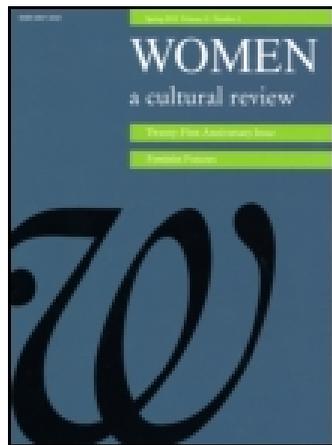


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‘Uneventful Lives’? Links between Charlotte M. Yonge, Ivy Compton-Burnett and Barbara Pym

Abstract: The lives and novels of Charlotte M. Yonge (1823–1901), Ivy Compton-Burnett (1884–1969) and Barbara Pym (1913–80) are connected by multiple similarities and coincidences, which this article explores. While biographers have claimed ‘uneventful lives’ for all three, these women enjoyed careers as highly professional novelists and, in a sense, their characters inhabit the same ‘house of fiction’, in Henry James’ phrase. Compton-Burnett and Pym read and admired each other’s work and were familiar with Yonge’s novels. All brought incisive wit, acute observation and highly skilled conversational reportage to bear on lives circumscribed by social and religious convention but of intense moral significance—a shared moral structure accepted by Yonge and Pym, and subversively reworked by Compton-Burnett. As practising Anglicans, Yonge and Pym reveal a shrewd appreciation of the nuances of parish life, while the fictional creations of all three novelists share character types, social ambience and even names. In addition, the novels of Yonge, Compton-Burnett and Pym celebrate qualities of endurance and continuity, displaying the ability to gather ‘a few green leaves’ from an apparently barren setting.

Keywords: Yonge, Compton-Burnett, Anglicanism, Oxford Movement, linked novels, genre, Pym

THE lives and novels of Charlotte M. Yonge (1823–1901), Ivy Compton-Burnett (1884–1969) and Barbara Pym (1913–80) are connected by multiple similarities and coincidences. While biographers have claimed ‘uneventful lives’ for all three, as highly professional novelists they evidently enjoyed the ‘full life’ celebrated by the unmarried Mildred

Lathbury at the end of Pym's novel *Excellent Women* (1952). Compton-Burnett and Pym read and admired each other's work, and both were familiar with Yonge's novels. All brought incisive wit, acute observation and highly skilled conversational reportage to bear on lives circumscribed by social and religious convention yet of intense moral significance—a shared hermeneutic accepted by Yonge and Pym, and subversively reworked by Compton-Burnett. As practising Anglicans, Yonge and Pym display a shrewd appreciation of the nuances of parish life, while the creations of all three novelists inhabit the same 'house of fiction', in Henry James' phrase from his Preface to *Portrait of a Lady*, sharing character types, social ambience and even names.

Further, the novels of Yonge, Compton-Burnett and Pym all celebrate the qualities of endurance and continuity. An early reviewer of Compton-Burnett's *Brothers and Sisters* (1929) called it 'a story of the present hurt by the past, but not defeated' (Spurling 1984: 29), and Yonge's novels often feature the loss of a parent, a fall in social status or a challenging test in life. In Pym, too, the ability to gather 'a few green leaves' from an apparently barren setting is celebrated.

Compton-Burnett and 'Influence'

Both explicit and implicit references to Yonge's novels abound in Pym's work, to the extent that Barbara Dunlap claims that 'the Victorian novelist's work infuses' Pym's (Dunlap 2003: 179). At the same time, the younger novelist acknowledged Compton-Burnett's more immediately obvious impact. Commenting on Compton-Burnett's distinctive manner, Pym noted warily:

The influence of Miss Compton-Burnett is very powerful once it takes a hold, isn't it? For a time there seems to be no point in writing any other way, indeed, there seems not to *be* any other way, but I have found that it passes (like so much in this life) and I have now got back to my own way, such as it is. But purified and strengthened, as after a *rich* spiritual experience, or a shattering love affair. (Holt and Pym 1984/1994: 100)¹

Lotus Snow adds that Pym said in a broadcast talk that she was 'influenced by Aldous Huxley in *Chrome Yellow* and later by Ivy Compton-Burnett' (Snow 1987: 141; see also Stanley 2007: 5), and there are stylistic indications that Pym's experience of Compton-Burnett left its traces. For example, in *Jane and Prudence* (1953), "Here we are all gathered around you", said Jane [to Miss Birkenshaw] "and none of us has

¹ For 'satirical letters' 'in the style of Ivy Compton-Burnett' written by Barbara Pym in the late 1930s, see Holt and Pym (1984/1994: 11).

