

Mrs. Oliphant through Other Spectacles:
Ideology and Subjectivity in her Works and their Publication

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Mrs. Oliphant through Other Spectacles:
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ABSTRACT

This thesis considers a few of the numerous works by Margaret Oliphant (1828-1897), not in light of their literary value, but as a means of understanding how literature can offer as "natural" particular ways of understanding oneself and one's relation to society, and how one can use that same literature to dismantle the illusion of inevitability which it fosters. Mrs. Oliphant's fiction, autobiography, and letters, offer positions from which the reading subject can understand the text and their relation to it. On the one hand women, as part of humankind, are depicted as unified subjects, the originators of meaning, will, and self-definition. On the other hand women are presented as gentle, passive, and giving by nature, and the meaning in their world is defined in relation to men. Although these positions exclude each other, Oliphant offers both as obvious and natural. At moments in her writing, these conflicting ways of understanding what it means to be a woman do battle with each other, leaving gaps in the text which, if filled, would display that neither one is inevitable or unchangeable.

"Mrs. Oliphant through Other Spectacles" draws for its theoretical framework on the work of Catherine Belsey, Terry Eagleton, and related theorists. Chapter 1 introduces those of their approaches which are relevant to the succeeding chapters. Chapters 2 and 3 present the application of the

approaches to three works from Oliphant's Carlingford series, Miss Marjoribanks, The Perpetual Curate, and The Doctor's Family. The engagement scenes in particular are used to demonstrate the conflicting interpellations of women which inform much of Oliphant's writing. Chapter 4 is a study, in these same terms, of Oliphant's autobiography. Finally, Chapter 5 turns to the arena of publishing, where ideology can be seen to work not only through the author's words, but through the publishing process itself. This is demonstrated with a close study of the publication process of Miss Marjoribanks and a consideration of the letters which passed between Mrs. Oliphant and her publisher at the time prior to and around its publication.

Chapter 1

Theoretical Framework and Thesis Overview

Mrs. Margaret Oliphant was one of Victorian England's most prolific and popular writers. She was born in 1828, died in 1897, and between her seventeenth year and her death she wrote over 90 novels, 25 non-fiction works, and hundreds of articles, mainly for Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine. The five-year period between 1862 and 1866 is typical of the ceaseless flow of her writing: she produced five of her "Chronicles of Carlingford" (many of which will be discussed in this thesis) along with two other novels, a biography of Edward Irving, and a translation of Montalembert's Monks of the West. Between writing these full-length works she produced her usual flow of articles, which covered topics as varied as theology, science, art, poetry, criticism, travel, and history (Williams 23).

Francis Russell Hart, author of The Scottish Novel from Smollett to Spark, calls Mrs. Oliphant Victorian Scotland's "most talented and tireless novelist" (93), but this high praise is unusual among what little modern criticism there is on this author whose work was forgotten soon after she died. In a reference book on British literary magazines, the section on Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine points to works by famous writers published in "Maga" (as it was called) and calls the other works appearing in its pages "novels by authors best forgotten" (Sullivan 45). Mrs. Oliphant's

seventeen novels published serially in that journal would naturally be included in this flippant dismissal.

When not dismissive, criticism of Mrs. Oliphant's work tends to be apologetic. Dissatisfied with her writing from the point of view of standard literary criticism, those disposed to like her work in a qualified way excuse her "faults" by turning to the trials of her personal life. From an early age Mrs. Oliphant had to support her three (later two) children and her alcoholic brother. Later, upon the illness of her other brother and the death of his wife, she had added to her burdens two of her nieces and her nephew, as well as the costs of supporting her young relation, Annie Coghill, who came to live with her. Mrs. Oliphant struggled constantly to maintain a high standard of living for all of these relations, most of whom died (the exceptions being her two nieces and Annie) before she herself died, a source of great bitterness and sorrow to her. On the grounds of these demands and trials, critics tend to pardon, if not overlook, Mrs. Oliphant's "weaknesses." In A Literature of Their Own, Elaine Showalter comments on "the poverty of her art," saying that

Mrs. Oliphant . . . fought a never-ending battle against bankruptcy . . . She lived in perpetual bondage to a string of publishers, selling ideas for books she had not begun to write, and writing books she never cared for, simply to stay ahead.
(47)

This is an echo of Virginia Woolf's words in Three Guineas:

Mrs. Oliphant sold her brain, her very admirable brain, prostituted her culture and enslaved her intellectual liberty in order that she might earn her living and educate her children. (166)

This "prostitution" and "enslavement" took the form of sensationalism, which all critics agree harms her work, and obscures both the quality of realism and her focus on human dilemmas of faith and love:

At least some of Mrs. Oliphant's badness, the resort to popular sentiment about mothers and religion, conventionally plotted intrigue, and sensationalism, can be put down to financial calculation. (Cunningham 232)

This approach to Mrs. Oliphant's writing leads, naturally enough, to much speculation as to whether, under more ideal circumstances, she would have been capable of finer work, comparable to that of her contemporary, George Eliot. Critics try to imagine the extent to which the quality of her work was harmed by the need for cash.

Robert and Vineta Colby, authors of a critical biography of Mrs. Oliphant, tend to take this same tone of sympathetic forgiveness, but add to it their own theory that in the Carlingford series at least, Mrs. Oliphant verges on greatness because of her sensitive treatment of religious conscience and persuasion, as she considers High and Low Anglicans, dissenters, curates, rectors, deacons, clerks, fanatics, and so on, and their moral dilemmas. To their own disappointment, the Colbys are forced to admit that

sensationalism mars the realism that they seek as the most coveted stamp of great Literature.

I will take none of these most common approaches. To judge the intrinsic "quality" (or lack thereof) in Mrs. Oliphant's work is something that has already been done, to the detriment of her reputation, and to no productive end. To excuse her in light of her difficult life presumes a fault to excuse, a fault identified by traditional critical approaches. To consider her work in terms of any theme of subjective debate or experience (such as religious or moral compunction), or in the light of how it succeeds or fails as realism, is to doom it to failure and obscurity.

It is not my objective to "rescue" Mrs. Oliphant's writing from critics who have "misunderstood" her, for, within the limits of their perspective, they understood her perfectly. I do not claim that her works deserve a place in the Great Tradition on its own terms. Rather, I would suggest that, on different terms, those suggested by current literary theory, the work (particularly the fiction, in this analysis) of Mrs. Oliphant can be re-opened for interpretation.

As Catherine Belsey says, a new critical practice "finds in the literary work a new object of intelligibility: it produces the text" (Critical Practice 129). It is my objective to "produce" Mrs. Oliphant's work from the perspective of the critical practices suggested in the writings of Terry Eagleton and Catherine Belsey, practices

which draw on Althusserian marxism, feminism, Lacanian psychoanalysis, and deconstruction.

In The Act of Reading, Wolfgang Iser addresses himself to the problem of how the same text comes to be understood in different ways in different periods. He implicitly problematizes the notion that true literature has a timeless essence which is perceived equally by sensitive readers in all times when he says that "the meaning of a literary text is not a definable entity but, if anything, a dynamic happening" (22). If it is dynamic, it is because one can approach the texts over and over, with new discourses, new ways of reading. These ways are not infinite; Eagleton says that the literary text

may be said to produce its own consumption--not that it dictates a single sense to the reader, but that it generates a field of possible readings which, within the conjuncture of the reader's ideological matrix and its own, is necessarily finite. (Criticism and Ideology 167)

Given, then, that my own "ideological matrix" is finite, I can only change the types of meanings which have come to be taken for granted by applying current forms of knowledge, and in doing so, produce meanings unavailable to Mrs. Oliphant and her contemporaries. I do this not to offer up the "correct" readings of some of Mrs. Oliphant's works, but to offer examples of how ideology works, how it produces within itself the possibility of resistance to it, and how recognizing ideology (without necessarily being able to escape it) allows for change.

Effective criticism cannot offer timelessness as its standard, for the very concept of timelessness denies change, endorses an endless stagnation of social relations, human understanding, political engagement, ultimately becoming a guardian of the status quo. It is the possibility for change emphasized by new critical approaches which makes such approaches valid. In the readings of Mrs. Oliphant's writings which follow, with their emphases on ideology and feminism, I hope to present a convincing case both for changing readings and approaches, and, more importantly, for changing practices.

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In an important essay, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," Louis Althusser introduced a new way of understanding "ideology." He does not use the term to signify "the body of ideas reflecting the social needs and aspirations of an individual, group, class, or culture" (Houghton Mifflin Dictionary 654) but "a 'representation' of the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence" (162). In other words, he replaces the notion that there is a one-to-one relationship between reality and representation, in which representation "captures" or "reflects" reality, with the notion that all representation is always mediated by the interests of the social class owning the means of production. This is not to say that all representation is

propaganda, but that it offers particular, limited, and interested ways of understanding reality. Literary texts, then, do not reflect ideology so much as act as "a certain production of ideology" (Eagleton, Criticism and Ideology 64). Writing is one of the material practices through which ideology is produced, and through which certain imaginary relations to the real are constructed. As Terry Eagleton says, "the imaginary London of Bleak House exists as the product of a representational process which signifies, not 'Victorian England' as such, but certain of Victorian England's ways of signifying itself" (Criticism and Ideology 77)..

Certain discourses are available to people at any given time, and it is from these, from what is already familiar, that the ways in which people signify themselves are drawn. Belsey says that literary criticism

constructs its signifieds out of juxtapositions of signifiers which are intelligible not as direct reflections of an unmediated reality but because we are familiar with the signifying systems from which they are drawn, linguistic, literary, semiotic. (Criticism and Ideology 49)

These signifiers are "already saturated with certain ideological modes of perception, certain codified ways of interpreting reality," (Eagleton, Marxism and Literary Criticism 26-27), and to this extent the author's "choices" are already circumscribed by ideology. For Mrs. Oliphant, the contradictory discourses of femininity and domesticity, on the one hand, and individuality on the other, were among those from which she could choose. The discourse of feminism

as we know it, was not available, although feminist issues and leanings reveal themselves unexpectedly in her work.

But literature does more than reproduce the discursively familiar. It also naturalizes it. What Roland Barthes says of myth is equally true of ideology. Myth, he says,

transforms history into nature . . . what causes mythical speech to be uttered is perfectly explicit, but it is immediately frozen into something natural; it is not read as a motive, but as reason. (129)

Naturalization is largely done by presenting the debatable as obvious, and through the suppression of the contradictory and ambiguous. Iser, although not a post-structuralist critic, sees this when he says: "the harmonization and eventual removal of ambiguities--this is the unacknowledged debt of New Criticism to the classical norm of interpretation" (The Act of Reading 15). The realist fiction of Victorian England (the novels of Dickens, Gaskell, Eliot, for example), rarely foregrounds its contradictions. Its movement is towards closure, the denouement, where all the knots are untied, all meanings made clear to all readers and characters; readers are rarely left to face unresolved contradictions (as in, say, Brechtian theatre). The contradictions are always there, though. They are part of ideology, but pushed aside, relegated to what modern critics love to call "the margins of the text."

