

**“And There Was No Helping It”:
Disability and Social Reproduction in Charlotte Yonge’s *The Daisy Chain*(1)**

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<1> The Victorian female body, recent studies have reiterated, was understood first and foremost as a reproductive body.(2) If women engaged in arduous physical or mental labor, they risked damaging that one function which defined them. In 1874, commenting on the effect of mixed education on women in American schools, Henry Maudsley writes,

It is not that girls have not ambition, nor that they fail generally to run the intellectual race which is set before them, but it is asserted that they do it at a cost to their strength and health which entails lifelong suffering, and even incapacitates them for the adequate performance of the natural functions of their sex. (473)

Maudsley acknowledges the intellectual ability of women, their mental equality with men, but stresses that intellectual effort will interfere with their “natural function” as reproductive bodies, and cautions against the introduction of the American system.

<2> However, this characterization cannot be applied directly to the physically disabled female body, for if Victorians essentialized women’s bodies as vessels for reproduction, the bodies of disabled women in fiction were almost universally represented as non-reproductive. Many Victorian writers portrayed disabled women sympathetically, but “no matter how close they get to the traditional Victorian heroine’s plot of courtship, love, and marriage, disabled women characters almost never become biological parents” (Holmes 6). In an era obsessed with heredity, and when Lamarckian theories of the transmission of acquired characteristics still prevailed long after Darwin published his theory of natural selection,(3) the reproductive potential of disabled women presented a double bind. If a disabled woman gave birth to an “able-bodied” child, it would go against the norms of heredity. Without these norms, an apple might indeed fall far from the tree: a body born to lower-class parents might be naturally endowed with bourgeois or aristocratic qualities, instead of having to painfully improve him or herself by dint of hard work, and still never losing the accoutrements of low birth. And if a disabled woman gave birth to a disabled child, readers might have condemned the mother for what they would have seen as blighting the life of her offspring for the sake of her sexual appetite.

<3> I will argue that in the work of Charlotte Yonge disabled female characters fulfill crucial reproductive roles, but that this reproduction is social, not biological. As Marxist and feminist critics have emphasized, capitalist patriarchal relations of production require the social reproduction of ideology, the interpellation of subjects in terms of gender and class.⁽⁴⁾ It takes not just a uterus (or indeed a village), but kinship structures, educational surveillance, cultural productions, and rituals, be they religious or secular, to raise a child into a gendered and classed subject who cannot but give consent to capitalist ideology. The disabled female characters in Yonge's novels highlight the necessity for social reproduction and ideological inculcation, for a form of reproduction which supplements and even corrects the biological reproduction of the non-disabled women.

<4> I will focus on Margaret May's socially reproductive role in *The Daisy Chain* (1856), Yonge's second-most popular novel (after the phenomenally popular *The Heir of Redclyffe* [1853]) and perhaps her most beloved novel among Yonge's aficionados, both among the many who read her in the nineteenth century and the few who read her today. After a carriage accident, Margaret is confined to her bed for most of the book. I will trace her reproduction of social ideology first inside the home with her younger sister Ethel, and then outside the home with Meta Rivers, daughter of the local country squire. Margaret provides a model of feminine discipline for her younger sisters, in particular Ethel, the main character of *The Daisy Chain*. I use the word discipline in a Foucauldian sense, arguing that Margaret reproduces in Ethel an internalized sense of docility and utility. Obedient and productive female bodies were as necessary for bourgeois social reproduction as docile proletarian bodies were for capitalist production and militarism, and Ethel's relationship with her disabled sister ensures her internalization of Victorian bourgeois feminine values.

<5> Second, drawing on Sharon Marcus's work on female friendship in *Between Women*, I will discuss Margaret's friendship with Miss Rivers (another Margaret, although called Meta for short). According to Marcus, "Female friends were integrated into the domestic realm as marriage brokers who helped facilitate courtship, but female friendship was defined in terms of affection and pleasure" (26). In *The Daisy Chain*, the affectionate friendship between the two Margarets facilitates the courtship of Meta Rivers and Norman May, Margaret's younger brother. Visiting Margaret for religious guidance keeps Meta coming back to the Mays, and in one scene, the tension created by her unspoken desire for Norman is released through kissing Margaret. The relationship between the Margarets cannot be described as queer, given the ubiquity of female friendship expressed in passionate language in an age before the phobic construction of lesbianism. However, the affection goes beyond the typical pity and sympathy a non-disabled character in a Victorian novel might feel for a disabled character, and effects the reproduction of heterosexual bonds through marriage. This ideal marriage, resulting from a friendship between a non-disabled and a disabled female character, contrasts with the less than happy marriage between Flora May and George Rivers, which originates from the friendship between Flora and Meta. Meta's friendship with the disabled Margaret more successfully reproduces heterosexual values than her friendship with the non-disabled Flora.

