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Accidents at Home in the Victorian Novel: Auguries, Probability, and Charlotte Yonge's Household Advice

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IN the middle of an initially tranquil evening at home, when the family has gathered together at the hearth, a teakettle topples over. Felix Underwood, the eldest of thirteen orphans, flings the youngest "out of the way of the boiling stream that rushed from lid and spout as the whole descended on the hearth, amid cries."[1] Splashed by boiling water, Felix is extensively scalded, with several detrimental results that radiate through the narrative. Exacerbated by a muscle strain that he sustains during another accident, this scald forms an important link in a pattern of mishaps that adds structure to an otherwise episodic family chronicle. *The Pillars of the House* (1873), one of Charlotte Yonge's most popular novels, details an impressive number of accidents and their long-term implications. Given Yonge's overarching didactic purpose as a religious novelist, we might expect cautionary tales: narratives involving punishment for transgressive protagonists and containing explicit warnings addressed to her main target readership of "young girls, or maidens, or young ladies, whichever you like to be called."[2] However, not only did Yonge aim to provide entertaining reading material without direct preaching, as advised by her literary and religious mentor, John Keble.[3] She also eschewed interpretations of personal misfortune as either poetic justice or a catalyst in moral conversion. Instead, her narratives resituate culpability among changing perceptions of risk and its management in everyday domestic life. In this emergent paradigm, risk-management practiced at home can eliminate or contain household hazards. Hence, the advice that Yonge offers is often emphatically practical, including hands-on instructions about open fires or boiling water. In her interpolation of such household advice, she presents

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domestic work as the management of everyday risk, promoting a concept that complicates narrative expectations of divine punishment and sudden conversion.

In demonstrating risk-management at home, domestic accidents in Yonge's novels, in fact, engage with a changing understanding of chance and likelihood that draws providential readings of personal misfortune into question. The interpretation of accidents as either fated or a form of punishment continued to influence popular fiction, yet these paradigms were increasingly in tension with shifting concepts of probability, with chance and risk. An author aiming to detail everyday life realistically, while self-consciously engaging with expected interpretations of misfortune, offers a particularly insightful case study of how domestic accidents operate in nineteenth-century narratives. Rejecting the limits of the conventional cautionary tale, Yonge places accident and injury squarely within discourses on risk and its containment through household management. In addition, a sustained concentration on the aftermath raises questions of blame from a perspective that markedly differs from the streamlined system of transgression and (usually immediate) punishment in the straightforwardly didactic paradigm that Yonge rejects. Instead, risk-management features as a strategy to ensure home safety, a concept that domestic fiction, like advice material of the time, helped popularize. Yonge's novels nonetheless record a conflict between emergent discourses on risk and the narrative potential both of individual transformation and of foreshadowing through prophecy. In *Pillars*, we shall see, Yonge references, in order to reject, two common interpretative frameworks: an accident as the fulfilment of an augury and conventional conversion patterns.

A closer look at domestic accidents in Victorian fiction reveals how narratives negotiate different explanations of how or why accidents occur and, further, what their functions in fiction should be. Cautionary tales routinely exploit the didactic potential of injury and illness, whereby the prospect of pain is used as a threat. Religious fiction of the time often similarly equates personal calamity with providential punishment. Yonge, however, reworks these formats. In *Pillars*, she overtly addresses the question of risk-management versus fatalism. Simultaneously, she cautions against potentially self-serving interpretations that understand accidents as catalysts for instantaneous conversion. In demonstrating this rejection of expected paradigms by depicting domestic crises that center on household mishaps, Yonge brings these debates home to her target readers in a relatable fashion. Ultimately,

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her narratives teach her readers not only practical strategies in case of a domestic emergency but also how not to misread such crises. In other words, mishaps at home are important to the readers' daily lives and in the fiction they consume (such as Yonge's novels), but at the same time, such incidents are not to be interpreted as cataclysmic, as something out of the ordinary. Precisely because not all the resulting ambiguities are fully resolved, Yonge's fiction allows us to explore how a conservative, religious novelist can nonetheless offer a nuanced, potentially feminist reading of household hazards. Domestic accidents, moreover, have hitherto received only sporadic attention in Victorian studies. Before critically parsing Yonge's complex representation of accidents, I shall therefore first situate her writing within changing ideas of probability, risk, and domestic risk-management.

Household Accidents and Victorian Ideas of Risk

The nineteenth century saw the emergence of modern concepts of risk and risk-management. Accidents came to be scripted as random, as a chance event, or, in what arose as a more comforting cosmology of risk and its potential management, as statistically predictable, rather than fated or the sign of divine retribution.[4] Within this modern cosmology of reassurance, risk could be captured in statistics and then contained through practices or institutions that promised to render such incidents more preventable. The Victorians encountered these evolving concepts in multifarious ways in their daily lives. In advice books, advertisements, and newspaper reports, emergent discourses on risk-management were woven into instructions and warnings about how their meals were prepared (or should not be prepared), their food and medicine stored, their babies strapped into newly patented devices, and, ultimately, how the chances of their deaths were being calculated.[5] Insurance companies, for example, deliberately "exercised readers' risk literacy" and thereby "helped to make probabilistic knowledge a part of everyday life."[6] By the middle of the century, probabilistic thinking and statistical language permeated popular culture.[7] Novels, like advice manuals and self-help books, registered a new awareness of statistical inevitability and circulated different strategies to utilize probabilistic knowledge. In negotiating competing paradigms, fiction dramatized changing attitudes to personal misfortune.

Despite the widespread idealization of home as a safe space, especially in much of the period's fiction, the domestic sphere was not

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immune to this new awareness of risk. Victorian writing on the regulation of domestic space increasingly conceptualized accident prevention through systematic, professionalized instructions. In the course of the century, household advice became predominantly print-based. It was available as manuals, columns in women's magazines, and also interpolated instructions in fiction.[8] Prefiguring what we now understand as modern ideas of home safety through the elimination of risk factors,[9] these texts prescribed strategies to minimize the likelihood of an accident by identifying the most hazardous areas and tasks in a household. However, even as these publications thereby underscored the importance of the home and of domestic labor, they stoked fears and allocated blame. Acknowledging that the home could be a dangerous place ran counter to prevalent domestic ideals. Yet precisely in attempting to bring these concepts into alignment, advice material fueled a persistent association of accidents with culpable mismanagement.

