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Awkward and Awry: Novel Directions for Female Development in Charlotte Yonge's *The Daisy Chain*

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<1>The geek, nerd, and klutz are all recognizable twentieth- and twenty-first century paradigms for awkward adolescence, but how do we interpret the presence of such characters in Victorian fiction? In Charlotte Yonge's popular 1856 novel, *The Daisy Chain; or, Aspirations*, the fifteen-year-old heroine, Ethel, is blessed with a "harum-scarum nature, quick temper, [and] uncouth manners" (1:50). She is also "angular, sallow...wriggling" (1:5) and myopic (1:8). The combination of Ethel's habits and body, which cause her great discomfort, also provide the plot with much narrative material as she progresses towards womanhood. Yet, despite the fact that she looks as if she has "never worn a gown in [her] life" (1:58), she is distinct from the novel's identified "Tom-boy," her sister Mary (1:109). Ethel is not "tamed" as tomboys often are. Nor is she recuperated by marriage. Rather, Ethel's trajectory is determined by her representation as an awkward adolescent, specifically a female "hobbledehoy."

<2> "Hobbledehoy" is a now-obscure colloquial term, used by a geographically and chronologically diverse set of authors to describe "clumsy or awkward youth" caught "between boyhood and manhood" ("hobbledehoy, n."). The hobbledehoy is more than simply a synonym for adolescence. It describes a subset of the Victorian adolescent, the young person whose changes are exceptionally intense, excruciating, and visible. I choose the word hobbledehoy for discussing awkward adolescence because, while the specific physicality of the hobbledehoy remains constant, the term has appealing ambivalence in its application to maturity and gender. The normatively male hobbledehoy's awkwardness provides a means of deconstructing the supposed agency of a masculine protagonist: he flails and fails in both romance and career. But we also find "hobbledehoyas" (Trollope 37), or the "feminine hobbledehoy" (Gaskell 88), characters "hobbled" by gender in addition to gawkiness.

<3> Ethel's body dominates *The Daisy Chain*, but she is never "fixed," and Yonge depicts Ethel's narrative of growth through moments where she reflects on and reinterprets her physical self. Thus, Ethel's failed attempts to "to make herself small" and feminine (1:141) seem at odds with the intentionally "dismal face" she presents at social gatherings (2:6). Her attempts both to negate and to amplify her awkwardness test concepts of embodiment, development, and individual agency. She is portrayed as responsible both for self-discipline that enables her social work and for cultivating nonconformity that critiques fictions of adolescent female growth. Despite Yonge's conservatism, we can read Ethel's trajectory not as that of a tomboy tamed or as a normative female Bildungsroman, but as a hobbledehoy plot. The hobbledehoy plot functions as a complement or alternative to the Bildungsroman, wherein the seemingly stalled development of a character opens the narrative into novel or incongruous, but viable, forms of adulthood.

<4> Recent readings of *The Daisy Chain* have aimed at locating it within Charlotte Yonge's canon, disability studies and modified agency, and Yonge's Tractarian faith.¹ However, this article uses Ethel to consider the intersection between representations of awkward adolescence and novelistic form within both Victorian and children's literary traditions. Recontextualizing Ethel within the framework of the hobbledehoy realigns our genealogy of female developmental plots. Though much of Yonge's work, including *The Daisy Chain*, was serialized in the youth-centered *The Monthly Packet* magazine, and "was clearly directed at a juvenile readership," the majority of recent critical work in Yonge has not clearly taken this generic marker into account (Simmons 10).² However, reading *The Daisy Chain* as a book for younger readers helps us by seeming ideological impasses. For example, genre addresses what seems to be severe limits on Ethel's autonomy, which are standard in contemporary youth literature.³ More importantly, *The Daisy Chain* is a key text within the genealogy of youth fiction—it is a significant, yet little-acknowledged precursor to *Little Women* (1868-69), a cornerstone text of both children's and American literature. Using the concept of the hobbledehoy and hobbledehoyden for Ethel's transition into adulthood expands the scope of female adolescent non-conformity beyond that of the tomboy and provides context for the development (or not) of future nonconforming female adolescents in nineteenth-century fiction for or about young people. By constructing Ethel's resolute awkwardness, Yonge creates an incongruous, successful, unromantic adulthood for her, against which later, "progressive," and ultimately heteronormative plots of odd girlhood are written.

The Bildungsroman, Hobbledehoys and Representations of Youth

<5> Yonge seems to challenge our notions of development, especially when we read her through the Victorianist approaches to Bildungsroman, which direct attention away from surface

representations of adolescent bodies. Talia Schaffer states that unlike the Bildungsroman, wherein “we identify with the character who leaves the family of origin in order to grow” (“Maiden Pairs” 100), Yonge’s family chronicles emplot a “reverse Bildungsroman” forcing “independent youths” back into the powerlessness of “early childhood” (“Mysterious” 274). On an individual level, this means that Ethel is “pruned” and “broken” to prevent her from growing naturally (Schaffer *Novel* 93).⁴ Schaffer’s assessment of Ethel’s stunted growth represents a critical consensus; Melissa Schaub voices a minority opinion in her assessment that Ethel’s “most admirable trait” —namely being a social visionary—endures discipline (80). Despite their surface disagreement, Schaffer’s partiality for “delightfully rebellious youths” (91) and Schaub’s triumphalism display a shared conviction that adolescence is a time of authentic identity-expression. Both assessments about Yonge and Bildungsroman fits with Jed Esty’s analyses of the genre’s traditionally “reciprocal allegories of self-making and nation formation” (3). The usually male protagonist models a liberal concept of individual agency as he navigates work, romance and social mores. This agency and freedom ends with marriage and the assumption of a stable adult identity that “manage[s]” and neutralizes the threatening turmoil of modernization (5). Maturation entails loss, rather than growth.

<6> But, what does youth look like? The answer remains maddeningly abstract. Despite the Bildungsroman’s association with nineteenth-century realism, representing adolescents has less to do with mimetic depictions of young people than with producing the effect of the “mastertrope of modernity” representing “constant transformation” (Esty 5). Neither does the psychoanalytic approach clarify the question of physical representation. Patricia Meyer Spacks identifies a pattern wherein nostalgic “elders” and “the parental generation” construct fantasies of youthful “intelligence, strength, sexual energy” (4).⁵ Youth is a fantasy of economic, national, or generational progress, rather than an observable stage of life.⁶ Besides the absence of young bodies, these accounts of the typical, Bildungsroman neglect three factors. First, the persistent literary presence of awkward adolescents, or hobbledehoy, whose characterization counters nostalgic fantasies of youth. Second, the effect of gender on developmental narratives, which differ for girls and women. Third, unconventional or disruptive ideas of “leaving” and “growing,” to which the hobbledehoy contributes.

<7> The hobbledehoy is a social concept of transition, which addresses a gap in medical discourses of adolescence. Ethel’s discomfiting growth, like that of other hobbledehoy, challenges mid-century medical guides opining that “the period of puberty advances in regular and unembarrassed order; and the intentions of nature are fulfilled without disturbance” (Deweese 261).⁷ Conversely, Juliana Ewing’s elliptical note in *Six to Sixteen* (1875), that “All girls [and boys] are not awkward at the awkward age,” suggests that the narrative of seamless progression erases the some individuals’ very visible physical and social transition (119). Thus, the hobbledehoy is defined first, by his or her in-between status and second, by exceptional

“awkwardness.” Like the notoriously unfixed chronological parameters of puberty and adolescence, hobbledehoydom has a floating age range. According to the 1884 definition of “adolescence” in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the developmental stage was “ordinarily considered as extending process or condition of growing up... ordinarily considered as extending from 14 to 25 in males, and from 12 to 21 in females,” while research on girls’ periodicals reveals that girlhood was commonly understood to last until twenty-four, and sometimes extended beyond thirty (Rodgers 15-16).⁸ Hobbledehoydom is therefore sometimes fixed, such as a “big, awkward lad, tall for his thirteen years... at the hobbledehoy stage” (Turner *Family* 6-7) or open ended, as when the “awkward, ungainly [individuals, who] ... are not as yet men, whatever the number may be of their years” go by “the ungraceful name of hobbledehoy” (Trollope 35). The ambiguous range of hobbledehoydom emphasizes the fluid boundaries between youth and maturity.

