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## “A FEELING OF SPACE”: MARGARET OLIPHANT’S SUPERNATURAL SHORT FICTION IN *BLACKWOOD’S EDINBURGH MAGAZINE*

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### ABSTRACT

During her prolific career, the Scottish writer Margaret Oliphant (1828–97) produced a cluster of short stories and novellas about the “seen and the unseen” world of supernatural and spiritual phenomena. This essay evaluates Oliphant’s contribution to the genre of the supernatural short story, focusing on the ten supernatural tales she published in the conservative *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine* between 1857 and 1897. Oliphant’s stories of the seen and the unseen occupy an uneasy ideological space between the commercial, the pious and the subversive and unusually seek to establish a continuum between this life and the next. This ambivalence is represented spatially in the stories’ persistent preoccupation with thresholds and journeys, which Oliphant uses to suggest the liminal encounters between the living and the dead and the passage from life to death but also to explore questions of gender, religion and modernity. Drawing on a critical framework provided by the spatial humanities, I read the stories’ overlapping spatialities – generic, periodical, gendered, spiritual – as indicative of the opportunities, constraints and strategies encountered by a professional female author publishing in the ideologically charged space of the periodical press during the seminal period of transition from the Victorian to the modernist.

**KEYWORDS** Margaret Oliphant; *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine*; supernatural; Gothic; short story; spatiality

“Stories of this description are not like any others,” Scottish author Margaret Oliphant (1828–97) wrote to editor and publisher William Blackwood III about her supernatural “Stories of the Seen and the Unseen” in November 1883: “I can produce them only when they come to me. I should be glad to do one for the New Year number,” she added, “but nothing suggests itself.”<sup>1</sup> By 3 December, however, the 27,000-word novella *Old Lady Mary*

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had conveniently “presented itself” and was forwarded for Blackwood’s consideration – and speedy publication as the flagship story in the January issue of *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine*, at 45 pages taking up almost a third of the 152-page New Year number.<sup>2</sup>

Despite Oliphant’s protestations, supernatural stories did in fact regularly suggest themselves to this author of exceptional “commercial perspicacity”<sup>3</sup> and “incredible tenacity,”<sup>4</sup> particularly at Christmas time. Between 1876 and 1897, in the context of an “abnormally tragic tally” of personal losses,<sup>5</sup> she published seventeen stories or serial parts “of this description” in the Christmas and New Year issues of various magazines, fully exploiting the commercial potential of the genre’s Yuletide associations. Her overall corpus of nineteen supernatural tales forms a small but important cluster within her prolific output of “some 98 novels, 50 or more short stories, nearly 400 articles, and 25 non-fiction works.”<sup>6</sup> Oliphant’s supernatural fiction consists of one novel (*The Wizard’s Son*, 1882–4), four novellas (*A Beleaguered City*, 1879; *The Lady’s Walk*, 1882–3; *Old Lady Mary*, 1884; *Dies Irae*, 1895) and fourteen short stories and novelettes largely divided into two overlapping series, “Stories of the Seen and the Unseen” and “The Little Pilgrim.” This essay focuses on the ten supernatural stories she published in *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine*, familiarly known as “*Maga*,” her most important periodical contact, between 1857 and 1897. They include some of her best-known ghost stories such as “The Open Door” (1882), *Old Lady Mary* (1884) and “The Library Window” (1896) as well as lesser known stories about the afterlife such as “The Land of Darkness” (1887) and “The Land of Suspense” (1897).<sup>7</sup>

Shaped by their original publication in predominantly conservative periodicals, Oliphant’s supernatural stories occupy an uneasy ideological position between the commercial, the pious and the subversive. As Penny Fielding notes, the author herself represents a “covert, problematic, curiously conservative modernity”<sup>8</sup> that for Valerie Sanders simultaneously “look[s] forward into the twentieth century as well as backward into the mid-nineteenth.”<sup>9</sup> Sometimes dismissed as “a pious domesticator of the supernatural,”<sup>10</sup> Oliphant is now increasingly studied for the “troubling polysemy” of her supernatural fiction, which articulates competing narratives that enable discussions of gender, class and religion<sup>11</sup> – something that Ann Heilmann describes as Oliphant’s “intermediate position” as a “gentle subversive” whose work is “marked by ironical ambivalence and self-contradiction.”<sup>12</sup>

The Gothic, as I have argued elsewhere, is a “spatially articulate mode” that frequently returns to characteristic spatialities, including, in the late nineteenth century, the haunted house, the nocturnal city, and a hostile Empire.<sup>13</sup> As an author of domestic fiction herself leading an “expatriate peripatetic life,”<sup>14</sup> Oliphant was what Robert T. Tally terms “attuned to matters of place,”<sup>15</sup> frequently deployed spatial tropes to discuss the

“darkling paths”<sup>16</sup> of personal loss and the “mountainous road” of financial anxiety, and admitted to having “curious superstitions about localities.”<sup>17</sup> As Joanne Shattock notes, Oliphant’s preferred periodical contact *Maga* was itself built on a “sense of place,” including the “social space” of the magazine’s “literary community,” an interest in Scottish culture and politics, and the carefully crafted, hierarchical “construction” of each periodical issue with the flagship position acting as a “sign of editorial confidence and recognition.”<sup>18</sup> Oliphant’s supernatural fiction is rich in spatial tropes, including “walls, doors and windows, ways in and ways out, confinement and liberation,”<sup>19</sup> the “world of fancy, or fantasy,” the “liminal spaces between the here and the hereafter,” the “uncharted regions of the hereafter,” and the motif of a “door, which both is and is not there”; her *Maga* stories also frequently introduce Scottish settings.<sup>20</sup> These threshold images, Sanders argues, provide Oliphant with a “hinge between two worlds,” allowing her to address the relationship between the “living and the dead,” “two social classes” and “men and women.”<sup>21</sup>

Julia Briggs notes that the ghost story typically engages with the “tension” “between the cosy familiar world of life [...] and the mysterious and unknowable world of death.”<sup>22</sup> Oliphant’s stories seek instead to establish a “continuum”<sup>23</sup> between this world and the next. Indeed, Oliphant herself emerges as a liminal figure whose career, as Elisabeth Jay observes, does not easily “fit a neat line of linear development” of “increasing self-determination and pyramidal achievement,” and Jay rightly cautions against any “mechanical division” of her stories because “their very variety [...] resists theoretical categorization.”<sup>24</sup> This essay reads Oliphant’s own precarity and the images of thresholds and journeys in her supernatural fiction against a critical framework provided by the spatial humanities. The overlapping spatialities of Oliphant’s supernatural short fiction – generic, periodical, gendered, spiritual – are, I argue, indicative of the opportunities, constraints and strategies encountered by a professional female author publishing in the ideologically charged space of the periodical press during the period of transition from the Victorian to the modernist.