In spite of the process of naturalization and of the marginalization of contradiction, however, ideology can be

discerned. It is not always invisible, as it ideally would be. The very presence of contradiction, ambiguity, omissions, transgressions, and inconsistencies, however much suppressed, "ensures that it is always possible, with whatever difficulty, to identify them, to recognize ideology for what it is" (Belsey, Critical Practice 45-46). The contradictions arise when ideologies are confronted with "what they occlude-- history itself" (Eagleton, Criticism and Ideology 95). Thus ideology is not seamless. Its very production

puts the ideology into contradiction, discloses the limits and absences which mark its relation to history, and in doing so puts itself into question, producing a lack and disorder within itself. (Eagleton, Criticism and Ideology 95)

Ideology is put into contradiction when it is forced to recognize its own historical origins, when it has to face that it is not part of an eternal "nature" but of history. This happens when it meets what Eagleton calls a "rival sibling." Ideology,

in discerning the moment when its rival emerged from the womb of history, is thereby constrained to acknowledge itself as the offspring of the same parent. (Eagleton, Criticism and Ideology 96)

The significance of a work, current criticism argues, lies in producing the different meanings which the act of recognizing and transforming ideology allows. Rather than seeking for unity and producing unified, limited, meanings, one can look for the plural meanings which the text produces.

Because the various meanings collide, the text comes to be no less than a criticism of its own ideology. Thus on one level it can be complicit with ideology, naturalizing the constructed, offering ways of understanding and living the real which are not necessarily "reflections" of the real, and on another level it can be shown to undermine the very ideology which it sets out to re-produce.

The contradictions in Mrs. Oliphant's fictional works and her autobiography prevent her from "representing" the world in consistent terms, even to the point where traditional critics throw up their hands in despair, pointing to the "flaws" of structure and theme which mar her writing, and detract from its realism. But it is these very contradictions which make her writing fascinating from the perspective of understanding and transforming ideology. If there is a failure in her works, it is a failure to make intention transparent, to smooth over conflicting discourses, not a failure to reproduce Victorian England "as it really was."

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In The Subject of Tragedy, Catherine Belsey locates the seventeenth century as a period in which the subject, "the destination of meaning" (5), (also the source of knowledge, meaning, and action), is in conflict with the discontinuous, fragmented subject of the sixteenth century and earlier. The

subject of the morality plays was clearly not in control, as he was buffeted from redemption to transgression and back again, hardly speaking at all; he was only an empty shell filled alternately with vice and virtue. She argues that in the seventeenth century, the modern subject had not yet established itself. The modern subject comes into being with the rise of liberal humanism, which is

the ruling assumptions, values, and meanings of the modern epoch. Liberal humanism, laying claim to be both natural and universal, was produced in the interests of the bourgeois class which came to power in the second half of the seventeenth century. (Belsey, The Subject of Tragedy 7)

What she demonstrates most strikingly is that the subject as the unified source of meaning, the "obvious" way to understand subjectivity, has not always been obvious at all. To people of the Renaissance, the subject was not in control, not unified in any sense. By bringing into question the inevitability of modern subjectivity, Belsey makes it possible to question the basis of a literary criticism which posits unity of character and effect as (naturally) the highest form of achievement in writing.

Ideology, Althusser tells us, interpellates (or hails) individuals as subjects (170), the subjects of liberal humanism, unified, autonomous centres of consciousness. Literature is part of the cultural "Ideological State Apparatuses" (ISAs) which produce and re-produce ideology. Thus literature participates in ideology, and it too constructs subjects: "Every text obliquely posits a putative

reader" (Eagleton, Criticism and Ideology 48), and this is nowhere more so than in the Victorian realist novel which "interpellates the reader, addresses itself to him or her directly, offering the reader as the position from which the text is most 'obviously' intelligible" (Belsey, Critical Practice 57). In Victorian fiction, threats to the subjectivity of the characters take the form of self-doubt or crises of faith; the character does not know how to view him/herself as a unified subject, and s/he is hemmed in by uncertainty and instability. Unless a strong narrative voice directs the reader's perspective and provides the missing unity, the reader may feel the threat of disruption along with the the character. But Victorian fiction also eventually relieves this discomfort of threatened subjectivity through closure, which reinstates a new order. The novel's ending banishes the hint of danger when it explicitly establishes the (fixed) position each character will adopt from that point on.

There are moments in Mrs. Oliphant's work, however, when the "obviousness" of the position to be adopted is disrupted. Emile Benveniste identifies three types of discourses: declarative, imperative, and interrogative. Catherine Belsey uses these terms to distinguish three kinds of texts in an effort to show that "not all texts are classic realist texts, smoothing over contradiction in the construction of a position for the reader which is unified and knowing" (Critical Practice 90). The last of the three types, the

interrogative text, "disrupts the unity of the reader by discouraging identification with a unified subject" (Belsey, Critical Practice 91), while the first two offer readers knowledge from a unified position which has the effect of stabilizing them as subjects.

A play by Beckett would fit in the interrogative category; a novel by Mrs. Oliphant would fit in the declarative one. And yet, and in spite of itself, there are moments when Mrs. Oliphant's writing, far as it is from Beckett's, becomes interrogative. In Eagleton's terms, there are points at which ideologies, meeting their "sibling rivals," produce contradictions which disrupt the text. Insofar as the text is declarative, these disruptions are accidental and undesirable, and produce the unsettling effect of the interrogative text. (Some of these contradictions will be discussed in the following chapters).

In the texts I have chosen to discuss, closure in marriage discourages the reader from answering questions posed by the text (an interrogative text would invite such questioning). In spite of this, Oliphant's books do often display some other elements of the interrogative text. The interrogative text will

employ devices to undermine the illusion, to draw attention to its own textuality. The reader is distanced, at least from time to time, rather than wholly interpolated into a fictional world.
(Belsey, Critical Practice 92)

Mrs. Oliphant frequently draws attention to her work's textuality through the same sort of self-reflexive writing that critics either love or despise (depending on whether they valorize the declarative or the interrogative text) in writings such as those of Fielding. Like his references to the "constructedness" of his text, Mrs. Oliphant's references to the act of writing fiction have the effect of jarring (and I don't use this term pejoratively) the illusion of reality which normally reigns in realist fiction. One can no longer imagine that words are a tool for displaying a pre-existing essence. Rather one is forced to confront their complicity in determining the real.

These moments of fiction about fiction appear, for instance, in the opening pages of Miss Marjoribanks, when, on the death of her mother, Lucilla, the novel's heroine, plans to be her father's comfort in his bereavement "as so many young persons of her age have been known to become in literature" (1: 3). In Innocent, a Tale of Modern Life, Innocent's young cousin objects strenuously to Innocent's marriage to an old, wealthy bachelor, saying, "He has old ways of thinking, old habits; in short, he is the sort of thing one reads about in novels. Such things don't happen in real life" (301). In The Perpetual Curate, the concluding pages have an accumulation of reminders of the work's textuality from the lips of the spiteful aunt of Frank Wentworth. She cannot accept that her nephew has succeeded in becoming a Rector without her patronage, and is unable to

join in whole-heartedly in the spirit of celebration pervading the novel's conclusion.

'How a young man like you, who know how to conduct yourself in some things, and have, I don't deny, many good qualities, can give in to come to an ending like a trashy novel, is more than I can understand. You are fit to be put in a book of the Good-child series, Frank, as an illustration of the reward of virtue,' said the strong-minded woman, with a little snort of scorn; 'and of course, you are going to marry and live happy ever after, like a fairy tale.' (3: 286-87)

Two pages later this sentiment is repeated:

Poetic justice . . . I don't believe in that kind of rubbish . . . I don't approve of a man ending off neatly like a novel in this sort of ridiculous way. (3: 289)

In each of these instances the reader is likely to think "but this is a novel," and as soon as this thought is formed, the illusion of reality disintegrates. And each time this happens, the text becomes the demanding, "writerly," interrogative text, unsettling the reader's expectations and forcing a type of engagement with the text which is other than that of passive consumption.

In these disruptive moments of metafiction, the reader is denied the comfortable position of sitting outside the narrative and seeing the represented world pass before him/her in a recognizable discourse which positions the reader as an eye with a unified and unifying perspective. Subjectivity itself is disrupted when the text becomes interrogative.

For women, subjectivity is more problematic than it is for men, for as liberal humanist subjects, women ought to be autonomous, independent. As wives and mothers in the subject positions offered to Victorian women, however, they ought to be dependent and obedient. This contradiction is not one that has gone unnoticed. Terry Eagleton points to it in Criticism and Ideology when he speaks of George Eliot's unique position as a Victorian woman: "elements of sexual ideology, which both reinforce the drive to individual emancipation and ratify the 'feminine' values (compassion, tolerance, passivity, resignation)" are some of the elements of that position (112). Mrs. Oliphant would most certainly have participated in these two discourses. As one of the main contributors to a magazine which was, according to Alvin Sullivan in British Literary Magazines, extremely conservative, she would most certainly have taken part in the "humanist discourse of freedom, self-determination, and rationality" (Belsey, Critical Practice 65). As a mother figure to several children and nephews and nieces, she would most certainly have recognized herself in the interpellations of the discourses of motherhood and femininity. When these discourses hail the naturally nurturing, retiring, tender mother, she would most naturally respond as the one hailed. Between these two interpellations she would be torn:

The attempt to locate a single and coherent subject-position within these contradictory discourses, and in consequence to find a non-contradictory pattern of behaviour, can create

intolerable pressures. (Belsey, Critical Practice 65-66)

It seems to me that the writing of Mrs. Oliphant displays this particular conflict in spite of efforts to banish it to the margins. Merryn Williams, a recent biographer of Mrs. Oliphant, says that

the author disliked ending her novels in the traditional way, with a marriage. Sometimes they end with the break-up of a marriage (A Country Gentleman and his Family), or an imperfect marriage (A Son of the Soil), or no marriage (Kirsteen). She always, when she could, avoided the stock situation. (54)

To say that Mrs. Oliphant "dislikes" stock endings is to take the author's (unified) subjectivity as the final guarantee of understanding the text, which, as Foucault has shown in What is an Author is ultimately no more than a way of limiting the readings of a text to one, final, authoritative reading.

