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# Realism and Parable in Charlotte Yonge's *The Heir of Redclyffe*

Susan E. Colón

“[T]he parable of actual life led [. . .] into the higher truth.”

—Charlotte Yonge, *More Bywords*

Critics writing in the vein of the “ethical turn” in literary studies have fruitfully explored the ethics of reading, including how narratives construct ethical relationships with readers. Andrew Miller’s provocative and important *The Burdens of Perfection: On Ethics and Reading in Nineteenth-Century British Literature* uncovers the ways the realist novel’s exploration of epistemology and perspective serves an ethical aim. The Victorians saw ethical action as following from one’s perception and interpretation of people and situations, so the novel’s experiments in third-person and second-person perspectives contributed to the formation of ethical consciousness. In this view, the novel became a sort of therapy for the ethically problematic paralysis of the will that followed from the Victorian period’s generalized skepticism about what one can know of others, the world, and even oneself. The principal component of this therapy is perfectionism, or self-improvement by the imitation of an exemplary other. For Miller, Victorian novels are characteristically perlocutionary: “successful only if [they] prompt a response” (17).

Curiously, the criticism of the ethical turn has not yet addressed itself to the narrative subgenre of parable. Miller suggests that perfectionism, the

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Victorian drive for ethical self-improvement, entails not the reproduction of stable moral codes, but rather the confrontation of those who are under such codes with “a therapeutic awakening, their eyes and hearts unsealed, themselves unlaced from the convenient harness of rules made in the past and made by others” (98). Such a therapeutic awakening from conventional morality is, I contend, the signature achievement of parables. In fact, a brief consideration of the traits of parables—generally given as riddling paradox and reversal encompassed in a mundane realistic narrative (Champion 16)—reveals strong correspondences with Miller’s understanding of the ethics of reading. The unexpected reversals which are a salient feature of ancient and modern parables induce skepticism toward conventional paradigms of moral conduct and human nature. Parables are the ultimate perlocutionary literary form: their riddling quality demands interpretation, and their interpretation usually entails the reader’s sudden awareness of his or her own ethical limitations. The interpretation of the parable is made complete when the parable’s reader or hearer responds to the command to “go and do likewise.”<sup>1</sup> In other words, the basic ethical function that Miller ascribes to the Victorian *bildungsroman* is aptly and economically captured in the parable.

Parable-in-literature studies in the past have typically been undertheorized and dogged by misconceptions. In most cases, literary critics use the term “parable” quite loosely as a synonym for allegory, exemplary tale, or fable. In what follows, I take the biblical parable form as the model for a theory of the genre of parable that is both more specific and more encompassing than these casual usages: more specific because the parable’s defining feature is a particular ethical relationship with the reader, and more encompassing because, as I see it, this relationship can be established in genres that are quite unlike the brief fables, allegories, and exemplary tales with which parables are commonly associated. Specifically, I will argue that nineteenth-century realist novels, in spite of their length, verisimilitude, and multi-plot complexity, can be parables. In particular, I will examine the case of Charlotte M. Yonge’s hugely popular novel, *The Heir of Redclyffe* (1853). This novel is both a retelling of a biblical parable—Jesus’ parable of the Pharisee and the publican in Luke 18—and a modern parable in its own right. In fact, viewing the novel through the generic lens of parable resolves the most persistent problems critics have raised about this text, including the tension between didacticism and realism and the widely unpopular ending. To understand this novel, I argue,

we must grasp its indebtedness to the biblical model of the parable genre, and we must historicize Yonge's specifically Tractarian rendering of the parable of the Pharisee and the publican.

Charlotte Yonge (1823–1901) was the leading novelist of the Oxford Movement. Parishioner and friend of John Keble, Yonge viewed her prolific writing career as an “instrument for popularising Church views” (Dennis 125). Her early success *The Heir of Redclyffe*, by far the most popular and enduring of her more than one hundred works of fiction, was warmly admired by Henry James and William Morris. Yonge's conservative ideology apparently kept her out of the mainstream of the feminist recovery of minor women writers, and she has been largely neglected until quite recently.

The perennial problem for critics of Yonge is the relationship of her realism to her didacticism. While admiring her complex psychological portraits and detailed descriptions of quotidian family life, readers since her own time have tended to fault her improbable manipulation of plot to reinforce her dogmatic aims.<sup>2</sup> Yonge's detractors dismiss her on these grounds.<sup>3</sup> Yonge's reluctant admirers (and most of her admirers are at least somewhat reluctant) are frequently seen to rejoice that Yonge's realism generally overcomes her dogmatism, that her interesting characters refuse to be strait-jacketed according to predetermined Tractarian notions.<sup>4</sup>

Perceptive readers have sought to explain this problem of realism and didacticism by more sophisticated generic models that accommodate hybridity. Kim Wheatley reads *The Clever Woman of the Family* (1865) as both “a set of [realist] psychological portraits and as a simple moral fable” in which verisimilitude is rightly eschewed (909). Catherine Sandbach-Dahlström reads *The Heir of Redclyffe* (1853), Yonge's best known novel, as a blend of realism and romance (28–58). Gavin Budge has furthered these claims by reading *Heir* as a hybrid of realism and typology, a blend that follows from contemporaneous aesthetic theory (including that of John Keble and John Ruskin) and from Tractarian understandings of typology (“Realism and Typology”).<sup>5</sup>