.....

really fulfilled her early promise”; Jane’s comment is reminiscent of ‘well you are all here’ a favourite Compton-Burnett introduction to some shattering or humiliating disclosure (Pym 1994: 481). In *Some Tame Gazelle* (1950), Miss Liversidge is one of a number of Pym’s characters who seem to have strayed in from the novels of Ivy Compton-Burnett. Dropping in on the Bede sisters at suppertime, Miss Liversidge’s companion Miss Aspinall murmurs that no difference in the menu should be made on their account, but Miss Liversidge dissents in tones redolent of Compton-Burnett: “Well I must say that I should like to feel an effort was being made, even if only a small one,” she said in a jocular tone. “I think we all like to feel that” (Pym 1994: 79).

Compton-Burnett herself was cautious, even sceptical, about the concept of ‘influence’. ‘I should not have thought that authors recognised influences. They tend to think, and to like to think, that they are not unduly indebted to their predecessors’, she declared, adding:

I think that people are often supposed to be influenced by someone, when it is only that they have similar gifts [and] the only explanation I can give, is that people who practice the same art are likely to have some characteristics in common. I have noticed such resemblance between writers the most widely separated, in merit, kind and time. (Compton-Burnett 1945/1972: 23)

Following Compton-Burnett, this article discusses the three writers of the title less in terms of ‘influence’ than the working of a series of interconnections, parallels and perhaps coincidences, ordered by consideration of ‘merit, kind and time’.

The Lives and the Novels

How widely separated and how closely connected are the lives and novels of Charlotte Yonge, Ivy Compton-Burnett and Barbara Pym? Of Compton-Burnett’s three elements—‘merit, kind and time’—the apportioning of merit is the most problematic. Pym’s friend Robert Liddell (‘Jock’) said in 1991 of Ivy Compton-Burnett, Elizabeth Taylor, Olivia Manning and Barbara Pym: ‘Ivy was a genius, Elizabeth was a gifted artist. Olivia and Barbara were story tellers who wrote well’ (Smith 1995: 367). Ironically, the ‘genius’ Ivy, identified in a 1935 review of *A House and Its Head* as ‘the single most powerful force at work in the English novel in the generation following James Joyce and Virginia Woolf’ (Spurling 1984: 152), is today the least prominent in academic discussion or reader popularity. None of the three has yet achieved canonical status

in the sense of inclusion in school or university curricula, but Pym's centenary has inspired much insightful analysis, while in the last decade scholarly work on Yonge has flourished.

With regard to time, Yonge is obviously the foremother, her life spanning most of the reign of Queen Victoria. Given the late Victorian/Edwardian setting of almost all Compton-Burnett's novels, it can be surprising to find that the two younger novelists' lives overlap significantly: Compton-Burnett lived from 1884 to 1969 and Pym from 1913 to 1980. The two women never, in fact, met, although on 24 May 1950 Compton-Burnett, then in her mid sixties, wrote to Pym that she had 'been greatly entertained by *Some Tame Gazelle*', and Pym's library contained 17 out of Compton-Burnett's 20 novels (Salwak 1987: 196, 166).

And, with regard to 'kind', to use Compton-Burnett's term, are these three novelists alike in kind? Had they themselves, as a beginning, the 'uneventful life' that Georgina Battiscombe claimed for Yonge in the title of her 1943 biography, which Constance Malloy and others attribute to Pym (Malloy 1987), and to which Compton-Burnett somewhat disingenuously owned when asked to provide a biographical outline for the first Penguin edition of her works. 'I have had such an uneventful life that there is little to say' (Spurling 1984: 8), she pronounced, passing over a series of tragic early bereavements, including the death of two beloved brothers and the suicides of two of her sisters.

Charlotte Yonge was born in the Hampshire village of Otterbourne and lived there all her life, producing an impressive amount of both fiction and non-fiction whilst involved in Sunday-school teaching, churchgoing and 'wholesome' social outings of an enjoyable, if immensely respectable, nature. The Yonge family included high-minded, rather repressive parents, Charlotte's younger brother Julian and Mrs Bargus, a domineering grandmother. Apart from annual visits to her lively 'cousinhood' in Devon, Yonge described her childhood as 'solitary': 'I have paced alone ... on the gravel path around our field, dreaming' of large families and romantic adventures (Coleridge 1903: 121). After the death of her beloved father in 1854, Yonge shared the family home, Otterbourne House, with her mother, later moving down the road to smaller premises at Elderfield, where for many years she cared for an invalid relative, Gertrude Walter. Although Yonge's travels were restricted to isolated trips to Ireland and France, plus visits to friends in various parts of southern England, she was, like Pym, an acute observer of all around her. Yonge brought a naturalist's keen eye to the foibles of her neighbours. For example, in a series of essays on woman's role, she remarked: 'There are four kinds of wives—the cowed woman, the deadweight, the *maitresse femme*, and the helpmeet. Of the cowed woman

there is not much to say. Poor thing! She has generally made a mistake' (Yonge 1877/1881: 179). For Yonge, life may have appeared outwardly 'uneventful', but, like Jane Cleveland of *Jane and Prudence*, she clearly found 'such richness' in the idiosyncrasies of village life.