### “A Mountainous Road”: Oliphant and *Maga*

Vineta and Robert Colby term Oliphant “easily the most prolific writer of the nineteenth century.”<sup>25</sup> This “born writer,”<sup>26</sup> who described herself as a “sort of machine, so little out of order, able to endure all things, always fit to work,”<sup>27</sup> became a “sort of general utility woman” for the Edinburgh publishing house of Blackwood, tasked with producing a “fluctuating but considerable” amount of copy on literature, history, travel and reviews as well as original fiction.<sup>28</sup> After her death, William Blackwood III would describe Oliphant not only as a “faithful and accomplished ally” of the firm, “intimate

with its history, thoroughly imbued with all its traditions, and very loyal to its past,"<sup>29</sup> but also as "one of the foremost women workers of the century."<sup>30</sup> While, as Sanders observes, Oliphant's literary career was "legitimised" by her "circumstances as a young widow and mother" supporting a family that seemed to be constantly expanding to accommodate dependent nieces and nephews, it is also notable that her literary efforts predated her marriage.<sup>31</sup> In spite of a religious upbringing in the Scottish Free Church, Oliphant belonged to the professional artist class which, as Linda Peterson notes, did not maintain the conventional ideology of separate spheres but instead enabled Oliphant to view "authorship and domesticity as continuous."<sup>32</sup> Oliphant had been encouraged to write from an early age, publishing her first novel *Margaret Maitland* in 1849 at the age of 21 and continuing to write during her short marriage to her artist cousin Frank Wilson Oliphant. While "retain[ing] a strong sense of her Scottish inheritance,"<sup>33</sup> Oliphant was also equipped with an "unusually cosmopolitan outlook,"<sup>34</sup> travelled widely on the Continent, and spent much of her life living south of the Scottish border in Birkenhead, London and Windsor. These themes of domesticity, precarity, religion and travel inform her supernatural short fiction.

While she never transitioned to the illustrated new journalistic fiction papers of the 1890s, Oliphant published in a number of periodicals during a period of extraordinary expansion in the British magazine market. Her career was, nonetheless, defined by her close relationship with the Edinburgh publishing house of Blackwood, and she "identified herself first and foremost as a Blackwood's author."<sup>35</sup> "One of the leading 'houses' of the period,"<sup>36</sup> Blackwood's had pioneered the monthly miscellany with their 2s.6d. *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* (1817–1980), the "first important modern magazine"<sup>37</sup> and indeed "one of the most successful magazines in literary history."<sup>38</sup> During its long life, *Maga* printed short and serial fiction by leading writers, including George Eliot, Anthony Trollope, Joseph Conrad, Thomas Hardy and Oscar Wilde, with Blackwood often reissuing periodical fiction in volume form to benefit author and publisher alike.<sup>39</sup> As a miscellany, this "leading representative of Tory thought and bourgeois middle-class cultural production"<sup>40</sup> also printed articles about politics, travel, history, literature, military matters, Empire and, importantly, Scotland,<sup>41</sup> providing a versatile writer of Oliphant's calibre opportunities for multiple contributions, even within a single issue. Blackwood's emphasis on the "corporate sign of the journal" over signature, together with a certain "ludic quality surrounding the tease of pseudonyms and identity of columnists," further facilitated Oliphant's multiple contributions to *Maga*, which were in turn anonymous, pseudonymous ("The Old Saloon," "The Looker-On"), initialled ("M.O.W.O.," referencing her full married name, Margaret Oliphant Wilson Oliphant, and commonly used in her critical work) or under the respectable married signature "Mrs Oliphant" (sometimes found

accompanying her fiction).<sup>42</sup> Yet in spite of these canny authorial strategies and her position as an “arbiter of taste in literature and social mores, and cultural gatekeeper for half a century,”<sup>43</sup> she never succeeded in securing steady editorial employment on the staff of the magazine, remaining a shadowy, precarious figure even compliant in a “deliberate self-marginalization” of her own achievements.<sup>44</sup> “I shall not leave anything behind me that will live,” she bleakly – and incorrectly – concluded in her *Autobiography* (1899).<sup>45</sup>

This authorial spectrality was further heightened by *Maga*'s conservative politics. This “most manly and masculine of magazines”<sup>46</sup> with a mainly male readership stood by “broad conservative values” of “respectable society and the balanced constitution,” expecting its authors to toe its Tory line and conform to “tight” “editorial control.”<sup>47</sup> These expectations undoubtedly guided Oliphant's hand as a contributor depending for her livelihood on Blackwood's continued goodwill,<sup>48</sup> and it is telling that “The Grievances of Women” (1880), her most progressive essay on the Woman Question, should have appeared in *Fraser's Magazine*, rather than in *Maga*, where she instead published more conservative disquisitions on the topic, including “The Laws Concerning Women” (1856) and “The Condition of Women” (1858). At the same time, “her activities as a reviewer” and “her voracious reading” also shaped her fiction-writing, which provided opportunities to test ideas that could not be explored in factual writing.<sup>49</sup> While anonymity and pseudonymity allowed her “to carve out a public space where her opinions would be heard without sexist assumptions,”<sup>50</sup> Sanders notes that “the more Oliphant addressed the social, rather than the purely literary, issues of the day, the more she used her pseudonymous personae to distance herself from the fray.”<sup>51</sup> Indeed, as Sanders observes, “Oliphant seems contradictory”: a supposed anti-feminist who nonetheless praises women and criticises men; an author defined by simultaneous “self-cancellation” and “self-promotion”; a seemingly conservative writer whose “self-protective, hesitant strategies” were designed to safeguard her livelihood; and a “self-appointed [...] ‘critic of the age,’ both on literary and social matters.”<sup>52</sup>

The supernatural short story was one arena in which Oliphant was able to explore these contradictions. Writing during the second half of the nineteenth century, she benefited from the development of the short story from magazine sketches to a distinct literary form.<sup>53</sup> Often associated with marginal authors, the short story, non-mimetic, elliptical, seemingly ephemeral and suited to narrative experimentation, appealed to female authors who saw it both as a means to commercial success and a vehicle for disrupting Victorian narrative orthodoxies and gendered expectations. The supernatural story, which, according to Andrew Smith, could articulate “political debates about economics, national and colonial identities, gender, and the workings of the literary imagination,” was a genre that particularly appealed to female writers.<sup>54</sup> As Vanessa D. Dickerson has influentially argued, the

figure of the ghost provided a useful metaphor for the “in-betweenness of the female writer” and for the “equivocal, ambiguous, marginal, ghostly” status of the Victorian woman, like the ghost a “figure of indeterminacy, of imperilled identity, of substance and insubstantiality.”<sup>55</sup> Though drawn to the commercial potential of the supernatural story, women writers therefore also recognised the “special kinds of freedom” the genre provided “to offer critiques of male power and sexuality which are often more radical than those in more realist genres.”<sup>56</sup> At typically 12,000–18,000 words, Oliphant’s stories are technically novelettes, and perhaps too drawn-out to fit neatly with contemporary attempts to define the “Short-story” (deliberately capitalised and hyphenated by the American critic Brander Matthews) as a distinct genre of writing, characterised by its “essential unity of impression” and “deal[ing] with a single event, a single emotion, or the series of emotions called forth by a single situation.”<sup>57</sup> Nonetheless, she found in this form possibilities for literary experimentation and social and religious commentary – what Jay terms a “dimension of experience not available within the prevailing realist tradition.”<sup>58</sup> All her supernatural stories in *Maga* appeared anonymously, indicating the tentative and searching nature of this body of fiction in relation to her predominantly conservative activities as a critic.