<6> Margaret's disability is able to reproduce social values effectively in part due to the emotional response her "affliction" provokes in others. Commenting on the melodramatization of

disabled lives from Tiny Tim in *A Christmas Carol* and onwards to the present moment, Martha Stoddard Holmes writes, “we know that when we enter a story about disability, we enter a world of pitying or heart-warmed tears, inner triumph, mirror-smashing rages, suicide attempts, angst and abjection, saintly compassion, bitterness, troubled relationships, and courageous overcoming” (2-3). In this paper I hope to join Holmes in her endeavor “to question, analyze, and disrupt the ‘natural’ connection between disability and feeling” (4). Although *The Daisy Chain*’s representation of Margaret includes plenty of the charged emotional scenes Holmes lists (although nothing along the lines of angst and abjection), Margaret strives to be considered as more than a helpless, dependent object of pity. By revising their initial responses of pity for what they assume to be Margaret’s helplessness, Ethel and Meta are forced to question and analyze themselves, and to reproduce Margaret’s self-discipline. Yet, showing the strength of melodramatic convention, Yonge reverts to a pitying tone when narrating Margaret’s eventual death.

<7> If the bodies of Victorian women were assumed to be primarily reproductive, that reproductive function was social as well as biological. The bodies of Yonge’s disabled female characters eminently fulfill socially reproductive duties at which non-disabled bodies are less successful. By exploring the disabled bodies in Victorian fiction, we may expand our understanding of the gendered body and its role in biological and social reproduction. In particular, disabled bodies could become desirable, even more desirable than non-disabled ones, through their reproduction of social values. Given the prevalence of disabled people in Victorian life and fiction,(5) the role of disability must be considered in interrogating the structures of gender, sexuality, and class, and attending to these representations may make our view of Victorian life more nuanced, more attentive to biological and non-biological models of kinship and reproduction.

Disability and Discipline

<8> Yonge gave *The Daisy Chain* the alternate title “Aspirations.” According to her first biographer, Christabel Coleridge, the book “rose out of discussions with Miss [Marianne] Dyson” (whom I will discuss further in the following section), and its “root idea was the danger of ambition” (183). The novel’s loose plot explores the hopes and dreams of the May children over a period of about seven years. There are eleven of them, but the ones whose aspirations are most fully fleshed out are the third to fifth eldest: Flora seeks entrance into the world of fashion and politics; Norman strives for academic success at Stoneborough, the local grammar school, and then at Oxford; Ethel envisions a church for the nearby impoverished neighborhood of Cocks Moor. All of these ambitions are shaped by the tragic event narrated in the novel’s opening chapters, the carriage accident which kills their mother, Mrs. May; permanently injures the right arm of their father, Dr. Dick May; and “cripples” the eldest daughter, Margaret. Instead of completely condemning the May children’s ambitions as vain and worldly, or completely endorsing them as successful stories of perseverance and self-improvement, the narrator occupies a middle ground, engaging in what Melissa Schaub calls “the project of *taming* ambition” (69, emphasis in original). Thus, while Ethel is forced to renounce her practice of keeping up with and assisting her older brother Norman’s studies in Greek, her project of establishing the church

at Cocks Moor eventually reaches fruition. Her youthful desires must be directed and contained, not repressed.

<9> Soon after Mrs. May's death, Flora discovers an unfinished letter written by their mother to her sister which contains portraits of the physical features and personality of each of the May children. Mrs. May describes Ethel's "old foibles": her "harum-scarum nature, quick temper, uncouth manners, and heedlessness of all but one absorbing object" (44). All these are shown in the novel's first scene. Ethel's words open the novel: "Miss Winter, are you busy? Do you want this afternoon? Can you take a good long walk?" In response to this unmannerly questioning, absorbed as Ethel is in her one object of visiting Cocks Moor, Ethel's governess coldly answers, "Ethel, my dear, how often have I told you of your impetuosity—you have forgotten." Ethel struggles to contain her quick temper as she is forced to postpone her inquiry, waiting for the necessary formalities of genteel small talk to proceed as her sister Flora enters the room. The narrator carefully details Ethel's half-successful efforts at self-restraint:

"I do believe she does it on purpose!" whispered Ethel to herself, wriggling fearfully on the wide window-seat on which she had precipitated herself, and kicking at the bar of the table, by which manifestation she of course succeeded in deferring her hopes, by a reproof which caused her to draw herself into a rigid, melancholy attitude, a sort of penance of decorum, but a rapid motion of the eyelids, a tendency to crack the joints of the fingers, and an unquietness at the ends of her shoes, betraying the restlessness of the digits contained. (3)

From head to foot, from fingertips to toes, Ethel's body bristles with an impatient energy that threatens to turn into aggressivity.

