

The Dove Before Larkin: MS Pym 27 and Pym's Original Vision

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I first read *The Sweet Dove Died* over twenty years ago, and I finished the book in a state of dismay. Why is Barbara Pym being so mean to her characters?, I wondered in a rather amateurish way altogether unsuitable to an academic. Having previously read *A Glass of Blessings*, *Excellent Women*, and *Some Tame Gazelle*, I was caught off-guard by what struck me as a complete change from what I had come to look forward to in Pym—her characteristic tone of good-humored and generous irony, to give just one example. Instead, the book concluded (as it seemed to me) with Leonora Eyre succumbing to a disturbing sort of paralysis, similar to that which marks James Joyce's characters in the short story collection, *Dubliners*. Over the years, I went on to read and reread all of Pym's novels multiple times, but much as I admire and esteem *Dubliners*, I did not return to *Sweet Dove*. To borrow a phrase from *Quartet in Autumn*, like Norman visiting his brother-in-law in the hospital, I didn't come to Pym "to be involved in this sort of thing."¹ If I wanted to read James Joyce, I would read James Joyce.

Then, as I began to take an increasingly serious and biographical interest in Pym, I learned of the circumstances under which she wrote *Sweet Dove*: of her years in the "wilderness," when she struggled in vain to revise and to place *An Unsuitable Attachment*; of her infatuation with Richard Roberts, a homosexual man eighteen years her junior, a difficult relationship that began soon after her rejection by Cape. Most importantly for my paper today, I read of the influence of Philip Larkin on a version of this unusual novel, which had been in the planning stages since March 1962, with a first draft completed by December 1967, but that did not achieve publication until 1978, in the wake of her quasi-miraculous "rediscovery."² Finally, I returned to *Sweet Dove* and, in a phenomenon not unfamiliar to readers of Pym, for whom each rereading reveals new facets, this time I could see how very good it was. I could even agree with the reader for publishing house Peter Davies Ltd (Mark Barty King), who judged it (in a rejection letter no less) "not far off a minor tour de force."³ But I continued to consider *Sweet Dove* to be fundamentally different in kind from her other novels, and I remained curious to know what form the novel had taken before Pym so radically revised it along the lines suggested by Larkin.

But what exactly had Larkin recommended? Here is a condensed account of their exchange. In September 1968, after the novel's rejection by Longmans, Pym accepted Larkin's offer to read the manuscript. With an arch joke, she wrote, "I am sending *The Sweet Dove Died* (a thriller about the American Presidential Election?) for you to read and hope it may give you some amusement." She assured him "Criticisms welcome," but added fatalistically, "perhaps the whole thing is hopeless for this day and age."⁴ Larkin wasted no time in turning the manuscript back around. Although he knew nothing of Pym's unfortunate attachment to Richard Roberts, he seems to have sensed where the emotional weight of the book lay. "I felt the story," he wrote Pym, "was of Leonora trying to capture James and failing, with Ned acting as a somewhat Puck-like thwarter of Leonora's intentions, but this wasn't really brought out. The story," he continued to underscore, "is of Leonora defeating Phoebe, & then someone (presumably the young girl in Sotheby's) defeating Leonora with Ned's connivance. The value of the book would be Leonora's

¹ *Quartet in Autumn* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1978), p. 14.

² See, respectively, Pym's journal entry and letter to Larkin in *A Very Private Eye*, eds. Hazel Holt and Hilary Pym (New York: E.P. Dutton, Inc., 1984), pp. 206, 244. Future references will be cited as *VPE*.

³ Quoted by Yvonne Cocking in *Barbara in the Bodleian* (Oxford: Barbara Pym Society, 2013), p. 179.