Oliphant’s supernatural fiction falls largely into two chronologically overlapping series, supernatural “Stories of the Seen and the Unseen” about “earthbound” spirits, and the religiously inflected “Little Pilgrim” stories about journeys in the afterlife. The first title appeared in January 1880 to accompany the signed publication of “Earthbound” in *Fraser’s Magazine*, while the second emerged with the unsigned publication of “A Little Pilgrim in the Unseen” in *Macmillan’s Magazine* in May 1882. The intriguingly hybrid title of the latter story positions the “Little Pilgrim” tales as a subspecies of the “Stories of the Seen and the Unseen.” Indeed, the line between the two blurs with a story such as “The Land of Suspense,” which explores the afterlife but omits the Little Pilgrim as narrator and was subtitled “A Story of the Seen and Unseen” [*sic*] on its publication in *Maga* in January 1897. This suggests that Oliphant did not herself draw a clear distinction between the two series but perceived the supernatural and the spiritual, the ghost as supernatural apparition and as departed soul, to exist on a continuum, just as her stories attempted to imagine a continuum between this world and the next. It is also worth noting the initial association of the two series with the 2s.6d. miscellany *Fraser’s* and the 1s. monthly *Macmillan’s*, both among *Maga’s* chief competitors: neither series was exclusively owned by any one magazine, Oliphant never achieving the kind of lucrative exclusive deal – which would no doubt have been attractive to her – that her fellow Scot Arthur Conan Doyle secured with the *Strand Magazine* over the serial publication of the Sherlock Holmes stories. Nonetheless, the recognisable series titles acted as canny marketing devices and may have given her

some leverage in her negotiations with *Maga*, her preferred publication venue. Given that her fiction contributions to *Maga* were unsigned, the series titles also acted as a covert signature, contributing to her reputation as a fiction writer and helping her to establish a recognisable brand as an author of supernatural tales.

### “Between the Seen and the Unseen”: Threshold Images

In female-authored supernatural fiction, as Melissa Edmundson and Emma Liggins have argued, the “motif of the haunted house” is frequently used “to comment on property, class, and economic issues”<sup>59</sup> and to articulate a sense of “unease in domestic space” and “contradictions and tensions about the constricted movement of women and the domestic rules that help to confine them.”<sup>60</sup> While these motifs are present in many of Oliphant’s ghost stories, such as “Earthbound” (*Fraser’s Magazine*, January 1880) and *The Lady’s Walk* (*Longman’s Magazine*, December 1882–January 1883), in which “beneficent” spirits<sup>61</sup> linger in places they once loved, her supernatural contributions to *Maga* complicate the traditional gender politics of the ghost story and reflect *Maga*’s masculine credentials by featuring male protagonists and ghosts caught in liminal circumstances that recall Victor Turner’s anthropological investigations into “interstructural” rites of passage<sup>62</sup> during which socially marginal or ambiguous “threshold people” are “neither here nor there.”<sup>63</sup> These stories introduce significant recurring motifs in Oliphant’s supernatural fiction: generational conflict, the need for privacy, children who are lost both literally and metaphorically, and the importance of homeliness. Their frequent Scottish settings also acknowledge *Maga*’s Scottish identity.

Oliphant’s first venture into supernatural short fiction was published in *Maga* in January 1857, when her husband was still alive. “A Christmas Tale” appeared alongside an instalment of her serial novel *The Athelings*, foregrounding her significant contribution to the magazine even at this early stage. The story appeared in the middle of an issue whose flagship feature was an instalment of George Eliot’s *Scenes of Clerical Life*, signalling a notable concentration of female-authored fiction in this seasonal issue. While not a *bona fide* story of the seen and the unseen and indeed separated from the rest of Oliphant’s production in this genre by almost two decades, “A Christmas Tale” is of interest because it demonstrates Oliphant’s early command of genre conventions and the liveliness of her spatial imagination. The nameless narrator, stranded in a rural backwater after missing the daily train, that symbol of modernity, seeks shelter at the “irregular and rambling” Witcherley Arms, where he is introduced to the local squire, a “comely, well-preserved old gentleman.”<sup>64</sup> The story shifts abruptly from a rural fairy tale about a drowsy village to the Gothic mode as the squire contemplates the

surrounding bleak moorland and locked gate of his estate before revealing to the horrified narrator that he is to die that very night to make way for his “sullen, resentful” son, who the following morning appears indeed to have usurped his father’s place.<sup>65</sup> The narrator’s desperate call for help is only interrupted by his sudden waking from a nightmare, and the reader’s simultaneous realisation that the story has made a “deliberately playful use of the supernatural” to produce an “allegory demonstrating that the New Year can only come of age at the expense of the death of the Old Year.”<sup>66</sup> Nonetheless, this early story establishes Oliphant’s understanding of the commercial potential of the seasonal Gothic or ghost story, her effective if ludic deployment of Gothic spatial tropes, and her use of the Gothic to explore difficult domestic, familial and generational relations – themes she would take up again nineteen years later in “The Secret Chamber.”

Published in *Maga* in December 1876 in the middle of an issue headed by Charles Reade’s serial *A Woman Hater*, “The Secret Chamber” is a full-bloodied if formulaic Gothic story making knowing use of the haunted Gothic spatialities of the fictional Gowrie Castle.<sup>67</sup> The mixed architectural heritage of this “beautiful old house” with “its labyrinths, its hidden stairs, its long mysterious passages” and “its fine gateway and flanking towers” suggests a “bold and vigorous” past predating contemporary “mediocrity” – both of the resident Randolph family and of Scotland itself.<sup>68</sup> A “bearer of history,”<sup>69</sup> the castle is rumoured to harbour a secret chamber, a reminder both “of the time when a man was not safe in his own house” and of a repressed family history, that “mysterious something which they did not know in their familiar home.”<sup>70</sup> The national and the domestic are inextricably intertwined in the very architecture of the castle, and the modern home is not safe from historical returns. When the heir, young Lord Lindores, comes of age, his father takes him to a “little intermediate place – this debatable land between the seen and the unseen,” from whence Lindores steps “across a threshold” into an “antiquated room,” the “most curious place he had ever seen,” to face a terrifying rite of passage with “wicked Earl” Robert, the “acknowledged magician of the family.”<sup>71</sup> The story pits youth and modernity against the feudal past to introduce two recurring themes in Oliphant’s supernatural fiction: spatial uncertainty and the lack of privacy. By resisting a pact with the earl, Lindores appears to escape the “curse of the house” of being forever “watched, surrounded, spied upon” by “that secret inhabitant of the house.”<sup>72</sup> Yet the story also hints that the possible continued existence of the titular secret chamber may allow the earl and the feudal traditions he represents to remain in hiding until a more favourable time.

