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An Education in Virtue: Didacticism and Audience in Elizabeth Gaskell's "Ruth" and Charlotte Yonge's "The Heir of Redclyffe"

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AN EDUCATION IN VIRTUE:

DIDACTICISM AND AUDIENCE IN ELIZABETH GASKELL'S RUTH AND CHARLOTTE YONGE'S THE HEIR OF REDCLYFFE

A Thesis

Presented To

The Faculty of the Department of English

The College of William and Mary in Virginia

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

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by

Tacye Langley Clarke

1996

APPROVAL SHEET

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

Author

Approved, May 1996

Kim Wheatley

Deborah Denenholz Morse

Elsa Nettels

DEDICATION

For my parents

McKendree and Sandra Langley

whose perseverance and faith have been a rich inheritance

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ABSTRACT

In an effort to reevaluate two popular women writers of the nineteenth century by examining their shared conception of art, this study focuses upon the issue of didacticism in Charlotte Yonge's The Heir of Redclyffe and Elizabeth Gaskell's Ruth, both published in 1853.

Part I traces the education of the central characters of the novels, revealing the direct application of the authors' didacticism. Through intellectual and moral development, the characters go from being flawed humans to being moral examples, both for their respective communities and for their readers.

Part II analyzes the methods Yonge and Gaskell employ in seeking to educate their readers by examining the didactic posture of the authorial presences. Gaskell's narrator, arguably the author's own persona, manifests her didacticism by speaking directly to the reader through authorial intrusions. Yonge, on the other hand, resists a direct confrontation with the reader, choosing instead to educate her reader through the discussions about reading that punctuate the novel.

Part III discusses the original reception of the novels in order to analyze the audiences' reaction to Yonge's and Gaskell's didacticism. The extant record suggests that professional reviewers, unlike modern critics, accepted this novelistic didacticism. Interestingly, the greatest stumbling block for the reviewers is the gender of these novelists; reviewers of both The Heir of Redclyffe and Ruth seek to relegate both the authors and novels to a feminine sphere, ultimately downplaying their significance. Part III also explores the reactions of literary professionals and general readers in an attempt to understand the early reception of the novels. Finally, Gaskell's and Yonge's relations to the literary elite are explored as a possible explanation of the critical acclaim for Gaskell's albeit contentious discussion of "fallen" women and illegitimacy and the critical denunciation and general disregard of Yonge's bestselling novel.

AN EDUCATION IN VIRTUE:

DIDACTICISM AND AUDIENCE IN ELIZABETH GASKELL'S *RUTH* AND CHARLOTTE YONGE'S *THE HEIR OF REDCLYFFE*

INTRODUCTION

Published at the beginning of 1853, Gaskell's _Ruth_ and Yonge's _The Heir of Redclyffe_ are significant examples of English women's writing from the period. Superficially, their authors share little in common. Whereas Charlotte Yonge (1823-1901) propounded the beliefs of the High Church Oxford Movement, Elizabeth Gaskell (1810-1865) was a Dissenter, the wife of a Unitarian minister. Yonge lived exclusively in rural Hampshire, whereas Gaskell's experience of both village life and urban Manchester colors her writing. Unmarried, Yonge devoted herself to her parents and her mentor, the Tractarian John Keble, submitting _The Heir of Redclyffe_ to them for aesthetic and moral criticism before she sent the manuscript to the publishers. Gaskell, on the other hand, balanced her writing with an active family life; she raised her four surviving daughters, ran the busy home of a minister's family, and yet found time to turn out multiple novels and short stories, usually writing at the dining room table. Unlike Yonge, Gaskell interacted with the literary elite of the day, both personally and professionally.

The novels this thesis will deal with are Gaskell's _Ruth_ and Yonge's _The Heir of Redclyffe_, both published in

January, 1853. In her novel, Gaskell again confronts a social issue through fiction, intent on exposing the hypocrisy of society in its treatment of the "fallen woman." Yonge's subject, on the other hand, is the taming of an aristocratic youth as he becomes part of a conventional family in rural England. Although heated debates over the morality of Ruth took place throughout England, critics of the day praised Gaskell for her artistic powers, defending the novelist against her detractors. Yonge's The Heir of Redclyffe, however, was a bestseller seldom noticed by professional critics, although it was read with great fervor by Oxford undergraduates, British soldiers in the Crimea and countless young women.

Despite these theological, biographical and artistic differences, however, Yonge and Gaskell share a remarkably similar approach in The Heir of Redclyffe and Ruth. Both are unabashed in their didacticism, creating their main characters as an ideal for their readers to follow. Both Guy Morville of The Heir of Redclyffe and Ruth Hilton/Denbigh of Ruth do not enter the novels as ideals, however; rather, the authors detail the education of their respective characters, the development of Guy and Ruth as they struggle to overcome their past. Thus, as readers witness the progress of the characters' education, they ideally come to share in the education propounded by the author. Although the main focus of the novels is upon such

development, the authors are careful to include negative examples of their ideals. Ultimately, both authors reconcile these opponents to the protagonists, creating subplots that also carry on the theme of education.

For both authors, education, while including the acquisition of skills and knowledge, is primarily a moral concern. At the same time that they engage in the book-learning of traditional education (represented in both novels by the acquisition of Latin--Guy at Oxford, Ruth in the study of Thurstan Benton), both Guy and Ruth receive a moral education, one that is ultimately more important. Under the guidance of his aunt Mrs. Edmonstone, Guy learns the virtues of self-control and duty, overcoming his youthful volatility. Ruth learns similar virtues under the tutelage of the Bensons, seeking to become a wise and capable mother to her fatherless son. Significantly, both Mrs. Edmonstone and the Bensons hold strong religious beliefs, suggesting a distinct connection between religion and moral education.

In these novels, Gaskell and Yonge reveal, therefore, what I shall term a "moral aesthetic," an approach to novel-writing that stresses moral didacticism, emphasizing the responsibility of art to educate and reform its readers by revealing the transformation of a flawed character into a moral ideal. Counter to modern aestheticism and "art for art's sake," the moral aesthetic heightens the power of art,

by asserting its potential to change the attitudes and develop the morality of the reader. Rather than be merely an escapist refuge, the novel acts as an agent of reform, challenging the reader. Ironically, however, this challenge comes through the medium of domestic life, usually depicted by professional critics as the bastion of conventionality and the status quo. Yonge and Gaskell's choice of a middle-class (in the case of Yonge, upper-middle class), domestic setting reflects the experience of their predominantly middle-class readers. Barbara Dennis, writing of Yonge's work, has noted:

> What her public wanted and what they got was a mirror-image of themselves and their own situations. Charlotte Yonge showed them what they wanted to be shown--that life is a drama, to be played out within the confines of the family, in the schoolroom and the drawing rooms of provincial towns. (Dennis, "Voices" 182)

This immediacy/reflexiveness gives still greater relevance and power to the authors' didactic projects, showing the middle-class, domestic experience to be significant, perhaps even subversive, and creating middle-class characters as the new heroes. In this, both authors wed realism and idealism, writing of subjects that are both familiar to and transcendent of the readers' experience.

The moral aesthetic depends upon a source of the

morality it desires to convey. In the case of these novels, it is the author who acts as a moral judge, separating out those actions that are morally motivated and those that are not, based upon her understanding of ethics and religion. Interestingly, however, both authors seek to conceal their role as moral judge. Gaskell's authorial intrusions attempt to bring her alongside the reader, at once seeking to judge the morality of the particular situations and sharing in the reader's emotion, thus making her less distant. Yonge, on the other hand, conceals herself as author. Instead, she uses the other characters, as seen in the case of Mrs. Edmonstone, and the discussion of books to propound her ideas about morality and education.

Recent criticism has condemned the novels for their didacticism and moral instruction. The record of reviews and comments made by readers at the time of the novels' publication exposes a much different response, however. By reviewing the early responses to Ruth and The Heir of Redclyffe, it is possible to determine the various audiences' means of evaluation as well as to explore the effect of the authors' didacticism upon their audiences.

Because the focus of this thesis will be upon several distinct areas that relate to the authors' employment of a moral aesthetic, I have chosen to divide the thesis into three parts. In Part I, I will do a close analysis of the texts, dwelling upon the idea of education in each novel.

Part II will seek to explore the manifestations of didacticism in authorial intrusions. Finally, Part III will be devoted to an exploration of the novels' reception in an effort to understand how the audiences, professional critics, other writers and general readers, respond to the didactic projects of the novels.

I have chosen to avoid both a biographical approach to Gaskell and Yonge and a theological critique of the two novelists. Many critics have chosen to view these works in light of their authors' lives or as representations of larger theological/political movements, often due to the belief that these authors as "popular" woman writers have a greater historical or sociological, rather than a literary, significance.[1] I believe, however, that these authors, albeit non-canonical ones, are significant for their employment of the moral aesthetic on multiple levels, for their conscious concern for audience, and for the critical rhetoric that they elicit. In choosing to focus upon the novels themselves, I believe that an examination of Yonge and Gaskell's theologies would divert the focus of this thesis. Indeed, while Yonge and Gaskell make clear in their novels that they adhere to distinct branches of Christianity, both avoid an discussion of theological nuance in these novels.

Finally, in choosing to work on these novels, I wish to make a case for the significance of women writers such as

Gaskell and Yonge. Based upon their reception, Ruth and The Heir of Redclyffe touched a chord in mid-Victorian readers, eliciting passionate responses that need further exploration. The novels expose the cultural relativity of aesthetic standards; the majority of Victorian readers and reviewers plainly accepted--and expected--moral didacticism in novels, the very issue that has relegated the novels into modern-day obscurity. The novels have artistic coherence as well; Yonge and Gaskell construct their novels around the issue of moral education, reflecting their theme both in style and substance, suggesting a unity of purpose. Furthermore, it is instructive to see how the authors' relation to differing literary communities impacts how they are perceived by critics. Indeed, as more scholars are advocating, it is time to dust off Ruth and The Heir of Redclyffe and evaluate their artistic purposes anew.

Notes for Introduction

1. This approach pervades Yonge criticism in particular. Mare and Percival's Victorian Best-seller: The World of Charlotte M. Yonge structures a discussion of Yonge's work in the context of her life and faith, exemplifying how Yonge captures the essence of the age in her novels. In Charlotte Yonge, Novelist of the Oxford Movement: A Literature of Victorian Culture and Society, Barbara Dennis explores the theological content of Yonge's work, as do Joseph Ellis Baker in The Novel and the Oxford Movement and Raymond Chapman in Faith and Revolt.

Much of older Gaskell criticism is biographical in nature. Winifred Gerin's Elizabeth Gaskell, A Biography, John Geoffrey Sharps's Mrs. Gaskell's Observation and Invention, and A. B. Hopkins's Elizabeth Gaskell: Her Life and Work address Gaskell's work in the context of her life. The more recent work by Felicia Bonaparte, The Gypsy-Bachelor of Manchester, seeks to describe Gaskell's inner life by exploring the writer's biography and work. Patsy Stoneman's critique of Ruth in her book Elizabeth Gaskell and Michael Wheeler's article "The Sinner as Heroine: A Study of Mrs. Gaskell's Ruth and the Bible" exemplify a concern to link Gaskell's theology and novel-writing, exploring the impact of Gaskell's Unitarianism on the novel.

PART I

THE EDUCATION OF A MORAL EXAMPLE IN THE NOVELS

In January, 1853, Elizabeth Gaskell expressed her apprehensions about the publication of her second major novel, Ruth, in a letter to a friend:

> I sent Ruth of course. You are mistaken about either letter or congratulations. As yet I have had hardly any of the former: indeed I anticipate so much pain from them that in several instances I have *forbidden* people to write, for their expressions of disapproval, (although I have known that the feeling would exist in them,) would be very painful & stinging at the time. 'An unfit subject for fiction' is *the* thing to say about it; I knew all/this\before; but I determined notwithstanding to speak my mind out about it.
> (qtd. Chapple 220)

The "unfit subject for fiction" of Ruth is, of course, the "fallen woman" and the manifestation of such fallenness in an illegitimate child, considered by Victorian society to be of dangerously unnameable sinfulness. In taking up the issue in the novel, Gaskell gives flesh to the shadowy and marginalized Fallen Woman, humanizing the social problem in an effort to make the sin forgivable. Critic Enid Duthie

has noted that the novel is

> . . . a demand for a more sympathetic understanding of the unmarried mother. It is not the rights of passion that Mrs Gaskell, who herself believed deeply in the sanctity of marriage, is defending in this book; it is the right of the human being, and most of all the defenseless child, to a more humane treatment from a society which claims to be Christian and is too often merely conventional. (Duthie 99)

Even as Gaskell feared condemnation, she hoped the novel would change the hearts and minds of her readers. She confesses this in another letter:

> I think the extremes of opinion that I have met with have even gone farther than yours; for I have known of the book being *burnt*. But from the very warmth with which people have discussed the tale I take heart of grace; it has made them talk and think a little on a subject which is so painful that it requires all one's bravery not to hide one's head like an ostrich and try by doing so to forget that the evil exists. (qtd. in Chapple 227)

The letter reveals two of Gaskell's goals in writing Ruth: first, the novel was written to elicit a response from its audience, to encourage them "to talk and think a little" on the subject of illegitimacy; second, the novel seeks to fight against ignorance, as Gaskell's ostrich simile

suggests. As a novel that seeks to challenge readers' attitudes about sexual fallenness and illegitimacy, Ruth is, undeniably, a didactic novel centered on the theme of education. Seeking to educate her audience as to the causes and outcomes of illegitimacy, Gaskell gives them the story of Ruth's seduction, abandonment and subsequent life as a student and teacher.

Superficially, Charlotte Yonge's The Heir of Redclyffe, also published in January, 1853, has little in common with Ruth. Unlike Gaskell, Yonge feared merely the pride borne of success, rather than the moral censure of the critics, with the publication of her novel. Whereas Ruth tackles a taboo subject, The Heir of Redclyffe details the subtle sins of a highly conscientious family. Like Gaskell, however, Yonge saw her novel-writing as a didactic tool. As Catherine Sandbach-Dahlstrom suggests,

> her conscious aim in writing was didactic before it aesthetic. Her motto 'Pro Ecclesia Dei' indicated clearly that her novels were designed to inculcate in her readers a desire to lead a Christian life in accordance with Anglican doctrine. (Sandbach-Dahlstrom 13)

Sandbach-Dahlstrom's comment captures Yonge's didactic intent and underlying presuppositions; in The Heir of Redclyffe, however, Yonge's theology remains the subtle, nearly invisible, underpinning to her moral message. It is

didacticism, not theology per se, that is central to the novel. Indeed, both style and substance are implanted with Yonge's didactic purpose. As in Ruth, education is a central theme in The Heir of Redclyffe. Writing to Marianne Dyson, the originator of the germ of the novel, Yonge characterizes herself as an educator when she describes the arrival of her newly published novel:

> If the maids had not an evil habit of keeping the arrival of a parcel a secret for some hours, I should not have let the dear Guy [Guy Morville--the hero of the novel. Yonge is using Guy as a synecdoche for the novel.] go without note or comment, but we never heard of him till just as we were starting for Winchester, when I wrote his mother's name [meaning Marianne Dyson] in the first that came out, and carried him off. I hope she is satisfied with the son she gave me to educate, who has been one of my greatest pleasures for two and a half years. (qtd. in Coleridge 188)

Although Yonge's letter is whimsical, her comment sheds light on the nature of The Heir of Redclyffe. It is Guy's education, and its repercussions, that make up the bulk of the plot. Like Gaskell, Yonge establishes the theme of education in order to expose her larger purpose: by detailing the education of her characters, she seeks to educate her audience.

Gaskell's and Yonge's main characters, Ruth Hilton and

Sir Guy Morville, do not enter the novels as educated persons or ideal members of society. Made parentless at a young age and with only a tenuous connection to society, Ruth and Guy are left to Nature to raise, happiest when left alone to enjoy the outdoors. Guy's cousin Philip offers the first description of Guy:

> You know Redclyffe is a beautiful place, with magnificent cliffs overhanging the sea, and fine woods crowning them. On one of the most inaccessible of these crags there was a hawk's nest, about half-way down, so that looking from the top of the precipice, we could see the old birds fly in and out. Well, what does Master Guy do, but go down this headlong descent after the nest. How he escaped alive no one could guess; and his grandfather could not bear to look at the place afterwards--but climb it he did, and came back with two young hawks. (Yonge 9)

Raised by an embittered and emotionally distant grandfather, Guy has been kept away from contact with society and has turned for companionship to nature, a setting that encourages Guy's recklessness. Coming to live with the Edmonstones, Guy is accompanied by the spaniel Bustle and his stallion Deloraine, more comfortable with animal rather than human companions. Guy's young cousin Charlotte learns of his other pets: "There was the sea-gull, and the hedgehog, and the fox, and the badger, and the jay, and the

monkey, that he bought because it was dying, and cured it, only it died the next winter, and a toad, and a raven, and a squirrel" (Yonge 37). Given a choice between classical study and a ball, Guy asserts that he prefers "[t]he hayfield best of all" (Yonge 91). Escaping the controlled and bookish atmosphere of the domestic interior, Guy rambles alone through the countryside, ever longing for a view of the unbridled sea, "that living ripple, heaving and struggling" (Yonge 34). In this, he personifies the Romantic outsider, uncontrolled and isolated.

With no living family and apprenticed to a demanding dressmaker, Ruth also finds solace in the natural world. Given a break during a late-night sewing session, Ruth turns away from the other apprentices and refuses food, drawing strength from nature instead.

> . Ruth Hilton sprang to the large old window, and pressed against it as a bird presses against the bars of its cage. She put back the blind, and gazed into the quiet moonlight night. It was doubly light--almost as much so as day--for everything was covered with the deep snow which had been falling silently ever since the evening before. . . Ruth pressed her hot forehead against the cold glass, and strained her aching eyes in gazing out on the lovely sky of a winter's night. The impulse was strong upon her to snatch up a shawl, and wrapping it round her head, to sally forth and enjoy

> the glory. . . . (Gaskell 4-5)

Later, when Ruth walks through the countryside with Mr. Bellingham, her communion with nature is so satisfying that she needs no human company:

> . . .when she was once in the meadows that skirted the town, she forgot all doubt and awkwardness--nay, almost forgot the presence of Mr Bellingham--in her delight at the new tender beauty of an early spring day in February. Among the last year's brown ruins, heaped together by the wind in the hedgerows, she found the fresh green crinkled leaves and pale star-like flowers of the primroses. . . Ruth burst into an exclamation of delight at the evening glory of mellow light which was in the sky behind the purple distance. (Gaskell 40)

For Ruth, the rural landscape, and flowers in particular, are a reminder of her dead mother, around whose window grew "China and damask roses" (Gaskell 38). Longing for the protection and comfort of her mother's love, Ruth displaces her affection upon the traditionally maternal natural world. Indeed, when Ruth is condemned for her involvement in an illicit relationship and abandoned by Bellingham, she seeks shelter in a hedge-bank and considers suicide in a pool, searching for comfort outside of human society. It is there that Thurstan Benson discovers her, "crouched up like some hunted creature, with a wild scared look of despair" (Gaskell 95-6).