Ivy Compton-Burnett was the seventh of 12 children from the two marriages of a successful homeopathic consultant, Dr James Compton Burnett (the hyphen was added to the family name after Dr Compton Burnett's death in 1901). After attending university, she returned to provincial family life until, in 1919, she joined forces with the furniture historian Margaret Jourdain, rarely venturing far from their flat in Kensington's Braemar Mansions where her non-writing enthusiasms appear to have been for lavish tea parties (for a typical menu, see Spurling 1984: 225), expensive chocolates and garden flowers. Hilary Spurling describes the companions in terms rather reminiscent of the Bede sisters in *Some Tame Gazelle*:

Margaret wore lace jabots, dashing plumed and flowered hats, gold chains, feather boas, finery of all sorts with a watch in her belt and a dangling Regency spy glass, [while] Ivy dressed like Miss Ridley, the governess in *The Present and the Past* [1953], to make a whole that conformed to nothing and offended no one. She made no mistakes in her dress, merely carried out her intentions. (Spurling 1984: 16)

Furthermore, like Pym's Harriet Bede with her curates, Margaret was always surrounded by 'her young men': she 'required, and saw that she got, a steady stream of young men to sit at her feet, pick her brains, join her for lunch, escort her round the sale rooms or on country house visits'. Spurling continues of Margaret and Ivy:

middle age suited them both. They had arrived together (and for the first time in each case) at an orderly and highly agreeable existence designed to please no one but themselves; and both agreed with Miss Mitford [the governess in *Parents and Children* (1941)], who said, when asked whether she would not have liked to be married, 'No, I never wanted a full, normal life.' Few writers have ever celebrated the single state so cordially as Ivy, who did it with especial vigour in her early books. (Spurling 1984: 43)

Such domestic arrangements seem to be a shared link between the three novelists, none of whom married and none of whom seems to have greatly regretted the fact.

Much has been said of Pym's comments on both the married and the single state, but many would agree with Mary Strauss-Noll that '[t]he

ambivalence of the single women and the disillusionment of the married women occur throughout all her writings' (Strauss-Noll 1987: 73). Widowhood can emerge as an enviable state, although Wilmet Forsyth's mother-in-law Sybil, in *A Glass of Blessings* (1958), is destined for a happy ending with Professor Root, and Beatrix Howick of *A Few Green Leaves* (1980) is keen for her daughter Emma to marry, and muses in free indirect discourse:

Dudley had been killed at Dunkirk, all those years ago, and since then there had been nothing much in that direction. A young, academically inclined widow with a child, as she had been, was not immediately attractive or accessible, and then there had been her work, the Victorian fiction. Charlotte M. Yonge's novels contained more than one attractive young widow. (Pym 1981: 93)

At the same time, Beatrix, as a Yonge aficionado, would have been aware that, in general, Yonge did not approve of second marriages, seeing even the most successful of these as fraught with difficulty.²

Barbara Pym's life was in some senses more varied than those of the older novelists, and her emotional life was either richer or more fully documented than theirs. Pym graduated from St Hilda's College, Oxford, before wartime conditions took her to Gibraltar and into independent life in Bristol and London. From 1946, she worked as assistant editor for the scholarly journal *Africa*, based at the International African Institute; after 17 years there, she retired to the Oxfordshire village of Finstock, where she shared a cottage with her sister Hilary until her death in 1980. The anthropologists she encountered at the Institute impact on her novels both as inspiration for a rich variety of characters (Esther Clovis, Digby Fox, Everard Bone and others) and as exponents of observational methodology. Pym frequently aligns the roles of the novelist and the anthropologist as students of human nature and culture.

Critical Connections

I would argue that for Yonge, Compton-Burnett and Pym, amongst the major 'events' of their lives must be counted the acquisition of status as professional novelists. Yonge was a 'Victorian best-seller', as the title of Mare and Percival's 1947 study asserts. A writer from her teenage years, she scored international success in 1853 with *The Heir of Redclyffe*, a favourite with the young William Morris and his circle, and reportedly the book most in request with convalescent Crimean War officers. In her

2 For example, that of the Kendals in *The Young Stepmother* (1861), where the task of training her difficult stepchildren severely taxes the inexperienced heroine Albinia.

