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From Realism to Reserve: Undergraduate Essays on Charlotte Mary Yonge's The Heir of Redclyffe

The Parallel Between Guy Morville and Jesus Christ in *The Heir of Redclyffe*

JOSHUA KWOK

Amidst the backdrop of the Oxford Movement, Charlotte Yonge's publication of *The Heir of Redclyffe* was met with success, propelling her to fame. Yet, the ending was regarded unpleasant and considered "widely unpopular" (Colón 30). Why did Yonge decide to end the life of the loveable and morally upright Guy Morville? Why did she spend nine seemingly unnecessary chapters trying to justify and resolve the character of Philip? I argue that, in order to understand the reason for these choices, it is important to realize the rhetorical situations which *The Heir of Redclyffe* was written in. In particular, I will be examining how Yonge's involvement in the Oxford Movement influenced the way she wrote the character of Guy Morville and portrayed Guy as a Christlike figure. Yonge parallels Guy and Jesus Christ to inform and persuade her readers, who may be Christians, of Tractarian thinking and principles. To begin understanding the intentions of Yonge's story in *The Heir of Redclyffe*, we must understand the key goals of the Oxford Movement, otherwise known as Tractarianism, and briefly of Yonge's religious background.

Charlotte Yonge grew up in a pious family and dedicated her life to Christ through the guidance of John Keble; a saint-like figure, Yonge described him as her "Master [...] in every way." ("Charlotte Mary Yonge."). Their relationship would be an important factor in Yonge's involvement with the Oxford Movement as John Keble was a leading figure of the movement; he wrote a handful of the tracts in *90 Tracts for the Times* as well as other works like *The Christian Year* (Ramsay 333) that would become influential to the Oxford Movement. These tracts that began in 1833 were to give the movement its name Tractarianism and focused on reviving the authority of the Church and dogmatic teachings of the early church; each tract addressed different topics about what the Church should look like and what it should teach (331-333). Therefore, because of Yonge's close friendship with Keble, a man leading the Tractarian movement, she became a leading novelist for the movement (Colón 31). Upon establishing the connection between Yonge and Tractarianism, Yonge's Tractarian thinking becomes apparent in the way *The Heir of Redclyffe* was written in.

The Heir of Redclyffe highlights a prominent motif of temptation that surrounds Guy Morville, a personified "hereditary demon" (Yonge 197) that has haunted him and the Morville family for generations. For Guy, the temptation that grieves him the most is to act out in anger and emotion. The first hint of this temptation is when Guy and Philip discuss Guy's educational background, resulting in Guy's irritation: "Guy, without even stopping to take off his great coat, ran at once upstairs, and the next movement the door of his room was shut with a bang that shook the house, and made them all start and look at Philip for explanation" (40). Yet, despite his irritation, nearly giving in to complete anger, Guy confesses to Mrs Edmonstone that he had been "so foolish as to be irritated at Philip's manner, when he was giving [...] good advice, and [was] very sorry" (41). Guy is constantly aware of this urge and humbles himself in such situations. He even resorts to physical incentives to prevent himself from acting out in his temptation: Guy tells Mrs Edmonstone, "It is a trick of mine to bite my lip when I am vexed. It seems to help to keep down words" (41). This way of addressing this temptation is firmly rooted in his knowledge from the Bible and from Jesus Christ; the book of Proverbs in the Bible talks about the words used against others, in that "A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger" (Prov. 15:1) and so we can see how Guy's background in Christianity influences his way of life.