Although the characters' early lives as nature children may seem to be an idyllic return to Eden or, at least, the living out of a Romantic posture, the authors assert the characters' need for knowledge and a connection to society. Gaskell and Yonge show Ruth's and Guy's lack of knowledge and appropriate moral guidance to be dangerous. Seeking to explain Ruth's familiarity with Bellingham, Gaskell reminds her reader that: "She was too young when her mother died to have received any cautions or words of advice respecting *the* subject of a woman's life" (Gaskell 44). It is, therefore, Ruth's very innocence that does her harm. As Hilary Schor writes,

> Ruth suggests that it is precisely the myth of nature's daughter that has led Ruth to fall, and that this is not the myth we are in the habit of questioning. Ruth's perfect receptivity has made her a sexual victim, and while society demands that she be the "beautiful ignoramus," it is clearly not the right thing to be. (Schor 67).

Lacking familiarity with appropriate relations between men and women, she is unknowingly seduced. Her employer, Mrs. Mason, makes no effort to act as a moral guide, but dismisses Ruth when she sees the girl in the company of a man, turning the sixteen-year-old out into the world with no explanation of what Ruth has done wrong.

Similarly, in The Heir of Redclyffe Guy's interaction

with nature has only served to intensify the isolation imposed upon him by his reclusive grandfather. The turbulence of the natural world around Redclyffe has done nothing to quell Guy's passionate nature. Having not been taught to curb his impatience or his inherited Morville temper, Guy fears that he will not only physically resemble his tempestuous ancestor, Sir Hugh Morville, but will resemble him in temperament as well. Guy reveals his dread of this to his cousin Laura in the following exchange:

> "There are traditions of his crimes without number, especially his furious anger and malice. . after many acts of mad violence, he ended by hanging himself. . ."
>
> "Horrible!" said Laura. "Yet I do not see why, when it is all past, you should feel it so deeply."
>
> "How should I not feel it?" answered Guy. "Is it not written that the sins of the fathers will be visited on the children?" (Yonge 65-6)

Rather than depict nature as an idyllic realm, the authors expose the dangers of being outside of a human community and without appropriate knowledge or moral restraint.

Adopted into new families, Guy and Ruth are brought into society and given the comfort that had formerly come through their experience of nature. Upon his grandfather's death, Guy comes to live with his relatives, the Edmonstones. In Mrs. Edmonstone, Guy discovers a surrogate

for his long-dead mother. Ruth, too, gains a family when Thurstan Benson learns that she is homeless and pregnant. He convinces his sister, Faith, to take her in, and the three journey to the parsonage shared by the Bensons and their servant, Sally.

Brought under the guidance of surrogate parents, Guy and Ruth are soon discovered to have insufficient educations. Guy's intellectual cousin Philip is quick to diagnose Guy's academic deficiencies:

> I only entered on the subject of his Oxford life, and advised him to prepare for it, for his education has as yet been a mere farce. He used to go two or three days in the week to one Potts, a self-educated genius--a sort of superior writing-master at the Moorworth commercial school. Of course, though it is no fault of his, poor fellow, he is hardly up to the fifth form, and he must make the most of his time, if he is not to be plucked. (Yonge 44)

As Guy has grown up on a remote estate, his education has been limited, lacking the intensity needed for one destined to attend university. Ruth, too, is in need of academic training, particularly when she becomes responsible for the upbringing of her child. "Her mind was uncultivated, her reading scant; beyond the mere mechanical arts of education she knew nothing" (Gaskell 177). Lacking parents, the characters are without an adequate education.

Mrs. Edmonstone and the Bensons, as surrogate parents, urge Guy and Ruth to develop their knowledge. Concerned with Guy's lack of consistency as well as fearing for his lack of preparation for university, Mrs. Edmonstone inquires into Guy's past education and encourages him to improve his grasp of classical languages. Under Philip's direction, Guy takes on a tutor to prepare him for admittance into Oxford. The tutor acknowledges that "Sir Guy had very good abilities, and a fair amount of general information; but that his classical knowledge was far from accurate, and mathematics had been greatly neglected" (Yonge 54). Guy soon plunges into a rigorous academic regimen that eventually leads him to Oxford. In Ruth, Faith Benson makes Ruth aware of her need for education:

> One day as she and Ruth sat together, Miss Benson spoke of the child, and thence went on to talk about her own childhood. By degrees they spoke of education, and the book-learning that forms one part of it; and the result was that Ruth determined to get up early all through the bright summer mornings, to acquire the knowledge hereafter to be given to her child. (Gaskell 177)

Acting in loco parentis, Mr. Benson undertakes Ruth's education.

> . . [S]he set to work under Mr. Benson's directions. She read in the early morning the books that he marked out; she trained herself with strict perseverance to do

> all thoroughly; she did not attempt to acquire any foreign language, although her ambition was to learn Latin, in order to teach it to her boy. (Gaskell 177)

Like Guy, Ruth is determined to improve herself, and she looks to the Bensons for help; unlike Guy's, Ruth's course of study improves not only her mind but her social status as well.

For both Ruth and Guy, the acquisition of knowledge is not merely for its own sake. Rather, it serves to restrain Guy and Ruth, teaching them duty and discipline over self-indulgence and laziness. Whereas his cousin Philip had, as a boy, been "head of his school, highly distinguished for application and good conduct" (Yonge 19), Guy is not by nature an intellectual, much preferring hunting and climbing. Nevertheless, Guy persists in mastering the classics.

> Used as Guy had been to an active out-of-doors life, and now turned back to authors he had read long ago, to fight his way through the construction of their language, not excusing himself one jot of the difficulty, nor turning aside from one mountain over which his efforts could carry him, he found his work as tough and tedious as he could wish or fear, and by the end of the morning was thoroughly fagged. (Yonge 54-5)

Yonge depicts Guy's education as an arduous odyssey, not unlike the travails of Bunyan's Pilgrim, whom Yonge cites in

the course of the novel. Guy's intellectual struggles thereby gain a note of heroism, and knowledge is presented as a rugged landscape that he must overcome. Guy proves himself worthy of his academic challenge, taking, with great struggle, a degree from Oxford.

Paradoxically, however, Guy learns to find in study a respite from the struggles of life. Jealous of Guy's opportunities, Philip explains Guy's request for several sums of money by determining that Guy has been involved in gambling, a false accusation that nonetheless leads Mr. Edmonstone to break off all contact with Guy, including Guy's informal engagement to Amabel Edmonstone. At Oxford, his family ties severed, Guy finds solace in his work: "If it had not been for chapel and study, he hardly knew how he should have got through that term" (Yonge 264).

Despite the misunderstanding with the Edmonstones, however, Guy discovers the need for a community and sets out to serve those around him, thus beginning to explore the moral components of education. Returning to Redclyffe for the Christmas holidays, he discovers the existence of poverty in his lands. When the steward informs Guy that poachers have been discovered at work on the estate, Guy's reaction exemplifies his increasing regard for humanity: "Guy used to be kindled into great wrath by the most distant hint of poachers; but now he cared for men, not for game" (Yonge 267). Having become part of a community, Guy no

longer finds the individualism of his youth to be satisfying. Significantly, his most heroic moment at Redclyffe occurs when he works with men from the estate against a perilous sea-storm to rescue stranded sailors. Whereas in his youth Guy had attempted risky climbs by himself, desiring to become part of the natural world, he now enlists the help of others when he seeks to save the sailors from the ravages of nature.

For Ruth, the discipline of study brings her a respite from the languor and longing awakened by Bellingham's desertion. Studying each day before her baby awakens, Ruth finds that "{t]hose summer mornings were happy, for she was learning neither to look backwards nor forwards, but to live faithfully and earnestly in the present" (Gaskell 177). Though Ruth had found life tedious following her abandonment, the discipline of study gives Ruth purpose and forces her to emerge from depressed passivity. "Life had become significant and full of duty to her. She delighted in the exercise of her intellectual powers, and liked the idea of the infinite amount of which she was ignorant; for it was a grand pleasure to learn--to crave, and be satisfied" (Gaskell 191). Study reawakens Ruth to life. As Coral Lansbury has written, "The first lesson Ruth must learn is to want to live" (Lansbury 26). Knowing the pain caused by an absent mother, Ruth resolves to live for her child. She ardently promises her newborn: "If God will but

spare you to me, never mother did more than will I. I have done you a grievous wrong--but, if I may but live, I will spend my life in serving you" (Gaskell 162). Through this promise, Ruth frees herself from her psychological isolation and begins to build a human community, developing morally as well as intellectually.

Moving their characters from a place of emotional isolation into the web of human society, Gaskell and Yonge describe the development of their characters' moral education. As mentors to Ruth and Guy respectively, the Bensons and Mrs. Edmonstone work to educate their protegees morally as well as intellectually. At the heart of this moral education are the ideals of self-control and service to others. When Faith Benson is horrified by Ruth's ecstatic reaction to the news of her pregnancy, Thurstan Benson seeks to convince his sister that Ruth's predicament, despite her illicit romance, may serve to elicit her moral development.

> Faith! Faith!. . .[T]he little innocent babe. . . may be God's messenger to lead her back to Him. Think again of her first words--the burst of nature from her heart! Did she not turn to God, and enter into a covenant with Him--"I will be so good?" Why, it draws her out of herself! If her life has hitherto been self-seeking, and wickedly thoughtless, here is the very instrument to make her forget herself and be thoughtful

> for another. Teach her (and God will teach her, if man does not come between) to reverence her child; and this reverence will shut out sin,--will be purification. (Gaskell 119)

Indeed, Ruth's love for her son Leonard makes self-sacrifice easy:

> the delight she experienced in tending, nursing, and contriving for the little boy--even contriving to the point of sacrificing many of her cherished whims--made her happy and satisfied and peaceful. It was more difficult to sacrifice her whims than her comforts; but all had been given up when and where required by the sweet lordly baby, who reigned paramount in his very helplessness. (Gaskell 196)

Though Thurstan Benson is a minister, he is careful not to speak directly to Ruth about her need for moral development; rather, it is the example of the Bensons that teaches her how to live a moral life in the context of a community.

> [I]t seemed that their lives were pure and good, not merely from a lovely and a beautiful nature, but from some law, the obedience to which was, of itself, harmonious peace, and which governed them almost implicitly, and with as little questioning on their part, as the glorious stars which haste not, rest not, in their eternal obedience. This household had many

> failings: they were but human, and, with all their loving desire to bring their lives into harmony with the will of God, they often erred and fell short; but, somehow, the very errors and faults of one individual served to call out higher excellences in another, and so they re-acted upon each other, and the result of short discords was exceeding harmony and peace. (Gaskell 142)

Interestingly, Gaskell depicts the Bensons' lesson of moral living as being implicit rather than explicit. Their tutelage is not coercive, but quiet and loving, dependent as much on Ruth's ability to perceive their example of moral living, and thus display an increasing moral sensitivity, as on their own example. The Bensons also do not make morality or virtue merely personal; rather, personal moral growth is both inextricable from and vital for community. Thus, the Bensons' humble household proves to equip Ruth for life within a community, while developing her own sense of virtuous living.

In The Heir of Redclyffe, Guy, too, must learn self-control and altruism. Angered by Philip and fearful of the effects of his unbridled rage, Guy confides in Mrs. Edmonstone that he feels he shall never overcome his vehemence:

> "It is all failing, and resolving, and failing again!" said Guy.

> "Yes, but the failures become slighter and less frequent, and the end is victory."
>
> "The end victory!" repeated Guy, in a musing tone, as he stood leaning against the mantleshelf.
>
> "Yes, to all who persevere and seek for help," said Mrs. Edmonstone; and he raised his eyes and fixed them on her with an earnest look that surprised her, for it was almost as if the hope come home to him as something new. (Yonge 46)

Mrs. Edmonstone's words serve to liberate Guy from the fear that he will inevitably succumb to the moral failures of his ancestors; through moral development and training, Guy can ultimately transcend his failures.

No longer believing that he is fated to live out the turbulent existences of his Morville ancestors, Guy establishes a rigid code of behavior for himself, seeking to become moral by abstaining from all social pleasures, as had his grandfather. Mrs. Edmonstone reminds him, however, that he cannot avoid all temptation, but must learn how to handle it.

> "There is nothing," said Mrs Edmonstone, "that has no temptation in it; but I should think the rule was plain. If a duty such as that of living among us for the present, and making yourself moderately agreeable, involves temptations, they must be met with and battled from within" (Yonge 50).

According to Yonge, moral education and the development of virtue is arduous labor, as difficult for Guy as the study of Latin had been. Denying the effectiveness of merely avoiding temptation, Mrs. Edmonstone encourages Guy to confront it direct in an effort to experience true moral triumph.

Guy learns, too, that his own desire to avoid temptation often has the effect of removing him from his community. His cousin Amy suggests this after Guy backs out of a promise to attend a ball with his relatives:

> "[I]s it not sometimes right to consider whether we ought to disappoint people who want us to be pleased?"
>
> "There it is, I believe," said Guy, stopping and considering; then going on with a better satisfied air, "that is a real rule: not to be so bent on myself as to sacrifice other people's feelings to what seems best for me." (Yonge 133)

Like Ruth, Guy learns that personal morality cannot be extricated from obligations to the community.

As they develop morally, Guy and Ruth paradoxically come to recognize their moral weaknesses and turn to the comfort of religion. It is the example of Christ and other biblical figures that gives Guy and Ruth the strength to overcome their struggles against evil. Religion also provides them a spiritual community and the comfort of not

being isolated in their suffering. Hearing Thurstan Benson read to his congregation from the Bible, Ruth becomes overwhelmed with her sense of sin:

> And so it fell out that, as he read, Ruth's heart was smitten, and she sank down; and down, till she was kneeling on the floor of the pew, and speaking to God in the spirit, if not in the words of the Prodigal Son: "Father! I have sinned against Heaven and before Thee, and am no more worthy to be called Thy child!" (Gaskell 154)

Writing in the cadences of the King James Bible, Gaskell connects Ruth to the Prodigal Son. As written in Luke 15: 11-31, the father in the parable represents a loving and forgiving God who accepts and even honors the son who had scorned and disobeyed him. Using the allusion, Gaskell suggests that Ruth has discovered both forgiveness and her acceptance into a spiritual family, the kingdom of God. The biblical text also points out Gaskell's belief in the centrality of love in the New Testament and her dependence upon the Bible as a source of inspiring examples for living out the moral life. Edgar Wright writes, Gaskell's "religion of love is necessarily a religion that must rely heavily on example and influence; the emphasis is again on conduct" (Wright 43). By following the Prodigal Son's plea for mercy and forgiveness, Ruth gains the comfort of not only a spiritual father, but the love of an earthly

surrogate parent. Despite the public setting of Ruth's posture of repentance, Miss Benson "loved Ruth better for this self-abandonment" (Gaskell 154).

Ruth is later comforted by the promise of hope offered by religious faith. After she is confronted by Bellingham on the way to church, Ruth is able to focus only upon a stone image in the shadows of the sanctuary.

> While all the church and the people swam in misty haze, one point in a dark corner grew clearer and clearer till she saw. . . a face. . . . The face was beautiful in feature. . . but it was not the features that were the most striking part. There was a half-open mouth, not in any way distorted out of its exquisite beauty by the intense expression of suffering it conveyed. Any distortion of the face by mental agony, implies that a struggle with circumstance is going on. But in this face, if such struggle had been, it was over now. Circumstance had conquered; and there was no hope from mortal endeavour, or help from mortal creature to be had. But the eyes looked onward and upward to the "Hills from whence cometh our help." And though the parted lips seemed ready to quiver with agony, yet the expression of the whole face, owing to these strange, stony, and yet spiritual eyes, was high and consoling. If mortal gaze had never sought its meaning before, in the deep shadow where it had been placed long centuries

> ago, yet Ruth's did now. . . it stilled Ruth's beating heart to look on it. She grew still enough to hear words, which have come to many in their time of need, and awed them in the presence of the extremest suffering that the hushed world has ever heard of.
>
> The second lesson for the morning of the 25th of September, is the 26th chapter of St Matthew's Gospel.
>
> And when they prayed again, Ruth's tongue was unloosed, and she also could pray, in His name, who underwent the agony in the garden. (Gaskell 282-83)

In the midst of her suffering, Ruth discovers a sense of peace with the realization that both the gargoyle and Christ share with her the experience of suffering. She is further comforted by their faith and endurance in the midst of great hardship. Although the gargoyle's face bears the marks of "mental agony," his eyes speak only of faith and hope. Despite her own troubles, Ruth is able to enter imaginatively into the pain of others. Listening empathetically to Matthew 26, the account of Christ's betrayal, arrest and interrogation, Ruth finds in Christ's example of patient suffering a model to follow, and she petitions Heaven in the name of Christ. By including Christ in her prayer to the Father, Ruth spiritually reenacts another event recorded in Matthew 26, the creation of Communion, the celebration of unity between Christians and Christ. Though she is initially overwhelmed by the

suffering caused by the presence of Bellingham, Ruth draws strength from the community created by common suffering.

Guy, too, draws strength from religion as he wages a moral battle within himself. Furious that Philip has slandered his name, Guy plots his revenge:

> 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, not for this offence alone but for a long course of enmity. (Yonge 215)

What Guy has feared has come to pass: he has inherited the passionate and uncontrolled rage of the Morvilles, and, what is more, he revels in it. A sudden glimpse of the majestic setting sun halts Guy's vengeful thought.