⁴ *VPE*, p. 247.

slightly-absurd ‘managing’ qualities turning to pathos and—what: Humphrey?” Sensing “more potential *feeling*” than usual in her novels, he urged her to focus more directly on the ‘pathos’ inherent in Leonora’s situation. “With fewer characters & slower movement,” he predicted, “it could be a strong, sad book.” In his view “all characters but Leonora, James, Humphrey, Phoebe, Ned & Miss X are irrelevant & should be dropped except for ‘comedy & pathos’.” Perhaps to soften the critical tone, he added, “The cats, as usual, are fine: are you a cat-owner?” Larkin also ferreted out some ambiguity in Pym’s representation of Leonora, questioning her intent with regard to this character: “Leonora wins one’s sympathy (I wonder if she’s supposed to?).” A bit later he posed a similar query: “Leonora is the chief character—I wonder did you feel sympathetic towards her?”⁵ Pym responded by putting the book’s weaknesses down to its “starting off as one thing and ending up as another”; time intervened, she explained, so that “continuity is lost and one’s ideas change in the meantime.” One of these changes, she confirmed, was in fact her view of Leonora: “I started not at all in sympathy with Leonora, who began by being a minor character, but as the book progressed I got more interested in her and really enjoyed writing about her best in the end.”⁶ She agreed with Larkin that the manuscript contains characters who, when Leonora gained in interest for her, should have been “scrapped.”

So what characters were, according to Larkin, “irrelevant” and to be “scrapped” as Pym rather ruthlessly puts it, so that she could focus on the pathos of Leonora’s story? My chance to see for myself came this past autumn (2017) when I was lucky enough to spend a few days with the Pym archives held in the Bodleian. I settled on MS Pym 27 as the volume (bound by the Bodleian) closest to the version Pym had sent to Larkin for his review and advice. With consecutive pages missing, and containing pages that start in mid-sentence, MS Pym 27 is very obviously a work in progress. (MS Pym 27 is 86 pages in length, as numbered by the Bodleian, but the library’s page 86 is Pym’s typescript page 160.) But because it fails to show any indication that she had begun revisions of the kind Larkin suggested, I think MS Pym 27 must be at least somewhat akin to the version he read, although viewed in light of his description of the *Sweet Dove*, it is probably an even earlier version.

Based on this assumption, my talk will attempt to recover something of Pym’s original vision, or if not quite her original vision, what she had set out to do before her drastic narrowing of the novel’s focus. For despite the incomplete state of MS Pym 27, I found patterns that clearly signal both a conceptual and a thematic unity that in retrospect have an applicability for the novel’s final form. The much larger context into which Pym places the attachment between Leonora and James, familiar to us as the novel’s singular focus, contains indications that she intended the relationship to carry not only a personal significance as regards the two characters, but to have a cultural import as well.

Broadly speaking, in this manuscript Pym contrasts a state of stasis (or attempted stasis) represented by Leonora to that of change (whether growth or decline). Such alterations as appear in lives and in personal relationships have their analogy in larger cultural motions. To explore this contrast, Pym sets Leonora’s stunted relationship with James alongside the changes on-going in a country village. She pictures a number of villagers, whether long-term residents, short-termers simply passing through, or new residents, and so builds a lively rather than stagnant environment, full (some might say too full) of characters who embody a variety of stances towards alteration.

Primary among these villagers is Rose Culver, a city transplant and relative newcomer, who serves as a normative counterpart to Leonora. As Rose gradually assimilates to the rhythms of village life, allowing herself to become integrated into it, she contrasts to Leonora, who resists

⁵ Philip Larkin, *Selected Letters of Philip Larkin, 1940-1985*, ed. Anthony Thwaite (London: Faber & Faber, 1992), pp. 405-06.

⁶ *VPE*, p. 247.

alterations, aiming instead to form relationships that must be as perfect and unchanging as the objects that she collects. This objectification of personal relationships, Pym suggests, has its parallel in the misguided objectification of periods in time, both personal and historical. In both Leonora and Rose, Pym explores a detrimental impulse—a propensity to idealize some particular chapter from the past, whether of a cultural or personal narrative. In this way, Rose’s narrative, which accommodates change, provides a counter to Leonora’s psychology, which represents in miniature a cultural longing as well—a misplaced wish to retain an image of Britain frozen in a romanticized time.