Accidents that happen at home, after all, formed a particularly problematic issue in a culture that was deeply entrenched in an ideology of domesticity that envisaged home as a place of safety, comfort, and rest. In Ruskin's much-cited words, home should be a "place of Peace," a "shelter" from "the anxieties of the outer life."[10] Household manuals, however, flatly contradicted the idea of home as intrinsically risk-free. First aid sections (fig. 1) illustrated the inevitability of accidents. *Cassell's Household Guide* (1869), for example, laid out "simple rules for the treatment of the slight accidents and emergencies of every day life as are commonly treated without resorting to medical advice."[11] Isabella Beeton's widely used *Book of Household Management* (1861) included not only a systematic list of poisons and their antidotes but also instructions about how to react to a child's "little accidents which must inevitably happen" while taking "care that such accidents are not of frequent occurrence, or the result of neglect."[12] The acknowledgment that some, but only some, accidents remained inevitable hence also always entailed an amount of blame. Throughout her numerous household books in narrative form, Mrs. (Eliza) Warren references a range of mishaps: "Accidents always do happen to valued articles, and it is 'Nobody's' fault," as she puts it in *A House and Its Furnishings* (1869).[13] Warren's practical solution, in this case, is to purchase only cheap products. The latest household advice might nonetheless ensure that homes were run smoothly and housework conducted safely without "put[ting] more guineas into doctors' purses," as Warren unreservedly advertised in the smugly titled *How I Managed My Children from Infancy to Marriage*

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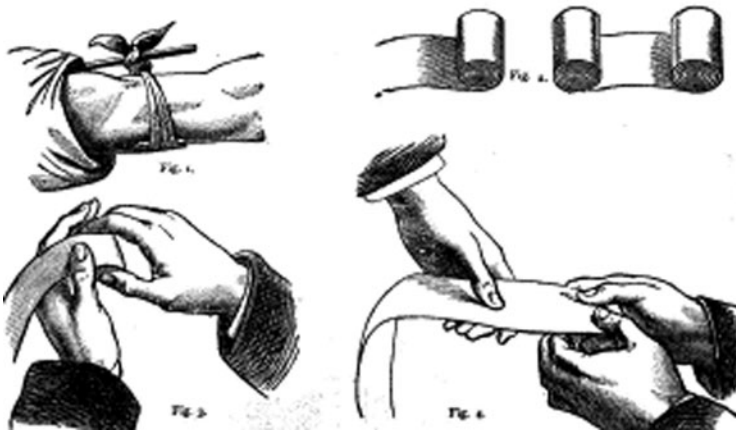

Figure 1. First aid in Victorian household books. *Cassell, Cassell's Household Guide; Being a Complete Encyclopaedia of Domestic and Social Economy and Forming a Guide to Every Department of Practical Life* (London: Cassell, Petter, and Galpin, 1869), 1:8.

(1865).[14] The idea of risk as something that could be identified and contained, if only taken seriously enough, ironically amplified anxieties about maternal failure. Such advice books hence tasked the mistress of a household, as its domestic manager, with realizing an ultimately elusive ideal.

Even though extensive scholarship on domestic labor has begun to address how and why advice writers constructed the home as fundamentally unsafe, there has hitherto been no study that explores domestic accidents.[15] Similarly, critical work on accidents, risk, and its management in Victorian Britain has concentrated on industrial and metropolitan spaces, on factory fires, omnibus collisions, and railway crashes.[16] Paul Fyfe has shown that, within the changing perceptions of the modern metropolis, urban accidents provided a powerful metaphor as well as a material context through which the Victorians reconfigured concepts of causality and change. Describing a trajectory toward probabilistic thinking, the shifting understanding of accidents was both subject to and drove divergent deterministic explanations. Risk thereby operated as a "signature concept of cultural modernity . . . replacing notions of fortune, fate, and providence with a diffused awareness of contingency."[17]

In *Accident: A Philosophical and Literary History*, Ross Hamilton speaks of a "fresh and unsettling awareness of the power of contingency" in Victorian thinking.[18] Mathematical concepts of probability and statistical laws "eroded the eighteenth-century's deterministic understanding of the world and created a powerful new awareness of arbitrary, random, or

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meaningless events."[19] The expanded level of conceptual uncertainty encompassed nineteenth-century discourses, from Darwin's conceptualization of "unconscious selection" as a driving force in species development to the search for mathematical constancies behind Babbage's calculating machines.[20] Literary scholars have begun to reconsider narrative credulity through the lens of these epistemological shifts to explore how writers turned to chance and improbability to address representational problems of contingency.[21] Thus, Tina Choi has traced how awareness of involuntary inclusion and the anonymity of statistical risk redefined social ethics and their representation in the period's fiction.[22] Yet these discussions still chiefly direct our attention to urban writing, to "medical rather than moral essays, to city streets instead of the safety of the home."[23] This predominant concentration on the urban, or on Ruskin's "outer life," replicates rather than investigates the Victorians' ideals of home as a supposedly safe space. This leaves out domestic accidents and, further, risk-management at home.

Risk-management emerged as a strategy to counter statistical inevitability. Elaine Freedgood speaks of modern cosmologies of risk, arguing against "the idea that modernity is characterized by an acceptance of the inevitability of risk," which "denies the endurance and flexibility of cosmological thinking within it."[24] Strategies of containment could "proffer large-scale consolation and reassurance," but generally, by reinforcing domestic ideologies that need the home to be intrinsically free of risk.[25] Freedgood concentrates on a geography of risk that banishes danger from the domestic scene by relocating it outside British borders.[26] However, if domestic accidents undermined this dichotomy, household books, I contend here, adapted such strategies for home use. Purchase the right manual and you might safely contain or expertly deal with the identified hazards. Such texts were thus doubly instrumental in importing emergent concepts of risk into the home: both in being consulted within the home and in pertaining to its everyday workings.

When popular novels featured domestic accidents, they navigated these contradictory ideas. An ideal home was supposedly risk-free, yet successful risk-management allowed authors to celebrate domestic work by highlighting its challenges. Conversely, mismanagement and failure became illustrative of blameworthy behavior. Fate or providence, moreover, still loomed large in nineteenth-century narratives. *The Pillars of the House*, a novel by a denominational writer whose works were widely read, dramatizes these competing interpretative frameworks. Yonge's self-conscious rejection of expected narrative developments, in fact, prompts

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us to reevaluate the surprisingly complex functions of mundane mishaps in the fiction of the time.

Domestic Accidents in Victorian Fiction

In Victorian fiction, accidents frequently form a cataclysmic moment. Arguably, this function seems the most familiar, or at least memorable cases tend to fall into this category. This usage underpins poetic justice and facilitates heroic action. Accidents also routinely operate as convenient plot twists. They orphan the protagonist or facilitate a sudden inheritance. As Hamilton has suggested, as the genre of the novel emerged, accidents could "stimulate curiosity and provide amusement" to a newly abstract audience, while concomitantly operating as life-transforming events.[27] It was part of the early novel's pedagogical potential to teach readers "how fictional heroes and heroines succeeded within the new culture of risk and reward."[28] Increasingly, the interpretation of accident became "a marker for the understanding of historical change," and yet Hamilton also suggests the growing importance of mundane, including domestic, accidents in nineteenth-century fiction: accidents "no longer needed to crash onto the page like the great wave that hurled Robinson Crusoe onto his island."[29] Instead, a myriad of incidents could affect individual transformation and display a character's ability to interpret accidental events.[30] Although novelists continued to utilize the pedagogical potential of accidents, changing concepts of chance and contingency rendered fiction a good testing ground for individual interpretations.

