



The Heir of Redclyffe

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First published in 1853, The Heir of Redclyffe was among the most successful novels of the century, equalling even the work of Dickens and Thackeray in popularity. The story of a clash of personality between well-born cousins, Guy Morville and Philip Edmonstone, the plot focuses on Guy's spiritual struggle to overcome the darker side of his nature. Philip's sinister insinuations about Guy's character almost thwart Guy's marriage to the gentle Amy, yet despite their bitter feuding the novel reaches an unexpected and dramatic conclusion that vindicates romantic virtue, self-sacrifice, and piety, epitomizing the period's nostalgia for an idealized chivalric past.

Adopted by William Morris and Burne-Jones as 'a pattern for actual life', Guy was a popular role model of noble virtue, while Amy is the ideal Victorian wife - redeemer and inspirer, support and guide. The Heir of Redclyffe is a virtual paradigm of the trends of thought which characterized the middle decades of the nineteenth century. It is deeply marked by the influence of the Oxford Movement, an aspect explored by Barbara Dennis in her Introduction to this unique critical edition.

The Heir of Redclyffe Details

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From Reader Review The Heir of Redclyffe for online ebook

Bob Hitching says

I first discovered this book reading the introduction to the Stone Lectures at Princeton in 1898 given by Abraham Kuyper. Kuyper made reference to The Heir of Redclyffe as being the book that influenced his conversion to Christianity.

I had no idea how this book would impact me. It follows the lives of an extended Victorian family with two great icons of the battle between Law and Grace. Law was represented in the fastidious and correct life of Phillip De Morville whilst in juxtaposition was the freedom and spontaneity of Grace embodied in his cousin Guy.

Charlotte Yonge weaves the most wonderful tapestry in which innocence prevails as a living yeast within the soul of Guy's wife Amy who appears to be always in need of protection and yet influences and transforms those she meets.

In Kuyper's Autobiography he makes mention of the book and said that when Phillip falls to his knees in repentance I fell down next to him.

Ian says

It's hard to believe that this was one of the most popular novels of its time and that Charlotte Mary Yonge rivalled Dickens and Thackeray in the bestseller lists of the day and it's very easy to understand why this has become a forgotten classic. There are many obscure gems of Victorian fiction out there but this is not one of them. I don't think I have ever read such a maudlin sanctimonious piece of fiction in my life.

The first third is incredibly slow and I almost gave up (I should have gone with my instinct). The middle third is where any semblance of a plot takes place and the final third is so preachy as to make it unpalatable for all but the most saintly of souls (myself obviously not included).

Yara says

Two cousins are contrasted: one titled and rich with an inherited temper that has been the ruin of his ancestors, the other, through misfortune, forced to become a captain in the army. The first works hard to rein in his natural inclinations, learning patience, kindness, and forgiveness. The other doesn't see his own envy and pride and feels justified in his judgment of the other.

It was fascinating to learn what qualities were most valued by the society at the time (England, 1800s), and was deeply touched by the relationships between the cousins and the sisters they loved.

Marjolein says

I am in doubt on whether I really like this book or not. When it comes to style Yonge is definitely inferior to many a Victorian writer. Moreover it takes a long while for the story to actually start as the narrator felt it necessary to first set the scene and to give background information, which does in great (perhaps a bit too much) detail. Also I found some of the characters rather vexing. Especially one of the main characters, Phillip, is hard to sympathize with as he seems a mere tool for the plot to develop, causing the character to be caught between extremes. As Phillip needs to misunderstand Guy for the story to take off, he is forced by the narrator to do this to such an extent that it almost becomes ridiculous. Afterwards, as he is repenting, the narrator forces him to do this in such a way that it becomes both unbelievable and almost vexing.

On the other hand there are some wonderful characters which seem to make up for these defects. One such character is Amabel. You cannot help but feel for her as she struggles through her mourning process when Guy has passed away. The way in which she finds happiness and strength in her daughter Mary is both beautiful and very touching.

Be this as it may, I really think this is one of those books that people should read for themselves to judge whether they like it or not.

Lmichelleb says

Is it a bad idea to review a book in the afterglow of having only just finished the last page? If so, please ignore this review!

Though the first quarter of the book was a steady and slow development of the principle characters of the story, by about one third of the way through I was continually drawn deeper into the thoughts and lives of these characters and wanting to know all!

Guy and Philip teach us so much about ourselves! And I am glad to be warned by the fallen characters, as I look for their faults in myself, seeking to repent and be changed.

I believe I missed some of the warnings of poor character in the beginning of the novel and now want to go back and reread that portion with the end in mind this time.

I can see myself describing my loved ones as a Charlie or Philip or Guy or an Amabel or Laura. What a great Victorian character study all wrapped up in an engaging tale!

T.Kay Browning says

I promised myself that I wouldn't read another book this about the problems of rich and semi-rich British people and their inevitable misunderstandings about who is courting who, especially one with the name of an estate in the title, but somehow this one snuck past onto my reading list. I think some book recommended it or something.