Early on, Pym parallels Leonora and Rose in their wish to live in an idealized environment. Leonora, as we know, carefully constructs hers, collecting the Victoriana with which she surrounds herself in her charming London house. Thus she controls a setting that is an extension of herself, that perfectly reflects her taste, which is of an earlier age—or more precisely, her aesthetic idealization of that age. Leonora creates her own time capsule in which to live, carrying out a plan for perfection flawed only by the process of her own aging—a flaw that cannot be forestalled, although by capturing James, the perfectly beautiful young man, she is vainly attempting to do so.

In a parallel narrative, Rose has moved from the city bringing with her a romanticized view of life in a country village. When she finds this view constantly undermined, she does not pretend otherwise. Village life simply does not conform to her imagined view. Nor should it, she is coming to see. One occasion that prompts this recurring realization is Rose’s visit to drop off jumble at a cottage that she considers to be “one of the most picturesque in the village.” Far from appreciating its old-fashioned beauty, the family that lives there, Mrs. Roman, her elderly mother (old Mrs. Pearce), and her two sons, “would have preferred a modern council house, but had done all they could to furnish the cottage with every tasteless modern luxury.”⁷ Clearly, the Romans have no desire to live in a relic of the past, however picturesque visitors to the village might find it. The scene continues in this vein, contrasting Rose’s idealized preconceptions to village life as it is led. When young Clive Roman arrives home for dinner, Rose cannot help her dismay at seeing the “fried ‘country rissoles,’ peas and crinkle-cut chips all fresh from the deep freeze. Where was the good old country fare one used to hear about, thought Rose sadly.” But immediately she corrects her view: “the invention of frozen foods meant that people like Clive’s mother had more leisure and that was good, she told herself firmly. Why shouldn’t the Romans be able to afford these so-called luxuries like everybody else?” The fantasy of “good old country fare” that she harbors reveals itself in her continuing meditation: “What had she expected Clive to have for his dinner, anyway? Home-made faggots [a traditional dish of offal] or some other old-fashioned delicacy made from an obscure part of an animal, with vegetables just gathered from the garden? Perhaps even nettles or dock leaves picked in the hedgerows, boiled with garden herbs.” In point of fact, that is exactly what Rose would have liked to see on Clive Roman’s dinner plate, but the slightly absurd quality of the extravagantly down-home description betrays the fantastical element in her imaginings. Pym has Rose locate very explicitly the faulty quality in her own expectations: “She really must give up this sentimental idea about the country,” Rose tells herself firmly “and the people who lived there.” Rose goes on to criticize her view even more pointedly: “Why should they be preserved like specimens in a museum just to fit in with a romanticized preconceived picture that a middle-aged woman, trudging to work through the London streets or waiting in the rain for a bus, had kept in her mind as something to look forward to in her retirement.” Rose now understands that she had objectified the country life—had planned her retirement as one might plan a trip to a museum or a tour to a place untouched by time. The telling analogy drawn between the country village and a museum is crucial to Pym’s exploration, via both Rose

⁷ Catalogue of the papers of Barbara Mary Crampton Pym (1913-1980), University of Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Pym 27. Unless otherwise noted, all further quotations will be of this text.

and Leonora, of the wish for time to stop—of the desire to preserve, as if behind glass, particular times, whether in a culture or in the life of a person.

Rose looks slightly askance at her own failure to live up to life as she imagined it lived in the countryside: “And what was she going to have for her own lunch, she wondered, going to the larder. It was too early for home-grown produce, so she took an egg out of the refrigerator. But the ‘free-ranging’ ones were finished and this had a mocking lion stamped on it, making it seem false and urbanized.” The note of falsity, now seen in Rose’s expectations, continues as, over her lunch, she “self-consciously reads Wordsworth. ‘Nature never did betray the heart that loved her. . .’ But was ‘nature’ to be found here in these unrugged surroundings?” Rose is reading “Tintern Abbey,” a poem that acknowledges and even welcomes changes that occur over time in a person’s perspective, and so is appropriate to the concerns that Pym is exploring. But Rose seems blind to that part of the poem’s message, instead measuring mid-twentieth century country life according to Wordsworthian standards and finding the present sadly lacking.