> That sight recalled him not only to himself, but to his true and better self; the good angel so close to him for the twenty years of his life, had been driven aloof but for a moment, and now, either that, or 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." Guy had what some would call a vivid imagination, others a lively faith. He shuddered; then, his elbows on his knees, and his hands clasped over his brow, he sat, bending forward, with his eyes closed, wrought up in a fearful struggle; while it was

> to him as if he saw the hereditary demon of the Morvilles watching by his side, to take full possession of him as a rightful prey, unless the battle was fought and won before the red orb had passed out of sight. . He locked his hands more rigidly together, vowing to compel himself, ere he left the spot, to forgive his enemy--forgive him candidly--forgive him, so as never again to have to say, "I forgive him!". . . as if there was power in the words alone, he forced his lips to repeat,-- "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us." Coldly and hardly were they spoken at first; again he pronounced them, again, again,--each time the tone was softer, each time they came more from the heart. At last, the remembrance of greater wrongs, and worse revilings came upon him; his eyes filled with tears, the most subduing and healing of all thoughts--that of the Example--became present to him; the foe was driven back. (Yonge 216-17)

Like Gaskell, Yonge uses biblical passages to spur on Guy's moral victory. Yonge's use of Ephesians 4:26-27 transforms Guy's relationship to nature. Once, nature confirmed his individualistic and unrestrained tendencies; now, however, nature takes on religious significance, prompting Guy to remember the biblical command against anger. Having internalized Mrs Edmonstone's moral training, Guy seeks to forgive his cousin, to defeat forever the curse that has

divided them. Guy mouths the words of Matthew 6:12, a line from the Lord's Prayer, as he shifts his focus away from anger to forgiveness. However, Guy is only able to understand the true nature of forgiveness when he remembers, like Ruth, the sufferings of Christ--the "Example." It is only then that Guy can relinquish his anger and move toward the possibility of creating a new unity between himself and Philip.

Though both Gaskell and Yonge grant significance to personal religious experience, they do not delve into the complexities of doctrine or theology; rather, they choose to show the effect of religion upon Ruth and Guy by relating the characters' response to their communities. The characters have experienced the profound changes elicited by their multi-faceted educations: they are now armed with the resolve and discipline gained through study; the altruism and desire for community gained from a developed moral sense; and the hope that comes from personal and communal faith. At last, Guy and Ruth prepare to face their social responsibility as mature adults. Having followed the humble and loving examples of their surrogate parents, both are equipped to act as parents themselves, both biologically and spiritually.

Ruth's maturity as a mother is exemplified when she is confronted by her former lover Bellingham on the beach at Abermouth. Hearing a reference to Leonard and realizing the

child is his own, Bellingham insists that he meet with Ruth in order to discuss Leonard's future. Ruth agrees to meet him on the beach, but this time she confronts him not as a forsaken lover but as a mother intent on maintaining the moral purity of her child. Bellingham first suggests that they renew their relationship; when he sees that Ruth is unmoving, he threatens to reveal Leonard's illegitimacy. Ruth remains firm:

> To save Leonard from the shame and agony of knowing my disgrace, I would lie down and die. . . but to go back into sin would be the real cruelty to him. The errors of my youth may be washed away by my tears--it was so once when the gentle, blessed Christ was upon the earth; but now, if I went into wilful guilt, as you would have me, how could I teach Leonard God's holy will? I should not mind his knowing my past sin, compared to the awful corruption it would be if he knew me living now, as you would have me, lost to all fear of God. Whatever may be my doom--God is just--I leave myself in His hands. I will save Leonard from evil. (Gaskell 301)

Ruth characterizes herself as the moral teacher of her son, and she clearly shows that she will let nothing hinder or sully her responsibilities as a parent. Though she admits with some passion that she had loved Bellingham, Ruth sees that they are fundamentally different because she has

experienced suffering and Bellingham has not. As she tells him,

> We are very far apart. The time that has pressed down my life like brands of hot iron, and scarred me for ever, has been nothing to you. You have talked of it with no sound of moaning in your voice--no shadow over the brightness of your face; it has left no sense of sin on your conscience, while me it haunts and haunts. (Gaskell 303)

Testifying to the pain caused by her illicit relationship, Ruth reveals the extent to which the Bensons' moral training has impacted her; no longer is she unconscious of moral standards. Implicitly, she also points to the torturous outcome of an illicit sexual relationship that the female partner must face but that is not shared by the male partner. No longer blind to Bellingham's immorality, Ruth chooses to protect her child rather than to rekindle a relationship with her former lover.

Even when Bellingham offers to marry her and thereby remove the stain of illegitimacy from Leonard, Ruth still places her child's moral development on a higher level than her former passion or even the lure of conventionality: "If there were no other reason to prevent our marriage but the one fact that it would bring Leonard into contact with you, that would be enough" (Gaskell 303). Ruth's moral training has transformed her from being Bellingham's passive, pet-

like mistress into a moral and determined mother, unwilling to let Bellingham take advantage of her again. Writing of this scene, one critic suggests that for Ruth, "devotion to her child--which in the intervening years had become primary with her--conquers the impulse to let the old passion revive. It is a strong scene; it marks the measure of her growth" (Hopkins 122).

Knowing the impact of education upon an individual, Ruth is adamant in her desire to retain power over her son's education, even if it means refusing him the opportunity of attending an expensive school. Bellingham is first to negotiate with Ruth over Leonard's education. He suggests a trade: Ruth will buy her son's education by again becoming Bellingham's mistress. As he tells Ruth: "If you would consent, Leonard should be always with you--educated where and how you liked. if only, Ruth--if only those happy days might return" (Gaskell 289). Though she secretly yearns to be able to better Leonard through a good education, Ruth resists all of Bellingham's attempts to gain influence over Leonard or his education.

> There was no sign of maternal ambition on the motionless face, though there might be some little spring in her heart, as it beat quick and strong at the idea of the proposal she imagined he was going to make of taking her boy away to give him the careful education she had often craved for him. She should

> refuse it, as she would everything else which seemed to imply that she acknowledged a claim over Leonard. (Gaskell 297)

Armed with a keen sense of morality, Ruth is no longer susceptible to Bellingham's gifts or promises; indeed, she determines to deny Bellingham's paternity in an effort to preserve Leonard from corruption, an act of true courage in an age when fathers had all legal control of their offspring.

Ruth's desire to maintain control over Leonard's education leads her to reject Mr. Farquhar's kindhearted offer as well, though Farquhar, unlike Bellingham, is a moral and generous man. Seeking to live in the example of Christ, Ruth desires to teach her son humility and wisdom, virtues that she believes are antithetical to what Leonard shall be taught in an expensive school:

> She was strenuously against the school plan. She could see no advantages that would counterbalance the evil which she dreaded from any school for Leonard; namely, that the good opinion and regard of the world would assume too high an importance in his eyes. (Gaskell 394)

Rejecting Bellingham for his blatant lack of morality, Ruth rejects Mr. Farquhar's offer in an effort to shield her son from the more subtly evil indoctrination of the world: that social standing and reputation are of the utmost

significance. Thus, Ruth clings to the moral lessons she has learned from her own experience, placing a higher premium on humility and true, not perceived, virtue.

When Leonard is eleven and has studied all that his mother is capable of teaching him, Ruth is approached by yet another man, this time a doctor, who offers to become the child's guardian and benefactor. Cautioning Ruth not to allow Leonard to cling to her apron strings, he suggests that Leonard become his apprentice after he has educated the boy; afterward, Leonard shall succeed him as a local doctor. Having seen the doctor's faithful work among the sick and lowly and learning that he, too, is the son of an unmarried woman, Ruth agrees to consider the plan for a fortnight. Before the fortnight is up, however, Ruth is taken ill and dies, leaving Leonard in the care of the Bensons by default. Ruth's love for her son and concern for his education cannot permit her to transfer authority over his schooling to anyone save her own teacher, Thurstan Benson.

Guy, too, is faced with parental obligation when he realizes the scope of his duties as master of Redclyffe and its surrounding villages. Mrs. Edmonstone encourages Guy to face up to the social responsibility to which he has been born, despite the difficulty it entails. Enjoining him to depend upon his faith, she urges to take up the duties that are his as a result of his inheritance of his estate. Formerly, when questioned on his role as master of

Redclyffe, Guy "made answers as brief, absent, and indifferent, as if all this concerned him no more than the Emperor of Morocco" (Yonge 47). When he returns to Redclyffe, following his days at Oxford, Guy's attitude has changed. Though he continues to grieve over his forced separation from his beloved cousin Amy, Guy takes up what he believes is his God-given role of master, determined to serve his people wholeheartedly. Sandbach-Dahlstrom notes that for Yonge, "the social body was an organic whole in which each individual had a moral obligation to put personal interest after the more pressing claims of duty and responsibility for others" (Sandbach-Dahlstrom 20).

Before Guy can take on the responsibilities of married life, he must see to his primary duties as a landowner. Guy discovers that the peasantry are unable to make necessary improvements on their own, but look up to him for help, childlike, trusting their master implicitly: "The inhabitants of Redclyffe were a primitive race, almost all related to each other, rough and ignorant, and with a very strong feudal feeling for 'Sir Guy,' who was king, state, supreme authority in their eyes" (Yonge 274). Guy also recognizes the extreme needs of the tenants, particularly in Coombe Prior, a village on the outskirts of his land. Horrified by the conditions, Guy sets out to improve the lives of the peasants, seeking wholeheartedly to fulfil his feudal, fatherly role by repairing the cottages of Coombe

Prior, searching for an active and empathetic clergyman to serve the community, and building a new school for the children of Redclyffe. Desiring the best for the peasants, Guy demonstrates himself to be a worthy and responsible master.

Whereas Ruth becomes a parent before she is fully prepared for the role, Guy becomes a husband and father only after he has proven his maturity by fulfilling his duty as master of Redclyffe. Won over by the account of Guy's heroic rescue of the stranded sailors, Mr. Edmonstone at last allows his daughter Amy to wed Guy. Parenthood follows quickly on the heels of marriage, as Amy becomes pregnant on their European wedding trip. Even on his deathbed, Guy's concern for his child overwhelms his desire to be quickly reunited with his beloved wife. Knowing that Guy is dying, Amy seeks to comfort him by suggesting that she, like his mother, will die in childbirth and join him in Heaven, but Guy silences her hope: "'A few months, perhaps'- said Amabel, in a stifled voice, 'like your mother.' 'No, don't wish that, Amy. You would not wish it to have no mother'" (Yonge 449). Despite the pain of separation, Guy desires his wife to undertake her parental duty, loving and teaching their child in his place.

Guy and Ruth extend their parental roles by providing for the education of others. In addition to setting up the Redclyffe school, Guy seeks to aid in the establishment of

another school, run by the Wellwood sisters. Guy is moved by their charity, and in particular, by the charity of Elizabeth Wellwood.

> . Elizabeth was one of those who rise up, from time to time, as burning and shining lights. It was not spending a quiet, easy life, making her charities secondary to her comforts, but devoting time, strength and goods; not merely giving away what she could spare, but actually sharing all with the poor, reserving nothing for the future. She not only taught the young, and visited the distressed, but she gathered orphans into her house, and nursed the sick day and night. (Yonge 203)

Moved by Elizabeth's sense of duty, Guy attempts to fund the sisters' dream of establishing a school and a hospital. Although Mr. Edmonstone refuses to give Guy the thousand pounds that he wants for the Wellwood's project, Guy finds a way to support their philanthropic institution when he discovers that his young cousin is in desperate need of an education, particularly a moral education. He tells his plan to his tutor, the Wellwoods' cousin:

> "Wellwood," said he, . . . "do you think your cousin would do me a great kindness? You saw that child? Well, if the parents consent it would be the greatest charity on earth if Miss Wellwood would receive her into her school."

> "On what terms? What sort of education is she to have?"
>
> "The chief thing she wants is to be taught Christianity, poor child; the rest Miss Wellwood may settle. . . ." (Yonge 240)

Leaving the dingy lower class life of London, Guy's cousin Marianne Dixon is sent to the country school where she is won over by Elizabeth Wellwood and "a little white bed" (Yonge 241). There, the child becomes part of the cycle of education as she begins to be "fitted for a governess" (Yonge 241), working to become educated for the sake of educating others.

Desiring financial independence for Leonard and herself, Ruth becomes a nursery governess for the foremost Dissenter family in Eccleston, the Bradshaws. As with Guy Morville, Ruth's chief concern is to give her young charges a moral education. Initially, Ruth questions her ability to be a moral example to the youngest Bradshaw children, Mary and Elizabeth. Ever conscious of her past sin, she asks, "Do you think I should be good enough to teach little girls, Miss Benson?" (Gaskell 200). Miss Benson reveals a similar concern for moral education when she responds, "Ruth, as you strive and as you pray for your child, so you must strive and pray to make Mary and Elizabeth good. . ." (Gaskell 200). Over five years, her work with the girls pleases the Bradshaws, so much so that Mr. Bradshaw asks Ruth to

instruct his older daughter Jemima in the suitable way to treat her suitor, Farquhar. Ruth resists, however, feeling unworthy to be the moral judge of a pure girl. Even Jemima seeks Ruth's teaching, seeing in Ruth a gentleness that she wishes she possessed:

> "Oh, Ruth! I have been so unhappy lately. I want you to come and put me to rights. . . You know I'm a sort of out-pupil of yours, though we are so nearly of an age. You ought to lecture me, and make me good."
>
> "Should I, dear?" said Ruth. "I don't think I'm the one to do it." (Gaskell 235)

Although Ruth's education has moved her beyond being an ignorant, seduced girl, Ruth struggles with her position as a teacher, feeling least secure when she is asked to serve as educator to a young woman who stands on the brink of sexuality. The fact of Jemima's physical and emotional development causes Ruth to accept-- albeit unconsciously-- conventional judgments as to their respective moral standings.

The continual linkage of morality and education in Gaskell's novel climaxes in Ruth's dismissal as a governess. Discovering the true circumstances of Leonard's birth, Mr. Bradshaw condemns Ruth in his daughters' schoolroom.

> . . how deep is the corruption this wanton has spread in my family. She has come amongst us with her innocent seeming, and spread her nets well and

> skilfully. She has turned right into wrong, and wrong into right, and taught you all to be uncertain whether there be any such thing as Vice in the world, or whether it ought not to be looked upon as virtue. She has led you to the brink of the deep pit, ready for the first chance circumstance to push you in. And I trusted her--I trusted her--I welcomed her. . . . That the very child and heir of shame to associate with my own innocent children! I trust they are not contaminated. (Gaskell 339-40)

Clearly, Mr. Bradshaw continues to take Ruth seriously as a moral teacher; now, however, he characterizes her instruction as perverse and dangerous--the devious work of an immoral woman. It is significant that the scene is played out in the schoolroom, as Jenny Uglow has pointed out: "Ruth's exposure and Jemima's defence [of Ruth] take place, aptly, in the schoolroom, a place of both innocence and knowledge" (Uglow 335). Morality and education continue to be linked.

Guy and Ruth come to personify the morals they have learned and taught. The characters are elevated to moral examples when they humble themselves by caring for the sick. Despite the fact that he is the respected master of Redclyffe, husband to Amy Edmonstone and soon to become a father, Guy risks his own health to care for Philip, seriously ill and alone in the Italian countryside.

> . Guy persevered indefatigably, sitting up with him every night, and showing himself an invaluable nurse, with his tender hand, modulated voice, quick eye, and quiet activity. His whole soul was engrossed: he never appeared to think of himself, or be sensible of fatigue; but was only absorbed in the one thought of his patient's comfort! . . . He earnestly hoped that so valuable a life might be spared, but if that might not be, his fervent wish was that at least a few parting words of good will and reconciliation might be granted to be his comfort in remembrance. (Yonge 398-99)

So concerned is Guy for Philip that he sacrifices all in order to work for Philip's recovery. In this, he seeks to heal the rift between them. Guy's subsequent death causes Philip to recognize his own pride and lack of forgiveness; whereas he had always seen Guy as an imprudent boy and himself as the upright, scholarly, and unjustly impecunious gentleman, he now understands Guy to be the moral example and himself to be foolish and unforgiving. At Guy's deathbed, Philip is overwhelmed by the full extent of his cousin's humility, and he, in turn, is humbled: ". . Philip had sunk on his knees, hiding his face on the bedclothes, in an agony of self-abasement, before the goodness he had persecuted" (Yonge 446). As one critic has written, Guy's "sacrifice robs Philip of the comforting

delusions he has cherished about Guy and Amy, and about his own conduct and motives" (Sandbach-Dahlstrom 53). Whereas once Philip had once appeared to be the ideal of the educated man, Guy has replaced him as such, having truly learned the lessons of his own moral education.

Ironically, Ruth's transformation into a moral example occurs just at the time when she has been universally condemned as an example of immorality. Dismissed by the Bradshaws, her true past known by all and needing work for financial reasons, Ruth turns to the lowliest labor possible: she becomes a sick nurse for the poor. Tending the dying, Ruth focuses upon the humanity of her charges, seeing beyond their sufferings: she

> think[s] of the individuals themselves, as separate from their decaying frames; and all along she had enough self-command to control herself from expressing any sign of repugnance. . . The poor patients themselves were unconsciously gratified and soothed by her harmony and refinement of manner, voice and gesture. If this harmony and refinement had been merely superficial, it would not have had this balmy effect. That arose from its being the true expression of a kind, modest, and humble spirit. (Gaskell 390-91)

Like the Bensons before her, Ruth has become an example of virtue to her community, revealing compassion in all her actions. Her virtue is not imposed; rather it is organic,

flowing out of her very nature and revealing the full extent of Ruth's transformation.

The community learns more of her gentle and compassionate ways when she tends the victims of a typhus outbreak. Once condemning of Ruth's early fallenness, the town comes to recognize her truly moral nature. Indeed, even in her unassuming work, Ruth remains a teacher, a moral example for both her son and the community, as one member of the community testifies: "Such a one as her has never been a great sinner; nor does she do her work as a penance, but for the love of God, and of the blessed Jesus. She will be in light of God's countenance when you and I will be standing afar off" (Gaskell 429). Hilary Schor has written that through her work as a nurse, Ruth "is transformed into a kind of saint, praised on all sides, her sin entirely forgotten in the good she is doing. . . she becomes a kind of icon--virtue personified" (Schor 72). Like Guy, she cares little for her own safety and demands the responsibility of caring for Bellingham when he falls ill with typhus. Though her care results in his return to health, Ruth falls victim to the disease, and she soon dies after a period of delirium, leaving her son and the community in awe of her altruism.