Such models usefully allow us to circumvent the need to see realism and didacticism as competing for control of the text. However, they remain inadequate to describe either Yonge's artistic and didactic aims or the effect the book has on its readers. The strong affective reactions to *Heir* since its first publication have not escaped critical notice: as Nicola Diane Thompson observes, “critics tend to focus their comments on the effects

*The Heir of Redclyffe* has on its readers, rather than on the work's intrinsic literary qualities" (97). This trend has not greatly abated: a recent sophisticated article of Talia Schaffer on another Yonge novel, for example, takes as its starting preoccupation the "powerful [emotional] reactions—and particularly the consistent impulse to express them" evident in many Yonge critics, including Schaffer herself ("Magnum Bonum" 246). Aside from overall enjoyment of the novel and its characters, the affective reaction to *The Heir of Redclyffe* that has been most consistently expressed is a strong dislike of the novel's ending, in which Yonge prolongs the tale well beyond the death of the hero (Guy) to narrate the repentance of the anti-hero (Philip). As we will see, Yonge had ample warning of this negative response in the views of her own family and friends when they read the book in manuscript.

I suggest that Yonge's choice of an ending—and readers' hostile and uncomprehending reactions to it—becomes intelligible when we view the novel as a parable. In this light, Yonge's aim of illustrating moral exemplarity in the characters is secondary to her aim of challenging the reader's own moral state, precisely in the book's affront to the reader's sympathies. My reading will show that *Heir* not only retells the parable of the Pharisee and the publican, but also becomes a potent Victorian parable.<sup>6</sup> It does so by reversing the reversal of the parable in order to deliver to the reader something like the startling effect that Jesus' parable delivered to its original audiences. Evidence for the success of this effect, I argue, is found in the overwhelmingly negative reaction of readers to the book's ending. My first section below will solidify the relationship between the ethics of reading and the genre of parable before moving on to establish the particular resonances of parables—and of this parable—in Tractarian thinking. In the second section I trace the correspondences between *Heir* and the parable of the Pharisee and the publican. Finally, my consideration of the ending and of readers' reactions to it will show how this novel achieves the parabolic quality of challenging the reader's assumptions about who does and does not enjoy divine favor.

## I

Any discussion of generic affinity between parables and Victorian realism must first take account of the neglect of—and sometimes contempt

for—realism found in parable-in-literature studies. Studies of extrabiblical parables invariably privilege modernism, especially such figures as Kafka and Borges.<sup>7</sup> Though Frank Kermode asserts that instances of the parable can occur in texts of varying length and texts that seem to be transparent, this insight has been practically ignored (34–41). Indeed, Kermode himself skips from Sterne to Joyce when tracing the legacy of the parable in modern literary forms (117). But the neglect of realism in parable-in-literature studies seems to result not from generic necessity, but rather from modernist bias against Victorian realism.<sup>8</sup> Parables, according to theorists such as Kermode and John Dominic Crossan, are by definition obscure, subversive, and iconoclastic, while realism is transparent, reassuring, and conservative. In the midst of his panegyric on Borges's parables, Crossan sneers that the realist novel is “that beloved child born to Mimesis in the years of its dotage” (*Raid on the Articulate* 77).

One possible answer to such judgments is to recall that biblical parables themselves are generally deeply indebted to mimetic story-telling. Paul Ricoeur aptly describes the tension that defines Jesus' parables as “the contrast between the realism of the narrative and the *extravagance* of the dénouement and of the main characters” (32, emphasis in original). In a similar vein, Bernard Harrison writes, “[T]he accuracy of the commonplace setting of the behavior described in the parables can frequently be contrasted with the fact that the behavior itself is frequently odd to the point of craziness” (224). Harrison goes on to show that the subversive import of the parables can often be located precisely in the unexpected departure from the audience's normative “conceptual scheme” for viewing the world—in other words, from conventional realism (226).

Another possible answer is to point to the extensive body of criticism complicating this reductive representation of realism. As early as 1981, George Levine influentially demonstrated that realism is “not a solidly self-satisfied vision based in a misguided objectivity and faith in representation, but a highly self-conscious attempt to explore or create a new reality” (19–20). More recently Caroline Levine has made a compelling case for seeing Victorian realism not as offering smug consolations of narrative and metaphysical coherency, but as emphatically resisting such consolations in favor of a skeptical and experimental epistemology. Realist suspense narratives, in Levine's analysis, inculcate in the reader the habit of testing hypotheses against observed facts, a habit which undermines rather

than bolsters facile and conventional judgments about reality. We could add to this Andrew Miller's observation that skepticism and religion are not necessarily at loggerheads: a believer is merely skeptical about different things, including the reliability of his own moral judgments (145–48).