Clearly, in Pym’s initial portrayal of Rose, there is something of the museum-goer—the observer who keeps at a distance from the life observed. She has chosen, very consciously, not to join the village community, its most obvious component being the church. This decision, once again, contradicts her imagined plan for her new life, which was to have proceeded in stereotypical fashion: “Of course she had hoped to find religion in the country, among other things, perhaps to discover the satisfying and comforting pattern of regular church-going.” In this aspect too, her plans for her new life are upended. This touchstone of the community does indeed, as it turns out, conform to imagined convention, but in an all-too tempting manner that Rose must avoid: “When she had seen that the church was beautiful and the vicar handsome she had stayed away, not wishing to become committed or involved in something that might be difficult to break away from.” Rose would like to participate, but only to a degree that would allow her to remain in control: “She would not have minded doing the flowers or even cleaning the brass, but she had seen herself forced by her conscience to attend weekday early services—perhaps the only person in the cold, still church—and the burden of that responsibility seemed too much.” Fearing both commitment and the possible loss of control, she resolves “better not to get caught up in it all.”

With their somewhat insular natures, Leonora and Rose are paralleled in yet another fashion. Both lack a definite rootedness or close connection to other people, a quality emphasized in their rather inconclusive romantic pasts. This is more clearly true of Leonora, who has had a series of romantic encounters vaguely alluded to, none of which proved satisfactory enough to warrant having even unsatisfactory histories. Evidently she has sought the perfect relationship, but aside from James, none has measured up to her standards, one of which seems to be the desire for minimal, if any, sexual activity. She allows herself, as in the published version, to toy with the idea of marrying James: “Surely life—and literature—were not without precedents for such a marriage? Then she remembered Humphrey looming over her that evening—but of course dear James wouldn’t expect anything like that.” This arrested, not to say fantastical, quality of the relationship she desires with James typifies Leonora, for whom the flow of time, implicit in the fluctuations of a sexual relationship, is marked chiefly by the purchasing of a seasonable wardrobe.

Rose has a different erotic story: a long-time but now moribund attachment to a married man, Oliver Bathurst, who spends most of his time in Africa and so sees her only infrequently. While their relationship was once certainly a sexual one, when the narrative opens, it has undergone a pronounced shift, now clearly in decline, having never really blossomed. When Rose receives Oliver’s letter inviting her to lunch at his club now that he is back in London, there is no doubt she will go. But although it has been a year since they have seen each other, “she did not look forward to the occasion with any special elation or excitement as she might once have done.” Rose mentally cites a favorite quotation from Matthew Arnold: ““The foot *less* prompt to

meet the morning dew' she thought, folding the blue airletter and putting it inside her book."⁸ And indeed, their lunch meeting is hardly what one would expect from long-separated lovers.

It is with the lunchtime meeting between Rose and Oliver that Pym emphasizes the analogy between the timeline of a relationship and that of a culture, both of which inevitably undergo alterations, sometimes declining, as Rose recognizes upon entering Oliver's club:

Looking round that large dining-room paneled in various kinds of wood, coming from the countries which had once composed the Empire on which the sun had now set, Rose wondered whether it was really the sort of place one would have chosen for a reunion luncheon with a lover. Yet was there not a parallel to be drawn between the decline of the British Empire and the deterioration of her relationship with Oliver? Naturally with the years something of the first rapture had gone out of it, but what had taken the place of that rapture?

Even their choice of food seems to be full of references that link the British Empire to Rose's and Oliver's relationship, as well as to the aging process itself. Oliver selects boiled mutton with caper sauce, ("a classic English dish if you like that kind of thing," as Rose remarks), and then allows himself to be coaxed into having a Guinness. Rose, only a bit more adventurous, settles on the chicken curry, fully aware of the menu's slant towards the past days of Empire—of its having been "compiled with an exaggerated regard for the tastes or delicate digestions of those who had spent the greater part of their lives in tropical climates."

