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Margaret Oliphant and George MacDonald as Scottish Writers for a British Audience

Sharin Schroeder

In his chapter on Victorian fiction in the *Edinburgh History of Scottish Literature*, Colin Milton claims that discussing authors such as George MacDonald, Margaret Oliphant, Andrew Lang, and Arthur Conan Doyle 'in relation to the history of Scottish literature raises an obvious question. How can writers who spent most of their lives, and all of their *writing* lives, outside Scotland be considered part of the Scottish tradition?' Milton's question is rhetorical; he goes on to say that 'the case is easily made for MacDonald and Oliphant: some of their best works are set wholly or partly in Scotland; their characters are often products of its distinctive history and traditions; each makes extensive use of Lowland Scots.'[1]

But questions of national identity were and are raised in relation to these two writers. *The Sheffield Evening Telegraph and Star* addresses some of these questions in a 4 October 1888 response to Glasgow's *Scottish Art Review*, which it says, 'raises a wail over the decline of Scotch literature':

> Where, it asks, are the Scotch men of letters now? Where are the Northern celebrities in the sense in which Scott, Hogg, Christopher North, and the brilliant galaxy in the early years of this century were celebrities? They don't live in Scotland now. They all go to London. In the world of fiction, Mrs. Oliphant, Mr. George MacDonald, Mr. William Black, and Mr. R. Louis Stevenson, are all Scotch by birth – but where is the Scotchness in their writings? They all write for a wider and more general audience than is to be found in their native country, and they have all left it. Dear old Scotland is stripped of the honour which should rightfully be hers; and her children are kidnapped and adopted by the English Metropolis. London, in short, drains Scotland now as much as she drains the provinces. By attracting to herself the Northern

[1] Colin Milton, '"Half a trade and half an art": Adult and Juvenile Fiction in the Victorian Period', in Brown, Clancy, Manning and Pittock (eds), *The Edinburgh History of Scottish Literature*, 3 vols (Edinburgh, 2007), II, 286–300, (287).

> geniuses she sucks all the local atmosphere out of them, and while adorning English literature, she decidedly robs Scotch.[2]

While many of Scotland's authors were, in fact, leaving their native land and attempting to appeal to a broader audience, the portrayal of Oliphant and MacDonald as authors who 'adorn[ed] English literature' but 'rob[bed] Scotch' sets up a false dichotomy between Oliphant and MacDonald's Scottish and British identities. Both authors maintained a loyalty to their Scottish heritage and relied to a great extent on Scottish literary and publishing networks. As the *Scottish Art Review* seems to recognise and lament, however, they were typical of their time in writing for a British audience that welcomed reading material not exclusively Scottish.

The *Scottish Art Review* clearly wanted a purer Scottish tradition. But, as Colin Kidd notes, 'there was nothing unnatural, awkward, or contrived about the idea of "British Literature"' in nineteenth-century Scotland, at least in the minds of most Scottish critics, for whom a 'pan-British compass was the norm'.[3] Kidd's assessment of this pan-British critical approach certainly represents MacDonald and Oliphant's work. Both authors were proud of their Scottish roots: Oliphant would draw on her Scottish identity when she wanted to explain the Scottish temperament to the English reader, as in the early pages of her *Life of Edward Irving*,[4] or when she wanted to identify herself with the most loyal of Scots, as in some of her writing for *Blackwood's Magazine* (including her review of George MacDonald's *Malcolm*).[5] However, when writing on non-Scottish subjects, other aspects of her identity came to the fore, including her gender, her religious views, or her status as an expert critic on literature, history, or life writing. MacDonald also took up his Scottish identity as needed to suit his artistry. He was committed to writing in extremely accurate Scots in his novels on Scottish themes, and Greville MacDonald insists in his biography on the importance of understanding the Celt as a

2 *Sheffield Evening Telegraph and Star*, 4 October 1888, 2, in *The British Newspaper Archive* <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk> [Accessed 3 July 2017]. Nineteenth-century periodical sources in this paper were accessed using either *The British Newspaper Archive* or *British Periodicals* (ProQuest).

3 Colin Kidd, 'British Literature: The Career of a Concept,' *Scottish Literary Review*, 8.1 (2016), 1-16, (11, 10). See also Douglas Gifford. 'Introduction,' in *The History of Scottish Literature*, ed. Cairns Craig, 4 vols (Aberdeen, 1988), Volume 3, ed. Douglas Gifford, 1–12 (8–9).