Yonge's basic posture toward the ethics of reading is in line with Miller's account, alluded to above, of the ways perspective conditions choice. As Gavin Budge has recently shown in his fine monograph on Yonge, Yonge conceived that moral choice follows from a person's perspective on that choice, and that one's perspective in turn follows from the set of associations one has formed. In this view, novels are not moral because they recommend virtue and condemn vice in any narrowly didactic way, but rather because they draw the reader into the process of forming associations that enable accurate judgment of the ethical stakes in any particular decision (*Charlotte M. Yonge*, 87–89). This essentially hermeneutic exercise educates the reader in the right interpretation of character and circumstance: “[F]ar from being crudely ‘didactic’ in the sense of asserting moral judgments that are presumed to be applicable in all circumstances, Yonge’s novels are designed to act as occasions for the reader to reflect on the process of interpretation by which they arrive at the moral judgments which they apply to the text” (161).<sup>9</sup>

As I noted above, parables similarly foreground interpretation as they aim at the readers’ or hearers’ self-recognition and self-indictment, and they often do this precisely in their occasional but salient transgression of realist conventions. As Harrison’s analysis of biblical parables shows, the *peripeteia*, or reversal, that marks the parable’s climax challenges the reader’s intuitive sense of what is real or expected. For example, whereas readers are inclined to locate the real in what Harrison calls the “everyday morality” of the early-arrived workers in the parable of the vineyard owner or of the older brother in the parable of the prodigal son, those parables insist that the reality of the kingdom of God is exemplified in the extravagant vineyard owner or the forgiving father, both of whom subvert instinctive notions of the just deserts due to other characters (Harrison 234). In the radically non-realistic actions of the central character, the reader learns in what way her assumptions about what is “real” and what is “unreal” reflect a this-worldly notion of strict justice rather than an other-worldly, extravagant grace, described by Jesus as pertaining to the kingdom of God. The *peripeteia* is not for the sake of surprise merely, but for

the sake of jolting readers into a consciousness of their own complicity with everyday morality.<sup>10</sup> I would like to suggest further that in the retelling of a canonical parable, more than a simple *peripeteia* is necessary to achieve the full parabolic effect. By virtue of familiarity, the originally startling reversal of a biblical parable comes to seem ordinary or expected. For a parable to be reinscribed in such a way as to retain its disquieting effect, a double *peripeteia* must occur.

The narrative technique of foregrounding the reader's interpretative freedom and responsibility corresponds perfectly with the theological and aesthetic norms of Tractarianism. According to the Tractarian doctrine of reserve as articulated in John Keble's *Lectures on Poetry*, what religion and literature have in common is that both conceal their meaning as well as reveal it, or conceal it while revealing it.<sup>11</sup> Sacred truths, whether in scripture, liturgy, or literature, are veiled in indirect discourses that can only be penetrated by readers whose "devotion be such as leads [them] to take zealous pains to search [truth] out" (Keble 482). The reader will enter into the meaning of the text to a degree proportionate to his or her moral preparation: "[I]t is a certain state of the heart which could alone receive [instruction] in the sense implied" (Williams 7). In Tract 80, written by cleric Isaac Williams as an apology for the doctrine of reserve, Jesus' parables are described as a paradigmatic instance of this phenomenon. Those who bring to a parable a reverent and repentant disposition will understand its message, while resistant readers—those seeking to master the text rather than be mastered by it—will be kept outside the meaning (Williams 8–11).

It will be useful, then, to look at Tractarian readings of the parable of the Pharisee and the publican preliminary to our examination of Yonge's parable in a novel. In Jesus' parable in Luke 18, the Pharisee lifts his eyes to heaven and thanks God that he is not a sinner "as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican" (Luke 18:11). He then reminds God of his moral achievements of tithing and fasting. The publican, for his part, "would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, 'God be merciful to me, a sinner'" (18:13). The Pharisee's moral complacency, if it is slightly offensive, is at least well-founded in his demonstrable acts of piety. The publican's self-abnegation is equally what can be expected of a notorious sinner who bothers to come to the Temple at all. The reversal, then, lies in the concluding re-



mark of Jesus: that the publican “went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted” (18:14). Divine favor is offered to the sinner and withheld from the (seeming) righteous.

For the Tractarians, the lesson of Jesus’ opposition to conventional religiosity had a great deal of current purchase. Both John Henry Newman and E. B. Pusey claimed that the Victorian cult of respectability was a version of Pharisaism and should be opposed by true Christians. Newman’s Anglican sermons are peppered with admonitions against the complacent belief that one merits God’s favor by conformity to everyday morality. The ordinary level of externally visible honesty, sexual probity, and social affability are, to Newman, mere pagan self-interest, since the nominally Christian middle-class Victorian culture rewards such so-called virtue. Rather, Newman insists, truly Christian virtue consists in a radical obedience to Scripture that “forc[es] you past the fear of men, and the usages of society, and the persuasions of interest” (48). Elsewhere he declares that conforming merely to popular morality “bring[s] in its train a selfish temperance, a selfish peaceableness, a selfish benevolence, the morality of expedience” that, in its “*appearance* of obedience,” leaves one with “no hope of salvation” (25, 27, emphasis in original). Crucially, Pharisaism, or self-righteousness arising from scrupulous conformity to conventional morality, is the precise moral failure against which so many of Jesus’ parables are directed, including the parables of the prodigal son, the good Samaritan, and the vineyard owner. Pharisaism is especially difficult to challenge, since its essence is the self-complacency that is all but immune to reproach. What makes parables effective against Pharisaism is the way they lead unsuspecting readers into the recognition of their sin. For example, by means of a parable the prophet Nathan convicted King David of his sin with Bathsheba; after David pronounced judgment on the man in the parable, Nathan told him, “Thou art the man” (2 Samuel 12:17). According to Newman, the Christian avoids Pharisaism by remaining skeptical of his own moral judgments, especially of himself; parables, which disrupt one’s unexamined assumptions of what constitutes acceptable morality, induce such skepticism.

