



Imagining Soldiers and Fathers in the Mid-Victorian Era

Charlotte Yonge's Models of Manliness

S U S A N W A L T O N

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SUSAN WALTON

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List of Abbreviations

B-C	Angela Burdett-Coutts
BL	British Library
CCC	<i>Colonial Church Chronicle</i>
ChC	<i>Churchman's Companion</i>
ChR	<i>Christian Remembrancer</i>
CMS	Church Missionary Society
CMY	Charlotte Mary Yonge
DNB	<i>Dictionary of National Biography</i>
EC	Edward Coleridge
EHR	<i>English Historical Review</i>
FR	<i>Fortnightly Review</i>
GCCL	Girton College Library, Cambridge
GP	Gladstone Papers
HPRO	Hampshire Public Record Office
ILN	<i>Illustrated London News</i>
JCMYF	<i>Journal of the Charlotte M. Yonge Fellowship</i>
KCLO	Keble College Library, Oxford
LMS	London Missionary Society
LPL	Lambeth Palace Library, London
Macm	Alexander Macmillan
MP	<i>Monthly Packet</i>
PWDRO	Plymouth and West Devon Record Office
QR	<i>Quarterly Review</i>
SCLC	Selwyn College Library, Cambridge
SPG	Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts
SR	<i>Saturday Review</i>
WEG	William Ewart Gladstone

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Introduction

‘Make us Thine own soldiers true’¹

A great deal of the history that scholars are producing now was completely unthinkable or literally unimaginable when Carr set out to describe and define the subject forty years ago.

—David Cannadine²

Viewing history as a literary artefact recognises the importance of narrative explanation in our lives as well as in the study of the past and it ought to liberate historians as we try to narrate the disruptive discontinuity and chaos of the past for and in the present. ... Because today we doubt ... empiricist notions of certainty, veracity and a socially and morally independent standpoint, there is no more history in the traditional realist sense, there are only possible narrative representations in, and of, the past, and none can claim to know the past as it actually was.

—Alan Munslow³

Manliness and Masculinities

The last thirty years have been an exhilarating period for Victorian studies. What had been examined largely as a story of serious political, economic and imperial development, as recorded in institutional archives and in the writings of Great Men (and a few Eminent Women) – indeed a sombre masculine version of the past, of which the Victorians themselves would have approved – has been undressed, handled, anatomized in a multiplicity of new ways. This has revealed a far more complex, fluid and colourful society than the term Victorian had come to denote. That this newly revealed body of knowledge has been opened up to inspection is due, to some extent, to the employment of a more interdisciplinary approach. The rigid distinctions between academic disciplines, which the Victorians strived to put into place so as to elevate them into honourable professions suitable for gentlemen, have been assailed. What had seemed to be solid divisions turn out instead to be mere stage curtains that are opaque until a spotlight reveals their flimsiness. Historians quarry the rich seams of anthropology, sociology and literature; literary critics draw on the scholarship of historians, psychologists and philosophers.

¹ *Hymns Ancient and Modern* (1861; London, 1924), No. 757, translated from Latin by Rev. Isaac Williams, a leading member of the Oxford Movement and friend of Rev. John Keble.

² David Cannadine (ed.), *What is History Now?* (Basingstoke, 2002), p. xi.

³ Alan Munslow, *Deconstructing History* (London, 1997), pp. 13, 16.

And within the old citadel of History there has been a democratization of the different varieties of historical study. The traditional pecking order which placed political, diplomatic and constitutional history on a higher plane than social and economic history has gradually been flattened; grudging doors have been opened for recent arrivals such as gender, cultural and postcolonial studies. The history which has emerged, with its emphasis on 'aspects of identity, consciousness and mentality in place of social structure, social organisation, and the economic bases of power', provides an opportunity to interrogate literary texts with the intention of adding to historical understanding.⁴ The insights provided by this wealth of perspectives have deepened our understanding of Victorian culture as a whole, giving a richness of colour to its sepia tones.

