Charlotte Mary Yonge's *Heartsease, or The Brother's Wife* (1855): Rewriting Arthurian Romance to Reclaim Role for Women

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Charlotte Mary Yonge's fiction has not fared well in the modern era, owing, it is often suggested, to her willingness to endorse the values of a patriarchal culture.[1] Evidence for such criticism is easy to find in her novels, but when analyzed for its use of symbols, language, and genre materials that span multiple historical periods, *Heartsease, or The Brother's Wife* (1855) can be read as more complex than it might have first appeared. As Victorian and medieval romance readers, we have combined our research interests to offer such a potential re-interpretation of *Heartsease* and will argue that it is much more than a family drama, owing to Yonge's ability to map the medieval Arthurian romance format onto her Victorian novel. Medievalism was widely popular in the Victorian period, and Yonge's love for it, as well as her knowledge of medieval history, languages, and literature, gave her the skills to convert what was a complex genre that *seemed* to support Church and King in generally patriarchal terms, into something that highlighted the possible, and in this romance, necessary, sacrifices of women. Medieval romance has a complicated relationship with its female characters, often embracing their beauty and exceptionalism, while undermining their integrity. The genre of Arthurian romance is too varied and complex to paint all female characters with one brush, but by investigating some of Yonge's sources, we will attempt to draw some useful conclusions about Yonge's adaptations. In particular, we will argue that Yonge lifts into center view the quests of her female characters and provides them with the education and experiences necessary to achieve a noble cause – the salvation of themselves, their husbands, and their families. Just as Amy S. Kaufman succinctly puts it in her study of gender and female agency in Malory, we too would like to draw your attention to "what the women do" in Yonge's text as agency is defined in ways that "involve transformative and interpretive power ... [and women are] identified as actors, agential forces who create concepts that redefine their world within individual ranges of agency."[2] In understanding *Heartsease* as a Victorian adaptation of a medieval Arthurian romance, the text becomes layered in cultural questioning and much deeper in its intellectual and spiritual reach than many critics have often understood her family

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[1] Emily Morris, "Imperfect and Alternative Marriages in Charlotte Yonge's *Heartsease* and *The Clever Woman of the Family*," in *For Better, For Worse: Marriage in Victorian Novels by Women*, ed. Carolyn Lambert and Marion Shaw (New York: Routledge, 2018) 34-45.

[2] Amy S. Kaufman, "Malory and Gender," in *A New Companion to Malory,* ed. Megan C. Leitch (London: D.S. Brewer, 2019), 176.

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chronicles to achieve.[3] In this adaptation of medieval Arthurian romance, Yonge transforms a genre known for its complicated idolization of women who are often most valued for their inaction (for example, one's virginity or status as reward for the actions of a noble knight) into a celebration of what an educated and noble wife can achieve through love, humility, faith in God, and love of children. In particular, Yonge transforms Violet into a hero capable of saving her husband Arthur, and she further transforms our understanding of marriage, as the union of Percival and Theodora will become a celebration of marriage and the reward of a noble quest not by a male knight, but a female one. These transformations are made possible through her use of Arthurian symbols and motifs and her recreation and revisions of the Arthurian romance format in this novel.

The frequent critical emphasis on Yonge's "essentially Victorian" nature suggests a life in total compliance with dominant norms, but, of course, naming Yonge "essentially Victorian" is an obvious oversimplification.[4] In doing so, biographers of Yonge confine her to the conservative domestic ideal that is the veneer covering much of her writing and disables the more complex, even, at times, subversive readings her work makes possible. For example, in *Womankind*, Charlotte Yonge claims that she has nothing new to say:

> only that which is so old that it may seem new. I have no hesitation in declaring my full belief in the inferiority of woman, nor that she brought it upon herself. I believe—as entirely as any other truth which has been from the beginning—that woman was created as a help meet to man. That there is this inequality there is no reasonable doubt. A woman of the highest faculties is of course superior to a man of the lowest; but she never attains to anything like the powers of a man of the highest ability.[5]

Yonge seemingly assumes female inferiority, and we can argue that she creates a text to help women develop the skills they need to function within their proper roles. Yet, strikingly, she does not entirely accept the notion of female inferiority as she suggests some women are actually superior to some men in her estimation, a situation she often demonstrates to be true in her novels. It is impossible to infer tone, of course, but one might wonder how many men Yonge would have considered to have "powers of the highest ability." She speaks in the voice of social mores but leaves room, a great deal of room, to find ways in which educated women could do good, become better, and on rare occasion, perhaps even achieve the noble status often reserved for the achievement of male excellence. Similarly, when she discusses the roles of women specifically, Yonge is careful not to limit them to only being the "help-meets" to husbands. Instead, she says that the birth of Christ consecrated maternity but also virginity, giving women the independence of living productive lives outside of marriage. Women need not marry if they instead choose to serve God and others through good works, for it is not in marriage that women find their rightful place in society, but in service to God.[6] Such an understanding of the roles of women and their potential is both Victorian/Church of England and, in some interesting ways, a continuation of Medieval/Catholic attitudes towards gender.[7] Yonge thus works from the essentially conservative position of women's inferiority to men, as both the Church of England and the Catholic Church did, but then moves beyond the restrictions inherent in that position to allow women more power, or at least more choice about how they might demonstrate their nobility and worth. We are not in the world of angels and saints, it should be noted, as in this novel that position is rejected as perhaps too extreme. The options for women are always firmly grounded in the values that Yonge believes must remain foremost: religious devotion, duty to God and family, strict obedience, efficiency, sympathy, cheerfulness, and (above all) service to others. Any readers of medieval romance will recognize so many of these qualities as privileged, not only in the description of an Arthurian romance heroine but also for Arthur's knights.

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[3] Gavin Budge, *Charlotte M. Yonge: Religion, Feminism, and Realism in the Victorian Novel* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2007), 11. Budge argues that "in modern terms, one might say that Tractarians such as Yonge engaged in consciousness-raising whose effect was to make them question Victorian social assumptions," 11. For other Victorian engagement with Arthurian texts, see Fiona Tolhurst, "Eradicating Victorian Backreading: Re-Reading Malory's Gwenyvere Through Gaynour and Isode," in *Arthurian Literature XXXVII: Malory at 550: Old and New*, ed. Megan G. Leitch and K. S. Whetter, (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2022), 193-230.

[4] Georgina Battiscombe, *Charlotte Mary Yonge: The Story of an Uneventful Life* (London: Constable, 1943), 17.

[5] Charlotte Mary Yonge, *Womankind*, 2nd ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1890), 1-2.

The link between Arthurian medieval romance and the kind of values that Yonge espouses can be seen, for example, in that to be humble (or not proud) is embodied in her idea of service to others. In her essay "Authorship," published in *The Monthly Packet* in 1892, which specifically addresses the responsibility of female writers, Yonge writes, "Women can often speak with great effect to her own generation, even if her achievements do not obtain lasting fame, and this should be her aim."[8] Here, as in other places, Yonge seems to urge women to consider the good they can achieve with their work. She simultaneously invites women to contribute to their society through writing and instructs them to think about their contributions in terms of service rather than personal gain or advancement.

In a striking passage in this text, however, Yonge examines the many motives that lead people to write and to some degree destabilizes the strict idea of service that she has seemed to establish:

> But to dwell on women alone, how different was the motive in each case. Fanny Burney, Jane Austen, and the Bronte sisters were all instances of the same kind of instinct, of need of expression; but Maria Edgeworth was the exponent of her father's thoughts, and her earlier works were exercises under his superintendence. Mrs. Trollope, now almost forgotten, but a considerable power in her day, wrote under the most unfavorable circumstances, late in life, for actual maintenance, and at the bedsides of a dying husband and son. Yet her factory tale was in its way almost as effective a protest

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[6] Yonge, *Womankind*, 5.

[7] Budge, *Charlotte M. Yonge*, 23-24. Budge argues that her Tractarian beliefs would have informed her faith more fully than just Church of England expectations for thought, beliefs, and actions.