The relatively mechanical coming-of-age motifs and Gothic sensibilities of “The Secret Chamber” link it with “A Christmas Tale” but also anticipate “The Open Door,” published in *Maga* in January 1882, and “The Portrait,” which appeared in January 1885. Accomplished examples of the pious

ghost story in which a supernatural influence brings about reconciliation and empathy between a worldly father and a sensitive son in an unhomey home, both stories appeared in the flagship position but without signature. Their settings are more modern and their conclusions more reassuring than those of “The Secret Chamber.”

Like “The Secret Chamber,” “The Open Door” takes place in Scotland, but in the modern, transitory setting of Brentwood, inspired by Oliphant’s visits to Blackwood’s Colinton House near Edinburgh.<sup>73</sup> Colonel Mortimer has taken Brentwood “on [his] return from India [...] for the temporary accommodation of [his] family,” its location “within reach of Edinburgh” providing access to schooling for Mortimer’s “pale-faced boy,” Roland, “fragile in body [...] and deeply sensitive in mind.”<sup>74</sup> During the “darkest [months] of the year,” Roland happens upon a ghostly wail “full of suffering and pain” in the “picturesque” “ruins of the former mansion of Brentwood” in the surrounding park, with a “something shut out, restlessly wandering to and fro” before the “open and vacant” “common doorway” of the former servants’ quarters.<sup>75</sup> Mortimer’s interpretation of this ruin as a “melancholy comment on a life that was over,” a “door that led to nothing [...] void of any meaning,” reveals much about his secular and proprietary mindset, which is only disturbed by the threat to the wellbeing of his family.<sup>76</sup> As in so many of Oliphant’s stories, the doorway becomes not only a “meeting-place between seen and unseen worlds”<sup>77</sup> but also “between two social classes”<sup>78</sup> when the local minister recognises the spirit as belonging to the wayward son of a former housekeeper. While the denouement, with the minister commanding the ghostly visitor to seek God’s mercy instead of haunting his mother’s former door, marks the story as religious in its motivations, the haunting also serves to foreground the Mortimers’ own rootlessness and introduces another key motif in Oliphant’s supernatural fiction: the prodigal son prevented from resting in peace.

Though subtitled “A Story of the Seen and the Unseen,” “The Portrait” turns on the trope of feminine spiritual influence but contains no actual ghost. The Canning household of this story may not be leading the peripatetic existence of the Mortimers, but their home, the “Grove, a large old house in the immediate neighbourhood of a little town [...] straggling and irregular, [...] with no economy of space,” has been left a “dull” and unhomey “house without women” by the death in labour of the narrator’s mother.<sup>79</sup> As Liggins points out, the “word ‘house’ appears ten times and the word ‘home’ only twice in the opening paragraph,”<sup>80</sup> marking the Grove as an essentially unhomey habitation symbolised by the “deadly good order” of the unused feminine and familial space of the drawing room.<sup>81</sup> The capitalist father and Philip, the son and narrator, live their lives, “spiritually barren and characterised by the suppression of emotion,” in the masculine spaces of the library and the study, or abroad on the

Continent.<sup>82</sup> While shielded by a “clump of trees” from the unwelcome influence of the nearby town whose rents the father predatorily collects, the house is permeated by the commercial atmosphere that intrudes at its “closed gates.”<sup>83</sup> This situation is disturbed by an estranged relative’s gift of a portrait of the dead mother as a plea for support for an impecunious young relative who uncannily shares both her name and appearance. Philip’s questioning of “what might have been had she lived, had she been there, warmly enthroned beside the warm domestic centre, the hearth which would have been a common sanctuary, the true home” is answered when the mother’s spiritual “gentler force, a more benignant influence” begins to act through him from the “tender regions of the unseen” to counter the father’s harsh economic mindset, imbuing the house with warmth and benevolence again.<sup>84</sup> While the story appears to conclude with the happy union of Philip and his kinswoman, this promise of domestic bliss is undermined by a side reference to the “place [...] being pulled down at this moment to make room for more streets of mean little houses,” which may suggest Philip’s subsequent loss of his wife and return to a capitalist mindset.<sup>85</sup> Domestic happiness is a fragile experience in Oliphant’s supernatural stories.

### “The Door that Stands Ajar”: Liminal Wanderings

If these stories with their secret spaces, unhomely homes and threshold images make relatively traditional use of the conventions of the ghost story and the Gothic tale, Oliphant was simultaneously developing a related strand of supernatural fiction exploring the experience of the afterlife that has attracted relatively little scholarly interest. The novella *Old Lady Mary*, published in *Maga* in January 1884, and the Easter story “A Visitor and His Opinions,” which appeared in April 1893, belong somewhere between these two story clusters, imagining the willing but temporary return of a spirit from the afterlife.

In her *Autobiography*, Oliphant writes about the “dizzy feeling” that she might be able to recover past domestic happiness by “knock[ing] at the door” of her “old house” and finding the life of old proceeding undisturbed inside.<sup>86</sup> *Old Lady Mary*, another unsigned flagship story, explores the strangeness of familiar spaces from the perspective of the title character, who, after a pleasant life during which “[s]he had lived through almost everything that is to be found in life,” is reluctant to “push open the door that stands ajar, and behind which there is ease for all our pains, or at least rest, if nothing more.”<sup>87</sup> Lady Mary’s relationship with her home is what Gaston Bachelard would describe as “topophilic”:<sup>88</sup> she has a “pretty house full of things which formed a graceful *entourage*,” “a pretty garden” and a stock of memories “like pictures hung in the secret chambers of her mind.”<sup>89</sup> Even the secret drawer

of an Italian cabinet in which Lady Mary mischievously deposits a will drawn up in favour of her impecunious young ward, little Mary, speaks of her sense of oneness with her home. However, Lady Mary has cause to regret this hiding place when the will remains undiscovered after her death and little Mary is left penniless.

While this premise would seem to lend itself to a conventional ghost story, Oliphant unusually makes Lady Mary in her ghostly form the central consciousness of the narrative. Her passage to death is depicted as an awakening to the surprise that she has “left home without knowing it” and finds herself in a liminal “great place” in the “midst of a company of people all very busy,” where earthly hierarchies are forgotten and she is invited to reflect on her life.<sup>90</sup> For Turner, liminal subjects are “entities in transition,” “betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial.”<sup>91</sup> Lady Mary, however, has trouble adjusting to her new position and longs instead for her former home, only to realise that “all communication with the world she had left was closed”.<sup>92</sup>

There passed through her mind a hundred stories she had heard of those who had *gone back*. But not one that spoke of them as welcome, as received with joy, as comforting those they loved. Ah no! was it not rather a curse upon the house to which they came? The rooms were shut up, the houses abandoned, where they were supposed to appear. Those whom they had loved best feared and fled them.<sup>93</sup>