Oliver's club seems to be frozen in the past, as the menu and décor implies. The predictable food on offer reminds both Oliver and Rose, by principle of contrast, of the earlier and livelier days of their affair. Rose remembers that "In the old days they had eaten much more exotically," and Oliver recalls "all those splendid indigestible dishes—osso buco, biriani, shell fish and garlic—eaten in Soho restaurants where one wouldn't have dared inspect the kitchens." But unlike Rose, who seems to regret their current choice of dining club and what it implies about their deteriorating relationship, Oliver views it as an improvement over their past, a view that measures the alteration that advancing age has made to his perspective: "It was much pleasanter and more comfortable to eat here among people of one's own kind," he thinks complacently. Rose's choice of white wine reminds her that her own palate has changed over time: "As she tasted its sweetness a wave of regret for her lost youth came over her. Perhaps even when she had first met Oliver she had enjoyed sweet wine, but then with the years of judgement, developing taste, frustration, disillusionment—who could say which?—the liking had gone."

The couple's reflections on their luncheon food and drink serve as an analogy to the state of their relationship which, in Oliver's view is now, in accordance with a meal taken at his club, more "comfortable": "of course, they wouldn't be expected to make love in the flat of that woman civil servant friend of Rose's which had always seemed so unsuitable, borrowed for the afternoon." So while he sees her as "a handsome woman, the best English type, with her fair hair and grey eyes, [who] certainly didn't look her age," his feelings have changed: "There was no passion between them now, only affection and friendship or whatever this cosy feeling with its slight undertones of irritation and boredom could be called." When he toasts their "years of friendship," Rose recoils a bit. "So that was all it had been, thought Rose, taking a large gulp of the sweet white wine. Surely it should have been sharp and acid as vinegar?" Rather than linger over dessert and coffee in the leather club chairs, a gesture that would imply her acceptance of this stalled relationship, she makes her excuse to leave the stultifying atmosphere of hushed conversation between drowsy ex-colonial diners. Satisfying her longing to walk about outside in the fresh air and sunshine leads to a chance meeting with a neighbor from the village whom she joins for

⁸ Pym cites this quotation in her diary to describe a similar emotional alteration in her response to the 1942 spring season in Bristol (*VPE*, p. 107).

drinks. Rose, Pym suggests, is in the process of severing a played out attachment and setting down fresh roots amongst her new acquaintances, thus activating the symbolism implicit in her first name.

The neighbor whom Rose meets in the city streets, Miles Drage, is one of the villagers, who, taken together, represent various points on the spectrum of change—both decline and growth—and portray a communal life such that the village could hardly be considered, as Rose is coming to understand, a museum relic. Miles is a fading actor (now reduced to doing television advertisements for coffee), a rake who wears “self-conscious country tweeds” and likes his alcohol. He confides to Rose over afternoon drinks that he sees himself as a failure, but at the novel’s end his career in film has undergone resurgence. More minor figures even than Miles Drage, Monica and Denys Stride (a choice of name that suggests forward and energetic motion) are a couple that seems drawn by Pym primarily to indicate the radical alterations that people may undergo. Denys has converted from Anglican priest to Roman Catholic lay novelist, and Monica has followed along with him.