<10> Contrast this initial scene with one after the accident. This time, Ethel also has a message, that their eldest brother Richard has suggested that he and Ethel go to Cocks Moor on Fridays to set up a school, and its communication is again thwarted, but the intended recipient is now Margaret lying on her bed. Ethel is in Margaret's room, having already waited over a day for this moment, and announces she has some news to tell her, but not until she completes her lessons. After patiently finishing them, Ethel must postpone her news again as one sibling enters after another. It is not until after the requisite afternoon walk that Ethel and Margaret can converse in peace. Instead of relaying the long-deferred information, however, the following exchange ensues:

"I should have been very glad of you last evening," said [Margaret], "for papa went to sleep, and my book was out of reach."

"O, I am sorry; how I pity you, poor Margaret!"

"I suppose I have grown lazy," said Margaret, "for I don't mind those things now. I am never sorry for a quiet time to recollect and consider."

"It must be like the waiting in the dark between the slides of a magic lantern," said Ethel; "I never like to be quiet. I get so unhappy." (74)

Instead of interjecting with the one object which absorbs her attention as in the scene with her governess, Ethel pauses to consider Margaret's subjectivity, her passive body and active mind. Ethel moves from pitying Margaret's helplessness to contemplating her contentedness. By sympathizing with Margaret's happy quietude, Ethel thinks of her own harum-scarum nature, her inability to be quietly content. Whereas previously Ethel had literally kicked against Miss Winter's imposition of docility in conversation, here she reflects on the potential pleasures of docility, comparing it to the pleasurable anticipation of a new image projected by a magic lantern. And in contrast to her interruptions in the opening scene, after this digression Margaret must prompt Ethel to convey her message about Cocks Moor.

<11> Margaret's disability enables Ethel to see docility in a new light, to imagine the disciplined, docile body as a body which one could desire to emulate. Docility, though, only represents one half of Foucauldian discipline. Bodies which have been disciplined are both docile and useful:

Discipline increases the forces of the body (in economic terms of utility) and diminishes these same forces (in political terms of obedience). In short, it dissociates the power (*pouvoir*) of the body; it turns one part into an "aptitude," a "capacity," which it seeks to increase; it reverses the energy, the force (*puissance*) which might result from the other part, and turns it into a relation of strict subjection. (138, translation slightly altered)

Foucault's analysis applies most directly to the lower-class male bodies of urban proletariats and soldiers, but I would suggest that it is germane to the middle-class female body as well. Victorian middle-class women, as Elizabeth Langland argues, should not be dismissed as passive, ineffectual figures, according to the stereotype of the "Angel in the House," but interrogated as agents fulfilling important social roles: "[The] Victorian wife, the presiding hearth angel of Victorian social myth, actually performed a more significant and extensive economic and political function than is usually perceived" (8). These women played a crucial part in installing and maintaining bourgeois ascendancy. Their busy day-to-day lives were occupied with managing their servants, organizing social events, and controlling the household's finances, and they were well aware of the importance of their positions.

<12> Likewise, Margaret is more than an idle and passive figure, confined though she is to bed and sofa. Shortly after the accident, Ethel walks into Margaret's room, and discovers (after Flora draws her attention to it) that Margaret has added white puffs to her night cap to make it more suitable for daytime appearance. Ethel protests, "You could be tidy without the little puffs! Your first bit of work too! [. . .] I can't see the sense of them." Margaret justifies her actions by claiming, "I did not think the trouble wasted, if seeing me look fresher cheered up dear papa a moment" (46). Her words provide an example of the not uncommon moments in Yonge's texts which might cause a modern reader to snicker, but instead of dismissing Margaret as a woman sadly in need of consciousness-raising, one might consider her claim as a cover for an understandable desire to do something rather than nothing. Later in the novel, she says to her father, "I have been thinking how well off I am, able to enjoy so much, and be employed all day long" (110-111). Kept busy with visits from her many siblings, her work at handicrafts, and even the management of her father's income, Margaret's disabled body, though docile, is not indolent. (6)