<8> Within a literary context, though “hobbledehoy” has received attention as a Trollopism (see Langbauer), the term appears in the work of authors like Charles Dickens, Juliana Horatia Ewing, Elizabeth Gaskell, Rudyard Kipling and William Thackeray, in Britain, while children’s author Ethel Turner deploys it in Australia, and usage by Harriet Beecher Stowe indicate its relevance in the United States. The major traits of the hobbledehoy character and narrative are defined in a text that draws on *The Daisy Chain*, namely Louisa May Alcott’s *Little Women*. Alcott’s protagonist, the awkward female adolescent Jo March identifies “the hobbledehoy age” as

the very time they need most patience and kindness. People laugh at them, and hustle them about, try to keep them out of sight, and expect them to turn all at once from pretty children into fine young men. (375)

First, the hobbledehoy age implies extended growth over “time” instead of a sharp transition “all at once” into adulthood. For some, oddness might endure beyond the formal closure of adolescence. Although Jo speaks of a “hobbledehoy age,” her decision to open a school for the aforementioned hobbledehoyes can be interpreted as a way for her to avoid fully entering the adult world. Second, as suggested by Jo’s own thorny relationship to her femininity and her identification with male hobbledehoyes, the hobbledehoy’s troubled transition from asexual “child” to “man” entails a questioning of the way gender norms are tied to narratives of maturation. Third, as unglorious youth, hobbledehoyes are a source of laughter and shame. They are simultaneously extremely visible and kept “out of sight” for their deviation from adult expectations. Fourth, the proper attitude towards the hobbledehoy, alongside laughter, is “patience and kindness” rather than judgment, fear, or hostility. The hobbledehoy is comic, rather than tragic, and the laughter he or she provokes is sympathetic rather than exclusionary.

<9> Three additional features of hobbledehoy narratives are implicit in Jo’s description, both of which contravene the conventional Bildungsroman. Though unspoken, Jo’s struggle between her

identity as an author and her choice to open a school indicates the often-unresolved vocational difficulties faced by hobbledehoy characters. The other major trait, tacitly present in Jo's description only because she speaks these words to her friend and would-be-lover, Laurie, is the hobbledehoy's enduring troubles in love and his or her non-conformity to the marriage plot. Hobbledehoys seldom "settle down" or find their "end" in work and marriage.

<10> The matrix of characteristics identified by Alcott's protagonist recur throughout British (and American) fiction, whether the term is used in passing or a source of authorial elaboration. Thus, in *Nicholas Nickleby* (1838), when Ralph Nickleby describes Nicholas as "a hobbledehoy, or whatever you like to call him, of eighteen or nineteen," the term becomes synonymous with the deficiencies that exclude Nicholas from adulthood (52). Namely, Nicholas "is wholly ignorant of the world, has no resources, and wants something to do" (52). Nicholas shares much in common with Pip and David Copperfield, as well as many secondary Dickens characters like Toots, Tommy Traddles, and Mr. Guppy.⁹ Similarly, Thackeray's brief description of awkward Jos Sedley as a "hobbldyhoy [sic]," whose teenaged bashfulness extend into adulthood, sets up the equally long-lasting but more nuanced articulations of adolescent awkwardness in the characterizations of Dobbin and the evocatively named ensigns, Stubble and Spooney (29).¹⁰ In the United States, Harriet Beecher Stowe elaborates upon an awkward young man emerging from "that transition condition of the polliwog, or the tadpole, which, by the more careful writers in anthropology, is called the condition of the hobbledehoy" (180). As an example of one of those "more careful writers," Trollope seems a connoisseur of adolescent awkwardness, building definitions of hobbledehoydom which distinguish between short-term phases of physical awkwardness and enduring social incongruity. Therefore, in *The Small House at Allington* (1864), the "true hobbledehoy," Johnny Eames, "is much alone, not being greatly given to social intercourse ... taking long walks, in which he dreams of those successes which are so far removed from his powers of achievement" (36). Trollope explicitly separates the incidental hobbledehoy, who passes through a phase, from the "true hobbledehoy," whose social awkwardness far outlast a growth spurt or the entrance into the workforce. Whether they be major or minor characters, these hobbledehoys comport themselves and are represented according to the guidelines Jo March sets out.

<11> Jo March and Ethel May's female awkwardness alerts us to the existence of female hobbledehoys. For example, the sister of Johnny Eames, Trollope's hobbledehoy *par excellence*, cannot perceive her brother's awkwardness because she is "somewhat of a hobbledehoya herself" (37); likewise, Elizabeth Gaskell's Molly Gibson emerges from childhood into "a state of feminine hobbledehoyhood" beside the equally awkward Roger Hamley in *Wives and Daughters* (1866) (119).¹¹ Yet Jo and Ethel also have counterparts in nineteenth-century juvenile fiction. Mary Martha Sherwood's *The History of the Fairchild Family* (1842), which was "quintessential reading" for nineteenth-century children (Demers 258), includes adolescent Bessy Goodriche,

who describes herself as “uncommon unlucky in tearing my clothes and getting them stained,” much to the horror of adults (Sherwood 138). In *Six to Sixteen* (1876), Juliana Ewing elaborates on the “hobble-de-hoy stage of girlhood” (119) in the form of “poor Matilda,” whose “silent and unsociable” awkwardness is compounded by inconsiderate adults who “discuss, approve, and condemn” her resemblance to a “sleeping stork” (116). If the male hobbledehoy offers a means to critique the coupling of masculinity, progressive growth, and maturity, then the female hobbledehoy further complicates the scheme. Unlike the tomboy, a well-known figure for young female gender nonconformity discussed below, the female hobbledehoy or hobbledehoyden’s strangeness does not consist of enacting “masculine” traits or behaviors.

Tomboys and Hobbledehoys: Placing Awkward Adolescence within Narratives of Female Development

<12> Reading *The Daisy Chain* allows us to see how—despite Yonge’s conservative affiliations—it contests emerging literary patterns of female development. Accounts of the female Bildungsroman have emphasized a turn from external to internal development after female agency is blocked by social forces (Abel, Hirsch, and Langland 11). Sarah Bilston, Sally Mitchell, and Michelle Anne Abate have documented patterns in nineteenth-century girls’ fiction, wherein late childhood and early adolescence offer a brief period of freedom and experimentation foreclosed by feminization and marriage. On first glance, Ethel’s development in *The Daisy Chain* seems to fit comfortably within this tradition of female Bildungsroman narratives. In Part One of *The Daisy Chain*, clumsy, fifteen-year-old Ethel dreams of starting a school and eventually establishing a church in the local Cocks Moor slum. She is uncomfortable with her body, and her pattern of growth is contrasted to that of her closest sisters, conventional Margaret, worldly Flora, and boisterous Mary. In Part Two, Ethel is eighteen and only marginally less awkward. Ethel struggles as she and the Cocks Moor school both “come out” into society and come increasingly under the surveillance of the middle-class community.

<13> So far, this description seems to fit especially with the developmental plot that Abate has called “tomboy taming,” wherein adolescent girls “adopt more feminine behaviors” after the freedom of childhood (31). Abate suggests that although nonconformity, even to the extent of switching gender roles, may be acceptable or even a sign of health in childhood, there is a strict age limit for such behavior. Tomboyism is a “phase” rather than an identity (xix). And this is where a key departure occurs between the usual storyline and *The Daisy Chain*.