Nonetheless, Lady Mary decides to try her luck on the “dark and dreadful way” and return to the world to secure little Mary’s future.<sup>94</sup> With the “strange, wistful feeling of an exile returning after long years,” she returns to her former home, where little Mary is now living as an economically vulnerable governess.<sup>95</sup> Like Turner’s threshold people caught up in a “betwixt-and-between” situation,<sup>96</sup> Lady Mary finds herself a “poor wanderer” “lost in a world which had no place for her.”<sup>97</sup> In her new liminal state of “invisibility,” “anonymity,” “submissiveness and silence,” she is only visible to children and animals but unable to communicate with either.<sup>98</sup> Little Mary, as Liggins observes, shares her marginality, with both women “circling the household and mourning its takeover by the new family.”<sup>99</sup> No matter how much the two Marys may have loved their former home, the memories that characterise the domestic space after Lady Mary’s death are overwhelmingly painful and associated with “emptiness” and “desolation,”<sup>100</sup> far from the “*felicitous space*,” the “space we love” where “our memories have refuges” described by Bachelard.<sup>101</sup>

The story’s conclusion sees both women accept their place following a liminal encounter witnessed by Connie, one of little Mary’s wards who, much to little Mary’s distress, keeps sighting Lady Mary about the house. While little Mary pleads for God’s mercy for Lady Mary, the two

marginalised women are briefly able to see “each other face to face.”<sup>102</sup> Little Mary will wake from the resulting “wanderings” of a “long illness” to discover that the will has been found.<sup>103</sup> Meanwhile, the traumatic experience of liminal wandering between the worlds of the living and the dead leads Lady Mary to welcome her eventual return to the afterlife: “how well one is in one’s own place! [...] Oh how lonely it is in the world when you are a wanderer.”<sup>104</sup> While allowing Lady Mary this visit to her former home, the story comfortingly concludes with her acceptance of her new place in the afterlife while restoring little Mary to her former social status.

The unnamed princely protagonist of “A Visitor and His Opinions” is also an anonymous liminal “passenger” in an “unknown landscape quite new to him,” but one who is in greater control of his sojourn than Lady Mary.<sup>105</sup> This unsigned flagship story, which appeared at Easter 1893 and was subtitled “A Story of the Seen and the Unseen,” imagines Christ’s return to, and rejection by, secular fin-de-siècle society and predates other such narratives of the 1890s, including W. T. Stead’s *If Christ Came to Chicago* (1894), Marie Corelli’s *The Sorrows of Satan* (1895) and Richard Marsh’s *A Second Coming* (1898). Oliphant’s Christ is a “Stranger,” a “foreign gentleman not accustomed to English ways,” who begins his “voyage of discovery in England” in Dover, where the view of the “dark sea tossing its waves, the spray dashing upon the rocks and piers,” recalls Matthew Arnold’s poem about the Victorian crisis of faith, “Dover Beach” (published in 1867).<sup>106</sup> Though “Dover is not a well-lighted town,” the visitor illuminates the “dark street[s]” by casting a “vague radiance” about him while always asking the same spatially inflected question: “What has brought you to this pass?”<sup>107</sup> The fin de siècle itself, with its characteristic mindset, emerges as a liminal period of transition in this story before the visitor returns, like Lady Mary, “to his own place,” not to be “seen or heard of more.”<sup>108</sup> The story weaves together religious questionings, social issues, travel motifs and a critique of xenophobia while providing *Maga* with a seasonal Easter tale that combines the supernatural with the religious.

### “Souls upon the Threshold”: Journeys in the Afterlife

Stories such as *Old Lady Mary* and “A Visitor and His Opinions” gesture towards Oliphant’s most distinctive contribution to the genre of the supernatural story: her attempt to imagine the afterlife. Oliphant’s own devastating losses had often led her to speculate on this topic. “Where, then, are they, those who have gone before us?” she wondered in 1864, after her daughter Maggie had died in Rome; “Oh if I could but think, or even imagine what he is set to do – what intelligent life there is, what conditions at all,” she wailed after the death of her son Cyril (“Tiddy”) in 1890.<sup>109</sup> Her “Little Pilgrim” stories, inspired by the sudden death of her Windsor neighbour

Nelly Clifford, reflect what Sanders describes as Oliphant's "increasing pre-occupation with death" by seeking to familiarise the afterlife and "imagine not just a tangible home for the dead, but also a process of arrival, information-gathering, and integration into a kindly collective of people like herself, resting after a lifetime of toil."<sup>110</sup> Although these stories about "soul[s] upon the threshold"<sup>111</sup> have been dismissed by some critics as "inferior work" "smacking too much of consolation literature"<sup>112</sup> and "uninteresting and badly written" "propaganda of a fairly crude kind,"<sup>113</sup> they were among the most popular of Oliphant's stories during her lifetime, confirming the commercial potential and diversity of the supernatural tale.<sup>114</sup>

The first "Little Pilgrim" stories, which appeared in *Macmillan's Magazine* in May and September 1882<sup>115</sup> and in *Scottish Church* in July 1885, confirm Oliphant's religious faith and "formulate her own theology" at a time of increasing secularity.<sup>116</sup> They imagine the Little Pilgrim's passage to heaven, which is in these initial stories configured as a "feminist utopia" where "tired women are allowed to rest,"<sup>117</sup> "free [...] from the earthly disadvantages of gender."<sup>118</sup> The three stories about the afterlife published in *Maga*, however, represent much darker "dystopian vision[s]" of hell and purgatory, drawing on Oliphant's familiarity with Dante's *Divine Comedy* and Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*.<sup>119</sup> Unlike the very first "Little Pilgrim" stories, these stories represent the horrific experiences of *male* characters who have *failed* to achieve peace in the afterlife. Significantly, two of them are presented as drawn from the "archives of the heavenly country" by the Little Pilgrim, a "woman whose humble career had terminated in great yet modest promotion in another world than ours" due to her curiosity "to see and hear all that could be learned in the wonderful country in which her abode was fixed."<sup>120</sup> Oliphant's imaginary heaven is not only a place where women are allowed to rest but where they can read, learn and be heard after a lifetime of earthly marginalisation. By contrast, the male characters of her *Maga* stories appear as cautionary figures.

"The Land of Darkness," which appeared as *Maga's* flagship story in January 1887 alongside Oliphant's "Old Saloon," imagines hell as a "brutalised landscape" that "concentrates all Oliphant's fears about the modern world as an environment in which spirituality is dead"<sup>121</sup> and "anticipates some contemporary dystopias."<sup>122</sup> The story commences *in medias res*, with the narrator's "tingling sensation of having come down rapidly upon the ground from a height."<sup>123</sup> His journey takes him to a number of urban, industrial hells. The first is a "dreadful city," busy, noisy, dark, hostile, commercial and lacking in order, with evidence of cruelty, greed and indifference all around, recalling a modern industrial town and surrounded by infernal mines where people toil for gold.<sup>124</sup> The second anticipates a Foucauldian "disciplinary society,"<sup>125</sup> a well-ordered city where all aspects of life are governed by a "long list of printed regulations," the

weak and vulnerable are kept out of sight in grotesque lazar-houses, “there [i]s nothing to interest the mind, nothing to please the eye,” and the narrator feels himself “inspected, closely scrutinised [...] by a cold observation that went through and through [...] so that [he] never felt [him]self secure from it.”<sup>126</sup> Next, the narrator finds himself in an “accursed home of pleasure” where rest is impossible, which he escapes only to stumble upon a place “full of furnaces and clanking machinery and endless work.”<sup>127</sup> These extreme visions of greed, toil, surveillance, leisure and indifference build a powerful critique of fin-de-siècle society. Home, Oliphant suggests, is instead characterised by empathy, privacy, respect, moderation and meaningful labour.