<13> Readers of *The Daisy Chain* have often commented on how Ethel, who had kept pace with her older brother Norman in his classical studies, is forced to give up her scholastic work when her governess complains of a particularly messy piece of handwriting. It is through her conversation with Margaret that Ethel arrives at the decision to renounce her studies, and the scene most clearly illustrates Margaret's work of social reproduction. The dialogue begins with Margaret requesting a reluctant Ethel, eager to attend to her Thucydides, to "have one of our talks" (153). Ethel guesses that the subject will be Miss Winter's desire for Ethel to stop going to Cocks Moor to teach, as it distracts her from her own lessons. Margaret points out how Ethel risks overworking herself. In addition to keeping up with Norman, she says, "[Y]ou have Cocks Moor to attend to, and your own lessons, besides reading all the books that come into the house. Now isn't that more than is reasonable to expect any head and hands to do properly?" (154). Instead of concurring with Miss Winter's recommendation that Ethel cease her charitable religious instruction, which would be unthinkable in a Yonge novel, Margaret suggests that Ethel come to terms with her feminine inferiority to Norman, something entirely thinkable for Yonge. "[W]e all know," says Margaret—"kindly," the narrator makes sure to add—"that men have more power than women, and I suppose the time has come for Norman to pass beyond you." What clinches Ethel's decision, though, is Margaret's playing of the "dear mamma" card: "would you give up," she asks, "being a useful daughter and sister at home? The sort of woman that dear mamma wished to make you, and a comfort to papa. [. . .] I don't think dear mamma would have liked Greek and Cocks Moor to swallow up all the little common lady-like things" (155). The fact of inheritance, of biological reproduction, is not enough; the reproduction of womanliness requires external supplementation.

<14> Margaret's disability enables her to fulfill this socially reproductive role. Soon afterward she observes to her father, "[Ethel] lets me scold her, asks my leave, never seems to recollect for a moment how little older I am, and how much cleverer she is" (156). Although neither Margaret nor her father mentions her disability, the reader may recall Ethel's earlier sympathetic recognition of Margaret's helpless immobility. If tempted to resist Margaret's constraints, Ethel might be reminded of Margaret's cheerful resignation to her own restricted horizons. Instead of striving to vindicate herself, Ethel attempts to emulate and internalize Margaret's lady-like discipline. By understanding the physical limitations imposed on her sister, Ethel can come to terms with the intellectual limitations imposed on herself, and, as Yonge's intended audience would understand, accepting such limitations would reap spiritual rewards. Yet Ethel and Margaret do not totally renounce the world and the worldly in favor of the afterlife. Discipline involves not only submission, but exertion and concentration as well. Margaret does not ask Ethel to give up her Greek entirely, but to limit her study to "half-an-hour, perhaps" (156), to make sure it doesn't occupy too much of her time, better spent not only on traditionally lady-like things, but on her pedagogical endeavors at Cocks Moor.

<15> I do not wish to imply that Margaret is the sole motivation for the taming, the disciplining of Ethel's ambition. As represented in Mrs. May's unfinished letter, she has "faults that show themselves, and which one can tell how to deal with, and I have full confidence that she has the principle within her that will conquer them" (44). Others, notably her father and her surprisingly feminine elder brother Richard, contribute to her transformation from twitching, agitated pubescent girl to focused and obedient young woman. Yet it is Margaret's docile yet not inactive body which suggests most intimately to Ethel the value of womanly discipline, which reproduces

most forcefully the inscription of Victorian class and gender roles, which transforms Ethel's potentially unruly feminist anger into disciplined philanthropic energy. It is because of the vital role Margaret plays in Ethel's upbringing that her biographer Georgina Battiscombe grudgingly admits that "Margaret is necessary to the complete development of the Mays" (94).

Disability and Amity

<16> Battiscombe's biography of Yonge, written during the Second World War, is surprisingly hostile to Margaret, in a work which generally and self-consciously treats Yonge's novels affectionately. "It is difficult," she writes,

to criticise a tale so dearly loved, a constant companion for a quarter of a century and comforter in a hundred troubles, great and small [...] Faults there are, of course, obvious even to the most devoted, and the worst of them is the invalid sister, Margaret. There is far too much of Margaret; unlike Ethel, we find no difficulty whatsoever in believing that the first waking to the knowledge that Margaret was gone could have been more fraught with relief than with misery [. . .] Throughout the story Margaret is a sad bore, but without her the May family would not have been altogether their same delightful selves, and if Margaret is necessary to the complete development of the Mays then she must be endured with patience. (94)

Why such animosity? Certainly, Margaret's cheerful acceptance of her disability disappoints the reader who values psychological depth and realism—whose expectations would be fulfilled in numerous other characters of Yonge. However, the contempt expressed by Battiscombe strongly resonates with her condemnation of Marianne Dyson, Yonge's "invalid" friend in real life, suggesting a phobic reaction.