For his part, Pusey called Pharisaism “the central failure of this day,” and insisted that “we all have more or less of the Pharisee clinging to us; for it presses in upon us through all the habits and ways of our times” (8,

16). In his sermon "Our Pharisaism," Pusey said, "[I]f we detested or despised [the Pharisee], as being in any way our inferior, [. . .] we should have arrived at out-Pharisee-ing the Pharisee" (1). Pusey's point is that precisely to the extent that one uses this parable to condemn the other, whom one labels "Pharisee," one becomes the target of the parable. The only sinless application of this parable, therefore, is to see oneself as the Pharisee; that act of seeing paradoxically makes one into the publican, asking pardon for one's manifest and hidden sins.<sup>12</sup>

In a similar vein, Archbishop Richard Trench, whom Yonge admired, claimed that Jesus directed the parable not at the Pharisees but at the "disciple, one already having made some little progress in the school of Christ, yet in danger, *as we are all in danger*, of falling back into pharisaic sins." Such a disciple "would only need his sin to be plainly shown to him, and he would start back at its deformity; he would recognize the latent Pharisee in himself, and tremble and repent" (502–503, emphasis added).<sup>13</sup> In other words, Trench exhorts his readers not to see the Pharisee as the other, but as themselves, and he points out the remedy to be the humble penitence of the publican.

Yonge puts this view of the parable to work in *Heir*. In Yonge's earliest plans for the book, the binary structure used in the parable is the foundation of her elaborate plot: she wrote that there were "two characters she wanted to see brought out in a story—namely, the essentially contrite and the self-satisfied." Yonge further noted that "Good men [. . .] were in most of the books of the day [. . .], whereas the 'penitence of the saints' was unattempted" (*Musings* xxix). In keeping with her project of exemplarity, Yonge presents the negative model of the Pharisee (Philip Morville) and the positive alternative: the person who combines the conscientiousness of the Pharisee with the penitence of the publican (Sir Guy Morville, the heir of Redclyffe).

But Yonge's parable is not merely exemplary, any more than Jesus' is. It is also, in its way, subversive of conventional morality even as it extravagantly subverts expectations about realism. This subversion occurs in the novel's ending: if the reversal of the parable is that even a publican who repents can be justified, the double reversal of the novel is that even a *Pharisee* who repents can be justified. Crucially, however, the novel exposes not only the Pharisaism of Philip, but also that of the reader who is eager to condemn Philip. In demanding the reader's transference of sympathy

from the saintly Guy to the despicable Philip, the text confronts the reader with his or her own Pharisaism much like the Lukan parable does. To recur to Trench's exegesis, Yonge's reader is likewise asked to "recognize the latent Pharisee in himself, and tremble and repent."

## II

Pharisaism is often seen as synonymous with hypocrisy, but the terms are not necessarily coterminous. Unlike such stock hypocrite-villains in Victorian fiction as Dickens's Mr. Chadband or Charlotte Brontë's Mr. Brocklehurst, the Pharisee may evince little or no incongruity between profession and conduct. E. B. Pusey's sermon makes this point about Pharisaism and hypocrisy particularly clear: "Many Pharisees were hypocrites, our Lord tells us. He does not say so of [the Pharisee in the parable]. We have only to take his character, as our Lord gives it" (3-4). Pusey's target is not the relatively obvious one of people who pretend to be good but are not, but rather the subtler problem of people, like Philip, whose real moral uprightness leads them to the damnable condition of self-righteousness.<sup>14</sup>

The cousins Philip and Guy come into contact with each other through the Edmonstone family, consisting of a father and mother, an adult son Charlie who is physically disabled, and three daughters: Laura and Amy, approaching marriageable age, and the younger Charlotte. Philip's Pharisaism is not initially apparent to the reader. The high regard for Philip expressed by the steady and serious Laura, the warm and principled Mrs. Edmonstone, and Philip's regimental colleagues and their families clearly establishes him as a "pattern" young man. A typical remark by his colonel's wife praises Philip's "excellent judgment, kindness of heart, and power of leading to the right course" (52). Guy himself is particularly affected by the story of Philip's noble sacrifice of a promising academic career to enter the army so as to maintain his sister in their childhood home. Only Charlie is prone to detract, but his habitual petulance and caustic tone, together with his evident jealousy of the attention given to Philip, compromise his credibility to the reader as a judge of Philip's character. Even Philip's failure to appreciate Guy could be taken as meritorious at first, as it seems to derive from a principled refusal to be charmed by superficial qualities. Not until chapter 4 does Philip's unacknowledged jeal-

ousy and spitefulness manifest itself in needlessly provoking behavior toward his younger and more fortunate cousin. Even then, it is the intangibles that offend. Philip's moral failure, being covert like that of the Pharisee, can only be detected in his "veiled assumption of superiority" (48).

