

The Excellent Women's Excellent Women: An Exploration of Domestic Service in the Novels of Barbara Pym

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Barbara Pym wrote of what she knew, and, like Jane Austen, painted on a small but exquisite canvas. She wrote of the (broadly speaking) middle-aged, middle class women she knew from the 1930s through the austerity years and on to the affluent 60s and 70s. A feature of these lives, particularly in the early years, was the supportive labour of working class women which freed our heroines for their rather more leisurely pursuits of Church fêtes, making and receiving social calls... and a little light gardening. Throughout these years the domestic servant situation changed radically with residential staff giving way to the Daily “Woman”, then the weekly Cleaning Lady and eventually just the au pair—or no one at all. As servants became ever rarer, so employer-servant relationships and terms of address changed. These developments run quietly through Pym’s novels, never drawing attention to themselves, but subtly colouring the lives of the characters.

This essay will discuss Pym’s quiet assumption of the existence of servants: the full, residential staff; the live-in maid of all work; the daily “woman”; the (twice) weekly cleaning lady; the au pair, and—most fascinating of all—the Lady’s Companion.

Throughout the comfortable 1930s of the middle and upper middle classes the “Servant Problem” was discussed endlessly in affluent drawing rooms. E.M. Delafield (*Diary of a Provincial Lady*) records a constant anxiety over the propensities of temperamental cooks to “make a change”, as they euphemistically called leaving their undomesticated employers in the lurch. Maids became flighty and unreliable, nannies and governesses exceeded their authority, and always the household was on the brink of servantless disaster. Pym’s ladies (in the early novels) fare rather better, but the unspoken assumption of the necessity of servants is as much a part of the fabric of their lives as Church and boiled chicken.

In the 1930s the more affluent middle class households expected to rely on the services of a residential staff. Cassandra and Adam (*Civil to Strangers*) employ Bessie the cook, Lily the maid, Rogers the gardener, and a daily woman called Mrs Morris. This last was probably of that genre of servant known as “a woman for the rough”, frequently employed in staffed households to help out with the heavier or dirtier tasks. Previously, and in grander households, the women, as well as the men, would probably have been called by their surnames, but this was less common in the 30s and here only the gardener seems to be so addressed. The Marsh-Gibbon servants address their employers as Sir and Madam, and refer to Adam as “the Master”, a term used also by Cassandra when giving instructions about her husband’s needs. Cassandra does actually work alongside her domestics when major tasks are to be done like turning out a room, but of course when the job is finished she will tidy herself and relax, while they begin on the rest of their daily work.

Miss Doggett (*Crampton Hodnet*) also employs residential staff. Only Florence is named, but the others are suggested as Jessie is told to supervise the “servants”. There would have been at least a cook and a maid, and almost certainly a woman “for the rough” and probably a man for the garden and odd jobs, who might not live in. We do not meet them as, apart from Florence, they do not figure in the dining or drawing rooms where most of the action takes place. Their presence is assumed as a necessary underpinning for Miss Doggett’s leisurely life of Church, entertaining undergraduates, and interfering judgmentally in her family’s lives. They address Miss Doggett as Madam but Jessie, the Companion, as Miss—a notable distinction.

The Hoccleve Vicarage (*Some Tame Gazelle*) has a similar establishment with a cook, a maid, Florrie,

and almost certainly a gardener. The garden is big enough for the Church Fête, which suggests help would be needed, and although one can imagine Agatha dead-heading the roses with grim zeal one cannot really see the Archdeacon raising a sweat in the vegetable patch. The servants are trusted employees and are left to run the house and look after the difficult and irascible Archdeacon when Agatha goes to Karlsbad, although they do express some understandable misgivings about this latter task. This situation recalls a similar one when Cassandra (*Civil to Strangers*) goes to Hungary leaving the petulant Adam to the care of their servants. The willingness of the women to leave two undeniably trying husbands to the “management” of their servants seems to suggest stable and reasonably contented staff with a high degree of identification with their respective employers.