.....
 introduction to the 1997 Oxford World's Classics edition, Barbara Dennis notes:

In terms of popularity, when it was first published and for generations after, *The Heir of Redclyffe* stands with *David Copperfield* and *Jane Eyre* and other literary giants of the century It touched a chord in the popular imagination and became an instant bestseller bestseller ... by 1875 it had reached more than twenty editions. (Dennis 1997: vii)

The Heir was followed by the much loved *The Daisy Chain* (1856) and by a major work, *The Pillars of the House* (1873), as well as a host of others. Yonge continued to publish until her death in 1901, when, although she had slipped from her pinnacle of critical acclaim, she was still immensely popular, ranking highly with public library book borrowers. It is highly significant that Yonge was, as Dennis calls her, 'the novelist of the Oxford Movement' (Dennis 2007: 5). From the first, Yonge consecrated her talents to the service of the Oxford Movement within the Church of England, an influential group who sought to restore the pre-Reformation Catholic heritage to the Church of England's theology, liturgy, spirituality and church buildings. Yonge was close to the movement's founding father, John Keble; together with John Henry Newman (who later joined the Roman Catholic Church) and others, Keble published *Tracts for the Times* (1833–41), disseminating their religious and political views and earning their followers the nickname 'Tractarians'. A prime concept for these High Church Anglicans was the identity of the Church of England as the direct inheritor of apostolic authority, sharing with the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Churches an unbroken succession of consecrated bishops stretching back to the Apostles of Gospel times. Yonge took the Latin dedication *pro ecclesia dei* as her motto and devoted much of her considerable earnings to the mission field in Melanesia (missionaries feature frequently in her novels, as in Pym's).

Compton-Burnett enjoyed a steady published output and a degree of critical acclaim which lasted from her third novel, *Brothers and Sisters*, described by Spurling as 'one of the year's minor publishing sensations' (Spurling 1984: 23), through to the posthumous and aptly titled *The Last and the First* (1971). She received numerous literary prizes and awards, and in 1967 was made a Dame. Her first novel, *Dolores* (1911), is based partly on her experiences as a student of classics at Royal Holloway, University of London. Although Compton-Burnett later disowned this early work, Spurling, in *Ivy When Young* (1974), draws frequent comparisons between Ethel May, the lead character of Yonge's *The Daisy Chain*, and the eponymous heroine Dolores. Spurling's inference is that

the numerous children from Dr James Compton Burnett's two marriages would have felt the 'immense influence' of Yonge. She argues:

The Daisy Chain was a book much beloved by the younger Compton Burnetts, partly no doubt because its account of nursery and schoolroom life in a doctor's household so closely resembled their own. The eleven May children [in the novel] divide up by age and sex as the Compton Burnetts did, the boys preparing for Oxford, the church or the navy, the girls in fee to dull and crochety governesses. (Spurling 1974/1975: 66)

Yonge, Compton-Burnett and Pym are also bizarrely connected by the ill-fated psychic adventure of Yonge's friend Annie Moberly and Eleanor Jourdain, sister of Compton-Burnett's companion, Margaret. Visiting the Trianon in 1901, Moberly and Jourdain claimed to experience a time slip into the days of Marie Antoinette; they published an account of their visions in 1911. In *A Few Green Leaves*, Miss Grundy's mysterious experience on the history society outing to Seedihead Park prompts Emma Howick's suggestion: 'something like Miss Moberly and Miss Jourdain at Versailles?' (Pym 1980/1982: 105).

Pym's career was more problematic than the careers of either of the two earlier novelists. Yonge may have suffered a decline in critical acclaim as she aged, but she continued to be a high-earning popular writer. Compton-Burnett's career took a while to become established, but she remained steadily successful after 1929. Pym's first six novels had, as Philip Larkin explains, 'been well received by reviewers and had gained a following' among readers (Pym 1982/1993: 5). In 1963, she sent her seventh, *An Unsuitable Attachment*, to her publisher. It was rejected by Cape and then by a second publisher on the grounds that: 'Novels like *An Unsuitable Attachment*, whatever their qualities, are getting increasingly difficult to sell' (Larkin, in Pym 1982/1993: 6). The same fate awaited *The Sweet Dove Died*. It was not until 1977 that the *Times Literary Supplement* ran a feature on the century's most over- and underrated novelists; two contributors named Barbara Pym as one of the latter. She became an overnight literary celebrity. *Quartet in Autumn* appeared in the same year, followed by *The Sweet Dove Died*, with the former shortlisted for the Booker Prize. Pym was made a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature. Her final novel, *A Few Green Leaves*, appeared shortly after her death in 1980, followed by the posthumous publication of other work dating from the 1963–77 period. Throughout the hiatus in her career, Pym continued to write and to see herself as a professional novelist, surviving the experience of rejection.

