references serve to marry Pym's novels to the long history of English literature. They function much as Bakhtin asserts dialogism works.<sup>37</sup> When readers see one quotation, they call to mind the source, and this recall may help them to interpret a portion of the text. If the source is unknown, then readers search it out, and the search itself gives meaning to the text once the reader has established the connection. Charles Burkhart points this fact out in his study of Pym's novels:

Barbara Pym is more "literary" in another way, and this is an odd aspect of her novels, and might be considered a defect. She herself was so enraptured with the "major English poets" that she takes several of her softer titles from them and her characters drop a quotation as readily as they drink a cup of tea. (25)

Burkhart finds the use of such intertextual references to be a weakness in the novels, but in fact, Pym is using such moments to direct comment on the text and to use readers' experience with reading to underscore the fact that all texts form a unity of sorts and cannot be read apart from one another. Extratextual references can also highlight the thematic meaning of a particular text, as in the case of Pym's *The Sweet Dove Died*. The novel refers to a poem by Keats that addresses the need to avoid capturing and imprisoning a love object. Of course, that is just what the characters in the novel do to each other so the poem, which gives the title to the novel, serves to underscore an important thematic issue that Pym wants her readers to understand.

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<sup>37</sup> For Bakhtin's ideas on comic novels and their characteristics, see M.M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*. (Ed. Michael Holquist. Trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Austin: U of Texas P,

Unlike extratextual references, intratextual structures may be a bit harder to uncover, and therein lies their problem. Intratextual references might easily slip past the reader, since he or she may not know about the intense influence that one writer can have on another. In Pym's case, the problematic issue of intratextuality evolves from her reading of Margaret Drabble's novels, reading which Pym saw as enriching her narrative form. These readings had incredible influence on the late novels of the 1970s. In particular, Drabble influenced Pym to open up and enrich her narrative form. However, Pym's reading of two of Drabble's novels—*Realms of Gold* and *The Ice Age*—may not be apparent to some readers because the influence is subtly incorporated into the later texts. One finds that the characters begin to evolve from the stock types that had peopled the earlier novels into more multilayered characters of the later novels.

Specifically, readers find characters like Marcia from *Quartet in Autumn* whose eccentricities dominate the opening pages of the novel. However, unlike earlier eccentric characters Marcia reveals a dark side in her self-destructive tendencies. Readers have to question where such a character comes from because Marcia is such a departure for Pym. While there have been oddball characters in all the Pym novels, none reflect such a death wish as does Marcia. The answer seems to be that Marcia, as a character, reveals that Pym could face the prospect of death in a comic novel, and the darkness personified by one character then intensifies the comic nature of the other main female character, Letty. It is a brilliant opening up of a text, but one that is significantly subtle and could be missed if readers are not careful. With Marcia, Pym sums up the fate for all the

eccentrics who people her novels. At the same time, with Letty, Pym reestablishes hope; the two different fates entwine themselves in one book, a radical departure for Pym.

This departure from a norm clearly relates back to the novels of Drabble, and reveals the power of intratextuality. The possibilities that occurred to Pym as she read Drabble's work reveal themselves in the characterization in the late novels. There is a sense of amplitude in the development of such characters as Letty and Marcia, Emma and Tom from *A Few Green leaves*, and James from *The Sweet Dove Died*. All of these characters display a richness in their interior lives that is unusual for Pym, who normally focuses on one main character. The idea that several characters could share the duty of developing the text and moving it to its conclusion evolves from Drabble's *Realms of Gold* where she created an extraordinarily organic narrative format. However, it is the nature of intratextuality to be subtle, and so the influence must be ferreted out. Pym reveals the relationship between herself and Drabble in her diaries. Her discussions of the nature of Drabble's impact on her own narrative form add a dimension to the understanding of the later novels and their relationship to the early works. This relationship, then, helps in underscoring an understanding of *why* the later novels are different. That is to say, understanding how Drabble impacted Pym's narrative gives a definite starting point for discussing the differences that exists between the later and the earlier novel, a point of departure that goes beyond merely stating that a difference exists.

I term the starting point that I argue for here a spatial reading because it takes in account the full spectrum of the narrative structure and can lead to a more enriched reading of a text. Why is this type of reading necessary? I believe it has primary importance because our society is evolving into one that incorporates narrative visually,

through television and through films. Audiences relate to a narrative in a spatial manner as they watch images move across the screen. This characteristic inspires the notion that people can hold in their mind's eye significant amounts of information that they draw on to interpret the meaning of what they see. This skill can be tapped into to create more powerful interpretation of written narratives, particularly as readers become accustomed to maintaining narrative links to a wide array of novels and narrative features. In her study of Pym's novels, Orphia Allen points out that Pym consciously developed links to connect her novels: "These links with the earlier novels are no accident. Rather they seem a deliberate attempt by Pym to unify her oeuvre and to clarify her role as novelist" (46). Just as Pym consciously tried to tie her narratives together, readers can also create connections between novels and other works. These "links" evolve out of a knowledge of reading and of the reading process: as one becomes a stronger reader, one can create stronger links to other works.

While the creation of links between texts facilitates the deeper understanding of any one individual work, the study of how readers appropriate textual details also plays an important role in developing spatial readings that bind together the various features of narrative art. Peter Rabinowitz's study concerning the reading process quite clearly reveals how readers process information that then is used to reach acceptable conclusions about texts. *Before Reading* demonstrates that the cognitive function of readers plays a vital role in the development of valid conclusions about narrative. What is important in his work is the fact that he points out that most of the work in reaching closure occurs mentally as readers process the text. This idea is of utmost power when discussing spatialized closure because it reveals that readers do not simply process a text in linear

fashion as they move through the pages. Rather they maintain a working databank of knowledge that they draw on to interpret any given moment in the text. This databank contains the necessary ingredients of a successful reading.

As Rabinowitz demonstrates, readers understand that certain aspect of a text carry power, and they pay close attention to these structures. Rabinowitz defines these terms as rules that aid in the creation of interpretation, and therefore, closure. The rules—of notice, of signification, of configuration, and of coherence—all illustrate the fact that the reading process occurs on various levels as the text is being process; readers maintain a working knowledge of other texts they have read, and these texts influence how readers see any following text. Based on their experience of one text, readers evaluate subsequent texts.

This evaluation of subsequent texts is a spatial process because it relies on the reader to dip into his or her vast storehouse of previous knowledge to interpret a given text. It is this process that leads to closure rather than the simple fact of finishing a novel. In order to achieve valid closure, a reader must be able to justify the interpretation, and therefore, must create an argument that not only illuminates meaning within a text, but also displays the connections that the text has to other members of its genre, as well as to members of other genres.

Herein occurs the problem with closure in Pym's novels. Since she clearly binds her work to other genres and to the long history of British literature, readers can use that tradition to uncover meaning in the texts. However, since Pym also reveals how other writers enrich her own writing, readers can additionally investigate those authors for images to mine for meaning. The problem with Pym's novels is not that they end on an

upbeat and eccentric note, but rather that they engage in dialogue with the span of British literature and understanding and interpreting that dialogue is as important to achieving closure to the novels as is the fact of reaching the concluding pages of any particular novel.

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