Dying because they had served those who seemed their enemies, the two become role models, identified with biblical and literary heroes. Through his development, Guy

comes to resemble Sintram, the hero of one of his favorite books, Sintram and his Companions. In a strange moment of self-reflexiveness, the fictional character of Guy takes another fictional character as his ideal: "Yes, Amy your words are still with me--'Sintram conquered his doom,'--and it was by following death! Welcome, then, whatever may be in store for me. . ." (Yonge 273). So well does Guy follow the path of his ideal that Amy's brother, Charles, in turn resolves to "follow his young man's example and take him for my hero model" (Yonge 567). As he tells Amy,

> .I really don't know whether even you owe as much to your husband as I do. *You* were good for something before, but when I look back on what I was when first he came, I know that his leading, unconscious as it was, brought out the stifled good in me. What a wretch I should have been; what a misery to myself and to you all by this time; and now, I verily believe, that since he let in the sunlight from heaven on me, I am better off. . . (Yonge 573)

In Charles' words, Guy's education comes full circle: once longing to be the moral example that Sintram had become, Guy struggles to tame his early exuberance and become the humble and forgiving servant; succeeding, Guy becomes, like Sintram before him, a moral exemplar, educated in the moral life and teaching others of it through his very actions.

Similarly, Ruth becomes a moral exemplar as well,

equated with biblical ideals of womanhood. Caring for the victims of typhus, Ruth is compared to the woman of Proverbs 31 when Gaskell writes that in Eccleston, "'many arose and called her blessed'" (Gaskell 430). Also implicit in the quotation is a reference to the Virgin Mary who proclaims in the Magnificat of Luke 1:48, ". . . from henceforth all generations will call me blessed" (KJV). Once compared to the prostitute Mary Magdalene, Ruth is transformed into a Madonna, the perfect mother. In this, Gaskell, like Yonge, exemplifies the moral power of literary examples. Just as an impure woman may be transformed into the likeness of a biblical ideal of purity, so too may the reader be educated by the fictional Ruth to live a life of service and sacrifice.

In becoming an ideal, Ruth shames those who had formerly appeared to be far more righteous than she. Indeed, Thurstan Benson, once her own teacher, finds his funeral sermon to be an inadequate tribute to Ruth's sacrifice, and turns to Revelation's sublime description of the reunion of God and humans as a fitting eulogy. Repenting of his condemnation of Ruth, Mr. Bradshaw determines to mark the memory of Ruth with a tombstone for he "had been anxious to do something to testify his respect for the woman, who, if all had entertained his opinions, would have been driven into hopeless sin" (Gaskell 458). Humbled, he seeks to comfort Ruth's son, casting off his

former hypocrisy and moved by "the sympathy which choked up his voice, and filled his eyes with tears" (Gaskell 458). This image concludes the novel, marking Ruth's triumph as a moral teacher, unconsciously humbling the proud through her own hard-won quest for moral education.

Both authors use the humble service of their characters to suggest a profound shift in the nature of the heroic. Although once the domain of the socially "noble," the aristocracy, the moral ideal now rests with the humble heroes who resist the ostentatious life of the dissipated rich. It is true that Ruth is described as appearing more refined by her education: Gaskell describes her as looking quite aristocratic.

> And although she had lived in a very humble home, yet there was something about either it or her, or the people amongst whom she had been thrown during the last few years, which had so changed her, that whereas, six or seven years ago, you would have perceived that she was not altogether a lady by birth and education, yet now she might have been placed among the highest of the land, and would have been taken by the most critical judge for their equal, although ignorant of their conventional etiquette. . (Gaskell 209)

Despite her appearance, however, Ruth strives not to join the aristocracy, but shuns the selfishness that is exemplified by the nobly-born Bellingham and the culture

typified by the fateful ball which occurs at the beginning of the novel. Ruth even rejects the raiment of wealth that Bradshaw repeatedly seeks to give her. Rather, Ruth chooses to dress plainly, her clothing mirroring her quest for a simple life. Under the care of the middle-class Bensons, Ruth learns how do homely work, serving others through humble labor. This lesson is extended into her work as a nurse, the humblest of all professions open to a middle-class woman, as Coral Lansbury has noted.[1] Tending the outcasts of society, namely those at the bottom of the social ladder, Ruth redefines the nature of ideal womanhood: in the novel, it is not the wealthy and refined woman but the humble working woman who proves to be the ideal. As one critic has noted, "Some of Elizabeth Gaskell's friends were well advised to burn Ruth, but not necessarily on moral grounds. The real threat in the book lies in the clear statement that even the dull and underprivileged can be of greater value to society than the clever and the rich" (Lansbury 80). Fitting into Gaskell's didactic purpose, the triumph of character over appearance, of compassion over class consciousness marks a new definition of heroism and creates a new ideal.

In The Heir of Redclyffe, similarly, Guy learns how to be a reliable master and, more significantly, a moral example, not from his noble ancestors, but in the congenial family life of the upper-middle class Edmonstones. Whereas

Guy's family, part of the landed gentry, is racked by heated feuds and careless cruelty, the Edmonstones possess a life of harmony and service that proves to be a model for Guy. Turning his back on the excesses of his own family, Guy becomes a member of the Edmonstones' less prestigious family, taking Mrs. Edmonstone's attitude of discipline and service as his own and using them to reshape his own aristocratic responsibilities. Guy also finds more significance in his service to Philip than in the prestige of his title. As he tells his wife during Philip's recuperation, Philip is

> ". . . too weak to speak, or look up often. When he did though, it was very kindly, very pleasantly. This is joy coming in the morning, Amy!"
>
> "I wonder if you are happier now than after the shipwreck," said Amy, after a silence.
>
> "How can you ask? The shipwreck was a gleam, the first ray that came to cheer me in those penance hours, when I was cut off from all; and now, oh, Amy! I cannot enter into it. Such richness and fullness of blessing showered on me, more than I ever dared to wish for or dream of, both in the present and future hopes. It seems more than can belong to man, at least to me, so unlike what I have deserved, that I can hardly believe it." (Yonge 404)

The richness Guy refers to is undeniably non-material, and

he reveals that reconciliation is of far greater value than was the display of his leadership at Redclyffe.

In basing the heroism of their characters upon their ability to serve, rather than on their status, and in placing their heroes in a chiefly domestic sphere, the authors offer their readers the chance to become virtuous and heroic as well. Under the influence of the authors' didactic purpose, the romance of the aristocratic world is replaced by the romance of servanthood, as exemplified by Ruth and Guy. Showing the greatest moral struggles as occurring in the everyday world of the domestic interior, Yonge and Gaskell suggest the practicality of Guy and Ruth's moral education, the relevance of their moral struggles to those of their middle class readership. In initially creating Guy and Ruth as thoroughly human, flawed yet striving, neither a depiction of pure goodness or pure evil, Yonge and Gaskell ironically make their humble ideals more potent, more clearly able to effect change in the lives of their readers. The authors enable their readers to know Guy and Ruth as individuals, not as types, thereby seeking to eliminate preconceptions and prejudice; readers are invited to see their own struggles in the characters' and then to trace the progress of the characters' educations. In vicariously making the moral ascent with Guy and Ruth, readers are shown the possibility of transformation and are thus encouraged to take up the mature Guy and Ruth as

examples for their own education in virtue. In this, Ruth and Guy serve their authors' didactic purpose, exemplifying the transformative power of such a moral education and making possible a community of readers who share the authors' ideals of sacrifice, discipline and service.

Note for Part I

1. Lansbury, 77-78.

PART II

INSTRUCTING THE READER:

AUTHORIAL INTRUSIONS IN THE NOVELS

Just as Yonge and Gaskell undertake the education of their main characters, so do the writers seek to educate their readers. This is most obvious in Gaskell's authorial intrusiveness[1], her repeated attempts to make moral sense of the novel's action. Yonge, on the other hand, seldom addresses her readers directly; rather, she seeks to educate her readers in the proper texts, using Philip and Guy's conflict over books to indicate the balance that must be struck between the moral and the aesthetic. Relying upon the establishment of a moral center to the novels, these didactic intrusions attempt to educate the reader, an education in which morally perceptive reading becomes a step toward living the virtuous life. I shall deal first with Ruth before turning my attention to The Heir of Redclyffe.

Gaskell's intrusiveness has been central to many critics' denunciations of Ruth. Edgar Wright's comments typify the complaints made about Gaskell's intrusions:

> Authorial commentary demands, or is a product of, continual thinking about one's readers. . . While writing the earlier "novels with a purpose" Mrs.

> Gaskell had felt that it was necessary to explain both the background and her views about it, but this direct injection of a personal comment into the narrative was, I have suggested, unsatisfactory. Her real interest as a novelist was in the individuals and their background; the humanitarian gloss on them led on to a lack of balance, particularly where it gave openings for the author's sensitivity to the emotional and the pathetic. (Wright 19)

Wright sees a lack of unity in Gaskell's emphasis upon characterization and her intrusive didacticism. In this, he implicitly endorses a more Jamesian approach to novel writing, calling Gaskell's novel weak due to the vocal and subjective presence of the author. This view overlooks the consistency with which Gaskell applies the idea of education to all levels of the novel; education functions as a theme, propels the plot, transforms the characters and motivates the use of authorial intrusiveness.

W. A. Craik has a similar critique of the novel. Writing about Ruth, he suggests,

> There are occasional troubles with her style, both in the author's narrative and in speech. These occur where Elizabeth Gaskell feels impelled to make generalizations about her moral purpose, or about religion. Here she becomes over-simple or slightly rhetorical, or an uneasy mixture of both. (Craik 87)

Craik's criticism is a bit more specific, arguing that Gaskell's intrusions limit the complexity of the issues in the novel by making her responses simplistic and one-sided. Both critics, however, seem to work on the presupposition that novelistic didacticism and authorial intrusiveness are inherently contrary to the "good" novel. Such critics' treatment of Gaskell's intrusions fails to place the intrusions in the larger context of Gaskell's didactic purpose; thus, their criticism remains biased and reductive, rejecting Gaskell's self-conscious "moral aesthetic" and limiting their evaluation of her to a canonical/non-canonical critique without regard to her cultural significance.

Despite the critics' condemnation of this authorial style, close attention to the intrusions and their function in the larger narrative is warranted as the intrusions perpetuate Gaskell's creation of morally didactic fiction.

Gaskell's intrusions almost invariably occur at moments of crisis. Stopping the flow of the plot with the appearance of the narrator upon the stage of the action to address the reader directly, Gaskell's intrusions serve several purposes. First, they indicate to the reader which moments are crucial, both for the plot of the novel and for the moral life of Ruth. In this, Gaskell seems to be educating the common reader in what is of significance in the novel. At the same time, however, whether consciously

or not, Gaskell seems to be minimizing the capacity of her readers to read well, particularly as Gaskell realized the subject matter might not be appropriate for that most impressionable and inexperienced group of readers, young women, but rather would be read by an older, more experienced audience. Second, the intrusions give voice to an unconventional standard of morality, resisting the traditional morality that would quickly condemn the actions of Ruth. In this, the author challenges the reader to rethink the harsh effects of a rigid moral code, offering the reader in its place not a rejection of ethical standards, but a moral code based upon forgiveness and mercy and the possibility of atonement for past sins that flows out of Gaskell's understanding of Christianity.

Further defining the nature and purpose of Gaskell's intrusions, I suggest that they can be divided into five major categories: first, intrusions that speak of the future, suggesting authorial omniscience; second, intrusions that suggest vague moral precepts; third, intrusions that question traditional morality; fourth, intrusions that specifically defend the character Ruth; and fifth--in contrast with the first category-- intrusions that suggest a *lack* of authorial omniscience. It is instructive to pay close attention to these moments in order to probe Gaskell's ease (or unease) with her own didactic purpose. Although in some intrusions Gaskell appears confident in her ability to

control the narrative, acting as the moral arbiter, other intrusions reveal her ambivalence, or, in a more problematic reading, insecurity about her own authorial control and stance as moral educator. A closer analysis is in order.

Gaskell appears to be most secure when she makes reference to her authorial omniscience. She places weight upon key moments during the process of Ruth's seduction by hinting at the significant effects of seemingly insignificant exchanges or actions. This is evidenced when Ruth, having been abandoned by her employer, makes the fatal decision to go with Bellingham to London: "Low and soft, with much hesitation, came the 'Yes'; the fatal word of which she so little imagined the infinite consequences. The thought of being with him was all and everything" (Gaskell 58). By differentiating between Ruth's unawareness of the gravity of her response and the author's knowledge of Ruth's looming fate, Gaskell draws the reader's attention both to the scene, itself significant in the process of Ruth's seduction, and to her own authorial omniscience. Similarly, the intrusion that follows Thurstan Benson's decision to pass Ruth off as a widow serves a similar purpose. "Ah, tempter! unconscious tempter! Here was a way of evading the trials for the poor little unborn child, of which Mr Benson had never thought. It was the decision--the pivot, on which the fate of years moved; and he turned it the wrong way" (Gaskell 122). Again, Gaskell makes a distinction between

the character's moral choice and the correct moral choice, her weighty and sorrowful tone making the reader aware of the negative ramifications of such a decision in a moment that foreshadows the sufferings caused by the Bensons' lie. In both passages, Gaskell's omniscience is also linked to her position as the moral center and arbiter; though both Ruth and Benson make the wrong moral choice, Gaskell is present to remind the reader of the correct moral choice.

Acting as a moral arbiter, Gaskell employs several intrusions to make general moral points, moments that are unflinchingly didactic. An example of this is seen shortly after Bellingham confronts Ruth as she is walking her young charges to church. Stepping completely out of the narrative, Gaskell suggests a parallel between Ruth's predicament and the experience of the readers.

> It sometimes seems a little strange how, after having earnestly prayed to be delivered from temptation, and having given ourselves with shut eyes into God's hand, from that time every thought, every outward influence, every acknowledged law of life, seems to lead us on from strength to strength. It seems strange sometimes, because we notice the coincidence; but it is the natural, unavoidable consequence of all.[sic] truth and goodness being one and the same, and therefore carried out in every circumstance, external and internal, of God's creation. (Gaskell 284-85)

Gaskell interjects Ruth's moment of crisis with this passage in an attempt to create a point of connection between Ruth and the readers. Gaskell does this by turning the mirror upon herself and the readers, effectively creating an atmosphere of introspection that draws the readers' attention from the plight of Ruth to the readers' own lives and then back again to Ruth. Gaskell softens her directive to consider one's own life through the use of "ourselves," the plural pronoun suggesting both a communal relationship between author and readers and the commonality of human experience. Gaskell's implicit point is this: we middle-class readers are not so different from the dramatically fallen Ruth. Gaskell concludes the lesson with a moral message, that the plea for divine deliverance begets in the individual the solace and strength that comes from a sympathetic and inherently good and truthful universe. In this, Gaskell again reveals her intent to educate her readers.

Although the authorial voice seeks to act as a moral center in the novel, Gaskell attempts to distinguish her moral views from what she considers a more status quo morality. This is seen in Gaskell's discussion of Ruth's dreams following the ball:

> . one figure flitted more than all the rest through her visions. He presented flower after flower to her in that baseless morning dream, which was all too

> quickly ended. The night before, she had seen her dead mother in her sleep, and she wakened, weeping. And now she dreamed of Mr Bellingham, and smiled.
>
> And yet, was this a more evil dream than the other? (Gaskell 18)

Gaskell's question implicitly recognizes that decorum would dictate that it is morally superior to dream of one's mother, but somehow questionable to dream of a man to whom one has no ties. Gaskell's very question challenges such an assumption, however. Indeed, Gaskell encourages her reader to resist jumping to moral conclusions before understanding the import of the dreams for Ruth. It is the empathetic reader who will see the dreams as the poignant manifestation of Ruth's loneliness and desire for love. The question certainly acts as a rhetorical device that challenges the reader, suggesting that Gaskell feels secure enough in her position to use the seemingly more tentative form of a question rather than a barefaced statement of her meaning.

Gaskell uses another question when she describes Ruth's behavior following Ruth's discovery that others consider her to be a fallen woman. This question, however, serves a different purpose. Gaskell writes: "Ever since her adventure with the little boy and his sister, Ruth had habitually avoided encountering these happy--innocents, may I call them?--these happy fellow-mortals!" (Gaskell 94). In this passage, Gaskell's question reflects a more traditional

view of the children's moral status, one from which, at least in this case, she seeks to distance herself.[2] Gaskell's answer to her own question is implicitly a negative one. She replaces the word "innocents" with "fellow-mortals," thus minimizing the moral divide that conventional morality would place between a "fallen" woman and "innocent" children. By using "fellow-mortals," Gaskell draws Ruth back into the community, stressing the commonality of a shared humanity rather than creating multiple moral categories. The only moral category that seems to be inherent in Gaskell's comment is that which is shared by all humans. She visibly replaces "innocents" with "mortals," a word suggesting limitedness and frailty, and links the latter to "fellow," suggesting that this is the only moral category that makes sense to use about the human community.

Gaskell undermines her desire to avoid differentiating between Ruth and others when she defends Ruth to her readers, claiming Ruth's innocence. "She was too young when her mother died to have received any cautions or words of advice respecting *the* subject of a woman's life. . . Ruth was innocent and snow-pure" (Gaskell 44). By claiming that Ruth is innocent because she lacks this integral (though ironically unnamed) knowledge, Gaskell falls back on the oversimplification that Ruth is somehow different from other humans. Whereas Gaskell's previously discussed intrusions

seek to contradict the conventional belief that Ruth is far worse than others, Gaskell's defense of Ruth suggests that she is far more innocent than most, a distinction that recreates moral categories and separates Ruth from conventional society.

While Gaskell defends Ruth's essential innocence, she also makes the reader aware that Ruth's knowledge is insufficient, implying that the reader must be educated in the knowledge of proper sexual relationships. For instance, when Bellingham suggests that he and Ruth take a walk together, Gaskell writes,

> at first she declined, but then, suddenly wondering and questioning herself why she refused such a thing which was, as far as reason and knowledge (*her* knowledge) went, so innocent and which was certainly so tempting and pleasant, she agreed to go the round. (Gaskell 40)

Gaskell grants that Ruth bases her decision to accompany Bellingham only after consulting her own conscience, her "reason and knowledge," thus denouncing a conventional moral standard that would label Ruth as wicked. However, Gaskell draws the reader's attention to the subjectivity and limitedness of Ruth's knowledge with the italicized "her"-- Ruth's knowledge is not complete knowledge and therefore must be further defined by the parenthetical comment. By distinguishing between true knowledge and Ruth's knowledge, Gaskell rejects Ruth's subjective morality as an inaccurate

moral compass, suggesting the dangers of relying on the untutored conscience. Here, Gaskell's didactic purposes are at odds: in sensitizing her reader to Ruth's plight she feels she must defend Ruth's damning innocence, yet she also seeks to show the reader that there exists a knowledge more correct than Ruth's. It is a tension Gaskell fails to resolve.