Count Ricardo Bianco, a foreign aristocrat who has unaccountably taken up residence in the village, (*Some Tame Gazelle*) owns a large house and gardens run by a full complement of both male and female servants. He is almost unique in Pym’s novels (the semi-aristocratic Felix Mainwaring in *Less than Angels* also seems to have a valet) for employing a personal manservant, an expensive domestic employee beyond the reach of the middle classes of the period. Agatha always makes a point of pairing Ricardo with Lady Clara Boulding, mainly as a snub to what she sees as Harriet’s social aspirations, but the Count himself, having long been in love with Harriet, puts the labour and skills of his cooks and gardeners, whose services he takes for granted with all the entitlement of one born to privilege, unreservedly at the service of the Bede sisters.

The majority of Pym’s servants, however, fall into the category of the sole residential woman servant, or dreadfully named “Maid of All Work”. Mrs Beeton, in her comprehensive instructions to servants (*Mrs Beeton’s Book of Household Management*), actually offers sympathy to this particularly overworked and exploited domestic, even admitting that her lot is a hard and unrewarding one, and she offers comfort to the maid-of-all-work for her multiplicity of tasks by observing that: “Change of work is said to be, to a certain extent, a rest”. Mrs B was, of course, a mistress not a maid so we can be sure she never had to experience for herself the restfulness of laundering the sheets with hard soap after scrubbing the front doorstep.

As the 1930s progressed servants became more difficult to find for the less affluent middle class households because of working class women’s widening career options. Those who did choose this occupation usually preferred to work in grand country or town houses if they could, where they would have other staff for company and a high-ranking employer. This last was considered important for the servant’s own status. (Apparently nannies of the period, meeting in Kensington Gardens with their prams, took their status and their right to a seat on the best park benches from their employers’ social rank. A duchess’s nanny trumped a countess’s and so on.) The lower middle classes, those who could barely afford a servant at all, usually had to make do with a very young girl, sometimes an orphan from the workhouse who had no other choice. She was still a status symbol for her mistress, however, as women aspired to be of the servanted classes and enormous kudos attached to having a maid to open the front door.

Mrs Gaskell develops this theme with great sensitivity in her novel *Cranford* where the single ladies, although living on very slender means, put a high value on having a servant to open the door and to serve tea to their guests. On one occasion the hostess, ringing for her young servant to bring up the tea things, wonders aloud what kind of refreshments they are going to have, although she knows perfectly well as she has herself spent the morning in the kitchen baking little cakes and savouries for the party. The ladies know she knows, and she knows that they know, but with consummate good manners they all perpetuate this harmless little fiction.

Pym’s characters are comfortably served by women who appear to be career domestic servants. Belinda and Harriet (*Some Tame Gazelle*) employ Emily, who cooks, cleans and opens the front door to visitors. She does not carry the entire workload, however, for the Bede sisters expect to tidy their rooms and do a little light

dusting. When they watch the departure of Agatha for Karlsbad, for instance, while Harriet is unashamedly peering through binoculars Belinda has a duster in her hand raised vaguely towards the window! Belinda also cooks on occasion, usually on Emily's day off, and memorably spends much of one day rolling out pasta for ravioli. On another occasion when Emily is busy in the kitchen pouring white sauce on the boiled chickens for a dinner party, Belinda greets guests at the front door because Emily is busy. In another household, and at an earlier time, this consideration might not have been given and the servant would have been expected to drop everything, change her apron, and answer the door.

Answering the door for a lady who was sitting idly in the drawing room while the maid had to rush upstairs from the kitchen, smooth her hair, put on a clean apron, open the door, announce the guest and then run back down to the kitchen where she was cooking, was a great grievance among maids-of-all-work. Rhoda, Sybil's live-in maid (*A Glass of Blessings*), apparently has been heard to grumble loudly about this particular imposition, and who can blame an elderly servant when a young woman (Wilmet) is sitting reading in the drawing room next to the front door! Wilmet remembers to open the door herself on one occasion, to stop Rhoda complaining, but on how many other occasions has it ever occurred to her? In the ballad "Charlotte O'Neil's Song" by Fiona Farrell a young servant girl is setting sail for Australia on a cheap ticket. The girl outlines the various humiliations and annoyances of domestic service that she will never have to suffer again, and she ends with the defiant crow: "And you can open your own front door!"