<17> Dyson, who lived near Yonge, was probably her closest friend. The two remained intimate from when they first met in the 1840s until Dyson's death in 1878, discussing Yonge's novels and the Sunday school classes each taught, and writing to each other constantly. Christabel Coleridge, Yonge's first biographer, describes Dyson as "twenty years older than Charlotte, and something of an invalid; she was lame and suffered from headaches, but she must have been a woman of much force and cultivation, with a great enthusiasm for education" (147). Yonge credited her as "Guy's mother," referring to the hero of *The Heir of Redclyffe*, the phenomenally popular novel which made Yonge into a reluctant literary celebrity. Battiscombe, however, amplifies Coleridge's somewhat ambivalent "must have been" into a mournful lament:

When she was about twenty Charlotte added a friend of her own to this select and serious circle. What she needed was a companion of her own age, someone young, gay, irresponsible; what she found was an earnest-minded invalid twenty years her senior. Marianne Dyson was perhaps Charlotte's dearest friend, but the suspicion arises that hers was among the worst influences on her life [. . .] Charlotte needed to expand, to see life as it was lived beyond the bounds of the Tractarian party; above all, she needed male society of a different brand to that provided by Mr. Keble or Warden Barter.⁽⁷⁾ Marianne Dyson was the complete spinster, living with her mother and a parson brother. (63)

Behind Battiscombe's scathing prose lies a scarcely concealed anxiety: Yonge's close friendship with this older disabled woman obstructed the heteronormative fulfillment Battiscombe so clearly wishes Yonge could have had.(8)

<18> It would be tempting to read Yonge's relationship with Dyson as a queer attachment.(9) One must keep in mind, though, the greater range of emotional and physical tokens of affection allowed in "normal" female friendships before the construction of a minoritized lesbian identity. Sharon Marcus's recent work in *Between Women* offers a useful model for interpreting these bonds without anachronistically projecting our understanding of subversive sexual identities onto them or unproductively denying their significance due to their social acceptance. For Marcus, female friendships should be understood both as "a technology of gender," a means of reproducing properly gendered behaviors and identities, and "an enactment of the play in the gender system" (56), the play of the system referring to "the elasticity of systems, their ability to be stretched without permanent alteration to their size or shape" (27). Thus, although women could express their admiration of, and indeed their desire for another female body—while such an expression for a male body would be unthinkable—this fit within the system of heterosexual courtship and marriage. Unmarried women could meet suitors through the mediation of their female friends, and these friendships would often continue long after the marriage of either friend: "By helping each other marry, friends expressed their love for one another in a world that valued female friendship but deemed marriage the most important tie a woman could forge with another adult" (71).

<19> Instead of "helping each other marry," Yonge and Dyson expressed their love for each other through their shared interests of religion, education, and writing. This does not necessarily make their relationship queer, but it does contrast with the representation of the relationships between disabled women and non-disabled women in Yonge's novels. In *The Clever Woman of the Family*, Rachel, the titular character, befriends the older, wiser, and "more than lame" Ermine Williams, and under her reforming influence transforms from unmarriageable bluestocking to the wife of Alick Keith.(10) In *The Daisy Chain*, Meta Rivers first encounters the Mays when Dr. May and Norman visit her father on a medical consultation. Meta and Norman eventually marry, but Meta's continued contact with the Mays in the first place depends on her friendship with Margaret. It is a textbook example of Sharon Marcus's "female amity plot," with the crucial difference that one of the friends is disabled. Yonge transposed her affection for Dyson onto the friendships between disabled and non-disabled women in her novels, but added marriage to the picture, perhaps in an attempt to make these bonds more acceptable, more conducive to biological reproduction.

<20> By placing Margaret within the domain of female friendship, Yonge represents her as more than an object of pity, indeed as a desirable female body, to whom Meta, the daughter of a country squire, can relate as an equal. In contrast to her own friendship with Marianne Dyson, however, Meta's friendship with Margaret works toward instead of against the heterosexual marriage plot. Margaret's disabled body, then, which first draws Meta's attention to the Mays, enables the reproduction of bourgeois-oriented heterosexual values, where interior psychological and emotional depths and properly gendered behavior count for more than aristocratic lineage.