4 Margaret Oliphant, *Life of Edward Irving*, 2 vols (London, 1862), I, 1–9.

5 Margaret Oliphant, 'New Books', *Blackwood's*, 117 (May 1875), 616–37, (634–37). (634–37).

means of understanding MacDonald's character.[6] Indeed, both novelists' Scottish heritage can be traced even in many of their works in English settings. Nonetheless, MacDonald, like Oliphant, wrote on many other themes than Scotland, and reviews of the two authors discuss them as Scottish and English novelists interchangeably.

Critics who take a nationalist approach to nineteenth-century Scottish literature can certainly find primary sources to support their views. On the other hand, those who maintain, like Kidd, that a broader British approach more accurately represents the way many nineteenth-century Scottish writers saw themselves, will also find ample evidence. Working from Kidd's point that 'constricting binary alternatives of England/Scotland' are not particularly helpful,[7] I will investigate the interplay between MacDonald and Oliphant's Scottish and British identities. Firstly, I will examine the importance of their Scottish networks when outside of Scotland; secondly, I will give a partial account of the English and Scottish reception of their fiction; and finally, I will explore how Oliphant's experiences with expatriate Scots, including MacDonald, influenced some of her non-Scottish fiction.

Scottish Networks in England

A closer look at Oliphant and MacDonald's friendship demonstrates the importance of expatriate Scottish networks in England for both writers. When MacDonald and Oliphant wrote, most publishers were in London. None of MacDonald's novels, though many of them are about Scottish subjects and make use of Scots, were published in book form in Scotland.[8] MacDonald made an unsuccessful attempt to publish *David Elginbrod* with Blackwood, one of the few prestigious publishers still in Scotland, writing in February of 1861, 'I would rather have you to publish it than any other firm'.[9] Oliphant published one fifth of her one hundred novels with Blackwood, the firm to whom she felt the strongest loyalty. Nonetheless, she published the other eighty with London publishers, including Hurst and Blackett (twenty-nine) and Macmillan (twenty-two).[10]

6 Greville MacDonald, *George MacDonald and His Wife* (New York, 1924), 44–45.

7 Kidd, 3.

8 *Malcolm*, *The Marquis of Lossie*, *Sir Gibbie*, *Mary Marston*, *Castle Warlock*, *Heather and Snow*, and *Salted with Fire* were serialised in Scotland. See Table 1.

9 Edinburgh, National Library of Scotland, Blackwood Papers, MS 4162, fols. 117–18 (4 Feb. 1861).

10 For a full list of the publishers of Oliphant's and MacDonald's novels, see Troy J. Bassett, *At the Circulating Library: A Database of Victorian Fiction, 1837–1901,* in

However, although the publishers were in London, they were not always English. Many of Oliphant's publishers, including Alexander Macmillan, W. & R. Chambers, David Bogue, and Smith, Elder were Scottish. The publisher of five of MacDonald's novels, Alexander Strahan, had started his business in Edinburgh before moving to London. William Isbister, publisher of *The Wise Woman*, and Blackie, publisher of *A Rough Shaking*, were also Scottish transplants. William Raeper notes that MacDonald's journey south followed the traditional route for a '"lad o' pairts" hailing from a poor background': the bursary to a Scottish university followed by a move to an England filled with other Scottish writers and a 'publishing business […] dominated by Scots'.[11] Attention to these networks demonstrates that there were particularly Scottish approaches to making one's way in the capital and highlights Oliphant's motivation to help MacDonald, a fellow Scot.

Many scholars have shown interest in the literary networks that contributed to Victorian publishing success, including scholars such as Joanne Shattock, Andrew Nash, and Nathan Hensley, who have written on particular Victorian Scots.[12] Shattock, writing on the differences between male and female Victorian literary networks, makes the well-known points that male writers had greater access to clubs and coffee rooms and publishers' dinners, that they sometimes had university or civil service positions, and that they were more likely to attend and certainly more likely to give lectures than women. However, the evidence in and out of Shattock's article also demonstrates that there was some fluidity in this networking: some of George MacDonald's early literary networks in London depended on what Shattock calls a feminine form of networking, the literary party.[13] As Rolland Hein notes, '[f]requent visits to [Lady Byron's] home opened to MacDonald an entrance into the literary and intellectual world of London'; it was through Lady Byron that MacDonald met Margaret Oliphant.[14]

Victorian Research Web. <http://www.victorianresearch.org/atcl [accessed 1 July 2017]. Bassett lists Oliphant as publishing one hundred novels and MacDonald as publishing thirty-eight. Disagreements may arise as to what constitutes a novel.