The author serves to neutralize the contradictions that may emerge in a series of texts: there must be . . . a point where contradictions are resolved . . . the author allows a limitation of the cancerous and dangerous proliferation of signification within a world where one is thrifty not only with one's resources and riches, but also with one's discourses and their significations. The author is the principle of thrift in the proliferation of meaning. (151, 159)

The author's likes, dislikes, and intentions are invoked to dispel the contradiction which threatens the text.

Nonetheless, it is precisely Mrs. Oliphant's ambivalent attitude to marriage identified by Williams which drew my attention to the conflicting discourses, and hence, the

instability of subjectivity, which runs through her work. Mrs. Oliphant's early non-fiction writing on the feminist movement and on women in general, and even some of her fiction, tends to show her complicity with the reigning ideology of femininity. But her complicity is disrupted by both her way of life (as bread-winner and business woman) and by the discourse of individual self-determination which appears in most of her fiction. Between offering contradictory subject positions to her readers and failing to efface those contradictions, Mrs. Oliphant produced texts which can now be re-opened for new readings, eminently available to new interpretation. In an effort to produce some of these new interpretations, I turn to a few of Mrs. Oliphant's numerous texts: chapters 2 and 3 of this thesis are a consideration of The Perpetual Curate, Miss Marjoribanks, and The Doctor's Family, in terms of the rival ideologies which, within their pages, cannot be effaced when they meet.

Just as Mrs. Oliphant offered conflicting interpellations to her reading subjects, so she, too, was the subject of conflicting interpellations. As a woman, a wife, a mother, she was the subject of the discourses of femininity; as a labourer, a writer, a shrewd business person, a public person, she was the subject of a very different set of discourses. Her life was a battleground of opposing ideologies, and this becomes apparent in her biography, which is short, disjointed, and full of

conflicting sentiments. Her position as woman writer, her biography, and their relationship to ideology are the subject of chapter 4.

The mode of production is also important in determining the interpellations of the subject. The imperatives of capitalizing on a new mass market and an extended audience, financial dependence on her publisher, and the rigid requirements of serial and triple-decker publication, determined much more than the form Mrs. Oliphant's works took. They reached into the heart of her work, demanding ideological and structural complicity. Chapter 5 is a consideration of the role of publication in Mrs. Oliphant's work; it demonstrates how ideology works on and out of her pen. As the texts are largely determined by forces beyond the "genius" of Mrs. Oliphant, chapter 5 also has the effect of problematizing the notion of unified subjectivity which the theory of the "creative imagination" implies. Finally, this chapter considers the bearing of gender on the publishing arena. It points once more to the conflicting interpellations of women and individuals. As a writer Mrs. Oliphant was a labourer who was given the (then) rare opportunity of struggling for the surplus value her work produced; she haggled with her publisher. As a woman she had to efface this highly unfeminine behaviour, so the correspondence in which she haggled was, like her novels and autobiography, riven with conflicting discourses.

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As should be apparent by now, this thesis is not simply a study of the life and writing of Mrs. Oliphant: it is a study, more exactly, of ideology and subjectivity as they function in Mrs. Oliphant's writings and writing process, and it is especially a study of how ideology and subjectivity function in relation to women.

Chapter 2

Women and Marriage in The Perpetual Curate and Miss Marjoribanks

In A Literature of Their Own, Elaine Showalter divides women writers into three main categories, namely the "feminine" (the writer internalizes social norms), the "feminist" (she protests, advocates minority rights), and the "female" (her aim is self-discovery--she searches for identity) (13). Without hesitation, Showalter slots Mrs. Oliphant into her first category, arguing that Mrs. Oliphant's characters do not take their fates into their own hands. When describing Lady Car, a novel written in 1889, Showalter says that

the last drops of sympathy are ruthlessly extracted for the mother's loneliness and disillusion. It never occurs to Mrs. Oliphant that anything but fate and genetics is to blame. She implicitly accepts the idea that the bliss of motherhood is a right that Lady Car has been cheated of, and she does not consider whether Lady Car has been mistaken in her expectations that motherhood will compensate for the weakness of her personality.
(179)

She goes on to say that "Mrs. Oliphant never faced the dangers of a social myth that places the whole weight of feminine fulfillment on husband and children."

It seems to me, however, that portraying marriage and motherhood in unenthusiastic, ambivalent, or even derogatory terms is in itself a subversion of the reigning interpellation of women as naturally maternal, naturally at peace in the domestic setting. If Mrs. Oliphant's novels

concluded, as many another Victorian novel did, in idealistic confirmations of romantic love, one might agree that she had internalized reigning norms, the dominant ideology. But more often than not she does not do this--she will go beyond the engagement, into the disappointments of marriage and maternity and aging, as in Lady Car. Or, if her novel does end with an engagement, then certain textual gaps, silences and inconsistencies reveal an ambivalence which makes the novel's "crowning" event, the engagement, bittersweet and ironic rather than joyful and simple.

The Perpetual Curate, for example, concludes with the engagement of the novel's lovers, Lucy Wodehouse and Frank Wentworth, and with Frank's promotion from Perpetual Curate to Rector of Carlingford. The ending is pure romance; the couple is young, virtuous, attractive, and in love. The promotion promises a bright future, and the denouement seems unmixed with any fears or concerns.

The text, however, has also produced a narrative whose effect is to undermine the flawless love story. This narrative involves Mr. Morgan, the Rector who precedes Wentworth, and his wife. These two are clearly parallel to Frank and Lucy, for they, too, were engaged, full of love and hope. Unlike Frank and Lucy, they were married after ten years of waiting and planning. Their relationship after marriage forms one of the novel's sub-plots. In it, we see Mrs. Morgan's disillusionment with her husband, who she discovers to be petty and small-minded rather than grand and

wise. At the beginning of the novel, Mrs. Morgan is young and idealistic, wife of the Rector of Carlingford, taking over the new Rectory, full of dreams and projects. At the novel's end, Lucy is in precisely the same position. One cannot help but wonder whether she will tread the same path of disillusionment and disappointment that her predecessor trod.

Initially one might think not, because Lucy and Frank are clearly morally superior to the Morgans. And yet, in the novel's closing pages, even its closing paragraph, there are hints that their marriage and lives could run a parallel course. Lucy, for instance, uses techniques of withdrawal (she sews or knits frantically, refuses to meet Frank's eyes) to manipulate her husband-to-be; these are precisely the same techniques Mrs. Morgan uses to manipulate her husband. And Frank, in the book's closing sentences, seems to be adopting Morgan's proprietary attitude to his new Parish, the very attitude which made Morgan an unsympathetic Rector and a disappointing husband. These parallels are present in the text, causing the novel's romantic closure to be mildly unsettled.

If Showalter were to take into consideration the "operations of the marketplace" (12) as she initially proposes, she might consider Mrs. Oliphant's financial dependents, her need for income, the economic advantages of ideological complicity, and the constrictions of publication, which worked together to produce those internalizations of social norms which in turn produce "feminine" writing. Then

she might wonder at the extent to which Mrs. Oliphant de-stabilized that ideological complicity.

The extent to which she disrupted standard interpellations of the Victorian audience (whether intentionally or not is unimportant) becomes even more apparent in Miss Marjoribanks and The Doctor's Family, where textual gaps and contradictions are much more intrusive. This and the following chapter will be devoted to a more detailed study of these texts respectively. In these texts, gaps take the form of unspoken or half-spoken engagements which are not quite joyful, and which therefore have no place in the dominant discourses of love and marriage in Victorian realist fiction.

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Miss Marjoribanks, one of the "Chronicles of Carlingford," published in 1866, opens with a lovely parody of the traditional Victorian heroine who sacrifices herself for the good of the ruling man in her life. Margaret Hale of Mrs. Gaskell's North and South is a perfect example of this type of heroine: she is a young woman who nurtures her father when her mother's health fails, supports her brother when he is in trouble with the law, and bears all the burdens of a disrupted family life. Miss Marjoribanks, at the age of fifteen, comes home upon the death of her mother, prepared to devote her life to her father: "for in such a case as hers,

it was evidently the duty of an only child to devote herself to her father's comfort, and become the sunshine of his life" (1: 3). However it quickly becomes clear that Lucilla Marjoribanks's high intentions are not as selfless as those of her fictional counterparts, because her concern for her father's comfort is not unmixed with dreams of her own enhanced position in society and all the attention that her position as "martyr" might bring:

Thus, between the outbreaks of her tears for her mother, it became apparent to her that she must sacrifice her own feelings, and make a cheerful home for papa, and that a great many changes would be necessary in the household--changes which went so far as even to extend to the furniture. Miss Marjoribanks sketched to herself . . . how she would wind herself up to the duty of presiding at her papa's dinner parties, and charming everybody by her good humour, and brightness, and devotion to his comfort; and how, when it was all over, she would withdraw and cry her eyes out in her own room, and be found in the morning languid and worn-out, but always heroical, ready to go down-stairs and assist at dear papa's breakfast, and keep up her smiles for him till he had gone out to his patients. (1: 3)

Her father is not quite as imaginative as Lucilla, and disillusions his daughter by sending her back to school. When she returns from the continent four years later, she assures everyone in Carlingford (where she plans to reform polite society), that her "great aim in life is to be a comfort to dear papa." This sentiment is repeated, between Lucilla and the narrator, at least fifty times in the course of the novel, and is humorously juxtaposed with the imagery of

sovereignty which is used to depict her real position in her father's home and in Carlingford:

But it was only next morning that the young sovereign gave any intimation of her future policy . . . it was only in the morning that Lucilla unfolded her standard . . . The Doctor said nothing but "Humph!" and even that in an under-tone; but he became aware all the same that he had abdicated, without knowing it, and that the reins of state had been smilingly withdrawn from his unconscious hands. (l: 47-49)

Miss Marjoribanks's coup is made palatable to her father because he finds her to be a source of amusement, and because Lucilla rules her new kingdom with humour and intelligence, and so he settles down under the new reign.

In all of this, and in much of what follows, one can read an incipient feminism, a rejection of those "naturally" feminine traits which are valorized in much Victorian literature. Lucilla appears as virtuous (kind hearted and proper) and feminine (content to make home her focus, eager to marry) like many another Victorian heroine (although she is quite fat, a detail which tends to make her a parody of the ideal). Despite this, she is in a constant bid for control of things which reach well beyond the hearth. Her influence and activities range from throwing parties and arranging matches to supporting and successfully bringing to office local political candidates and setting up schools for needy children. If her motives can be read as "feminine" (her ultimate goal and ulterior motive in all she does is to make a good match), they can also be read as "masculine" for

whatever she does, she seeks power: the "evenings" are planned and controlled by Lucilla, the matches are arranged through vigorous manipulation, her school is hers to direct, and her admiring political candidate wins the election because of the sharp intelligence she brings to bear on his campaign and the power she exerts over him in ensuring that he follows her advice.