This early misdirection of the reader's judgment appears to have been anticipated, if not intended, by Yonge. As she began the book, Yonge wrote to her friend Marianne Dyson, "On reading my first chapter I doubt whether Philip will not strike those who do not know him as intended for the perfect hero; I rather hope he will, and as one of those perfect heroes whom nobody likes" (Coleridge 175).<sup>15</sup> A little later she added, "Mamma says people will think [Philip] is the good one to be rewarded, and Guy the bad one punished. I say if stupid people really think so, it will be just what I should like, for it would be very like the different morals caught by different people from real life" (Coleridge 177). After the first few chapters, no one could mistake Philip's identity as "the bad one," but Yonge's willingness for her readers' sympathy to be misled shows that she is intentional not only about the reversals embedded in the narrative, but also about challenging readers' facile notions of the hermeneutics of character. The first reversal occurs as the reader is made to recognize that the apparently upright Philip is actually the novel's villain.

Philip's very determination to be perfectly honest and fair-minded convinces him that he cannot be mistaken or prejudiced. His criticisms of Guy's character are often accompanied by such apparently reasonable caveats as "I am not condemning him; I wish to be perfectly just; all I say is, that I do not trust him till I have seen him tried" (35). Another time he explains his galling behavior thus: "It may be painful to ourselves, and irritating to [Guy], but depend upon it, it is the proof of friendship" (89). On the strength of that assurance of disinterestedness Philip becomes less and less capable of doing Guy justice. Philip descends to increasingly corrupt behavior driven by his very confidence in his own perfection and purity of motive.

Significantly, Philip's suspicions of Guy are bolstered by appeals to conventional realist psychology. Philip is quick to put a negative construction on Guy's impulsive acts of self-restraint (such as giving up hunting and not going to the regimental ball) based on Philip's ideas of human nature: "Philip, firm in his preconceived idea of [Guy's] character, and *his own knowledge of mankind*, was persuaded that he had imputed the true

motive" (73, emphasis added). In other words, he insists on judging Guy by the standard of realism, and thereby attributes to him the feelings of a slighted lover or of wounded pride. "It is caprice or temper," Philip declares of Guy's absence from the ball, dismissing as "incredible!" Guy's own explanation of self-discipline (131). Charlie describes this mistake later when he says, "I knew it would come out later that [Guy] had only been so much better than other people that nobody could believe it" (334). The limitations of what Philip can conceive of as "real" highlight his alienation from the self-transcending values heralded in Jesus' parables.

Much later, after Guy's death, Philip reflects, "It had been his bane, that he had been always too sensible to betray outwardly his self-conceit, in any form that could lead to its being noticed" (521). The interiority of his sin is far more dangerous to his spiritual condition because it seems to obviate the continual repentance that alone makes one justified before God according to the parable. The description of the Pharisee in Pusey's sermon could be taken for a sketch of Philip himself:

He, and we too often dwell on any good [qualities] we think we have; [. . .] we tacitly lay good store by them [. . .]. The mirror of our mind reflects to us what we present to it; all which we purposely leave behind, that great hideous humpback of unknown, unthought-of, unenquired-for sin, grows, day by day, the more deformed, [. . .] because, in our ignorance of it, we are continually aggravating it. (Pusey 9)

Philip's external perfection and self-righteousness reinforce each other, such that the only sins he has are those that derive from thinking he has none.

Guy, however, is patterned after the publican. He is quick to self-accusation and penitence for all his faults, great (the desire for murderous revenge on Philip) and small (failing to enjoy himself when others are trying to give him pleasure). The visibility of his characteristic temptation—outbreaks of temper—prevents him from deceiving himself about his own perfection and thereby instills the habit of confession that prevents hidden sins from developing. However overstrained Guy's conscientious confessions of slight faults might seem, Yonge's point is clearly that Guy's

awareness of his own sinful predilections keeps him in a salutary state of spiritual dependence on God and on other Christians.

Also unlike Philip, Guy is acutely conscious of a gap between the appearance and reality of one's moral state. When Mrs. Edmonstone praises his "victory" over his temper after one run-in with Philip, Guy replies, "The victory will be if the inward feeling as well as the outward token is ever subdued" (139). When Guy learns of Philip's inquiries about him with the tutors and tradesmen at Oxford, Guy "only wished his true character was as good as what would be reported of him" (274).

Guy's inner posture of penitence is reflected in the intuitive sympathy he always feels for other penitents. His grandfather's long years of repentance from his hasty words that caused Guy's parents' deaths have profoundly colored Guy's moral sentiments. When speaking of Charles I, whom all Yonge's "good" characters revere, Guy's comment is that "his heart was too tender, his repentance too deep for his friends to add one word even in jest to the heap of reproach" (64). The *Innominato* of *I Promessi Sposi* draws Guy's sympathy as well: "I never read anything equal to the repentance of the nameless man" (44).