[8] Charlotte Mary Yonge, "Authorship," in *A Chaplet for Charlotte Yonge*, ed. Georgina Battiscombe and Marghanita Laski (London: The Cresset Press, 1965), 189.

> against white slavery as *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was against black slavery; and Mrs. Beecher Stowe really only began to write by the advice of her mother-in-law, who thought her strength and ability wasted in trying to make puddings and mind three baby children at the same time. It was for no burning partisanship of the negroes that she began the story, but the facts grew on her after the serial was started. Her other books show her to have had real power and imagination.[9]

On the surface, this passage may appear to merely support the idea of service through writing, but Yonge also suggests a distinct opportunity for female power. Trollope *achieved a strike against white slavery,* which is a bold claim for the power of female writing. And when considering Yonge's examination of needing to write "for maintenance," we see that what might seem like a negative framing instead demonstrates what powerful contributions can be made by educated women. This passage also reveals evidence or space for a form of resistance in Yonge's conformity to conservative social and religious ideals for women when she states that Harriet Beecher Stowe wrote because her mother-in-law "thought her strength and ability wasted in trying to make puddings." Stowe began writing, perhaps, in service to herself, so as not to "waste" the talents that God bestowed upon her, and the service she provided to others developed as a beneficial byproduct; as she educated herself on the facts, she was able to influence the moral instruction of others. Thus, while Yonge's beliefs about service and responsibility to others sometimes seem constrictive, she also opens wider avenues of influence for women within the carefully constructed limitations that she creates while seeming to conform to patriarchal norms.

While Yonge's nonfiction simultaneously establishes and begins to trouble a conservative ideal for women, her fiction more clearly dramatizes the tensions that arise when one's desire to be good and dutiful conflicts with other desires, such as the desires for social status, recognition, or even personal fulfillment. Yonge's female characters are certainly good, but their virtue does not always come naturally or easily. Like the medieval elements that she incorporates into *Heartsease*, her female characters can suffer from the same kind of debilitating pride that often bedeviled, for one example, the medieval character Perceval's attempts to find the grail, be of true service to Arthur, or indeed just be a true servant to God. So, in fact, while most of Yonge's female characters become good women, or in the case of *Heartsease*, noble women, to make that happen Yonge borrows from an old genre that supports the idea of suffering as a path/quest/pilgrimage to goodness and even nobility. All suffering, not just male suffering, can be rewarded in medieval romances. Yonge's interest in the power of virginal women (non-married in her words) as discussed earlier lends support for why she would be interested in literature which would privilege just such characters. Yonge, like Walter Scott, and so many of the authors she admired, wanted to portray noble characters and the trials that they must endure to achieve such status, but unlike Scott, who had the luxury of writing adventure stories that focused on male achievement, her narratives had to conform firstly to one of her primary goals, writing for the education of women. It is her female characters who must endure scathing trials to achieve humility as true Christians and to become worthy of love. Indeed, in *Heartsease*, many of her male characters are poor specimens in terms of strength of body and character and therefore easily led astray. They are not heroic examples, despite their Arthurian namesakes/ forbearers. Thus, in the character sketches that she presents, Yonge demonstrates the ways her ideals can be made real and obtainable, but she also shows that such achievement is not easy. And in fact, the harsh punishments and trials of the women who transgress social, class, and religious boundaries inevitably leads readers to question the ideals her writing appears to uphold.

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[9] Yonge, "Authorship," 185-86.

WHY WOULD YONGE NEED TO ADAPT THE GENRE OF ARTHURIAN ROMANCE?

One theory to explain Yonge's negotiations within strict sociocultural ideals and a complex set of "rules" for young women emerges in Catherine Sandbach-Dahlstrom's book "*Be Good Sweet Maid": Charlotte Yonge's Domestic Fiction: A Study in Dogmatic Purpose and Fictional Form*. Relying on anthropological theories of muted and compromise models, Sandbach-Dahlstrom explains:

> the expression of life experiences by members of dominated groups—such as women—in a given society will be muted or blanketed by the dominant ideology of that society. For the dominated group, one solution to this problem is to generate a compromise model that expresses some of the dominated group's experience without actually confronting dominant ideology.[10]

Women, as members of a dominated group, believe the dominant ideology, even when it does not correspond with their personal experience. In their writing, then, we would find not an absolutely alternative view, but signs of "double-voiced discourse" containing a dominant and a muted voice.[11] Sandbach-Dahlstrom points to the ways Yonge uses the dominant idea of the Victorian angel in the house but does not limit her angels to roles where they only support men. Instead, the "angels" in Yonge's fiction have increased realms of power, influencing all the characters and events around them. More importantly, Yonge shows that women are not naturally angels; they learn—often painfully—to fulfill that role as they reshape the role into new constructions.

Along with Sandbach-Dahlstrom's discussion of compromise as a means by which women's experience emerges in spite of their use of the dominant discourse, Kate Flint's theory of appropriation describes ways that women speak from the same posture of authority as their male counterparts, using masculine language and ideals to obtain power.[12] In her examinations of nineteenth-century discussions about female reading, Flint explains that women and men were believed to have very different responses to reading, and that women were considered especially at risk of being led astray by what they read, due to their heightened emotions and diminished capacity for critical thought:

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[10] Catherine Sandbach-Dahlstrom, *Be Good Sweet Maid: Charlotte Yonge's Domestic Fiction: A Study in Dogmatic Purpose and Fictional Form* (Stockholm: Almquist and Wiskell International, 1984), 6.

[11] Sandbach-Dahlstrom, *Be Good*, 105.

[12] Kate Flint, *The Woman Reader 1837-1914* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 10.

> Whether conducted by men or by women, this discussion was very frequently used to uphold and reinforce dominant patriarchal structures. Those women who voiced their anxieties about how vulnerable girls could be to certain types of reading helped to circulate and make familiar these conservative attitudes and terminology. To do this gave them access to cultural capital, in Pierre Bourdieu's sense of the term: commenting on and censoring the behaviors of their own sex was one means by which they could readily wield authority in a society where direct access to public expression of opinion could be difficult for a woman.[13]

Flint suggests that women's appropriation of dominant masculine ideology was one way for them to gain acceptance. By adopting the voice of the majority, or by appearing to do so, women found they could be heard.

The works of Sandbach-Dahlstrom and Flint create the backdrop for our understanding of why and how Yonge could adapt the genre of Arthurian romance to suit her purposes. Arthurian romances were often written or adapted to support political aims and the dominant discourses of when they were written, for example, in a patriarchal medieval society whose cultural norms were deeply entwined with and supported by religious beliefs. However, while Arthurian romances often serve patriarchal authority, they also create space for questioning the very norms they were designed to uphold. Yonge's knowledge of this genre and the historical period that fostered it was both detailed and broad, and, like so many in the Victorian period, her enthusiasm for medievalism ran deep. There are many critical examinations of the use of medievalism in Victorian literature. *The Oxford Handbook of Victorian Medievalism,* published in 2020, contains 40 chapters that explore the ways medievalism infused many aspects of Victorian culture, including art, architecture, and literature. In her chapter "Women Writers and the Medieval," Clare Broome Saunders examines the ways writers "use medievalism to criticize the passivity of women in their society, and to explore the social transitions occurring in their 'modern' world."[14] Sometimes, the use of medievalism could be subversive rather than reactionary, for Saunders claims that "At the center of female medievalism is the demand for iconic, passive femininity to have an articulate voice, expressed by women rereading, and rewriting, medieval legend."[15] While many point to Yonge as a primarily a conservative practitioner of medievalism, we argue that Yonge crafts the genre into something that could be used to support her aims, including her emphasis on women's particular sense of duty, which is a strong characteristic in Victorian medievalism.[16] Yonge was deeply steeped in the "popular medievalism" of the nineteenth century, which employs "an imaginative use of the past [to create] a vision of what Britain should be in the future."[17] Especially noted should be the love both Yonge and her parents had for the work of Sir Walter Scott. In addition, such luminaries as William Morris' interest in reviving the pastoral complements and gives substance to Yonge's romantic vision of the medieval world. Morris' beautiful version of the *Canterbury Tales*, his paintings and those of the Pre-Raphaelite brotherhood, with the writings of Tennyson, most specifically in the 1842 Arthurian poems, and later *The Morte* and *Idylls of a King*, speak to the popularity of the ideas Yonge incorporates into her work and the possibility that such an informed audience could read more fully into how she adapts it and to what end.[18]

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[13] Flint, *Woman Reader*, 10.