The main narrative functions of domestic accidents in nineteenth-century fiction nonetheless fall into two main categories: the cautionary tale and the (frequently sensational) invocation of fatalism.[31] At one end of the spectrum, straightforward warnings are generally in the style most familiar from Mary Martha Sherwood's *The History of the Fairchild Family; or, The Child's Manual* (1818) and Heinrich Hoffmann's *Struwwelpeter* (1845). Aimed at younger readers, these texts employ a simple cause-and-effect structure to illustrate a particular point.[32] However, the putative case studies offered in household advice, including "how-to" books that chiefly work as cautionary narratives of how not to do it, are structured along the same lines. In both sets of texts, household accidents are the direct result of—and punishment for—a specific action or its omission, whether it is a child's disobedience or a mother's failure. The latter may include the use of the wrong methods or products,

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specifically in "artifact-driven advice books."[33] Interpolated instructions in domestic novels and, conversely, household books in narrative form employ the same rhetorical strategies.[34]

At the other end of the spectrum, sensation novels dwell on a sense of the ominous when anticipating or describing accidents. Even when detailing mundane mishaps, they evoke fate, destiny, or providence, which as Winifred Hughes has shown, appear "arcane and vaguely supernatural, transcending probability or doubt."[35] In Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White* (1860), Pesca's accident "turn[s] the whole current of my existence" in defiance of "all human probability"; *Armadale* (1866) is obsessively structured around the recurring question of "Fate or Chance?"; and *The Two Destinies* (1876) yokes traditional superstitions to newly fashionable theories of mesmerism and telepathy.[36] More drastically still, in Mrs. Henry Wood's novels, each and every household mishap seems fated, including the domestic servant's broken leg that delays the murderer's identification in *East Lynne* (1861).[37] In *Lord Oakburn's Daughters* (1864), Wood insists that such seemingly "unaccountable accidents" are not (only) the result of bad luck but foretell or cause it: "accidents that come, and nobody can tell why. They bode ill luck."[38] Slippages in household management become compressed into evocations of fate or destiny, in a deliberate reordering of cause and effect.

Victorian debates on realism hinged upon shifting concepts of contingency and narrative credulity.[39] Generally, nineteenth-century fiction nevertheless strove to locate meaning in the ordinariness of incidents. Most writers, without being as invested in an enervating sense of foreboding as sensation novelists were, employed chance encounters and impactful accidents, engaging with concepts of probability that were still in flux.[40] Accidents in fiction thus contributed to an evolving understanding of chance and risk while simultaneously renegotiating competing narrative demands: of closure, a happy ending, poetic justice, probabilism, or, conversely, the demonstration of a specific agenda, whether in a social-problems novel, a thinly fictionalized tract, or a household book in narrative form. Since explicit reflections on statistical probability in Victorian writing concentrate on large-scale events, such as a railway or a stock-market crash, domestic accidents are nonetheless easily overlooked. For the purpose of this discussion, I define such accidents as unintended incidents that result in injury or damage, and which take place within domestic spaces, chiefly inside a household or its immediate environs such as the garden or a surrounding estate.[41] They comprise falls, items falling, burns, scalds, and poisoning through contaminated

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food, wrongly dispensed medicine, or the inadvertent ingestion of other substances.[42] To study these accidents consequently also reveals important aspects of Victorian concepts of home safety and, further, of the novel genre's complex relationship to domestic ideology.

In particular, the persistent correlation between culpable mismanagement and domestic accidents deserves to be critically unpacked. Advice publications necessarily capitalized on an identification of household mishaps with ignorance and inefficiency. The application of risk-management to domestic labor additionally cemented this alignment, and fiction variously reinforced and circulated the association. Throughout a range of narratives, household accidents signal culpability of some kind, whether through willful neglect, incapability, or a value system that the author criticizes. In Dickens's *Bleak House* (1853), the exposure of an uncomfortable home memorably works by metaphorical extension to critique Britain's domestic politics. Mrs. Jellyby ignores the needs of her family in order to focus on "telescopic philanthropy" instead. Her children's misadventures, including Peepy's comically described tumble downstairs—with "the dear child's head record[ing] its passage with a bump on every stair"—are symptoms of mismanagement.[43]

To equate domestic accidents with maternal failure, in fact, underpins their most pervasive portrayal in Victorian fiction.[44] Written in response to this cliché, the few notable exceptions further underscore how easily mothers were blamed by default. Several times, including in "Lizzie Leigh" (1850) and *Ruth* (1853), Elizabeth Gaskell, for example, establishes that such accidents can be outside maternal control. Her fiction models alternative reactions. Even though a young nurserymaid's carelessness, in the prestory of *Ruth*, results in her charge's permanent disability, the "forgiveness of the gentle mother" has ensured the servant's subsequent devotion and loyalty to the family.[45] This "gentle mother" teaches the recommended reaction, with notably little stress on the carelessness or the childcare arrangement. In "Lizzie Leigh," an adoptive mother's distress over a young toddler's fatal fall is met with a doctor's quick condemnation of supposed inattention. Individual authors thus critically respond to such relentless indictments while pinpointing their persistence.

Yonge similarly dismantles sleight-of-hand allocations of blame but with a specific agenda, as we shall see. Throughout her writing, she criticizes and redirects expected responses to accidents. In a pointed rewriting of the classic cautionary tale involving naughty children playing with fire, for example, Yonge's early *Scenes and Characters* (1847) culminates in the exposure of the teenage protagonists' bungling of their allotted household

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and childcare duties. Their long-standing negligence is responsible for an explosion in the nursery, not the young child who lights the match. Major accidents, moreover, are often offstage and primarily facilitate a juxtaposition of contrasting reactions. Thus, an accident at the opening of *The Daisy Chain* (1856) sets off a chain reaction that radiates through the novel and its sequels, establishing the format that became a hallmark of Yonge's family chronicles: through a focus on sibling groups (eleven in *Daisy Chain*; thirteen in *Pillars*), these texts combine the interests of the classic bildungsroman with the innovative structure of a domestic chronicle. As Maia Mcaleavey has recently argued, although this format has "often been overshadowed by individualist genres like the bildungsroman, their narrative form offers an innovative approach to the nineteenth-century novel's classically tense negotiation between individual needs and group membership."[46] This focus might make Yonge's texts appear nearly plotless and "non-protagonistic,"[47] but in foregrounding interconnectedness, their story arcs provide an alternative to narratives that see the individual—and individual misfortune—at the center. In *Pillars*, Yonge navigates and indeed explicitly discusses alternative models of how to understand and represent accidents. Paralleled and interlinked mishaps lend structure to a seemingly plotless narrative in demonstrating a guiding interest in contrasting concepts of misfortune.

