



Alliance of Literary Societies
President: TBC
www.allianceofliterarysocieties.org.uk

Newsletter: Autumn/Winter 2022

Not Only, But ALSO...

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Introduction to Charlotte M. Yonge

At next year's AGM weekend, the ALS will be celebrating the bicentenary of Charlotte M. Yonge's birth. So who was she and why is she worth celebrating?

Background

CMY (1823-1901) was an internationally famous bestselling author in her lifetime. At the height of her fame she was under constant pressure, steadily resisted, to come to London and take her place among the popular authors of the day. Her subsequent eclipse was largely due to changing social attitudes.

She was born on 11 August 1823 in Otterbourne, just outside Winchester, where she lived all her life. She never married and she didn't need to earn her living. Perhaps more important to her than her writing was her unpaid work as a teacher in the church Sunday school and the village school.

There were two profound influences on her life and thought, one being her father, William Yonge (d.1854), a deeply religious Anglican, who had on his marriage retired from the army and settled in Otterbourne. Although not the lord of the manor or even the largest landowner, he took on the role of squire in the village. The other influence was John Keble (d.1866), one of the leaders of the Anglican High Church Oxford Movement, her parish priest, who prepared her for confirmation, and was a family friend.

This quiet background of religion and service to others shaped Charlotte M. Yonge. Read by all classes of society, her works appealed to all walks of life, from servants to soldiers, from priests to princesses. In 1854 the sales of her bestseller, *The Heir of Redclyffe*, earned £1,000, which she gave away to missionary work among Pacific islanders. But this was only one of well over a hundred books which she

published in her lifetime, which were read in America and the Antipodes, in Italy, Spain, France, Germany and Russia. Her subjects ranged from fiction to non-fiction, from the historical to the contemporary, from family sagas to stories for schoolchildren.

Reputation

So why did her works descend into near-oblivion? A profoundly Christian and didactic author, she fell out of favour with all but a dedicated few in the twentieth century, when her perceived 'preachy' tone overshadowed her vivid characterisation and lively dialogue. But for the past 30 years or so, CMY's popularity has been increasing. Readers have come to value her writings as a window on the Victorian age and how attitudes changed over her 60 years of literary activity, from 1839 to 1901. CMY herself, via her writings and her own activity, promoted good causes including gentlewomen's education and employment. (This education, of course, had to take place in Church of England schools and colleges.) But above all, we're now enjoying her novels as good reads, with lifelike and likeable characters, believable, unstilted dialogue and moments of high drama. I've chosen four of them to give you a flavour of her work.

Books for adults

CMY introduces human drama and adventure into all her books for adults. In *The Heir*, the hero almost single-handedly rescues the entire crew of a sinking ship, while banished from his guardian's home on the unjust suspicion of incurring gambling debts; in *The Daisy Chain* the materfamilias is killed at the beginning of the book in a carriage accident, and the young sailor brother is given up for lost at sea. This is typical of CMY's work – in other books she deals with murder, fraud and addiction, not to mention burglary and child-stealing.

A best-selling romantic drama

The Heir of Redclyffe has all the above-mentioned qualities and more. It's a good read whether or not you know anything about Victorian authors and their predecessors. But if you love reading, you will enjoy CMY's way of upsetting well-loved tropes. I'm far from the first to observe that *The Heir* makes the Gothic and Romantic respectable in the person of the hot-tempered but lovable Guy Morville, who destroys the curse and the feud which he has inherited by forgiving his hitherto villainous cousin, Philip, on his deathbed. His widow, Amy, then goes on to upset another trope by being good and gentle, like Austen's Fanny Price ('she could only have gone away and cried') and Dickens' Ada Clare, but, unlike them, active and effective in her restoration of Philip to useful life.

A family saga

CMY wrote several family sagas, of which perhaps the best-known is *The Daisy Chain* with its heroine Ethel May, plain, awkward and destined never to marry, who is nevertheless one of CMY's best-loved characters. Today's readers find Ethel's giving up classical Greek in favour of household duties deeply upsetting, but we can't dismiss CMY as anti-feminist on the evidence of this one book alone. It's true she was never in favour of votes for women, but as time went on, she (like many another Victorian) came to understand that women needed a good education, not only in itself but also to fit them to earn a living, which they also needed. Not every young gentlewoman had a sensible father and the run of his library! In real life CMY was a member of the founding committee of the Winchester High School for girls, now St Swithun's, where the ALS AGM will be held.

Children's books

In CMY's other works she was to upset the trope of the reluctant (Jane Fairfax in Jane Austen's *Emma*) or under-appreciated governess (Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*) or indeed the ineffective governesses in

The Daisy Chain, by portraying enthusiastic and well-qualified women who win the affection and respect of their pupils and employers alike. Typical of these is Miss Fosbrook in *The Stokesley Secret*, from whose point of view much of the story is narrated. This is a children's book, unusual in its rounded portrayal of a governess who is much more than a mere authority figure. As such it will appeal to those ALS members who enjoy children's books, as will *Countess Kate*. Here Kate Umfraville inherits a title and a fortune, but as you would by now expect from CMY, this is more of a trial than a blessing.