I really liked Guy. He had a tragic flaw, it actually impacted the story, and he, believably, worked his way past it. A lot of the other characters had some really great progression throughout the book. I was sold on the climax, although it seemed a little contrived.

I did not like how tightly the story wrapped up, or how long the winding up of the book was, but the author seemed determined to get everyone to a good place after tragedy. I get the sentiment.

Melanie says

I read this book as part of a 2010 book club reading English literature. I had high hopes for it, but I just didn't love this one.

It's one of those books where the author tries to prove a point by killing off one of the main characters. You just don't kill the good guy so that bad guy can learn from his mistakes and spend the rest of the book trying to redeem his earlier follies.

You might call it redemption on one hand, but I call it bad reading and a waste of ink.

Jo Walton says

Hated the end with supernova fire.

Abigail says

This is an intensely moral text--in some ways more interested in teaching a lesson than in telling a story--but I liked it well enough. The turn it takes towards the end is interesting, and there are some moving scenes.

Mhairi Gowans says

I really enjoyed this book for, despite the piety of the morals, Yonge is brilliant with characters. She always makes me care, despite the extremely domestic setting of well to-do families. I found myself loving Guy, despising Philip, warming to Charlie, and being wary of Laura. The only point that was difficult to take was mid way through the book, when you feel like all the bad consequences are happening to the wrong people.

Melynda says

A fabulous work of Tractarian fiction, an extremely influential novel, and one of the most reliable tearjerkers of all time.

Kathy says

I was totally unfamiliar with Charlotte Yonge, although I'm an avid reader of Victorian literature. A must read. Very good.

Laura says

Free download available at Project Gutenberg.

Lucy says

I was disappointed with this, knowing of its huge contemporary success, and having loved 'Pillars of the House' and 'The Daisy Chain'. Those novels, while pious and moral, at least had credible, likeable characters - there is not one real person in this work. They are all moulded to fit an absurd contrast between the two men, with the slightest imperfection being magnified into a sin.

I should have realised I would be uncomfortable with the moral stance when early on in the book it is made clear that 'I Promessi Sposi' is more to be admired than 'Dombey and Son'. Says it all, really!

Tanya says

This book seems a little long at first and it took a while for me to get into it. But once I did, I really liked it. It is dramatic and perhaps a bit over the top, but I found the ups and downs told beautifully. The way she could describe the flaws and strengths of each character was unique and made me love them (well most of them). She showed that consequences of poor decisions can be very hard and these parts were really really sad for me. But then embedded in those were the goodness and forgiveness of other people- I loved that. I think my favorite character ended up being Charles. I loved who he became.

Patrizia says

Se non ricordo male, una delle letture preferite di Louisa May Alcott, che doveva essere una ragazza facile agli entusiasmi letterari. Mi è piaciuto (ci sono molte scene deliziose), ma la perfetta santità del protagonista maschile, Guy Morville, non è il massimo per conquistargli la simpatia dei lettori, purtroppo, nei tempi grami in cui viviamo...

miffyness says

Christ this book is miserable. It is like a mashup of Mansfield Park and Wuthering Heights with bonus God.

Elizabeth says

This was very disappointing following The Clever Woman of the Family. The characters and familial relationships were portrayed very well—Yonge excels at this—but all that fell by the wayside. The lead character--the heir--is martyred horribly and the whole second half of the book is suffused with piety that manages to be both stern and sickening. And absolutely humorless, which I can never forgive.

Yeah, I totally gave away the ending, but I can't imagine many would read this. I had a tough time finding this edition, and I really looked forward to reading it. Too bad.

Diane says

Sweet Victorian family saga about two cousins and the sisters with whom they fall in love. The author does a good job of making piety and noble attributes seem appealing. The second half of the book deals with the conversion and reformation of one of the characters.

The story is definitely suffused with the values of the Anglo-Catholic tradition of the Church of England, but the author makes them appealing. She also creates an appealing family in which to situate her characters.

K. says

Free on kindle. Mentioned in Little Women. Apparently one of the most popular novels of its time.

Bleh, bleh, (if you could hear me trying to spit its taste out). Spit, hack, eww.

Saccharine, disgustingly moralistic. (And, hey, remember me? I LOVE moral books, but this was just tooooooo much). I just read a review of another book that likened the happy and fluffy book to eating too much cotton candy but avoiding toothache. That does not apply to this book. Too much cotton candy, cod liver oil flavored, and lots of toothache, stomachache, everything ache, after.

Okay, I could handle the preachy preachy mostly, even though I thought Phillip one of literature's most dastardly villains, and even though the girls are just roses and water, so I kept reading until I realized what was going to happen, whereupon, if this was a real book, instead of text on my kindle, I may have dumped it in the toilet. Gag. I do NOT want daughters or sons like the characters in this book. Not that we all can't benefit from a little more self-discipline, but this was just too much. Women in the book= spineless angels, gag. Men either impossibly virtuous, total self-righteous prigs, or idiots. Charles was the only character I could like at all.

Popularity aside, this is how NOT to do it.

Maybe, though, I was early prejudiced by the fact that Yonge was obviously no Dickens fan.

Not recommended.