"The kettle toppling over": Handling Daily Hazards and Putative Prophecy in *Pillars*

Yonge was a popular and prolific novelist and editor, whose writing has become the subject of intense critical discussion over the last decades. Her novels have been analyzed side by side with canonical literature in studies of women's work, historical girlhood, parenting, disability and ethics of care, as well as emigration and missionary writing.[48] Although she considered it a main purpose of her work to supply reading material for the younger members of the Oxford Movement, an affiliation of High Church Anglicans also known as Tractarianism, her fiction was widely read.[49] Commenting on the limitations of didacticism, Yonge differentiated between delineating everyday experience as informed by the way of life she sought to promote and narratives with a "forced moral":

> a "religious tale," overloaded with controversy, and with forced moral, should be carefully distinguished from a tale constructed on a strong basis of religious principle, which attempts to give a picture of life as it really is seen by Christian eyes.[50]

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Tacitly worked into her narratives, her advice intends to help readers to "perceive how to bring your religious principles to bear upon your daily life."[51]

Suggesting that Yonge "converted the tractarian [*sic*] impulse into novels of family life," Vineta Colby has already pointed out that these novels are concerned with the "characters' problems of daily living far more than with their problems of dogma and ritual."[52] June Sturrock speaks of Yonge's "double preoccupation in fiction with 'heaven and home,' the religious and the domestic."[53] Realism and didacticism, however, frequently operate at cross-purposes as Yonge minutely records what defies her underlying ideology. As Talia Schaffer has shown, Yonge's "strong adherence to realism . . . drives her to depict phenomena that contradict her plot resolutions."[54] Schaffer critically addresses the temptation "to sift Yonge's fiction for its unexpected kernels of homoeroticism, gender dissidence, racial assumptions, and feminism" when "doing so ignores the *raison d'être* of her writing."[55] How these "kernels" operate within her texts nevertheless helps us trace revealing ambiguities and complexities as Yonge strives to reconcile realism and ideology. Since in Victorian writing, the representation of accidents routinely invites didactic commentary, Yonge's balancing act here becomes particularly pressing.

Pillars presents a nuanced engagement with personally catastrophic events that occur in the supposed safety of the home. The promotion of domestic risk-management forms part of Yonge's didactic intent, and yet as she disdains simplistic causality, she produces a feminist portrayal of housework that contradicts her overarching design. What underpins her writing is an anti-individualist stance that, however, similarly complicates conversion patterns premised on catharsis and moral transformation. Dramatizing long-term consequences and interconnectedness, *Pillars* spans nearly two decades, recounting the everyday experiences of the Underwood children: Felix (sixteen at the opening), Wilmet and Alda (fifteen-year-old twins), Edgar, Geraldine (Cherry), Clement, Fulbert, Lancelot (Lance), Robina (Bobbie), Angela, and Bernard, as well as Stella and Theodore (Tedo), twins born in the course of the novel. Initially cheated out of an inheritance, the Underwoods live in comparative poverty. For the primarily female target reader, they usefully model how you can accomplish hands-on housework, from cooking and ironing to cleaning boots, without forfeiting your claim to gentility. Hazards validate their work as a worthy challenge. Early in the novel, the father dies (of tuberculosis, exacerbated by overwork), and a seemingly minor mishap incapacitates the mother. As she slowly succumbs

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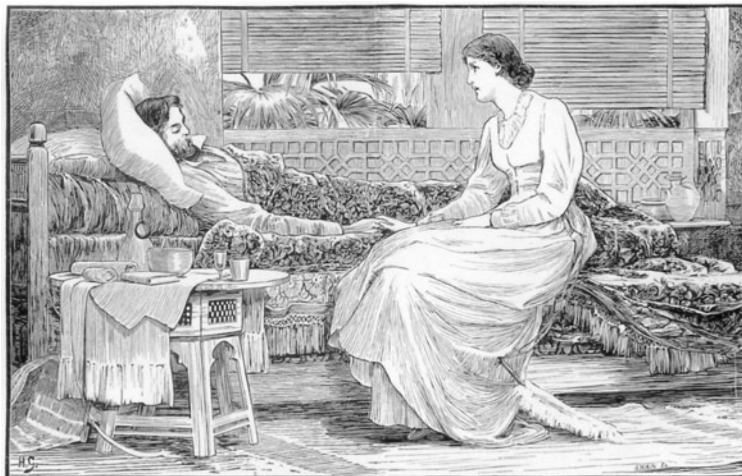
to her injuries, the eldest children begin to run the household. Even as repeated accidents lend structure to a seemingly shapeless novel, Yonge nonetheless undercuts interpretations that read them as cataclysmic events. In particular, she critically renegotiates a prophecy that appears to come true when Tedo dies, and she questions evangelical conversion patterns by exposing Angela's insistence on the personal importance of her culpability as selfish.

A map of domestic accidents in *Pillars* not only reveals their sheer number in the text. It also highlights parallels, repetitions, and long-term consequences. The term "accident" alone is referenced forty times, yet this count does not capture all. The narrative dwells on injuries, illnesses (as the result of accidents), recovery (including its retardation or failure), altogether numerous sickrooms (fig. 2), as well as near-accidents and averted disasters. An overview of the ways in which accidents work in *Pillars* lets us trace recurrent patterns in Victorian fiction and how distinct aspects of the novel depart from the expected representation. This deviation renders the text narratively self-reflexive, as Yonge cautions against self-centered readings of individual misfortune.

The following table categorizes accidents according to type, as listed in the first column. The second column indicates the frequency of these occurrences, while the third states the number of fatalities and differentiates between minor and life-changing injuries.



'Once he asked, "Where's your brother?"'—Vol. ii. page 142.

Figure 2. Detailing the aftermath of accidents. Herbert Gandy, "Once he asked, 'Where is your brother?'" Charlotte Yonge, *The Pillars of the House* (London: Macmillan, 1889), 2:142.

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Table 1.

Accident	Frequency	Injury/Fatality
scalding with hot water	2 (plus 1 overseas)	1 fatality; 2 injuries
fire	2	3 fatalities; 1 injury
falls*	7	1 fatal; 2 causing major injuries; 4 with minor or no injury
poisoning	3	n/a
drowning	2 (plus 3 averted instances)	2 (plus 1 cross-referenced); lasting injury caused through rescue attempts
object in eye	1	1 minor injury
sunstroke	1	1 lasting injury
dropping/knocking into household items	3	damage

*excludes falling as the sign or result of illness or injury

The table captures all domestic accidents, sustained within a household or its surroundings, including open water on the Underwoods' inherited estate, which is centrally defined as their restored home and linked to an adage or supposed prophecy. Most of the accidents occur within the Underwoods' various homes and involve family members.[56] The list excludes offstage injuries received overseas, with the exception of a cross-reference to a paralleled scalding.[57] This incident, caused by carelessness in the maintenance of a boiler in Egypt, repeats and thereby renews the discussion of Felix's scald. The household mishap qualifies Wilmet to deal with subsequent emergencies: she is able to nurse her fiancé because she has had "experience of scalds, through Felix's accident, and one that had befallen a servant" (2:138). Domestic work enables Wilmet to contribute throughout the empire, while the parallelism reframes her earlier, at the time still bungling, reactions. An example of Yonge's interpolated practical instructions, the children commit the mistake of "tearing off the clothes, instead of cutting them," as several siblings rush to give a "hasty vigorous pull, made in ignorance" (2:9). In highlighting parallels, the table allows us to pinpoint and then closely parse the various connections between them in the text.