In fact, Miss Marjoribanks's behaviour and her motives, which are frequently juxtaposed to humorous effect, embody the contradiction between individualism and the feminine ideal. There are varying distances between what Lucilla says and what she does, however, and it is here that the text's discomfort with itself, fruit of the tensions caused by the conflicting ideologies, becomes most obvious. Lucilla's claim that her only desire is "to be a comfort to dear papa" is undermined by the narrator's implication that her goals are more selfish. This forms a hypocrisy, gentle and harmless enough, yet which is too harsh for Victorian readers, interpellated, as they so often are, as "gentle readers." The notions of self-effacement and self-sacrifice are delicately satirized from the beginning of Miss Marjoribanks to the end, through the endearing but headstrong manipulations of Lucilla, and it is this combination of satire on the part of the author and hypocrisy on the part of the heroine which Mr. Blackwood, the publisher of "Maga" and the Carlingford series, identified as a "hardness of tone" in the novel, and which he asked her to modify (Colby 63-64).

Writing almost a century later, Robert and Vineta Colby seem to side with Blackwood, for they say that

the smug, self-centred, self-righteous heroine was not appealing or attractive enough to hold [the Victorian readers'] attention through three volumes . . . We find a relentlessly satirical character sketch of a female egoist. (65)

The offensive tone could have been amended, for the magazine serial mode of periodical publication allowed for a unique type of communication between reader and writer. The audience could express their responses and hopes as the work was in process. In materialist terms, this type of production,

by allowing the bourgeois audience's ideological engagement to be sensed and expanded, allows as well the extraction of even greater surplus value from the production (or "creative") process itself. (Feltes 9)

In asking Mrs. Oliphant to soften her tone, Blackwood had "sensed" the audience's engagement and was encouraging her to "expand" upon it. Unexpectedly, she does not. "Unexpectedly" because it is surprising that she would make no concessions when the popularity and sales of her writing were at stake. Her biographers and critics have long maintained that Mrs. Oliphant had no literary scruples when extra cash was an issue. In Everywhere Spoken Against, Valentine Cunningham says that the "resort to kitsch factors of sensationalism, conventional plotting, and so on, as guarantors of popular esteem comes with curious readiness" to Mrs. Oliphant (233).

And indeed, in her critical writing, she often disparaged the sensational fiction which she would then produce. Her own literary standards rarely kept her from producing what she hoped would be, above, all, lucrative work.

In spite of this, Mrs. Oliphant responded to Blackwood's request by refusing to alter the nature of her heroine:

As for what you say of hardness of tone, I am afraid it was scarcely to be avoided. I hate myself the cold-blooded school of novel writing, in which one works out a character without the slightest regard to whether it is 'good or bad, or whether it teaches or revolts one's sympathies. But at the same time I have a weakness for Lucilla, and to bring a sudden change upon her character and break her down into tenderness would be like one of Dickens's maudlin repentences . . . Miss M. must be one and indivisible, and I feel pretty sure that my plan is right. (204-205)

There are three things of particular interest in this response by Mrs. Oliphant. The first I have already mentioned, namely the fact of a refusal. The second is that she makes what is (for her) an unexpected plea for artistic coherence. Her sudden emphasis on "indivisibility" in her heroine is not in keeping with her habitual writing practices. In The Perpetual Curate, for instance, the novel's heroine, Lucy Wodehouse, moves inexplicably from a petty, ill-founded jealousy, to an unqualified support of her lover. The only apparent reason for this is that it facilitates a hasty expedition of their romance when space is running out--indivisibility has no place here. Finally, using the words "break her down into tenderness" reveal an ambivalent attitude to the tenderness which was offered as the natural

state of mind of all good women. Tenderness is ignobly described if it is something which one must be "broken down" into! Her position vis a vis femininity would be more consistent were she to refuse "to raise her up" to tenderness in the name of character coherence.

Thus the unified (indivisible) subject of liberal humanism is invoked by Mrs. Oliphant to preserve her heroine's integrity, an integrity which embodies a contradiction that Mrs. Oliphant cannot bring herself to marginalize. Whether intentionally or not, she does not offer a single, comforting way of viewing Lucilla, who is neither purely feminine nor purely masculine. Miss Marjoribanks moves uncomfortably between the two, between philanthropy and self-indulgence, between sacrifice and gratification. As a result, the audience is never quite comfortable, never in a position to feel that all is as it should be, that all represented ways of living are the familiar ones offered in discourse and that a recognizable order reigns.

This instability is carried through to the last pages of the novel, where Lucilla, having "failed" in her marital ambitions after ten years of "evenings" and whose girth is witness to the passage of time, is proposed to twice. Her wealthy political candidate, grateful for his victory, sees the use of an intelligent, competent wife, and goes down on his knee. Within the hour, her cousin, who had proposed to and been rejected by her at the beginning of her "career" in Carlingford, rushes in after his return from India and

insists that she accept him. Lucilla does not make the "sensible" choice and accept the man who would be the natural culmination of her ambitious career. Instead, and rather to her own surprise, she loses her self-possession and, in a moment of emotion which is uncharacteristic, accepts her cousin.

In the engagement scene, Mrs. Oliphant fails to keep Lucilla's character "one and indivisible." Compelled to introduce the type of comic ending the market demanded and which has no place in Lucilla's no-nonsense, calculating character, Mrs. Oliphant stages the engagement scene so that Lucilla loses control. In short, it is another woman, nothing like Lucilla, who accepts Tom:

Miss Marjoribanks had come through many a social crisis with dignity and composure. She had never yet been known to fail in an emergency . . . But now . . . all Lucilla's powers seemed to fail her . . . She broke down just at the moment when she had most need to have all her wits about her . . . The fact was that Lucilla relinquished her superior position for the time being and suffered him to make any assertion he pleased, and was so weak as to cry . . . which, of all things in the world, was surely the last thing to have been expected of Miss Marjoribanks at the moment which decided her fate.
(3: 254-255)

This unprecedented collapse is preceded two pages earlier by a strong statement of independence: "'I am not going to be tyrannised over like this,' said Lucilla, with indignation, again rising, though he still held her hands" (3: 252) and is followed on the next page by her immediate retrieval of her "superior position":

As for Lucilla, her self-possession gradually came back to her when the crisis was over, and she felt that her involuntary abdication had lasted long enough, and it was full time to take the management of affairs back into her own hands . . . The moment of his supremacy was over. It was to be Tom after all; but Lucilla had recovered her self-possession, and taken the helm into her hand again, and Tom was master of the situation no more. (3: 256-57)

In a novel verging on nine hundred pages, in which the heroine is consistently dominant (although "feminine" in the ways discussed earlier), this "abdication" (which plays again on the notion of Lucilla as a sovereign) is uncomfortable. The author's discomfort is apparent in her frequent references to her surprise at Lucilla's behaviour (see page 31) and in statements such as the following: "It is hard to wind up with such a confession [i.e. that Lucilla "broke down"] after having so long entertained a confidence in Lucilla which nothing seemed likely to impair" (3:254).

In a concession to the demand for romance, Mrs. Oliphant supplies a scene in which Miss Marjoribanks's natural inclination towards her cousin (barely developed in the novel) is suddenly given the form of an emotion which forces her to lose her composure. But the terms of her engagement, the fact that she "broke down" and cried, that she had to be other than herself in order to enter into this bond, coupled with the sparse references to affection (not to mention love) give the reader of these few pages of "romance" a rather uncertain, unexpected, way of understanding love. They might expect an ending as appropriate as that of Mrs. Gaskell's

North and South, where the heroine, in the novel's final pages, also overcome by emotion:

turned her face, still covered with her small white hands, towards him, and laid it on his shoulder, hiding it ever there. . . At length she murmured in a broken voice: 'Oh, Mr. Thornton, I am not good enough!' (529)

An attempt to display an essentially "feminine" nature in Miss Marjoribanks (impulsive, romantic, yielding) is uncomfortably given, then quickly withdrawn, a "failure" next to Mrs. Gaskell's seamless closure.

The closure in a romantic union, a requisite for Victorian popular fiction, seems inescapable, and Mrs. Oliphant responds appropriately to the demands of the form. And yet she offers, for a fleeting moment, an alternative which is revoked as quickly as it appears. This alternative, planted in the reader's mind, also has the effect of unsettling the standard closure in marriage. These seeds are sown long before Lucilla becomes engaged. In the midst of her career in Carlingford, Lucilla runs her father's house, she has access to his comfortable income and independent wealth for the financing of her "evenings" and redecorations, and she has to defer to no one, being the household sovereign. She is, in short, the envy of her married and matronly counterparts who

looked back a little wistfully at Lucilla going home all comfortable and independent and light-hearted, with no cares, nor anyone to go on at her, in her seal skin coat. (3: 68)

The standard view of the "old maid" (for Lucilla is certainly and old maid here, having reached her thirtieth birthday without receiving an acceptable proposal) as a pitiable specimen of humankind, is reversed. It is her long-suffering friends, all more or less disappointed with married life, who gaze wistfully after the "old maid" who is bound to no one. In a society where the dominant interpellations of women were as mother and wife, where to be a true woman was synonymous with matrimony and fecundity, this view of the marginal woman, (the woman who can only be identified by the absence of a man, not in relation to him) as enviable, is most unsettling.

Thus we find three sets of contradictory positions. First, Lucilla Marjoribanks is never quite purely "feminine," although her interests and the realm in which she acts them out are. Nor is she consistently "aberrant" for a woman. Even though she is self-seeking and manipulative, she is also kind-hearted, generous, intelligent, and humorous. There is no simple perspective from which to behold Lucilla. Secondly, we are faced with the contradiction between Lucilla's enviable position as an unmarried woman and her unflagging search for a husband, a contradiction which is echoed and expanded in the noticeable tension created between the call for romantic closure and a certain ambivalence to the marriage which forms that closure. Finally, all of these are part of the same inescapable contradiction of the competing ideologies of individuality and femininity. The conflicts

reappear again, more forcibly, in The Doctor's Family, a novella written at about the same time as part of the Carlingford series.