[14] Clare Broome Saunders, "Women Writers and the Medieval," in *The Oxford Handbook of Victorian Medievalism*, ed Joanne Parker and Corinna Wagner (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 577. Note that Saunders sees Yonge as a writer who typically upholds conservative ideas about society and gender.

[15] Clare Broome Saunders, *Women Writers and Nineteenth Century Medievalism* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 183. Note that Saunders sees Yonge as a writer who typically upholds conservative ideas about society and gender.

So, while Yonge's novel is often described as a "family chronicle," we would argue, as we have already begun to do, that *Heartsease* is an Arthurian romance built in many ways upon the traditional medieval format. There is little debate to be had by saying that medieval romances were created to support the belief that nobles felt their way of life superior, their ideals and obligations of a higher order, and that therefore they should be treated and rewarded as such. Catholicism played a major role in identifying knights and crusaders as figures called to their mission to protect and defend against infidels and sinners as well as a duty to serve the weak. The Church's position in many ways reflects how Yonge uses faith to bulwark her characters and their social positions. Yonge is not, we would argue, attempting to revisit such complexities or address them in her work, but she does rely on clearly recognizable medieval and Victorian approaches to an understanding of gender and class.

Medieval cultural theorists such as Susan Crane and Geraldine Heng have been working for decades to rethink how we understand those gender and social constructions: they have come too late to be of help to Charlotte Yonge, but not for us.[19] Crane demonstrates in *Insular Romance* that in

> French romances dissonances between noble ambition and social restraint can be resolved within ideal chivalry and love. Internalizing the conflicts of violence versus pacification and passion versus control, protagonists work out emotional and

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[16] Clare A. Simmons, *Popular Medievalism in Romantic-Era Britain* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 7.

[17] Simmons, *Popular Medievalism*, 6.

[18] Clemence Schultze, "Charlotte M. Yonge and Oxford," https://www.alumni.ox.ac.uk/article/charlotte-m.-yonge-and-oxford. In her article on Charlotte Yonge, Schultze (Oxford Alumnus) argues that *Heir of Redclyffe*, "caused a stir in Oxford, where Edward Burne Jones and William Morris (both at Exeter College) found that it chimed in exactly with their ideals: like many others, they adopted it as a pattern for life. It remained Yonge's trademark, and the words 'by the author of *The Heir of Redclyffe*' appeared on the title pages of her numerous later works of fiction and non-fiction.

[19] Geraldine Heng, *Empire of Magic* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003). In particular, see Chapter 2: The Romance of England, 63-68, for Heng's work on rethinking gender and social constructions.

> behavioral equilibria that model resolutions for their society's turbulence.[20]

Obviously, the romance genre has evolved since Chrétien de Troyes began writing for patrons such as Marie de Champagne (1177-1181), but Crane's reading of French romances suggests a model that we argue Yonge was able to adapt. Its roots are discernable as Yonge manipulates the romance motif to explore an immoral idea, such as colonial plantations supporting "noble" classes and how a woman's beauty is an avenue for movement between classes. Yonge's work stresses far more strongly the need for *a woman* to be self-sacrificial than the majority of medieval Arthurian romances. This may reflect the influence of her desire to educate and explore the roles of Victorian women or a desire to reinvent the Arthurian Romance to suit her own purposes, or indeed as we intend to suggest here, perhaps both.

What is most interesting about this novel, given what so many of Yonge's contemporaries said about her traditional Anglican interests and very middle-class thinking, is how Yonge manipulates an Arthurian romance formula with knights, crusaders, and literally, Arthur and Percival as main characters, into a study of how women were tested mentally and physically through righteous suffering as a means to save their families or even more generally to become noble, sometimes despite class or gender status. Theodora, for example, one of the two main female characters, performs life-endangering heroics to "redeem" herself, which is far "knightlier" than the actions of the mostly sickly and compromised male characters in the novel, despite their chivalric names. We must ask, therefore, is Yonge only as traditional as her contemporaries and some critics claim? Might she have read in Chrétien de Troyes' *Le Chevalier de la Charette* (*Knight of the Cart)*, which is a model using Guinevere or Lancelot that suggests such a testing of women for love and/or for God was possible? This romance is a powerful model for many reasons, but most especially as it demonstrates Lancelot and Guinevere's complex relationship, which results in questions about what love is, as well as what is required to achieve and maintain it.

Equally intriguing is the model of Enide in Chrétien's Arthurian *Erec and Enide*, in which Erec falls for a poor nobleman's beautiful daughter, marries her, but then is frustrated by how she seems to think that he needs her help. Gossip about how Erec spends too much time in bed with his wife justifies Erec starting a quest to demonstrate to Enide and everyone else that he is a manly knight and that Enide's fearful interventions on his behalf, while based in love, were not necessary. It is also arguable that Yonge sees a model for Theodora in the ending of Guinevere and Lancelot's affair in Malory's *Morte d'Arthur*, a much later Arthurian romance. In Malory's final chapter, the reader witnesses Guinivere's conversion to a nun; her use of faith and forgiveness, it is often argued, saves Lancelot and suggests the kind of complex interweaving of social and religious values that we see in Yonge's work.[21] She references both Chrétien and Malory, as well as several other medieval Arthurian authors, in her non-fiction, and, we will argue, draws inspiration from both to inform her understanding of how Arthurian romance might be adapted to explore the women's power in the Victorian world.

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[20] Susan Crane, *Insular Romance* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 143-44.

[21] For an example of this reading, see Mickey Sweeney, "Divine Love or Loving Divinely?: The Ending of Malory's *Morte Darthur*," *Arthuriana* 16, no. 2 (2006): 73–77. See also Alan Gaylord, "Back from the *Queste*: Malory's Launcelot Enrages Gwenyvere," in *Arthuriana* 16, no. 2 (2006): 78–83.

MORE MEDIEVAL THAN THE MEDIEVAL AUTHORS—THE IMPORTANCE OF SOURCES FOR ARTHURIAN IDEALS

Catholicism is not the faith of choice in this novel, but we know that the medieval Church's claims were adapted by nobles to support their "right" to rule and bolster patriarchal thinking, evident in the construction of medieval knighthood and the romance genre that glorified it. Yonge's use of faith in this novel mirrors some of those same methods to bulwark Anglican beliefs and Victorian cultural norms. She does this by adapting the medieval Arthurian chivalric romance into a Victorian vehicle that on the surface supports the aims of both church and patriarchy, but provides, like all Arthurian romances, space to analyze the complexities and costs of such demands upon its knights. We expect traditional stories, given her love for Walter Scott and her deep faith, but we must not forget her investment in female education. It may be exactly *because* of her interest in female success that she negotiates a Victorian Arthurian romance that focuses on the suffering and trials of her *female* characters. Such insights into her work are established by how she handles the Arthurian materials she has inherited. When we investigate her education, her interests, the languages she spoke, and her love of Scott, we see a formula for expertise in medieval materials that supports her ability to adapt it for use in her own period.