As this table reveals repetitions, cross-references, and long-lasting consequences, it guides analysis of what might otherwise appear to be sudden or unconnected incidents. Seemingly minor mishaps start off a series of calamities with lifelong complications. Early in the narrative, a forgotten toy, over which the mother stumbles, sets in motion a cascade of detrimental injuries and losses. While pregnant with twins, Mrs. Underwood falls down four steps and hits her head. We are never told

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who has left the toy on the staircase. With this omission, Yonge significantly departs from conventional didactic tales. Blame fails to dominate the description of the accident. Instead, its retrospective reconstruction underscores irrevocable consequences. It also renders the incident itself peculiarly anticlimactic. Vague symptoms include "a strange fretful impatience" (1:53), a "new and extraordinary petulance" (1:55), an inexplicable "irritability" (1:68). Subsequent inquiry into attempts to "conceal this mishap" lays bare how arduous and risky housework is (1:67). Incessant "drudgery," it is admitted, causes accidents: the mother's "endurance had consisted in 'suffering and being still' . . . her mental life had almost been extinguished in care, drudgery, and self-control. . . . And now, how much of her torpor had been collapse, how much the effect of the accident, could not be guessed" (1:71). Yonge nonetheless backtracks on this potentially feminist critique. First, the diagnosis suggests that only a blow on the head could cause a good mother's irritability. Second, Yonge stresses how unforeseen poverty has much to do with the drudgery, and this renders the mother a victim of disinheritance and compromised gentility rather than of housework itself. Lastly, the emphasis insistently rests on the aftermath. After three years as a bedridden invalid, the mother dies, whereas one of the twins, Tedo, has been "kept back for his mother's sake" (1:148) as a preternaturally quiet baby to tranquilize the irritable mother while her older children run the household without her. His infantilization delays intervention for a mental condition that may likewise be traceable to his mother's fall.[58]

The most consistent aspect of Yonge's representation of accidents is this focus on life-changing consequences. In addition, resulting injury can rarely be read as an immediate or direct punishment: it affects the wrong person; it is not in proportion to the mischief causing it; and it does not, often contrary to expectations, generate moral conversion. A particularly troubling example is Lance's sunstroke, probably Yonge's most overt rejection of poetic justice. Retrieving a friend's schoolwork left out in the sun, Lance succumbs to sunstroke, which costs him a scholarship (which his friend gets instead) and permanently bars him from academic work. Lance terms it "that *coup d'état* [that] addled my brains" (2:239). Throughout the novel, he suffers from "an amount of irritability and excitability of brain" that he likens to his mother's and Theodore's condition (1:399). Good deeds, in Yonge's world, have to be done for their own sake, not for a reward. Equally important, although Lance's accident is at one point said to be "in great part occasioned by . . . William's [the friend's] carelessness" (1:295), self-blame is unproductive:

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"he will treat himself as if he did in on purpose" (1:314). Nonetheless, in one of Yonge's practical injunctions, William Harewood's parents cover the medical costs accrued by Lance's long illness. In the same vein, Ferdinand Travis, another family friend, pays back insurance money for a house fire he caused. Such practical, constructive help contrasts with a self-blame that is scripted as selfish.

The question of Ferdinand's culpability is indeed variously reframed in the course of the novel. A good example of how minor mishaps work through parallels and contrasts, a "bit of mischief" involving an accidentally burnt paper impels Ferdinand to confess how he "smoked to spite the landlord," causing a fire that kills several people (1:116, 118). The unrelated "mischief" thus has an important narrative function. As Robina, one of the younger Underwoods, decorates a lodger's room with holly, her movements cause a document to flutter into the hearth. Ferdinand scandalizes the children by nonchalantly suggesting that they conceal the mishap, and this—more than the fatalities—prompts him to rethink honor and responsibility: "when those children seemed so shocked at my advising them to hold their tongues about their bit of mischief" (1:116). Ferdinand's self-blame nonetheless at first only threatens to consume himself, but his subsequent reimbursement, secretly accomplished, pointedly contrasts with Angela's self-dramatization, as does the Harewoods' "wish to bear the damages" (1:416). In a series of vignettes, Yonge juxtaposes different responses to accidents.

Accidents form a main theme as well as a structuring device. Familiar patterns are woven into, yet also deliberately unraveled, in the text. A central question in the study of accidents in fiction is, of course, why they are there at a particular moment in the narrative. What are their narrative functions, and further, what is the meaning of specific causes or consequences in a given text? In *Pillars*, some misadventures are without doubt first and foremost evidence of household hazards and hence illustrate opportunities for heroic action at home to encourage as well as caution the target readership. Carelessness and, in some cases, willfulness, or unwillingness to perform a chore, play a part in causing mishaps. Similarly, self-accusation can be salutary when it leads to atonement or compensation, as modeled by the Harewoods. Nonetheless, Yonge avoids a portrayal of providential punishment or simplistic prompts for conversion. Instead, most accidents are the result of a complex chain of events and, moreover, do not affect everyone involved in proportion to their culpability.

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To some extent, realist observation here conflicts with didacticism. However, by subscribing to domestic risk-management, Yonge also applies a peculiarly statistical logic (imported into domestic discourse through household advice, as we have seen), which contradicts prophetic prediction. Accordingly, the sheer amassing of incidents raises the likelihood of the next accident being more serious. Early in the novel, this potentiality is addressed in a conversation about accidents being very common in large families: "'But the little darling might have broken her neck.' 'Oh life in a large family is made up of *might haves*'" (1:28). Several such "might haves" add barely prevented calamities to the list of accidents. At one point, two inattentive brothers lose sight of the youngest sister and are "almost out of their minds, thinking she must have tumbled into the river," yet the "catastrophe" remains confined to scratched legs and a torn skirt (1:324–25). Another averted disaster combines "a sudden slip" with the threat of drowning, potentially repeating a fatal incident in one of Yonge's earlier novels, *The Castle Builders* (1854), which is referenced by a boy named after his drowned uncle (1:366). The third harmless incident involving open water has "none of the dignity of danger" as a family friend falls into a pond (1:164). Mishaps causing comparatively little injury or damage help to reframe a supposed prophecy about injury through water. The repetition, in increasing likelihood, questions such interpretations.

Pillars dramatizes the misinterpretation of accidents. Throughout the novel, Yonge indicts self-serving readings of events. As Felix sagely asserts, it "is absurd to make auguries or protests" (2:24). Invocations of providence—considerably few in the text—are likewise often misguided, ranging from flippant jokes (for which characters are instantaneously chided) to the more serious indictment "that Providence is generally said to lead in the direction of ease and £.s.d." (2:199). Similarly, it is the atheist Edgar who maintains that the deaths that have led to their unexpected restoration to the family estate make "one believe in a Providence at last" (2:420)—an interpretation that the text condemns.[59] In a similar vein, Yonge ridicules newly fashionable spiritualism as a harmless party game, a strategy she employs in several of her novels.[60] At such moments, Yonge becomes more openly didactic, presenting a "lesson against dealing with conjurors . . . to arm your pupils against spirit-rapping for ever" (1:242).

Yonge thereby carefully distances self-made, or secular, omens from religious belief. The first debate on auguries in the text significantly relates to such self-made predictions. They might seemingly realize a

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belief that it is possible to discern providence at work in the everyday, which formed part of Tractarian doctrine. Yonge, however, exposes these personal interpretations as fallacious, as a sign of self-conscious worrying or, we might say, a projection of anxieties. In the midst of moving house, Geraldine deplores that a physical disability prevents her from actively assisting in housework. Instead, she watches over toddlers playing with paper boats, each of them named after a sibling. Seeing some of the boats wrecked and believing herself to be the "ill-made thing" that needs to be "left at home because hindering all the rest," Geraldine is "[m]aking omens, foolish child!" (1:170–1). A reliable clergyman acts as a mouthpiece in declaring that he "hate[s] auguries," terming them a "superstition," although he qualifies that "[s]ometimes experience seems to show that in good Providence a merciful preparation is sent not so much to lead to anticipations, as to bring the mind into keeping with what is coming, and, as it were, attune it," but "*not* constantly" (1:171). So, even as "little things may be . . . types of great future ones"—underscoring Yonge's emphasis on mundane minutiae—becoming attuned to possible calamities is carefully differentiated from acting on a superstition. But does the narrative bear out these fears or prophecies? Although several siblings could be said to wreck their lives (Edgar, Alda) and Theodore drowns, as I shall explore in more detail, Geraldine overcomes her fears of being a hindrance. Instead, she becomes an increasingly important, active member of the household and, subsequently, an adoptive mother. This part of the supposed prophecy is proven false. Geraldine's prophesying is instead a "foolish" expression of her self-conscious worries, which she is explicitly cautioned not to conflate with religious belief.