In an update of his research into modern masculinities as they evolved in the nineteenth century, the historian John Tosh defines their key features as a 'declining investment in physical violence', 'an increasing self-consciousness about occupation' and 'the value placed on the domestic sphere'.⁵ In this book I examine the complications that resulted from such modifications in the lived experience of mid-Victorian men, influenced as they inevitably were by imaginary conceptions and role models. The writings of Charlotte Yonge, a best-selling author and editor, can provide a useful route into the cultural beliefs embedded in constructions of masculinity in the mid-nineteenth century; by an examination of some of her work in an exact historical context it is possible to understand better the standpoints, anxieties and values of important sections of Victorian society and to consider the ways whereby she provided prototypes of male behaviour as well as guidance on the formation of manly character. Within Yonge's works we can reflect on the practicalities of Tosh's key features: the difficulties which ensued when trying to reconcile a 'declining investment in physical violence' with the need to produce soldiers and empire builders; the confusions which 'an increasing self-consciousness about occupation' inserted into domestic life when the home served as the hub of private and public enterprises; the stresses and conflicts within men's psyches created by the 'value placed on the domestic sphere'. Her novels provide an arena where we can witness contested versions of masculinities weighed up, debated and rehearsed, offering another perspective on the history and culture of mid-Victorian people and throwing light into a notable area of their lives.

While all periods of history are times of flux, it is arguable that the early years of Victoria's reign were unstable in remarkable and unaccustomed ways. From our vantage point, knowing the end of the story, it is difficult to share in their sense of dislocation and peril; their troubles can appear minor as compared with the global challenges facing the world in the twenty-first century. Good historians, however, must try to inhabit nineteenth-century mindsets to appreciate their sense of foundational threats. The mid-century was a time of shifting attitudes,

⁴ Richard J. Evans, in Cannadine, p. 8.

⁵ John Tosh, 'Masculinities in an Industrializing Society: Britain, 1800–1914', *Journal of British Studies*, 44 (2005): pp. 330–42.

structures and ideologies. The groundwork for the Victorian state and society was being laid with many features, later characterized as archetypal, still unresolved. Cultural qualms were debated and contested within the greatly enlarged arena of print, which empowered all silent readers, men and women, to participate in the arguments. The struggles to negotiate the social and political consequences of the upheavals, brought about by technological change together with rapid urban growth, have been worked over by legions of scholars.⁶ What has been less recognized until recently has been the extent to which the emerging Victorian state was a male construct: that gender saturated the language whereby professional organizations, institutions, disciplines, legislation, public and private spaces were shaped.⁷ Assumptions about the proper nature of men and women in a modern nation lay at the heart of topics of mainstream historical importance such as the Ten Hours Movement, Chartism, Parliamentary Reform, the workings of liberal economics, the Anti-Slave Trade campaign.⁸

A key transformation during these years, culminating in the Corn Law crisis of the 1840s, was the shift from a nation where the concerns of the Agricultural Interest were foremost, to one where these were increasingly sidelined by the demands of the newly industrial areas; the 1851 Census famously marked the point at which more people lived in towns than in the countryside in England. These developments punctured traditional assumptions about the archetypal male citizen, typically portrayed as a yeoman, with bullish, independent characteristics. They also presented new challenges not only for the people of crowded urban areas but for that still large percentage who, like the Yonges and their wide circle of friends, were living in rural parishes and small towns. Although Victorians paid lip-service to an essentialist notion of gender as innate, they betrayed uncertainty about what types of behaviour could be labelled indubitably masculine or feminine and they agonized over the central question of how such gender was to be performed, observed, adjusted, learned, commented upon and clothed, making it a site of perpetual unease with clouded and precarious borders.

The ground-breaking historical and literary studies that emerged from the twentieth-century feminist movement revealed the hitherto overlooked place of women in nineteenth-century history; but increasingly such studies have broadened

⁶ For a recent re-examination: Arthur Burns and Joanna Innes (eds), *Rethinking the Age of Reform: Britain 1780–1850* (Cambridge, 2003).

⁷ Nancy Fraser, 'What's Critical about Critical Theory', in Johanna Meehan (ed.), *Feminists Read Habermas: Gendering the Subject of Discourse* (New York, 1995), pp. 21–55, demonstrates the failure of theorists such as Habermas to factor in the extent to which oppositional gendering is implicit in the language used to describe capitalist structures.

⁸ Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes. Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780–1850* (London, 2002, revised edn); Jane Rendall, *The Origins of Modern Feminism. Women in Britain, France and the United States, 1780–1860* (Basingstoke, 1985); Clare Midgley, *Women against Slavery. The British Campaigns, 1780–1870* (London, 1992); Anna Clark, *The Struggle for the Breeches. Gender and the Making of the British Working Class* (Berkeley, 1995).