Rhoda is a cook-general, which means she does all the cooking and serving at table, and much of the cleaning, but probably has help with "the rough". She appears to live as well as work downstairs and is still available for door opening duties in her evenings. Sybil is highly competent and seems to make all the domestic decisions, but somehow one cannot imagine her, or the spectacularly idle Wilmet, doing anything more practical than arranging the flowers—a task which, apart from shopping for delicate little luxuries which she will not have to cook or prepare, seems to be Wilmet's only domestic skill.

Across the way in the Clergy House (*A Glass of Blessings*) there is another general servant, Mrs Greenhill, although here she is dignified by the title of Housekeeper. The vital difference is that, although she lives in and does all the cleaning and cooking, as does Rhoda, she also makes all the decisions, there being no mistress, and in fact runs the establishment single-handed. Wilf Bason, who succeeds her, is not a career servant and would probably object to such a job title, but he has a particular interest in fine cuisine and therefore enjoys cooking for the fastidious and sophisticated gourmet Fr Thames, though he is contemptuous of the working class Fr Bode who likes strong "builders' tea" and fish and chips. Although Wilf is not really a servant, in this he echoes the disdain of many domestics for anyone of lower class who has somehow crept into a servanted household and has to be waited on. Working for the upper classes is one thing, serving those from one's own background quite another.

Mrs Bone, the eccentric bird-hater (*Excellent Women*), employs an elderly maid-of-all-work who answers the door deferentially to Mildred. The Cleveland family (*Crampton Hodnet*), being probably less affluent than Miss Doggett, also employ one resident maid called Ellen. Mrs Cleveland does some cooking, mainly on Ellen's day off, but makes preserves etc, and Anthea, the daughter of the house, expects to help serve. But the domestic arrangements in Dulcie's aunt's and uncle's house (*No Fond Return of Love*) are much more interesting.

Mrs Sedge, an unmarried immigrant who has assumed the title Mrs for reasons of self-respect and perceived English custom, lives and works, seemingly very comfortably, in the basement. She is not keen on being given orders so the modest tastes of her employers suit her very well as she dishes up boring, unappetising food which they eat uncomplainingly. One gets the impression that in any other house she would have been sacked long ago! Mrs Sedge also has a problem with door opening...especially when she is settled in

front of her television of an evening (unlike the overworked Rhoda) so her employers and their guests work around this and don't disturb her more than they can help. She also expects a certain consideration from family guests and Dulcie is reminded that she must go down to chat to her when she visits her uncle and aunt. No guest would ever have been expected to sit in the kitchen and chat to Emily, or Rhoda, or Ellen, or Mrs Bone's maid, so a decreasing level of deference to employers and condescension to servants becomes apparent here. Even so, an amusing situation, pregnant with comic possibilities, could have arisen when Dulcie's friend Viola gets engaged to Mrs Sedge's brother, Bill. When visiting the house as Bill Sedge's wife, Viola would have entered through the area door and been received in the basement kitchen, while Dulcie would have entered through the front door and been invited into the drawing room. Furthermore the Sedges address Dulcie as "Miss Dulcie" and Viola, obviously, as just Viola. This would have caused several delightful little frictions and one wishes Pym had made this happen at least once! This is the reason, of course, for Dulcie's uncle's incredulity that a friend of his niece could get married to his servant's brother. All very difficult, but a sign of the changing times. Luckily for Viola's self-esteem the household is about to disperse, and Mrs Sedge is going to inflict her culinary skills on the students at a teachers' training college.

Once the convenience of a residential maid has become almost impossible to achieve, the Daily Woman becomes the domestic mainstay of the middle class home. This necessary employee is sometimes called just "The Woman", as when Everard Bone (*Excellent Women*) invites Mildred to dinner and explains rather dismissively that "the Woman" has prepared it. One imagines she attends to Everard's needs of cooking and cleaning on a daily basis and goes home at night leaving his meals ready. Fabian Driver (*Jane and Prudence*) has a similar arrangement with his Mrs Arkwright as does Alaric Lydgate (*Less Than Angels*) with his Mrs Skinner while Rupert Stonebird (*An Unsuitable Attachment*) employs a Mrs Purry who cooks and cleans for him and also cooks for his dinner party. These women would generally be addressed politely as Mrs rather than by the single first name, or surname, of even elderly maids like Rhoda. A single man would probably have retained the services of such a daily servant later than a comparable single woman, as middle class men of the period tended to regard their domestic ignorance as a point of masculine pride.