Clearly, there have been moments of interest in medievalism since the Middle Ages, but not since Malory and Caxton have so many artists, historians, and cultural critics taken up the mantle of medievalism as in the Victorian period. When we look at Yonge's education and her non-fiction writing, we see a regular return to Arthurian materials as inspiration.[22] As a small example, she details and summarizes vast material in this concise moment: the *Quest for the Holy Grail* is "The fall and defection of the two most accomplished knights through unhallowed love, the death of one, and the rebellion of the other, the lover of Arthur's own faithless wife, … All this is our own peculiar insular heritage of romance, ennobled as it has been by old Mallory's prose in the fifteenth century and in the nineteenth by Tennyson's poetry, the best of all the interpretations of the import of Arthur himself.".=[23] Unfortunately for this analysis, her work on Christian names comes after the publication of *Heartsease*, but when we do explore her early non-fiction, such as *The History of English Kings for Children*, or the reading that she mentions in the autobiographical portion of *Charlotte Mary Yonge, Her Life and Letters,* a combination of autobiography and biography edited by Christabel R. Coleridge (1903), we see that she had several sources for Arthurian information.[24] It is clear she understood how to use that language and applied those ideals to those she loved and knew. For example, in Coleridge's biography, we are told:

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[22] Charlotte M Yonge, *Kings of England: A History for the Young* (London: B.Tauchnitz, 1870), https://archive.org/details/kingsenglandahi00yonggoog; and March 9, 1863 edition of her *History of Christian Names* (United Kingdom : Macmillan and Co, 1884), The Project Gutenberg ebook #70419, https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/70419/pg70419-images.html. In her discussion of the name Arthur (Section II) she also clearly knows Geoffrey of Monmouth's "legendary history" as she provides a brief summary of Arthur's background.

[23] W. Lucas Collins, "King Arthur and His Round Table," in Blackwood's *Edinburgh Magazine* 1860, 268, https://d.lib.rochester.edu/camelot/text/collins-king-arthur-and-his-round-table. Collins mentions Charlotte Yonge's "pleasant fictions" by which many young ladies "ask the most puzzling questions of their well-read governesses touching Sir Galahad and the San Greal," in the first paragraph of his summary. He also offers a wonderful summary for readers of our article as well as

> It is satisfactory to find that Charlotte Yonge's grandfather used all the proceeds of his living in the service of the Church. Lord Seaton, her mother's step-brother, and her cousin by marriage, continued through life to be her ideal of the virtuous and honourable soldier. He was her justification for the chivalrous and knightly characters which she loved to draw. She never would admit that the heroes of her stories were "too good to be true," but always said she had known as good, and better, an opinion which those who have in any way shared in the same environment will not care to contradict.[25]

We also discover from that source that Yonge read (and loved) such works as:

> Dec. 19. — C. began Rollin's *Ancient History* [translated from the French in 1768] (It lasted me years, but it was excellent for me; I am very glad I read so real a book.)
>
> Dec. 28. — Sunday. C. began Trimmer's *Sacred History* Sacred.[26]
>
> Summer 1830: He [Father] read me the *Pilgrims Progress* out of Southey's edition when I was recovering, and on many Sundays—and how I loved it.
>
> There too came Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, a book that was absolute delight to me, and is still showing forth that most attractive character in its fulness. I may respect, admire, rely on other authors more, but my prime literary affection must ever be for Sir Walter![27]

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providing a summary of Villemarque's argument is very helpful considering that Yonge claims to have read it.

[24] Christabel R. Coleridge, *Charlotte Mary Yonge, her life and letters* (London, New York: Macmillan, 1903) and Charlotte M Yonge, *Kings of England: A History for the Young* (London: B.Tauchnitz,1870), https://archive.org/details/kingsenglandahi00yonggoog; and March 9, 1863 edition of *History of Christian Names* (United Kingdom: Macmillan, 1884), The Project Gutenberg ebook #70419, https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/70419/pg70419-images.html. In her discussion of the name Arthur (Section II), she also clearly knows Geoffrey of Monmouth's "legendary history" as she provides a brief summary of Arthur's background. She details the *Quest for the Holy Grail* as, "The fall and defection of the two most accomplished knights through unhallowed love, the death of one, and the rebellion of the other, the lover of Arthur's own faithless wife, ...All this is our own peculiar insular heritage of romance, ennobled as it has been by old Mallory's prose in the fifteenth century and in the nineteenth by Tennyson's poetry, the best of all the interpretations of the import of Arthur himself," 268.

[25] Coleridge, *Charlotte Mary Yonge*, 36.

[26] Coleridge, *Charlotte Mary Yonge*, 62.

[27] Coleridge, *Charlotte Mary Yonge*, 111, 113.

Such information helps modern readers to appreciate the influences that came together to form her understanding of medieval chivalric romance and its potential uses in the Victorian world. To better understand these references in her own writing, we can see how she judged and evaluated events. For example, in the *Kings of England*, she evaluates Arthur's success: "The sons of Vortigern, and those noble princes Ambrose and his nephew Arthur—the brave king, of whom so many stories are told—fought long and gallantly in defence of their country, but in vain; one county after another was lost to them, until nothing remained except Cornwall and Wales."[28] Her discussion of the Crusades is also of note as she clearly understands such historical figures as Richard the Lionheart in romantic Christianized terms, describing him as noble and righteous in his actions for the Church. She judges her historical figures in how they best served God and describes their flaws as sins.

Such a system of judgment provides enormous insight into how she constructs her Victorian Arthurian romance heroines. If we turn for a moment to what was surely one of the most influential sources for her medievalism craft, it must be Sir Walter Scott's work. For this context, what might be most interesting is not that she loved his stories, since it is clear that he was a favorite of the entire household, but how his goals for his work and his approach to medievalism shaped her understanding of its potential. When we examine J. G. Lockhart's *Life of Walter Scott*, as Yonge herself did, we see that Lockhart reports that Scott was informed, happily, that:

> On the 4th of May on that same trip, he is introduced to Don Michele Gaetani, and his lovely sister the Marchesa Loughi, and she said "She had had … though young, her share of sorrows and in his work she had found not only amusement but lessons of patience and resignation" (Rome—Mr. Cheney).[29]

Such a reading seems to be much more in tune with what we would expect from Yonge's novels, so seemingly understood to be for young ladies, although clearly, they were popular with many. Mr. Cheney once again by way of a letter demonstrates what Scott said about his own work: "it is a comfort to me to think that I have tried to unsettle no man's faith, to corrupt no man's principle, and that I have written nothing which, on my death-bed, I should wish blotted."[30] Modern theorists again have long argued that no author is to be trusted, and the task at hand is not to reevaluate Scott's words, but to demonstrate that Yonge would have been exposed to this sensibility.

Yonge, however, has a problem that Scott did not: her focus on female influence in *Heartsease* suggests that she must reconfigure the source materials that Scott had embraced and recreated with an eye for adventure. If Yonge were looking to understand how she might convert Arthurian material into what "gentlewomen" should be reading, then Malory's *Morte d'Arthur* would have provided such a model. Yonge may or may not have had access to Stansby's 1816 version of Caxton's *Morte D'Arthur* or the 1817 version by Southey, but there were multiple versions available to her and, she was, no doubt, exposed to arguments that Scott, along with his contemporaries, were engaged in about such texts. More to the point is the influence Caxton suggests that reading this type of book might have on its audience. Caxton states in his preface (in Sommer's amazing page-by-page 1889 version of Caxton's *Morte d'Arthur*):

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[28] Yonge, *Kings*, 12.

[29] J. G. Lockhart, *Life of Sir Walter Scott* (New York: Thomas E. Crowell, 1870), 373, https://www.loc.gov/item/29024973/.

[30] Lockhart, 378, https://www.loc.gov/item/29024973/.