into a productive study of gender: its characterization and purpose, its nuances and confusions, its function in the fabrication of the new professional middle classes, of the machinery of state, of a capitalist economy. Viewed now through this wider lens, Victorian disquiet about the position of women can be better understood as a consequence of the central dilemma of how men should conduct themselves both in the new types of public spaces and in the privacy of their homes: the novel freedoms of the marketplace were accompanied by strictures on life-styles – their occupations, behaviour, character and clothes – which placed weighty expectations on the shoulders of young men.⁹ The growing ranks of middle class families were united by a common problem: what should their sons do with their lives; to what employment or to what purpose should they devote themselves. Scattered throughout the novels of Dickens and Trollope, Mrs Gaskell and Mrs Oliphant, as well as those of Charlotte Yonge, are numerous examples of sons and husbands who struggle to find their feet in the respectable professional world of work. Nineteenth-century memoirs, biographies and diaries provide further evidence of the real-life stories of men falling short of the stringent standards which parents set for their sons.¹⁰

Added to the external pressures of society, there had also been a shift in expected roles within families, elevating that of the mother to a ‘pinnacle of esteem’: ‘Moral motherhood ... probably commanded greater prestige and practical observance in Britain between the 1830s and 1880s than at any other time’.¹¹ This newly-sanctified maternal authority brushed off onto other females within a household: as mothers, sisters, aunts, cousins, teachers and wives, they were allowed to have an important input into the moulding of their menfolk. Initially, boys were taught in their homes about the ingredients of manliness and how to perform masculinity. When they left the family circle, the messages learned from the women of the household were meant to remain within their psyches, whispered as prompt-lines should they forget how to play their manly roles. Yonge’s best-selling stories can be seen as the rehearsal rooms for productions of patriotic English men.

Recent works in other disciplines such as sociology and anthropology have underlined the extent to which masculinity has always been an unstable and contested state into which boys have to be inducted; its acquisition then requires constant monitoring with adjustments controlled by both internal and external constraints.¹² Although my aim is to place Yonge’s works in their specific mid-

⁹ David Kuchta, *The Three-Piece Suit and Modern Masculinity: England, 1550–1850* (Berkeley, 2002), ch. 6, ‘The Making of the Self-Made Man’.

¹⁰ Valerie Sanders, *The Tragi-Comedy of Victorian Fatherhood* (Cambridge, 2009), ch. 2, for the exasperation of Charles Dickens at his sons’ resistance to steady work.

¹¹ John Tosh, *Manliness and Masculinities in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Harlow, 2005), pp. 134–5; see also p. 48 and Rendall, chs. 2 and 3.

¹² Harry Brod and Michael Kaufman (eds), *Theorizing Masculinities* (Thousand Oaks, 1994); Ian M. Harris, *Messages Men Hear: Constructing Masculinities* (London, 1995); Victor J. Seidler, *Man Enough. Embodying Masculinities* (London, 1997); Stephen M. Whitehead and Frank J. Barrett (eds), *The Masculinities Reader* (Cambridge, 2001).

nineteenth-century context, careful use of such scholarship about later periods can illuminate our understanding of the dilemmas of the early Victorians. Far from being easy to acquire for anyone born with the appropriate chromosomes, masculinity is a 'prize to be won or wrested through struggle'; a 'precarious or artificial state that boys must win against powerful odds'.¹³ The use of the plural, masculinities, gives a better sense of the variety of traits which masculinity can incorporate. This underlines the changeable nature of those characteristics viewed as acceptably male, impelling some men constantly to shift their stance. It also elicits a possible imbalance between a man's inner and outer self: masculinity as the costume to wear for public appearances away from the privacy of a domestic setting. Of particular interest is the work of the social anthropologist David Gilmore in his studies of different types of present-day communities across the world; these illustrate how, even in more traditional rural and pre-industrial settings, boys require training in masculine behaviour. His contention about the central role of learning to face danger – that indoctrination of some sort has always been necessary to turn boys into men and men into soldiers – has a specific relevance to my first chapters on military matters at mid-century. In agreement with the work of Ernestine Friedl, Gilmore holds that the ultimate test of manhood is a willingness to sacrifice his life:

This acceptance of expendability constitutes the basis of the manly pose everywhere it is encountered; yet simple acquiescence will not do. To be socially meaningful, the decision for manhood must be characterized by enthusiasm combined with stoic resolve or perhaps "grace". It must show a public demonstration of positive choice, of jubilation even in pain, for it represents a moral commitment to defend the society and its core values against all odds.¹⁴

If so, this serves as a reminder of the many complications for men in modern industrial societies where opportunities for rehearsing expendability are fewer or different in nature.