For the large middle section of the novel, the moral contours of the paired opposites are sufficiently transparent to the reader. By the time Guy and Philip meet in Italy after Guy and Amy's wedding, the reactions of the two men to each other are perfectly predictable, and the reactions of the reader no less so. We hate Philip and love Guy with equal intensity. But just when we think we have mastered the novel's contrasting case studies, Yonge plots a second and more profound *peripeteia*. Philip insists on traveling through a fever-infested region of Italy; Guy decides that he and Amy will take a different route. Philip attributes Guy's decision to stubborn pique, but when Philip falls ill of the fever, Guy and Amy come to nurse him. Philip recovers, though never completely, but Guy contracts the fever and dies.

Rather than ending the book with this closure, however, Yonge is far from finished. In the concluding section following Guy's death—almost a fifth of the novel's total length—Yonge reveals the secret she encoded in the title to the novel: that the central figure of the novel is not Guy but Philip. The "heir of Redclyffe" seems a romantic way of referring to Guy, who becomes the baronet on the death of his grandfather just as the novel's action opens. But as a number of critics have noted, this means

that the heir apparent to Redclyffe for the majority of the novel is Philip. When he finally inherits Redclyffe after causing Guy's death, Philip asserts his position as the novel's title character; the reader realizes that Philip's inheritance is the *telos* that the title has suggested all along. The character the reader has been led to regard as the antagonist is suddenly reintroduced to the reader as the protagonist.

Now it is Philip who "shrink[s] into himself" at praise (480), who engages in merciless "self-reproach," (543), and who embraces "the load and the stings of a profound repentance" (511). By the end of the novel the reader is asked to regard Philip as an paragon indeed: Charlie, who of all the characters is the most chary of praise and the most contrary to Philip, finally says, "I think him positively noble and grand, and when I see proofs of his being entirely repentant, I perceive he is a thorough great man" (586–87). In the novel's long afterglow, as the characters' acute grief over Guy fades, we see that Guy—a Christ figure—was sacrificed in order to redeem Philip and set him on a course to true greatness.

Philip thus comes to resemble the most prominent Pharisee in Christian history: the apostle Paul.<sup>16</sup> Yonge's descriptions of Philip's dawning self-knowledge in Italy clearly show that she wants her readers to see Philip as an analogue of Paul. When Philip finally learns that Guy wanted his one thousand pounds in order to endow an Anglican sisterhood (and not to pay off gambling debts as Philip supposed), "Philip heard as if a flash of light was blinding him. [. . .] Philip had sunk on his knees, [. . .] in an agony of self-abasement before the goodness he had so relentlessly persecuted" (463). Later the narrator again describes Philip's growing self-awareness with a metaphor directly drawn from the biblical account of Paul's conversion: "[T]he scales of self-admiration fell from his eyes, and he knew both himself and his cousin" (469).<sup>17</sup> Saul/Paul's dramatic conversion from zealous persecutor of the faithful to suffering missionary to the Gentiles is a fitting paradigm for Philip's radical redirection.

### III

Many if not most readers have resisted the shift in sympathy that the novel asks of them regarding Philip; yet I suggest that in their resistance can be traced the confrontational effect of the novel as a parable. Disbe-

lief, or a denial of the realism of Philip's repentance, is one form of that resistance. An otherwise laudatory review in *The Christian Remembrancer* objected that "the depth and reality of Philip's repentance, considering his intense egotism and self-sufficient vanity, does not, we must confess, approve itself altogether to our belief" ("Miss Yonge's Novels" 63). When we remember that it is precisely in the departure from ordinary realism that parables transmit their aggressively subversive message about ultimate reality, we can see that Philip's allegedly unbelievable repentance is the pivot for the whole book.

Even those who do not object to Philip's repentance on the grounds of probability may still be unwilling to grant the sympathy the novel claims for Philip in its final section. Antagonism to Philip formed the chief part of the criticism that was offered by Yonge's family and close friends when they read *Heir* in manuscript, according to Christabel Coleridge's authorized biography of Yonge. Sir John Coleridge desired that Amy's child would be male because "the public would never stand seeing Philip heir of Redclyffe" (Coleridge 166). Yonge's brother Julian wanted to horsewhip Philip around the quad at his Oxford college. A *Fraser's* reviewer in 1854 declared that Philip "never wins our cordial love and sympathy, even in the most bitter of his trials" ("*Heartsease*" 502).

As Robert Lee Wolff points out with more detachment, "Philip [. . .] is so disagreeable that the reader can easily emerge from the book without realizing that Charlotte Yonge intended Philip's development to be as important as Guy's" (134). This is at least as true of modern critics as of Victorian readers. Vineta Colby says the "long, tearful epilogue" is "[f]aulty [. . .] both emotionally and artistically" (201). Other critics, including Barbara Dennis, ignore the novel's final section, giving the impression that Philip's faults alone are worth comment.

Hence the ending is frequently regarded as an artistic problem—namely, that Yonge fails to win the reader's sympathy for the repentant Philip. In fact Yonge's master-stroke as a parabolist lies in this apparent failure: in the reader's resistance to Philip's transformation, the novel exposes the reader's own likeness to Philip. Readers who cannot believe in Philip's repentance align themselves with the earlier Pharisaical Philip, who refused to believe that Guy was better than his experience of human nature ("his own knowledge of mankind") could accommodate. The reader is made to feel that her moral judgment of Philip is erroneous. For



some readers, (mis)led early on to take Philip as “one of those perfect heroes whom nobody likes,” it will in fact have been twice erroneous. The outcome of Philip’s life as Yonge narrates it thus requires skepticism toward conventional or “worldly” psychological expectations at the same time that it requires credence in a worldview structured by the gospels—a worldview that remains, in nineteenth-century Britain as in first-century Palestine, radically subversive of conventional moral ideas. *Heir* therefore fulfills the thesis of Caroline Levine: that realist suspense narratives inculcate skepticism about what one thinks one knows.