Finally, Gaskell inserts a few intrusions that suggest a lack of authorial omniscience, but ironically these serve to reveal Gaskell's own sense of authorial security. Gaskell suggests the parameters of her knowledge early in the novel, differentiating between those issues that are significant and those that are insignificant. Glossing over the motives of a minor character, she writes, "Whether smelling or hearing had most to do in causing his obedience, I cannot tell; perhaps you can" (Gaskell 71). Gaskell raises possible reasons for the character's actions, but does not settle the issue definitively, leaving it to the reader to determine. While Gaskell does not desire to pursue this minute strand as she has far more important issues at hand, the comment "perhaps you can" suggests giving interpretive power to the reader. Significantly, this does not occur, however, in the crucial moments of the novel, for Gaskell seems eager to shape the response of her audience, coaching the audience in those moral questions that are least negotiable.

Gaskell similarly uses her lack of knowledge as a technique to focus upon what she believes is the real issue. When Gaskell introduces Faith Benson to her readers, the author concedes that "I do not know whether she was older than her brother [Thurstan Benson], but, probably owing to his infirmity requiring her care, she had something of a mother's manner towards him" (Gaskell 111). Gaskell's lack of knowledge of this seems a strange gap, especially when she later goes on to explain Sally's extensive history with the family, including when the Bensons were small children. However, Gaskell's assertion of her ignorance can be read as a technique for skimming over incidental details in order to focus upon the essence of the siblings' relationship. She does not wish to become burdened with peripheral details, so intent is she to educate the reader in larger moral issues.

Gaskell's use of authorial intrusions focuses her readers' attention upon that which is central to the novel: Ruth, the "fallen woman," illegitimacy. Gaskell seeks to act as a moral arbiter and educator, distinguishing between right and wrong, both with the actions of the characters and the judgments of the conventionally-minded reader. In this, she seeks to maintain control over the novel and over the reader. At times, her professed lack of omniscience superficially suggests that she is not as omniscient a narrator as she seems; however, these moments may also be read as Gaskell's relinquishing her control as author, of

empowering the reader to fill in the gaps she leaves. In such moves, Gaskell begins to break down the traditional author-reader hierarchy, thereby enhancing the shared imaginative community. Gaskell does at times appear to be too heavy-handed with her readers, at once exhorting them to learn the moral lessons that the novel seeks to teach yet not trusting the reader to do so independently; yet this is due more to Gaskell's unmoving allegiance to certain moral principles than to a raw desire for power, particularly as Gaskell seems to perceive morality to be something absolute. For Gaskell, the acceptance of the moral reasoning her authorial voice professes is the key needed to enter into the moral universe of the novel and thus to empathize with Ruth.

Unlike Gaskell, Yonge generally eschews obvious authorial interventions. Sandbach-Dahlstrom notes that because Yonge

> is aware that many critics of her day are opposed to religious novels on the grounds that the authors of such works twist their narratives to "point the moral," she is open to the idea that to be convincing, novels must be plausible and show inner coherence. Thus. it ought not, she writes, to lead to narratives being manipulated "unjustifiably." (15-16)

Although the critic is speaking of Yonge's conception of plot, the comment is also relevant to Yonge's lack of

intrusions in order to maintain verisimilitude. Therefore, Yonge uses a more discreet technique to educate her readers. Through the characters' discussion of books and reading, Yonge points to what and how one must read, ultimately attempting to make a case for the role that books generally, and her novel specifically, can play in the moral life of the receptive reader. She extends her didactic project through the recurring theme of moral reading that is throughout The Heir of Redclyffe.

Yonge's characters read voraciously, an occupation that at once takes them beyond their rather limited domestic sphere and teaches them how to act heroically in their seemingly quiet lives. Not surprisingly, religious works, and specifically Tractarian literature, are a staple of the Edmonstones' reading diet: the characters read from the Anglican Prayer book, Amy comforts herself at bedtime with "a book of sacred poetry" (305), and Guy, Charles and Amy become engrossed in Butler's Analogy of Religion, Natural and Revealed, an eighteenth-century treatise against Deism. Yonge pays a compliment to her mentor, John Keble, when she has Mrs. Edmonstone give Guy a copy of The Christian Year, Keble's book of devotional poetry. The Edmonstones do not limit their reading merely to overtly religious works, however. In addition to devotional poetry, the characters read Petrarch, Dante's Paradiso (illustrated by John Flaxman), Morte d'Arthur, Helmine von Chezy's Beharre,

Scott's The Lady of the Lake, Spenser, Milton (despite his Low Church bent), Burns, Wordsworth, Byron, Southey and Tennyson. Novels are also well represented in the Edmonstone's collection: Alexander Manzoni's I Promessi Sposi, Goldsmith's The Vicar of Wakefield, La Motte Fouque's Sintram and His Companions, and Dickens' Dombey and Son. Laura and Philip also read works in the fields of science and mathematics, including Joyce's Scientific Dialogues. Yonge's many references to reading and to actual works warrant a further exploration of her purpose in doing so.

Yonge often uses Philip to raise the issues of aesthetic standards and the purpose of reading. Philip, well-suited to a university system that is grounded in the classics, plays the role of the intellectual reader. His reading tastes appear to be much higher than his cousins', including classical authors and continental novelists in the original languages. Unlike Amy and Charles, who enjoy Dickens' Dombey and Son in addition to other of the latest novels, Philip has not indulged in English novels, as Laura snobbishly relays: "he was brought up on the old standard books, instead of his time being frittered away on the host of idle modern ones" (Yonge 28). Responding to the cousins' discussion of current reading habits, Philip says, "I have often been struck by finding how ignorant people are, even of Shakspeare [sic]; and I believe the blame chiefly rests on the cheap rubbish in which Charlie is nearly walled up

there" (Yonge 28). Clearly, Philip deplores popular fiction, differentiating his loftier reading from that of his low-brow cousins.

Understanding the experience of reading to be merely an intellectual and moral exercise, Laura and Philip resist the ability of novels to move the reader's emotions. Laura admits that she did not finish reading Dombey and Son after she witnessed her sister's emotional response to it: "I can't quite say I don't know whether he lived or died. for I found Amy in a state that alarmed me, crying in the green-house, and I was very glad to find it was nothing worse than little Paul" (Yonge 28). Unlike the majority of nineteenth-century readers, Laura distrusts such emotional reactions, worried by her sister's imaginative empathy. After becoming secretly engaged, Philip presents Laura with a "book of algebra,--a very original first gift from a lover. It came openly, with a full understanding that she was to use it by his recommendation" (Yonge 147). Rather than admit that her subsequent depression is due to her secret engagement and her jealousy of Guy and Amy, Laura seeks to bury her emotions beneath the intellectual discipline needed to work though the algebra text. Yonge shows Laura's reliance upon such excessive intellectualism to be dangerous, a substitute for emotional honesty and filial submission.

Philip, too, fears the effects of emotional reading.

When he discovers that Guy has been reading Byron's Giaour, Philip warns his cousin that "it is bad food for excitable minds. Don't let it get hold of you" (Yonge 82). Philip also remarks that for Guy there is a general danger of reading fiction due to the emotions it can stir up: "I should think it should be hardly safe for so excitable a mind to dwell much on the world of fiction" (Yonge 63). Although Yonge later reveals that she largely reflects Philip's opinion of Byron, she uses the excessive rationality of Laura and Philip as a sign of their hardness of heart, their lack of emotional honesty, qualities that ultimately prove to burden the couple.

Yonge does not unreservedly share such an ideal of detached reading; rather, she suggests through Guy an alternative way of reading. Unlike Philip, Guy imaginatively enters the fiction that he reads to such a degree that he is profoundly affected, both emotionally and morally, by the message of the books, seeing in fiction a guide for his own life and circumstances. When Guy reads La Motte Fouque's Sintram and His Companions, a German chivalric novel, Laura describes the book's effect upon him:

> Nothing has affected him so much as Sintram. . I never saw anything like it. He took it up by chance, and stood reading it while all those strange expressions began to flit over his face, and at last he fairly cried over it so much, that he was obliged to

> fly out of the room. How often he has read it I cannot tell; I believe he has bought one for himself, and it is as if the engraving had a fascination for him; he stands looking at it as if he was in a dream. (Yonge 64)

Guy's reading is not a substitute for life, however; rather, it teaches him how to deal with the moral struggles of his own life. Relating himself to the heroes of the books, Guy seeks to live by the moral lessons that are learned by them. Reading Southey's Thalaba, Guy compares it to Sintram and His Companions and finds the books share the same moral message: "[a] strife with the powers of darkness; the victory, forgiveness, resignation, death" (Yonge 110). It is this moral victory experienced by the heroes that gives Guy hope that he can overcome his own failings.

Philip seems to share Guy's concern with the moral message of books, but his singleminded search for the correct "message" leaves him blind to the transforming power of books. The issue of truth, or the absence of it, is raised by Philip in regard to novels. Novels, like those of Dickens, while not truly wicked, are safe only for those who have been schooled both in more rigorous literature and in "the truth," according to Philip. Speaking of popular fiction, he concedes that, "as their principles are negative, they are not likely to hurt a person well armed with the truth" (Yonge 29). Speaking of Tennyson's

"Locksley Hall," Philip privileges the morality of literature over its aesthetic qualities: "There is nonsense, there is affectation in that, Laura; there is scarcely poetry, but there is power, for there is truth" (Yonge 33). Philip does not define what he means by truth, but in the context of the poem, his "truth" appears to be more personal than spiritual, more self-absorbed than transforming. Like the persona of "Locksley Hall," Philip is an impecunious orphan and fears that he will lose the hand of his beloved cousin to a wealthier, though less loving and unintellectual, suitor. By recommending the poem to Laura, Philip is able to express his feelings about their relationship, but only in a self-servingly moralistic and detached way. Although Philip seems to mouth Yonge's concern for moral fiction, Yonge shows him to have a pharisaical preoccupation with principles as well as aesthetic and intellectual standards. The reader comes to see that Philip is an intellectual snob and a hypocritical moralizer. In this, Yonge shows the failure of moralizing when it is used as a means by which to reform others before one is first transformed.

Guy develops a theory of literature that echoes Philip's concern for moral principles, but Guy goes beyond Philip in living out that which he professes. As in "Locksley Hall," all of Guy's favorite works (<u>Morte d'Arthur</u>, <u>Sintram and his Companions</u>, <u>I Promessi Sposi</u> and

Thalaba) contain a love story as a subplot; what is different in Guy's favorite novels is that the romantic subplot serves as a device to prompt the heroes' allegorical quest and spiritual purification, not, as in "Locksley Hall," the root of the persona's bitterness.

At Philip's suggestion, Guy reads a translation of the romantic novel I Promessi Sposi, and the subsequent discussion of the novel suggests another difference between Philip's reading and Guy's.

> ". . . I must thank you for recommending the book," said Guy; "how beautiful it is."
>
> "I am glad that you have entered into it," said Philip; "it has every quality that a fiction ought to have."
>
> "I never read anything equal to the repentance of the nameless man."
>
> "Is he your favorite character?" said Philip, looking at him attentively.
>
> "Oh no--of course not--though he is so grand that one thinks most about him, but no one can be cared about as much as Lucia."
>
> "Lucia! She never struck me as more than a well-painted peasant girl," said Philip.
>
> "Oh!" said Guy, indignantly; then controlling himself, he continued: "She pretends to no more than she is, but she shows the beauty of goodness in itself in a--a--

> wonderful way. And think of the power of those words of hers over that gloomy, desperate man."
>
> "Your sympathy for the Innominato again," said Philip. (Yonge 41-42)

Whereas the elitist Philip sees the character of Lucia as only a "well-painted peasant girl," Guy sees past the character's humble origins to her acts of unpretentious kindness, the true measure of a person. Philip belittles Guy's opinion of her, however, seeking to focus Guy's attention upon the repentant nameless character in order to suggest a model for Guy--but not himself--to follow. Again, Yonge subtly criticizes the reader who, in seeking the moral of a novel, fails to be convicted and transformed by it.

Philip also belittles Guy for his adherence to a rather strict diet of moral literature. When Philip learns that Guy has sworn off all of Byron's writing, he questions Guy on the impetuous action. Guy responds by asserting,

> "My notion is this. . .there is danger in listening to a man who is sure to misunderstand the voice of nature,--danger, lest filling our ears with the wrong voice we should close them to the true one. I should think there was a great chance of being led to stop short at the material beauty, or worse, to link human passions with the glories of nature, and so distort, defile, profane them."
>
> . [S]aid Philip, thinking this extremely

> fanciful and ultra-fastidious[,] "Your rule would exclude all descriptive poetry, unless it was written by angels, I suppose?"
>
> "No; by men with minds in the right direction. [T]he spirit is the beauty." (Yonge 385)

Guy's comments make it clear that the moral and the aesthetic are inextricably linked. Although Philip has elsewhere seemed to agree with such ideas, his words in this scene show his thinking to be inconsistent. Indeed, Philip is so overcome by his feelings of superiority and anger with Guy that he fails to recognize in Guy's words what he himself has previously professed. Ironically, Philip's intellectualism is overwhelmed by his emotion, as Philip becomes a victim of jealousy and pride.

On the issue of Byron, Yonge shows herself to side with Guy, revealing Guy to be not only an ultimately ideal character, but an ideal reader as well. She makes known her support for Guy's renunciation of Byron when she interjects, in an extremely rare moment of authorial intrusiveness,

> he little knew how much he owed to having attended to that caution [about reading Byron]; for 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?

(Yonge 384-385)

Yonge thus implies that all works of literature are potent enough to inspire imitation of their authors' morality. Fiction, just like human souls, cannot be neutral, but always professes a particular moral (or immoral) stance. Just as an individual may be moved by a moral example to the extent that his life is changed for the better, so too is the unwary reader risking much in pursuing art that "misunderstand[s] the voice of nature," a euphemism for a Thomistic conception of Natural Law. It is a distinction that Guy understands and Philip, for all his intellectual powers, does not.

Exposing his own haughtiness, Philip goes so far as to reject Yonge's own purpose. Referring to one of Guy's favorite books, <u>Morte d'Arthur</u>, Philip denigrates the work before loftily asking the ruffled Guy to "pardon others for seeing a great sameness of character and adventure, and for disapproving of the strange mixture of religion and romance" (Yonge 143). Yet it is exactly the mixture of religion and romance that Yonge has praised and exemplified in her own work. Clearly, Guy's favorite works mix the two, creating a potent moral example that Guy, as a receptive reader, seeks to reflect. A more significant contradiction of Philip's view is Yonge's own use of the medieval quest/romance tradition in <u>The Heir of Redclyffe</u>, however. As Sandbach-Dahlstrom has discussed, Yonge's novel is heavily dependent

upon both the realist and romance traditions.[3] By using the conventions of medieval romance, Yonge is able to suggest through allegory the spiritual odyssey, without blatant discussions of religion and theology. Romance, therefore, is closely linked to religion, providing conventions that suggest a prototype for the moral life. Thus, quests such as appear in medieval romances such as Morte d'Arthur can even be incorporated into Yonge's seemingly realist novels as a means of revealing religious truth.

The way in which the characters read mirrors the way they carry on their lives. Philip's intellectual snobbery bleeds over into his life: he pridefully refuses to accept the natural authority of his aunt and uncle, the Edmonstones, and fails to work for the reconciliation of the two branches of the Morvilles that are embodied in Guy and himself. In addition, Laura's handling of her courtship is, according to Yonge's fastidious code of behavior, inappropriate, her mistakes due in large part to her very lack of novel-reading: "she was eighteen; she had no experience, not even in novels; she did not know what she had done" (Yonge 115). Similarly, Amy blames Philip's censoriousness for Laura's acceptance of his secret proposal:

> "You know he never would 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 Charlie would say it is a very *novel* excuse for a young lady falling imprudently in love." (Yonge 410)

Because Laura has not read conventional novels, she is untutored in the ways of romantic love, knowledge that Yonge, in an echo of Gaskell, suggests is necessary. Elliot Engel has noted that in Yonge's work

> [i]n all instances, the novel represents a vicarious learning experience for a young woman. Reading novels allows a person to experience the complexities of romantic love without paying the penalties that reality could demand. This alternate knowledge could later save a lover from making a tragic mistake, like Laura's, in an actual romantic situation. (Engel 140)

Having no romantic example to follow because Philip desires that she be intellectually "pure," Laura ends up miserable and disobedient. Guy and Amy, on the other hand, develop and mature in part because they have been receptive to the message of the books they have read and because they have sought to live out the example of repentance and forgiveness of their literary heroes and heroines.

This causes at last a reversal in the moral stature of the characters. Laura and Philip, appearing to be the intellectuals of the family in the beginning of the novel,

are exposed to be weak and proud at the conclusion. Guy and Amy, emotional and immature at the outset of the novel, have developed into the literary character they have idolized. Like the characters of Morte d'Arthur, Sintram and his Companions, I Promessi Sposi and Thalaba, Guy and Amy come to embody a kind of chivalric and spiritual ideal. Comparing Guy and Amy's idyllic/chivalric relationship with that of Laura and Philip's secretive engagement, Charles

> observ[es] that the strangest part of the affair was the incompatibility of so novelish and imprudent a proceeding with the cautious, thoughtful character of both parties. It was, he said, analogous to a pentagon flirting with a hexagon; whereas Guy, a knight of the Round Table, in name and nature, and Amy, with her little superstitions, had been attached in the most matter-of-fact, hum-drum way, and were in a course of living happily ever after, for which nature could never have designed them. (Yonge 433)

Because Laura and Philip abstain from novel-reading, they ironically end up acting "novelish;" but because Amy and Guy do read romances, they end up living out the life of their chivalrous ideals in the most proper and respectable way.

Yonge gives her readers one test of their ability to read morally and receptively. The novel concludes in the conventional fashion of domestic fiction with the marriage of Philip and Laura. Superficially, this ending fulfills

conventional readers' expectations; however, perceptive readers have learned through Yonge's tutorial to probe beneath externals and to expect more than the conventional. Fearing that others will see Laura and Philip's fate as a success, and her own widowhood as a defeat, Amy says: "Here are Philip and Laura finishing off like the end of a novel, fortune and all, and setting a very bad example to the world in general" (Yonge 559). Amy, like the educated reader, resists the notion that Philip and Laura, due to the conventional ending, are the real heroes. Amy's interpretation can only be true for one who has gleaned Yonge's message: success is measured not in material terms, but in moral terms. At the same time, Yonge's denigration of novelistic conventions suggests that she has at once made use of a popular form that seems less lofty than high literature and has at the same time transformed the popular novel into a means of propagating elevated ideals of morality and reading.

