

**“Setting Novels at Defiance”:
Novel Reading and Novelistic Form in Charlotte M. Yonge’s *The Heir of Redclyffe***

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<1>It will come as no surprise to feminist critics of the nineteenth-century novel that Charlotte M. Yonge suffered from enormous critical condescension throughout most of the twentieth century. For many critics, the exclusion of popular women writers such as Yonge appears to have been fundamental to their claim for the seriousness of the nineteenth-century canon, and while the vitriol with which Q.D. Leavis denounced Yonge as a “simple-minded fanatic” (Leavis 155) was exceptional, her basic appraisal of the worth of Yonge’s work was not. Raymond Chapman’s claim that Yonge made “no contribution to the direction of the novel” (Chapman 73) represents the nadir to which her reputation fell – surpassed only by Elaine Showalter’s utterly off-putting description of her as “the good grey Charlotte Yonge” (Showalter 137).

<2>Yet, as Susan Walton has recently argued in her refreshing study of Yonge’s writing, readers who do make their way past this critical opprobrium will be pleasantly surprised to discover how “lively” and “animated” her work is (Walton 13). Yonge has been revisited, along with other women writers of her period, by critics more willing to read her work on its own terms, to engage with her religious worldview, and to consider the complexities of her Tractarian, conservative gender politics, rather than dismissing them as straightforwardly antifeminist. Careful work by Gavin Budge, Tamara S. Wagner, Susan Colón and Talia Schaffer, among others, has opened up new ways of exploring Yonge’s wide-ranging fictional output, and her hugely popular “family chronicles” (Yonge, *Daisy Chain* v) are increasingly likely to be mentioned alongside the major works of nineteenth-century literature.

<3>In this essay, I will argue that far from standing outside the novelistic tradition, Yonge’s work is centrally concerned with novel reading and novel writing. Yonge’s reputation for reactionary conservatism, as well as her long-lasting popularity with younger readers, have in my opinion led critics to overlook the self-consciousness and subtlety of her engagement with the form of the novel, and with novel reading as an ethical practice. There prevails a tendency to read Yonge’s work only for its religious or didactic qualities, but far from representing a

formal dead-end, as critics such as Chapman have implied, Yonge stands squarely in the tradition of bestselling women writers whose work engages with that of their forerunners and can be seen to influence that of their successors. I will offer a reading of her 1853 novel *The Heir of Redclyffe*, the breakthrough bestseller which established her reputation and popularity, as an experimental, generically hybrid work, which potently combines the realist and gothic novelistic traditions, in order to create a newly Christianised form of domestic gothic.

<4>*The Heir of Redclyffe* provides a crucial bridge between the Gothic novels of the Romantic period and the Post-Romantic Medievalism and Pre-Raphaelitism of the mid-Victorian era. William Morris and Edward Burne-Jones were avid readers and admirers of *The Heir of Redclyffe* (Colby 194), and its tremendous commercial success (Dennis vii) is a testament to the potency with which Yonge blends literary tropes and generic conventions. Moreover, far from being an exception in Yonge's own oeuvre, I will argue that it points the way to the style she was to perfect in late, great family chronicles such as *The Pillars of the House* (1873), as well as indicating the latent Gothicism of domestic realism which was drawn out in the 'sensation' craze of the 1860s, traces of which can be seen in Yonge's own novels of the period.[\(1\)](#)

<5>In making this argument, I am influenced by the work of Gavin Budge, who has explored Yonge's "typological realism" and the challenge it poses to traditional definitions of formal realism (Budge, 'Realism and Typology', 203), and Tamara Wagner, who has pointed out that in *The Heir of Redclyffe*, Yonge "contributed centrally to a domestication of the Gothic" (Wagner, 'Stretching' 217). Building on their persuasive readings, which, taken together, cast Yonge as an innovator in both the realist and the Gothic traditions, I would like to pursue Karen Bourrier's suggestion that "*The Heir of Redclyffe's* awareness of its own genre [...] deflates the conventions of romance, making them an acceptable part of Yonge's domestic realism" (Bourrier 126). Whilst exploring this 'deflation', I will also suggest that Yonge destabilises domestic realism itself, confronting her readers with the very plot-lines they had been invited to dismiss as improbable, and leading us to acquiesce in judgements which the novel's 'realist' characters had decreed to be improbable, or even 'novelistic'. This instability is made a source of readerly pleasure rather than anxiety, as it gives way to a reformed (and re-formed) generic stability at its conclusion: having met our (perhaps guilty) desire for a vicarious escape from the domestic, through an extended excursion into the realm of the Gothic, the novel finally returns us to the domestic realism with which we began, now inflected with a Christianised Gothic glamour. Despite the ambivalence the novel sometimes displays and engenders about novel reading and novel writing, *The Heir of Redclyffe* finally justifies its own form, and, by extension, our reading experience.