At first Philip seemed close to the kingdom of God while Guy seemed distant; then Philip seemed remote while Guy received justification, as did the penitent sinner in the parable. But finally Philip, in his repentance, is shown to be closer to God than, perhaps, the readers in their self-complacent condemnation of Philip. Readers’ reluctance to sympathize with the changed Philip points to their secret Pharisaical sense of moral superiority to him. They recoil from regarding him as like themselves in much the same way that the Pharisees recoiled from Jesus’ association with known sinners. In Pusey’s words, they are guilty of “out-Pharisee-ing the Pharisee” in their very act of visiting righteous indignation on Philip. The novel’s ability to induce skepticism toward the conventional morality of the characters—that is, to disrupt readers’ confidence in their judgment of the characters’ proximity to the kingdom of God—is preparatory to the challenge to readers’ self-righteousness.

The truest interpretation of this perlocutionary novel therefore comes in the reader’s imitative enactment of the repentance of Philip. Miller’s observation on Newman’s critique of complacent “knowingness” is apposite here: Newman’s therapy for the moral and mental torpor induced by knowingness is “a particular interpretive practice—one that turns on our abilities to convert words through our response to them, thus allowing them to convert us—on which conversion our own salvation depends” (160). This is the mode in which parables operate: according to David Lyle Jeffrey, “It is the parable that interprets the sinner. [. . .] As a narrative of repentance, the purpose of such a parable [as the Pharisee and the publican] is evidently to initiate the possibility of repentance in a reader who is not yet irremediably hard-hearted” (361, 363).

That the parabolic valences of *Heir* have not been noticed either by contemporaneous or modern critics actually strengthens my argument. As

we have seen, according to the Tractarian doctrine of reserve, parables only yield their secrets to the devout and reverent, and those who do receive a veiled meaning will not be eager to publish it. We have already observed as well that Yonge was conscious, perhaps playfully so, of misleading certain of her readers who were not sufficiently attuned to the way her fictional technique serves the text's moral provocation. Yonge was fully aware that a good many of the novel's enthusiastic readers did not perceive her central moral message. Though pleased to read a positive review in the *Times*, she also wrote, "It seems to me *exactly the world's judgment* of Guy and Philip" (Romanes 69, emphasis added). The reviewer's complaint—that "[t]he lower orders in the moral world must feel themselves not so much encouraged or edified as crushed by the self-abasement of one so superior as Guy. His humility tramples us into the dust"—makes clear that the reviewer was not of the penitential disposition to receive the instruction the novel offers ("The Heir of Redclyffe" 9). If he were, he would not protest being made aware that his good-enough morality isn't. From the standpoint of Tractarian morality discussed above, this reviewer, despite his geniality, shows a damnable disposition to be satisfied with remaining among the "lower orders in the moral world" in which he, with evident irony, places himself. Yonge's full consciousness of "the world's" erroneous judgment of her novel, even when that judgment is largely positive, implies that the novel's ability to provoke different levels of reaction and understanding from differently-disposed readers was part of the design of the novel.

Nevertheless, one would like to find some corroboration of my reading among the multifarious responses to the novel, and I am pleased to find it in the one reader who was probably most attuned to Yonge's aims. As Yonge's mother recorded in a letter to Dyson following one of the endless discussions about *Heir* among the circle of Yonge's family and neighbors, "Mr. Keble says everybody is like Philip" (Coleridge 189). This statement is more startling than it might first appear. There is ample evidence that the novel's many eager male readers, from army officers to undergraduates, widely identified with Guy, and it was Guy with whom the female readers fell in love (Battiscombe 76). But Keble believed, as did Trench and Pusey no less than Yonge, that the path to being a saint lies through the painful recognition of oneself in the Pharisee: every morally conscientious person tends toward Pharisaism unless he or she, like Guy, practices continual re-

pentance from minor failings, including the very self-satisfaction that arises from meticulous conformity with everyday morality. The novel's extraordinary achievement lies in its ability, whether latent or realized, to reproduce this shock of recognition in the reader. Just when the reader is ready to horsewhip Philip, the reader is told—like David was told by Nathan—“Thou art the man.” As Philip's story shows, only when one's hidden sin is exposed does the repentance occur which can eventually produce the saintly purity of a Guy Morville. The novel instigates this process in the reader via the character of Philip while also making its results imminently attractive via the character of Guy.

Reading *The Heir of Redclyffe* as a Victorian retelling of the parable of the Pharisee and the publican contextualizes the tension between Yonge's realism and didacticism while also explaining Yonge's willingness to provoke the disbelief and hostility of her readers in the novel's much-maligned ending. Yonge not only retells the parable in modern dress, but she also recreates its subversive effect by her double *peripeteia* that challenges the reader's presumptive moral certainties and potentially incites repentance.