Among the villagers, the grouping with the richest thematic importance for the novel is an unorthodox trio, made up of a couple, Violet and Hilary Couchman, with Violet’s ex-husband Lionel Beecher, as the third. Violet’s interest in the country is that of an observer—a naturalist rather than a museum-goer—and she stalks through the woods with a sharp eye out for “newer and stranger animals’ droppings to be discovered, buds and flowers to be exclaimed over, and strange noises to be listened to and identified.” A retired sociologist Professor Beecher is an observer as well, especially of the goings-on in the vicarage, “which was of more interest to him than the most badger-infested wood” (p. 22). In this threesome’s odd domestic arrangement, Pym portrays the wish to hang onto a past life, a desire that she casts here in a somewhat absurd, but also endearing light. Although divorced and remarried, Violet continues her life with her ex-husband, Lionel, who lives in a hut at the bottom of the Couchmans’ garden and whose meals she provides. The trio goes on walks together, and when Violet links arms with both husbands at once, Pym gives a visual symbol of a woman refusing to relinquish her past, clinging very literally to a by-gone relationship: “impulsively she took an arm of each of her husbands as the three of them strode up the drive in anticipation of their hot milky bedtime drinks.” Lionel too keeps close connection to his past, again in a comical fashion, retaining a number of female admirers, students from his old days at the London School of Economics. Their number is large enough to justify the hire of a minibus on the occasions that they all travel to the village together in their annual summer tribute to him. Lionel recites their names from slightly faltering memory: “Dorothy, Eleanor, Barbara, Ruth, Joan, Betty, Sylvia, Frances, Ailsa and Elizabeth—that makes ten—oh, and Phyllis—that’s eleven.”

In another slightly ridiculous case of the past persisting into the future, when (in the course of the novel) Lionel dies, the fruits of his research, which currently consist of bundled together newspaper clippings, will be allowed to ripen rather than rot in the garbage bin. But change is underway even so in the world of research: the sociological harvest will appear in the form favored by current scholarly techniques, a product of computerized analytical processes. So Lionel’s scholarly work, which is revealed to focus on scandalous behavior of the clergy, will not die on the vine (although perhaps it should) but will be pressed into contemporary scholarship, its gossipy form reduced to much less juicy statistical tables. When Violet “drily” observes of her ex-husband’s research, “Scenes of Clerical Life,” Pym reminds us of the rich literary tradition focused on the clergy, a tradition that, while it may persist in this data-driven world, is certainly suffering a falling off from the days of George Eliot.

The aged Lionel is not the only figure engaged in research. The young too conduct forays into the past, with an interest in bringing it into the present. There is Ned’s scholarly work on Keats, and Phoebe’s job in the village, editing Lady Wedge’s “literary remains,” is another effort

of that kind. Most important of these examples, because it establishes a central conceit of the novel, James's apprenticeship in the business of antiques has him rummaging the past in yet another way, visiting the sales at country estates to furnish Humphrey's shop with objects that will continue their lives in the houses of present-day collectors such as Leonora.

This interest of the young in the old, whether in the past's objects, literature, or history, has its analogy in personal relationships, primarily James's attraction to Leonora. In another parallel between the two women, Pym gives to Rose as well a young man who is blatantly curious about her. The young villager Clive Roman banter with Rose about her unmarried state while complimenting her looks and her choice of clothing in a way that she finds cheeky yet agreeable. Clive speculates that Rose will some day marry, and, when she asserts that she doesn't think about the possibility, flatly contradicts her: "Oh-ho," he said facetiously, "that I do not believe, if you'll excuse me saying so." In contrast to Rose's expectations of villagers like him, young Clive Roman certainly doesn't think of her as an unchanging object in a museum, but as a person engaged in an on-going life.

MS Pym 27 is shot through with couples who are mismatched in age. Further supplementing the Leonora / James pairing, Violet has married a younger man, and Lionel Beecher's many female admirers, although hardly youthful, are younger than him. A more important instance of mismatched couples comes as a surprise in the course of the narrative. When Rose writes Oliver to tell him that, even with the death of his wife, she does not see marriage in their future, his return letter brings the news that he will be marrying a woman many years his junior. A similar marriage constitutes a mystery of sorts uncovered in the heart of the village. The vicar, Francis Seldon, had, at age 42, been married to an 18-year-old choirgirl, another reason for his washing up in the country village. This "secret of the hut," is discovered upon Lionel Beecher's death. Among his papers concerning scandalous behaviors of the clergy, with headlines that proclaim "SECRET LOVE OF VANISHED VICAR," and "PRIEST AND MOTHER OF FIVE: BUNGALOW HIDEOUT," Violet locates for Rose the relevant article: VICAR, 42, TO WED CHOIRGIRL, 18. A clipping dated a mere month later relates the lurid sequel to the story: CHOIRGIRL WIFE QUILTS VICARAGE—to run away with the organist, it is revealed. Francis Seldon's marriage was a disastrous one, and he has hopes that a country living will provide a "healing balm" after his failed attempt at monastery life that followed this scandal.