Similarly, Yonge also references another passage from the Bible in another instance when Guy is tempted again. Guy receives news of the dissolved engagement between him and Amy and is initially tempted to bring about a "long course of enmity" (Yonge 197) as he "contemplated his revenge" (196) towards Phillip, whose "long course of slander and ill-will" (196) caused this break-up. However, Guy overcomes this by remembering "greater wrongs" and looking to "the great Example," referring to Jesus (198). This motif parallels the biblical story of Jesus' forty days of temptation in the wilderness (Matt. 4:1-11) where Jesus leans on Scripture to reject Satan, as Satan unsuccessfully tempts Jesus into testing His divine nature. Guy attempts to be like Jesus, "the great Example" (Yonge 198) in two instances. The first instance is when Yonge describes Guy's thought process through Scripture. As Guy is struggling with his temptation, it can be inferred that God helps Guy emerge victorious when Yonge describes, "a still higher and holier power, made the setting sun bring to his mind, almost to his ear, the words, -- Let not the sun go down upon your wrath, Neither give place to the devil" (197). The latter part is a direct quotation from the book of Ephesians, "Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath: neither give place to the devil." (Eph. 4: 26-27). The second instance is when Guy repeats to himself a section of the Lord's Prayer that Jesus provided His disciples during the Passover meal (Matt. 6:9-15); Guy repeats, "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us" (Yonge 197). In both these moments, we see how Guy resists his "hereditary demon" (197) and, therefore, his temptation through leaning on Scripture, just as Jesus had resisted and overcame Satan in the same fashion. Gavin Budge makes a similar remark about this particular "typological [...] episode" in his article "Realism and Typology in Charlotte M. Yonge's *The Heir of Redclyffe*" where he notes that Yonge has "established this parallel between Guy and Christ" and she was "fairly discreet about employing it" (204-205).

Within the scope of this argument, we see how Yonge writes Guy into a Christlike figure in this parallel of temptation: just as Jesus quoted from Scripture and resisted the devil, Yonge drops subtle hints of Scripture that Guy is aware of and he resists his demon. Others, however, may make the argument that some readers will not be able to see how Yonge uses Scriptural references as a medium for portraying Guy's Christlike nature. In this regard, I concede that readers may miss these references, especially modern readers since they may not be as knowledgeable about the Bible as Victorian readers. If this were the case, then perhaps Yonge had intended to only allow certain readers to understand. I argue that Yonge intended to direct these references only to those who could understand it because of the doctrine of reserve.

The doctrine of reserve can be described as a rule where the "mysteries of faith should not be made public without considering the state of the hearers. Teaching must regard the disposition and the prior knowledge of the taught, not revealing too much to those not spiritually ready to receive it" (Chapman). This doctrine stems from the eightieth tract of the Oxford Movement which states that "JESUS CHRIST is now, and has been at all times, hiding Himself from us, but at the same time exceedingly desirous to communicate Himself" (Williams). Yonge regarded this doctrine in the same way: in her book *Musings over the "Christian Year" and "Lyra Innocentium"*, Yonge comments about how *Christian Year* gives the "first utterance" of "reverent reserve" (212) and how the poem "Fourth Sunday in Lent" exists "the germ of [Isaac Williams's tract "On Reserve in Communicating Religious Knowledge"]" (213). In it, she critiques the outspoken, those who, "in their burning zeal to proclaim the central truth of the Gospel, had obtruded it with little regard to the season of speaking," by comparing to those who act with "reverent reserve" (212). They are those who abstain from the "curious gaze" and "shrink from all irreverent display and analysis of either holy things or private feelings" (212). Yonge makes another point in that reserve is when the teachings of God are "withheld from the unbelieving ear, and reserved for the faithful few" (213). The way Yonge perceives this doctrine is reflected in *The Heir of Redclyffe*: Yonge does not explicitly say what her intentions are, making many subtle Scriptural references, and only those who have studied Scripture or, in Yonge's own words, are "faithful" (213), will be able to see through her veil of metaphors to her true intentions. The reserve is demonstrated well multiple times throughout the novel. For example, Mrs Edmonstone says, "Those who do such things are faint-hearted, and fail in trust in Him who fixed their station" (Yonge, *Heir*, 46); another is when Guy looks back to the "great Example" (198). In both examples, we see the capitalization of "Example" and "Him", but who these refer to is not explicitly stated. However, from the capitalization, it can be inferred that it is someone of importance and, in the context of the Tractarian movement and the prominent religion of the Victorian period, deduced that this refers to Jesus Christ. Therefore, Yonge's Tractarian intentions are directed to those of the faith, those who have studied Scriptures and are spiritually capable of figuring out her intentions with Guy's character.