More broadly, it is clear from the foregoing that the reading practices demanded by parables can also be deployed within realism. The epistemological vertigo induced by Jesus' parables, and reproduced with relish by modernist parabolists, is ideally suited to the Tractarian emphases on moral strenuousness, distaste for religious business as usual, and reserve. The ends of this effect in modernist parables are, of course, various, but Yonge's parable in a novel follows its biblical models in its ends as well as its means, as it aims at bringing about the self-knowledge which the self-righteous are ordinarily insulated against by their scrupulous conformity to conventional morality.

## Notes

I am grateful to Ralph Wood, David Jeffrey, Phillip Donnelly, Courtney Micksch, and Caroline Levine for their responses to this essay in manuscript.

1. This was Jesus' instruction to his questioner at the conclusion to the parable of the prodigal son (Luke 10:37).
2. See Dennis, Langbauer, Sandbach-Dahlström, Schaffer, and Wheatley.

3. For a particularly vituperative example, see Q. D. Leavis.
4. See, for example, "The Author of *Heartsease* and Modern Schools of Fiction;" Coleridge 183; and Bailey 198.
5. See also Elisabeth Jay's observations about typology as a component of aesthetic theory in *The Heir of Redclyffe*.
6. Virginia Bemis suggests that Yonge's "favored mode of teaching was the parable rather than the sermon," but she does not attempt to apply this claim in any depth to any particular novel (124).
7. See Kermode, Crossan, TeSelle, and Funk. Some of these discussions are outlined in Champion.
8. Victorianists are less easily misled on this point. A handful of critics, including Gribble, Hill, and Larson, have analyzed parabolic design and effect in the novels of Dickens. However, as Champion points out in his survey of studies of parables in literature, such studies rarely attempt to theorize the relationship of parable to other, modern genres.
9. Budge further discusses "those critical and ironic elements in Yonge's writing the experience of which is reliant on the reader's willingness to play an active interpretative role, and which have often been neglected by critics who assume that Yonge's religious commitment necessarily implies a dogmatic denial of interpretative freedom to the reader" (*Charlotte M. Yonge* 46).
10. The parable's conjunction of reversal and self-knowledge corresponds to Aristotle's theory that *peripeteia* and *anagnorisis* (recognition or discovery) are linked: "The finest form of Discovery is one attended by Peripeties" (*Poetics* 11, 1452a33).
11. In his *Lectures on Poetry*, Keble claims that the "strong tie of kinship which binds [religion and poetry] together" is "a tone of modest and religious reserve" (481–82). Keble directly applies his remarks only to poetry, not to fiction, but Yonge's clear intention to write realist fiction in the vein of Tractarian aesthetics warrants our extending the application to her novels.
12. This sermon postdates *Heir* by a number of years, but another sermon by Pusey on the same parable was published as early as 1833, indicating that the subject was on his mind for some time. Yonge was undoubtedly familiar with Pusey's work from her close association with Keble. Whether or not Pusey had any direct influence on Yonge's conceptualization of Philip (or, for that matter, whether or not the character of

Philip had any influence on Pusey's understanding of the Pharisee), it is enough to see that Pusey and Yonge present two very similar versions of a Tractarian understanding of Pharisaism.

13. Yonge was familiar with this book and recommended it in her guide for Sunday-School teachers, *How To Teach the New Testament* (ch. V, I.5).
14. Philip becomes a conventional hypocrite when, after contracting his secret understanding with Laura, he actively persecutes Guy as an untrustworthy spouse for Amy. However, this aspect of his hypocrisy is passed over lightly by the perceptive characters, such as Charlie, who express Yonge's view that Philip's root sins are self-righteousness and self-complacency. Barbara Dennis shows her opacity to this distinction when she writes of Philip, "Though he may go through the motions of the behavior appropriate to a good churchman, his assent is clearly superficial" (57–58). Such a judgment is true of Flora in *The Daisy Chain* (1856), who combines "complacent self-satisfaction" with a religious life that is merely "mechanical" (ch. 20), but there is no evidence in *Heir* that Philip's credence is either insincere or superficial. Yonge distinguishes between simple hypocrisy and the aggravated self-righteousness of the Pharisee in several books, including *The Clever Woman of the Family* (1865) and *Heartsease* (1854). As far as I know, Georgina Battiscombe is the only critic to identify Philip as a Pharisee in print (77).
15. Yonge's epistolary discussion of the novel's progress with Dyson was particularly copious, no doubt due to the fact that the germ of the story had been conceived by Dyson. Yonge scrupulously credited Dyson throughout her life, even saying that *Heir* was better than the rest of her books because the idea had not been her own (Romanes 63).
16. Paul's self-description in his epistle to the Philippians includes the comments: "in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless" (Phil. 3:5–6).
17. On the road to Damascus, Paul is blinded by "a light from heaven;" then he "fell to the ground," and the voice of Jesus accused Paul of "persecuting" him (Acts 9:3–4). Three days after being blinded on the road, Paul meets the Christian Ananias who lays hands on Paul: "Immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales: and he received his sight forthwith" (Acts 9:18).

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