11 William Raeper, *George MacDonald* (Tring, Herts, 1987), 191.

12 Joanne Shattock, 'Professional Networking, Masculine and Feminine', *Victorian Periodicals Review*, 44.2 (2011), 128–40; Andrew Nash, 'William Robertson Nicoll, The Kailyard Novel and the Question of Popular Culture', *Scottish Studies Review*, 5.1 (2004), 57–73, (69); Nathan Hensley, 'What is a Network? (And Who is Andrew Lang?)' *Romanticism and Victorianism on the Net,* 64 (Oct. 2013) <10.7202/1025668ar>; Nathan Hensley, 'Network: Andrew Lang And The Distributed Agencies Of Literary Production', *Victorian Periodicals Review,* 48.3 (2015), 359–82.

13 Shattock, 134.

14 Rolland Hein, *George MacDonald: Victorian Mythmaker* (Nashville, TN, 1993), 150.

Shattock's article also implicitly demonstrates that nationality as well as gender had a large impact on literary network access. Oliphant's own network-forming followed what Joanne Shattock sees as the traditional route for male Scots new to the capital, 'the obligatory call on Carlyle'.[15] Shattock notes that David Masson, the first editor of *Macmillan's Magazine* (and MacDonald's successful rival for the Chair of Rhetoric and *Belles Lettres* at Edinburgh), met 'George Nickisson, the proprietor of *Fraser's Magazine*,' T. K. Hervey, editor of the *Atheneaum*, and George Henry Lewes at Carlyle's house, where he also made numerous other important London connections.[16]

As a Scottish *woman* of letters, Oliphant's call on Carlyle was perhaps less expected; when working on the biography of the Scottish preacher Edward Irving, whom Carlyle had known, she visited his house, 'shy as I always was, yet with the courage that comes to one when one is about one's lawful work, and not seeking an acquaintance or social favour'.[17] Regardless of Oliphant's motive, as Elisabeth Jay notes, the research for the Irving biography, including the visits with Thomas and Jane Welsh Carlyle, led to 'new contacts and friendships and launched her into a world where she was regarded as a successful breadwinner'.[18] Oliphant's connections in London and in literary networks were extensive both for a Scot and for a woman, and as early as the 1860s, when she was still in her thirties, she was able to use them on others' behalf, including George MacDonald's.

In fact, Oliphant played an important role in helping at least two Victorian novelists reach success. In the first case, that of Dinah Mulock, Oliphant was a reluctant mediator, at least in retrospect. Oliphant describes how it was she who helped Mulock, a rival novelist, eclipse herself in financial success by introducing her to the London publisher Henry Blackett of Hurst and Blackett.

> I had introduced Mr Blackett by his desire to Miss [Dinah] Muloch

[15] Shattock, 132.

[16] Ibid., 131.

[17] Margaret Oliphant, *The Autobiography and Letters of Mrs. M. O. W.* Oliphant, ed. Mrs. Harry Coghill (Edinburgh, Blackwood and Sons, 1899), in *The Selected Works of Margaret Oliphant*, 25 vols (London, 2011–2016), VI, ed. Linda Peterson (2012), 62; *The Autobiography of Margaret Oliphant*, ed. Elisabeth Jay (Peterborough, Ontario, 2002), 142. I cite both twenty-first century editions of Oliphant's autobiography when possible; Peterson's contains the original published text, including the letters, and critical notes on the changes made to the text; Jay's edition is Oliphant's unexpurgated autobiography, given in its original order.

[18] Elisabeth Jay, *Mrs Oliphant: 'A Fiction to Herself'* (Oxford, 1995), 17.

> [sic] in London,—he, apparently with some business gift or instinct imperceptible to me, having made out that there were elements of special success in her. [. . .] He had at once made an arrangement with her, of which 'John Halifax' [1856] was the result, the most popular of all her books, and one which raised her at once to a high position, I will not say in literature, but among the novel-writers of one species. She made a spring thus quite over my head with the helping hand of my particular friend, leaving me a little rueful,—I did not at all understand the means nor think very highly of the work, which is a thing that has happened several times, I fear, in my experience.[19]

Oliphant's reluctance and regret in Mulock's case, where Oliphant's networking was casual, can be contrasted with her tireless mediating efforts a few years later with the same publisher, Hurst and Blackett, on behalf of George MacDonald and his first popular novel, *David Elginbrod*.