Chapter 3

Silences in The Doctor's Family

Victorian ideology offered as "natural" positions of power and authority for men, weakness and docility for women. That women were offered the positions of physically and intellectually weaker "others" has been well documented. Given these positions, the relationship between men and women in marriage was a relationship of dominance and subjection. Ideologically, this relationship would be presented as "natural," perhaps softened to the terms of "gentle sovereignty," and "loving obedience." But the reality of the relationship, where one side of the partnership owned and controlled the finances and could theoretically demand unqualified submission, was nonetheless one of dominance and subjection. In The Doctor's Family there comes a point when Nettie, the story's heroine, reflects on the gap between the interpellation of womankind as the natural subject of mankind, even the willing and loving subject, and what that loving submission might entail. She suspects, in the mildest terms, that the ideological representation of union might be the best part of that union. After she recognizes her attraction to Dr. Rider, her suitor, and recognizes her appreciation for his flattering attention, she pauses to enjoy her bittersweet awakening affection for him. It is bitter for what seems the impossibility of its fruition, sweet for existing at all.

The woman was better off than the man in this hour of their separation, yet union. He chafed at the consolation which was but visionary; she, perhaps, in that visionary, ineffable solacement found a happiness greater than any reality could ever give. (213)

The ambivalent attitude to women's position hinted at in this passage comes to be the most striking element in the concluding pages of The Doctor's Family.

The first chapter of The Doctor's Family, which begins: "Young Dr. Rider lived in the new quarter of Carlingford" (55) fulfills the expectations already raised by the title, namely that Dr. Rider is to be the focus of this text. And this expectation is upheld in the first few chapters, for all the story's main characters are introduced in the light of Rider's observation and understanding of them. As it progresses, however, the focus of the novel increasingly becomes its heroine, Nettie Underwood. This is partly because Rider's focus is on Nettie, but at times, and for long stretches, we do not see Nettie as Rider sees her, but as the narrator sees her. The unified pursuit of Nettie which constitutes the sum total of Rider's consciousness is of less interest than the struggles and tensions which constitute Nettie's consciousness, and so Nettie takes over in The Doctor's Family.

Dr. Rider, from his first glance at Nettie, views her in relation to himself: he pictures her in his living room, presiding over his house, and resents the demands made on Nettie which keep her from him. Nettie, however, views

herself quite differently, always in relation to a private moral code, whose main tenet is duty to her family: she never looks beyond what is, to her, unquestionably right. She does not view herself in relation to her suitor, Dr. Rider.

Nettie is more than dutiful, though. She is energetic, self-reliant, forceful, and generous. She arrives in Dr. Rider's life as the guardian of her sister, Susan, who has come to England from Australia to search out her husband, Fred, Dr. Rider's brother. Fred had married Susan, squandered the capital of her slight income, produced three children with her, then deserted her, returning to England to live off his brother, and give himself over to alcoholism. It is Nettie who has orchestrated and financed the search for Fred and who has transported her sister, nephews and niece, to England and uncovered Fred at Dr. Rider's. She relieves a grateful Dr. Rider of his brother.

It is this capable woman Dr. Rider falls in love with. She rents and runs a house in Carlingford, presides over the meals, cares for and disciplines the children: she commands everyone with perfect poise and assurance. When she forbade Fred to drink more beer, he only "stared at her with a dull red flush on his face; but he gave in, in the most inexplicable way; it seemed a matter of course to yield to Nettie" (93). Nettie also determines, almost to the end of the book, the terms of her relationship with Dr. Rider.

Dr. Rider, whose chief thoughts are generally for his own comfort, and who envisions marriage in the most abstract

terms as something which will make his living room more pleasant to return to after a hard day's work, is attracted to Nettie partly because of her self-confidence and force, and partly because of her appearance, which belies her power. Whenever Nettie is most determined and certain, and when her femininity is consequently most disputable, the reader is reminded of her petite stature. In the first paragraph in which she appears, she is called "little" three times, besides being described as "slight," "slender," "thin," and of a "lighter figure" (69-70). The qualities of determination, self-assurance, and independence which make it possible for Nettie to survive as a single woman are those characteristics least suited to the role of submissive wife, and it is to smooth over this aspect of Nettie's character that her stature and delicacy are invoked.

Like Lucilla in Miss Marjoribanks, Nettie does not answer comfortably to interpellations of her as "woman," for although she is submissive to her "duty" as nurturer, and she exerts all her efforts to preserve a family's unity, she is forceful and commanding. She is also, not insignificantly, in control of her own money. Thus she is single and independent but also, by choice and metaphorically, married, subject to her duty and to the interpellations of womankind. And so she seems to hold two subject positions. They are positions neither mutually exclusive, nor mutually complementary. They simply coexist, rubbing against each other, creating a friction which will disrupt the story by its conclusion.

The disruptions of which I speak, take three forms. The first and least significant is in the shifting characterization of Susan's and Fred's children. The second is the metaphor of abdication surrounding what should have been, according to the expectations constructed by the text, a scene of liberation. The final and most striking disruption comes with Nettie's unenthusiastic entrance into her engagement with Dr. Rider.

Susan's and Fred's children are generally characterized as rambunctious and uncontrollable. Their role, initially, is to expose their parents, who are too selfish and helpless to discipline their children properly. Fred lounges, smokes his cigars, reads his novels, and drinks, while Susan whines and complains about imaginary ailments and hardships. The children run wild. The children come to represent the chaos that results when the "natural" order of things is disrupted. The hierarchical relation between husband, wife, and children, is out of kilter and the noise and frantic activity of the children signify this.

Yet these same children are devices used to show Nettie's maternal instincts and deft authority. For Nettie the children behave perfectly. They become miraculously calm and clean under the unusual sovereignty in which Nettie rules. In the first scene in which the children appear, they quite dismay Dr. Rider, who is left alone with Susan and the children. Then Nettie arrives, orders dinner, and transforms them: "Nettie cut up the meat for those staring imps of

children--did them all up in snowy napkins--kept them silent and in order" (91). Capable of holding multiple subject positions, these children serve as an attempt to hold Nettie into a single subject position. The striking inconsistency in their personalities has the effect of undermining the unified personality they are meant to display in Nettie.

The second disruptive element in the story is Nettie's reaction to her "liberation" from Fred and his family. After more than a year as the leader of her sister's family, its supporter, mother, father, teacher, nurse, and seamstress, Nettie is suddenly relieved of her responsibility for them all. A few months after Fred drowns while on a drinking spree, Susan becomes engaged to an acquaintance from Australia. Susan proposes to return to Australia with him. Nettie's burdens are thus lifted, and she is liberated to accept Dr. Rider. But her joy is not unequivocal. She does not feel free. Rather, she feels that she has lost her position of authority, her right to direct the lives of those around her, and she experiences a sense of loss and resentment. The metaphor surrounding her displacement as head of the house is that of the abdication of royal authority, the end of her sovereignty. She is quite the opposite of Lucilla, whose coup leads her to the throne of her father's house at the beginning of Miss Marjoribanks:

Nettie's occupation was gone. For the first time in her life utterly vanquished, with silent promptitude she abdicated on the instant. She seemed unable to strike a blow for the leadership thus snatched from her hands . . . Never abdicated

emperor laid aside his robes with more ominous significance, than Nettie. (267)

This is hardly the expected tone in a novel in which the heroine is suddenly liberated from a prospective lifetime of service to a peevish and helpless sister and several ill-behaved children, liberated to marry the man who desires her and to whom she is attracted. For although Nettie was bound to her family, a captive of her own sense of duty, she was, nonetheless (as the abdication metaphor shows), the sovereign of the family to whom she was bound. Her unenthusiastic manner of relinquishing her power tends to undermine the notion that a woman's highest goal and greatest joy is to be married, subject to the patriarchal sovereign of the Victorian family. For Nettie this alternative status, as wife and subject, would be particularly dissatisfying because of the contrast to her old position and because of the nature of Dr. Rider, who has been characterized as temperamental, selfish, and petulant. Dr. Rider's suitability as a "sovereign" is implicitly problematized; he is most often portrayed as frothing with frustration and indignation (he can neither understand nor bear the duties that keep Nettie from him) and whipping his horses up to unwonted speeds and activity.

Thus once again the heroine's impetus to individual, self-determining action is in conflict with the familiar discourses of love and marriage. Nettie might be expected, after her "liberation" to turn her tiny face to Dr. Rider's

shoulder, "hiding it ever there," thus keeping the tale's comic conclusion within the realm of the familiar. But Mrs. Oliphant is constrained by the demands of publishers and readers, all of whom are implicated in the ideological aspects of the romantic ending. Mrs. Oliphant can hardly have Nettie square her shoulders, toss her head, and continue as the sovereign of her own life. Nor has Nettie been characterized as a woman who would absolutely want to. On the contrary, she too has felt some frustration as her sister's guardian and has felt, as I've said, attracted to Dr. Rider. But just as the metaphor of abdication had the effect of unsettling what "should have been" a joyous moment of liberation, so the engagement scene between Nettie and Dr. Rider has the effect of unsettling the novel's romantic conclusion.

Nettie's engagement scene is very unlike Margaret Hale's in North and South. It is punctuated with defensive, defiant references, on Nettie's part, to her independence and freedom:

'Dr. Edward,' said Nettie, trembling, half with terror, half with resolution, 'you have no authority over me. We are two people--we are not one . . . I do not interfere with your business, and I must do mine my own way.' (259)

Later she tells Rider: "I am left unrestrained, but I am not without resource" (280). She refuses to let him take her arm, saying "I can walk very well by myself, thank you" (281), and, finally, before she agrees to marry him, she asserts: "I

do not hold you to anything. We are both free" (281). These are hardly the expected sentiments from a young woman who is being proposed to. She accepts, though again in a most unenthusiastic way. As she is pressed by Rider to marry him, and as she becomes more and more defiant, she also becomes more and more emotional and overwrought. Finally she bursts into tears, and this, it seems, is the form her acceptance takes: "At last Nettie had broken down; and now he had it all his own way" (284). She is "broken down," crying, and is holding her little nephew in her arms, a barrier between Dr. Rider and herself, as she becomes engaged. She does not speak.

Nettie is forced to choose between two "natural" subject positions available to her: liberal humanism or pure femininity. To make such a choice and reject one subject position is to reject nature itself, for both positions claim nature as their alibi. Choosing one shows that the other is not eternal and natural, and exhibits the historical determinism of the conflicting subject positions offered her.

The choice, therefore, cannot be made explicit; it must take the form of an omission, pure and simple. The engagement itself cannot be spoken. It is the text's main silence, its greatest gap. To speak her choice would be to answer definitively to one of the two interpellations, to force ideology into open conflict. The text's silence is an effort to keep contradiction in the margins. Its effect, however, is to unsettle the audience, who can never feel that

Nettie has adopted a single, unified, recognizable subject position and that order has been restored.