<14> In Part Two of *The Daisy Chain*, Ethel endures a “makeover”—*not* a common occurrence in mid-nineteenth-century texts, as discussed later in this paper. The performativity of Ethel’s

makeover allows her to subsequently mediate between her awkwardness and public expectations of femininity, rather than “empowering” her to conform. This mediation allows Ethel to refuse the conventional “end” of female adolescence through marriage. Instead, she recommits herself to the goals of her youth: namely, transforming her town through her twin passions of education and faith. As many critics have pointed out, girl-heroines seldom accomplish goals they set out for themselves in late childhood or in adolescence. Instead, the narrative trope of tomboy taming establishes that healthy girls who survive to adulthood marry; therefore, the bodies of adolescent girls are shadowed by the specters of maternity and national futurity (Abate xix, Halberstam 118). In this respect, the female protagonists resemble their male counterparts. The concluding marriage of many novels locks young couples into stable adult identities and fixed social relations. Ethel bucks the tomboy-taming trend and the usual end to the Bildungsroman. Without marrying, therefore, Ethel keeps negotiating her relationship to different social circles. Her place within families, educational communities, and mixed-gender interactions are never fully settled.

<15> The divergence between Ethel and the tomboy is signaled through Yonge’s representation of her as particularly adolescent. Although several critics erroneously identify Ethel as a “tomboy” (Wright 44, Gore 129, Foster and Simons 68), Yonge distinguishes sharply between adolescent Ethel and her tomboy sister, Mary. Mary belongs to “that division of the family collectively termed ‘the boys’” (1:8). She is both labelled as a “Tom-boy,” (1:109) and described as boyish, because she “is a rough, merry creature, always skirmishing” with her brothers (1:50). Unlike Ethel’s awkwardness, there is a marked lack of anxiety regarding Mary’s seemingly masculine girlhood. The novel’s initial plot device, a mother’s posthumously-discovered letter, contains admonitions that guide the conduct of all the children in the family—except Mary. Whereas Mrs. May worries that Ethel’s “foibles” will overcome her “brilliant cleverness” (50), the letter provides no prediction for Mary, because her close association with her brothers and heartiness require no improvement. According to Yonge’s 1877 treatise *Womankind*, tomboyishness consists of the “wholesome delight in rushing about at full speed” into “active games,” a trait that should “be retained up quite to the ‘teens’” (10). As an unselfconscious, female boy, Mary will grow up into an unselfconscious, robust woman.¹² Indeed, for awkward Ethel, “to be like Mary” stands as an ideal, because “nobody should take notice of one, but that one’s own people may have the satisfaction of saying, ‘she is pleasing’” (2:267). Ethel desires the invisibility of outward social conformity because her body makes her visible in all the wrong ways.

<16> In contrast to Mary, Ethel is meant to seem *unpleasing* in her divergence from the tomboy model. While critics minimize Ethel’s physicality by describing her as “frustrated” and “intellectual” (Schaffer *Novel* 99, 117), or “intelligent, enthusiastic, imperfect” (Moruzi “Inferiority” 62), Yonge emphasizes Ethel’s uncomfortable embodiment. In contrast to

broadcasting boyish heartiness or unrecognized genius, Ethel is “a thin, lank, angular, sallow girl, just fifteen, trembling from head to foot with restrained eagerness” (1:5). None of the adjectives used to describe Ethel is particularly gendered. She is not boyish; neither does the narrator offer any veiled compliment, wherein a shortcoming promises hidden or forthcoming feminine beauty. Ethel’s subsequent characterization suggests that girls can be disruptive beyond appropriating normatively “masculine” characteristics. Rather, like Trollope’s “true hobbledehoy” she is marked by aspirations that exceed the body’s capabilities.

<17> Yonge’s depiction of Ethel’s adolescence repels nostalgic idealization, for she is not a simply an adolescent, but a hobbledehoy. She is in “what people call a difficult, dangerous age,” (1:60), what is elsewhere synonymously referred to as the “awkward age” (Ewing 118) or “hobble-de-hoy stage of girlhood” (119).¹³ Yet the parameters of this “age” or “stage” are ambiguous and unfixed. Hobbledehoys range from Turner’s thirteen-year-old Bunty to Dickens’s late-teenaged Nicholas Nickleby and David Copperfield to Thackeray’s clumsy, middle-aged Dobbin. Thus, hobbledehoydom can be both a discrete “stage” of periodic adolescent growth spurts, and an enduring state of being, marked by an inability to conform to social standards of maturity for both males and females.

<18> The hobbledehoy’s simultaneous embodiment of a specific developmental moment and a prolonged set of behaviors provides an interpretative challenge for characters attempting to read adolescent bodies. Ewing suggests adolescent awkwardness is caused by the adolescent body’s jumbled chronology, wherein disproportionate bodies “prematurely foreshadow the future growth” of an individual (118). In *The Daisy Chain*, for example, Ethel despairs that her bodily awkwardness and her character are permanently set after observing her resemblance to her father’s angular frame and “heedlessness,” announcing “he could not change it, and no more can I” (1:131). By contrast, her conformist older sister Margaret’s riposte that “you are fifteen, instead of forty-six” posits the primacy of developmental stages (1:131). While Ethel’s perspective adheres to an adolescent-essentialist view of identity, Margaret’s argument implies that by growing “up” or “out” of a phase, Ethel’s adult form may bear little resemblance to her current sense of self. For Margaret, such change registers as growth rather than loss, but for Ethel, change registers ambivalently. Ethel’s ultimate pattern of development depends upon the novel’s synthesis between these two models. Yonge suggests that Ethel’s “difficult dangerous age” isn’t simply limited to her fifteenth year of life, but prospectively stretches into her future because she develops it into a touchstone of self-formation.

<19> The hobbledehoy provides a countertradition to overdetermined and idealized representations of youth. Portraying hobbledehoys’ lack of control over their bodies allows texts to modify normative narratives of growth without resorting to tragedy. In her study of Trollope’s

male hobbledehoy, Laurie Langbauer notes that narrators often seem to indulge these characters for their nonconformity “in excess of any value they could possibly serve” (113). If idealized youth represents modernity and capital, the hobbledehoy’s bumbling seemingly inadvertently pushes at definitions of social and economic “value.” Thus, hobbledehoy exists ambivalently in the arena of comedy and the social mistake. As Kent Puckett has noted, in fiction, social mistakes provide narrative space for exploring decorum, “codify[ing] convention”—and telling readers how to behave (6). For Puckett, these narrative conventions help those “unsure of the rules of the game” they play. But the mistakes of hobbledehoy position agency differently, whether the hobbledehoy knows the “rules” or not. The hobbledehoy’s bumbling body and social mistakes interfere with the supposed agency of a masculine protagonist or the ability of a female protagonist to “naturally” conform to standards of feminine conduct. Trollope’s Johnny Eames is incapable of asserting himself, even if he knows he should. Despite his best efforts, the number of feet on which William Dobbin steps is incalculable (Thackeray 45). Nicholas Nickleby’s “wholly ignorant” hobbledehoy identity depends on his being vocally unhappy about the injustice of the type of manhood which his uncle Ralph forces onto him (Dickens *Nickleby* 52). Teenaged David Copperfield uses “a great deal of bear grease,” even though it “looks bad” (Dickens *Copperfield* 278). The hobbledehoy is bad form incarnate, self-conscious, while still often inadvertently offensive.

<20> Yet, while David and Nicholas pass through the hobbledehoy phase, Johnny and Dobbin, like Ethel, have a hobbledehoy identity and plot. Whereas David passes through his bear-grease fad unscathed and Nicholas quickly ages through experience, the characterization of Johnny, Dobbin, and Ethel depends on the consistency of their awkwardness through time. The performance of awkwardness, or the transformation of awkwardness from an external physical limitation to an internalized social orientation, is therefore one key method by which hobbledehoy narratives create space for alternative futures.