After MacDonald's early patron, Annabella Milbanke, Lady Byron, introduced MacDonald to Oliphant, Oliphant became interested in helping him publish *David Elginbrod* and gave him suggestions on the manuscript.[20] MacDonald had applied to Blackwood to publish the novel in January and February of 1861. John Blackwood, however, responded that he had 'read the greater portion of your novel' and found it unsuitable for serial publication in *Blackwood's* or for separate publication: '[m]y main objection,' Blackwood wrote, 'is that the characters are (to my eyes at least) so unlike anything in real life[,] but there is truth[,] excitement + interest about the story[,] and I think it may very probably succeed'.[21]

Oliphant would later refer to the many rejections *David Elginbrod* received as 'one of the instances of publishers' blunders',[22] but MacDonald's original two letters to Blackwood about the manuscript do not come off as particularly professional. His first asks the firm to consider his novel without telling them anything about it; however, he notes twice his hope 'for a speedy answer, which is of some consequence to my plans'.[23] His second informs them that he has 'not been able to give it the polish I intended before submitting it to your inspection' but that 'those who happen to know anything of my prose

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19 Oliphant, *Autobiography*, ed. Linda Peterson, 66; *Autobiography*, ed. Elisabeth Jay, 147.

20 Hein,150.

21 NLS, Blackwood Papers, MS 30360, p. 33a (13 February 1861).

22 Oliphant, *Autobiography,* ed. Linda Peterson, 214.

23 NLS, Blackwood Papers, MS 4162, fols 115–16 (23 January 1861).

compositions would be satisfied to trust me with the finish'.[24]

When the manuscript reached Oliphant, it was very visible that MacDonald had had trouble placing it: Annie Coghill writes before the 1884 letters in Oliphant's autobiography that the manuscript 'came enveloped in wrappings that showed how many refusals it had already suffered'.[25]

After receiving the novel, Oliphant first lobbied with Hurst and Blackett to publish it and then persistently attempted to convince John Blackwood to let her review it in *Blackwood's Magazine*. Perhaps the most interesting letter in this negotiation, datable only to somewhere in March or April of 1863, is published at the end of her autobiography:

> I am very glad you like 'David Elginbrod,' and my anxiety to get the article admission I may explain by telling you that it was at my urgent recommendation (having read the MS. and made such humble suggestions toward its improvement as my knowledge of the literary susceptibility made possible) that Mr Blackett published it; and that the author is not only a man of genius but a man burdened with ever so many children, and, what is perhaps worse, a troublesome conscientiousness; so please, if you are persuadable, let me have my way this time, and I will assault or congratulate, haul down or set up, anybody your honour pleases hereafter.[26]

Blackwood, however, was not persuadable. Between January and April,[27] Oliphant wrote Blackwood at least six letters regarding the review; in the first two she simply proposed an article on 'Thoughtful Books', listing several that she might review but saying that her real motive was 'to say a good word for a curious novel written by a poet whom I know, and called "David Elginbrod". The most extraordinary and absurd of *stories* but full of the most beautiful thoughts and scraps of divine philosophy. Let me do this please—'.[28]

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[24] NLS, MS 4162, fols 117–18 (4 February 1861)

[25] Oliphant, Autobiography, ed. Linda Peterson, 214.

[26] Oliphant, *Autobiography*, ed. Linda Peterson, 132. Greville MacDonald claims a different origin of *David Elginbrod*'s acceptance, stating that Jessie Ballantyne showed the manuscript to Dinah Moluck, who 'took it to her own publishers, Hurst and Blackett, and told them they were fools to refuse it. "Are we?" they asked. "Then of course we will print it without delay"' (322). William Raeper correctly attributes the intervention to Oliphant (180).

[27] Oliphant's letters are often unfortunately undated; archivists have penciled in the first January date. Blackwood's extant responses (some replies are missing) do have dates.