At the conclusion of the story, the narrator entertains the possibility of escaping across the “perpendicular cliffs, and awful precipices” of the “dark mountains,” only to turn his back on “hope that is torment.”<sup>128</sup> “On the Dark Mountains,” narrated by the Little Pilgrim, imagines a successful escape from the “cities of the night” of the Land of Darkness.<sup>129</sup> The story appeared, unsigned, as the second feature in the November 1888 issue of *Maga*, which also contained a review of Oliphant’s *Life of Tulloch*, and could be seen as a sequel to the 1887 story. In it, the Little Pilgrim witnesses for herself that “traveller[s] in the darkness” could indeed escape the “Land of Darkness – that region in which the souls of men are left by God to their own devices” by seeking a dangerous path through a “great gulf of darkness” on the “dark mountains.”<sup>130</sup>

“The Land of Suspense,” which appeared towards the end of *Maga*’s January 1897 issue alongside Hugh M. Stutfield’s hostile analysis of the “Psychology of Feminism,” is an example of a story that “explore[s] loss, bereavement, and the tentative hope of reunion with loved ones beyond the grave” just six months before Oliphant’s own death in June 1897.<sup>131</sup> Her last surviving child Francis (“Cecco”) had died in October 1894, and this late story imagines the reunion of her family in the afterlife. Though generically related to the “Little Pilgrim” series, “The Land of Suspense” does not feature the Little Pilgrim as narrator and, unusually for Oliphant’s stories about the afterlife, situates the protagonist, a nameless “young man,” as walking through the “loveliest part of Italy” – a powerful reminder of Oliphant’s earlier losses in Rome – without “know[ing] where he was going, nor what place this was, nor the direction in which [his walk] would lead him,” but with an “impression” of “going home.”<sup>132</sup> However, once the young man reaches his destination, he finds himself unable to enter through the recurring motif of the “wide open gate.”<sup>133</sup> While he remembers that “his former goings home had not always been happy,” he is also aware that his “home was never closed to [him] before,” with his “mother’s light always burning to guide” him.<sup>134</sup> The “homeless wanderer” finds himself “abandoned, forsaken, the door shut upon him – worse than that, open, but he unable to enter,”

and pining for the “other life which he had left! the homely house, the quiet room, the face all smiling weeping, at the door!”<sup>135</sup> Oliphant disturbingly places the restless prodigal son in purgatory, imagined as a pleasant but tedious country offering “no home, no duty, no life.”<sup>136</sup> Here the young man, “nobody’s enemy but his own,” must abide a while in a liminal state of invisibility to reflect on his former conduct before being allowed to join the rest of his family in the “boundless space” of the heavenly city.<sup>137</sup>

### “A Feeling of Space”?

Jenni Calder notes that the “image of being trapped by nothing and a doorway that goes nowhere is particularly chilling when looked at in the wider context of Oliphant’s investigation of women’s lives.”<sup>138</sup> In Oliphant’s supernatural stories in *Maga*, such spatial limitations more commonly affect male than female characters, and the ghosts in the “masculine” *Maga* are also largely male. Whereas Lady Mary and the dead mother of “The Portrait” are able to reach out benevolently from beyond the grave and the Little Pilgrim finds respect in her new life, male characters almost invariably find threshold spaces intimidating. Given her own precarity, Oliphant may be suggesting that the marginality of nineteenth-century women made them better able to negotiate liminal experiences than their male contemporaries, whose very security in the public sphere may have made the margin a troubling space.

“The Library Window” is a notable female-narrated exception to this rule, although the story’s ghost is again a man. This “flawless”<sup>139</sup> 18,000-word story appeared in the flagship position in the January 1896 issue of *Maga*, which also contained Oliphant’s vicious, initialled attack against Hardy’s *Jude the Obscure*, “The Anti-Marriage League.” The contrast between this review and “The Library Window,” which Jay terms “at once the most accomplished and least self-indulgent account of the woman writer’s predicament that Mrs Oliphant ever produced,”<sup>140</sup> could hardly be starker and amply demonstrates how “competing voices could be seen jostling for space” even within a magazine as carefully edited as *Maga*.<sup>141</sup> At the very end of her life, Oliphant’s uniquely suggestive story explores the “slippage between public and private spheres”<sup>142</sup> that had characterised her authorial life and exposes the “limited choices open to women of imagination yearning for something beyond the peaceful domestic round of their elders.”<sup>143</sup>

Described by Calder as “perhaps the most sustained and luminous piece of prose Oliphant produced,”<sup>144</sup> “The Library Window” powerfully explores women’s exclusion from scholarly life and the challenges of accepting marginality.<sup>145</sup> The story is unique in Oliphant’s supernatural corpus in its lack of religious messages and in its strong feminist sensibilities, conveyed

through the unnamed narrator's yearning for a room of her own,<sup>146</sup> which recalls Oliphant's reflections on her own lack of privacy:

I have never been shut up in a separate room, or hedged off with any observances. My study, all the study I have ever attained to, is the little second drawing-room of my house, with a wide opening into the other drawing-room where all the (feminine) life of the house goes on; and I don't think I have ever had two hours undisturbed (except at night, when everybody is in bed) during my whole literary life.<sup>147</sup>

During luminous June evenings, when "it is daylight, yet it is not day," the adolescent female narrator contemplates the strangely "opaque" and possibly non-existent window of the library of the ancient Scottish university of St Rule's from the "refuge" of the "deep recess" of her aunt's "drawing-room window."<sup>148</sup> As a visitor to St Rule's recuperating from an unnamed illness; an adolescent between childhood and adulthood; seated in her liminal window between the public and the private spheres; and perceiving the world through what she terms "second-sight" but seen by others as "fantastic and fanciful and dreamy," the narrator is a threshold person *par excellence*.<sup>149</sup> Her aspiration to a scholarly life in a society that offered women few such opportunities gradually leads her to perceive a "vision of scholarship," a spectral scholar working at his desk behind the tempting library window.<sup>150</sup> However, the "feeling of space" the narrator spies behind the apparent window eventually evaporates as "an optical illusion," a pitiful "dream."<sup>151</sup> Calder rightly notes that the library "window may suggest opportunities of looking out into another, bigger world, but it is only an illusion of opportunity. You can see through glass, but not move through it."<sup>152</sup> "It is a longing all your life after – it is a looking – for what never comes," the story bleakly concludes.<sup>153</sup>