Slightly surprising, given the later date, is the employment of a Daily Woman called Mrs Dyer at the rectory where Tom Dagnall and his sister Daphne live (*A Few Green Leaves*). Presumably the size and inconvenience of an old rectory makes this arrangement essential as it is clear that Daphne works alongside Mrs Dyer, sharing the major tasks. Mrs Dyer also moonlights as a waitress at the sherry party given by Dr G and his wife, which recalls Mildred's Cleaning Lady "helping out" at the Malory vicarage when extra hands are needed (*Excellent Women*). Both Mrs Dyer and Mrs Morris clearly regard themselves as to some extent the "servant class" happy to work for "the Quality".

Just as incompetent as the bachelors who employ Daily Women, however, is Jane Cleveland (*Jane and Prudence*) who is spectacularly unskilled in any domestic area whatsoever. She barely knows where the kitchen is and apparently cannot even make coffee for a church meeting in her drawing room and has to rely on her "treasure" Mrs Glaze. Even her own crockery is unfamiliar to her when Mrs Glaze serves coffee in the best china for her former vicar and his wife. The relationship between the two women is not one of equality. Mrs Glaze invariably addresses Jane as "Madam" and the daughter of the house as "Miss Flora", but she herself is given her title and surname, not just a first name. Mrs Glaze shows a slight degree of contempt, veneered with a layer of courtesy, towards her incompetent employer, whereas Mrs Arkwright, the woman who "does for" Fabian Driver, just across the village green, is indulgent towards his helplessness, thus reflecting current gender attitudes.

Mrs Glaze makes all the domestic decisions for Jane. She does the shopping and is pleased to be able to provide liver for her employers from her nephew the butcher—a rare treat apparently in the years of austerity.

She decides on the meals, cooks and serves them, and even leaves an evening meal for them to warm up and eat after she has gone home. Jane's single, vague idea when asked by her husband to provide a meal is that she supposes they could open a tin of something! One senses that she has no idea what the tins in her larder might even contain. Wisely she and Nicholas go to the local "Spinning Wheel" cafe —where, incidentally, male customers get preferential treatment in line with the gentlewoman proprietor's dictum that "a man needs meat".

Although both would have been brought up in servanted households, Dulcie (*No Fond Return of Love*) and Mildred (*Excellent Women*) now manage with the help of a once- or twice-a-week Cleaning Lady. Although Dulcie still lives in the large house of her childhood, Mildred's flat is quite small and it can only be the result of her upbringing that makes her feel the necessity of domestic help. Neither woman has particularly onerous or time consuming paid work but clearly cannot imagine life without any kind of servant. Their relationships with their respective cleaners are interesting. Both Mildred and Dulcie share their tea or coffee break with their employees, Mildred with Mrs Morris and Dulcie with Miss Lord. Both have regular rituals around this little ceremony. "Kettle's boiling, miss", says Mrs Morris exactly at eleven o'clock and Mildred makes the expected response, "Oh good then let's have our tea"; while in Dulcie's kitchen Miss Lord lights up a cigarette and as usual describes her lunch in minute detail while Dulcie makes their Nescafé at the stove. The consciousness of different social status is clearly there, but nevertheless they converse on fairly equal terms, although Mrs Morris does rely on Mildred's greater knowledge of the Church to comfort her over Father Malory's wearing of a biretta, a Romish practice that she finds deeply disturbing. Miss Lord is a former sales assistant and a late entrant to domestic employment, which may be why she seems less like a servant, but she is perfectly happy to serve at table for Dulcie's dinner party, and she does memorably prepare a meal for Dulcie's and Viola's return from holiday. After taking offence over their late arrival to eat her carefully and lovingly prepared casserole she does have the candour to admit at last that it is just a tin of Campbell's condensed mushroom soup tipped over chicken pieces and shoved in the oven. A meal almost worthy of Jane (*Jane and Prudence*)!