Conclusion

So there you have something of Charlotte M. Yonge, a surprisingly unconventional author, a good read and a window on the Victorian age. You are warmly invited to come and find out more about her at 2023's AGM Weekend from 21 -23 April.

Alys Blakeway

Chair, Charlotte M. Yonge Fellowship

Welcome to the Digital World

We are in the 21st century. I think that by 2022 there's no denying it, and that means we DO have to move with the times (however bad these times may seem to be...) At the ALS there have been some changes in personnel doing the volunteer roles of managing our website and social media. I have taken over website duties from Linda who put in a more than sterling effort to the ALS over many, many years. So, this seems as good a time as any to send out a plea for help – or more precisely, for you to help me to help you in the most efficient manner.

Here in the 21st century, we've all come to realise that digital communications are no longer an add-on option to our lives, they are an integral part of the way anyone communicates. So it's time to move with the times.

Digitally, the ALS offers you the member benefits of posting events to our Events Calendar, items for the News section and an article for Society of the Month. With many more societies wanting to use these options, I'd like to run you through how you should do it to make my (and therefore your) life easier.

1. Events Calendar. Many of you will be familiar with Google Events Calendar in your personal/professional capacities. In which case, it's a no-brainer that supplying us the information in the same format that you would post it saves us all time.

However, if you're not familiar with this system (except as a reader/consumer of Events Calendar) the correct protocol is as follows:

Send an email to allianceoflitsocs@gmail.com with the header EVENTS CALENDAR and in the body of the email list the following information:

The Date, Location and Title of the Event. A short description of what it is and any information regarding cost. A link to your website or email or however someone may contact you further.

Please note, the 'good' old days of sending information (randomly) to someone at the ALS (usually Chair/Secretary) and hoping (or expecting) that someone will trawl through that information for the

relevant details IS GONE. Sorry. It's just that we're in the 21st century and we're all too busy to do that. Please also note that any event you send for posting MUST be open to all, not just to your membership.

2. News items. If you have something newsworthy to share with us (something that can't wait for the biannual newsletter) then please send it in an email to allianceoflitsocs@gmail.com with the header ALS WEB NEWS and I will (if appropriate and space allows) add it to the News section of the website. Please don't make it more than a short paragraph. Longer news/information should be directed to the Newsletter editor (currently Mark Green)

3. Society of the Month. This is the newest member benefit/feature on the website. We are currently full through till Spring 2023 but we work on a first come/first served so if you want to take part, I'd encourage you to send information as soon as you can. If you want a specific month I will try to accommodate you – so anyone with summer/autumn 2023 anniversaries might well want to get their 'post' in now. Don't delay, because with only one slot a month, if you delay you may always be at the back of the queue.

For SOM you need to send an email to (you guessed it) allianceoflitsocs@gmail.com with the header SOM. The information you need to include is standardised to include: a brief intro to the author/society followed by the recommendation for their CLASSIC WORK, a BEST FOR BEGINNERS and a BEST BIOGRAPHY/ LIT CRIT work. Aim for 200 words and definitely no more than 300. You can include buying links to the works if you like. You also need to send an image (as attachment to the email) in JPEG format. This does not need to be a big, high res one, ideally an image around 300x400 pixels (but if that doesn't mean anything to you, just send a relatively small file please!).

Finally, if I can manage your expectations. Like everyone these days, I have a busy life and I only check ALS email twice a week. I then work through all those items which have headers appropriate to me: EVENTS CALENDAR, NEWS and SOM. In the limited time available for my ALS duties, I will reply to your email, confirming that I've received it, and let you know what action I will be taking. If you don't provide information in a way that's easy for me to action, I may not have the time to root around trying to work out what you want me to do. Sorry for that. So please, help me to help you by following these guidelines. The goal is to share information as widely as possible. The aim is to make the process of information exchange as simple as possible! The prize: the more people who know about your Society and what you're up to, the more members you may recruit/retain. Which is what we, at ALS, are committed to helping you achieve.

Cally Phillips

Racially Offensive Terminology in the Works of Rudyard Kipling

The Kipling Society, perhaps unusually for literary societies, carries all the works of its author on its website, generally accompanied by explanatory and critical comment. The website is open to the general public as well as to members, and it is very popular, with multiple daily hits on Kipling's most well-known works, and in particular his poems. We also curate his writings by topic and by target audience, such as children.