Simultaneously, Yonge here disassociates disability from auguries and indeed largely from accidents as well. Frequently considered Yonge's most interesting portrayal of a disabled character, Geraldine also becomes a successful artist and, in a sequel, eventually marries. In a novel so replete with injuries, it is moreover significant that Geraldine's disability is not the result of an accident but possibly due to arthritis.[61] Instead, Yonge's representation of accidents here concentrates on active prevention as a form of risk-management. Modeling an inclusivity that shows how especially Yonge's representation of disability can seem at odds with her conformist values, accident prevention includes hands-on instructions about how to adapt domestic space. Thus, "bridges of matting" are laid out to prevent Geraldine from slipping, and similarly, the family's daily routines are adjusted to Theodore's needs (2:253).[62] Living with a disability, therefore, is

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divorced not only from prophecies but also from conventional didactic narratives that mete out injury as a punishment.

Theodore's death, however, complicates the repeated dismissal of prophecy. The inherited estate comes with an "adage": the rivers running through it putatively claim an Underwood in each generation. Several siblings track down historical records for "fun," only finding "one real Underwood, and one intended," upon which Felix dryly remarks: "Quite enough for an adage" (2:261). In pointed contrast, he retorts with a pragmatic warning: "all of you, remember once for all that I desire you will never go in the boat without some one who can swim, nor take Theodore without me" (2:260). Felix premises his injunction on a potential containment of risk-taking or "foolhardiness": "I do not mean the rivers to get their due through any foolhardiness" (2:261). When Theodore drowns and Felix is injured in the rescue attempt, the unfolding of narrative events seems to validate the prophecy. Close reading, however, reveals how Yonge insists that "foolhardiness" is the cause. Angela's recklessness leads to a boating accident; what further foregrounds her culpability is that Felix sustains another injury where he has previously been scalded, reminding both of the earlier accident: "'Brother, you remember my scalding you? . . . When I would not let you pardon me, and you didn't want to.' 'Rather oddly put, but I remember'" (2:463). Yonge thus uses this scene to parallel and connect accidents, to stress lasting consequences, such as Felix's injuries, and to present concrete assessments of risk factors (such as foolhardy teenagers) in opposition to vague auguries.[63]

Nevertheless, a central ambiguity about this prophecy remains. The prediction seems validated, but by chance. As Caroline Levine suggests in her insightful discussion of George Eliot's *Romola* (1862–63), in such a case prophecy "fails on curious grounds": it might fit experience, "but only by *chance*." The seeming fulfilment shows "an accidental, inauthentic correspondence between words and the world."[64] In Eliot's text, questioning its validity affirms skepticism and ultimately a questioning of authority;[65] the opposite happens in Yonge's novel. The augury might be from a dubious source that Felix dismisses as unreliable gossip, but it also introduces his injunction, an order issued by the head of the family. A lapse in risk-management here replaces fatalism, as Angela's recklessness sets off a cascade of events that seem to validate the prophecy.

Similarly, the resulting focus on disobedience seems to reinstate didactic intent, and yet Yonge here dismantles conventional conversion plots. The paralleling of Felix's accidents underscores this rejection of

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instantaneous moral transformation. In the earlier incident, what results in "the kettle toppling over" is "just a squabble" between several children (2:9, 11), so that Felix insists, "*This* was no fault of hers [Angela's]!" (2:11). His injury might nonetheless "seem a chance of making an impression," yet the use of "seem" is striking (2:11). Felix notably deems such an appropriation of an accident unfair: it "does seem taking an unfair advantage of you to catch you now" (2:12). The repetition of "seems" suggests a narrative uncertainty, and yet the attempt to turn the situation into an opportunity to teach miscarries. In a pointedly unsentimental sickroom scene, Angela accuses Felix of having "forgiven [her] for [his] own comfort" (2:12). If this already works as an example of an accident not leading to conversion or indeed character growth of any kind, the subsequent paralleling of incidents reinforces this rejection of a common paradigm. After the boating accident, Angela exhibits a diametrically opposed, but equally flawed, reaction. This time, she demonstratively embraces guilt. In an almost parodic reading of the situation, she insists on the "really tragic nature of her troubles" (2:502), whereas Yonge scripts her as a misbehaving teen: as a "naughty girl . . . instead of an interesting penitent with a tragic crime on her hands" (2:512).

Yonge transforms the rejected interpretation into a different cautionary tale: a warning against religious schisms and Low Church doctrine in particular. Throughout the novel, Yonge faults what she terms the "priggish self-confidence" that makes self-absorbed characters feel "rather hurt at [others] not making [their] misfortune of more importance; but it seems to have been an accident" (1:220). In condemning self-centered interpretations of personal misfortune, Yonge foregrounds the accidental to promote risk-management, while simultaneously advocating a doctrine of reserve and reticence, essential values in Tractarian theology and aesthetics. Several scholars have pointed out that the synthesis of aesthetics with theology formed a fundamental aspect of the movement's doctrine, that Keble instructed Yonge to avoid overt preaching, and that, as a result, Yonge sought to demonstrate the doctrine of reserve without violating reserve in doing so.[66] Tensions between religious views and literary methods thereby rendered her epistemologically self-reflexive.[67] In undermining Angela's interpretation, suggested to her by Low Church characters, Yonge uses the accident to promote other values and, simultaneously, to make a particular point about narrative structure itself. The anti-individualist format of the family chronicle becomes ideally suited to the rejection of personally catastrophic or cathartic misfortune.

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The disputed conversion is thus condemned as socially disruptive. Angela commits an "open act of schism" when members of a Low Church congregation claim that she is experiencing a "true conversion" and encourage her to focus on what the accident—including her sense of personal guilt—means to herself (2:458, 461). For Yonge, this interpretation violates Tractarian reserve. It is also individualistic and therefore, for Yonge, selfish. Angela's temporary defection culminates in her defense of a traveling dissenting preacher, showcasing, as Elizabeth Jay has explored, how "a manifestation of the Evangelical impulse demonstrates the dangers of sympathy and co-operation with Dissent."[68] As Yonge "takes a side swipe at open air preaching in her picture of the Ranter," his activities "embarrass the Evangelicals of the village . . . and thus lend evidential support to the old High Church arguments" that Yonge endorses.[69] Yonge debunks evangelical conversion patterns to make a point about schisms. Upending a common structure of cautionary tales becomes the means for a different warning.