Ethel’s Makeover: Agency, Submission, and Convention

<21> Awkwardness, when performed rather than accidental, can be a source of empowerment by drawing attention to the ridiculousness of social convention (for example, when teen-aged Dobbin wins a mock-epic duel with Cuff in *Vanity Fair*, his awkwardness in victory doubly reduces Cuff’s pompous snobbery). And, if the male hobbledehoy questions the teleology of individual progress, a female hobbledehoy raises the stakes still higher. Ethel not only fails to achieve goals set for her by the society around her, she looks bad while doing it. When representing Ethel in her young adult form, Yonge does not compensate for Ethel’s odd personality or lack of social skills with transcendent beauty, as in the cases of Dorothea Brooke or Maggie Tulliver. While critics have often noted Ethel May’s haphazard manners and taste for

Greek, very few have drawn attention to the way Yonge makes Ethel interpret her own physical incongruity.

<22> Throughout *The Daisy Chain*, Ethel transforms awkwardness from accidental bodily gaffes into statements of intent by her habit of pulling silly faces and grimaces when she is already embarrassed or uncomfortable. Ethel uses these grimaces especially in her rejection of social expectations of feminine beauty (*Daisy* 2:77, 2:86; *Trial* 48). Consider the following discussion between Ethel and her brother, Norman, about the prospect of marrying and leaving home:

“I am very ugly, and very awkward, but I don’t care. ... I am glad no one is ever likely to make me care less for [papa] and Cocks Moor.”

“Stay till you are tried,” said Norman.

Ethel squeezed up her eyes, curled up her nose, showed her teeth in a horrible grimace, and made a sort of snarl: “Yah! That’s the face I shall make at them!” and then, with another good-night, [she] ran to her own room. (1:297)

Ethel initially cites her perceived ugliness and awkwardness as protection against the threat men pose to her current goals and identities based in the family and her school-building mission at Cocks Moor. Note that she differentiates between these characteristics; ugliness is aesthetic, while awkwardness encompasses both bodily movement and behavior. Although ugliness and awkwardness initially seem factors beyond her control, Ethel subsequently emphasizes her agency in repelling suitors. By scaring men and then running away, Ethel’s planned performance combines both fight and flight. When Ethel is finally “tried,” however, she is preoccupied with another sort of performance, that of femininity.

<23> Between Part One and Part Two of *The Daisy Chain*, Ethel’s growth contests the idea of “natural” feminization. When Ethel compares herself to “the ugly duckling,” her friends remind her of the duckling’s transformation into a swan (2:62). But, unlike the ugly duckling whose transformation is unconscious and completely natural, Yonge shows that style, like awkwardness, can be learned. Rather than naturally blooming into beauty as do her other sisters, at eighteen, Ethel exudes a “sense of not being like other women, which sometimes hangs painfully about girls who have learned to think themselves plain or awkward” (2:145). Yonge emphasizes “learned” awkwardness, suggesting that the “painful” experiences of puberty continue to influence Ethel’s young adult persona. Although Ethel maintains a position of authority in the Cocks Moor school, when interacting with her peers of similar age, gender and class categories, she feels her appearance has “a scanty, schoolgirl effect” (2:77). Despite her academic prowess, Ethel still feels unschooled in the subject of girlhood. Concordantly, Flora, Ethel’s worldly and beautiful sister, believes that “Ethel wanted nothing but attention to be more than her equal” (1:75). Flora’s “attention” is initially ambivalent: it might mean Ethel’s

increased self-discipline in conforming to standards of dress, or the attention of an attracted male, or the attention that women direct towards each other. Flora's decision to give Ethel a makeover suggests the latter.

<24> While the term "makeover" is anachronistic,¹⁴ it is apt to describe Ethel's unusually abrupt and technical transformation in *The Daisy Chain*. Many Victorian and Edwardian novels present plain girls blooming into latent feminine beauty through a combination of increased health and the simple passage of time.¹⁵ Narrators welcome readers into the ranks of careful observers who see that the heroine of *Anne of Green Gables* (1908) has eyes that signal "spirit and vivacity" and a "sweet-lipped and expressive" mouth that is otherwise overlooked (11). Similarly, twelve-year-old Katy of *What Katy Did* (1872) unconsciously awaits "charming changes" to her eyes, nose, and mouth that will transform her into "the part of a heroine" (20). Often, the transformation occurs in a narrative gap. Despite her difficult childhood, Maggie Tulliver morphs into a "simple noble beauty" and "an object of some envy" by the time she is twenty; readers have no sense of how this transformation is affected (429, 400). If the heroine is not beautified, male preference can amend perception, as in *Little Women* (1868-9), wherein "Jo's angles are much softened" and admired by Laurie (199). Ethel's narrator offers less consolation. In the three-year gap between Parts One and Two, Ethel develops paradoxically "rounded angles" and is tidier, but "[n]o one could call her pretty" (2:4).

<25> Conscious remodeling of one's looks, however, has a negative moral valence, and seem to involve girls who are already feminine, but who wish to project upward social mobility. In *Emma* (1816), Harriet's happiness is nearly ruined by Emma's "improvements," though we have no explicit makeover scene, per se. In *Little Women*, Meg March has her beauty enhanced when the Moffat girls outfit her in a low-cut dress, powder, "and even ear-rings" before a ball (76), but social embarrassment teaches her to be content with "being modest as well as pretty" (83). Similarly, in Ethel Turner's *Seven Little Australians* (1894) and *The Family at Misrule* (1895), Meg and Nellie Woolcot's friendships with older girls who read fashion magazines, instead of novels by Alcott and Yonge (*Seven* 48), leave them "looking ill" (55) and "immeasurably miserable" (*Family* 138).¹⁶ Harriet, Meg, Meg, and Nellie all engage not so much in personal transformation but in a process of aspirational, cross-class disguise, something Sarah Bilston identifies as connected with "transitional identity, *en route* to adulthood" (72). However, the results warn would-be Cinderellas to be wary of would-be fairy godmothers.

<26> On the other side of the makeover spectrum, Hale (131), Foster and Simons (109) have noted that, for problematic girls, accident or illness provides dramatic transformation. The improvements of invalidism are the often the inverse of the makeover's goal of social mobility by fixing the young woman in the domestic space.¹⁷ Marianne Dashwood in *Sense and*

Sensibility (1811), Cathy Earnshaw in *Wuthering Heights* (1847), Katy Carr in *What Katy Did* (1872), Geraldine Underwood in *The Pillars of the House* (1873), Judy Woolcot in *Seven Little Australians*, and Ruby Gillis in *Anne of the Island* (1915), are all suddenly subdued through illness. In *Wuthering Heights*, for example, Cathy emerges a “very dignified person with brown ringlets” after five weeks of convalescence at Thrushcross Grange, having entered “a wild, hatless little savage” (78).¹⁸ Nelly tells Lockwood that Mrs. Linton enacts a “plan of reform” by plying Cathy’s “self-respect with fine clothes and flattery,” but, as with Maggie Tulliver, the effect is of a stark before and after juxtaposition (78). Although illness “fixes” girls in more acceptable roles and spaces, the tendency of these girls to die shortly after their reformation (as do Cathy, Judy, and Ruby) indicate a deep anxiety about potential recidivism. Most memorably, to be acceptably “made over,” Cathy must be reborn and reshaped in the form of her daughter, Catherine II. For such girls, transformation is dangerous.

<27> The safest choice, these fictions suggest, is not to change. Thus, Jane Eyre proves her moral agency vociferously by *refusing* the potential makeover of clothes and jewelry that Rochester offers her (343). Unlike Cathy, Meg, and Meg, Jane already knows which simple styles suit her best. Perhaps it is for a similar reason that Ethel’s initial physical description in Part Two of *The Daisy Chain* ends with her favorite accessories: “a book, a dictionary, and pencil” (2:4). Though her body might become “rounder,” Ethel retains her association with the angular and the obtuse. However, unlike Jane or Cathy, who lack friends or family, Ethel is situated within a female community eager to teach her social norms. If most stories of female development suggest that experimentation with feminine performativity is potentially immoral and dangerous, then *The Daisy Chain* provides a more complex consideration of where these dangers lie, locating them specifically in the agency of the one being purportedly re-made.