Finally, however, Yonge's and Gaskell's unwillingness to define what Yonge terms "men with minds in the right direction" seemingly weakens their projects. This tendency is certainly due to a reluctance to spell out doctrine in fiction and may be part of a nineteenth-century willingness to accept the notion of universal and perceptible moral absolutes. Both authors stress the necessity of moral education, suggesting that moral beliefs are not a priori

but learned, and both Yonge and Gaskell rely upon the educated reader's ability to differentiate between "right" and "wrong" directions, so confident are they of the unambiguousness of educated morality. The lack of stated presuppositions undermines their didactic purpose, however. This is particularly true for Yonge as her theory of reading rests on being able to distinguish between the ill-defined "immoral" and "moral" writers. This failing points to the authors' belief that fiction cannot be autonomous but must be tied to the moral teachings of their respective churches, at the least an artistic difficulty. For these authors, therefore, fiction works toward the moral education of the reader, but its moral stance is presupposed and dependent upon an authorial source. In this way, the authors stop short of giving the reader full independence when they ultimately fail to provide them with all the critical tools needed to become a moral reader and a virtuous person.

This difficulty ultimately reveals the limitations of fiction for Yonge and Gaskell; fiction cannot be the primary means of moral education. Rather, Yonge and Gaskell imply the necessity of some larger religious community and tradition for the continuation of the moral education. While community is simulated through a connection to character and author, fiction cannot take the place of life; rather, it is for Yonge and Gaskell merely an example, a vicarious life experience that should create in the newly-

equipped reader a desire for true virtue in the context of a real community.

Notes for Part II

1. I believe that in the case of Ruth Gaskell and the narrative voice may be considered to be one and the same. Gaskell's strong feelings about the topic, as well as the excessive anxiety about the novel that is expressed in her correspondence, points to Gaskell's personal involvement in the novel. She is by no means detached from the work, so crucial does she believe its import to be.

2. The question of moral innocence is one about which Gaskell seems have contradictory opinions. Ruth is at once an innocent, yet at the same time needs to propitiate her sin, as critics have pointed out. While Gaskell clearly depicts Leonard as being the stereotypical "innocent," her suggestion here that the children Ruth encounters are more "mortal" than "innocent" serves her message of the commonality of humanity, but undermines her arguments elsewhere that children (including Ruth and Leonard) are innocents. This inconsistency suggests that Gaskell herself was unable to come to a satisfactory solution to the problem of innocence and human imperfection.

3. See "Conventions of Romance and Realism in The Heir of Redclyffe: Religious Allegory and Realist Representation." Sandbach-Dahlstrom, 28-53.

PART III

"LADY NOVELISTS" AND THE LITERARY ESTABLISHMENT: THE RECEPTION OF THE NOVELS

As demonstrated in Parts I and II, both Yonge and Gaskell reveal in their novels a preoccupation with the education of their characters and their audience. In order to follow this theme to its logical conclusion, it is instructive to turn to the reception of the novels in order to analyze the contemporary audiences' reactions to the authors' didactic projects. The reception of Ruth and The Heir of Redclyffe can be divided into three distinct parts: the formal reviews found in periodicals of the day, informal comments made by nineteenth-century literary figures, and the reaction of the general reading public. The extant record suggests a divide between the reception of Ruth and The Heir of Redclyffe; whereas Ruth is given much critical attention, most of it positive, The Heir of Redclyffe, though by far the more widely-read book, is given little attention, most of it negative and condescending.

Gaskell's own comments on Ruth do not prepare the reader for the reviewers' reception of the novel. In letters to friends, Gaskell repudiates the novel, calling it "an unfit subject for fiction" and likens herself as author

to St. Sebastian, shot through with the arrows of public vilification. The actual reviews, however, bear little resemblance to the critical outrage for which Gaskell had steeled herself. Indeed, of the twenty-five reviews of Ruth published between January 1853 and July 1853, only five are clearly negative.[1] Although these reviews substantiate Gaskell's fears that the book would be condemned as dangerous for general family reading, the negative reviews focus more often on the novel's lack of realism and its dangerous portrayal of class.

Only two of the negative reviews condemn Ruth as being morally dangerous reading. Sharpe's London Magazine, catering primarily to a "family audience," calls the work dangerous for families and echoes Gaskell's own fears:

> the subject is not one for a novel--not one to treat of by our firesides, where the young should not be aroused to feel an interest in vice, however garnished, but in the triumph of virtue--not a subject that can be talked of before youths and maidens, much dilated and dwelt upon by the morbid fascination of such a three-volume novel as Ruth. . . [W]e protest against such a book being received into families, it would be the certain uprooting of the very *innocence* which is so frequently dwelt upon by the author with pleasure and delight. (Sharpe's 126)

Seeking to preserve the false and fatal innocence condemned

by Gaskell in Ruth, the reviewer portrays the novel as an instrument of instruction--illicit instruction--unsuitable for the unsullied hearthsides of Victorian England. The reviewer implicitly assumes that young, sexually innocent readers will not have the moral framework needed to read the novel appropriately and that therefore they will be titillated by the tale of Ruth's seduction.

Similarly, The Christian Observer, an Evangelical Anglican publication, berates the novel for its message. Beginning the review by self-righteously confessing that he has not actually read the novel he is reviewing, the critic rejects Gaskell's suggestion that the fallen woman should be allowed a place in the bosom of society. Believing Bradshaw's dismissal of Ruth to be a most appropriate action, the reviewer writes sarcastically,

> The object of the work is to prove, that not only this barbarian [Bradshaw], but that all persons are to be condemned, who refuse a plenary indulgence to such an offender, and who do not deal with her, we may say, altogether, as though she had not transgressed. Now we exceedingly question this "moral" of the history; and doubt, to say the least, whether the frame-work and character of society would not be materially injured by any great extension of social privileges to persons in such conditions. . Virtue needs all the guardians she can have in this "naughty world," and one of them

> is, those fences which society has erected to exclude from the common haunts of society the notoriously guilty, though they may also be the sincerely contrite. (qtd. in Easson 314-315)

Dichotomizing the world into the categories of vice and virtue, the reviewer portrays Ruth as exemplifying those vices that would irredeemably corrupt society, and as challenging the feminine Virtue that must be protected by such guardians as The Christian Observer's critic.

A frequent theme of the negative reviews is that Ruth presents a biased depiction of English social classes. The Christian Observer admits that Gaskell's views on class issues have inclined him to dislike Ruth:

> "Mary Barton" had prepared us to find the writer disposed to employ her very considerable powers in the vindication of the lower classes of society, at the expense of the higher. So outrageously was this the character of the first work, that we had no right to expect anything entirely satisfactory in a second. (qtd. in Easson 314)

The Spectator also takes Gaskell to task for her depiction of class.

> A great defect of *Ruth* lies deeper. Life has been too much looked at through the spectacles of newspaper articles and commissioners of inquiry. The cant of philanthropy is prevalent; not grossly, but in spirit.

> The poor are virtuous, sometimes sentimental as well; the respectable or rich are hard, selfish, and regardless of others, mostly with arrogant manners to boot. As these notions, when embodied in action, cannot be altogether made to square with the actual, the story ceases to be a general picture of life, and consequently fails in impressing the lesson the author would apparently teach. (Spectator 61)

For this reviewer, Gaskell's alleged privileging of lower class people over higher class people destroys any credibility that her didacticism might have.

Sharpe's is also critical of Gaskell's depiction of class, denouncing her portrayal of the social elite through the characters of Bellingham and Bradshaw. According to the reviewer, Bellingham "is drawn as worthless and heartless as it is the erroneous and unwise habit of some to portray *gentlemen*" (Sharpe's 126); Bradshaw is a

> rich, rough, pompous merchant prince, a clever but painful development of a class of men who are capable of as much good and as much refinement as any other; but the author of *Mary Barton* has a strong propensity to look at the *wrong side* of what are termed "respectable persons;" and so this rich member of the congregation is all but a bear. (Sharpe's 126)

The reviewer's tone in these passages is ominous in his use of "unwise habit of some to portray *gentlemen*" and

"propensity to look at the *wrong side* of what are termed 'respectable persons.'" The reviewer seems to suggest that only harm can come of depicting the social elite in a less-than-flattering way, implicitly holding to the notion that moral excellence is linked to social superiority, which in turn leads to societal stability. The references to class in the negative reviews suggest that Gaskell's work is a threat to traditional hierarchies, as well as to traditional notions of fallenness and the possibility of forgiveness.

Seeing Ruth in the light of class, the reviewers condemn the novel for its lack of realism in depicting both the "typical" fallen woman and the "typical" minister. Sharpe's London Magazine exemplifies the criticism of Ruth:

> . if we repeat the author's object was to excite sympathy for that class, she has failed, because her portrait is untrue to the daily experience of actual life; she rubs against the reader's moral sense of the truth, and Ruth, in her childlike purity and innocence, is not a veritable type of her class. (Sharpe's 125)

Although the reviewer does not define what the "daily experience of actual life" may be, there is an implicit assumption at work that *actual* fallen women are sophisticated in the ways of the world--possessing none of Ruth's naivete--and are primarily of the lower class. The Sharpe's reviewer confesses that, when dealing with a fallen woman, "we would soothe her, and employ her, but we would

not place her as a teacher in a family. . ." (Sharpe's 126). In this, the reviewer reveals an implicit desire to maintain a connection between fallenness and social inferiority: the fallen woman can be granted the charity of her social and moral superiors, but she cannot rise from the lower class; she can be found work, but not the sort of work a middle-class, educated woman might undertake: teaching. Not only is there the danger that the educator might corrupt her charges, but there is a desire to keep the fallen woman from the midst of the middle-class, relegating her instead to the lower-class world of female employment in industry. Granting moral significance to Ruth's lower-class standing at the outset of the novel, The Spectator also questions the plausibility of Ruth's extreme innocence, given that she had been a lower-class working girl: "the grand labour of the writer [is] to impress the reader with the idea of the innocence and ignorance of Ruth,--though such is hardly consistent with sixteen and some months' experience in a milliner's workroom" (Spectator 61). As part of a lower-class culture, Ruth could not maintain the purity that would be expected of the protected, middle-class damsel. Together, these negative reviews reveal a desire to maintain a clear connection between social status and morality.

The reviewers also challenge another aspect of Gaskell's characterization when they question the plausibility of Thurstan Benson's lie. Writing in The

Athenaeum, Henry Fothergill Chorley criticizes Gaskell's depiction of the minister. "A good man such as Mr. Benson is shown to be--preaching Truth in the face of his congregation, week by week--could not, we apprehend, so easily have connived at an actual lie, such as is set down for him. . ." (Chorley 77).[2] The reaction of Sharpe's is similar: "We fearlessly assert, that no Gospel minister who knew and valued truth *could* have done this" (Sharpe's 126). As a representative of the clergy, Benson, in the eyes of the critics, should maintain the highest ethics, revealing no human weakness or failing, while Ruth, a representative of the fallen woman, can do nothing to reintegrate herself into middle-class society. In such criticism, the reviewers seek to deny both the fallibility of upstanding ministers and the possibility of raising, both morally and socially, the fallen woman.

Whereas the majority of the negative reviews focus upon morality and class issues, a few address the issue of Ruth as art. This is particularly seen in the literary Athenaeum. Although Henry Fothergill Chorley praises Gaskell as "one who writes with such feeling, such earnestness and such beauty" (Chorley 77), he ultimately condemns the novel for having little artistic sense: "The temper of 'Ruth' as a tale, is admirable: more admirable, however, than its logic,--and, therefore, than its art" (Chorley 76). Anticipating the criticism of twentieth-

century critics of Ruth, Chorley points to the didacticism of the novel as its chief artistic flaw. Chorley clearly defines Gaskell as a didactic novelist:

> So grave, indeed, is the penitential stanza, by Phineas Fletcher, chosen for its epigraph, as to indicate that the aim of the author has been to teach no less than to move, and to bring herself within the circle of what must be called religious novelists. (Chorley 76)

By categorizing Gaskell as a "religious novelist," Chorley implicitly downplays the literary nature of the novel, and although he praises Gaskell's "feeling," he challenges what she has to teach, rejecting as false her portrayal of Benson and adding that in the case of Benson's remorse, "we are told rather than shown" (Chorley 77). The New Monthly Magazine questions Gaskell's artistic purpose more succinctly: in the didacticism of Ruth, there is no room for the pleasant amusement that could be expected of Sir Walter Scott's novels. Rather, Gaskell's Ruth

> is the most gloomy picture of the great "inquisition" of the moral and intellectual world that we have ever seen depicted by an artist's hand. There is no redeeming point. . . there is no atonement here below; nothing remained but death; and such is the ghastly conclusion of this most dolorous story. (qtd. in Easson 233-234)

Both critics reject Gaskell's didacticism, seeking either a

more "artistic" or amusing work instead.

While the negative reviews come from primarily "family reading" periodicals, the political or theological persuasions of the periodicals cannot account for the direction of the reviews. Understandably, such publications as the radical Leader, the Unitarian Prospective Review, and the Free Trade Manchester Examiner & Times praise Ruth; however, praise also comes from such periodicals as the High Anglican Guardian; The Sunday Times, a respectable London weekly; the family periodical Eliza Cook's Journal; and the Tory Morning Post. Contrary to Gaskell's fears, Ruth is applauded by periodicals that do not share either Gaskell's theological or political views. This may be due to the author's avoidance of excessive sectarianism, the increasing popularity of social, as opposed to religious, novels, and a tendency of the reviewers to come to a consensus on the work.

As most of the negative reviews came out nearly immediately after the publication of the novel,[3] many of the positive reviews respond to the negative reviews' charges against Ruth by heartily endorsing the novel for its emotional and moral power as well as for its verisimilitude. Repudiating the criticism of Sharpe's and The Athenaeum that Benson's lie is unrealistic and damaging, The Nonconformist argues that the minister's fallibility makes the character lifelike and calls the novel a "most interesting and

touchingly told tale; we recommend our readers to the book. . ." (Nonconformist 85). The Morning Post offers more praise for Ruth:

> All these incidents are sufficiently common-place, and have entered again and again into the composition of novels. The interest which the story inspires affords a striking illustration of the power of genius in elevating and ennobling the most familiar topics. (qtd. in Easson 230)

George Henry Lewes also finds the novel's moral teaching to be useful. In his first review of Ruth, published in the 22 January 1853 issue of the radical journal The Leader, Lewes challenges the notion that the novel should only be experienced by a few mature readers. He concludes his review with a daring command: "Let no one leave *Ruth* unread" (Lewes, Leader 91).

Indeed, by 20 February 1853, criticism had so overwhelmingly turned in favor of the novel that the Sunday Times could write of Ruth,

> The author of *Mary Barton* has been fortunate alike in the purpose of her story [Ruth]and the leading character through whom it is displayed; fortunate, also, in not presenting us with a repetition of her former creations. . . and not less so in the critics of her new tale, *who have one and all pronounced it the most charming she has yet written*. We are pleased to

> be able to confirm this verdict, for a more touching and unaffected record of sorrow and sin, and of the trials resulting from the lapse from female virtue, is hardly to be found in the range of fiction. (Sunday Times 2, emphasis added)

Certainly, the critical vilification feared by Gaskell had been quickly overwhelmed by approbation for Ruth as critics apparently joined a consensus to support Gaskell's efforts in the novel.

Responding to the charge that Gaskell's novel is excessively didactic, many reviewers assert the validity of Gaskell's didacticism. Lewes affirms Gaskell's moral didacticism when he writes, "*Ruth* is not a 'social' novel, but a moral problem worked out in fiction" (Lewes, Leader 89). Indeed, the moral instruction offered by the novel has the potential to influence society, according to The Nonconformist: "we feel we are expressing a wish for the moral elevation of society, and for a much needed change in society's treatment of a certain class of sins, in wishing that this book may be as widely read as its predecessor" (Nonconformist 85). Bentley's Miscellany is more confident of the power of Ruth to affect societal attitudes. The reviewer proclaims,

> This is noble teaching. Many will respond affirmatively to the question, "Is it not time to change some of our ways of acting and thinking?" If

> the sad histories of all those poor outcasts who people by nights the streets of our large towns were known to the world, how large a proportion of the great evil would be written down to the account, not of the wilful depravity of the wretched creatures themselves, but the hardness and uncharitableness of those who might have redeemed them! (Bentley's 239-240)

Whereas Bentley's suggests that the novel can create empathy in the readers for prostitutes and fallen women, Lewes takes the argument further when he suggests that Gaskell's novel might be used for the benefit of fallen women themselves.

> If women who have placed themselves in Ruth's position only could find the moral courage to accept the duties entailed upon them by their own conduct, it would much lessen the misery and social evil that now follows in the train of illicit connexions. (Westminster 480)

Ruth, therefore, can serve as an example both for conventional society and for its outcasts, according to the reviewers. Clearly, many reviewers believe in the efficacy of Gaskell's didactic project.

Even as they praise the positive instruction offered by the book, many critics are quick to assert that Gaskell's teaching is not excessively pedantic, thus making a distinction between artistically appropriate and inappropriate didacticism. In this, reviewers acknowledge the potential pitfalls of a weighty approach, and they make

a distinction between the appropriate didacticism that comes from a spirit of love and strident didacticism that is merely coercive. According to the _Sunday Times_,

> the lesson inculcated through the medium of the trials of poor Ruth, and the consequences of the falsehood which Mr. Benson, from the best motives, is led into, is the value of truthfulness under circumstances which seem to justify, if anything can, a departure from it. Mrs. Gaskell does not preach this moral, but she does better--she works it out with great force and consistency. (_Times_ 2)

Bentley's Miscellany compares the novel to a sermon, while praising it as a work of fiction. The reviewer writes, "Simply as a work of fiction it is very beautiful. We wish that we could afford to dwell on its manifold charms. But it is the high moral purpose of the story that we most admire. It is better than any sermon" (_Bentley's_ 238). In _The Westminster Review_, Lewes writes: "'Ruth,' then, besides being a beautiful novel, satisfies the highest moral sense by the pictures it suggests. It is a sermon, and of the wisest, but its teaching is unostentatious" (Lewes, _Westminster_ 484). So, too, does _The Prospective Review_ argue that "[t]he unobtrusiveness of the moral elements in 'Ruth' constitutes, we think, one of its greatest charms, and enhances its merit as a work of art" (_Prospective_ 228-229). It is apparent, therefore, that while the reviewers

affirm Gaskell's moral didacticism, they are aware of hazards of such an approach, namely, the potential to lapse into narrow sermonizing or propagandizing. Gaskell's ability to resist such a temptation leaves the reviewers with much respect for her powers as a writer and instructor.