Theological Patterns

The fictional lives of Yonge’s and Compton-Burnett’s characters demonstrate a shared focus on the dynamics of Victorian families—leisured, conventional, articulate and often enclosed. For Yonge, as an unashamed apologist for High Church Anglican views, the Christian family was the sacramental pattern rather than a mere metaphor for the relationship between God (the Father/father), Mother Church and her faithful, obedient children. Authority was a prime concept in an Anglican theology which was striving to vindicate the Church of England’s claim to apostolicity; obedience to parents, like obedience to the visible Church, meant obedience to God. Moreover, the family paralleled the Church in being at once a human and a divine institution—a construction which was able to combine idealization of the family with acceptance of its less favourable aspects.

Compton-Burnett’s novels are also almost exclusively set within the ‘self contained, heavily controlled and monitored, closed society of the High Victorian family’, her declared reason being that: ‘I do not feel that I have any real or organic knowledge of life later than about 1910. I should not write of later times with enough grasp or confidence’ (Compton-Burnett 1945/1972: 27).³ But while Yonge and Compton-Burnett explore the common territory of the Victorian family, they offer very different maps to their readers, and here Pym seems to have more in common with Yonge than with Compton-Burnett. As R. Glynn Grylls famously remarked, ‘any ... novel by Miss Compton-Burnett ... is about a family whose address is *Huis Clos*’ (Glynn Grylls 1957/1972: 66), and readers soon realize that, behind these closed doors, often in another room in Greek-tragedy mode, are played out scenes of forgery, plagiarism, sexual deceit and deviancy, the destruction of wills, incest, and both attempted and actual suicide and murder—often reported by a butler taking unctuous satisfaction in performing the function of the Greek messenger. ‘You write of the family as being a destructive unit’, commented a 1960 radio interviewer to Dame Ivy, who answered austere: ‘I write of power being destructive and parents had absolute power over children in those days. One or the other had’ (Spurling 1985: 317). In thus defining parental power as a destructive force, Compton-Burnett offered a complete inversion of Yonge’s theological system, a system which she must therefore have perceived with some clarity. Compton-Burnett made her own use of the Tractarian metaphor. While she rejected the stereotypes of the subservient ‘home daughter’ and the believing Anglican, she stayed inside the same structure of thought by stressing the paternal role of the Deity; the father (or sometimes the

³ Having no great opinion of Virginia Woolf (‘Well, is she really a novelist?’, she once asked rhetorically), Compton-Burnett may be referring slyly to Woolf’s famous comment in ‘Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown’ that ‘on or about December 1910 human nature changed’ (Stansky 1996: 2).

mother, as both can be the figure defined by Robert Liddell as ‘the tyrant’) takes on the characteristics which Emily Herrick and Richard Bumpus of *Pastors and Masters* (1925) ascribe to God as ‘one of the best drawn characters in fiction’: ‘I like him not childless, and grasping and fond of praise ... and he had such a personality ... such a superior, vindictive and over-indulgent one’ (Compton-Burnett 1925/1984: 24).

The existence of God is the (often unspoken) reality to which both Yonge’s and Pym’s fiction attests; the religious antithesis between Yonge and Compton-Burnett is the contrast between the family as a divine institution, part of an ordered system and a means of salvation, and the family as a human arena for the attempted resolution of power conflicts, with parental authority seen as a force for evil rather than for good. Yet Compton-Burnett’s novels do not leave the reader sunk in Oresteian gloom, thanks partly to what Spurling has called her ‘sleek and frivolous wit’ (Spurling 1979: 154), and partly to the qualities of endurance and continuity which characterize the conclusions of her works—qualities that are shared by both Yonge and Pym.

Pym’s Anglican Christianity was shaped by the nineteenth-century refashioning of the Church of England by Yonge’s circle of clerical thinkers. Wilmet Forsyth is not the only figure to commend ‘the catholicity of the Church of England’, and amongst the varieties of religious practice (Low Church, Nonconformist and Roman Catholic) described or mentioned in Pym’s novels, it is the High Church or Anglo-Catholic rites which predominate. Anglican priests are often referred to as ‘Father’; altar servers and incense, flowers and candles are routine, all innovations (daring at the time) of the Oxford Movement. The anxieties of Mildred Lathbury’s domestic, Mrs Morris, about the ‘Popish practices’ at St Mary’s echo nineteenth-century suspicion of the Oxford Movement, as well as testifying to their prevalence in mid twentieth-century Anglicanism (Pym 1980: 24). And in *A Glass of Blessings*, Pym slips in a daring High Church in-joke: Miss Daunt asserts that her rare blood group has been described as ‘*This precious blood*’, a term used in High Anglican and Roman Catholic piety for the consecrated wine which the Eucharist has transformed into the blood of Christ (Pym 1958/1989: 77) .