The novel sets Nettie up as one confined by duty to a life of toil for unappreciating relations. She is kept from her "natural" place (and the reader, along with Rider, is encouraged to feel frustration for Nettie's unrewarding life) as a wife and mother. And yet, when she is free to take her natural place, everything associated with the transition is ambivalent rather than joyful, and the reader feels that his/her expectations are being relentlessly undermined. There is no simple resolution, no unified point of subjectivity (e.g. as wife/mother) for Nettie to slip into like a hand into a tailored glove, as there was for Margaret Hale. It is hard, at the conclusion of The Doctor's Family, to believe that order has been restored and all is as it should be. Nettie, after all, is crying.

Chapter 4

A Fractured Autobiography

I have identified the incompatibility between the interpellations of Victorian women as self-determining liberal-humanist subjects on the one hand and "essentially" sensitive, intuitive, retiring, and domestic on the other, as the ideological contradiction which forces its way into Mrs. Oliphant's texts time and again, disrupting the stability of the audience's interpellation. When Vineta and Robert Colby say that Mrs. Oliphant's

'Scotchness,' together with early widowhood and the responsibilities it entailed, instilled in her a particularly tough-minded attitude towards such household gods as love, courtship, marriage, and family life, (xii)

I would disagree, arguing that the conflicting ideologies which disrupt her writings were also at work in producing remarkably inconsistent attitudes to her writing and to her role as a woman. Her experiences, her "Scotchness," her "early widowhood" may all have played a part in producing these attitudes, but in my opinion their parts were secondary to that of ideology. A text produced by the author need not necessarily "reflect" ideology. Rather,

it is the product of an aesthetic working of 'general' ideology as that ideology is itself worked and 'produced' by an overdetermination of authorial-biographical factors. (Eagleton, Criticism and Ideology 59)

So instead of "reflecting" ideology, the text can reproduce ideology as ideology has produced the author, interpellating its audiences as the author has been interpellated. This, it seems to me, is what happens in the writing of Mrs. Oliphant, and so I turn now to those elements of her life which embody conflicting interpellations, and the conflicting discourses which her autobiographical writings display as a result.

Short biographies of Mrs. Oliphant which characterize her as no more than a Victorian prude (emphasizing some of her earlier, anti-feminist articles, and her denunciation of Thomas Hardy's Tess of the d'Urbervilles as an immoral work) are simply the works of critics who attempt to smooth out the conflicting jumble of attitudes and actions which formed her life. Just as the dream one narrates over coffee in the morning is a tidied-up version of the disjointed, mutilated images of the dream, so the critic's work, in such a case, aims to tidy up the author's unstable existence (or in most cases, the gaps and contradictions of their texts). As Eagleton says:

Grasping the text as a mere fictive rehearsal of an ideal object which 'precedes' it, an ideal present within the text as an abiding truth or essence from which it deviates, the typical gesture of 'normative' criticism is to inscribe a 'Could do better' in the work's margin . . . 'normative' criticism intervenes to treat and modify the text so that it can be better consumed. (Eagleton, Criticism and Ideology 91)

To call Mrs. Oliphant a prude is to make her life something that can be "better consumed" as well, and to do so is to

ignore much that belies such an assertion. Certainly one of the subject positions available to her, and one she adopted easily and often, was that of the disapproving, censorious, virtuous woman. But it was not the only one. In adopting other ones, she lived the contradictions that "mar" her writing.

The act of writing itself is a locus of contradiction: "The Victorians expected women's novels to reflect the feminine values they exalted, although obviously the woman novelist herself had outgrown the constraining feminine role" (Showalter 7). This is very much like the contest of ideologies which was at work in the huge project of Victorian philanthropy. The philanthropic work done (mainly by upper- and middle-class women) in England during Victoria's reign, has been described by Olive Banks as both radical and conservative: radical in that it led women out of the home, and conservative in that its goal was primarily to promulgate the virtues of domesticity (26-27). Philanthropic activities gave women skills which they would not acquire while simply filling their roles as mothers and wives: "they gained experience of such activities as drawing up regulations, the election of officers, taking minutes, overseeing accounts, and corresponding with other ladies' societies" (Banks 14). Add to this their efforts in "tactics of recruitment, organization, fund raising, propogandization, and petitioning" (Cott 8), and one can see women developing the skills of working men, not of domestic recluses. In the very

act of "spreading" domesticity, women were stretching the boundaries that domesticity was trying to police.

In writing for public consumption, the woman novelist was intruding on a ground which had hitherto been considered man's domain, just as the philanthropist was doing. Not all women writers wrote to earn necessary money. Those who were already supported and were writing for pleasure rather than money, were not forced to live or even acknowledge the struggle between femininity and self-determination. Those who wrote to support themselves or their families were stretching the limits of propriety. The very fact that these writers took the role of supporters put them in an exceptional relation to their families (exceptional for upper- and middle-class women, that is). They were doing a "man's" job. Mrs. Oliphant, whose husband died when she was only thirty-one and the mother of three, was able to support her family through her writing. She had supported it even when he was alive, as his work as a stained-glass artist was not lucrative. "Writing offered unique financial opportunities without sex discrimination" Showalter says (48), and Mrs. Oliphant capitalized on these opportunities to the extent that she was able to educate her sons and nephew at Eton, live in comfort, and travel throughout Europe with all her many dependents in tow. In thus supporting her family, a woman writer was clearly more than most Victorian mothers.

And yet she was less, too, for the writing which made an income possible also had implications as far as her domestic

functions went. She necessarily had less time and energy for the maternal tasks and devotion which the exemplary woman ought to have. Mrs. Oliphant prided herself on her availability to her dependents, but her extreme productivity would indicate that much of her day went to her writing.

Furthermore, a woman writer had to confront the "outside" world of business through her dealings with her publisher. If she was to succeed, she had to be tough-minded and wily. She could not trustingly put herself into the publishers' hands and hope for the best, for, like any labourer, she discovered that her own and her employer's interests were not perfectly in accord.

Finally, the very desire to write for the public precluded a strong sense of modesty and involved a most un-feminine willingness to be open to scrutiny and discussion. If there is an element of prudery in Mrs. Oliphant's writing, it might well be put down to her sense of the inconsistencies of her position. She writes, and through writing enters the man's realm of bread-winning and business dealing; she is forced to qualify her devotion to her domestic chores and children, and she puts herself in the public eye. In none of these things does she answer to ideology's hailing of her as a "true" woman. Why, then, the prudery? Partially it was because, like most Victorian woman writers, she was "deeply anxious about the possibility of appearing unwomanly" (Showalter 21) which was almost inevitable. This anxiety produced the compulsion to express

strongly "feminine" sentiments in the hope that such sentiments would absolve her of her guilt. Showalter sees this as a general trend among the "feminine" writers of Victorian England: "By working in the home, by preaching submission and self-sacrifice, and by denouncing female self-assertiveness, women writers worked to atone for their own will to write" (21).

If one looks at Mrs. Oliphant's autobiography one can see just this mixture of desire to write and guilt, and one can hear the discourses of individualism and femininity competing. The result is a text writhing in discomfort. To those who awaited Mrs. Oliphant's autobiography after her death, it was a disappointment in more ways than one. Not only was it carelessly and sketchily written (it was less than 150 pages and had to be supplemented with her letters), but it was, like her novels, the field of an unconscious battle between the two interpellations of women, both of which claimed to be natural and essential.

In her autobiography, Mrs. Oliphant returns repeatedly to four particular contradictions. The first lies in her guilty longing for fame. She thinks wistfully of the two Georges, Eliot and Sand, her contemporaries, saying, "how very much more enjoyment they seem to have got out of their life, how much more praise and honour and homage" (8). And bitterly, she grants herself some praise "for nobody will give it to me. No one ever will mention me in the same breath with George Eliot" (7). These longings, however, are in

themselves somehow undignified, even improper, and Mrs. Oliphant denies them as often as she expresses them. She proudly claims that she "would not buy their fame" (8) and she reduces her disappointed desire to "a droll little complaint" (8). The importance one senses she attaches to fame is both asserted and denied.

She comes to a similar impasse when she tries to write about whether or not she is entitled to the fame she both covets and despises. She has a sense that, although not equal to George Eliot, she deserved more praise than she actually received, for her writing had once been mistaken for Eliot's. Mrs. Oliphant's popular Carlingford series was appearing in Blackwood's at the same time as George Eliot's Adam Bede. Both were published anonymously and some people believed their authors to be the same, a point of confusion which made George Eliot indignant and which Mrs Oliphant took in her stride. She hints that she had the seeds of genius, like her contemporary, but that they never grew for lack of tending: "Should I have done better if I had been kept, like her, in a mental greenhouse and taken care of?" (5). What she gives herself with one hand, however, (the claim to some hint of genius) she takes away with the other. When she says that no one will mention her in the same breath with George Eliot, she adds: "And that is just" (7), and later, more self-deprecatingly, she asks: "Why should I [impress anybody]?" I acknowledge frankly that there is nothing in me" (8). She feels dissatisfied with the equitability of Fame's favours,

but she goes on to belie this sentiment, proclaiming her own inadequacies.

On a different front, she adopts opposing positions vis a vis the reasons for her writing. Sometimes she claims to write because she desires to: "I have written because it gave me pleasure, because it came natural to me, because it was like talking or breathing" (4). In fact, it was such a pleasure to her that she felt no thanks were in order:

how little credit I feel due to me, how accidental most things have been, and how entirely a matter of daily labour, congenial work, sometimes now and then the expression of my own heart, almost always the work most pleasant to me, this has been. (67)

To claim that she writes for the joy of it is to be entirely too self-centred, though. As a woman, to live for herself and not others was unthinkable. And so the voice of the true woman, self-sacrificing and dutiful, comes to do battle with the voice of egoism, and duty takes over from pleasure as the motivation for writing: "It had to be done, and that was enough," she says (125). "[People] will say I did my duty with a kind of steadiness, not knowing how I have rebelled and groaned under the rod" (67).

Finally, one comes upon declarations in Mrs. Oliphant's autobiography that she is satisfied with the life she has chosen: "If I could live otherwise, I do not think I should" (67). But in the same paragraph, in the next sentence even, she contradicts herself, saying, "if I could move about the house and serve my children with my own hands, I know I

should be happier." Once again, answering to two interpellations at once, Mrs. Oliphant fits nowhere in absolute unity. She is always divided. On the one hand she begrudges her obscurity, claims to love her work, and expresses contentment with her life. On the other she scorns fame, disparages her own ability, claims to write of necessity, and longs for a more purely domestic life. She is torn between her will to write (with all the unfeminine positions it entails) and the role of mother and wife. She is the divided subject of competing ideologies, and the contradictions which riddle her autobiography and fiction are the points where that competition can be seen for what it is, and the historicity of ideology can be confronted.