<28> The makeover poses a problem in expressing gender, individuality, and community. Do clothes—not chosen by oneself—make the woman? In her analysis of contemporary makeover shows, Katherine Sender notes that “[t]here is nothing inherently feminine about personal transformation” when it stresses “individualism and reinvention”; yet in its female incarnation, makeovers often feature “complaint without refusal, disappointment managed through hope” and a “feeling of collective suffering” (29). Young women do not remake themselves to stand out; they remake themselves to blend into a preexisting model of nubile young womanhood.

<29> Correspondingly, Ethel’s makeover is a communal event wherein her individual agency is suppressed in favor of the collective will of her friend Meta, her sisters, and two ladies’ maids. For Ethel to be made over, her will must be literally “stripped off her back” along with her clothing (2:77):

The former [maid] ... was quite used to adorning Miss Ethel against her will... before Ethel knew what was going on, her muslin was stripped off her back...She made one of her most wonderful grimaces of despair, and stood still. The dresses were not so bad after all; ...In the meantime, she could only endure, be laughed at by her elders, and entertained by Mary's extreme pleasure in her array. (2:77)

Whereas the grimace Ethel directs towards Norman expresses her agency, in this scene her "grimace" functions as an acknowledgement that she has been overcome. Her stillness signals her absence of hope in challenging a female community. At the same time, Ethel is also represented as complicit in her treatment. While she grimaces, the free indirect speech indicates that she might, after all, like the dresses. This contradictory reaction is repeated in a second makeover, where Ethel exudes a "glow of amusement and pleasure" after a French maid "la[ys] violent hands" on her (2:79). Her pleasure is a response to the way her newfound style recasts her "lankiness" as a "distinguished" feature (2:79). One might conclude that the moral of Ethel's makeover is that girls become women by learning to delight in submission. But such an assessment is oversimplified.

<30> At the same time as Ethel's grimace signals her helplessness, it is also an exaggerated performance of submission in front of a female audience. Readers are invited to join Mary and the "elders" as they laugh at Ethel's discomfort, because her grimace publicizes a shared female experience that otherwise remains hidden. By making comedy out of the discomfort of feminization, by making Ethel intentionally grotesque at the very moment that she is beautified, Yonge also makes explicit the performative aspects of nubile feminine identity. As soon as Ethel submits, her agency reasserts itself, and she retains her critical distance from the expectations applied to young women in her community. Instead of growing "up" into a conventional young lady, Ethel ends up somewhat to the side of Flora's goal.

<31> Even at her most swanlike, Ethel retains the intentionally ugly duckling's mentality. Although Ethel acquiesces to her makeover, she ultimately pays only "a degree more attention to her appearance" (2:144). Therefore, her increased self-control manifests in her choice to discard most—but not all—of what Flora offers. During the makeover process, temporary submission masks a long-term assertion of selfhood. Consequently, a similar dynamic enables Ethel to resist the charms of her attractive and intelligent cousin, Norman Ogilvie. Rather than tying her to a heteronormative future, Ethel's makeover gives her tools to escape it.

<32> In *The Daisy Chain*, the representation of Ethel's rejection of marriage opens alternate routes for maturation. In her study of twentieth-century texts, Kathryn Bond Stockton suggests that fictional queer children are represented as avoiding or delaying growing "up" to avoid the

impossible demand to conform to heteronormative adult culture. Similarly, reading late-Victorian and Modernist novels, Esty postulates that “the adolescence/maturity binary operates ... as a coded version of the queer/straight binary” (114). Characters who reject marriage reject heteronormative maturity. In the majority of the cases Esty considers, rejecting the marriage plot results in “frozen,” stagnant, or dead youth (3). But Stockton’s treatment of the queer child offers another alternative in reading a mid-Victorian text like *The Daisy Chain*. Similar to the queer child,¹⁹ Ethel’s potential progress upwards and outwards is replaced with intentional “sideways and backwards” movement, allowing her to grow around rather than into the pattern proscribed by the marriage plot (4).

<33> The presentation of marriageability challenges the novel’s previous representation of Ethel’s agency; thus far, her will manifests through her reactions to the way her “natural” awkwardness creates a barrier between her self and her society. While awkwardness has hitherto been a source of social alienation, Ethel’s physicality throughout the novel paradoxically naturalizes Yonge’s descriptions of this young woman’s reciprocal, physical response to Norman Ogilvie. Her feelings for Norman Ogilvie are not merely intellectual but grounded in her awareness of their bodies. She imagines a “sense of power on his side” (2:83) and is “made so hot and conscious” by merely a passing comment about him (2:105). As Ethel is embodied by her clumsiness, and her consciousness is represented as an ever-belated response her body, it is not incongruous to have her desire represented. And yet, the mutuality of Ethel and Norman’s attraction undermines the basis for Ethel’s self-discipline, namely her attempts to accommodate herself to social conventions. She feels “pleasure” and “unmaidenly shame” that Norman Ogilvie is “attracted by her—by her, plain, awkward Ethel” (2:92). If awkwardness is attractive, then not only have Flora’s standards been revealed as faulty; Ethel’s own hard-earned defenses—intentional awkwardness and ugliness—are potentially useless. Therefore, Ethel’s narrative of growth is predicated on retaining the form of agency she has thus far achieved, by stalling her relationship with Norman Ogilvie.

<34> Romance plots involving hobbledehoys center on the male lover’s limited agency, and the impossibility of coercing feeling or consent within a domestic setting. In male hobbledehoys’ love affairs, such as Dobbin and Amelia Sedley in *Vanity Fair*, Pip and Estella in *Great Expectations*, and Johnny Eames and Lily Dale in *The Small House at Allington*, male agency reaches a fixed, unbreachable limit. Instead of acquiescing to male attention, the female objects of hobbledehoy love firmly offer only friendship or exile. Inversely, in *The Daisy Chain*’s hobbledehoy love plot, Ethel’s relationship with Norman Ogilvie and its abrupt end unfold according to the philosophy of Charlotte Lucas in *Pride and Prejudice*, wherein “very few ... have heart enough to be really in love without encouragement” (59). Instead of enabling Norman as it did Flora, Ethel’s emotional containment disables him from further action. Though she has no moral, physical, or emotional resemblance to Dickens’ Estella, Ethel is similarly effective in

freezing out her suitor. By “remov[ing] that sense of not being like other women,” Ethel feels her power as a woman most strongly when she rejects love (2:144). Thus, Ethel’s agency is confirmed by her sense that she stays single by choice, not because her awkwardness is an impediment.

<35> Ethel’s potential marriageability emphasizes her chosen divergence from normative behavior and heightens the demand for readers to recognize the validity of her choice. Not only are readers instructed to have sympathy for Ethel’s awkwardness in Part One, in Part Two, they learn that a girl might consciously and rightfully disengage from a future of marriage and maternity. Ethel’s difference and her divergence from the expectations of her family do not make her choices less worthy. Whereas the phenomenon of the “odd woman” presented unpaired females as the helpless victims of demographics (Greg 12), Ethel demonstrates maximal agency in living her life against the grain of conventional female adulthood. In the words of Bartleby the Scrivener, Ethel would “prefer not to;” unlike Bartleby, Ethel affirms her identity through refusal. In failing to fend off male attention through emphasizing her awkwardness and subsequently refusing a proposal Ethel is not unique in Yonge’s canon. By turning away an eligible match who would acknowledge and support her vocation, Ethel has a counterpart in Geraldine Underwood, who features in Yonge’s doorstopper *The Pillars of the House*.²⁰ Ethel and Geraldine respectively discover that men do not consider awkwardness (and, in Geraldine’s case, additional physical disability) as disincentives for marriage; when pressed, it is only the women’s choice to refuse that can halt a marriage. Moreover, the choice not to marry suggests that a woman’s strongest emotional commitment may not be to a man at all.