By the late 1890s, Laurel Brake writes, "*Blackwood's* appears expensive, unillustrated, and essentially non-urban, a pioneer of the magazine genre that eluded modernity."<sup>154</sup> While *Maga* would survive until 1980, Oliphant died in June 1897, having outlived all the children for whose wellbeing she had toiled so hard. The "broken cadence"<sup>155</sup> with which her *Autobiography* concludes – "And now here I am all alone/ I cannot write any more"<sup>156</sup> – captures her exhaustion, isolation, sense of futility and loss of purpose. If the "non-sequential narrative"<sup>157</sup> of the *Autobiography*, a genre that tends to aspire towards a sense of coherence, suggests "[f]ragmentation" to have been the "meaning and the pattern of a woman's life,"<sup>158</sup> Oliphant's short supernatural fiction explores what Fielding describes as "other possibilities."<sup>159</sup> Instead of the fragmentary and elliptical narratives typical of this genre, Oliphant's "Stories of the Seen and the Unseen" and the related tales about the Little Pilgrim in the afterlife seek to establish continuums and commonalities between this world and the next, between authorship

and domesticity, and between men and women. For Turner, liminality is a “condition [...] of ambiguity and paradox” which represents a “realm of pure possibility”: a creative space.<sup>160</sup> Oliphant used her marginal position as a professional female author writing supernatural stories for the conservative *Maga* to offer nuanced commentaries on questions of gender, religion, generational conflict and modernity. While the stories’ “feeling of space” often proves illusory, her supernatural fiction conveys a strong feeling for space that eloquently articulates the challenges of her role as *Maga*’s anonymous flagship author.

## Notes

1. Mrs Harry Coghill, ed., *The Autobiography and Letters of Mrs M. O. W. Oliphant*, 2nd edn (Edinburgh and London: Blackwood, 1899), 321. Coghill dates the letter 13 November 1884, but as the story that subsequently suggested itself was *Old Lady Mary*, which was published in January 1884, the letter must in fact have been dated 1883.
2. *Ibid.*, 322.
3. Elisabeth Jay, *Mrs Oliphant: A Fiction to Herself* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 158.
4. Anne M. Scriven, “Margaret Oliphant’s ‘Marriage’ to *Maga*,” *Scottish Studies Review* 8.1 (2007), 27–36: 27.
5. Valerie Sanders, *Margaret Oliphant* (Brighton: Edward Everett Root, 2020), 155.
6. Elisabeth Jay, “Introduction,” in *The Autobiography of Margaret Oliphant*, ed. Elisabeth Jay (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview, 2002), 7–23: 8.
7. Blackwood also published the 1895 novella *Dies Irae*, which is not considered here since it only appeared in volume form.
8. Penny Fielding, “Other Worlds: Oliphant’s Spectralisation of the Modern,” *Women’s Writing* 6.2 (1999), 201–13: 202.
9. Sanders, 191.
10. Esther H. Schor, “The Haunted Interpreter in Margaret Oliphant’s Supernatural Fiction,” *Women’s Studies* 22 (1993), 371–88: 371.
11. Victoria Margree, *British Women’s Short Supernatural Fiction, 1860–1930: Our Own Ghostliness* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 29.
12. Ann Heilmann, “Mrs Grundy’s Rebellion: Margaret Oliphant between Orthodoxy and the New Woman,” *Women’s Writing* 6.2 (1999), 215–37: 215–16.
13. Minna Vuohelainen, *Richard Marsh* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2015), 16.
14. Jay, “Introduction,” 10.
15. Robert T. Tally, Jr., *Spatiality* (London and New York: Routledge, 2013), 13.
16. Mrs Oliphant, *Annals of a Publishing House: William Blackwood and his Sons: Their Magazine and Friends* (London and Edinburgh: Blackwood, 1897), II, 472.
17. Margaret Oliphant, *The Autobiography of Margaret Oliphant*, ed. Elisabeth Jay (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview, 2002), 180, 155.
18. Joanne Shattock, “The Sense of Place and *Blackwood’s (Edinburgh) Magazine*,” *Victorian Periodicals Review* 49.3 (2016), 431–42: 439, 432, 435, 438, 439, 440.

19. Jenni Calder, "Through Mrs Oliphant's Library Window," *Women's Writing* 10.3 (2003), 485–502: 487.
20. Jay, *Mrs Oliphant*, 157, 170.
21. Sanders, 162.
22. Julia Briggs, "The Ghost Story," in *A Companion to the Gothic*, ed. David Punter (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 122–31: 126.
23. Jay, *Mrs Oliphant*, 171.
24. *Ibid.*, 3, 158.
25. Vineta Colby and Robert A. Colby, *The Equivocal Virtue: Mrs. Oliphant and the Victorian Literary Market Place* (n.p.: Archon, 1966), xiv.
26. *Ibid.*, xi.
27. Oliphant, *Autobiography*, 96.
28. Oliphant, *Annals of a Publishing House*, II, 475, 454.
29. William Blackwood, "Prefatory Note," in *ibid.*, I, vii–ix: ix, viii.
30. William Blackwood III, quoted in Solveig C. Robinson, "Expanding a 'Limited Orbit': Margaret Oliphant, *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, and the Development of a Critical Voice," *Victorian Periodicals Review* 38.2 (Summer 2005), 199–220: 217.
31. Sanders, 37.
32. Linda H. Peterson, "Margaret Oliphant's Autobiography as Professional Artist's Life," *Women's Writing* 6.2 (1999), 261–78: 269–70.
33. Jenni Calder, "Introduction," in *A Beleaguered City and Other Tales of the Seen and the Unseen*, ed. Jenni Calder (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2000), vii–xviii: viii.
34. Colby, xii.
35. Scriven, 28.
36. David Finkelstein, "Introduction," in *Print Culture and the Blackwood's Tradition, 1805–1930*, ed. David Finkelstein (Toronto, Buffalo, London: University of Toronto Press, 2006), 3–17: 9.
37. Shattock, 434.
38. Finkelstein, 9.
39. Robert L. Patten and David Finkelstein, "Editing *Blackwood's*; or, What Do Editors Do?," in *Print Culture and the Blackwood's Tradition, 1805–1930*, ed. David Finkelstein (Toronto, Buffalo, London: University of Toronto Press, 2006), 146–83: 149.
40. *Ibid.*, 149.
41. Laurel Brake, "Maga, the Shilling Monthlies, and the New Journalism," in *Print Culture and the Blackwood's Tradition, 1805–1930*, ed. David Finkelstein (Toronto, Buffalo, London: University of Toronto Press, 2006), 184–211: 202.
42. *Ibid.*, 192.
43. Sanders, 30.
44. Jay, "Introduction," 16.
45. Oliphant, *Autobiography*, 183.
46. Oliphant to Blackwood, 1855, no date, in Coghill, 160.
47. Michael Michie, "'On Behalf of the Right': Archibald Alison, Political Journalism, and *Blackwood's* Conservative Response to Reform, 1830–1870," in *Print Culture and the Blackwood's Tradition, 1805–1930*, ed. David Finkelstein (Toronto, Buffalo, London: University of Toronto Press, 2006), 119–45: 119–20.
48. Sanders, 38.
49. Jay, *Mrs Oliphant*, 5.