Chapter 5

Mrs. Oliphant in the Victorian Publishing Matrix

Publishing, as I pointed out in my introduction, also plays a part in ideology. Like the text, it has a role in offering the reader determinate subject positions; the process of publication does much more than determine the text's form. I hope to demonstrate in this chapter the extent to which this is so. Since almost all of Mrs. Oliphant's writing appeared initially in various periodicals, and much of it (articles excepted) was re-issued in hard-bound, three-volume texts to be used by lending libraries, this chapter will consider the imperatives of both periodical and triple-decker publication, and discuss their influence on the text's substance. I preface the chapter with a brief history of the rise of mass publication and its significant place in the ideological matrix in which Mrs. Oliphant published.

The importance of the periodical press in Victorian England was undeniable: "Mass circulation journals became as central a feature of the industrialization and urbanization of Britain as did coal, iron, and textile industries" (Bennett 226). In an essay in Victorian Periodical Press, Walter Houghton credits this remarkable development of the periodical press to the growing middle class who were, for unexplained reasons, eager to learn more about "things in general" and to the general upheaval in standard thoughts and ideas which required resolution in some accessible medium

(4). Scott Bennett, in his analysis of the same phenomenon is in accord with Houghton when he says that the pre-condition for creating a mass market was "a basic need, that for information" (251), but, as he points out, "pre-conditions do not bring themselves to fruition . . . In other times and places there have been other ways for supplying this need" (251). The simple "supply and demand" model which Houghton is implying is unsatisfying. It in no way explains why or how the mass market for printed material came to be the particular manner in which the "need" was met in Britain in the 1830s.

In the 1820s there was no mass market. Publishers produced relatively few copies of a work and recovered publication costs through high prices. This meant that increased sales brought a high profit. This changed in the 1830s and the production of a large number of a particular publication at a dramatically reduced per-unit price (which involved a greater risk to the publisher and less profit with increased sales) became the main marketing strategy (Bennett 238). But the mass market for reading was not something which swelled up spontaneously among people who suddenly wanted to read more and "demanded" mass publications. Scott Bennett has shown that, to the contrary, the mass market was something that was deliberately produced by Charles Knight and the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge (SDUK), who published inexpensive works for mass audiences at a loss to their Society, in order to make reading affordable to as

large an audience as possible. The fact that they did this at a loss has generally led chroniclers of the SDUK to pronounce the project a failure, but Bennett points out that in spite of their losses and the vast amount of labour that went unpaid (all the editorial work was voluntary), the society was successful, for it did create a mass market and a mode of publication which formed a "revolution in thought" (Bennett 250).

Their first mass publication was the Penny Magazine, and Bennett's study of its financing has shown that

it was a mass-market product not by accident nor by force of competition, but rather by the conscious and innovative design of the SDUK and Charles Knight. (Bennett 242)

Thus the concept of supply and demand which is generally invoked to explain and naturalize market changes is problematized by Bennett, and the mass market can be seen as the result of a concerted, conscious effort on the part of identifiable parties, to create a market. Its source and development need not be constructed ideologically as natural and inevitable.

Similarly, the retail traders did not simply "respond" to a demand for cheap publications. In fact they opposed the new market strategy, "having first set their faces against any publications which should not pay them cent per cent [i.e. 100 per cent profit]" (qtd. in Bennett 244). It was the success of the Penny Magazine which forced new trade

practices (i.e., thinner profit margins) on an unwilling trade:

At least in its first flush of success the Penny Magazine was in this specific and concrete way able to enforce the fundamental condition of a mass market . . . This was the way old conventions of the trade were broken down, the way the market-place for the common reader was created. (Bennett 244).

Furthermore, the new mode of publication would determine future magazine content, for in aiming to reach the largest possible market publishers found it necessary to become increasingly a-political. They had to avoid factional interests. They were

looking for a common ground in ideas and interests, not for ideological victories . . . Knight and the SDUK found that to produce this revolution in thought, they had to ignore as much as possible the revolution going on in other spheres of British life. (Bennett 249-250).

This produced a trend in magazine publications towards pure amusement.

In tracing this movement, Houghton points to a rough division between "reviews" and "magazines": "the former are devoted to serious discussion and the latter to entertainment" (Houghton 17). The "reviews," whose name came from their original function, namely to review books, but which had slowly slipped away from any direct reference to the books and had become quite editorial) "consisted largely of essay-like criticism and of articles" (Houghton 7), while the magazines

contained, in addition to articles and an occasional review, poetry (original and translated), short stories and serialized--often sensational--fiction, sometimes with illustrations . . . and their first requisite was to amuse. (Houghton 17)

The trend to pure amusement was to lead to the "new journalism" of magazines such as the Graphic, which featured large wood-block engravings, sports, fashion, poetry, novels, and the type of "news" we have come to recognize in current tabloid journals, where "events of contemporary life are selected and reduced, constituted not only as topics but as facts by their brief acknowledgements in the [magazine's] pages" (Fettes 68).

In his discussion of the differences between reviews and magazines, Houghton concedes that constructing them as a dichotomy (i.e. serious discussion versus entertainment) is "pertinent but it implies a contrast that is only half true of both" (17). Even the most serious journals adopted some degree of amusement: "If all were designed to entertain, some were also concerned, like the reviews, with the formation of opinion" (Houghton 18). In this category of magazine, i.e. both amusing and instructive, Houghton includes Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, which began as a Tory reaction to the Whiggish Edinburgh Review. It was thus initially chiefly political, only later becoming "literary" and a source of "amusement" (Williams 11). It remained a Tory magazine, but with the imperatives of non-factional journalism, it became

increasingly less vigorous in its attacks on the Whigs (Sullivan 49).

Margaret Oliphant's writing demonstrates both the imperatives of amusement and serious writing, for she contributed to Blackwood's in both these capacities. Many of her novels first appeared, serialized, in Blackwood's, and she wrote literally hundreds of articles, book reviews, and commentaries for "Maga." Of her own contributions she says: "it would be false modesty not to allow that I had myself in these days a fluctuating but considerable share in bringing grist to the mills of 'Maga'" (Annals, 2: 454). Fittingly, she became the magazine's chronicler. Just before her death she was asked to write a history of the Blackwood family and enterprises. She agreed, but was only able to produce the first two (of three) volumes before she died. In the Prefatory Note to the work, Annals of a Publishing House, William Blackwood says that "for forty years Mrs. Oliphant had worked incessantly for the 'Magazine,' intimate with its history, thoroughly imbued with all its traditions, and very loyal to its past" (1: viii).

Mrs. Oliphant was more than "loyal" to Blackwood's, however. She was dependent upon it. She was never able to save money, and so was frequently writing to pay off debts which she was able to incur by borrowing from Blackwood's. The family was her greatest creditor, and so she virtually had to write for them in order to make good her debts. Whenever they would take her work, or when she was

commissioned to write for them, she put herself at their disposal:

I suppose I must have become by this time [1845] a sort of general utility woman in the Magazine, as I remember being called upon to write a short article on [a sermon] at a moment's notice, which I did in the midst of a removal, with a flying pen, in a room unoccupied as yet by anything but dust and rolled-up carpets, where a table and an inkpot had been hurriedly set out for me. (Annals, 2: 475)

Margaret Oliphant had once been known to collect signatures for an anti-Corn Law petition (Williams, 1986, p.5), and was later to express indignation, in a personal letter to William Blackwood Jr., over a story which ridiculed women who aspired to parliamentary positions: "Some of us," she says,

are reasonable beings, and it is worth while considering I think whether perpetual impertinence of this kind may not have an effect quite the reverse of that which I suppose its originators intended. I am almost sorry to say that I don't feel myself much sillier than the majority of men I meet. (qtd. in Williams 102)

But "Maga" was acknowledged everywhere as a conservative publication, and in spite of her flashes of defiance, Oliphant's writing for publication was constant in its conservatism. In the brief summary of Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine to be found in British Literary Magazines, Mrs. Oliphant is referred to several times as exemplifying "the magazine's truly reactionary nature." She is quoted as having written that the lower classes had a "want of logic . . . a

propensity to blame somebody for every grievance or hardship they experience" (qtd. in Sullivan 49). Mrs. Oliphant, never a great fan of Dickens's work, criticized him in her book reviews for his persistent use of the lower classes in his novels. She herself never wrote of the aristocracy, but her novels all centred on wealthy members of the middle class. Carlingford, Robert and Vineta Colby write, "is a bourgeois society even at its highest level" (Colby 43).

To the extent that she wrote fiction which was self-censored (free of the "immoral," "shameful," and "coarsely indecent" elements she identified in Hardy's novels (qtd. in Sullivan 50), to the extent that she produced consistently conservative non-fiction, and to the extent that she produced work which fulfilled both the imperatives of an "amusing" magazine with serious journalism, Mrs. Oliphant's work was determined by forces other than her "creative imagination." This is not to say that Mrs. Oliphant was simply writing whatever Blackwood wanted while secretly rebelling; as I've argued earlier, she was quite capable of complicity in re-producing current bourgeois ideology to defend the liberal-humanist subject. But the imperatives of publishing for an extended audience, trying to capitalize on a mass market created by Knight and the SDUK, were determining and had real, if unmeasurable, effects.

The requirements of magazine serialization and triple-decker publication would also work to determine the tone and style of Mrs. Oliphant's writing. These have been

well-documented in many studies, but bear repetition in this study of the impact of publication practices on the content of Mrs. Oliphant's writing, especially since so many of her novels appeared in both forms and would have involved a consciousness on her part of the demands of both forms:

Because of the contemporary popularity of the novel, the indispensable staple of the magazines, after 1840, was at least one piece of serialized fiction (sometimes two at once), and for the same reason a vast majority was reprinted in a three-decker or one-volume edition; and in any event an author would have been reluctant to leave his work in fragments. As a matter of fact it would be more accurate to say that novelists consciously planned a double publication from the beginning. (Wolff 22)

The serialized version of the novel was published first, with the triple-decker close on its heels. Mrs. Oliphant's The Perpetual Curate, for instance, appeared in Blackwoods between June 1863 and September 1864, and the three-volume version was published in 1864. Likewise Miss Marjoribanks was serialized February 1865 to May 1866 in the same magazine: it was "published in three volumes in April 1866, three weeks before the last episode appeared in 'Maga' as was Blackwood's custom" (Haythornthwaite 102).