Amongst other Anglican High Church traits inherited by Pym is the traditionally unostentatious ‘reserve’ of Tractarian spirituality, in which unspoken belief and unobtrusive practice underpin daily life, as Barbara Dunlap points out (Dunlap 2003: 180). Mildred Lathbury, Wilmet Forsyth, Jane Cleveland, Sophia Ainger and others attend church, utter private prayers of which we do not hear the words, and strive to do their best in a world which is often heavily weighted against the appreciation and fulfilment of ‘excellent women’.⁴ If Yonge’s novels celebrate

⁴ In *An Unsuitable Attachment* (1982), a poignant passage describes Sophia: ‘She sat humbly in the cold church, making some effort to get into the right mood for the service. God is content with little, she told herself, but sometimes we have so little that it is hardly worth the offering’ (Pym 1982/1993: 100).

mundane activities as a means to sanctity, Pym, too, is strong on the sacramental nature of the quotidian; her novels, after all, celebrate the apotheosis of the cup of tea. Dunlap suggests that, for both Yonge and Pym, '[t]ea is pre-eminently a secular sacrament, dispensed by women ... this secular rite ... provides moments of community and comfort', even when provided by 'marginalised', undervalued figures (Dunlap 2003: 190–1). The daily experience of the unmarried—'the rejected ones', in Mildred's words—forms much of Pym's fiction, which is rich in circumstantial detail of restaurants, trains, offices and church events (Pym 1980: 126).

The quest for perfection undertaken by the imperfect, weak and often lovable characters in Yonge's novels provides the most characteristic structure of her plots. To an extent, this is also true of Pym—for example, Wilmet's discovery of the real satisfactions of a life which she has previously found wanting in excitement encapsulates a realization worthy of Yonge. This occurs at the end of *A Glass of Blessings*, whose title quotes the seventeenth-century poem by George Herbert, which was much admired by Victorian Anglicans.

Family Ties

Both Yonge and Compton-Burnett stress emotional ties between siblings, and between parents and children, rather than between lovers; they have a sympathetic yet unsentimental view of children; single women are given emphasis and validity; human failings are unsparingly exposed; and the main channel of communication with the reader is through dialogue. Some, if not all, of these elements are also familiar to readers of Pym. Like the two older novelists, Pym is strong on sibling relationships and rivalries, offering the Bede sisters, Rowena and Piers Longridge, Neville and Aylwin Forbes, Dulcie Mainwaring's Aunt Hermione and Uncle Bertram, and Winifred and Julian Malory, amongst others. Although Pym's families do not attain the large numbers of Yonge's (and often Compton-Burnett's), in some cases these remain as unreachable points of reference. Barbara Dunlap says Jane Cleveland 'uses her memory of Yonge's novels as a distorting prism' (Dunlap 2003: 183):

as the years passed and she realised that Flora was to be her only child, she was again conscious of failure, for a picture of herself as a clergyman's wife had included a large family like those in the novels of Miss Charlotte M. Yonge. (Pym 1953/1994: 478)

This reference is made more poignant by the fact that Flora is a name taken from *The Daisy Chain*, as Wilmet is from *The Pillars of the House*.

In Pym's novels, romantic unions are often tentative, uncertain, unsatisfactory or offstage. At the end of *No Fond Return of Love* (1961), *A Few Green Leaves* and *Excellent Women*, Dulcie, Emma and Mildred respectively seem poised for future happiness; only in Mildred's case do we learn the outcome—the rather subdued satisfactions of marriage to Everard Bone. Wilmet (in *A Glass of Blessings*) settles for life with her stolid husband Rodney in a flat nearer the parish church, while Leonora Eyre (in *The Sweet Dove Died*) seems doomed to lonely, selfish middle age. In *The Sweet Dove Died*, we realize that Ned is cruel and James is weak; in *Excellent Women*, Allegra Grey is a ruthless manhunter, Helena Napier a useless housekeeper and Rocky an unredeemed flirt; and in *A Few Green Leaves*, village life offers some unpleasant characters.