<36> While Ethel’s refusal of marriage is not complemented by any strong homoerotic bond, the possibility exists in other Yonge texts. Rather than rendering a character frozen, stagnant, or dead, choosing to prioritize non-heteroreproductive marital bonds opens the characters to emotional flourishing. As Talia Schaffer has noted, the choice not to marry a man opens the possibility for “sororal” and potentially martially-inflected pairings between women, such as Grace and Rachel Curtis and Allison Williams and Fanny Temple in *The Clever Woman in the Family* (1865) (“Maiden Pairs” 100), or odd-ducks Emma Brandon and Theresa Marston and the exemplary Theodora and Violet Martindale in *Heartsease* (1854). Even if a woman is nominally married (Violet) or widowed (Fanny), these female bonds allow for the intensification of vocational purpose and spiritual healing that are blocked or made impossible by romantic male-female relationships. Conversely, in Alcott’s *Little Women*, Jo March specifically fears a sister’s marriage because “Meg will be absorbed and no good to me any more” (161). If sororal love is so attractive, it is worth considering the absorptive dangers of heterosexual marriage.

<37> Ethel not only thrives in her refusal; her choice allows her story to continue. By contrast, in many nineteenth-century novels (though not Yonge's), marriage is seen as the narrative end of female growth, because the kinds of growth that occur after marriage are unnarratable. Indeed, Yonge excels at representing female characters struggling to grow after they enter bad or unequal marriages, as does Flora after marrying her husband for his position. The postmatrimonial life of ideal matches, like that between Ethel's brother Norman and his wife Meta, or Theodora and Percy in *Heartsease*, seem to be left off the page. Instead of pairing with another woman, however, Ethel's fulfilling singledom opens her to different forms of relation as an educator as well as a sister.²¹

<38> Withholding consent for future courtship allows Ethel to prioritize her family and her work at Cocks Moor. Thus, conscious choice re-anchors Ethel's identity to her adolescent goals. However, her choice does not entail a celebration of adolescent authenticity. Until the last page, *The Daisy Chain* toys with the consequences of Ethel's choice in her further development. In one reading, Ethel denies herself the opportunity of "natural" growth into adulthood. Alternatively, however, she opens up new avenues toward maturity. Many critics have cited Ethel's choice to reject Norman Ogilvie as a crystallization of the novel's domestic and familial ideology, wherein submission to the patriarch outweighs romantic fulfillment (Gore 127-128, Foster and Simons 81, Scaub 78, Juckett 119). However, the narrative does not let Ethel off so easily. Although Ethel imagines her family will collapse if she chooses marriage and a "misty brilliant future of mutual joy," she is confronted with the uncomfortable truth that the family evolves in her absence (2:92).²² Indeed, she "beg[ins] to believe that it had been all a mistake that everyone was too dependent on her" (2:109). Concordantly, whereas Flora is "pleased at Ethel's development" in Norman Ogilvie's presence (2:86), she subsequently labels Ethel's behavior as regressive, stating that Ethel is "as bad as the children at the Infant School" (2:94). Far from being a self-assertive woman, Ethel is a "[p]oor child," one who is "afraid" (2:94). Indeed, considering Ethel's teenage boldness in staking a claim in the Cocks Moor slum in order to save souls, safety is a rather weak argument. The only other May sibling who successfully denies herself romantic emotional integrity is Flora herself, who marries pragmatically—we might even say safely—and finds that "[i]t's not worth it" (2:66).

<39> Ultimately, Ethel's strongest argument is her conviction of her difference. When Flora asks whether leaving home is "such a wicked thing," Ethel replies "not in others" (2:95). The potential match is wrong because Ethel has decided that she is different from "other" people. By embracing her awkwardness and her otherness, Ethel justifies her unconventional choice not to pursue love. Ethel's characterization has been anchored in her awkwardness; negation of her self-conscious performance of accident would be a negation of her most recognizable traits. Echoing Margaret's formulation of adolescence as a series of progressive stages, the "development" Flora sees in Ethel is that of an awkward girl into a polished, conventional

woman (2:86). As “her abruptness [is] softened...[t]here [is] no saying what Ethel would come to!” (2:86). Ethel has the potential to transform beyond recognition, and this is the crux of the problem. Ethel, married and “soft,” would be indistinguishable from “other” women.

<40> In marriage, does a young woman cease to be herself? Critics of Ethel’s Transatlantic sister Jo March suggest so. Angela Estes and Kathleen Lant influentially argue that independent “young Jo must be destroyed” because “no future is possible” for such a young woman (567). Moreover, Jo’s choice to “marry for love” in her late twenties instead of becoming the “literary spinster” she imagined herself to be at fifteen constitutes a “violent narrative abuse” (569). In this reading, the adolescent self has the only claim to authenticity; Alcott’s representation of Jo’s slowly changing perspective based on increased life experience is labelled as an unacceptable, artificial, and false trajectory for growth. An implicit reason for this critical rejection of a literary representation is the divergence between Jo’s trajectory as a married woman (who also runs a school and writes), and Alcott’s trajectory as a literary spinster (possibly queer, who disliked teaching, and supported her natal family).²³ For Jo March, heterosexual marriage specifically kills the narrative possibility of “growing sideways” into queer adulthood, and more generally raises the frightening possibility that adult selves might differ greatly from adolescent selves—without regret. Such a prospect, and Alcott’s two sequels depicting Jo as a happy, though unconventional, adult woman challenges the idealization of adolescence and girlhood as a time of freedom. When Bildung is not halted by marriage or adulthood, nostalgia falters.

<41> *The Daisy Chain* uses marriage to offer a different, equally problematic take on the question of growth and identity. Refusing the threatening change of marriage may allow for the pursuit of adolescent ambitions, but it might also lead to a refusal of growth and development. If mature womanhood is conferred through marriage, then Ethel potentially forces herself into the position of perpetual girlhood. Indeed, Schaffer suggests that Yonge’s novels force “independent youths” back into the powerlessness of “early childhood” (“Mysterious” 274). More stridently (and unsympathetically), Q.D. Leavis draws the conclusion that the love of family in Yonge’s fiction “will not...offer anything to the mature” (154).

<42> These readings tacitly invest in the marriage plot as a key to maturity in a way that Yonge does not. When the Bildungsroman is dominantly read as presenting youth as a metonym of capitalist modernity and a concluding marriage as national stability, it is easy to argue, conversely, that incongruous adolescents symbolize maladaptation or form tragic critiques of these economic or national systems of meaning. Jed Esty’s term “frozen youth” describes the state of those young people whom modernity does not benefit and who, therefore, cannot grow up (2). Yet the hobbledehoy is neither a nostalgic idealization of youth, nor an attractive mask for modernity. Neither is he or she the tragic inverse. If we focus our attention only on

representations of tragic, “frozen” misfits, we read only part of the Victorian literary landscape. Because Ethel is awkward and determined *not* to think of romance, the novel’s only source of narrative material is her growth as a sister, a scholar, and an educator.

<43> Ethel’s choice to rededicate herself to her adolescent passions of Cocks Moor and home exceeds and reflects upon problematic ideas about the youthful self being more “authentic.” Cocks Moor is not a static or stale fantasy. The most important lessons Ethel learns in her two-volume saga of development are not about being a woman but about pedagogy and institutional management. Despite her “hate [for] all this management and contrivance,” she finds herself hiring a teacher, managing curriculums, and navigating boards (2:36, 1:291, 2:15). Although she often “trie[s] to make herself small,” it is “an art in which she [is] not successful” either in person or character (1:141). Ethel’s school flourishes because of her ability to perform—just enough, and despite her discomfort—in public (2:240). Within Yonge’s storyworld, Ethel’s vacillation between seeking invisibility and performing excessive visibility lead to her presentation as a role model for younger women. Whereas Ethel wishes to be “like Mary” because “nobody should take notice of one” but to note “she is pleasing” (2:267), Ethel’s future sister-in-law, the “fairy”-like Meta (2:250), identifies Ethel’s uncompromising determination as stronger inspiration for future generations: “To be like her has always been my ambition... I hear so much of what girls would do, if they might, or could, that I long to see them like Ethel—do what they can” (247). Because she cannot be “pleasing,” Ethel must be good, even if goodness is strange, odd, or even unpleasant. As Flora notes, “Ethel’s awkwardness” is “anything but vulgar awkwardness”; her awkwardness is conscious and grounded in a critique of the social world in which she engages (1:202).