<6>The novel's plot is structured around the opposition between the two Morville cousins, Guy and Philip, both orphans and nephews of Mrs Edmonstone, who struggle for a place in her

home, as the family feud is unwittingly re-ignited by the unconsciously jealous Philip. His attempts to displace Guy from the Edmonstone family and thwart his love for the younger Edmonstone sister, Amy (whilst himself contracting a secret engagement to the elder sister, Laura), are laid to rest only by Guy's heroic self-sacrifice in nursing Philip through a near-fatal fever at the cost of his own life. The narrative device of the cousins' (ultimately reconciled) feud also enables Yonge to dramatise different modes of novel-reading and writing, as the two cousins struggle for control of the narrative and its interpretation. Guy's arrival injects a thrilling dose of the Gothic into the novel's domestic realism, the doomed heir of Redclyffe who has grown up in a gloomy castle, haunted by the misdeeds of his ancestors, strolling into the Edmonstones' comfortable sitting room and introducing the Dickens-reading Amy to the delights of *Sintram* and *Thalaba*. In his interaction with the Edmonstone family, a subtle conflict between the realistic and the romantic, the Gothic and the domestic, is staged. Simple opposition between the two modes of reading and writing thickens, as Philip comes to personify not only a debased and excessively materialist form of realism, but also an inappropriate desire for the drama of Gothic, while the reader's own pre-empted desire for excitement beyond the scope of the domestic is channelled into Guy's heroised version of Christianised Gothic.

<7>At the novel's opening, however, its genre appears both stable and secure, as we find ourselves in the drawing room of the Edmonstones' family home, Hollywell House. This, we are told, "was one of the favoured apartments, where a peculiar air of home seems to reside" (1). The slippage from past to present tense implies an immediacy of setting, a situation which the reader is likely to identify with their own: in such a setting, it is no wonder that Philip's pretensions to melodrama appear risible. The imminent arrival of their cousin Guy prompts discussion of the ancient family feud, but the subject appears wholly out of place: Philip's claim that "'since he and I are now the only representatives of the two branches of Morville, it shall not be my fault if the enmity is not forgotten'" is soon made the subject of Charles's mockery, and we are invited to giggle "uncontrollably" along with Amabel (4). The bored Charles's desire for the feud to be re-ignited, on the grounds that this would be "'more romantic and exciting'" (9), echoes the reader's own desire for a plot to be set in motion, and preferably a less prosaic one than this world of horticultural shows and landscape sketching seems to offer, but this desire is satirised by Charles himself as unrealistic. That it is his credulous little sister Charlotte who is led to believe in the feud, inspired by her reading "'in the history of Scotland'", encourages us to distance our own expectations from hers, especially as they are held up to ridicule:

'There was one man who made his enemy's children eat out of a pig-trough, and another who cut off his head.' 'His own?' 'No, his enemy's, and put it on the table, at

breakfast, with a piece of bread in its mouth.' 'Very well; whenever Sir Guy serves up Philip's head at breakfast, with a piece of bread in his mouth, let me know.' (12)

Although we have not yet met Guy, this eventuality is comically remote, and if we are not to expect a romantic villain, then we are also discouraged from expecting a virtuous paragon, by Charles's dismissal of the idea that Guy already loves Philip as beyond "'the bounds of probability [...] a fiction created either by papa's hopes or Philip's self-complacency'" (15).

<8>These are only the first in a long litany of Charles and Charlotte's references to what 'would happen' in a story or a book, and Charles's scepticism as to the likelihood of these things coming to pass clearly marks him out as both a realist character and a realist reader: it is no coincidence that he is the most avid novel-reader of the family, as Karen Bourrier has pointed out (Bourrier 125). Charles goes so far as to speculate about how he himself would be represented in a novel or a play, jokingly referring to the tradition of the sainted invalid, in clear and humorous contrast to his own flawed and complex personality (265-6). This delineation of a character or situation as 'realistic', through their contrast with fictional convention, brings to mind George Levine's suggestion that realist writers "self-consciously dismiss previous conventions of representation", as part of what he calls "a self-conscious effort [...] to make literature appear to be describing directly not some other language but reality itself" (Levine 8).