50. Scriven, 29.
51. Sanders, 46.
52. *Ibid.*, 2.
53. Ian Reid, *The Short Story* (London and New York: Methuen, 1977), 25.
54. Andrew Smith, *The Ghost Story, 1840–1920: A Cultural History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010), 2.
55. Vanessa D. Dickerson, *Victorian Ghosts in the Noontide: Women Writers and the Supernatural* (Columbia and London: University of Missouri Press, 1996), 7, 5.
56. Diana Wallace, “Uncanny Stories: The Ghost Story as Female Gothic,” *Gothic Studies* 6.1 (2004), 57–68: 57.
57. Brander Matthews, *The Philosophy of the Short-Story* (New York, London & Bombay: Longmans, Green, 1901), 15–16.
58. Jay, *Mrs Oliphant*, 158.
59. Melissa Edmundson, “The ‘Uncomfortable Houses’ of Charlotte Riddell and Margaret Oliphant,” *Gothic Studies* 12.1 (2010), 51–67: 51.
60. Emma Liggins, *The Haunted House in Women’s Ghost Stories: Gender, Space and Modernity, 1850–1945* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 4, 8.
61. Colby and Colby, 89.
62. Victor Turner, *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1970), 93. Turner draws on the earlier work of Arnold Van Gennep.
63. Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (New Brunswick and London: AldineTransaction, 2008), 95.
64. [Margaret Oliphant], “A Christmas Tale,” *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine* 81.495 (January 1857), 74–86: 75, 76.
65. *Ibid.*, 84.
66. Jay, *Mrs Oliphant*, 158–9.
67. Oliphant later reused elements of this story in a three-decker novel, *The Wizard’s Son*, which was serialised in *Macmillan’s Magazine* between November 1882 and March 1884.
68. [Margaret Oliphant], “The Secret Chamber,” *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine* 120.734 (December 1876), 709–29: 709.
69. Fielding, 204.
70. [Oliphant], “Secret Chamber,” 710, 711.
71. *Ibid.*, 716, 717. The phrase the “seen and the unseen” in this story predates Oliphant’s use of it to describe her stories as a series.
72. *Ibid.*, 723, 725, 726.
73. Edmundson, 59.
74. [Margaret Oliphant], “The Open Door,” *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine* 131.795 (January 1882), 1–30: 1.
75. *Ibid.*, 11, 16, 3, 17, 3.
76. *Ibid.*, 3.
77. Merryn Williams, *Margaret Oliphant: A Critical Biography* (New York: St Martin’s, 1986), 131.
78. Edmundson, 59.
79. [Margaret Oliphant], “The Portrait,” *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine* 137.831 (January 1885), 1–28: 1, 2.
80. Liggins, 103.

81. [Oliphant], "Portrait," 2.
82. Margree, 39–40.
83. [Oliphant], "Portrait," 1, 5.
84. *Ibid.*, 16, 21, 28.
85. *Ibid.*, 1.
86. Oliphant, *Autobiography*, 155.
87. [Margaret Oliphant], *Old Lady Mary*, *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* 135.819 (January 1884), 1–45: 1.
88. Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, transl. Maria Jolas, foreword by John R. Stilgoe (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994), xxxv.
89. [Oliphant], *Old Lady Mary*, 2–3.
90. *Ibid.*, 11.
91. Turner, *Ritual Process*, 95, 102.
92. [Oliphant], *Old Lady Mary*, 14.
93. *Ibid.*, 16.
94. *Ibid.*, 16.
95. *Ibid.*, 21.
96. Turner, *Forest of Symbols*, 110.
97. [Oliphant], *Old Lady Mary*, 38, 39.
98. Turner, *Ritual Process*, 95, 102, 103.
99. Liggins, 99.
100. [Oliphant], *Old Lady Mary*, 44.
101. Bachelard, xxxv.
102. [Oliphant], *Old Lady Mary*, 45.
103. *Ibid.*, 44.
104. *Ibid.*, 45.
105. [Margaret Oliphant], "A Visitor and His Opinions," *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* 153.930 (April 1893), 481–511: 482, 481.
106. *Ibid.*, 485, 483, 498, 485.
107. *Ibid.*, 486, 490, 492.
108. *Ibid.*, 511.
109. Oliphant, *Autobiography*, 39, 90.
110. Sanders, 156, 160.
111. [Margaret Oliphant], "The Land of Suspense," *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* 161.975 (January 1897), 131–57: 156.
112. Colby and Colby, 103.
113. Williams, 121, 134.
114. Colby and Colby, 105. Macmillan printed over 20,000 copies.
115. The stories were unsigned despite Macmillan's promotion of signature.
116. Margree, 36.
117. Sanders, 184.
118. Jay, *Mrs Oliphant*, 171.
119. Sanders, 156.
120. [Margaret Oliphant], "On the Dark Mountains," *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* 144.877 (November 1888), 646–63: 646.
121. Calder, "Introduction," xiv.
122. Colby and Colby, 105.
123. [Margaret Oliphant], "The Land of Darkness," *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* 141.855 (January 1887), 1–36: 1.
124. *Ibid.*, 17.

125. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, transl. Alan Sheridan (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991), 209.
126. [Oliphant], "Land of Darkness," 19, 20.
127. *Ibid.*, 33, 34.
128. *Ibid.*, 29, 36.
129. *Ibid.*, 36.
130. [Oliphant], "On the Dark Mountains," 646, 651, 648, 647.
131. Margree, 36.
132. [Oliphant], "Land of Suspense," 131, 134.
133. *Ibid.*, 136.
134. *Ibid.*, 134, 136.
135. *Ibid.*, 138, 139.
136. *Ibid.*, 144.
137. *Ibid.*, 143, 142.
138. Calder, "Through Mrs Oliphant's Library Window," 489.
139. Williams, 178.
140. Jay, *Mrs Oliphant*, 263.
141. Finkelstein, 5.
142. Tamar Heller, "Textual Seductions: Women's Reading and Writing in Margaret Oliphant's 'The Library Window,'" *Victorian Literature and Culture* 25.1 (1997), 23–37: 26.
143. Sanders, 177.
144. Calder, "Introduction," xvii.
145. See Minna Vuohelainen, "University Gothic, c. 1880–1910," in *Gothic Britain: Dark Places in the Provinces and Margins of the British Isles*, ed. Ruth Heholt and William Hughes (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2018), 118–36.
146. See also Liggins, 106.
147. Oliphant, *Autobiography*, 67.
148. [Margaret Oliphant], "The Library Window," *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* 159.963 (January 1896), 1–30: 8, 17, 2.
149. *Ibid.*, 2.
150. Heller, 23.
151. [Oliphant], "Library Window," 5, 17, 6.
152. Calder, "Through Mrs Oliphant's Library Window," 500.
153. [Oliphant], "Library Window," 27.
154. Brake, 206.
155. Jay, "Introduction," 20.
156. Oliphant, *Autobiography*, 203.
157. Jay, *Mrs Oliphant*, 3.
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159. Fielding, 201, 203.
160. Turner, *Forest of Symbols*, 97; *Ritual Process*, 128.

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