Another possibly daily or twice-weekly domestic help is Mrs Jubb who looks after the very low expectations of Julian and Winifred Malory in the vicarage (*Excellent Women*). She serves a pallid meal of whitish macaroni cheese, with very little of the latter ingredient, followed by a pale "shape" or blancmange. Mildred is not impressed but her hosts eat it cheerfully enough, clearly accustomed to Mrs Jubb's monochrome meals. Employers who have little knowledge of, or low expectations on, the culinary front usually get their deserts in Pym's novels! Dear Father Bode only gets to sample the exquisite cuisine of Wilf Bason because he happens to eat at the same table as the epicurean Father Thames (*A Glass of Blessings*).

The particular type of domestic help provided by the Au Pair features in only two of Pym's novels. This is probably because the Au Pair's usual function is to care for young children, and very few of Pym's characters have children at all, and those who do usually have grown up daughters (e.g. Flora in *Jane and Prudence*, Anthea in *Crampton Hodnet*, and Janie in *Civil to Strangers*). Rowena, a friend of Wilmet's (*A Glass of Blessings*), employs domestics for the house and also an Au Pair for the children, but we never meet her. Caro (*An Academic Question*) employs a Swedish Au Pair called Inge to look after her young daughter Kate. Although au pairs are normally regarded as part of the family, Caro does in fact treat hers rather like a servant, expecting her to make tea for Alan when Caro, another of Pym's under-worked and undomesticated heroines, cannot be bothered.

The novels that make no mention of domestic servants are also of interest for that very reason. The four protagonists of *Quartet in Autumn*, barely within the middle classes where Pym's usual characters are found, are of too low an income even to consider employing servants. Norman and Letty both live in lodgings; Edwin

does own a house but seems self-sufficient with his church attendance and Father G as drinking partner, and no mention is made of any domestic help; and the eccentric Marcia would never have tolerated the intrusion of a cleaner into her chaotic house, even if one had been prevailed upon by the social workers to try! A cleaner might have presumed to throw out her old milk bottles or re-organise her tins.

Leonora (*The Sweet Dove Died*) is definitely of the servanted classes and one would have expected her to have a Daily Woman, but in fact no mention is made of such a person. Although one can easily picture Leonora concocting delicate little meals for herself and James, washing her antique china and dusting her treasures, one finds it more difficult to imagine her cleaning floors, scouring the oven, Hoovering the stairs or taking the rubbish out. It is perfectly possible that Leonora would have had a Daily (or Weekly) but that such an intrusion from the working classes would have been beneath her notice, confined to both times and spaces in the house not required by her fastidious and over-sensitive employer—but who knows?

Similarly Ianthe (*An Unsuitable Attachment*) would have had servants in her parental home, and her very class-conscious aunt and uncle almost certainly still do in their grand Belgravia vicarage, but no mention is made of her own domestic arrangements. She might have had a weekly cleaning lady, but is quite possibly the first generation of her family to manage without. This was an increasingly common feature of life as the 50s progressed into the 60s and 70s. An increasing array of efficient kitchen appliances and the change to cleaner sources of energy all made housework less of the hard labour it had previously been. This together with the reluctance of young women to become servants and the wider employment opportunities available even for older women, who might once have accepted cleaning work as inevitable, all contributed to the expectation that a middle class woman would now do her own housework.

Mrs Mabel Swan and her sister Rhoda (*Less than Angels*) regret the absence of servants nowadays but do not expect to employ anyone else in their shared home. This would have been quite usual for comfortable middle class women living in suburbia. Their neighbour Alaric Lydgate does have a Daily Woman, but then he is a man, as is the rather grand anthropologist Felix Mainwaring who has a full complement of staff plus a girl from the village to help out when he has guests. This is by now very unusual and the young anthropologists who enjoy his hospitality are slightly uneasy with his opulent lifestyle—although themselves mainly middle class, it is not one they are accustomed to.

By the time we meet Emma (*A Few Green Leaves*), the idea of paying other people to cook or do her housework does not seem to occur to her. She expects to look after herself. There is a folk memory in the village of the grand old days when the de Tankerville family employed a full staff at the Big House and a Miss Vereker was Governess to the “girls” but this is merely a nostalgic longing as few village inhabitants, with the exception of the rector and Dr G, expect to employ domestics any more.

But for that most fascinating of all, that much bullied and abused employee, we need to return to the earlier novels and meet the Lady’s Companion.