<10>Levine might seem an odd figure to cite here, since Gavin Budge has amply demonstrated the problems that Levine's delineation of realism holds in the case of Yonge's work (Budge, 'Realism and Typology' 194-6), but it seems to me peculiarly fitting that Charles's early characterisation so closely correlates to Levine's model, because it is a technique that Yonge subtly destabilises throughout the course of the novel. As the very plot twists which Charles satirically forecasts come to pass, and Charles's understanding of "the bounds of probability" are challenged and then transformed through his exposure to Guy's extraordinary goodness, the reader is drawn into an extremely complicated engagement with the question of what a 'realistic' perspective might be, and how reading might inflect 'real life'.

<11>Initially, at least, Guy's eruption onto the Hollywell scene appears to gratify Charles's (perhaps improper) longings for what "'would be more romantic and exciting'" (9). At the level of plot, domestic realism appears to give way to Gothicism, as the family feud between the two branches of the house of Morville is re-animated by Guy's inheritance of Redclyffe and his arrival at Hollywell.⁽²⁾ Moreover, Guy's characterisation brings to the novel many of the features Robert Miles lists as "generic pointers" in Gothic novels of the 1790's (Miles 41). Guy is quickly revealed to possess a castle that is said to be haunted (5), an ancestor who had a hand in the murder of Thomas à Becket (5), and a horse named after the hero of Scott's *Lay of the Last Minstrel* (24).⁽³⁾ By the time we see Redclyffe itself, with its gloomy courtyard and perilous

rocky coast, or accompany Guy and Amy on their honeymoon to the Alps, we are thoroughly primed to accept the Gothicism of Guy's characterisation.

<12>In case we miss any of these hints, Guy's taste in reading makes his generic affiliations very clear: he is "very ignorant of modern books" (23), but is devoted to de la Motte Fouqué's romance *Sintram*,⁽⁴⁾ Southey's *Thalaba*, and the *Morte d'Arthur*, "[t]he depth, the mystery, the allegory" of which he has to defend from Philip's disapproval of "the strange mixture of religion and romance" (117). Philip's sneering scepticism about the ghost that is said to haunt Redclyffe, in contrast to Amy's sympathetic credulity, elicits a response that reminds the reader of Guy's inherited claim to Byronic volatility: "his eyes seemed to grow dark in the middle, and to sparkle with fire [...] conveying a tremendous force of suppressed passion" (52). Moreover, while Guy goes on to deny a literal belief in the existence of the ghost, his sense of inherited guilt does amount to a belief in a "curse" (55), which he likens to that of *Sintram*.

<13>Yet if Guy is shown to be a romantic figure straying into a realist world, and trailing Gothicism in his wake, "too deep and sensitive not to find more pain than pleasure in commonplace society" (131), the opposition between his characterisation and Philip's is far from being a straightforward juxtaposition of the romantic and the realist. It is Philip who holds himself above everyday pleasures, and Guy who defends them. When Laura relays Philip's disapproval of the foolish conversation and laughter of Charles's visitors, Guy remarks that "Nonsense must be an excellent thing if it makes people so happy" (21-2), and it turns out to be Philip who holds novels in contempt.

<14>Yonge's assertion in a letter that she "meant [Philip] to be what stupid people might take for a perfect hero" (*Letters*, September 27th 1851) surely refers to his claims to be above the prosaic realities which surround him, and, especially, above the "cheap rubbish" which Charles reads. The characters' debate regarding novel reading centres on Dickens's *Dombey and Son*, published in 1847, rendering it strikingly relevant to readers in 1853: novels such as they themselves might read are being discussed, and since in order to encounter Philip's perspective, we must do so as novel readers, we are necessarily included in his disdain. It is likely to be a relief, then, to find novel reading defended by Amy, the character already associated with Guy's perspective, and soon to be his bride. Together, the couple form a pair of model readers, against whom Philip's perspective is continually defined.