This intriguing inversion, or redeployment, of a common narrative use of accidents in nineteenth-century fiction exemplifies Yonge's sustained rejection of injury or illness as cathartic or redemptive. Yonge indeed repeatedly questions instantaneous conversion. As she pointedly puts it in her mission novel *New Ground* (1868), "there is nothing more fallacious than the notion that a great misfortune is like a thunderstorm, and must needs clear the air and make all right."[70] In *Pillars*, the dead end of Angela's would-be transformation, moreover, contrasts with Ferdinand's lengthy and complicated conversion. During convalescence—presented as tiresome rather than cathartic—he presents a moral danger to the younger Underwoods, and even though owning up to a mishap impresses him, as we have seen, his conversion is neither sudden nor straightforward. Although it is admittedly tricky to see how his relatives' objection to Ferdinand being "beslobbered and befooled with a lot of Puseyite cant" differs from the Underwoods' reaction to the Ranter (1:154–55), Yonge rejects instantaneous transformation, divorcing accident and conversion in the process.[71]

As a text that exemplifies both how accidents generally operate in Victorian fiction and how the self-reflexive redeployment of expected structures can work for particular agendas, *Pillars* illustrates three revealing points. (1) Nowhere else in her fiction does Yonge so explicitly discuss auguries and stress practical risk-management in opposition to them. In addition, the sheer amassing of similar accidents drives up the incidence rate, so that an eventual fatality becomes a statistical

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likelihood rather than fulfilled prophecy. Even as its seeming validation complicates Yonge's caution against making auguries, the stress is on obeying practical assessments of risk. (2) Yonge upends a common conversion pattern that predominates in nineteenth-century cautionary tales. Hence, the text self-reflexively comments on two conventional interpretative frameworks of an accident in fiction: it is neither fated nor cathartic. (3) Her representation of accidents concentrates on consequences and thus explores complex causality, both what leads to them and their lasting aftereffects. This emphasis indeed appears as a self-reflexive refrain of "Wilmet's old 'what it may lead to!'" (2:461). Although Wilmet's anxiety—often about social consequences—verges on becoming a running joke, Felix ultimately terms it "her old wisdom" (2:461). Yonge thereby underscores mundane responsibilities, reinforcing her focus on the domestic and interpolating practical advice on all aspects of home safety.

While using paralleled accidents as a structuring device for her otherwise episodic family chronicle, in fact, Yonge self-consciously weighs their various narrative functions. The range includes even the comical and, in a pointed rejection of this narrative paradigm, the potentially sensational. In a parodic dismissal of sensational poison plots, for example, schoolboys inadvertently poison Mr. Harewood by melting lead in the kitchen, which "drop[s] into the pudding": "'the Pater got it at dinner, and said it was the heaviest morsel he ever had to digest' 'But wasn't it poison?' 'I suppose not, for you see he isn't dead'" (1:193–4). Home safety is more demanding, but also more adventurous, than her target readers might initially think. Yet as Yonge promotes practical risk-management as domestic heroism, she simultaneously cautions against applying specific interpretative structures. What remains her most consistent impulse is to condemn convenient self-dramatization of the supposedly "really tragic nature of [one's] troubles" (2:502). Ultimately, Yonge redeploys these narrative structures to create a different kind of cautionary tale that warns precisely against such interpretations.

A close look at the way in which accidents operate within the detailing of domestic events in nineteenth-century fiction allows us to unpack otherwise seldom-noticed patterns and self-reflexive experiments. Domestic accidents, so easily overlooked, fulfilled hitherto underestimated narrative and ideological functions in Victorian literature. Domestic risk-management offered a hands-on cosmology of reassurance that fiction helped circulate. Yet even as novelists integrated advice into their narratives, they variously struggled to reconcile the underpinning

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concepts with persistent thought patterns and expected paradigms. To address competing interpretations within a narrative offered a way to test out and reevaluate changing ideas of chance and risk, probability and providence. Domestic accidents in fiction thus critically renegotiated interpretative frameworks of personal misfortune, shaping narrative developments in complex ways.

Notes

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1. Yonge, *Pillars*, 2:9. All subsequent references to this edition are noted parenthetically in the text.
2. Yonge, "Introductory Letter," i.
3. John Keble was one of the founders of the Oxford Movement. Yonge set herself the goal to provide "a sort of instrument for popularizing Church views that might not otherwise have been taken in" (Romanes, *Charlotte*, 190). Compare Coleridge, *Charlotte*, 119.
4. Freedgood terms risk-management a modern cosmology of reassurance (*Victorian*, 2). See below.
5. Statistical thinking underpinned the promises of insurance companies, while advertisements and advice material popularized new thinking about risk. A widely used manual, *Cassell's Household Guide* (1869) includes a discussion of insurance coverages. I explore domestic risk-management below.
6. Choi, *Anonymous*, 24.
7. Choi, *Anonymous*, 14.
8. Beetham, *Magazine*, 67.
9. Tarr and Tebeau, "Housewives," 196–233.
10. Ruskin, *Sesame and Lilies*, 2.
11. *Cassell's Household Guide*, 7.
12. Beeton, *Household Management*, 1014.
13. Warren, *House*, 40.
14. Warren, *How*, 8.
15. Scholarship on Victorian domesticity is extensive and covers a range of approaches. Important work has been done on the way advice material transformed domestic labor into "a skilled task in a modern world which increasingly stressed literacy and print-based

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knowledge" (Beetham, *Magazine*, 67). Such advice not only traded on but amplified readers' anxieties (Wagner, *Victorian Baby*). On accidents in working-class households, see Holmes, "Death," 305–31.

16. Fyfe, *By Accident*, 10. Most work has been done on railway crashes. See, for example, Harrington, "Railway Safety," 187–207.
17. Fyfe, *By Accident*, 9–10.
18. Hamilton, *Accident*, 238.
19. Hamilton, *Accident*, 230.
20. Hamilton suggests that Darwin's concept of "unconscious selection" among domestic animals "acknowledged accident as a driving force" (*Accident*, 232). Choi explores writers' divergent engagements with probabilistic thinking, relating the resulting narrative experiments to new concepts of speculation and Babbage's calculating engines (*Victorian Contingencies*).
21. Grener, for example, stresses that "the meaning of probability has changed profoundly over time" (*Improbability*, 3).
22. Choi, *Anonymous*, 10.
23. Choi, *Anonymous*, 5.
24. Freedgood, *Victorian*, 2.
25. Freedgood, *Victorian*, 2.
26. Freedgood, *Victorian*, 1. Freedgood's discussion of Nightingale's *Notes on Nursing* acknowledges how Nightingale's exposure of "'handsome' and 'comfortable' homes [as] breeding grounds for disease" subverts the "domestic ideology that secured the home within the unassailable precinct of a separate sphere" (60–61).
27. Hamilton, *Accident*, 134–35.
28. Hamilton, *Accident*, 135.
29. Hamilton, *Accident*, 238, 220.
30. Hamilton discusses Austen as "a transitional novelist" who explored that "any accidental event could induce a change or transformation of character" (*Accident*, 219–20).
31. Comedy forms a third important category. Overlaps include satirical indictments (a comically described accident caused by a mismanagement that is thereby exposed) or a domestic oversight that facilitates crime. Some of Dickens's comical mishaps indict household management. Conversely, Wood sensationalizes household instructions (Wagner, "Risk-Management").
32. The English translation of Hoffmann's tales, *The English Struwwelpeter*, was published in 1848. The typical trajectory of such cautionary tales

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follows up disobedience with an abrupt and often exaggerated punishment.