[28] NLS, Blackwood Papers, MS 4184, fol. 38 [19 January 1863]

Oliphant's next letter, which I put second but which is undated, states '[t]he paper I thought of was upon *Thoughtful* books [. . .] specially a book called *David Elginbrod* which pretends to be a novel'.[29] Blackwood initially agreed both to this paper and another paper by Oliphant on liturgies; the articles were supposed to go into the May number of the magazine, but, after reading them, he objected to them both, apparently mainly on theological grounds. He found Oliphant's description of MacDonald's novel too heterodox and, regarding the second paper on liturgies, which Oliphant commented that she 'trust[ed] you'll think orthodox enough for anything', believed the article likely to cause offense to members of both the Church of Scotland and the Church of England, with the result of embarrassment to the magazine and perhaps to its author, should her authorship become known.[30]

Oliphant's advocacy of *David Elginbrod* went quite far, however, and she did not give up easily. She promised to 'cut out all the objectionable matter from the paper about David Elginbrod if you will return me the proof—Perhaps to delete what you don't like [and add another review] would be the best way'.[31] She evidently wrote two separate revisions making 'amendments in the point of orthodoxy' and seems to have hoped, after her liturgies article was refused, that the paper on thoughtful books would still appear, especially since Blackwood was particularly worried about whether he would have enough material for a strong number in May.[32] On April 20, however, Blackwood responded that he did not think her review would do:

> I fear the patched David Elginbrod on Thoughtful Books is rather an unsatisfactory paper a very eccentric sound indeed – I incline not to use it.
>
> As I assented to the subjects of both this paper + the Liturgys when

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[29] NLS, Blackwood Papers, MS 4184, fol. 62.

[30] NLS, Blackwood Papers, MS 4184, fol. 78; MS 30360, pp. 374–5 (15 April 1863)

[31] NLS, Blackwood Papers, MS 4184, fol. 80.

[32] NLS, Blackwood Papers, MS 4184, fol. 58. See also fol. 94, where Oliphant notes that she hopes Blackwood will like the David Elginbrod paper 'in its amended form'. Both of these are difficult to date. On the one hand, in fol. 94 she says she has not yet finished the liturgies article, so that letter must have been written before April 15, when Blackwood refused it. Folio 58 discusses Blackwood having sent Oliphant proof of the Elginbrod article, which, Oliphant says 'conveys a certain faint hope that you might be induced to use it—as that I send it back with some amendments in the point of orthodoxy'. This letter then immediately goes into the section quoted in the letters of her autobiography and above (Peterson, 132). But it is unclear whether this letter was sent before Blackwood's letter refusing Oliphant's articles on liturgy.

> I felt very doubtful as to how they would suit you I will not allow you to lose your labour altogether + inclose [*sic*] a cheque £20 – which we shall consider as worked off in the next no– of the Magazine altho it may contain nothing from your pen.[33]

Oliphant was not pleased with this response, refused the cheque as payment for the articles, though she accepted it as an advance, and defended herself on the counts of heterodoxy:

> I daresay you will not expect human complacency to go so far as that I should be quite contented with this second rejection—two in our week is rather hard measure—Of course I have only to submit—but I confess I can't very well understand it. I have touted David Elginbrod simply as a book containing certain interesting though heterodox opinions which I have described historically, neither as a champion nor assailant. I don't for my own part agree with MacDonald in the very least—and what I have said is simply a narrative of his opinion, not by any means an expression of my own—the most orthodox may surely without impugning their own belief give a fair description of the sentiments of any book under discussion—and this is all I have done—however of course it is your business to accept or reject—and I can have nothing further to say in the matter, though I don't pretend not to feel it—My cheque I neither can nor will accept for work which is of no use to you—were I to return it it might look like ill-temper, but it must stand against the next paper I send you—[34]

I go into such detail about Oliphant's proposed *David Elginbrod* review, in part, because only the published letter has been previously discussed, and one complaint that has historically been made about MacDonald scholarship is that we lack a strong understanding of MacDonald's interactions with many of his contemporaries. Roderick McGillis, in his 1995 response to the publication of the Rolland Hein biography and the Glenn Edward Sadler edition of MacDonald's letters, shows frustration in the number of 'lacunae [that] remain in our understanding of George MacDonald's life. Truly, we do not have all we need for a complete portrait of MacDonald the man, and further, we can

33 NLS, Blackwood Papers, MS 30360, 376 (20 April 1863).

34 NLS, Blackwood Papers, MS 4184, fols 74–5.

never have all we need'.[35]