<15>Philip's desire to see himself as above novel-reading turns out to be an aspect of his misplaced self-regard: just as his sacrifice of his career for his sisters is revealed to have been excessively dramatic, and even unnecessary (43-4), so his pretensions to understand the plot of his own story better than those around him prove to be unfounded. In terms which strongly recall those of *Northanger Abbey*'s Henry Tilney, he reproves Charlotte for her notions about the family feud: "You know, my little cousin, that I am a Christian, and we live in the nineteenth

century.' Charlotte felt as if annihilated at the aspect of her own folly" (69). In fact, just as Catherine Moreland's suspicions of the General's character, if not the terms in which she expresses them, turn out to be well-founded, so Charlotte is revealed to have read Philip's situation better than he has himself.(5)

<16>Ultimately, Philip is forced to recognise that his dislike of Guy sprang from "pride and secret envy" (397), and Charlotte's fears about the "deadly feud" (69) are realised in Guy's death, the direct result of his decision to nurse Philip through the illness he contracts as a result of his stubborn refusal to accompany Guy and Amy to Venice, instead of journeying through the fever-infested area ahead. Philip's animosity thus causes Guy's death – not through deliberate malice, nor any dramatic confrontation, but indirectly and prosaically, for Guy's inherited curse turns out to be a weak constitution, rather than a damned soul. In a manoeuvre that recalls Ann Radcliffe's innovation of the "explained supernatural" (Miles 46), Yonge is thus able to employ a Gothic plot-line in such a way that it can be accommodated by a novel that retains a basic allegiance to realist form.

<17>Philip's self-satisfaction in being above the novelistic, both in its realist and Gothic forms, causes him to overlook completely his own novelistic desires, for it is Philip whose improper desire for a sensational plot sets in motion the novel's most Gothic plot-line. Failing to recognise or to suppress his unacknowledged desire to see Guy as the villain of a Gothic novel, Philip convinces himself, and then Mr. Edmonstone, that Guy is a dissolute aristocrat whose inherited degeneracy will have its way. Specifically, he accuses Guy of gambling against his expectations, and succeeds in having him banished from Hollywell and temporarily stymieing his engagement to Amy. Despite his lofty dismissal of Charlotte's Gothic fears, Philip himself ends up playing the role of the Gothic patriarch, disrupting the union of the virtuous lovers, and causing the scene of the story to shift from the cosy domestic space it has hitherto occupied to the gloomy castle of Redclyffe.

<18>In provoking Guy's inherited temper, he also propels the story towards the Gothic, as we witness the first outbreak of the rage Guy has been said to suppress many times before:

[...] his face a burning, glowing red, the features almost convulsed, the large veins in the forehead and temple swollen with the blood that rushed through them; and if ever his eyes flashed with the dark lightning of Sir Hugh's, it was then [...] on he hurried, fast, faster, conscious alone of the wild, furious tumult of rage and indignation against the maligner of his innocence [...] Never had Morville of the whole line felt more deadly fierceness than held sway over him, as he contemplated his revenge, looked forward with a dire complacency to the punishment he would wreak [...] He devised its execution, planned his sudden journey, saw himself bursting in on Philip early next morning, summoning him to answer for his falsehoods. (173-5)

However, the violence that is envisaged here in the form of a duel with Philip is displaced onto Guy's struggle with himself, in which he triumphs against his own worst nature through prayer. Guy's success in taming his rage in this scene constitutes a containment of the Gothic that amounts to its reformation: Guy is a hero of Gothic passions, but one who can re-direct them into truly Christian heroism. The reader's desire for an outbreak of something "romantic and exciting" has been met in the vigorous and dramatic description of his inner struggle, but Guy counters his own Gothic rage with deliberately prosaic reasoning, expressed in the understated language of realism. His "furious tumult" and "dire complacency" at the thought of "the punishment he would wreak" is replaced by the reflection that "[Philip] was, of course, under a mistake, had acted, not perhaps kindly, but as he thought, rightly and judiciously, in making his suspicions known" (176). The danger of capitulation to the Gothic side of his character is made explicit, when the narrator later comments upon Guy's decision to avoid reading Byron: "who could have told where the mastery might have been in the period of fearful conflict with his passions, if he had been feeding his imagination with the contemplation of revenge, dark hatred, and malice, and identifying himself with Byron's brooding and lowering heroes?" (311) The question is an implicit reproach to any readers who have longed for the release of Guy's passions or the eruption of violence into the plot. Guy's association with the Gothic might have derailed the novel's plot and his own soteriological trajectory, had it not been properly resisted and contained.