Using the fact that Guy frequently looks back to Jesus and Scripture, Yonge may have tried to portray the way Christians should also look back to earlier teachings that were closer to the Apostles and the teachings of Jesus. In a society where the Latitudinarian, or the Liberal, way of approaching

Christianity preferred comprehensiveness of the religion over dogmas and doctrines, this was Yonge's way of showing and convincing her Christian readers the importance of Scriptural truths and firm doctrine in overcoming the devil's schemes against them.

Perhaps the best evidence for Guy's parallel to Jesus is the sacrifice of Guy Morville in saving Philip from death. In the Christian faith, it is believed that Jesus, who is the Son of God, died for humanity's sins and was risen from the dead three days later. As it is written in the Bible, "But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Rm. 5:8). This sacrificial act of Christ is replicated in *The Heir of Redclyffe* as Guy gave his life so that Philip may live through his fever. This comparison point is vital because of what happens to Philip after Guy dies. While Guy exemplifies the characteristics of Christ throughout the story – regarded by many as "gentlemanlike" (Yonge, *Heir*, 175) and most people enjoyed his company – Philip's self-righteousness and pride that eventually hurts Guy and his relationships paint him to be a dislikeable man from the reader's perspective. Philip's character changes drastically after learning of his sins towards Guy and asks for his forgiveness, which Guy responds, "That was done long ago. Even as you pardoned my fierce rage against you, which I trust is forgiven above. It has been repented!" (408). This influence of a Christlike figure changing one's life is what Yonge depicts in the last several chapters of the novel. In Susan Colón's "Realism and Parable in Charlotte Yonge's *The Heir of Redclyffe*", she argues that the dynamic between Guy and Philip is reflective of Jesus' parable of the Pharisee and the Publican in Luke 18 and Philip, in recognizing his own sin and self-righteous piety, realizes that he needed to humble himself like the publican (37). This is precisely what is seen in the subsequent chapters following Guy's death, as Philip does all that Guy had asked of him prior to his death with assisting the poor residents of Coombe Prior and, instead of continuing his attitude of self-righteousness, he is humbled. Yonge portrays this change to show that a Christian must not be like Philip initially, a character showing traits of "Pharisaism, or self-righteousness arising from scrupulous conformity to conventional morality" (36), but to be transformed to be Christlike and follow the example of Jesus. Thus, Yonge communicates that for Tractarian Christians, they should be looking to Jesus, who is the cornerstone of the Christian faith, for their faith and return to the teachings of Jesus. Using Philip as an example, Yonge also seems to suggest that even those who are not Christian or those who don't follow Tractarian views could also be changed by simply looking at Jesus.

When viewing through the lens of the Tractarian movement, the clever narrative of *The Heir of Redclyffe* becomes a medium in which Charlotte Yonge expresses her Tractarian views as a leading literary figure in the Oxford Movement. The questions regarding the purpose for the death of Guy and the redemptive arc of Philip is then answered; Yonge utilizes the doctrine of reserve by hiding the parallel of Jesus' death on the cross to redeem humanity behind the characters of Guy and Philip, as the former dies to bring about the redemption of the latter. This allegory of Guy Morville and Jesus Christ, as well as the story as a whole, serves as a function of the equation that details key concerns of the Tractarians, in particular the notion of looking back to early teachings of the church. Yonge is also able to effectively communicate these ideas to her Christian readers through her subtle references to Scripture, employing the doctrine of reserve. In the case for the broader and modern audience who

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may not have much of a Christian background, we can garner a sense of morality from this Victorian tale; there are good Samaritans out there and being one can change the course of another person's life, like Guy's grace for Philip who, even in his dying breaths, changed Philip's purpose for living. Though Philip's self-righteousness and pride are presented in the extreme, it also reveals to us that we, as readers, may sometimes be oblivious to our own faults and weaknesses in our lives. A character who was portrayed initially as the antagonist but who is then revealed to be the protagonist all along forces modern readers to reflect on their own lives and the way they live it out. Thus, this story offers more than just a persuasive piece on Tractarian Christian living for those who understand it, but a mirror that makes all readers deliberate on their morality and faults.

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