More broadly, Oliphant's letters to John Blackwood regarding *David Elginbrod* provide fascinating insights into her place in British literary and publishing networks. Her importance in this role is clearly complicated, alternatively underrated and overrated by her peers. Yes, she helped MacDonald to publish his novel, but her influence was limited. Blackwood could and did veto her work if it did not match his own views and was not even persuaded when she promised that if he accepted this piece, she would 'assault or congratulate, haul down or set up, anybody your honour pleases hereafter'.[36]

When Oliphant's influence was recognised, it was sometimes viewed negatively; Henry James and Thomas Hardy both came to resent it. Hardy made use of Oliphant's influence early in his career when Oliphant requested his work for the newly founded *Longman's Magazine* in 1882, but he was offended by Oliphant's review of *Jude the Obscure* and wrote more than one critical account of Oliphant.[37] Henry James, writing about Oliphant's influence, infamously claimed, '[s]he wrought in "Blackwood" for years, anonymously and profusely; no writer of the day found a *porte-voix* nearer to hand or used it with an easier personal latitude and comfort. I should almost suppose in fact that no woman had ever, for half a century, had her personal "say" so publicly and irresponsibly'.[38] As is clear from the letters above, however, Oliphant's say was often not *personal*, but rather subject to the Blackwood brand and the whims of its editors, and her anonymity, far from being a means of gaining power over an unwitting public, actually gave her less authority and less ability to say what she wished.[39]

Oliphant herself gives perhaps a too underrated account of her influence in her autobiography. She repeatedly underscores her failures at London

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[35] Roderick McGillis, 'What's Missing: Lacunae in the Life and Letters of George MacDonald', [Rev. of Rolland Hein's *Victorian Mythmaker* and Glenn Edward Sadler's *An Expression of Character: The Letters of George MacDonald*], The Lion and Unicorn, 19.2 (1995), 282–87, (284).

[36] Oliphant, Autobiography, ed. Linda Peterson, 132.

[37] J. S. Clarke, '"The Rival Novelist"—Hardy and Mrs. Oliphant', *Thomas Hardy Journal*, 5.3 (1981), 51–61, (51, 56–8).

[38] Henry James, 'London Notes August 1897', in *Notes on Novelists with Some Other Notes* (London, 1916), 353–60, 358.

[39] On the *Blackwood's* brand, and on Margaret Oliphant's role as writer for *Blackwood's*, see David Finkelstein, *The House of Blackwood: Author-Publisher Relations in the Victorian Era* (University Park, PA., 2002), (112, 113–28). I also discuss the limits of Oliphant's authority in *Blackwood's* in 'Lasting Ephemera: Margaret Oliphant and Andrew Lang on Lives and Letters', *Victorian Periodicals Review*, 50.2 (2017), 336–65.

networking—how she stood in corners at parties, 'rather wistfully wishing to know people, but not venturing to make any approach' and 'exasperat[ing] my aspiring hostess, who had picked me up as a new novelist, and meant me to help her amuse her guests, which I had not the least idea how to do'.[40]

In matters of temperament, Oliphant and MacDonald seem well matched. Hein describes MacDonald as 'not generally socially gregarious' and claims that he 'despised the masks people tended to assume in public gatherings'.[41] Oliphant, in her autobiography, describes a similar reticence to make much of herself and her work, calling it 'Scotch shyness [. . .] and the strong Scotch sense of the absurdity of a chorus of praise'.[42]

She also believed herself, as a woman, to be at a disadvantage in questions of influence, protesting against the 'the fictitious reputation got up' by men such as Augustus Hare and Matthew Arnold, 'who happen to be "remembered at the Universities", and who have many connections among literary men'.[43]

In considering Oliphant's position as a Scottish and British author, it may be worthwhile to note that the universities she refers to are English, and, if she sometimes resented their control over reputations, she also rated their value highly enough to send her own sons to Eton and Oxford. It is also worthy of comment that some who criticised her seemed to marginalise her both because she was a woman and because she was a Scot. After her death, Henry James wrote that her 'instrument was essentially a Scotch one […] What was good enough for Sir Walter was good enough for her'.[44] When W. E. Henley admonished James that he could have no 'pretensions to interest in literature' without having read Oliphant's novel with a Scottish heroine, *Kirsteen* (1890), James 'laboured through the book', with the conclusion 'that the poor soul had a simply *feminine* idea of literature' and could not be considered an artist.[45]

Although Oliphant discusses multiple themes in all her writings, in contemporary responses to her autobiography, her role as a woman writer and her loyalty as a Scot frequently come to the fore. Reviewers highlight members of Oliphant's Scottish networks, George MacDonald, the Carlyles, and James

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[40] *Autobiography*, ed. Linda Peterson, 35; ed. Elisabeth Jay, 76.