The origin of the Lady’s Companion probably lies in the custom of queens and aristocratic ladies throughout much of medieval and early modern history to have groups of ladies always around them, whether called Ladies-in-Waiting, Maids of Honour, Waiting Women or Women-of-the-Bedchamber. The role of these women was to keep their Lady company, amuse her, sit and sew with her, walk with her and generally be always on call, day or night. All decisions regarding their shared activities were made by the Lady, and her companions would be expected to respond cheerfully to all her whims and fancies and to have no particular requirements of their own. These attendant women were very important in the life of a Lady who had no other function but to be decorative and to bear children, and who could not seek company outside her own home.

The aristocratic, landed gentry or upper middle class woman of the 19th and 20th centuries who chose

to employ a Companion had similar expectations of her. These ladies would typically employ only one, but that one's functions had not changed fundamentally from those performed by her predecessors of earlier centuries. She would still be expected to keep her mistress company in whatever activity the latter chose to engage herself, but, although sharing in the activity, her part in it would always be at an inferior level, just as Fanny Price (in Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park*) is told by her Aunt Norris that she, effectively the Companion to her Aunt Bertram, must always be "the least and the lowest" on any occasion—the last to be served and the least regarded.

Although the expectations of the employer had not radically altered over the years, the reasons for a woman choosing this occupation were rather different from those of her predecessors. The medieval or early modern lady's waiting-woman would have used this position as a step towards social advancement, possibly political influence, and a good marriage. She would have been offered the position because of her family's high status, the political intrigues of her (male) relatives or the notice of the King or Lord. To live at the King's or the Lord's court was to be at the centre of political and cultural life—a good to be desired above all things.

With few career opportunities, however, a late 19th or early 20th century gentlewoman with no other means of support would typically consider applying to be a Governess or a Companion, or sometimes a "Lady Help" (a general factotum who occupied an even more anomalous position), as these were the only occupations available to her if she did not want to lose caste completely. They also provided a home and security. Sharing the employer's daily life, using the drawing room and dining room not the servants' hall, and being waited on by the employer's servants all set the Companion above the domestic staff, but didn't elevate her to equality with her mistress. She frequently occupied a rather lonely limbo where she had few choices and where it was difficult to make friends of her own. The fact that the Companion might be a poor relation of the mistress didn't usually make any appreciable difference.

The figure of the Lady's Companion appears in the earlier novels without any particular authorial comment; Pym accepts that certain women employ them in the same way that most employed general servants. Interestingly Pym presents the Miss Doggett/Miss Morrow relationship twice, first in *Crampton Hodnet* and then again in *Jane and Prudence*, with significant differences that reflect the passage of time. In the earlier novel Jessie features as a fairly typical Companion. She is possibly (but not necessarily) paid a salary and has a regular afternoon off a week, like a servant; but she lives alongside Miss Doggett, eats at her table and shares in her social life, whether supper with the Clevelands or entertaining undergraduates to Sunday tea, and she is expected to manage the servants when Miss Doggett is out. However there is no doubt about who serves whom. On shopping trips Jessie carries the parcels, on walks she carries the mackintoshes and umbrellas, in the drawing room she holds the wool for her employer to wind (such a boring job—I remember doing it for my grandmother!) and always she must come when called. All decisions are made by Miss Doggett, when they will have tea in Fuller's, when they will walk and when sit on a park bench. Jessie's whole life is one of adapting to the commands, or whims and caprices, of her employer and sometimes her younger body and sharper mind must have ached with frustration. She is frequently made to feel inferior and indeed even invisible, such as when Miss Doggett opines that their lodger, Mr Latimer, will have a lonely evening because she is going out, although Jessie will be at home! Miss Doggett barely acknowledges Jessie as a woman and sees in her no possible temptation for a young curate. Had she only known...!

The two women invariably address each other as Miss Doggett and Miss Morrow, even though Jessie is at least a generation younger and nowadays would probably expect to be called by her Christian name. In earlier decades Miss Doggett would probably have addressed her Companion as "Morrow", thus preserving the distance in their relative positions, and Jessie might possibly have called her "Madam", so some degree of

equality is just creeping in.