Many reviewers praise Gaskell's emotion and empathy as preserving her didactic intent from having negative effects upon Ruth. The English Review's critic writes of the novel: "It is replete with holy pathos--pathos which seems to refresh the heart. The process of expiation for sins is embodied with marvelous skill. There is no morbid sympathy with sin, though much tender pity for the sinner" (qtd. in Easson, 254). Such pathos does not minimize the power of Gaskell's work; rather, it serves to purify the reader, just as Ruth is purified, ultimately giving the novel emotional energy. George Henry Lewes also lauds Gaskell's power to move. Ruth is

> [a] book so full of pathos, of love, and kindliness; of charity in its highest and broadest meanings; of deep religious feeling, and of fine observation, you will not often meet with. It cannot be read with unwet eyes, nor with hearts uninfluenced. (Lewes, Leader 89)

Bentley's also makes much of the emotional power in Ruth.

> . . . [W]e are almost wholly indebted to our lady-writers for the entertainment of the month. We have before us some of the saddest tales that have ever

> stirred gentle hearts, and moistened soft cheeks with tears. Foremost among these is "Ruth." (Bentley's 237)

Although the critic implicitly praises the ability of Gaskell to elicit emotion in the reader, the use of "*gentle* hearts" and "moistened *soft* cheeks with tears" suggests that Ruth is primarily effective for a feminine audience. In this, the critic points to a significant tendency in the reviews to classify the novel as a woman's novel, created by a feminine sensibility for a female audience.

Continuing the themes of emotionalism and gender, John Malcolm Ludlow uses Gaskell to defend the right of married women (but not single women) to write novels on the grounds that their emotion and experience has much to offer society. Writing in the North British Review, he outlines the conventional Victorian view of gender:

> We know, all of us, that if man is the head of humanity, woman is its heart; and as soon as education has rendered her ordinarily capable of expressing feeling in written words, why should we be surprised to find that her words come more home to us than those of men, where feeling is chiefly concerned? There seems nothing improbable in the thought, that this supremacy of woman over the novel is one which will go widening and deepening, and that only through her shall we learn what resources there are in it for doing God's work

upon earth. (Ludlow 90)

Ludlow implicitly assumes that the novel's purpose is to move the reader and that women, as primarily emotional beings, are superior in their use of the novel form. In praising the ability of women writers, like Gaskell, to move their readers, Ludlow further suggests that their message is useful to all society and that women novelists possess a greater ability to act as moral guides, leading their audience to think about "God's work upon earth." Although many other reviewers pay lip service to this idea, elevating women as novelists and moral instructors, many ultimately contain Ruth and its message within a primarily female realm, thereby segregating the novel from the male mainstream.

Many of the reviewers allude to Gaskell's own identity as a wife and mother in an effort to defend the morality of the novel. For example, The North British Review stresses that the author of Ruth is a "wife and mother" (North British 81): "But the authoress of Ruth is a mother, and the duties of hallowed motherhood have taught her own pure soul what its blessings may be to the fallen" (North British 83). The English Review adds that Gaskell is "the wife, we understand, herself of a dissenting minister in the north" (qtd. in Easson, 255). The Nonconformist writes of Ruth: "we are sure that the purest mind will be strengthened in its purity, by contact with the delicate

womanly instincts, yet further refined by religion" (Nonconformist 84). Again, the reviewers make the issue of female purity and virtue one that is central. In depicting Gaskell as a pure and virtuous individual *because she is a mother and the wife of a minister*, the critics seek to extend her virtue over the novel, suggesting thereby that the novel, due to Gaskell's ability to live up to the ideal of middle-class motherhood, is itself "safe."

The reviewers segregate Ruth further into a "feminine" sphere when they classify the "fallen woman" issue as a predominantly female concern, praising Gaskell *as a woman* for her treatment of the subject. The Atlas suggests that it is appropriate for a woman to tackle the subject of fallenness. ". . .[I]t is a relief to turn to Ruth in which a woman of strong mind and sound heart has with exquisite taste and delicacy encountered questions that perhaps no man amongst us would have treated equally well" (Atlas 90). George Henry Lewes also praises Gaskell for her treatment of the fallen woman issue: "She approaches it like a woman, and a truly delicate-minded woman; with a delicacy that is strong in truth, not influenced by conventions" (Westminster 476). The Nonconformist mostly clearly accepts typically Victorian descriptions of femininity in describing Gaskell's significance. The critic writes:

> The sight of a woman, whose place on 'the white heights of her womanhood,' gives to her, if to any one, the

> right of scorn, sitting with such tender pity beside the sinner, and pointing society to the gentle ministries of hope and love and trust which alone can redeem, is a rare and beautiful one. (Nonconformist 85)

It is because Gaskell occupies the exalted place of pure womanhood that she has the moral power to teach society to care for her fallen sisters. Like Gaskell's ultimate portrayal of Ruth, Gaskell ascends to a place of perfect womanhood.

Finally, the solution for the problem of unwed motherhood is left at the marble feet of Woman. No longer a "social problem," it has been reduced to being merely a "woman's problem." George Henry Lewes exemplifies such a transformation: "if women are to have their lives rehabilitated, it must be through the means of women, who, noble and pure in their own lives, can speak with authority, and tell them that in this world no action is final" (Westminster 483). Such a statement overlooks Gaskell's belief that the problem affects the entire community and, as such, must be dealt with by those communities, symbolized by the Bensons and Sally, who feel human compassion for women such as Ruth. In addition, this approach evades the reality of the contribution of males to the problem of "fallenness," just as the negative reviews' concentration on class distracts from the idea that prostitution and unwed

motherhood are societal problems that are attributable to the failings of all classes.

The majority of reviews of Ruth, therefore, while praising the novel as necessary and inspiring, limit the power of the novel to affect all of society by characterizing the book, subject, style and author as distinctively feminine. In this, they overlook Gaskell's recurrent theme of the interdependence of humanity and her persistent demand that society name its fear of the outcast and lowly and act with concerted compassion.

In discussing the reception of The Heir of Redclyffe, Yonge's early biographers speak in effusive terms about the initial response to the novel. Yonge's first biographer and friend Christabel Coleridge exemplifies such claims.

> The *Heir of Redclyffe* was published in the first days of 1853, and the reception it met with astonished author, advisers, and publishers alike. It was an immense success, newspaper puffs began to pour in, letters were received from acquaintances and from strangers, and, as Charlotte writes, "every day brought some new peacock." (Coleridge 182)

Although Coleridge's claim that the novel was indeed a surprise bestseller is substantiated by the record, the prolific "puffs" are few and far between when the literary journals are searched. Unlike the case of Gaskell's Ruth, there are few discoverable reviews of Yonge's The Heir of

Redclyffe from 1853 that can be found in literary publications or newspapers.

Although reviews of Ruth are prevalent in the pages of literary periodicals, The Heir of Redclyffe is only marginally mentioned.[4] Both The Athenaeum and Spectator mention The Heir of Redclyffe among their "Books Received" lists for 15 January 1853. A lengthier treatment of the novel can be found in the July 1853 issue of Gentleman's Magazine. In an article entitled "The Lady Novelists of Great Britain," the critic writes:

> we will only give one instance of what we think commendable generosity to the public, in a tale entitled "The Heir of Redclyffe," recently published in two volumes. We are not now noticing its literary ability, and are quite uninstructed as to its authorship, whether male or female--it would do honour to any pen--but also it deserves to be singled out for its generous allowance of matter--it contains as much as four volumes of our ordinary novels, furnished at less than half the price. (Gentleman's 21)

Although the reviewer seems to praise the novel, the review again focuses on two recurring issues of publication: gender and economics. The novel is good enough to be worthy of *either* a male or female writer, but its greatest recommending strength is the value it offers, providing much novel for "half the price." Certainly, the treatment of

The Heir of Redclyffe by literary journals upon the novel's publication is cursory at best.[5]

Significantly, it is not until after Yonge had become a bestselling author that the critics began to take note of her work. For instance, the Unitarian Prospective Review praises The Heir of Redclyffe as Yonge's best work in the November 1854 review of The Heir of Redclyffe, Heartsease and The Little Duke. In a review of Heartsease from the same time, The Spectator mentions the furiousness of Yonge's sales as a preface to commenting on the author's popularity. "The writer whose popularity is thus established by the surest of all popular tests [i.e. sales figures] is the author of various didactic and historical juvenile books and fictions. The work which has been the means of thus exciting interest is most probably *The Heir of Redclyffe*" (Spectator 1157). The reviewer is quick to categorize Yonge's work by those labels which, when appearing in a literary journal, signal a decidedly negative opinion: Yonge's work is "popular," "didactic," "juvenile."

In addition, the North British Review mentions Yonge in a November, 1856 multi-book review when it seeks to deal with the growing class of books whose concern is primarily religious. The critic writes,

> Looking at the matter simply as novel-readers, without regard either to the logical ability displayed, or to our agreement or disagreement with the religious views

> of the writer, we should have no hesitation in assigning the highest place in this questionable class to the author of the "Heir of Redclyffe." (North British 117)

The critic so undermines the subgenre of religious fiction and makes clear that any praise is entirely apart from his own personal judgements, that the foot-dragging praise he offers Yonge's novel following his multiple disclaimers is of little weight.

The Saturday Review continues the tone set by the North British Review, making clear that any critical attention given to Yonge is due not to true literary merit but to the phenomenon of her popularity. Indeed, as is typical of the Saturday Review, the critic does little to conceal his disdain for *popular* fiction.

> The authoress of the *Heir of Redclyffe* is one of the most popular writers of the day. Perhaps, in her own walk of literature her popularity is unrivalled. When it is known that she is about to publish a new fiction, hundreds of young ladies look forward to the day of publication as one of the great events of their lives; and directly the work appears, copies can scarcely be issued fast enough to meet the demand. When we come to criticise her fictions, we cannot, therefore, regard their power to interest and amuse as an open question. The critic cannot say that these stories of domestic

> detail are wearisome, for he knows that the great majority of those who read them consider them very entertaining. (Saturday 357)

The critic's use of "her own walk of literature" clearly differentiates Yonge's fiction from established literature, and his characterization of her audience as "hundreds of young ladies" denies the relevance of the novel for a larger audience. He is quick to distinguish the naive judgements of young, impressionable females from his own, one that despite his sarcasm cannot be swayed by mere popularity.

As in the criticism of Ruth, the issue of gender pervades much of the criticism of The Heir of Redclyffe and is often used as a tactic in the critical denigration of the novel. The Saturday Review critic continues his condescending tone when he praises Yonge for being appropriately feminine in her style. "We feel throughout that the writer is really a lady, and a lady who knows that candour, and gentleness, and reserve are excellent things in women" (Saturday 357). The review implicitly denigrates such attributes when it comes to writing, however; he finds Yonge's work, due to the limit sphere of life it describes, to be "wearisome."

The Prospective Review also wastes no time in raising the issue of gender. The critic begins the review by alluding to Yonge's gender.

> The author, or, as we strongly suspect, the authoress,

> of these tales has a genius which may be called an artistic mean between that of Miss Austen and Miss Sewell, with not a little of the fine intellectual faculty for close observation of the former, and with all the deep sentiment and a touch of the morbid tendencies of the latter. (Prospective 460)

Determining that Yonge is a woman, the reviewer limits his judgement of her work by comparing it only to other "lady novelists," segregating Yonge in a community of women writers, as others have relegated her work to a merely female readership, a place where standards of judgement are implicitly believed to be lower.

Indeed, the critic goes on to fault Yonge, along with other women writers, with depicting only a limited range of life. "Her genius rather pines on the meagre diet of narrow personal experience to which she restricts it. Her characters are many of them too good and well conceived, for the very narrow range of experience by which she attempts to unfold them" (Prospective 480). The criticism is extended to include women writers in general:

> The feminine experience-novelists. . . are always purely human; but the result of their so closely "hugging the land" in their small cruises on the ocean of imagination, is that they delineate *narrow specimens* of humanity; they lose the freedom and breadth of scale belonging to the greater power that can transmute its

> experience into the forms, and clothe it in the events, which best suit it. (Prospective 472)

Although the reviewer earlier concedes that Yonge, like Austen, paints vivid and minutely detailed characters, he here indicates that such characterization is ultimately futile if not joined with the depiction of a broad range of experiences, experiences that are beyond that of the majority of women writers.

The North British Review echoes this sentiment in a 1856 critique of Yonge.

> We can only say, that with her power of truthful and natural representation, and with her fine observation and thoughtful insight, she still wants a wider sympathy with the varieties of human character, and with the manifold interests of life, to enable her to rank with the foremost of our female novelists. (North British 117)

Interestingly, the critic makes a distinction between the work of Yonge and, implicitly, Gaskell, the latter being an example of what the reviewer compliments as being "[a]n author, who has felt keen sympathy with the sufferings of any class, who has observed their habits closely, and is personally acquainted with their virtues and vices" (North British 113). Yonge, unlike Gaskell, has not the range of characterization and scenes and reveals in her novels a "partisan" bent. Significantly, both the "gifted"

and the lesser religious/didactic women writers, exemplified by Gaskell and Yonge, respectively, remain limited by their feminine minds and to the female sphere, unable to be good novelists in a context apart from their gender.

Along with gender, Yonge's religiosity is discussed. To differing degrees, the reviewers depict the novelist's interjection of religion or religious tenets into the novel as undermining her artistic purpose. In the case of the Prospective Review, the critic makes a distinction between Yonge's religious sentiments and her theological beliefs. He praises the characterization of the Christianity depicted in the novel: "The religion put forth in these tales is eminently a religion of life, of active duty, and self-sacrifice, and deep affectionate trust in the love and holiness of God" (Prospective 480). The reviewer betrays his own low church bias, however, when he faults Yonge for the emphasis the novel places upon the clergy and sacramentalism. "We cannot dismiss our author without expressing something between amusement and regret, at the sacerdotal nonsense mixed up with a very deep and generally healthy tone of religious feeling" (Prospective 480).

The North British Review and The Times also decry the presence of sectarianism in novels. The North British Review faults Yonge for the shortcomings in her art that are due to her Tractarianism:

In the 'Heir of Redclyffe,' and the other works of its

> gifted authoress, we certainly do find a narrowness of religious sympathy, and many of what opponents regard as the moral and intellectual defects of the high Anglican school of writers. . . . (North British 117)

Although the reviewer acknowledges that Yonge is "gifted," he chides her for "narrowness" and "moral and intellectual defects," characteristics that are linked to her theological camp. The Times of London also chastises Yonge for her sectarianism.

> And, lastly, we would conjure the author, if it be possible, to avoid party sentiments and batchwords, and to give us something which we may all enjoy and admire alike. . . we do not want Puseyism or Evangelicalism, or any other sectarian tenets poked into our hands when we unsuspectingly let down the window to enjoy the sun and air. (Times 9)

Certainly, the reviewers resent the mingling of sectarian theology with art.

The Prospective Review, on the other hand, portrays Yonge as being a more moderate religious novelist, less prone than such religious writers as Elizabeth Sewell and Georgiana Fullerton to engage in excessive didacticism and less willing to privilege message over art. In comparing Yonge to other religious novelists, the Prospective Review praises Yonge for being less singleminded about the religious aims of her novel:

> And while our author is in disposition and conviction of the school of Miss Sewell and Lady Fullerton, she appears to have more real pleasure in her art, for its own sake, than either of them. Her power does not seem to be so merely called out by, so utterly dependent on, the religious interests to which she devotes it. (Prospective 461)

For this reviewer, the balance that Yonge achieves between the seemingly competitive forces of religion and art is a good one.

Despite the reviewers' generally negative reaction to Yonge's theology, they do concede that Yonge merits praise for the realism of her characterizations. The Prospective Review writes, "The strict impartiality of the Daguerreotype process has seldom been carried so fully into fiction" (Prospective 461). The North British Review similarly praises The Heir of Redclyffe's verisimilitude:

> There is a true adherence to nature and great dramatic skill displayed in the exhibition of character: whether we like them or not, we feel that we thoroughly know them, and that they are no conventional reproductions, but like the men and women we may meet any day in ordinary life. . . . We do not accept the author's view of life, and duty, and truth; yet we acknowledge her skill as a creative artist. (North British 117)

Again, a division is made between art and theological perspective; the critic can appreciate Yonge's realism while rejecting her high Anglican worldview.

The Saturday Review gives Yonge some credit for both balance and realism. The critic confesses: "The writer does not overdo her scenes or her characters--she does not advocate her favourite opinions with blindness or bitterness--she takes care not to get too far away from what is actual, or common, or possible" (Saturday 357). Though elsewhere the reviewer deems the novel as "wearisome," he here does acknowledge Yonge's evenhandedness and realism.

Whereas most reviewers privilege art over theology, The Times confesses that The Heir of Redclyffe may be more powerful for its very lack of artistry.

> *The Heir of Redclyffe* is not excellent as a tale. There is very little action, and. . .[t]he one attempt at anything like complication of plot is almost puerile. . .   Still, when all is said, *The Heir of Redclyffe* is a very beautiful and touching book, and will charm more, and do infinitely more good, than works of far stronger intellect and higher artistic excellence. If it is not admired, it will be loved, which is, any day, the better fortune of the two. (Times 9)

The critic implicitly raises emotion over rationality and separates emotion from art, suggesting that touching a

reader's heart is ultimately of greater significance than impressing the reader's mind with artistic or intellectual excellence. In this, the reviewer appears to be accepting Yonge's own purpose as his grounds for evaluation.

In summary, the reception of Yonge's The Heir of Redclyffe can be classified as generally condescending if not completely negative. Yonge's novel is denigrated as being the product of a limited female imagination, as being too overtly Tractarian, and as being intended for a female audience of general readers. Reviewers do give Yonge credit for her realism, but fault her for her limited range. In general, these reviews are begrudging reactions to Yonge's popularity. Finally, the paucity of reviews of The Heir of Redclyffe in 1853 may be due in part to the fact that the novel was one of Yonge's earliest, written when she was unknown to the world of publishing. More significantly, it suggests the bias of literary journals against popular fiction by women. Finally, Yonge's marginality in English literary society may have played a role in the condescending at best, and negative at worst, reception of The Heir of Redclyffe. In support of such a thesis, it is therefore instructive to compare the informal responses of the literary elite to Ruth and The Heir of Redclyffe.

Reception of both Ruth and The Heir of Redclyffe was not limited to the reviews in journals. Indeed, general readers, apart from professional critics, were the foremost

audience intended by both novelists, readers who could take the authors' messages to heart. For the sake of clarity, it is useful to divide the discussion of the readers' responses into the informal comments made by literary figures on Ruth and The Heir of Redclyffe and the response of general readers through statistics and anecdotal evidence.