<21> Norman first converses with Meta in the drawing room of her manor, under the supervision of her governess, Mrs. Larpent. Meta begins cutting leather into the shape of ivy leaves, answering Norman's eager questions on the nature of the craft. Norman explains, "I wanted to learn all about it, for I thought it would be such nice work for my eldest sister." Meta reacts immediately: "A glance of earnest interest from little Meta's bright eyes at her governess, and Mrs. Larpent, in a kind, soft tone that quite gained his heart, asked, 'Is she the invalid?'" (125). Clearly, "the invalid" has been the subject of many conversations. After questioning Norman on Margaret's life, Meta responds with sentimental pity: "'How very good she must be,' said little Meta, quickly and softly; and a tear was sparkling on her eyelashes" (125), and sends Norman off with a choice bouquet for her from the Grange's ample conservatory. In the following chapter, Ethel finds Norman and Margaret busy at work on this new obsession in Margaret's room: "There she found a great display of ivy leaves, which Norman, who had been turning half the shops in the town upside down in search of materials, was instructing her to imitate in leather work—a regular mania with him, and apparently the same with Margaret" (132). One suspects that Norman's new "mania" derives in part from his attraction to Meta; similarly, Margaret's participation in the new handicraft suggests some curiosity regarding the source of Norman's newfound knowledge.

<22> After first meeting Margaret, Meta describes her enchanted encounter to her governess: "Oh! you must go and see her; you won't look at her without losing your heart. [. . .] She looks the picture of goodness and sweetness. Only think of her having some of the Maidenhair and Cape Jessamine still in water, that we sent her so long ago. She shall have some flowers every three days" (146). Like Ethel, she aspires to Margaret's docile discipline: "I am a motherless girl like them, and I ought to be everything to papa, just as Miss May is, even lying on the sofa there" (147-8). Later, Meta decides, following Margaret's religiously-toned advice, to go without the services of her maidservant so that she may stay with her ailing mother. Calling to mind Margaret's disabled body allows her to internalize the value of self-abnegation, as she later applies "the resolution made beside Margaret's sofa" by repressing her objections regarding her Sunday school teaching to Mrs. Wilmot (211).

<23> Besides providing a model of sympathy and emotional restraint for Meta, Margaret mediates the budding attraction between her and Norman. At one point in the novel, Norman has been unfairly accused of misconduct at school. When he is cleared of these suspicions, Margaret, home alone, is the first to find out. After the Mays, along with Meta, return to Margaret, the news quickly transmits from May to May, and Meta finds herself near Norman in his moment of vindication. Norman tightly grasps her offered hand, and she blushes: "Meta's colour flushed into her cheek as she found it still held, almost unconsciously perhaps, in his agitation" (246). But when Dr. May subsequently is reminded of Meta's presence and calls her, she goes not to him, or Norman, but to Margaret: "And there was no helping it; the first kiss between Margaret May, and Margaret Rivers, was given in that overflowing sympathy of congratulation" (247). Desire for Norman causes Meta to blush, but she cannot express her desire. However, she can physically express her excitement by kissing Margaret, and indeed she cannot help but to kiss her. Meta is the helpless one, not Margaret, irresistibly drawn to her disabled body, as Yonge was drawn to Dyson.

<24> It would be misleading, though, to think of Meta and Norman's courtship as primarily constituted by a Girardian triangulation of desire involving Margaret, to the exclusion of all other characters. Meta, like current readers still drawn to Yonge's family chronicles, takes pleasure in the diverse mix of personalities she finds in the May family. When she first visits the Mays, although she has much to say in praise of Margaret, she is most impressed by Flora, the family beauty. To her governess, she describes Flora as "about seventeen, so pretty! such deep blue eyes, and such a complexion!" (147), and declares, "Flora May shall be my friend" (148). Like many Victorian women, Meta frequently expresses her admiration of feminine beauty. At her Sunday school, her favorite student is "the prettiest of all—the one I liked best, and had done everything for" (205). Yet this attraction is dangerous—not because it suggests homosexuality, a category which did not yet exist, but because it can lead to indiscipline. Her Sunday scholar misbehaves, mimicking her gestures, punishing her uncritical appreciation of beauty.