Yonge and Compton-Burnett tend to set their action in the large country house near a small town or village; Pym also uses village settings or those areas of London which function almost as villages, with their own churches, shops and parks. The home, the family and restricted social circles are seen as places where destiny is worked out, and Pym's fictional anthropologists might recognize Mary Dalton Rowsell's terminology when she says:

An important aspect of an individual's life [in a Compton-Burnett novel] is his role, his position in the family and village in which he lives. Thus we are introduced to a character through a statement of his kin relationships and of his position in the community. (Rowsell 1979: 214)

In some ways, then, the three novelists inhabit similar 'houses of fiction'. And the fictional lodgers in those residences exhibit family likenesses. The household is usually presided over by 'the tyrant', to use Liddell's definition. Compton-Burnett's novels are never without one; Yonge has many, such as *The Three Brides'* (1876) Mrs Charnock, an all-powerful invalid; while Pym offers choice specimens, such as Miss Doggett (*Jane and Prudence*), Mrs Bone (*Excellent Women*), Leonora Eyre (*The Sweet Dove Died*) and that prime example Archdeacon Henry Hoccleve, introduced in *Some Tame Gazelle* and haunting several other novels. Amongst other mutual character types are weak, sometimes optimistic, vain people, such as Fabian Driver (*Jane and Prudence*) and Compton-Burnett's Sir Godfrey Haslam from *Men and Wives* (1931). Excellent women and general helpmeets, who are rife in Yonge and Pym, are also to be met with in Compton-Burnett, where a good example is Patty in *Brothers and Sisters*.

Animals also feature in these novels. There are sometimes dogs, with many in Yonge and, notably, the snappy poodle Felix in Pym's *No Fond*

Return of Love, but especially two cats, the tortoiseshell Faustina in *An Unsuitable Attachment* and Plautus in Compton-Burnett’s *Mother and Son* (1955). Plautus, who lives with the spinsters Emma Greatheart and Hester Wolsey, is introduced to Miss Burke:

‘Why do you call him “Plautus”?’ said Miss Burke ...

‘Oh, because he *is* Plautus’, said Miss Wolsey. ‘Because the essence of Plautus is in him. How could he be called anything else?’

‘Who was Plautus in real life?’

‘Who could he have been but the person who gave Plautus his name?’

‘He was a Latin writer’, said Miss Greatheart as Miss Burke left a second question unanswered. ‘I think he wrote plays; not very good ones’.

‘Why did you call the cat after him?’

‘Well, he has not written any good plays either’, said Miss Wolsey, holding out her hand to Plautus, who came and considered it, as if in the hope of some offering. (Compton-Burnett 1955: 49)

Linked Novels and Shared Names

Although she does so to a lesser degree, Pym follows Yonge’s practice of linking—that is, of introducing characters from previous novels into the current one. Yonge’s linked novels present a richly complex interweaving of characters as an important element in her successful creation of a parallel universe within her fiction. She confessed to ‘the curious semi-belief one has in the phantoms of one’s brain’ (Yonge 1847/1886: ix), who ‘seem like real acquaintances’ (Coleridge 1903: 176). Pym reintroduces not only Archdeacon Hoccleve, but many others—for example, Wilmet, Rodney, Piers and Keith make a cameo appearance in *No Fond Return of Love*; Esther Clovis stomps in and out of the novels; and we have occasional news of others, such as ‘that nice Miss Lathbury’. While all of Pym’s novels are free-standing (which cannot be said of some of Yonge’s later novels), there is a sense that Pym knows exactly what has happened to her ‘people’ since their last mention. Like Yonge’s fictional families, their lives within the writer’s imagination function in formalist terms, as the *fabula* from which the *sjuzbet* of the novels is extrapolated.⁵

For Alan Bellringer, Pym’s ‘crossover characters’ emphasize the conscious fictionality of the novels: ‘novel writing is partly what [Pym’s

⁵ For an explanation of these formalist terms, see Wales (1989: 169, 422–3).

books] are about' (Bellringer 1996: 14). Sandra Goldstein finds the practice 'endearing' and an aspect of Pym's lifelong habit of thrifty recycling of resources (Goldstein 2013: 10). This insight could account for Esther Clovis's memorial service appearing in two novels. In Chapter 12 of *An Academic Question* (1986), the heroine Caro represents her husband Alan at the service commemorating 'Esther Ivy [!] Clovis 1899–1970', with an address given by Professor Digby Fox. Although written in 1970–1, *An Academic Question* was unpublished when *A Few Green Leaves*, Pym's final novel, appeared in 1980. Here, Chapter 19 covers the same service, again with Digby Fox as speaker, but without the detail of Miss Clovis's dates. Both Bellringer and Goldstein comment on Pym's introduction of herself into the dining room of The Anchorage guesthouse in *No Fond Return of Love*, seeing this as a daring intervention in the relationship between text and reader (Bellringer 1996; Goldstein 2013). But since Pym's novels are rich in intertextual references (not only to Charlotte Yonge), I suspect a homage to Alfred Hitchcock's signature appearances in his own films. Hitchcock's widely acclaimed classic mysteries, such as *Rebecca* (1940), *Vertigo* (1958) and *Marnie* (1964), always included a cameo appearance by Hitchcock himself; this happens in 39 of his 52 surviving movies, and may well have given Pym the idea for her Anchorage visit.