As readers of the ALS Newsletter know, Rudyard Kipling wrote in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century. His upbringing, partially in India, was at the apogee of Victorian Imperialism and it is

not surprising that he grew up believing in the virtues of Empire and the inherent superiority of the white over other races. Whilst some of his early writings (e.g 'Departmental Ditties', 'Plain Tales from the Hills' or his Indian journalism) are critical of parts of the colonial administration, its overall benefit to colonised peoples is never in doubt. The linguistic currency of his age and milieu contained words to describe people of other races that were offensive then and are offensive now, and those words were used by Kipling.

The Kipling Society has recently considered the problems associated with unmoderated access to those of Kipling's works that contain offensive language. This consideration was triggered by a member challenging whether 'the n-word' should continue to appear on our website. This particularly offensive word occurs in a number of Kipling's works. Most print publishers edit this word out of Kipling's children's stories and for some years the Society has followed their lead. Now, however, it is time to consider our approach to the works that are not (primarily) for children.

The members of our Council were, in our early discussions, broadly divided between those who thought that it was our role to be the definitive source of what Kipling wrote, and that it would be heretical to edit, and those who felt that it was necessary to prevent the hurt which an unexpected encounter with racially derogatory terminology can cause. There was also the question of what exactly constituted derogatory terminology: was it just the use of specific racist vocabulary, or was it the implicit racism in the writing, such as in this stanza from Kipling's well-known 'Gunga Din':

*'E would skip with our attack,
An' watch us till the bugles made "Retire,"
An' for all 'is dirty 'ide
'E was white, clear white, inside
When 'e went to tend the wounded under fire!*

After further debate, we arrived at the policy below, which we believe is a balanced approach:

- a. We will not, in general, edit Kipling's work.
- b. We will, however, include a prominent warning at the beginning of each of Kipling's work which contains the n-word, along the lines of '*The Kipling Society presents here Kipling's work as he wrote it, but wishes to alert readers that the text below contains some derogatory and/or offensive language*'.
- c. In the accompanying commentaries on our website, we will explain the context in which Kipling was using the n-word and that it is a highly offensive term.
- d. We will not attempt to edit past editions of *The Kipling Journal*, which are available as searchable pdfs on our website, to remove the n-word, whether in Kipling's works, the works of other authors or in contributors' commentaries.
- e. For those works which we specifically promote as being suitable for children, we will follow the practice of recent publishers of editing out the n-word. We will not explain in the commentary what we have done (as this might lead to awkward questions to parents or teachers), although we will include the general statement '*This story has been edited to remove some offensive wording, as we specifically recommend it for young people*'.

We will preface the statement of our policy with the following sentence. *'The Council of the Kipling Society recognises that Rudyard Kipling, in common with many other writers of his time, used certain derogatory terms to describe members of different racial groups which would not be considered appropriate for use in most contexts today.'*

We advised members of this policy in a recent newsletter and have received little feedback so far. That which has been received is supportive. We intend to monitor what, if any, reactions we receive when the policy is fully implemented, and anticipate extending it to other derogatory racial terms should there be a demand from members or the public to do so.

We will also include a more general warning on our home page, along the lines of *'Some of Kipling's works contains words or express views relating to race, gender or other matters which today are generally considered to be unacceptable.'*

Mike Kipling
Secretary, The Kipling Society

The ALS would be interested to hear from other literary societies who have addressed similar issues in the works of their author. Please send the Editor your thoughts for the next issue of the newsletter.

Julie Shorland Memorial Grant

Our colleague and friend, Julie Shorland, who had served as treasurer of the ALS for over 20 years, sadly passed away in January 2021. It was decided by the committee to establish an annual grant in her memory. The award of £100 will be announced each year at the ALS AGM, and will be given to a member society for a project or as a contribution towards a project.

Applications will consist of a brief description of the project and will be submitted to the Chair by 31 January 2023. The committee will make its decision at its February meeting. Societies that have a representative on the committee will not be barred from applying for a grant, but the committee member concerned will abstain from voting.

The ALS has a tradition of providing small grants to societies on an ad hoc basis and, while we appreciate that the amount is small, we feel that making this an annual recognition of all that our societies do is a fitting way to pay tribute to Julie.

Marty Ross
ALS Chair

For your diary

Next year's AGM weekend, hosted by the Charlotte M. Yonge Fellowship, will take place 21-23 April in Winchester. Details of the programme and registration forms will be in our spring newsletter.

ALS Contacts

We welcome your feedback and information. Please contact as follows:

Website content and events: Cally Phillips: gallowayraiders@gmail.com

Newsletter: Mark Green: markr_green@msn.com

Facebook/Social media: Mark Green: markr_green@msn.com

For other matters contact:

Chair: Marty Ross Smith: martyross73@gmail.com

Treasurer: Jeremy Mitchell: treasurer.als@outlook.com



The views expressed in this publication are those of the individual contributors and not necessarily those of the Alliance. Please send copy for the next issue by 1st February 2023 to Mark Green: markr_green@msn.com. We reserve the right to edit copy for space. The spring newsletter will be published in early March 2023.