

The Charlotte Mary Yonge Fellowship

cmyf.org.uk

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

Temptation and Masculinity in Charlotte Yonge's *The Heir of Redclyffe*

CAITLYN CHAU

In Charlotte Yonge's *The Heir of Redclyffe*, the battle against temptation forms the thematic core of the novel. The most prominent of these battles is Sir Guy Morville's struggle with his temper, a hereditary trait that defines his family's legacy. Fearing its effects on his behavior, Guy wrestles with his temper with an emotional sensitivity and passion considered to be feminine under Victorian ideals of masculinity. This approach contrasts with the method of Guy's constant opponent, Philip, who rejects this emotionalism and embraces a more rational approach, aligning himself with the traditional image of the Victorian man. By placing Philip and Guy in constant conflict, Yonge pits these two depictions of masculinity against each other: a feminized version versus a traditional one. Ultimately, the feminine triumphs over the traditional. At first glance, this appears to defy Victorian gender ideals; however, a more thorough analysis of masculinity during this period reveals a more complicated scene. The simultaneous popularity of contrasting masculine ideals during the 1850s forms an ambiguous picture of manliness; thus, Yonge's appraisal of Guy's emotional engagement with temptation and subsequent condemnation of Philip's rational stoicism both defies and supports Victorian ideals of masculinity.

The construction of Victorian masculinity is based on a crucial distinction between manliness and maleness. Maleness is considered "the possession of innate potency or 'untutored energy'" (Sussman 25). Manliness is the management of maleness, defined as "a continuous process of maintaining a...balance characterized by regulation of this potentially destructive male energy" (Sussman 25). This process of maintenance forms the foundation of Victorian masculinity, as the latter becomes a question of how successfully one can regulate their innate male energy. Under this lens, Guy and Philip's struggles with temptation are actually their attempts to regulate their maleness. When Guy gives in to his temper after reading the gambling accusations against him, the aggressive emotions that consume him break down "all the barriers imposed on them by a long course of self-restraint" (Yonge 289). Philip's love for Laura tempts him into considering attending Guy and Amy's wedding; however, he refuses because his presence at an event that he vehemently opposes would threaten his

personal code of conduct (469). The natural impulses Guy and Philip work so hard to restrain are manifestations of their maleness and cause destructive behavior when left unchecked, consequently upsetting the balance that masculinity is so dependent on. Thus, an analysis of their approaches to temptation in the context of the Victorian definition of manliness, using examples of men both fictional and nonfictional during this period, allows an analysis of Guy and Philip's masculinity and their accordance with Victorian gender ideals.

Philip's rational approach to temptation aligns with the defining quality of manliness for early Victorians. In Thomas Carlyle's *Past and Present*, medieval monk Abbot Samson avoids the dangers of temptation by throwing himself into the productive work of the monastery (Sussman 26). Reviewers viewed Samson as "the exemplar of all that is 'manly'" (Seigel 212), suggesting that the heart of manliness was a repression and reserve that avoided "the female qualities of passivity, interiority, isolation" (Sussman 27-28). Carlyle describes the key to achieving this in *Sartor Resartus* where he uses clothing to "figure the need for a psychic armor to hold within the uncleanness of maleness" (Sussman 28). True manliness is achieved by an external system of restraint that enables the desired repression and reserve. Philip displays this external restraint in his dealings with temptation. He believes that the "moral force of principle is the only efficient pledge" (Yonge 263), which leads him to create a code of conduct that dictates his actions. In the aforementioned scene where he considers attending Guy's wedding, he quickly dismisses his initial temptation to go because "it was contrary to his principles" (Yonge 468). By staying consistent with a set of rules for his character and image, Philip can successfully repress any desires that don't align with his rules. This code of conduct is his psychic armor. As a result, Philip battles his temptations with a train of thought that follows a logical pathway, showing a calm reserve that aligns with traditional masculine ideals.