[41] Hein, 150.

[42] *Autobiography*, ed. Linda Peterson, 16; ed. Elisabeth Jay, 49.

[43] Oliphant, *Autobiography*, ed. Linda Peterson, 166. The quotation above is solely in reference to Hare. On Arnold, see Jay, *Mrs Oliphant*, 78.

[44] James, 'London Notes', 359.

[45] A. C. Benson, 'A Visit to Lamb House' (January 1900), in *The Diary of Arthur Christopher Benson*, ed. Percy Lubbock (New York, 1926), 46–48; repr. in *Henry James: Interviews and Recollections*, ed. Norman Page (New York, 1984), 87–8.

Barrie, as examples of figures to whom Oliphant offered untinctured praise. Oliphant's anecdotes about Tennyson, Dickens, Mulock, and George Eliot, also discussed in the reviews, have a sharper edge.

Oliphant's intervention in the publication of *David Elginbrod* gave many reviewers pleasure. At least three comment with interest and even surprise that it was she who helped him reach his first success as a novel writer and contrast her treatment of MacDonald with her treatment of others. *The Bookman* editor and advocate of Kailyard writers, W. Robertson Nicoll, in his review of Oliphant's *Autobiography* notes that Oliphant 'did not, as a rule, put a high estimate on the work of her competitors, but it is pleasant to find that she helped George MacDonald to get "David Elginbrod" published, and that she regarded him in many ways a noble writer'.[46] The *Times* writer maintains that '[t]he autobiography is frank to an extreme. [. . .] She confesses to mortification when Miss Muloch [sic], the author of "John Halifax," whom she herself introduced to Mr. Blackett, "took a leap over her head." By the way, we learn that it was Mrs. Oliphant who launched George MacDonald'.[47] William Canton, in *Good Words*, also contrasted Oliphant's advocacy of George MacDonald with her supposed failures of judgment in regard to Dickens's *Great Expectations*: '[o]n the other hand, she furthered the publication of "David Elginbrod"—who among Scottish readers that remembers the books of the sixties but remembers that novel with pleasure?'.[48]

The English and Scottish Reception of Oliphant's and MacDonald's Fiction

Because Oliphant and MacDonald wrote so prolifically, a thorough account of their Scottish and English reception histories would require a much longer study. The Scottish reception history, especially, has long been hindered by access difficulties. In 1925, John Malcolm Bulloch wrote that he was unable to give a complete history of George MacDonald's serialisations, 'particularly—strange to say—in the matter of Scots papers in which he serialised some

[46] W. Robertson Nicoll, 'Mrs. Oliphant's Autobiography', *Bookman*, 16. 93 (June 1899), 67–68, 67. Nicoll, who was in great part behind the popularity of Kailyard writers, also notes that when Oliphant was given 'a proposal that she should show up the Kailyard School, Mrs. Oliphant expressed her admiration for Mr. Barrie' (67). See Nash, 'William Robertson Nicoll,' with attention to page 57 for Oliphant's response to the Kailyard school.

[47] 'Mrs. Oliphant's Autobiography', *The Times*, 27 April 1999, 8.

[48] William Canton, 'From an Idler's Day-Book', *Good Words*, 40 (Dec 1899), 429–32, (430).

of the Scots stories'.[49] I uncovered new information on some of these serialisations, listed in Figure 1, by searching for advertisements in the *British Newspaper Archive*.[50] However, at the time of this writing, *The Glasgow Weekly* Herald, which serialised *Malcolm*, and *The Glasgow Weekly Mail*, where *The Marquis of Lossie*, *Sir Gibbie*, *Castle Warlock*, *Heather and Snow*, and *Salted with Fire* appeared, remain undigitised.[51] As Paul Fyfe notes, digitised and microfilm newspaper collections have significant gaps, particularly among Scottish and provincial newspapers.[52] While we can look forward to a better understanding of MacDonald's reception history as digitisation projects go forward, some newspapers, never having been preserved, are beyond recall.