Beyond Ethel May

<44> Yonge’s representation of Ethel’s development helps us recontextualize awkwardness in children’s and girls’ fiction. As a prolific author and the editor of *The Monthly Packet* between 1851 and 1891 (wherein the first part of *The Daisy Chain* was published), Yonge did not adhere to a single future for odd, adolescent female characters. Beside the continuation of Ethel and her siblings’ development in *The Trial; or, More Links of the Daisy Chain* (1864), Yonge’s other fiction generates a body of young women who test the limits of feminine identity and female developmental plots. Thirteen-year-old Geraldine Underwood in *The Pillars of the House* (1873) is perhaps the most similar, in using a physical distinction (in her case, a cork foot) as a way to reject marriage and carve out an alternative career path. Female characters in their early twenties, such as educator Theodora Martindale, intentionally frumpy church-restorer Emma Brandon, and bespectacled Anglo-Catholic Theresa Marston in *Heartsease* (1854), and intellectually self-isolating Rachel Curtis in *The Clever Woman of the Family* (1865) provide

various trajectories for girls who set themselves at odds with community mores, to differing effect. Most of them (excluding Rachel Curtis) succeed in their vocational goals. Like Ethel, they do not exist in isolation; rather, their success is measured by their ability to build communities around themselves. Sometimes, as in the case of Ethel May and Geraldine Underwood, they even share the same narrative universe.

<45> Given Yonge's prolific output, it is unwise to discount her influence. As discussed in the section on makeovers, Ethel's transformation and mediation between expectations and personal comfort builds on preexisting tropes and reverberates through later novels for girls. Most of *The Daisy Chain's* influence, however, is channeled through Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women* (1868-69). Some parallels are overt: Jo March retreats to the attic to sob over a Charlotte Yonge novel (27), and *Little Women's* structure as a family chronicle owes much to Yonge's popularization of the genre. Most significantly, Ethel's characterization looms large over *Little Women*. Even the briefest description admits surprising similarities: Ethel is "brown, sallow, and with that sharp long nose, and the eager eyes, and a brow a little knit by the desire to see as far as she could" (1:198), while Jo is "thin, and brown" with "a comical nose, and sharp, gray eyes, which appeared to see everything" (13). They are both undeniably awkward: as Ethel struggles in social situations, Jo dreads parties because she is "sure to upset something, tread on people's toes, or do something dreadful" (31). A similarly tense relationship exists between awkward Ethel, worldly Flora, and invalid Margaret, as between Jo, Amy, and Beth, wherein the beautiful pragmatist acts as an advisor and the invalid provides a domestic anchor. Jo March shares not only Ethel's physical characteristics and sibling dynamics, but her educational goals, and distaste for romance.²⁴ Indeed, Ethel's self-conscious avoidance of love and her close involvement with a younger generation of children provides a compelling counterpoint to the seeming inevitability of Jo's marriage and maternity. As the more enduringly popular text, *Little Women's* "end" for Jo March has been read as a foreclosure of an uncoupled adult female life centered on fulfilling one's vocation. However, reading Jo's future as an author, mother, and educator in the context of Ethel's decisions eleven years earlier allows us to read Alcott—like Yonge—as expanding possibilities for girls within youth fiction.

<46> While Ethel May resituates narratives of female maturation, *The Daisy Chain* also contributes to reevaluations of male hobbledehoy narratives. In sharp contrast to the critical sympathy generated for Ethel, male hobbledehoy have been inversely judged. While Langbauer concludes that hobbledehoy are ultimately productions of "pointless fantasy," her initial suggestion that Trollope's hobbledehoy represent an "escapist, ineffective recoil from capitalist ambition" offers opportunity for further thought (114). Ethel's growth is not so much a recoil as an opening-up of the narrative pattern, as is Dobbin's long, nonmarital cohabitation and coparenting with Amelia in *Vanity Fair*, or Pip's avuncular care of Little Pip and his unromantic rapprochement with Estella. Hobbledehoy do not function as utopian visionaries, but their

existence argues for alternative forms of adulthood that exist alongside the successful, self-made John Halifax, Gentlemen and the miserable, self-defeating Lydgates of fiction. Instead of dying or being consigned to exile, they hobble on into adulthood.

<47> Yonge's representation of Ethel's tenacity in holding to her youthful dream makes readers think about the value narratives place on of fidelity to adolescent goals and the consequences of constructing adolescence as a time of "authentic" selfhood, without providing a clear answer. Rather than tracing Ethel's linear growth, *The Daisy Chain* shows the identities she claimed as an adolescent growing thick, dense, and complex. Instead of promoting Ethel's choices as *the* singular path she might take, Yonge establishes Ethel's agency in choosing one route among several. If we read this novel a foundational text that paved the way for enduringly popular children's classics, such as *Little Women*, then Ethel's characterization becomes important as a counterpoint to the awkward fictional girls who precede and follow her.

Notes

¹ These four veins predominate within the recent resurgence of Yonge criticism. Talia Schaffer has noted alternative familial structures in Yonge texts other than *The Daisy Chain*, focusing on sibling and sororal ties ("Maiden Pairs," "Magnum"). Clare Gore, Mia Chen, Martha Stoddard Holmes, and Tamara Wagner ("Marriage") engage with depictions of disability and the related modeling of "alternative family units" (Gore 124). Other critical approaches to *The Daisy Chain* includes connecting Yonge's interest in mirroring imperial missionary work in domestic religious reformation (Schaffer "Taming" and *Novel*, Walton, Theresa Huffman Traver) and in engaging with Yonge's Tractarian faith and its consequences, particularly "reserve" (Wagner "Reserved", Colón, Schaub).

² The under-reading of Yonge as an author for young people is a longstanding convention. Joseph Ellis Baker's strategy in 1932, namely that he would "try not to include purely juvenile fiction" in his analysis, reverberates with contemporary minimizing of *The Daisy Chain's* status as a text for young people as well as adults (103). Earlier readings of *The Daisy Chain* within the children's literature tradition tend to be contextualizations of her considerable, but forgotten influence (Nelson, Wright, Foster and Simons).

³ For example, the expectation that Ethel finishes her chores and "remembers to ask permission" before hurrying off to her slum-school is less a mark of Yonge's authoritarianism than a standard expectation for young people (Schaffer *Taming* 214). Even half a century later, the relatively relaxed Frances Hodgson Burnett feels it necessary to apologize for her protagonist Mary Lennox's innocent exploration of the manor where she lives in *The Secret Garden* (1911),

explaining that the girl has “never been taught to ask permission ... and she knew nothing at all about authority” (33).

⁴ My reading diverges from the critical consensus on Ethel. Many critics cite Ethel’s restriction of her Greek scholarship as an attack on her fundamental, authentic adolescent self (Wright 45, Schaffer *Novel* 100, 106, Foster and Simons 73, Sanders *Brother-Sister* 19, Moruzi “Inferiority” 62). These readings fixate on the restriction of Ethel’s study of Greek in Part One, often only briefly addressing her further development. Such analyses suggest that the redirection of Ethel’s energies from being a scholar to being an educator signals a definitive end to her intellectual development, despite evidence to the contrary. Schaub is an exception in emphasizing Ethel’s tenacity of purpose (in building a church) throughout the disciplinary process. Eventually, Ethel resumes and exceeds the studies she once gave up. In the sequel to *The Daisy Chain*, the narrator comments that Ethel’s Eton-educated brother Tom never “enjoy[s] a triumph over her scholarship” despite his best efforts (*Trial* 3).