But the attraction between old and young, however ill-fated, even wrong-headed, Pym suggests, is irresistible. Rose too entertains the possibility of taking a younger lover, "a devoted young admirer," of the kind she imagines Leonora to have "acquired" in James. With the circumspection of one for whom the possibility remains abstract, Rose considers the "peculiar anxieties" that must exist alongside the "many compensations," and "even positive joys" of such a relationship. Finally, she concludes that a young admirer cannot be sought out in a deliberate manner, as one might shop for an object; rather the relationship "must happen of its own accord." Such a development in her life must come about naturally, in the course of events, an open-ended perspective towards living that she comes to embrace more generally.

Despite the false starts that have fitfully delivered Rose into middle-age, she represents the possibility of change in the form of lively growth. She refuses to remain a constant in Oliver's life, an "unchanging object" conveniently tucked away in her countryside cottage forever awaiting his visits. When, after his wife's death, he tells her, over lunch at his club, "I'll just think of you as being always there," she listens to his plans "with a touch of irritation now, feeling that this was less than she deserved—to be fixed in one place like some landmark, a rock or tree, vaguely remembered and unlikely to move." Taking her leave from Oliver one last time, she realizes that, despite her earlier determination to remain at a distance from her village neighbors, "she belonged to the country now and there was plenty to do at home." Rose leaves Oliver at his club in no way despondent over her objectified place in his life. Rather, she sees their relationship as

having ended. Her mind is on the dinner party she is to host, and so her “slightly elegiac thoughts of Oliver were intermingled with ideas of suitable menus for a late summer evening.” Perhaps we are to note a parallel between the season of the year—late summer—and the season of Rose’s life, which has its own particular delights.

Pym associates Rose with literal as well as figurative growth. Rose takes an interest in Phoebe’s untidy garden, and agrees when the young woman comments sarcastically on ““The satisfaction of watching things grow.”” She acknowledges too that people can change and grow in unexpected ways—that the enjoyment of gardening, for example, can be acquired over time, revealing to Phoebe that ““I certainly didn’t like gardening when I was your age.”” It is when she is in her garden that her life begins to approximate the conventional one she had imagined herself living and might yet grow into. When Francis Seldon, escaping a tumultuous scene at the vicarage (where his mother and housekeeper are at loggerheads), arrives at Rose’s gate, Pym sets out her response:

She felt a little self-conscious among the flowers, as if the rather contrived setting had been arranged on purpose as a prelude to a scene in a nice novel about village life, the kind of village and the kind of life she had imagined herself coming to when she bought the cottage. One could almost see the illustration the story might have—the good-looking clergyman with his hand on the gate and the woman tying up a delphinium. For a moment she regretted that life was not going to be like that but then Francis stopped.

Francis stays for dinner, and they assume a domestic tableau, Rose embroidering on a piece of tapestry while he smokes his pipe. With this vignette, Pym drops a hint that Rose’s life might possibly take this unexpected conventional turn, thus incorporating the sort of open-ended quality built into other novels and most clearly similar to the relationship ambiguously blooming between Emma Howick and Tom Dagnall at the conclusion to *A Few Green Leaves*.

As the narrative progresses, Rose incorporates herself into village life. She agrees to work alongside the village women who serve tea after the church musical festival. On the very day that Rose receives the letter from Oliver announcing his upcoming marriage, she receives as well a visit from a village woman, who invites her to take part in the ritual upkeep of the church, even to polish the lectern. This intertwinement of Rose into the life of the village occurs gradually and haphazardly, a result not of any master plan overtly managed, but of natural sociability, of Rose’s disinclination to be an unchanging object in Oliver’s life, and of her inclination, finally asserting itself, to welcome change that might come her way.