<25> Likewise, her appreciation of Flora's beauty does not lead to a reciprocal exchange of unaffected, non-utilitarian affection, but worldly vanity and ambition on Flora's part. After Ethel and Flora first visit the Rivers, Flora reflects:

She saw she was likely to be very intimate with Meta Rivers, and she was roaming away into schemes for not letting the intercourse drop, and hopes of being admitted to many a pleasure, as yet little within her reach—parties, balls, London itself, and, above all, the satisfaction of being admired. The certainty that Mr. Rivers thought her pretty and agreeable, had gratified her all the evening, and if he, with his refined taste, thought so, what would others think? (183)

Although Sharon Marcus argues that in the mid-Victorian period, "female friendship was defined in terms of affection and pleasure, not instrumental utility" (26), here Flora exemplifies such a utilitarian perspective. She is fully aware that her friendship with Meta will lead to enhanced social opportunity, and that her beauty will work to her advantage. Meta's father, like Meta herself, finds her "pretty and agreeable," and among the "others" that she wonders about in her closing question, naturally, would be potential suitors of a high rank. Indeed, she subsequently marries Flora's half-brother. Although the marriage is not a completely unhappy one—such a desecration of the sacramental bond would be unthinkable for Yonge—it does lead to unhappiness. Pushing George Rivers to run for Parliament, the two lead a busy life in London, leaving their baby Leonora to the care of her nurse. Flora biologically reproduces, but fails in her maternal duty of social reproduction: through her neglect, she allows the servant to regularly dose the infant with an opium cordial, which eventually leads to Leonora's death. Repentant and desiring nothing more than to live a retired provincial life, Flora still must continue taking part in the stressful political life she has chosen for her husband. Her manipulation of female friendship for her own ends is thoroughly, bluntly punished.

<26> As Meta's friendship with Margaret shows, though, female friendship can lead to reward instead of punishment. Yonge not only shows that a disabled woman can be represented as physically desirable within the framework of female friendship; the contrast between Flora and Margaret suggests that it is safer for an "able-bodied" woman to desire a disabled woman in this way than it is to desire a non-disabled woman. If there is any danger in intimacy between

women, it is not because of any inherent threat to heterosexuality, but because an overinvestment in worldly beauty distracts from the proper inculcation of religious responsibilities and the reproduction of disciplined relations between self and others (and indeed within oneself). Her affection for Margaret's disabled body leads Meta towards internalizing Margaret's religious self-regulation, while the friendship between Flora and Meta leads to unhappiness for Flora. Female disability provides a check on worldliness, a policing of the bonds between women so that they result not only in biologically reproductive marriages, but socially reproductive kinship ties.

Conclusion

<27> Despite her efforts at portraying Margaret as more than a helpless object of pity, Yonge finally reverts to a conventional representation of disabled life. After going to such lengths to provide Margaret with a rich and rewarding life, Yonge kills her off near the novel's end, providing the following retrospective:

Over now! The twenty-five years' life, the seven years' captivity on her couch, the anxious headship of the motherless household, the hopeless betrothal, the long suspense, the efforts for resignation, the widowed affections, the slow decay, the tardy, painful death agony—all was over; nothing left, save what they had rendered the undying spirit, and the impress her example had left on those around her. (546)

Yonge, like Dickens, immensely enjoyed the sentimental death scene,⁽¹¹⁾ but her tear-jerking evocation positions Margaret once more as a passive victim, whose sufferings far outweigh the enjoyment and happiness Margaret had been quick to claim during her life. Her work of social reproduction—"the impress her example had left on those around her"—is relegated to a secondary position in comparison with her own thwarted desires and physical pains.

<28> Yonge's reversion to the sentimental portrayal of the suffering disabled woman indicates the strength of that trope, which of course continues to influence us today. For Yonge and many after her, the sympathetic representation of a physically different body requires the framing prophylaxis of pity. As it is, Margaret's life is barely narratable: not because nothing happens, as these final lines suggest, but because the narrator must deftly balance portraying her as deserving pity as an idle, "afflicted" body on the one hand and deserving respect as an efficacious, disciplined individual on the other. If this representational double bind tilts in favor of discipline while Margaret converses with Ethel and Meta, the novel's initial conceptions of Margaret, and the reader's parting image of her, picture her as pitiable.