> Ientyl and vertuous dedes that somme knyghtes vsed in tho dayes / by whyche they came to honour / and how they that were vycious were punysshed and ofte put to shame and rebuke / *humbly bysechyng al noble lordes and ladyes wyth al other estates of what estate or degree they been of* / that shal see and rede in this sayd book and werke / t*hat they take the good and honest actes in their remembraunce / and to folowe the sam*e / Wherin they shalle fynde many Ioyous and playsaunt hystoryes / and noble & renomed actes of humanyte / gentylnesse and chyualryes / For herein may be seen noble chyualrye / Curtosye / Humanyte / frendlynesse / hardynesse / loue / frendshyp / Cowardyse / Murdre / hate / vertue / and synne / Doo after the good and leue the euyl / and it shal brynge you to good fame and renommee / And for to passe the tyme thys boook shal be plesaunte to rede in / but for to gyue fayth and byleue that al is trewe that is conteyned herin / ye be at your lyberte / *but al is wryton for our doctryne / and for to beware that we falle not to vyce ne synne / but texersyse and folowe vertu / by whyche we may come and atteyne to good fame and renomme in thys lyf / and after thys shorte and transytorye lyf to come vnto euerlastyng blysse in heuen / the whyche he graunte vs that reygneth in heuen the blessyd Trynyte Amen /*
>
> Thenne to procede forth in thys sayd book / whyche I dyrecte vnto alle noble prynces / lordes and ladyes / gentylmen or gentylwymmen that desyre to rede or here redde of the noble and Ioyous hystorye of the grete conquerour and excellent kyng . Kyng Arthur / somtyme kyng of thys noble royalme / thenne callyd / brytaygne / I wyllyam Caxton symple persone present thys book folowyng / Whyche I haue enprysed tenprynte / And treateth of the noble actes / feates of armes of chyualrye / prowesse / hardynesse / humanyte loue / curtosye / and veray gentylnesse / wyth many wonderful hystoryes and adventures.[31]
>
> the gentle and virtuous deeds that some knights used in those days, by which they came to honour, and how they that were vicious were punished and oft put to shame and rebuke; humbly *beseeching all noble lords and ladies, with all other estates of what estate or degree they been of, that shall see and read in this said book and*

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[31] William Caxton, *Preface* to *Syr Thomas Malory Le Morte dArthur*, ed. H. Oskar Sommer (London: David Nutt, 1889), 3 University of Michigan Library Digital Collections, https://quod.lib.umich.edu/c/cme/MaloryWks2/1:1?rgn=div1;view=fulltext.

> *work, that they take the good and honest acts in their remembrance, and to follow the same.* Wherein they shall find many joyous and pleasant histories, and noble and renowned acts of humanity, gentleness, and chivalry. For herein may be seen noble chivalry, courtesy, humanity, friendliness, hardiness, love, friendship, cowardice, murder, hate, virtue, and sin. Do after the good and leave the evil, and it shall bring you to good fame and renown. And for to pass the time this book shall be pleasant to read in, but for to give faith and belief that all is true that is contained herein, ye be at your liberty: *but all is written for our doctrine, and for to beware that we fall not to vice nor sin, but to exercise and follow virtue, by which we may come and attain to good fame and renown in this life, and after this short and transitory life to come unto everlasting bliss in heaven; the which He grant us that reigneth in heaven, the blessed Trinity. Amen.*
>
> Then to proceed forth in this said book, which I direct unto all noble princes, lords and ladies, gentlemen or gentlewomen, that desire to read or hear read of the noble and joyous history of the great conqueror and excellent king, King Arthur, sometime king of this noble realm, then called Britain; I, William Caxton, simple person, present this book following, which I have enprised to imprint: and treateth of the noble acts, feats of arms of chivalry, prowess, hardiness, humanity, love, courtesy, and very gentleness, with many wonderful histories and adventures.[32]

"Do after the good," as Caxton says, could be the subtitle of *Heartsease,* but as we have pointed out*, Heartsease* demonstrates very little concern for male chivalric accomplishments, so this instead applies to the example that the female characters set. As noted, most of Yonge's men are weak and not fully developed characters, but she is very interested in how the good works of women can serve as a model of reform to her readers, especially when one falls into vice and the temptations of pride. Her central male characters, so provocatively Arthurian by name—Arthur and Percival—demonstrate to us that we are knee-deep in a chivalric setting, but her version of Arthur seems to be cast in what we would describe as the "Chrétien model," in which Arthur is ineffective and compromised. Caxton may not have been her only model, as we see how, like Chrétien did in *Le Chevalier de la Charette* (*Knight of the Cart*), she makes room for new characters to join the Arthurian cast. Chrétien introduces Lancelot as a counterbalance to the sorry state of Arthur, and we see that it is with his help that Arthur is restored, if also compromised in a new way. Guinevere is an active participant in the story, sometimes the cause of Lancelot's suffering, sometimes the source of his joy, but she is key to how his thinking and behavior evolves. Yonge's construction of Percival (Percy) is also telling; he attempts more and is the character of greater moral strength than Arthur in *Heartsease*, but many chapters are completed in which he does not figure prominently. The structure of romance and its patriarchal leanings are still (unfortunately) clear, but we must wonder if in transforming even the figures who represent religious power into female leads in her romance, Yonge has not accomplished something new and interesting under the cover of maintaining high church values and middle-class mores. Romances were never designed to be radical—that is more the business of Dante and Chaucer—but they do provide safe spaces for moral complexity. What Yonge's work demonstrates is that even without the aid of magical apparati and supernatural props, which many medieval and Victorian romances rely on when exploring difficult topics, the Arthurian romance format could be used to explore the outcomes and challenges of faith and noble behavior *even* for Victorian women.

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[32] William Caxton, *Preface* to *Syr Thomas Malory Le Morte dArthur*, ed. H. Oskar Sommer (London: David Nutt, 1889), 4 University of Michigan Library Digital Collections, https://quod.lib.umich.edu/c/cme/MaloryWks2/1:1?rgn=div1;view=fulltext.

To support this reading, we can turn to "Helping Girls to be Heroic," in which Fiona Tolhurst deals with medievalism of a later period, but whose insightful argument for the possibilities of Arthurian medievalism as a vehicle that supports female education is persuasive. Tolhurst outlines her approach by building on the well-known work of Maureen Fries, whom she describes as creating the "categories of heroine, female hero, and female counter-hero [which] enable readers to define with precision the gender roles at work in medieval Arthurian literature."[33] Tolhurst suggests that we must build on Fries categories, and she adds that, "in contemporary fiction many female protagonists occupy more than one of Fries' categories while others occupy categories outside of her schema, most often those of tragic heroine and female warrior hero."[34] Tolhurst suggests that these extra categories create room for distinguishing authors whose characters embody "healthy" ideas about womanhood.[35] Tolhurst's research is of particular interest to our argument, *not* because we can argue that Yonge's work made possible the later works of medievalism such as Nancy McKenzie's *Guinevere's Gifts*, but because Tolhurst identifies that Arthurian romances are possible to adapt for the purposes of supporting female education. To quote Tolhurst again, a wife-hero's philosophy might encourage young girls "to use their wisdom and power for good, despite the traditional gender roles of wife and mother to which medieval [and we would add Victorian] society restricts them. ... In addition, she reminds her daughter that education is the key to success for a nobleman's wife."[36]

Similarly, Yonge's wife-hero Violet, who eventually becomes the heartsease of the novel, is a woman who must use her wisdom and power for good. Violet is depicted as a young and naive girl who has recently married Arthur Martindale. Yonge immediately reveals Violet's weaknesses but suggests they are problems of situation rather than character. Only 16 years old, she has married into a well-to-do family that did not approve the match. Her youth and her ignorance are her greatest disadvantages. She admits to her brother-in-law, John, that because her courtship with Arthur lasted only six weeks, she did not have time to learn all she needed: “I did wish it could have been longer. I wanted to learn how to keep house, and I never could, for he was always coming to take me to walk in the park and it all happened so fast, I had no time to understand it, nor to talk to mamma and Matilda [her sister].”[37] The language in this passage signals a subversiveness in the text: Violet is unable to master the ideals of domestic femininity because she must embody the ideals of courtship. Few Arthurian heroes are interested in domestic skills, but Violet is a prize that all the male characters recognize from the start. It is not just her beauty, which is a typical key to social mobility in romance, medieval and modern, but also her goodness. From the beginning, Yonge points to the difficulty young women face when they try to meet all the idealized demands of their role, but there is more to Violet than meets the eye.

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[33] Maureen Fries, "Female Heroes, Heroines and Counter-Heroes: Images of Women in Arthurian Tradition," in *Popular Arthurian Traditions*, ed. Sally K. Slocum (Bowling Green: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1992), 5-17, cited in Fiona Tolhurst,"Helping Girls to Be Heroic?: Some Recent Arthurian Fiction for Young Adults*,"* in *Arthuriana* 22, no. 3 (2012):70.