<19>Yet the Gothic is never truly banished from the text, but rather displaced and redeemed. The Gothic energy that Guy has suppressed finds its outlet in the dramatic shipwreck a few chapters later. Catherine Wells-Cole has suggested that "[w]ater is the dominant metaphor for Guy's '[i]nnate, distinctively male energy'" (Wells-Cole 74, quoting Sussman 10); here, the wildness once attributed to Guy is displaced onto the sea itself, with its "fearful swell" and "waves [that] thundered, bursting on the cliff" (235). Guy is thus associated with drama and passion, but at a remove, while his sense of an inherited curse is preserved, but re-imagined in Christian terms. Just before his marriage with Amy, Guy expresses the consciousness of his own generic inheritance, but is able to put such potentially morbid musings to salutary spiritual use: "It was such a check as he might have wished for, to look at that grim old castle, recollect who he was, and think of the frail tenure of all earthly joy, especially for one of the house of Morville" (290).

<20>By the time of his death, it seems reasonable to claim that Guy has transcended novelistic representation, and can no longer be contained by even so generically flexible a novel as this one. He is said to be best captured in the picture in which he is represented as Sir Galahad, and Amy's recognition that "Guy's was a face to be better represented by being somewhat idealized, than by copying merely the material form of the features" (389) can be taken as Yonge's comment on novelistic representation. Charles's claim that the account he was given of

Guy's character was not "within the bounds of probability" (15) has long since given way to full belief in his extraordinary virtue: "I knew it would come out that he had only been so much better than other people that nobody could believe it" (260). Karen Bourrier's suggestion that "The novel's affective trajectory [...] is best represented by Charles" (Bourrier 120) is fully borne out by the novel's final scene, in which Charles effectively explains how Guy's example has affected him, explaining that "his leading, unconscious as it was, brought out the stifled good in me" (462).

<21>The implicit contrast between Guy's sensitively offered and practical assistance and Philip's tactless and frequently harmful efforts, made explicit in Charles's statement that, "If it had not been for Guy, [Philip's] fashion of goodness would have made me into an extract of gall and wormwood" (458), deflates Philip's presumption to be the hero of the story. In the end, his unacknowledged desire to supplant Guy is punished through Guy's supplanting him in the way that matters most to him, in his influence over the Edmonstone family. This is captured in the decline of Philip's influence over their reading: Charles accuses Philip of being "disappointed" (112) when he finds them reading *Butler's Analogy* rather than the novel he had expected, clearly at Guy's suggestion rather than his. In his final conversation about literature with Guy and Amy, after their marriage, he is so thoroughly on the back foot that he ends up defending Byron – whom he himself had warned Guy against (311).

<22>Just as Philip's loss of authority as a reader is matched by Guy and Amy's developing readerly confidence and seriousness, his trajectory as a novelistic character is a mirror-image of Guy's. Where Guy finally transcends novelistic representation, Philip finally realises that he has reduced himself to acting out what is repeatedly described as a conventional novelistic plot-line: that of the secret engagement. Philip's justification for concealment was that "his poverty would be the sole ground of objection" (93), but in fact, we are shown that he resists submitting to Laura's parents' judgement because he wishes to retain his authoritative position in relation to them: "secrecy was the only way of preserving his intercourse with her on the same footing, and exerting his influence over the family." (93). To appear before them as a suitor, at a material disadvantage, is to be reduced to a less exalted level, and, by implication, to the level of the novelistic. Charles declares that Philip would never propose (when we know he has already done so), not because he would be certain to be refused, but because: "He is just the man to plume himself on making his judgment conquer his inclination, setting novels at defiance. How magnanimously he would resolve to stifle a hopeless attachment!" (113) It is Philip's desire to feel himself to be "setting novels at defiance" which leads him so widely astray, for in holding himself above social convention, as realist novels represent it, he does not recognise the falsity of a position which, as it transpires, is held in conventional scorn for good reason.

<23>Interestingly, although Charles voices the traditional view that Laura will not have any romantic ideas about Philip because “[she] is very innocent of novels” (114), a statement which proceeds from the assumption that novels are at the root of feminine foolishness, the narrator steps in to voice the opposite view. It is Laura’s ignorance of novels which renders her so vulnerable to Philip’s manipulation: “she had no experience, not even in novels; she did not know what she had done” (94). We are subsequently told that Laura “always had a dread of tête-à-têtes, and conversations over novels” (135), and, lest this hint escape us, it is repeated by Amy, the most reliable of the novel’s readers, when she learns of Laura’s behaviour:

The only possible satisfaction [for Amy] was in casting as much of the blame on him as possible. ‘You know he would never let her read novels; and I do believe that was the reason she did not understand what it meant.’ ‘I think there is a good deal in that,’ said Guy, laughing, ‘though Charles would say it is a very novel excuse for a young lady falling imprudently in love.’ (331)

This amounts to a robust defence of both novel-writing and novel-reading as a means to learn about social and romantic conventions, and to acquire a critical perspective on an otherwise all-controlling male judgement.⁽⁶⁾ Implicitly, Yonge positions herself as part of a tradition of female novelists, defending their craft from bullying male detractors, here personified by the relentlessly snobbish Philip.⁽⁷⁾ Although Yonge displayed ambivalence about the propriety of novel-writing as a profession, giving away the profits of her novels to charitable causes (*Chaplet* 183), and staving off any accusation of total absorption in novel-writing by writing fiction, history and religious works simultaneously, a page of each in turn (Hayter 12), she defends novel-reading as a practice by associating it with Amy, rather than Laura, and its condemnation with Philip.

<24>Yet there is also an implicit denigration of the novel, in the fact that Philip is punished for his self-conceit by being reduced, in his own eyes and in that of other characters, to the level of the “novelish” (350). Where Guy and Amy read their own story in the light of *Sintram* and *Verena*, Philip and Laura are cut down to size by Charles’s deceptively approving remark: “‘Made for each other all along. One could not see them without feeling it was the first chapter of a novel.’” (425) It seems a cruel irony, rather than a mercy, that in fact Mr. Edmonstone’s consent is easily obtained after the humiliating revelation, for “[h]e was not so much displeased with Laura; in fact, he thought all young ladies always ready to be fallen in love with” (350), and is soon “well pleased [...] that they might look to having a wedding in the family; it had been a very long attachment, constancy as good as a story” (425). Philip’s desire to make Mr. Edmonstone play the part of the Gothic patriarch who would cruelly refuse the virtuous but penniless young lover is completely thwarted, since he is not only now an eligible prospect, through having inherited Guy’s estate, but the clear implication is that he would have been

kindly treated in any case had he only appealed to the prosaic Mr. Edmonstone, whose judgement he despised as being beneath him. Whereas Guy's true superiority of character appears to put him above the "commonplace" (131), a superiority which is only confirmed by his efforts to strive against this tendency, seeking to enjoy others' pleasure as "the best [thing] there is on earth" (109), Philip has to accept that he has been mistaken in thinking he was above the novelistic. In the end, he is only too grateful to end up "'marrying just like a good hero in a book'", although he is too remorseful to live "'very happy ever after!'" as Charlotte fears he will (416).

<25>Philip's misplaced self-dramatisation and improper desire for a Gothic plot is well captured, if not quite understood, by Charlotte, who fears that he will disrupt Guy and Amy's wedding, "'like in a book'", an idea that is satirically corroborated by Charles; "'As if he must act Ogre [...] and forbid the banns, entirely for Amy's sake, and as the greatest kindness to her'" (299). Yet if these pretensions to the Gothic are shown to be degraded and ridiculous, the kind of 'realist' perspective that might be thought its counterbalance is also rejected. Philip's sister, Margaret Henley, a thoroughly modern woman who keeps up with all the latest ideas through "the book club over which she presided" (393), tries to read Philip's story in so prosaic a 'realist' light that she distorts it completely. I would suggest that she represents the kind of novel-reader who rejects the ideal as unbelievable, and that through her wholly incorrect interpretation of events – for example, her belief that Philip must desire his inheritance (394), and that his vehement admiration for Amy must indicate that he is in love with her (397) – we are alienated from this perspective. More persuasive is Charles's 'realist' reading, by which Philip's repentance cannot be expected to last:

'I have no doubt that he was thoroughly cut up, and I could even go the length of believing that distress of mind helped to bring on the relapse; but [...] as to his breaking his heart after the first ten minutes at finding himself what he has all his life desired to be, in a situation where the full influence of his talents may be felt [...] no one but silly little Amy would ever dream of.' (400)

Although far less offensive to the reader, and perhaps chiming with our own desire to think the worst of the aggravating Philip, this interpretation of the likely course of events is fundamentally similar to Margaret's, in that it proceeds from the assumption that material considerations will ultimately trump spiritual ones, and that so ordinary a man as Philip will have 'ordinary' – which is to say worldly – motivations. In fact, Amy's reading of Philip's feelings turn out to be correct, her belief "'that he will think the inheritance a great misfortune'" (400) wholly borne out by the text.