As with the critical reception of Ruth, the informal comments on the novel made by literary persons are generally supportive and affirming of Gaskell's work. Among those who are most positive about the book are Charlotte Bronte, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Charles Kingsley and Charles Dickens.

In her correspondence to Gaskell about Ruth, Charlotte Bronte responds to Gaskell's nervousness about the novel by extolling the beauty and purpose of the book.

> The beauty of "Ruth" seems to me very great. Your style never rose higher, nor--I think--have you ever excelled the power of certain passages. The brutal dismissal of Ruth by Mr Bradshaw, the disclosure of her secret to her son, his grief and humiliation, the mother's sacrifices, efforts, death--these, I think, are passages which must pierce every heart. (Wise 48)

So convinced was Bronte of the social significance of Gaskell's novel that she arranged to delay the publication of her own novel Villette in order allow critical attention for a time to rest solely on Ruth: "'Villette' has no right

to push itself before 'Ruth.' There is a goodness, a philanthropic purpose a social use in the latter, to which the former cannot for an instant pretend" (Wise 35). Bronte therefore praises both the social aims and the aesthetic qualities of the novel.

While Bronte's critique of Ruth is primarily positive, save for an early protest against the necessity of Ruth's death, she warns Gaskell that the reviewers may not be as encouraging of her efforts in Ruth. Indeed, Bronte accurately predicts many of the criticisms that reviewers level against Ruth.

> I anticipate that a certain class of critics will fix upon the mistake of the good Mr Benson and his sister--in passing off Ruth as a widow--as the weak part of the book--fix and cling there. In vain is it explicitly shown that this step was regarded by the author as an error, and that she unflinchingly follows it up to its natural and fatal consequences--there--I doubt not--some critics will stick like flies caught in treacle. These, however, let us hope will be few in number; and clearer-sighted commentators will not be wanting, to do justice. . . . (Wise 48-49)

Such a passage reveals much about the concerns of both writers. Bronte's warning at once serves to prepare the nervous Gaskell for the attacks of the critics and simultaneously to reassure her. Bronte defends Gaskell from

the imagined attacks of the reviewers by stating that she knows Gaskell does not condone the Bensons' lie, and she soothes Gaskell's fears by minimizing the number of critics who would attack Ruth on such grounds.

Unlike Bronte, with whom Gaskell had cultivated quite a close relationship, Elizabeth Barrett Browning was not at this time personally known to Gaskell, although Gaskell had sent the poet a letter expressing admiration for her work. It is clear from this letter of 16 July 1853 that Barrett Browning reciprocated the feeling.

> I love & honour your books, especially 'Ruth' which is noble as well as beautiful, which contains truths purifying & purely put, yet treats of a subject scarcely ever boldly treated of except when taken up by unclean hands. I am grateful to you as a woman for having so treated a subject. . . . [Robert Browning] is not a thick or thin novel-reader like me, but he was absorbed in your Ruth & feels all my feelings on it. (qtd. in Easson, 316)

Interestingly, Barrett Browning echoes some of the reviewers' reliance upon gender when she praises Gaskell "as a woman" and characterizes the novel as "purifying and purely put."

Charles Kingsley also exemplifies the gender critique of <u>Ruth</u>. He, like Bronte, empathizes with Gaskell.

> I am told, to my great astonishment, that you have

> heard painful speeches on account of 'Ruth;' what was told me raised all my indignation and disgust. Now I have read only a little (though, of course, I know the story) of the book. . . [i]t is too painfully good, as I found before I had read half a volume. But this I can tell you that among all my large acquaintance I never heard, or have heard, but one unanimous opinion of the beauty and righteousness of the book, and that, above all, from real *ladies*, and really good women. If you could have heard the things which I heard spoken of it this evening by a thorough High Church fine lady of the world, and by her daughter, too, as pure and pious a soul as one need see, you would have no more doubt than I have, that whatsoever the 'snobs' and the bigots may think, English people, in general, have but one opinion of 'Ruth,' and that is, one of utter satisfaction. (Kingsley 294-295)

Kingsley, like many of the critics, falls back upon gender as the ultimate justification of the novel, appealing to the estimation of "real ladies" to prove the morality of the novel. Furthermore, he seeks to appease Gaskell's unease by appealing to the least likely of allies, a High Church, aristocratic woman and her daughter.

Similarly, Dickens taps into the issue of gender and morality when he writes, suggesting that he would like to publish more of Gaskell's work serially: "My dear friends

Ruth and Mary Barton, I can put no limitations on. Their visits are too like those of angels" (Storey 62). Dickens too affirms Gaskell's work, and his description of her characters as "angels" encapsulates the rhetoric of exceptionally pure women that surrounds both the novel and the reception of it. Unlike others in the literary world, Dickens teases Gaskell for her extreme sensitiveness about the reception of Ruth:

> Forget that I called those two women [Ruth and Mary Barton] my dear friends! Why if I told you a fiftieth part of what I have thought about them, you would write me the most suspicious of notes refusing to receive the fiftieth part of that. So I don't write--particularly as you laid your injunctions on me concerning Ruth. . (Storey 76)

Dickens is responding to Gaskell's plea for no one to comment on Ruth, but his albeit facetious bantering suggests that, unlike other literary figures, he does not comprehend her anxiety about the novel, its subject and her own reputation.

Not all prominent literary figures were complimentary in their discussion of Ruth; both George Eliot and Arthur Hugh Clough give the book mixed reviews. Eliot, while admiring beauty in the book, finds nothing artistically enduring about the novel. She writes in a letter to Mrs. Peter Alfred Taylor:

> Of course you have read 'Ruth' by this time. Its style was a great refreshment to me, from its finish and fulness. How women have the courage to write and publishers to buy at a high price the false and feeble representations of life and character that most feminine novels give, is a constant marvel to me. 'Ruth,' with all its merits, will not be an enduring or classical fiction--will it? Mrs Gaskell seems to me to be constantly misled by a love of sharp contrasts--of "dramatic" effects. She is not contented with the subdued colouring--the half tints of real life. Hence she agitates one for the moment, but she does not secure one's lasting sympathy; her scenes and characters do not become typical. But how pretty and graphic are the touches of description! (Haight 86)

Eliot also brings up the issue of gender and publishing, annoyed by the "false and feeble representations" put out by women writers. Although she seems to differentiate Gaskell from this class of writers,[6] Eliot is troubled by the lack of realism and restraint in Ruth. At the same time, Eliot concedes that Gaskell's work has wit and emotional power: "Mrs Gaskell has certainly a charming mind, and one cannot help loving her as one reads her books" (Haight 86). In this, Eliot seems to be divided between a positive emotional response to the novel and a negative intellectual appraisal of it.

Clough's opinion of Ruth is similarly mixed. His main complaint echoes some of the concerns raised about the punishment meted out to Ruth:

> it is really very good--but it *is* a little too timid--I think--. Ruth did well--but there is also another way and a more hopeful way--Such at least is my feeling--I do not think she has got the whole truth--I do not think that such overpowering humiliation should be the result in the soul of the not *really guilty*, though misguided, girl any more than it should be, justly in the judgement of the world-- (qtd. in Easson 272)

Clough seems to be implicitly upbraiding Gaskell for resorting to a moral heavyhandedness though she has clearly disproven any notion of Ruth's wanton immorality. He, unlike Gaskell who vacillates between seeing Ruth as innocent and believing that she should undergo punishment, deems Ruth as "not really guilty," impatient that Gaskell does not absolve her character. Not recognizing the risks Gaskell has taken in writing on the subject, he deems the book "timid."

Harriet Martineau, on the other hand, was more disparaging in her estimation of the book. According to Catherine Winkworth, Martineau believed it was "a thoroughly '*poor*' book, which she was sorry Mrs Gaskell should have published" (qtd. in Easson 245). Although this comment is not elaborated on, Martineau's disgust may be due to her own

uncompromising radicalism as she believes, like Clough, that the book does not risk enough in dealing with the subject of the fallen woman.

Whether positive or negative, the informal comments made by the literary elite certainly suggest that Gaskell's work was believed worthy of being read and that she as an author was taken seriously.. This reveals that Gaskell was generally supported by the literary establishment, even when her work challenged conventions. Interestingly, it is those like Dickens, editor of Household Words and with the successful publication of A Christmas Carol and David Copperfield behind him, and George Eliot, as Assistant Editor of The Westminster Review, who are most secure in their place in the literary world who are somewhat less empathetic with Gaskell's overwhelming anxiety and sensitiveness about Ruth.

Just as there is a paucity of reviews of The Heir of Redclyffe, so too are there few extant comments by literary persons on the novel. However, a few secondary sources allude to the high estimation with which a handful of literary personalities held The Heir of Redclyffe. Charles Kingsley apparently read the novel, and Tennyson's biographer Palgrave recounts an anecdote in which the vacationing Tennyson was riveted to the novel. Edward Burne-Jones, Dante Gabriel Rossetti and William Morris were also admirers of Yonge's novel.

J. W. Mackail writes,

> . . another book which exercised an extraordinary fascination over the whole of the group, and in which much of the spiritual history of those years may be found prefigured, [is] 'The Heir of Redclyffe'. . . The young hero of the novel, with his overstrained conscientiousness, his chivalrous courtesy, his intense earnestness, his eagerness for all such social reforms as might be effected from above downwards, his high-strung notions of love, friendship, and honour, his almost deliquescent piety, was adopted by them as a pattern for actual life: and more strongly perhaps by Morris than by the rest, from his own greater wealth and more aristocratic temper. (Mackail 43)

It is not surprising that Yonge's book, with its idealism and strains of medievalism, would appeal to the young PreRaphaelites.

The lack of commentary on Yonge's novel by the literary establishment does suggest that relatively little attention was paid to the novelist. Not having Gaskell's connections, Yonge remained in the very marginal literary community that revolved around her mentor, and author of the popular work of poetry, The Christian Year, John Keble. So removed from the literary and publishing establishment were Yonge and her community that The Heir of Redclyffe was initially submitted to John Murray and Co., a publisher that did not handle

fiction.[7] Certainly, a lack of ties to the literary world did not help Yonge gain acceptance as anything more than a lady novelist for adolescent females.

Gaskell, on the other hand, appears to have enjoyed a clear place in the literary world, in part as established by the critical approbation her work received; the popular reception of Ruth was not as positive, however. Despite Gaskell's concern that Ruth would be burned in households across Britain, the novel did not meet with an ignominious end upon the bonfire; rather, Ruth persisted--both shunned and adored--in the public eye. Though it was banned by some lending libraries, including Bell's Library in London, it was in great demand at Manchester's Portico Library.[8] Indeed, Ruth was the subject of great debate throughout England; though many chose not to read it on moral grounds, the book was certainly not ignored by the public, and many, like Florence Nightingale and Archdeacon Hale, praised the book. Sales of Ruth were respectable. Ruth was published in four editions between 1853 and 1861,[9] suggesting a continuing popular interest in the novel.

Although Ruth met with greater critical success, The Heir of Redclyffe eclipsed it in sales and popularity. So quickly was the novel discovered by the public that by February 23, 1853, less than two months after the original publication, Yonge could announce to a friend, "A note from papa tells us Parker [the publisher of The Heir of

Redclyffe] has sold 500 out of 750, and talks of an edition of 1000" (qtd. in Coleridge, 192). Though the numbers are small in comparison to modern-day sales of popular novels, the figures in a nineteenth-century context appear to be consistent with other novels published at the time. In the first decade of the novel's life, the popularity of The Heir of Redclyffe did not wane; indeed, the National Union Catalog of Pre-1956 Imprints indicates that The Heir of Redclyffe was in its thirteenth printing by 1861. Just fourteen years later, the novel was produced in its twenty-second edition.

Contrary to the critics' suggestion that Yonge's novel was primarily a "female" novel, evidence shows that The Heir of Redclyffe was popular with young men as well. Aside from the interest shown by the PreRaphaelites, the novel appears to have been avidly read by Oxford undergraduates and, according to Yonge's brother, by soldiers fighting in the Crimean War.

Both books went on to have international success as well. The Leipzig publisher Tauschnitz put out an edition of Ruth in 1853 and one of The Heir of Redclyffe in 1855, and American editions of both works soon appeared. In addition, Ruth came out in French translation, and The Heir of Redclyffe appeared as the oft-reprinted Dutch Erfgenaam van Redclyffe.

France appears to have paid the most attention to Ruth.

The book was reviewed positively by at least one French journal. The French author Prosper Merimee read the novel and, though he did not care for its conclusion, suggested that if Ruth had been sent to France, she would have been loved. Gaskell also received praise for her novel from the Prussian minister to England, Christian von Bunsen: "I have read 'Ruth' with heartfelt sympathy and admiration. I admire the courage as much as the genius of the authoress. She has looked the tragedy of life straight in the face" (qtd. in Easson, 242-243). The novel even reached an audience in Russia.

Testimonials to the power of The Heir of Redclyffe came from Americans and Europeans alike. Henry James was generous in his praise of Yonge's powers, and Louisa May Alcott had her heroine Jo March cry over the novel in Little Women. A German princess wrote to Yonge in 1882 to express the great admiration that she and her sister had for The Heir of Redclyffe and The Daisy Chain: "I cannot tell how much these books are to us; it is not enough to say that they are our favourite ones, because they are far more than that, and cannot be compared to other books" (qtd. in Coleridge, 350).

Yonge's novel also had a profound effect upon the premier Dutch politician of the nineteenth century. Reading the novel while recuperating from a nervous breakdown, Abraham Kuyper, a young minister much lauded for his

scholarly work, found himself confronted by his own egotism and pride in the character of Philip. The novel prompted a conversion experience in him, and he found in Yonge's depiction of English parish life a quality that he found lacking in the church of the Netherlands. Profoundly changed by the novel, Kuyper went on to lead the Protestant Anti-Revolutionary Party, working tirelessly to integrate his Christianity with all aspects of life. The novel that had been written by a high Church Anglican went on to enjoy great popularity among Dutch Calvinists.

A comparison of the reception of Ruth and The Heir of Redclyffe reveals much about the issues that surrounded the work of women writers at the time. Gaskell's established reputation appears to be a factor in the attention paid to Ruth. Critics and literary friends alike defend Gaskell's novel against hostile critics. Lacking the support of the literary establishment, The Heir of Redclyffe was largely overlooked by reviewers and the literary community, however. Gaining a reputation through her unexpected popularity, Yonge is denigrated for being popular.

Despite the centrality of education in the novels and the didactic intent of both authors, the formal reception of the works centers not so much on the issue of didacticism, but on the issue of gender. Both women are unable to avoid a gender critique, their work often appraised on the fact that the authors are "lady novelists." The issue of

audience is also tied to the issue of gender. Opponents of Ruth claim the novel should not be given to young women; critics of The Heir of Redclyffe imply that the novel is fit *only* for young women. On the problem of didacticism, reviewers of Ruth praise Gaskell for the novel's moral virtues; Yonge is chided not so much for her moralism as for her allusions to high Church Anglicanism.

Finally, given the aesthetic, social and moral issues that the novels raise, Ruth and The Heir of Redclyffe are works worthy of study. Drawn from the two ends of the literary and theological spectrum, the novels, and the subsequent formal and popular receptions of them, reveal much about the anxieties and ideals of Victorian England. Both novelists depict the outworking of morality in the context of society in their novels, giving centrality to the idea of moral education, both through their central characters and their authorial voices. Although this approach is antithetical to modern artistic thought, critics and readers responded positively to the novelists' didactic projects, moved by the examples of Ruth and Guy. As scholars become more concerned with the issue of audience and the position of writers within the literary culture, works such as Ruth and The Heir of Redclyffe must be recognized for their historical and literary significance as they reveal the dependence of artistic appraisal on culture.

Notes for Part III

1. The negative reviews are found in Sharpe's London Magazine, The Spectator, The New Monthly Magazine and The Christian Observer. In Elizabeth Gaskell: The Critical Heritage, Angus Easson notes that the Literary Gazette also reviewed Ruth negatively, though he does not include the review in his book. In addition, Henry Fothergill Chorley, writing in The Athenaeum, gives the novel a mixed review, praising it for its "feeling," but casting doubt on its artistic merits (76).

2. Strangely, Chorley blames this bit of "disingenuousness" upon Gaskell's "regard for popular opinion" (Chorley 77).

3. The reviews of Ruth found in The Athenaeum, Sharpe's London Magazine, and The Spectator were all published in the 15 January 1853 issues of those periodicals. These reviews are the earliest published on Ruth, as the novel was published at the beginning of January. The Literary Gazette's negative review of Ruth appeared in that periodical's 22 January 1853 issue.

4. Bibliographical information on Yonge is sorely lacking. In what few biographies and critical analyses exist on Charlotte Yonge, few cite particular reviews, lapsing instead into unsubstantiated generalities or painfully incomplete references to reviews. A search of The Wellesley Guide to Victorian Periodicals, The Combined Retrospective Index to Book Reviews and Poole's Index provided virtually no useful leads. Twentieth Century Literary Criticism's entry on Charlotte Yonge yielded no review previous to 1861. I therefore painstakingly hunted through the literary periodicals that had published reviews of Ruth, finding only a few brief references to Yonge. By far the most useful, though recently written, source is Nicola Thompson's work on the reception of the novel, pointing me to several reviews discovered by Thompson by a similarly painstaking search through periodicals from the 1850s and beyond. Thompson's work also substantiates my claim that few literary periodicals reviewed The Heir of Redclyffe.

5. By far the most thorough review of The Heir of Redclyffe that appeared in 1853 can be found in the High Anglican Christian Remembrancer. Its praise for the novel was indeed effusive, using terms such as "genius" and "literary power." However, this journal is not cited by any guide to Victorian literary periodicals and is, in fact, classified as a religious journal, intended primarily for the clergy. For this reason, I am excluding it from my discussion of reviews, as I wish to limit my scope to literary periodicals. For a lengthier treatment of the review of The Heir of Redclyffe in The Christian Remembrancer, see Nicola Thompson's work.

6. In her famous article of 1856 "Silly Novels by Lady Novelists," Eliot implicitly cites Gaskell (along with Harriet Martineau and Charlotte Bronte) as an example of a talented writer.

7. Yonge's novel was published by Keble's publisher, J. H. and J. Parker.

8. See Uglow, 338-339.

9. These editions, according to the Note on the Text in the 1985 Oxford University Press edition of Ruth, include the 1853 original three volume Chapman and Hall edition; Chapman and Hall's 1855 one volume "Cheap Edition;" the 1857 two volume Smith, Elder edition; and the "New Edition" published in 1861 as part of the "Parlour Library" series.

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