Guy, on the other hand, exhibits qualities that were rejected by Victorian masculinity in his battle with temptation. The romantic model of the ideal Victorian poet "valorized...emotive openness and imaginative inwardness" (Sussman 82). These are all based on emotionalism—tapping into and engaging with maleness rather than actively repressing it. Since the romantic model directly opposed the traditional model of the Victorian man, male Victorian poets "worried that they might in effect be feminizing themselves" (Sussman 82) because "man in the nineteenth century was still rational...women emotional" (Stearns 81). Guy shares these feminine qualities. After a criticism given by Philip, Guy's "heart and head throb with impatience," signaling the arrival of "an impulse of anger" (Yonge 327). Instead of repressing his Morville temper, he allows himself to feed into its energy before fighting to keep it down. He also spends a lot of time throughout the novel "in deep thought...his countenance stern with inward conflict" (198) and reflecting on the ills of his temper. In these long internal monologues, Guy shows the emotive openness of the Victorian poet. Thus, Guy's emotionalism in dealing with temptation rejects the traditional image of the Victorian man.

Yonge advocates for Guy's emotionalism, thus defying Victorian ideals of masculinity. When Guy confesses to Amy about the severity of his temper, Amy thinks that he is "much safer and better with such a quick temper...because [he] is always struggling and fighting with it, on the true religious ground, than a person more even tempered by nature" (Yonge 440). Guy's constant interaction with

his temper forges an emotional awareness of his own flaws and "prevents him from deceiving himself about his own perfection" (Colón 40), something that Philip's code of conduct prevents him from doing. Instead, his principles create a false sense of perfection and self-righteousness that ultimately lead to his downfall. After Guy dies, Philip's personality takes a turn and through constant repentance and confession, he suddenly demonstrates the type of emotive openness characteristic of Guy. Yonge essentially condemns Philip for his rational stoicism in favor of Guy's emotionalism. Since Philip's rationalism promotes traditional masculine ideals and Guy's emotionalism rejects them, Yonge also condemns traditional Victorian masculinity.

However, under the lens of Christian manliness, Yonge actually promotes Victorian masculine ideals. In the early to mid-19th century, Christian manliness advocated for qualities typically considered to be feminine, especially self-sacrifice and public displays of emotion (Davidoff and Hall 89). Christian manliness advocated for qualities typically considered to be feminine, especially self-sacrifice and public displays of emotion (Davidoff and Hall 89). Yonge in particular valued a type of manliness constructed by her own admiration of both the military and Christian missionaries. Her father, William Yonge, was a member of the Rifle Brigade, a regiment of the British military defined by its modern nature as gentleman-soldiers (Walton 57). By emphasizing brotherhood and sacrifice, the Brigade helped reshape the image of a soldier into an "acceptable knightly model suited to modernity" (27). Yonge's perception of men was thereby shaped by her father's military participation (57). She transferred her admiration of these knightly virtues onto Christian missionaries, viewing them as "the perfect combination of soldierly courage with abnegation of physical violence" (52). In Susan Walton's analysis of Yonge's portrayal of male missionary heroes, she outlines the foundation of Yonge's ideal heroic personality as "an amalgam of feminine sensitivity combined with masculine physical courage and practical adventuring" (173). Guy possesses these virtues of sensitivity and emotionalism that Yonge so appreciated in military men and missionaries. Amy makes the distinction that Guy's fight with temptation occurs "on the true religious ground" (Yonge 440) and in one of his struggles with his temper, Guy turns to God with such emotion that even his eyes fill with tears (292). He also demonstrates a capacity for self-sacrifice through his "readiness to lay down his life for his pompous cousin Philip" (Walton 179). The knightly model that Yonge admired appears in Guy's struggles with his temptation as well. By referring to his temper as a "temptor" that must be defeated, his struggle becomes the battle against evil that is typical of the stories of knights like Sintram or the Christian knights Yonge believed missionaries to be (Yonge 198). Guy is a shining example of Yonge's valued Christian manliness and an "incarnation of Yonge's ideal knightly men who battled with the forces of evil wherever they found them" (Walton 180). Her appraisal then becomes both a rejection and promotion of Victorian masculine ideals. She rejects the traditional image of Victorian men and promotes a different version of masculinity at the same time.