By contrast, in the parallel narrative, Leonora attempts to orchestrate her relationship with James in order to keep him to herself and so maintain the status quo. Markedly distinct from the published version of *Sweet Dove*, in MS Pym 27, Leonora’s masterminding of events meets a degree of success, eased by the American Ned’s love for all things stereotypically British. So while Pym has Rose criticize the falsely sentimentalized view that she held of the county life before moving to the village, an American interloper’s similar view provides Leonora with the key to holding Ned at bay. His love of Leonora’s “terribly English meal” of roast beef and Yorkshire pudding extends to his enthusiastic response to her suggestion that he live in Phoebe’s newly vacated cottage. The final chapter of MS Pym 27 has Ned ecstatic over his prospective new quarters: ““Vine Cottage’ . . . the way Ned breathed the words made it sound unbelievably exotic, far removed from the shabby little place where Pheobe had lived and worked and anguished over James.” Ned is thrilled at the prospect of country pleasures—of log fires and of walks during which he might spot that most exotic of animals, the fox. With Ned safely and happily tucked away in the countryside, Leonora imagines, her relationship with James will retain its perfection, a perfection her control will assure, determined as she is that “she was going to take very good care of him.”

As MS Pym 27 winds down, Pym's portrayal of Rose takes on an emblematic significance. While harvesting grapes from the neglected vine, Rose asks a question that has special point for her own narrative: "who would have foreseen that they would ripen so late?" Significantly, although they have come to fruition later than expected—"too late for the harvest festival"—the grapes will have an unexpected use nevertheless, to be made into wine by the Women's Institute. Analogously, in severing her ties to Oliver, Rose leaves herself open to whatever late harvest or unexpected growth the future may have in store for her, refusing a relationship in which she is seen as "an immovable object who would always be there." When Rose sends her letter to Oliver, in which she forecloses a possibility of marriage, she does so thinking "There could be something better in life, even if it was to be an unmarried state." Miss Dodd, the church worker who solicits Rose's help, unwittingly provides the suitable metaphor for Rose's supposition. Although the church lectern is made of wood rather than of brass, Miss Dodd assures Rose that "wood can be very rewarding," and, she adds, "we do manage to get a good polish on the bird's body." If, to apply Miss Dodd's phrasing metaphorically, marriage has the obvious rewards of a polished brass lectern, perhaps the unmarried state has the unexpectedly rewarding qualities of wood, an assurance that Rose, as if she sees the applicability to her own life, "repeated to herself, taking comfort from the words."

Pym's early vision is very much in line with her previous novels, which I would broadly classify as novels of manners—that is, she takes a good-humored look at the manners of the day as practiced by a certain segment of society. The foibles of Leonora and of Rose initially, can be seen as a commentary on or analogous to cultural foibles—the idealization of the Victorian age, for example, the time when British Empire was at its height, and the sentimental view of life in an unchanging British countryside. But notwithstanding my sympathetic reading of Pym's early vision, Yvonne Cocking's fairly critical view of what I take to be MS Pym 27 is well taken: "All very bland, I thought, a rambling plot with far too many characters and subplots, and no real focus." Certainly she gives an accurate contrast between the draft and published versions, judging that "The acerbity and deep feeling of the final work is completely absent," an effect Pym achieved, as we have seen, in part by narrowing her original focus and "scrapping" many of the characters in MS Pym 27.⁹ In doing so, she wrote a very different kind of novel, less social in its interest and much more psychological in its portraiture. It is not clear to me that she could have done both at once. What is clear is that she *could* do both. We can appreciate the remarkable range Pym possessed as a novelist without knowledge of MS Pym 27, but her range seems all the more remarkable when we measure the difference between these two sweet doves.

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⁹ For Cocking's description of the early drafts of *The Sweet Dove Died*, see *Barbara in the Bodleian*, pp. 175-76.