The requirements of serialized fiction were stringent. The part-issue publication of books, which preceded the serialization technique, left some room for the author to control production. This has been documented in the case of Dickens's influence in determining the form Pickwick Papers was to take in 1836 (Felttes 63). "Part-issue," Norman Felttes

writes, "was, for the capitalist publisher, an imperfect form of commodity-text production; control of the production process was erratic" (63). But the magazine serial, he argues, left no room for resistance on the part of the writer:

control of the product, i.e. copyright in the text, might be negotiated in advance, but control of the actual production of a serial for a magazine or weekly newspaper did not need to be negotiated; it was a given . . . Fiction writers entered their pages as hand-loom weavers entered a factory. (63-64)

Strict editing for propriety was one of the most well-documented forms of control over the production of the text. The history of Hardy's (failed) struggle for control in the Graphic's serialized version of Tess is the classic example. The length of the submissions was also a function of publication: "chapters had to be fitted into more or less prescribed limits" (Houghton 20). Finally, since the magazine's success depended, in a large measure, on the success of its novels, the novelist was encouraged to end each installment in such a way that the reader was enticed back the following month or week. This necessitated a series of small climaxes and an (almost) endless deferral of closure. The denouement had to come in the novel's final installment. All of these requirements were respected absolutely by Mrs. Oliphant, who never wrote a sexually-offensive word, whose two-chapter segments were of roughly

even lengths, and who often introduced an element of suspense in a segment's final paragraph.

In addition to these requirements, Mrs. Oliphant had to prepare her serialized work for publication as a triple-decker. In terms of content, both versions would be identical, for Mrs. Oliphant was much too busy a writer of new works to revise older ones, and too eager to reap the profits of the triple-decker to wish to delay its publication. In any case, a delay would mean that interest generated by the magazine version would have time to dwindle before the three-volume version appeared. Thus Mrs. Oliphant wrote the serialized version with the triple-decker in mind, and so her works took into account the imperatives of that mode of publication as well.

Triple-deckers were elegant three-volume versions of novels, and they were produced almost exclusively for the use of lending libraries, most famously Mudie's Lending Library. This particular form of publication was advantageous to both the libraries and the publishers. The publishers agreed to produce novels only in this form on the understanding that the libraries would buy enough copies to ensure a solid profit for the publishers. The libraries profited in that the exorbitant cost of producing bulky and expensively-bound novels prohibited any but the very richest from purchasing novels, thereby forcing people to use the lending system. Furthermore, each volume was rented out at one shilling per volume, and the advantage of the triple-volume format to the

libraries was that one novel could be borrowed simultaneously by three readers, producing a greater profit per novel. Each volume was also bound smartly, and was made as bulky as possible on the principle that elegance and size convinced consumers they were getting their money's worth.

The emphasis placed on the issue of quantity over that of quality is illustrated in George Eliot's disappointment over the size of the last of the eight parts of Middlemarch --parts which resembled triple-deckers in their bulk and binding, and part-issues in their layout (adds in front and back) and price (they were for sale, not loan) (Sutherland 198-202). She said that it was unfair to "ask five shillings for a smaller amount than that already given at the same price [in earlier parts]" (Beaty 47).

The bulk was provided on the one hand by the publishers, who used wide margins, large type, and double spacing, and on the other by the authors, who, if necessary, became repetitious and wordy, and introduced meandering, irrelevant sub-plots. One can see this double effort at producing volume at work in the production of Miss Marjoribanks. The 1976 edition of this novel is a reproduction of the original three-volume work; all three volumes are bound together to create a single massive volume. Upon opening the book, one discovers the publisher's contribution to size in the 934 sparsely-printed, almost white, pages. Mrs. Oliphant's contribution is more interesting.

According to J.A. Haythornthwaite, when Mrs. Oliphant began Miss Marjoribanks her intention had been to produce a short novella, running four or five issues in Blackwood's. She found that the story ran smoothly, and decided not to constrain herself to any particular length. Haythornthwaite speculates as to "whether the prospect of a regular income over a long period was what really influenced her to abandon her original plan of writing a novella" (93). No doubt she also recognized the potential for her heroine to become the subject of a three-volume book for the lending library, the production of which would provide her with some extra income. The result is a marked shift in the tempo of the novel. What began as a snappy, witty, fast-paced novella (the first three chapters see Lucilla through four years of her life) becomes a detailed, somewhat repetitive triple-decker (the rest of the first volume and all of the next cover no more than a single year). The repetition of the ironic statement that Lucilla Marjoribanks's "great aim in life is to be a comfort to dear papa" pointed to earlier, eventually loses its impact. The duplication of the scenario in which Lucilla is led to understand that she is about to be proposed to and is both disappointed and placid in her disillusionment, lacks inventiveness and adds length. These techniques for lengthening her novel are what have often led critics to claim that Oliphant would have been more successful, more truly "literary," had she been more brief. And it is these very techniques which point to the emphasis on quantity which

was produced by the cartel established by the publishers and lending libraries.

In light of all this, the author's autonomy is less absolute than it seems; the cartel on triple-deckers and the requirements of serialization produced formal constraints which determined much of the form and the content of Mrs. Oliphant's works. Her "consciousness" was certainly not the source of every happening in her novels; her control over the product was never complete.

In spite of all this acquiescence to the demands of form, Mrs. Oliphant was not entirely passive. She struggled against the constraints of the dominant literary mode of production as did so many authors, in her negotiations with her publisher for money. The author's labour power could produce surplus value just as the introduction of new technology into the publication process could. Norman Feltes notes in Literary Modes of Production that the introduction of advanced machinery into printing and publishing is generally understood as simply "a steady progress to high-speed, 'modern,' production" resulting in "more, cheaper, and larger" literary products (61). The notion of these technical innovations as unmotivated, disinterested "advances" is ideological; an imaginary relation (people are the fortunate recipients of technological advances) to the real relations of production is offered as natural. However,

the new distinction introduced between workers, the employment of unapprenticed youths, the institution of bonus payments in the composing

room, all point to the introduction of these machines . . . as the occasion of an intense struggle between proprietors and workers, as indicating in publishing the steady appropriation of labour-power as fixed capital. (Fettes 61)

The writer too was a source of labour-power, and differed from the typesetter only in his or her right to become actively involved, to a limited measure, in the struggle for the surplus value produced by his or her work. The struggles between writers and publishers are "historically determined in complex ways" (Fettes xi). One of these determinants, of course, is gender. What follows is a brief discussion of the struggle between Mrs. Oliphant and John Blackwood for the surplus value of Miss Marjoribanks, a struggle documented in their correspondence and summarized in an article by J.A. Haythornthwaite in Publishing History. Haythornthwaite chose Mrs. Oliphant as his subject for a study of publishing financing because he viewed her as an "average journeyman author" who "could be said to represent the Victorian literary middle ground" (92).

Her position as a woman novelist was also on the Victorian literary middle ground, as so many of England's novelists were women. It is her relationship to her publisher as a labourer and a woman which is particularly interesting, As a writer, haggling was permissible; as a woman, it was "unladylike." As a result, her correspondence, like her autobiography and her novels, reveals the impossibility of taking one position or another. Oliphant's femininity and a

demand for her share in the profits come into open conflict in her correspondence to Blackwood over Miss Marjoribanks.

Miss Marjoribanks had been preceded by two of the Carlingford novels and three shorter stories. The novels had had varying measures of success. Salem Chapel had been hugely profitable to Blackwood, and, in the hopes that Mrs. Oliphant's career had finally "taken off," and expecting to capitalize on her new-found popularity, Blackwood paid her £1,500 for her next novel, The Perpetual Curate. The large sums she received for the series in total led her to recall in later years that these books, although "no longer very well remembered by anyone" were "the greatest triumph, at least in a pecuniary point of view, of my life, and settled upon better foundations my after-career" (Annals, 2: 487). But the £1,500 she received for The Perpetual Curate was the most she was ever to receive for a novel. It was not as successful as its predecessor, Salem Chapel, and as a result Blackwood was hesitant to agree upon a fixed price for Miss Marjoribanks, especially since its proposed length was also unfixed.

Unwilling to make a settlement, Blackwood wrote to Mrs. Oliphant: "Leave yourself in my hands" (qtd. in Haythornthwaite 93). She agreed to do this, in a typical gesture of feminine submission. She had no choice. She had no male go-between, no George Lewes. She submitted herself to the capable, strong hands of her advisor, creditor, friend, and employer. By the time the final installment of Miss

Marjoribanks was submitted, Mrs. Oliphant had still not been given a price. Nonetheless she expressed "perfect confidence" in Blackwood (qtd. in Haythornthwaite 93). In doing this she is being as insistent as any labourer demanding wages, but her insistence is veiled in the discourse of feminine dependence. On 2 April 1866, Blackwood offered her L1,200 for Miss Marjoribanks (L300 less than for The Perpetual Curate) explaining his decision in terms of The Perpetual Curate's lack of popularity.

In her response to this offer, the struggle between her position as business person and woman is marked, and, as above, she tried to obscure the former by combining it with the latter. She expressed disappointment at the proposed fee and then, uncomfortable pushing for money on no other grounds than her expectations, she invoked her position of helplessness as a woman: forgetting that she had initially been uncertain about the novel's length, she reminded Blackwood that she had committed herself to his hands earlier, and this reminder was a rebuke. It suggested that he had taken advantage of her position; she said she feared that had she pressed for a settlement earlier, she would have received the same L1,500 she had received for The Perpetual Curate.

Mrs. Oliphant failed to convince Blackwood to pay her more, but in trying to convince him, the discourses of femininity and liberal humanist individualism come into conflict once more. Rival siblings, each undermining the

essential, natural character of the other, confront each other.

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It is this same confrontation, impossible to escape in Victorian England's conjuncture of industrial capitalism and dogma on femininity, which rears its head time and again in so much of Mrs. Oliphant's writing. It appears in much more than her correspondence with Blackwood: in The Perpetual Curate it takes the form of a sub-plot (the Morgans's marriage) which parallels and undermines the main plot (Lucy's and Frank's engagement). In both Miss Marjoribanks and The Doctor's Family it is revealed in the characters of the heroines, who fill no recognizable, consistent role; both Lucilla and Nettie vacillate between traditional female and male positions. Neither of these women enter marriage through the rosy glow of ideology--both are distanced from its glory by the satisfactions of the monarchies they have headed and have been forced to abdicate. And in order to become engaged, both have to abandon their strong voices, become passive or even silent. In her autobiography, the disparities between the various perspectives she holds on her life reproduce the same contradiction: her desire for fame and her love for her work are denied, once stated, and belied by more acceptable, feminine sentiments. Her life, too, reproduces the conflict between liberal humanism and femininity. She is both a mother

and a professional, a nurturer and a breadwinner, a home-maker and a public figure.

Her texts are clearly more than a figuring forth, consciously or unconsciously, of this confrontation, but this analysis of her writings demonstrates that they are open to more than close readings. By peering into the gaps in her texts, one can discover no less than the historicity of ideology and subjectivity themselves.

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