<29> Though Yonge clothes Margaret in a protective layer of pity, Margaret is more than a parasitic, non-reproductive body. Far from being helpless, she exerts a panoptical force on Ethel and Meta, as they repeatedly come to her side to relate their actions, doubts, and successes, composing the scenes of what Ethel refers to several times as the magic-lantern show of Margaret's life (74, 77, 534). In Yonge's novels, disabled female bodies—middle-class ones, at least—have lives thoroughly integrated into life both within the home and beyond its wall, lives

worth narrating, and the reader is invited not to pity or fear these bodies, but, like Meta, to kiss them affectionately.

Endnotes

(1) I gratefully acknowledge editors Martha Stoddard Holmes and Mark Mossman for their helpful comments and for their work in putting together this special issue. For introducing me to the work of Charlotte Yonge, and for much assistance in shaping this project from its earliest stages, it is my pleasure to thank Talia Schaffer.^(^)

(2) Marjorie Levine-Clark's *Beyond the Reproductive Body* examines the demands placed on working-class women in the early Victorian period to define themselves as both reproductive and able-bodied, straddling the gendered division of the body:

The able body was a male body: men were supposed to be workers, providing for their families. Their bodies were considered naturally suited to this task. By contrast, the reproductive body was a female body. Its biology was dictated by its reproductive capacities; its nature was to be dependent on others. [. . .] The ideal of the female body was certainly the reproductive body, but the male body was a constant foil that placed contradictory demands on working-class women.” (5)

In *Gendered Pathologies*, Sondra Archimedes explores the connection between female bodies and the body politic in the nineteenth-century novel, using reproduction to link the two: “Because the female body was associated with reproduction, parallels between that body and the larger social body as a product of evolution were inevitable. Thus, while Victorian science marginalized many kinds of bodies [. . .] only the female body was capable of representing the entire species in its reproductive capacity” (7).^(^)

(3) Darwin himself was arguably a Lamarckian. Psychologist Paul Ekman, in his preface to Darwin's *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* (1872), notes, “Darwin scholars have argued about the extent to which Darwin accepted the inheritance of acquired characteristics, but there is no doubt that he did rely upon it to explain the origin of many [emotional] expressions” (xxxii).^(^)

(4) The classic statement is Althusser's: “As Marx said, every child knows that a social formation which did not reproduce the conditions of production at the same time as it produced would not

last a year. The ultimate condition of production is therefore the reproduction of the conditions of production” (1).(^)

(5)As Julia Miele Rodas notes, “[T]he disabled figure is an astonishingly important presence in Victorian literature. [. . .] The extent of this presence in Victorian fiction may be attributed in part to the real presence of disabled people in Victorian culture. Considering the rise of industry, the aftermath of the Napoleonic wars [. . .] the increase in urban populations and the resulting rise in contagious disease – the presence of disability must have been altogether familiar to our Victorian predecessors” (372).(^)

(6)It should be noted that Margaret’s handicraft, in Nancy Armstrong’s words, is “labor that is not labor.” Armstrong traces the development of middle-class domestic virtue defined against both aristocratic idle amusements and working-class labor for the sake of money: “As conduct books differentiated the woman’s ideal role from both labor and amusement, they created a new category of labor” (79). Margaret’s leisured handicraft distinguishes her both from aristocratic idleness and working-class physical and menial labor.(^)

(7)John Keble initiated Tractarianism, also known as the Oxford Movement, along with John Henry Newman and Edward Pusey, which espoused Anglican High Church values. Yonge considered herself a popularizer of the Oxford Movement’s ideals.(^)

(8)Later, Battiscombe speculates: “Rumour has it that a distinguished soldier [Major Wilbraham] was in love with Charlotte. The story is unconfirmed either by written evidence or by family tradition, but it cannot be ruled out as inherently improbable [. . .] If the proposal were ever made it is sad to think that it should have been rejected” (99).(^)

(9)The graduate student protagonist of Harriet Waugh’s 1999 novel, *A Chaplet of Pearls*, does exactly this. The “young deconstructionist feminist” working on a biographer of Yonge “intends to establish that Charlotte Yonge was sexually abused as a child by her father, was Keble’s mistress and had a lesbian relationship with her friend Marianne Dyson” (Hayter 38).(^)

(10)Cindy LaCom’s ““It Is More than Lame,”” quoting Ermine’s description of herself, contrasts representations of female disability in *Clever Woman* and Anthony Trollope’s *Barchester Towers*. (^)

(11)This addiction, according to Battiscombe, began with Guy’s death in *The Heir of Redclyffe*: “Guy’s touching death moved so many to tears that perhaps her success in this line prompted Charlotte to an overdose of death-bed scenes in later novels” (76).(^)

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