Detailed examinations of Victorian masculinities, initiated by J.A. Mangan and James Walvin in the late 1980s in their examination of the culture of boys' schools, literature and clubs, have been followed by other important studies.¹⁵ In some of these, where imaginative writing is explored for clues to contemporary beliefs, there is an assumption that key lessons about manhood are provided by male authors. Therefore, the works of Thomas Carlyle, Captain Marryat, William Thackeray, Charles Kingsley and Thomas Hughes all come under the spotlight, and rightly so, but I contend that the writings of women, such as Yonge, are also

¹³ David D. Gilmore, *Manhood in the Making. Cultural Concepts of Masculinity* (New Haven, 1990), p. 11.

¹⁴ Gilmore, pp. 223–4; Ernestine Friedl, *Women and Men. An Anthropological View* (New York, 1975).

¹⁵ J.A. Mangan and James Walvin (eds), *Manliness and Morality. Middle Class Masculinity in Britain and America, 1800–1940* (Manchester: 1987).

worthy of consideration from this perspective.¹⁶ John Tosh, the leader of the field in the study of historical masculinities, insists that the significance of gender is not limited to marginal areas of the domestic past but is crucial for an understanding of mainstream political history. In a series of articles and books he has both advanced our understanding of the meanings of masculinities as lived, talked and written about by the Victorians, and kept track of the research undertaken by other scholars in this field.¹⁷ His illuminating case-study of the family life of E.W. Benson exposed the conundrum of the many professional middle class men for whom home was their work place rather than somewhere to which they could retreat for relaxation.¹⁸ The simplistic notion of distinct separate spheres delineating the lives of men and women cannot be an appropriate model for the complexities of self-image and duties in such establishments, common for numerous doctors, vicars, schoolmasters, as well as landowning gentry. This has related resonances when considering the many men in such families in Yonge's stories, based as they were on men within her own wide circle of families.

Tosh's analyses of the distinctive use of the words manhood, manliness and masculinity are fundamental to this present study.¹⁹ The choice of manliness rather than masculinity for the overall title of this book reflects its centrality to the Victorians themselves (witnessed by the torrent of print that they devoted to the subject, to be found in the British Library), as well as its portfolio of inner meanings for them. Whereas masculinity is the twenty-first century's preferred word for denoting the range of male qualities available for manipulation into the particular form adopted by individual men (more of a pick-and-mix than a set menu), manliness for the Victorians contained desirable moral characteristics that all men should aim to acquire: courage, determination, readiness to work at useful tasks and to take familial and political responsibilities.²⁰ Manliness indeed included

¹⁶ Joseph Kestner, *Masculinities in Victorian Painting* (Aldershot, 1995); Donald E. Hall, *Muscular Christianity. Embodying the Victorian Age* (Cambridge, 1994), and *Fixing Patriarchy. Feminism and Mid-Victorian Male Novelists* (Basingstoke, 1996); Norman Vance, *The Sinews of the Spirit. The Ideal of Christian Manliness in Victorian Literature and Religious Thought* (Cambridge, 1985); Andrew Dowling, *Manliness and the Male Novelist in Victorian Literature* (Aldershot, 2001); Herbert Sussman, *Victorian Masculinities. Manhood and Masculine Poetics in Early Victorian Literature and Art* (Cambridge, 1995).

¹⁷ Michael Roper and John Tosh (eds), *Manful Assertions: Masculinities in Britain since 1800* (London, 1991); John Tosh, *A Man's Place: Masculinity and the Middle Class Home in Victorian England* (New Haven, 1999); Stefan Dudink, Karen Hagermann and John Tosh (eds), *Masculinities in Politics and War. Gendering Modern History* (Manchester, 2004).

¹⁸ John Tosh, 'Domesticity and Manliness in the Victorian Middle Class: the Family of Edward White Benson' in Roper and Tosh, pp. 44–73.

¹⁹ John Tosh, *Manliness and Masculinities in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Harlow, 2005), pp. 1–3, 32–4, 44–51, 74–7.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 83–102.

within it a non-gendered and non-classed sense of adulthood, denoting resolution in the face of danger and difficulty, a characteristic that women had the ability to implant and even to share. Although a term already in use in the eighteenth century, it needed to be redefined for the changed conditions of the Victorian age. A critical problem, especially within gentry families, was how to express inner determination without the physical shows of strength previously regarded as proof of manly vigour: this quandary emerges repeatedly in arguments over the discipline of children, punishments in schools, prisons and the armed services, the settling of differences between boys and young men, and what types of sports and hunting were acceptable. Importantly, it presented a serious challenge for perceptions of soldiering and enlistment, as well as for foreign policy. Admiration for the imagined code of honour of the medieval knight, fondly embraced by numerous Victorian middle class men and women, acquires a new meaning in the light of contemporary debates over the appropriate use of force and pugnacity by men.²¹ As I will demonstrate, all of these issues are weighed up and chewed over in Yonge's books.