[34] Tolhurst, "Helping Girls," 70.

[35] Tolhurst, "Helping Girls," 70.

[36] Nancy McKenzie, *Guinevere's Gift* (New York: Bluefire, 2011). All subsequent references to this book appear as parenthetical citations as referenced in Tolhurst, "Helping Girls," 78.

Why does Yonge make the innocent Violet so central to the success/redemption of the male characters? We know that Yonge is perfectly capable of complex research and storytelling; we need only see some of her later non-fiction as proof. She is also familiar with the original materials, as we have demonstrated, but when it comes to creating *Heartsease*, she is appropriating didactic story methods not found in the medieval originals and weaving them into a romance formula that allows her to focus on and create chivalric women in her novel. In creating Violet as beautiful and long suffering, we see the familiar, but, when directed to God she is more than able to give meaning to her ordeals. Next to the most pious character in the novel, John, the wise but suffering sage, she becomes the most powerful influence for good, owing to how she endures and understands her suffering.

In Yonge’s “History of Christian Names,” she defines the name Violet: “It may very probably be a corruption of some old Latin name such as Valentinus, or, which would be a prettier derivation, it may be from the golden violet, the prize of the troubadours in the courts of love.”[38] Yet, she is more than a prize. Yonge constructs Violet, it can also be argued, in the mold of Perceval in Chrétien’s *Le Conte du Graal.* This is a model that embraces the complexity of class boundaries and ignorance, while demonstrating to the audience that nobility can be achieved by suffering. In this model, one learns to love God only when the hero understands how suffering can be made meaningful. Perceval is guided by a vavasor who offers advice that he does not know how to apply properly, which causes everyone great distress. Violet’s ignorance is not so powerful, except when it is understood in relationship to Theodora, who is regularly provoked by what she interprets to be the causes for Violet’s behavior. Violet’s status, like Perceval’s, is redeemed when her quest is transformed into a pilgrimage; their lives regain meaning and they are heralded. Their similarities do not stop there, however; Perceval, like Violet, must earn his place in a “noble” family through education, but more than that it is his suffering and repentance that allow him to achieve his ultimate Christian status. We would expect the use of such storylines for Yonge's male characters, and it would be a more traditional Arthurian romance if that were the case, but this is not the journey of her character named Percival; instead, this is Violet's journey.

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[37] Charlotte Mary Yonge, *Heartsease: Or, The Brother’s Wife* (New York: Appleton, 1856), 20.

[38] Yonge, *History of Names*, 206, https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/70419/pg70419-images.html#r105. Yonge cites these sources in her research: “105. Villemarqué; Cambro-Britain; *Mabinogion*; Mallory, *Morte d'Arthur*. 106. Villemarque; Davies; Ellis; Cambro-Briton; Geoffrey of Monmouth; O'Donovan; Chalmers; Munch. These authors and texts are the best regarded critics and historians of the day, as well as the appropriate texts for just such a discussion. Arthurian researchers might disagree with some of her conclusions now, but they are well informed. In including Perceval as one of her main characters for *Heartsease*, we see that she makes room in this romance for a character, or indeed several, to be saved by faith and that patience and persistence are not just the tools of a chivalric knight but also of women of faith.

We include this detailed history to demonstrate that Yonge understands the full nature of what it means to name one of her main characters Percival/ Percy. Yonge charts the history of the name Perceval in her *History of Christian Names*:

> *Section VII.—Percival.*
>
> *... Chrétien de Troyes has a long poem on the story of Perceval, and his adventures are almost identical with those of the Peredur of the Mabinogion.*
>
> The story of the orphan, stirred up to chivalry by the sight of the knight whom he took for an angel, the same as that of Mervyn les Breiz, here appears, and Perceval or Peredur shows some kindred with the dummling of Persia by his ignorance and dulness till he comes to the castle, where he sees the wounded king, the bleeding lance, and the Greal or bowl of pure gold, that are the great features in his history.
>
> ... However, in the twelfth century, the ideas of this vessel had assumed a Christian form. ... Perceval, once the companion and guard of the sacred Grail, gradually descended from his high estate, and became only a knight of the Round Table, high and pure of faith and spotless of life, but only on the same terms as the rest, and though not failing in the quest, still inferior to Galahad.
>
> ... The later French romances spoilt the nobleness and purity of Perceval's character, but he is always one of the best of the knights, and succeeds in finding the Sanc-greal.[39]

We include this lengthy quote purposefully; it should be clear that Yonge is capable of complex research but also refashioning her sources.[40] In including Percival as one of her main characters for *Heartsease*, we see that she makes room in this romance for a character, or indeed several, to be saved by faith. Furthermore, she contends that patience and persistence are not just the tools of a chivalric knight but also of women of faith.

Thus, Yonge's *Heartsease,* with its emphasis on Violet, is not a retelling but an adaptation of medieval Arthurian romance. The format is expanded to demonstrate that through faith, patience, and physical suffering (which does not only mean crusade, since Perceval suffers in a lonely quest much more than in any battle) women can also achieve knightly/noble status. This quote from a conversation between Violet and Emma is even reminiscent of a scene from Chrétien's *Le Chevalier de la Charette* (*Knight of the Cart*) in terms of the understanding of what is real and what is magical, which is not the same as Yonge's use of "fairy tale" (see quote below) but helps to make clear that the mood of an Arthurian romance is created (or, perhaps more accurately, sustained) in the modern context through the means by which the characters understand their realities:

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[39] Yonge, *History of Christian Names*, 279.

[40] Yonge, *History of Christian Names*, 278.

> "Do you know, I sometimes think I have got into a fairy tale. Everything is so beautiful and so bewildering, and unlike what I fancied."
>
> [Emma] "Because you are so like a fairy princess yourself. Are you sure you have not a talisman ring!"
>
> "I think I have," and Violet pulled off her glove. "There—that forget-me-not the first ring I ever had. From the day he gave me that it has all been so strange, and now and then I have been almost afraid to awake for fear it should not be true."[41]

It is possible to draw parallels with Chrétien's narrative, specifically when Lancelot must check to see if he is being enchanted on multiple occasions, the most significant of which is when he consults the magic ring that the narrator tells us the Lady of Lake, a fairy who raised him, has given him. David Staines translates: "The stone had such power that anyone looking at it could not be in enchantment," which is the reassurance Lancelot needs to know that the situation he faces is real. Few people need magic to understand reality, but Lancelot's views on love perhaps explain why he lives the way he must. In Chrétien's romance, once Lancelot is able to break out of his real prison, the men of Logres follow him, as he is rumored to be sent to save them. Their hope, inspired by who he is, allows them to fight bravely.[42] Violet's role in *Heartsease* is characterized by its similarities to Lancelot's thinking and status as role model; her very suffering and goodness are upheld as examples for those who have lost their way, namely Arthur and Theodora. We are not arguing that this use of a fairy tale trope suggests magic. At the heart of many Arthurian romances is a magical component, which would not make sense in Yonge's story, but her use of fairy tale is a nod perhaps towards how she would address the absence of magic in her modernized Arthurian romance. A modern audience might respond more to the function of magic in medieval romances when it is updated as "magical thinking." For example, Violet is not allowed to luxuriate in the life of her "fairy tale" for long, as her struggles begin almost from the moment she meets the family. The feminine image of Violet the innocent beauty is a very different one from the woman who emerges in response to the demands that Violet the wife and mother must meet for the survival of her family.

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[41] Yonge, *Heartsease,* 89.

[42] Summary of lines 2334-2344 in Chrétien de Troyes. *The Complete Romances of Chrétien de Troyes,* ed. & trans. David Staines (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 198-99.