The life of a Companion must be a frustrating and boring one for Jessie, with few opportunities for independent pursuits, yet she is not unhappy. She acknowledges that she has a comfortable home and that she is much better off than many women in her position, and she derives considerable wry amusement from the foibles and weaknesses of those around her—excellently placed as she is to observe them from her dimly lit and subordinate corner! Interestingly, she rejects the one opportunity she has for escape from her present position by marrying the handsome curate and cocking a snook at Miss Doggett at the same time! Perhaps she recognises that a loveless marriage to Mr Latimer would still involve the subordination of her own will and interests to another, and that that other might prove even more trying to live with than Miss Doggett.

When Pym returns to the Miss Doggett/Miss Morrow relationship in *Jane and Prudence* Jessie is presented as her (now rather more mellow) employer's poor relation, is usually addressed as "Jessie", and does seem to enjoy a higher degree of equality as the employer-servant relationship in society generally has been changing, to the advantage of the latter. She still has scheduled evenings off, like a servant, and still has to adapt herself to her employer's chosen activities, whether doing the church flowers or sorting out the effects of the late, but hardly lamented, Constance Driver, but she is not quite so disparaged as in *Crampton Hodnet*, and although her claims to womanhood are not much more highly rated, once her shock over Jessie's engagement to Fabian has diminished Miss Doggett is actually quite excited at the thought of her approaching marriage and doesn't seem to resent the fact that they will be social equals thereafter. The earlier Miss Doggett (*Crampton Hodnet*) would have been apoplectic with indignation at the elevation of her employee to her own class!

Edith Liversidge (*Some Tame Gazelle*) has offered a home to her distant, indigent relation, Connie Aspinall. Connie is a career Companion, having spent many years in this role in the home of Lady Grudge in Belgrave Square, a life which she recalls with longing and nostalgia. Connie seems content to be subordinate if it allows her to mix with high society, as she did in SW London. She has an instinctive tendency to be one of the humble followers as long as she can breathe the same air as those she looks up to. She is anxious to be one of Lady Clara Boulding's train as that lady proceeds grandly around the church fête; and is thrilled to be invited to the vicarage for supper after Bishop Grote's lecture. She is a natural and unresentful Companion and this is basically the role she adopts with Edith, although she is almost certainly not paid, her board and lodging being her only reward for her ready obedience. Edith has a distressing habit of calling Connie to heel like a dog and generally giving her orders, deciding what they will do and when, who they will visit or when they will go home. Connie knows her place and complies even when Edith shows some of the same disparaging attitudes towards her as does Miss Doggett towards Miss Morrow. Thus although Connie is not a servant, she is a subordinate and a dependant and as such, worryingly, is exactly the wife for the arrogant and conceited Theo Grote—though one trembles for her chance of happiness.

So familiar is this domestic model to Belinda (*Some Tame Gazelle*) that when she fears that Harriet is going to marry Mr Mold she seriously considers advertising in the Church Times for a Companion for herself, as she doesn't want to live alone. She muses on the type of woman who might be suitable—Church of England of course, with an interest in literature and gardening—but she recognises in despair that a paid Companion would never be as true a companion as her sister. Luckily for Belinda (and all future curates of the parish), after rejecting Mr Mold and failing to catch Bishop Grote, Harriet decides that her life as a curate-indulging, comfort-loving spinster is too congenial to be given up lightly. And we hope that this will be her final word on the subject for Belinda's sake!

Barbara Pym seldom comments on the role of servants in her novels; they are accepted as an ineluctable part of the fabric of middle class life, changing through the years as expectations of and opportunities for

women develop maybe, but still the unsung and often unseen underpinnings of leisure and privilege. But even so she must have been aware of the dearth of available servants after the Second World War and the consequent problems for the middle classes. By this time very few women wanted to be domestic servants. There were now many more opportunities for them in industry, retail, catering, etc. which did not involve long hours, uniforms and the imposition of deference. In the 1940s and 1950s several politicians and writers became increasingly exercised about this “problem”, as they saw it. How, they asked, was the middle class lady to pursue the life of the mind, the intellect, without domestic help? How was she to continue to perform her charitable duties, to organise her community and her church without servants? Or, to put the question another way, how were the Excellent Women to continue with their excellence without the support of their own Excellent Women?