As I have already noted, the inhabitants of Yonge's, Compton-Burnett's and Pym's 'houses of fiction' often share names. Several critics discuss Compton-Burnett's predilection for naming characters after English poets—such as Herrick, Donne, Chaucer, Keats, Rossetti and Shelley—suggesting that the lack of resemblance between the illustrious figures and their mundane namesakes is a deliberate irony. Pym certainly follows Compton-Burnett, with many poetic examples, including Clare and Cleveland, as well as Donne (but curate Edgar Donne confutes Archdeacon Hoccleve by insisting that his name is pronounced 'Donn' rather than the academically accepted 'Dunn'). Less celebrated surnames are also shared between Compton-Burnett and Pym, including Spong, Bode, Napier and Ainger. As for forenames, both novelists use a large number taken from Yonge: Flora and Wilmet, Agatha, Geraldine, Fulbert, Felix, Clement, Aubrey and Edgar, Julius, Verena, Bernard, Rachel and Sophia are the first to come to mind. Mildred and Dudley recur in both Compton-Burnett's and Pym's works.

Questions of Genre

Compton-Burnett's category of 'kind' can be considered in a further sense—that of genre. The term 'comedy of manners' has been applied to both Compton-Burnett and Pym; like Yonge, they have been compared with Jane

Austen, and certainly all three admired Austen greatly, although Yonge's novels may be more usefully compared with those of George Eliot. In addition, anyone concerned—like Pym's Beatrix Howick—with a study of the nineteenth-century novel soon realizes that there is no such thing as realism, or at least no such thing as an entirely realist novel. But despite elements such as romance, quest narrative, fairy tale, governess fiction, allegory and so on, which enrich the novels of Yonge and many of her contemporaries, there is also a strongly realist trend in Yonge, as there is in Pym, towards the transparency of the art that conceals art—the mimesis of setting, dialogue and detail. Pym's powers of observation and ability to home in on significant and unexpected detail are notable: Goldstein mentions the 'startlingly bearded' female bus passenger in *No Fond Return of Love* (Goldstein 2013). Both Pym and Yonge use clothes and menus to define nuances of character. Furnishings are significant indicators: Jane Cleveland's unworldly approach to housekeeping is signalled by her realization that 'anything was better than having to pretend you had winter and summer curtains when you had just curtains' (Pym 1994: 621). This level of mimesis is not found in Compton-Burnett, of whom Elizabeth Bowen said that she had 'stripped the Victorian novel of everything but its essentials' (Bowen 1944/1972:). Bowen noted that Compton-Burnett carried on the tradition of the Victorian novel, although with her own 'sinister cosiness'—a lovely phrase, capturing much of this author's evil charm. And Bowen explicitly linked Yonge and Compton-Burnett when she wrote:

[The Victorians] concentrated on power and its symbols—property, God, the family ... For what they required to work on, for what magnetised them, the Victorians had no need to look far beyond the family ... The most obvious instance is Charlotte M. Yonge. ... Miss Compton-Burnett is not copying but actually continuing the Victorian novel. She continues it, that is to say, from the inside. (Bowen 1944/1972: 59–60)

Pym and Her Predecessors

Given Bowen's insight into Compton-Burnett's relationship with nineteenth-century writing, it can be argued that Pym experienced the Victorian novel in two layers: directly through Yonge and by inference, and perhaps influence, from Compton-Burnett. For example, Pym's clergy wives see Yonge's world as gentler and more structured than their own, so that her novels function as indicators of a lost Anglican ideal; at the same time, Compton-Burnett's astringency flavours Pym's ironic dialogue. In

addition, Pym's shrewd appreciation of the relationship between Yonge and Compton-Burnett allowed her to play with an imaginary conflation of the two novelists. Basing her game on characters from Yonge's much loved and highly respectable *The Daisy Chain*, she wickedly rearranged the relationships between eccentric patriarch Dr May, his scholarly son Norman and his fairylike daughter-in-law Meta, writing on 26 November 1971: 'Reading Charlotte M. Yonge's *The Daisy Chain* and see the echoes or rather foreshadowings of Ivy Compton-Burnett in it. Ivy would have made Dr May marry Meta Rivers and she would then have had an affair with Norman' (Holt and Pym 1984/1994: 269). Pym's witty rewrite encapsulates her understanding of her links with the two earlier novelists. Reading Yonge and Compton-Burnett is both rewarding for its own sake and, for students of Pym, intriguing and enriching.

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