<26>I would suggest that Amy becomes from this point the novel's ideal reader, inheriting Guy's generous and even idealising interpretation of other people's characters, and able to

complete the process Guy began of redeeming Redclyffe's Gothicism. When Philip flies from one extreme to the other, reacting against his experiences in his sister's house by shutting himself up in Redclyffe, it is Amy who draws him back from the brink of madness by deflating his Gothic speech with everyday politeness. She responds to his accusation that she has "come to heap more coals on [his] head" with the simple assurance that she is "sorry to find [him] so poorly" (440). Able to reduce melodramatic and self-destructive repentance to the level of 'poorliness', Amy can yet resist the temptation to diminish the spiritual significance of Philip's repentance, able to bring threatening imaginative fancies down to earth without diminishing the importance of the truly unearthly. Able to appreciate the fact that Guy is "better represented by being somewhat idealized", and remembering him "as one more belonging to heaven than to earth" (389), Amy herself does not move beyond the scope of the domestic realist novel, for she is fully contented in her "own dear home [...] very happy, for [Guy] is, and all I have is made bright and precious by him" (462). A truly Christian perspective can reconcile the ideal with the real, Yonge clearly shows us, so that although we are left in the realist domestic setting with which we began, it is irradiated by the glamour Guy has left behind him, for those who truly appreciated him – a perfect literary typology for the irradiation of the Christian's reality by the gospels.

<27>In the last analysis, Yonge is able to 'Christianise' the Gothic and romanticise the real through Christian allegory. By making Guy's life, and especially his death, an allegory for Christ's example and sacrifice, her plot-line cannot be accused of improbability, and is fitted to a fundamentally 'realist' novel, yet by re-telling the Christian story through a Gothic lens, she is able to warn against the excessive materialism of realist fiction, and the dangerous habits of incredulity it can foster. J. Russell Perkins's argument that *The Heir of Redclyffe* is best read as a "theological romance" (Perkin 78) rightly draws our attention to the strong religious scaffolding which ultimately underpins the novel's experiments with generic convention and novelistic plot. Yet recognition of the strength and seriousness of this underlying structure should not obscure Yonge's playful, knowing engagement with the reader's expectations and desires along the way, which renders the novel so readable, and explains why it was not merely well thought of, but best-selling.

<28>Yonge subsequently became most famous for her family sagas, perhaps partly because of the sheer number she wrote, and partly because they appealed to a niche audience of girls and young women who remained loyal to her, after the wider audience she had reached with *The Heir of Redclyffe* had turned to other authors and genres. Yet if the seeds of great family sagas such as *The Daisy Chain* (1856) and *The Pillars of the House* (1873) can be seen in *The Heir of Redclyffe*, in its lively dialogue, subtle characterisation and vividly detailed portrayal of domestic space and activities, the novel does not tend unilaterally in that direction. The generic departures of sensation writers of the 1860s, who brought traditionally Gothic motifs into

domestic spaces, are prefigured in *The Heir's* far more earnest, but also perhaps more self-conscious, genre-bending. Although the novel is structurally underpinned by a strong moral schema, Yonge indulges readers' desires along the way: the desire for excitement, for escape from the domestic, for passion and even violence are met, and skilfully re-channelled into a typological plot-line, the moral fitness of which is irradiated with romance.

<29>Over the course of her career, Yonge was to grow more mistrustful of such indulgence of readers' desires. Typology became far more deeply embedded, realism more thorough-going and unrelenting, and the sacrificial conclusion less glamorous and more subdued in later novels such as *The Pillars of the House*.⁽⁸⁾ I would suggest that this evolving approach to genre and plotting explains why, although Yonge was always commercially successful and had a secure readership, she did not repeat the enormous success of *The Heir of Redclyffe*. Perhaps it is this hindsight as to the direction taken in Yonge's later work which has distracted critical attention away from the playfulness and experimentalism of this early novel, which in its self-conscious engagement with the form of the novel and the act of novel-reading, also offers a sophisticated response to its own place in the novel-writing market and the novelistic tradition. When read in this light, it seems ironic that Yonge should have been accused by Q.D. Leavis of writing novels in which "no one can enjoy anything without feeling guilty" (Leavis 155), for in *The Heir of Redclyffe*, Yonge offers her readers the ultimate guiltless pleasure. She allows us an excursion into the Gothic that is rendered blameless by its reformation in the hands of Guy Morville, and a version of domestic realism which basks in his reflected glamour.