Yonge's Arthur, given his name, is of particular note in this argument. He is saved from dissolution by his wife Violet, but even more is accomplished by their pairing. Consider the role of class in the medieval and Victorian worlds: Violet is a beauty, but clearly a product of a lower class, who through her faith and beauty rises beyond her social status to cure an ailing prince. Yonge's Arthur is a flawed hero as in the best romance tradition. Violet is a romance Guinevere, without sexual baggage, and her faith transforms her from a weak (physically and emotionally) wife and mother to a powerful influence for good. Only the dead Helen, saint-like in her absence, who all eventually come to venerate, might have a more powerful spiritual role in the text.

If we turn back to Malory's *Morte d'Arthur* for a more in-depth analysis of it, we find a potential model for such a reading of the power of female faith. In Book XXI, Guinevere and Lancelot's love is finally possible, as people believe Arthur to be dead, but because of the human and moral cost of their love, Guinevere takes herself to Almesbury to become a nun. She rejects Lancelot to earn herself a place in heaven. Her crisis gives rise to Lancelot matching her sacrifice, albeit at first unwillingly, and thereby being redeemed. Book XXI explores the disaster of misguided love, as in the case of incest and the figure of Mordred, who ultimately kills Arthur or forces him to depart for Avalon. Mordred, Arthur's son and nephew, is described as wanting to "wed his father's wife and his uncle's wife," which the Bishop of Canterbury is scandalized by, saying, "ye first displease God and sithen shame yourself, and all knighthood? Is not King Arthur your uncle, no farther but your mother's brother, and one her himself King Arthur begat you upon his own sister, therefore how may you wed your father's wife?"[43] So weak and "new fangled" are the English that Mordred convinces them that his reign will be one of joy and bliss, so they support him. In doing so, they abandon Arthur, despite his greatness, or perhaps because of the sin of incest, and readers see that he is punished and glorified by the complicated ending that Malory devises for him. This narrative road is averted by Yonge, her focus being on how educated women of faith can be a force for good, so Guinevere's challenge to Lancelot to redeem himself, as she is attempting to do in this ending, strikes the perfect chord for how love (even this adulterous kind) can be a means to bring even compromised men and women back to God. But the challenge for any audience of Malory is to understand how we interpret his ending of the affair between the lovers:

> When Sir Launcelot was brought to her, then she said to all the ladies: "Through this man and me hath all this war been wrought, and the death of the most noblest knights of the world; for through our love that we have loved together is my most noble lord slain. Therefore, Sir Launcelot, wit thou well I am set in such a plight to get my soul-heal; and yet I trust through God's grace that after my death to have a sight of the blessed face of Christ, and at domesday to sit on his right side, for as sinful as ever I was are saints in heaven. Therefore, Sir Launcelot, I require thee and beseech thee heartily, for all the love that ever was betwixt us, that thou never

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[43] Thomas Malory, *Morte D'arthur*, ed. William Caxton, vol. II, ch. I [Ebook #1252], https://www.gutenberg.org/files/1252/1252-h/1252-h.htm#part21.

> see me more in the visage; and I command thee, on God's behalf, that thou forsake my company, and to thy kingdom thou turn again, and keep well thy realm from war and wrack; for as well as I have loved thee, mine heart will not serve me to see thee, for through thee and me is the flower of kings and knights destroyed; therefore, Sir Launcelot, go to thy realm, and there take thee a wife, and live with her with joy and bliss; and I pray thee heartily, pray for me to our Lord that I may amend my misliving."
>
> "Now, sweet madam," said Sir Launcelot, "would ye that I should now return again unto my country, and there to wed a lady? Nay, madam, wit you well that shall I never do, for I shall never be so false to you of that I have promised; but the same destiny that ye have taken you to, I will take me unto, for to please Jesu, and ever for you I cast me specially to pray. If thou wilt do so, said the queen, hold thy promise, but I may never believe but that thou wilt turn to the world again. Well, madam," said he, "ye say as pleaseth you, yet wist you me never false of my promise, and God defend but I should forsake the world as ye have done. For in the quest of the Sangreal I had forsaken the vanities of the world had not your lord been. And if I had done so at that time, with my heart, will, and thought, I had passed all the knights that were in the Sangreal except Sir Galahad, my son. And therefore, lady, sithen ye have taken you to perfection, I must needs take me to perfection, of right. For I take record of God, in you I have had mine earthly joy; and if I had found you now so disposed, I had cast me to have had you into mine own realm."[44]

In his chapter "Adulterous Love," Corey Olsen argues that Malory is interested in the complexity of real situations and devises an ending that struggles with how to understand true love in theory and how to live it in the world.[45] His contention is "that Malory, conscious of the apparent contradiction [Guinevere and Lancelot's love is adulterous and has led to the destruction in some part to Camelot] insists both on the virtue of Lancelot and Guinevere's love and on the genuineness of their repentance and religious zeal at the end."[46] He argues further that "Malory anticipates exactly this reformative role for 'trew' love," and that their relationship demonstrates that "Love has natural morally recuperative and even redemptive tendencies."[47] Similarly, Tom Hanks, in "All maner of good love comyth of God," suggests that Malory uses Guinevere's sacrifice of their love to redeem them both. Hanks argues that Malory demonstrates that all human love is inherently ennobling.[48] We see evidence for this in the romance itself, when despite Lancelot's anger at having given up so much for Guinevere's sake, he follows in her footsteps and says, "I will ever take me to penance, and pray while my life lasteth."[49] Given the next steps, it is clearly the right choice, as not even a few lines later Lancelot receives the sad news from Bedivere about Arthur's death and declares, "Alas, who may trust this world?" then kneels and is shriven and made brother by the Bishop of Canterbury.[50]

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[44] Malory, *Morte*, vol. II, ch. IX.

[45] Corey Olsen, "Adulterated Love: The Tragedy of Malory's Lancelot and Guinevere," in *Malory and Christianity: Essays on Sir Thomas Malory's Morte Darthur*, ed. D. Thomas Hanks, Jr. and Janet Jesmok (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2013), 30.

[46] Olsen, *Adulterated Love*, 30.

[47] Olsen, *Adulterated Love*, 45.

After Lancelot's death, we are assured that he has been forgiven because his fellow penitents give witness to sanctity and vision of his welcome to heaven. Olsen argues that the lovers saved themselves by the depth of their devotion to each other.[51] This formula is certainly lived out in the ending of *Heartsease* when Arthur's sins and poor physical health nearly result in his death. That he married Violet, a girl of a lower class family with grasping relatives, without the consent of his family, is not as grievous a "sin" as the potential of Guinevere and Lancelot's adultery, but as Malory's complex approach to the ideal versus the real demonstrates, Yonge can also resolve these larger social tensions by having Violet provide healing, not just by showing Arthur the truest path to human love and God's love, but by helping to heal the entire family. Violet provides for this family what medieval Arthur never had, legitimate children, so her role is doubly blessed. But Yonge, like Malory, does not make the journey an easy one. Violet suffers in childbearing and childbirth, at least one of which is life-threatening, and while she perseveres in her humility, her Arthur is the picture of weakness. He has chosen a sinful and ignoble lifestyle because he cannot see his way to faith or appreciate the gift that is Violet. One might argue that his inability to see her true worth is owing largely to his patriarchal thinking; he refers to her regularly as a child, for example, despite having made her his wife. Certainly, such intellectual limitations would not qualify him in Yonge's words to be an example of "a man with the highest ability." As readers, we cannot help but feel that he is not just foolish, but that the way he thinks and indulges himself has led to immoral behavior and impeded his faith. Is Yonge making a comment on patriarchal thinking and behavior when Arthur is saved by Violet? In reversing these traditional roles, Yonge highlights the power of faith and the importance of the roles of women who serve God. To be sure, this is a rewriting of Malory's ending, but the seeds can be seen in how she crafts a two-fold happy ending—Arthur and Theodora are both saved by Violet from their pride, foolishness, and spiritual failings.