However, one could argue that Yonge still fully rejects Victorian masculinity, instead of only partially, because of the feminine qualities that underlie Christian manliness. Beginning in the mid-19th century, Muscular Christianity began to take hold. Based on an emphasis of athleticism, Muscular Christianity developed as a response to Christian manliness. One of the initial leaders of the

movement, Charles Kingsley, criticized Christian manliness for its embrace of feminine qualities in men (Newsome 207). Under this perspective, Christian manliness wasn't manly at all and thus, Guy's masculinity didn't align with any traditional Victorian gender ideals. However, Christian manliness did not actually embrace femininity as critics believed. There was still a clear distinction between "manly sensibility" and "effeminate sentimentalism" (Davidoff and Hall 112). Davidoff and Hall provide an example of this in William Marsh, a real citizen and member of the English middle class during the Victorian period. Marsh grew up with a feminine grace and tender sensitivity which he was taunted for. However, when he expressed this sensitivity in a religious context through his dedication to Christianity, he "was molded into an example of real manliness" (110). Christian manliness redefined feminine qualities by removing them from the female sphere and placing them in the male sphere—the rejection of femininity still remained. Thus, Christian manliness was still a prominent version of masculinity that remained in the sphere of the masculine, meaning Yonge promotes this masculinity with Guy. It is also worth noting that despite criticisms of Christian manliness, Guy's character had a positive reception. This suggests the impact of the aforementioned reshaping of the British soldier's image and the shift towards modern knightly valour—a shift which Walton argues is one of the reasons why Yonge's stories appealed to such a wide audience (27).

This strange paradox where Yonge both promotes and condemns Victorian masculinity works because of the self-identity crisis that the latter experienced throughout the nineteenth century. As Davidoff and Hall note, "early nineteenth-century masculine identity was fragile" (229). Victorian masculinity was a fluid ideal that evolved rather than remaining as a monolithic standard throughout the era. It was not "an essence but a plot, a condition whose achievement and whose maintenance forms a narrative over time" (Sussman 13). *The Heir of Redclyffe* was published in 1853, a period characterized by "shifting attitudes, structures, and ideologies" (Walton 2-3). The previously mentioned historical instances and movements, such as the modernization of the British soldier and the development of Muscular Christianity, all led to new models of Victorian masculinity. However, these models were not developed one after the other in a rigid, chronological sequence; instead, they developed simultaneously and managed to coexist because of masculinity's fragile and fluid nature. In that case, it's difficult to say that Yonge leans toward one side or the other because there were competing versions of masculinity that existed instead of one definite standard.

In an analysis of temptation and masculinity in *The Heir of Redclyffe*, the grey area around Victorian ideals of masculinity reveal the natural fluidity of manhood and its existence as a structure that evolves over time. As shown throughout this paper, the narrative of Victorian manhood is one filled with contradiction and conflict as Victorian men attempted to reconcile the always progressing societal attitudes toward gender and their need to maintain their positions of power. This complication reveals itself in Yonge's treatment of masculinity, creating a curious paradox that reflects the constant evolution of the Victorian man.

Chau, Caitlyn. "Temptation and Masculinity in Charlotte Yonge's *The Heir of Redclyffe*." *From Realism to Reserve: Undergraduate Essays on Charlotte Mary Yonge's The Heir of Redclyffe*, edited by Laura Griffith. Charlotte Mary Yonge Fellowship, 2020. cmf.org.uk

Works Cited

- Colón, Susan E. "Realism and Parable in Charlotte Yonge's *The Heir of Redclyffe*." *Journal of Narrative Theory*, vol. 40, no. 1, 2010, pp. 29-52
- Davidoff, Leonore, and Catherine Hall. *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780-1850*. University of Chicago Press, 1987.
- Newsome, David. *Godliness and Good Learning: Four Studies on a Victorian Ideal*. Murray, 1961.
- Siegel, Jules Paul. *Thomas Carlyle: The Critical Heritage*. Routledge, 1971.
- Stearns, Peter N. *Be A Man! Males in Modern Society*. Holmes & Meier Publishers, Inc. 1979.
- Sussman, Herbert. *Victorian Masculinities: Manhood and Masculine Poetics in Early Victorian Literature and Art*. Cambridge University Press, 1995.
- Walton, Susan, Dr. *Imagining Soldiers and Fathers in the Mid-Victorian Era: Charlotte Yonge's Models of Manliness*. Taylor & Francis Group, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/washington/detail.action?docID=495319>.
- Yonge, Charlotte M. *The Heir of Redclyffe*. London, John W. Parker, 1853.