Endnotes

(1) See Tamara S. Wagner's discussion of Yonge's 1865 novel, *The Clever Woman of the Family* in 'Led Astray to be Newly Framed: Redeeming Sensational Fraud in Charlotte Yonge's Epistolary Experiments', *Women's Writing* 17.2 (August 2010), 305-323, and "'Stretching 'The Sensational Sixties': Genre and Sensationalism in Domestic Fiction by Victorian Women Writers", *Victorian Studies* 35.1 (Spring 2009), 211-228.^(△)

(2) Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), often considered to be the first Gothic novel, turns on the disinheritance of the rightful heir to the castle; the feud that originated with Hugo Morville's disinheritance of Philip's ancestor can therefore be seen as a quintessentially Gothic plotline.^(△)

(3) Although I have found no evidence to suggest that Yonge chose the name for this reason, 'Redclyffe' is such a close homophone to 'Radcliffe' that the title itself might be said to carry the suggestion of Gothic literary inheritance. Moreover, Guy's ancestral links to historic – and

specifically Stewart - royalty, and his well-meaning naïveté in the face of the complexities of his situation, recall characteristics of Walter Scott's heroes. (▲)

(4) Sintram is the hero of the German Romantic poet's Friedrich de la Motte Fouqué's *Sintram and His Companions*, first published in Germany in 1814 and in translation in England in 1820. The poem was much admired in Tractarian circles, and Yonge wrote an introduction to a new edition in 1896, in which she praised its "elevation of sentiment and the earnest faith pervading all". Her claim that, "In Sintram, we cannot but see that Fouqué's thought was that the grosser human nature is unable to appreciate what is absolutely pure and unearthly", suggests why she wanted to associate Guy particularly strongly with this poem (*Sintram and his Companions and Undine*, Friedrich de la Motte Fouqué, introduction by Charlotte M. Yonge (London: Gardner, Darton & Co., 1896), p.xvii.) For a more detailed discussion of the influence of *Sintram* on *The Heir of Redclyffe*, see Barbara Dennis's Introduction to the Oxford World's Classics edition of the novel (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997) xi-xii. (▲)

(5) Philip's words closely echo those of Henry Tilney in Chapter 24 of *Northanger Abbey*: "Remember the country and the age in which we live. Remember that we are English, that we are Christians. Consult your own understanding, your own sense of the probable, your own observation of what is passing around you." (Austen, 186). Although Philip is clearly a much darker re-working of Henry's characterisation, and his attempts to 'educate' his cousin come to seem far less benevolent, I would suggest that Yonge is working in the tradition of Austen when she destabilises these claims to what is self-evidently 'probable', without straightforwardly vindicating the Gothic. For a discussion of Austen's engagement with the idea of the 'probable', see Mark Loveridge, "Northanger Abbey; Or, Nature and Probability", *Nineteenth Century Literature* 46.1 (June 1991), 1-29. Yonge's connection with Jane Austen extends far beyond this specific resonance: Yonge was a great admirer of Jane Austen (Sturrock 16, Hayter 7-8) and made sophisticated use of her work; see June Sturrock, 'Emma in the 1860s: Austen, Yonge, Oliphant, and Eliot', *Women's Writing* 17.2 (August 2013), pp.324-342. (▲)

(6) Barbara Dennis has argued persuasively that Philip's reasoning, which justifies a morally dubious course of action through appealing to the ultimate greater good (which stands in clear contrast to Guy's unwillingness to break a promise, even when it would enable him to clear his name with Mr. Edmonstone and thus avoid injustice and misunderstanding in the long term), demonstrates his utilitarian philosophy (Dennis xviii). For a more detailed discussion of Philip and Laura's secret engagement, which makes the argument that Yonge is criticising arrogant masculine intellectual presumption, see Gavin Budge, *Charlotte M. Yonge: Religion, Feminism and Realism in the Victorian Novel* (178). (▲)

(7) For example, the narrator's defence of novel-reading and novel-writing in Chapter 5 of *Northanger Abbey*, pp.36-7. (▲)

(8) Susan E. Colón's work on the typology of *The Pillars of the House* ("Realism and Reserve: Charlotte Yonge and Tractarian Aesthetics", *Women's Writing* 17.2 (August 2010), pp.221-235) finely illustrates the subtlety and restraint of this novel, the darkness and difficulty of which, I would suggest, stands in contrast to the exuberance of *The Heir*.(△)

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