Like Violet, Yonge also has Theodora suffer to achieve true nobility. Violet is the more traditional female romance hero as discussed, so perhaps that is what we would expect for Theodora. However, the way Yonge structures Theodora as a rewriting of the medieval Perceval character, while linking her romantically to her Victorian Percival character, means that she can achieve something remarkable. In Theodora, Yonge creates a female knight whose crusade to "save" her brother is discovered to be "sinful." Her pride is not only her downfall but a source of harm to her family. Like Chrétien's Perceval, her pride, ignorance, and lack of self-knowledge is the cause of much suffering. She is forced to literally go through a trial by fire, and she suffers the loss of love, by which she *learns* how to be humble and worthy of love. Her transformation from an immature and shallow creature, who is royal in looks only, into a woman of depth, faith, and character mirrors the transformation of Chrétien's Perceval and, indeed, Malory's Guinevere. Yonge's use of medieval plot lines is signaled, obviously, by Theodora's relationship with a character named Percival. In Yonge's *History of Christian Names*, Theodora is translated as "Divine gift."[52] The medieval Perceval is one of the most famous of Arthurian knights who only learns his name and true self through the most difficult of quests; of equal note, is his struggle for his faith to be restored after his realizations about the Graal, arguably God's divine gift. Therefore, his pairing with Theodora in *Heartsease* makes symbolic sense. Yonge creates a plot line that ostensibly embraces the respect for marriage demanded by Victorian culture and the Church of England, but through her use of medieval materials and Arthurian romance motifs, she simultaneously questions that institution and the particular roles of husbands and wives, and she demonstrates the power of education and faithful women.

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[48] Tom Hanks, Jr., "All manner of good love comyth of God," in *Malory and Christianity Essays on Sir Thomas Malory's Morte Darthur*, ed. D. Thomas Hanks, Jr. and Janet Jesmok (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications 2013), 21.

[49] Malory, *Morte*, vol. II, ch. X

[50] Malory, *Morte*, vol. II, ch. X.

[51] Olsen, *Adulterated Love*, 45.

For another example of how this works, we can look at the pairing of Theodora and Percy and how that plotline has meaning in both the Victorian and medieval registers. In knowing Chrétien's romance, we see how important it becomes that Theodora, like the medieval Perceval, must learn to be worthy of her name. If we, like Yonge, ignore the Arthurian implications for Theodora's intense need for her brother Arthur's attention, which signals a much darker Arthurian incest motif, we see Theodora's sin is one of pride. Theodora's relationship with Percival is tested when he leaves her, believing that she is too willful and disobedient to make a proper wife. When Theodora loses Percy, she turns to Violet, who guides her through this loss. Violet becomes the only person who can influence Theodora, through "her resolution, her strength, not her weakness."[53] Theodora acknowledges Violet's effective approach: "Slowly had the power of Violet's meekness and lowliness been stealing into her affections, and undermining her pride."[54] With Violet's influence, Theodora begins to accept that her prideful ways could and did cause harm. Violet convinces Theodora to return to her parents' home and try to follow her father's wishes. This turn in the plot could be interpreted as the loss of her spirit and a return to patriarchal/social norms, but Yonge makes it subversive even while it is seemingly a return to traditional behavior. This will be the great test of Theodora, not only as a prideful woman, but as a powerful human being who will risk everything to save the people she loves. She steps into a knight's role, while her brother Arthur, who should traditionally be the one to come to the rescue, is nowhere to be found; in fact, even worse, we find out later that he was off gambling.

We see Theodora's transformation begin even before the fire, when back at her parents' home, Yonge marks the changes: "Her bearing was less haughty; her step, still vigorous and firm, had lost its willfulness; the proud expression of lip had altered to one of thought and sadness, and her eyes had become softer and melancholy."[55] Her transformation is not complete, however, until Theodora experiences a rite of purification in the shocking scene in which she saves her family—specifically the children—from the fire that destroys their home. After hours of helping to fight the fire and salvage what she could, her head, face, arms, and hands were burned and bleeding. The physical damage is so marked that even months later, when she runs into Percy, he exclaims, "Theodora! I did not know you!"[56] But she is emotionally healed and cleansed by her ordeal by fire, and like the best medieval knights, her doubts and self-censure are healed by a turn to faith. This is how Yonge's Percival and Theodora become deserving of each other. Theodora's redemption is complete when she asks for Percy's forgiveness, saying "I was unbearable. No man of sense or spirit could be expected to endure such treatment. But, Percy, I have been very unhappy about it, and I do hope I am tamer at last if you will try me again."[57] Theodora is humbled, "tamed," and her ultimate submission after her defiance shows readers that "rebellious and unfeminine conduct will expose women to danger, and that such sins as pride, willfulness, and selfishness will be punished."[58] This interpretation, however, overlooks the romance context in which every knight must learn to conquer pride and to face a test of greatness. Yonge demonstrates, just as Arthurian romance writers of the past have done, that pride is one of the greatest sins, and for Theodora with her regal spirit, it is one of the great temptations. Yonge also shows that curing these sins entails self-awareness, reflection, and often difficult penitential acts, as in the example of Theodora's scarred body and spirit. Audiences must then reflect on whether the price Theodora has had to pay seems too high; if it were only to fit into the role of the Victorian feminine ideal, then the answer might well be yes. But to be noble, to be a paragon of virtue worthy of Perceval (and his Victorian counterpart Percy), and most importantly to be doing God's work, then Theodora, like many chivalric knights both in fiction and in life might have said, the price was necessary to achieve the prize. When we think of characters being burnt and broken, we often think of the trials of sainthood, but that is not Yonge's aim; she clearly creates a plot in which Theodora and Percival *together* are capable of great things and that is not just a good marriage. Theodora and Violet save their families but also whole communities by their examples, as represented by the story line of Lord St. Erme among others.

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[52] Yonge, *History of Christian Names*, 278, cxxviii, 101-102.

[53] Yonge, *Heartsease*, 2:13.

[54] Yonge, *Heartsease*, 2:51.

[55] Yonge, *Heartsease*, 2:110.

Charlotte Yonge has masterfully managed the genre of medieval Arthurian romance and translated an overtly masculine and martial format into a form that is well-suited to demonstrate the powerful good a noble and educated Victorian woman of faith can achieve.. Medieval Arthurian romances at first glance seem an unlikely genre to redeploy in this way, but when one looks closely at the source materials, we see the ways Yonge's Victorian characters can be both medieval and Victorian in design and spirit. More importantly, this discussion demonstrates how Yonge's female characters can ennoble themselves and others through powerful forms of sacrifice and humility, be it through pilgrimage and/or quest. Yonge's female characters experience such hardships that they must become educated in their faith to survive. In turn, their faith provides them with a way to be powerful and accepted in Victorian society. In the Victorian world, like the medieval one, faith is one of the few sources of power that women could draw upon to be heard and execute good works. In this Victorian Arthurian romance, faith is a source of power for women that is distinctly neither magical nor sexual, which seems to be so at odds with what many romance scholars assume is the function of women in the genre of Arthurian romance. However, Yonge's clear knowledge of British and French histories, Arthurian romance, and Christianity informs how she reconfigures an Arthurian romance hero into a model of feminine strength: she is noble, beautiful, and powerful (physically and mentally). Yonge, like Caxton long before her, understood the power of the genre to capture and educate all genders and classes, thus her interest in female education found a powerful outlet in this genre. Yonge's ability to have an impact on her audience rested, in large part, on her ability to restrain an urge to demand social change and instead work in the quiet mode that she so admired in the earlier female authors that she lauds in her own non-fiction writing. Yonge provides for us in *Heartsease*, as in all Arthurian romances, so much more to value and consider than the critics of popular entertainment often acknowledge. We must wonder if the Victorian lovers of medievalism would have been more alert to the levels of reading that Yonge creates in her construction of *Hearstease* than some modern critics might be in their dismissal of texts such as this one. This research will hopefully provide some insight into how we might reread Yonge's vast array of works with a clearer sense of her complexity and methodology.

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[56] Yonge, *Heartsease*, 2:204.

[57] Yonge, *Heartsease*, 2:246-47.

[58] Sandbach-Dahlstrom*, Be Good*, 113.

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