⁵ Spacks’ perspective aligns with an earlier vein of criticism marks the idealization of youth as an extension of the Romantic Child (Buckley 4, 23, 59).

⁶ More recently, Sally Shuttleworth’s work on the mind of the child has focused on nineteenth-century science’s attempts to describe the internal, rather than external features of child development.

⁷ Medical texts participate in the idealization of young adulthood as “in the flower of his age” (Blumenbach 524) or “the bright spring-time of life” (Keating 392). By using puberty to divide sharply between childhood and reproductive maturity, medical discourse overlooks the possibility of uneven development (Blumenbach, 524-25, Duglison 616, Keating 389). The hobbledehoy is located specifically in the gaps between the individual’s physical, social, and intellectual capacities.

⁸ Rogers’s research indicates the importance of marriage as a marker of maturity. While our contemporary definition of girlhood blurs the boundaries as a “young or relatively young woman,” in previous editions until 1989, the word could be either a “female child” or “commonly applied to all young unmarried women” (“girl” 2.a.).

⁹ Nicholas Nickleby is unusual in comparison to other hobbledehoys in his lack of physical awkwardness and his romantic success. His uncle, perhaps unsurprisingly, has mislabeled him.

¹⁰ Dobbin is perpetually out of sync – physically, socially, developmentally. As Dobbin’s adolescent clumsiness trails him into adulthood, Thackeray emphasizes his tendency to “blush,” “stumble,” and then “crush” the feet of those around him, (40). As one character puts it, “Modesty! Awkwardness you mean” (117).

¹¹ In *Wives and Daughters*, Molly's awkwardness leads to a non-romance plot strikingly like that of William Dobbin's in *Vanity Fair*. Because of their awkwardness, both watch, and indeed encourage, their friends (Cynthia Kirkpatrick and George Osborne) enter into relationships with the individuals they desire. Whereas Dobbin waits some eighteen years and engages in a period of non-romantic coparenting and cohabitation with Amelia Sedley before he marries her, Gaskell's death before she had finished writing *Wives and Daughters* leaves Molly's love for Roger tantalizingly unresolved.

¹² In *The Brother-Sister Culture in Nineteenth-Century Literature: From Austen to Woolf*, Valerie Sanders studies Mary's emotional reliance on her brother Harry; as they grow into adulthood her efforts to gain his approval turn their childhood corps d'esprit into a gendered hierarchy. She is robust, but docile; a mirror image of Harry, who becomes a strong but obedient naval officer. Thus, gentle "tomboy taming" might be seen in Mary's developmental plot, and is distinct from Ethel's trajectory.

¹³ Sarah Bilston's *The Awkward Age in Women's Popular Fiction, 1850-1900: Girls and the Transition to Womanhood* details the cultural prevalence of "the awkward age" as a descriptor of the period between childhood and marriage. In Bilston's account, the "awkwardness" arises from the indeterminacy of such young women's social roles. While Bilston's contribution is valuable in categorizing the historical development nineteenth-century girlhood, her methodology does not focus of physical awkwardness.

¹⁴ The OED lists an early usage in 1860, four years after *The Daisy Chain*, but the word only becomes commonly used after 1925 ("makeover, n. and adj."). It seems that the postwar-era also provides a shift in attitudes about makeovers. For example, L.M. Montgomery's pre-war novels featuring Anne Shirley focus on the Romantic, unconscious transformation of the self through nature. However, in *Anne of Windy Poplars* (1936) the eponymous heroine berates an acquaintance for her plainness: "Clothes are *very* important," Anne advises. "There are so many homely people who would actually look quite attractive if they took a little pains with themselves" (158).

¹⁵ The intermixing of "adult" and "children's" literature intentionally reflects the traditionally and currently mixed readership of these novels. For example, Penguin currently issues unabridged editions of *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights* alongside *Little Women* and *What Katy Did* in its children's Puffin Classics imprint, listed for readers "10 and up" ("Wuthering Heights").

¹⁶ Moruzi observes the Alcott-Yonge link in passing ("Never Read" 78).

¹⁷ Conversely, conventional, ultrafeminine girls like Margaret May in *The Daisy Chain* and Beth March in *Little Women* (1868-9) experience illness as a reward and shield from masculine and adult social spaces in which they cannot function. Because their identities are so strongly tied to their childhood homes, death provides an escape from the alienation from self, provoked by marriage and removal to a new home. These girls sustain preexisting homes, but they are

incapable of building new domestic spaces. Through death and memorialization, a “failure” to mature or reinvent one’s relation to the home becomes idealized.

¹⁸ Illness and recovery offers a timeline for their feminization, domestication, and masks the pubertal transformation.

¹⁹ While hobbledehoys do not fit with Stockton’s definition of queerness, they merit inclusion according to Duc Dau and Shale Preston’s call to open interpretations of queerness as non-normative behavior or character in nineteenth-century literature (8).

²⁰ However, unlike Ethel’s intense introspection, Geraldine’s refusal of Mr. Grinstead occurs quickly, to avoid separating from her brother Felix, whom she loves “better dead than any other man alive” (134). Grinstead proves his worth by helping Geraldine establish her artistic career after he has been rejected. She only “yield[s] to the preserving constancy” of her suitor after the death of her brother in the sequel, *The Long Vacation* (1895) (4). Thus, as much as Geraldine initially resembles Ethel, in her disability and her belated marriage to a faithful suitor, Geraldine resembles Ermine Williams, who eventually succumbs to Colin Keith in *The Clever Woman of the Family*. Whereas Ermine’s story does not extend much past her marriage, Geraldine’s story resumes once she is widowed (10).

²¹ If Ethel’s hobbledehoy characteristics open up the possibilities for a kind of queerness (though in her case, nonsexual), it is worth considering other potentially queer characters, such as her brother, Richard. Richard, the brother most supportive of Ethel’s educational initiatives, is in some ways equally a misfit. Yet, whereas Ethel and Norman are male and female counterparts of the same personality traits, Ethel and Richard initially seem similar only in their nonconformity. They are “two people, who would never have chosen each other for companions...but who are nevertheless very affectionate and companionable” (54). Gore has commented on the femininity of Yonge’s hero-brothers (129) and it is true that Richard teaches Ethel “to thread a needle, tie a bow, and stick in a pin” (1:58). At the same time, Richard “had rather look at a steam-engine any day” than art (145). His “precise” skills and technical intelligence is of the wrong sort for the May family’s class and social standing (85). He seems to succeed as a clergyman because, like Ethel, his inability to fit neatly into middle-class social categories helps him recognize the needs of the Coxmoor congregation. Yet it seems significant that Richard, like Ethel, chooses not to marry. Instead of becoming a patriarch, his identity as a brother dominates his conduct as an adult and as a spiritual guide. Like Ethel, Richard’s non-conformity is “queer” insofar as he exceeds gender categorization by adhering to neither masculine strength nor effeminate grace.

²² We might also think of the ways Ethel’s refusal has consequences for the novel’s assumption of English-Anglican cultural supremacy. As Schaffer and Traver have noted, the Melanesian-missionary plot is tied to Cocksmoor by twin goals of cultural inculcation; Schaffer, especially, notes the presence of Irish cultural “others” at Cocksmoor (*Taming* 209). Norman Ogilvie, as the son of a Scottish laird, offers a potential third space for a “civilizing” mission of tying the British

periphery to the center. His marriage to an anglicized Scot (Ethel's father is Scotch) would naturalize the transfer of Ethel's cultural affiliations to Scottish village life. Instead, Ethel finds value in committing to her local community.

²³ A similar mistrust might be seen in reactions to Maggie Tulliver's death as a departure from Marianne Evan's own ability to break free from provincial life, forge a career, and challenge religious restrictions on marriage.

²⁴ While Laura Robinson and Hilary Wright have noted the link between Ethel May and Jo March, the centrality of their awkwardness to their characters has not been fully discussed.

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