33. Such product-oriented manuals were essentially advertisements, such as *Fennings' Every Mother's Book* (1865) or *Baron Liebig and the Children* (1873). Gurjeva terms them "artifact-driven advice books" ("Child Health," 107).
34. Warren popularized the household book in narrative form with *How I Managed My Children from Infancy to Marriage* (1865), *How I Managed My House on Two Hundred Pounds a Year* (1866), and *My Lady-Help and What She Taught Me* (1877), among others. Several novelists, as otherwise different as Gaskell, Wood, Yonge, and Dickens, embedded or dramatized specific household instructions.
35. Hughes, *Maniac*, 22.
36. Collins, *Woman in White*, 9; Collins, *Armadale*, 308. Collins's *Basil* (1852) sensationalizes accidental meetings in modern urban life; in *Hide and Seek* (1854), fate is repeatedly said to "work through" characters; *The Legacy of Cain* (1888), as well as *The Two Destinies*, evokes various contemporary theories to explain supernatural appearances or affinities.
37. Wood repeats this fateful accident in *Mrs Halliburton's Troubles* (1862): breaking a leg while cleaning sets in motion a cascade of crimes. I discuss Wood's sensationalization of housework elsewhere (Wagner, "Risk-Management").
38. Wood, *Lord Oakburn's*, 27.
39. Writers as different as Anthony Trollope and George Eliot condemned what they considered superstitious readings of reality and misleading concepts of realism. Trollope satirized reliance on putatively predictable chances as a form of gambling, a symptom of a speculative society, whereas claiming to have met someone "by accident" regularly appears as a facile excuse in his novels. Grener argues that Trollope's "use of chance registers disconnection, marking the limits of the bildungsroman to link individual development to social progress," in contrast to the way Dickens "leverages coincidence to assert a social interconnectedness whose scope cannot be directly experienced" (*Improbability*, 32). Compare Hamilton on Trollope as someone "who abhorred surprises" and therefore "embraced gradualism" (*Accident*, 238). Eliot altogether debunked the search for meaning in the accidental as a fallacy, using a randomly scratched pier-glass as a metaphor in *Middlemarch* (1872) to articulate her concept of realism (book 3, chap. 27). Compare Choi (*Victorian*

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Contingencies, chap. 4) and Hamilton (*Accident*, 238–43) on *Daniel Deronda* (1876).

40. Grener suggests that chance and coincidence can operate as tools for realist representation precisely in that they reflect historical shifts in the meaning of probability (*Improbability*, 3).
41. What precisely constitutes a domestic accident remains a debated question in studies of accident prevention today. It is often established negatively, demarcating what it is not. For a historical discussion of home safety, see Tarr and Tebeau, "Housewives."
42. More unusual accidents occurring within the household include explosions (of children's school experiments in several of Yonge's novels, for example) and a child's accidental ingestion of his father's chemicals in Charlotte Riddell's *Too Much Alone* (1860). Sensation fiction trades on fears of accidentally—or deliberately—swapped medicine bottles. Drowning in a garden pond, well, or river running through an estate is often identified as an everyday, domestic accident, in novels as different as Catherine Crowe's *Susan Hopley; or, The Adventures of a Maid Servant* (1841) and Wood's *St Martin's Eve* (1866).
43. Dickens, *Bleak House*, 46–47. When Peepy gets his head stuck between the rails, tumbles downstairs, or strays from home to be brought back by a policeman, his distress indicts philanthropists who, like his mother, see nothing closer than Africa.
44. Maternal neglect as evidenced by children's injuries is a theme in child rescue fiction, household books, and in several canonical novels such as Dickens's, including *Bleak House*. Sensation novels reinforce the connection by presenting putative accidents that cover up crime, such as the suspicious death of a child left unsupervised with a lit paper lantern in Wood's *St Martin's Eve* (Wagner, *Victorian Baby*, 225–26).
45. Gaskell, *Ruth*, 110.
46. Mcaleavey, "Anti-Individualism," 216.
47. Yonge's episodic form, Mcaleavey argues, "was taken up by Anthony Trollope, Margaret Oliphant, Louisa May Alcott, and Margaret Sidney. These writers' chronicles are non-protagonistic, nearly plotless, and potentially endless" ("Anti-Individualism," 216).
48. Sturrock, *"Heaven and Home"*; Holmes, *Fictions of Affliction*; Wagner, "Home Work," 101–15; Gore, *Plotting*; Schaffer, *Communities*.
49. Budge maintains that since Yonge "described her target audience as 'young ladies,' by which she meant unmarried middle-class women

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between fifteen and twenty-five, and since this corresponded with the demographic aimed at by any mid-Victorian novelist, . . . her novels belonged to the mainstream of development of the Victorian novel and were read with enthusiasm by such eminent Victorians as Tennyson and Kingsley" (*Charlotte*, 9).

50. Yonge, "Children's Literature," 310.
51. Yonge, "Introductory Letter," i–ii.
52. Colby, *Yesterday's Woman*, 186–87.
53. Sturrock, *"Heaven and Home*," 15.
54. Schaffer, "Mysterious," 247.
55. Schaffer, "Mysterious," 245.
56. This includes characters who intermarry with the Underwoods, such as William Harewood (who marries Robina) and Ferdinand Travis (who marries their cousin Marilda after Alda breaks off their engagement).
57. The table excludes offstage scalping, bullet wounds, and a fatal duel.
58. Although Lang has suggested that "Yonge gives us in Theodore Underwood a very clear picture of a child who would now be diagnosed as having an autistic spectrum disorder" ("Theodore," 54), the narrative suggests a causality between his mother's accident and his physical as well as mental developmental delay.
59. There are only seven references to providence, including a young boy's ridiculed reliance on providence to get him out of a scrape. The most chilling use, however, is Edgar's, as his dying words prove his worldliness.
60. In *The Three Brides* (1876), playful fortune-telling at a Christmas party upstages a feminist speaker.
61. On Geraldine's arthritis, see Gore, *Plotting*, 105. Compare Holmes, *Fictions*, 51–52.
62. See also Lang, "Theodore," 54–61.
63. Although Felix fears he might have inherited his father's consumptive lungs, doctors in the text dispute this explanation. Vague references to "treatment" might indicate a tumor, but to what extent the accidents have caused, exacerbated, or exposed it remains obscure.
64. Levine, "Prophetic," 145.
65. Levine, "Prophetic," 158.
66. See Mason, "'Her Silence,'" 125–41. Colón discusses how Yonge exploits realism's potential to practice and preach reserve ("Realism," 221–35).

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67. Budge, "Realism," 193. Compare Jay, "Charlotte"; Sandbach-Dahlström, *Be Good*.
68. Jay, *Religion*, 117.
69. Jay, *Religion*, 116–17.
70. Yonge, *New Ground*, 249.
71. "Puseyite" (after Edward Pusey) was a derogatory term applied to Tractarians.

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