Such topics were matters of significance to women: they needed to consider their stance in relation to the use of force to impose authority, to punish, to win arguments. Would they despise or cheer on men who contained their emotions and opted out of contests of physical strength in favour of appeasement? What kind of masculine attributes would they esteem and encourage them to adopt? Although throughout the book I focus on notions of masculinity, implicit within such perceptions are questions of equal import for femininity: what roles should or could women adopt, what characteristics might they claim for themselves as well as for their menfolk? As the daughter of an army officer, but also as someone with close associations to leading members of the Oxford Movement, this was a question of major consequence for Charlotte Yonge. Tractarian clergy were frequently portrayed as unmanly; the preference of some for celibacy was taken as evidence of emasculation, as was their attention to church vestments and decorations. Labelled as popish, they were lumped together with Roman Catholic priests, popularly perceived as perverse, subservient and unpatriotic. Tosh states that the key ingredients of manliness for the Victorians – what he calls their 'common currency' – were, 'assertiveness, courage, independence and straight-forwardness'.²² In the eyes of their critics, many male followers of the Oxford Movement failed on all four counts. The enduring popularity of Yonge's *The Heir of Redclyffe* (1853) would filter alternative, positive notions of the manly qualities embraced by Tractarians into the wider reading public.

Gilmore expresses surprise that the ultimate ideal of manhood held in most societies embraces qualities of nurturing and self-sacrifice often perceived as

²¹ Mark Girouard, *The Return to Camelot. Chivalry and the English Gentleman* (New Haven, 1981), remains the standard work; see also Alice Chandler, *A Dream of Order. The Medieval Ideal in Nineteenth-Century English Literature* (London, 1971).

²² Tosh, *Manliness and Masculinities*, p. 5.

feminine: these ideologies ‘always include a criterion of selfless generosity even to the point of sacrifice. Again and again we find that “real” men are those who give more than they take; they serve others’.²³ But these heroic exemplars are surely familiar from literary and historical stories throughout the ages: the ideal man, the knightly gentleman, the Scarlet Pimpernel, the courageous Captain Oates. Imagining such men appears to be an essential ingredient in learning how to become one. In his essay on Lawrence of Arabia, Graham Dawson opens a discussion on the significance of representations of heroic masculinity with the apposite sentence: ‘Masculine identities are lived out in the flesh, but fashioned in the imagination’. Enlarging on this, he postulates the necessity of an ‘imagined identity’:

... it organizes a form that a masculine self can assume in the world ... as well as its values and aspirations, its tastes and desires. ... The forms furnished by representations often figure ideal and desirable masculinities, which men strive after in their efforts to make themselves into the man they want to be. ... The history of masculinities must therefore include within its scope the tracing of those many and varied historical imaginings which have given shape, purpose, direction to the lives of men.²⁴

Although Dawson is writing about the early twentieth century and Gilmore about its last decades, their comments have important insights relevant to the cultural perceptions of, and problems for, masculinities in the earlier decades of Victoria’s reign.

‘Charlotte M. Yonge, Author of *The Heir of Redclyffe*’

The *Heir of Redclyffe* is a very beautiful and touching book ... If it is not admired, it will be loved, which is, any day, the better fortune of the two. The form and character of Guy, and the picture of his reconciliation with Philip, and his early death will live in all hearts, and perhaps wake in some new affections and impulses for good. (*The Times*, 5 Jan. 1854, p. 9)

The soldier, the divine, the seamstress, the lawyer, the grocer-boy, the belle and the hair-dresser peeping over her shoulder, joined in full cry, according to their different modes of lacrymation, over the lowly grave under the chestnut-trees. (*North American Review*, 80 1855, p. 452, on the death of Guy)

Throughout her long literary life, Charlotte Yonge’s name was bracketed with that of her bestselling novel, *The Heir of Redclyffe* – her subsequent books included this reference on their title pages; even the oddity of a cigarette card image of her, late in her life, added this key claim to fame (Figure I.3). She was thus

²³ Gilmore, p. 229.

²⁴ Graham Dawson, ‘The Blond Bedouin. Lawrence of Arabia, imperial adventure and the imagining of English-British masculinity’, in Roper and Tosh, *Manful Assertions*, pp. 118–19.