What is clear from extant information is that there was no uniformly English or uniformly Scottish response to the novelists' work. Some Scottish newspapers seemed thrilled merely to publish news of MacDonald's success; more than one local Scottish newspaper reprinted a column describing how an 'old Aberdeen student has achieved, during the last few days, his first success as a novelist [*David Elginbrod*]'.[53] However, Scotland also provided some of Oliphant's and MacDonald's harshest critics, such as the writer for the *Greenock Telegraph and Clyde Shipping Gazette,* who complained of the novels each author published in Glasgow newspapers. The critic panned Oliphant's *Squire Arden* but called it 'a masterpiece compared with the miserable collection of melodramatic impossibilities and wire-drawn sentimentalities which Mr George MacDonald has heaped together under the title of "Malcolm"'.[54]

The English reception also varied – and is complicated by the fact that some anonymous writers for English newspapers may, in fact, be Scottish. From isolated reviews, we can see that writers in English periodicals usually, but not

[49] John Malcolm Bulloch, *A Centennial Bibliography of George MacDonald* (Aberdeen, 1925), 5.

[50] I would also like to thank Troy J. Bassett, who continuously updates *At the Circulating Library* and answered several of my questions about information on the MacDonald serialisations listed there.

[51] Readers may also have noticed that opinions given in my first long quotation, purportedly those of a writer in the *Scottish Art Review*, are mediated through an English paper, the *Sheffield Evening Telegraph and Star*. The *Scottish Art Review* is not yet digitised.

[52] 'An Archaeology of Victorian Newspapers," *Victorian Periodicals Review* 49.4 (Winter 2016), 546–77, 554.

[53] *Dundee Advertiser*, 20 January 1863, 3; *Dundee, Perth, and Cupar Advertiser*, 20 January 1863, p. 5; *Elgin* Courier, 23 January 1863, 6.

[54] *Greenock Telegraph and Clyde Shipping Gazette*, 11 September 1874, 2.

always, preferred the Scottish sections of *David Elginbrod* to the English, the *Athenaeum* reviewer being a notable exception,[55] and that they often, but not always, would comment on MacDonald's use of Scots in his novels.

English reviewers' opinions on the value of Scots varied, however. The *Athenaeum* review of *Robert Falconer* claimed that mastering the 'quaint Scotch dialect' was 'well worth the small effort'.[56] Edwin Paxton Hood of the dissenting *Eclectic Review* noted of *Alec Forbes* that 'while some readers will possibly find it difficult to follow the pages through their long Scotticisms,' he personally could not think of a novel 'in which the humour—for […] there is a most delightful humour in Scotch discourse—of the Scottish character has been so happily rendered'.[57] The *London Review* critic, on the other hand, writing of *Robert Falconer*, was less enthusiastic about MacDonald's 'profuse indulgence in the Scotch language,' as the reviewer was 'frequently obliged to guess at his meaning'.[58]

For Scottish critics, it seems the arguments were somewhat different, but no more uniform in their conclusions. Margaret Oliphant is often quoted for her response to *Malcolm* in *Blackwood's Magazine*: '[w]hy will Mr. MacDonald make all his characters [. . .] talk such painfully broad Scotch? Scotch to the fingertips, and loving dearly our vernacular, we yet feel it necessary to protest against the Aberdeen-awa' dialect [. . .] which bewilders even ourselves now and then, and which must be almost impossible to an Englishman'.[59] She contrasts MacDonald's Scots negatively with that used by Sir Walter Scott and believes that it is 'poor art, and not truth at all, to insist upon this desperate accuracy'. MacDonald's insistence on the 'exact words, or rather breakings up and riddlings of words', Oliphant protests, has a tendency to obscure the

[55] 'David Elginbrod,' *Athenaeum*, 17 January 1863, 79–80, 79. The *Athenaeum* reviewer did admire Elginbrod's character, writing, 'Those who are not deterred by the Scotch dialect from reading this portion of the story, cannot fail to be struck by the simple and original remarks of the old Scotchman.' The reviewer, however, unlike most, who preferred David Elginbrod, found the 'most interesting part of the book [. . .] is Hugh's residence at Armstead' (79–80). This is quite a contrast to the *Globe* (London), whose critic admired 'the first part of the book, in which David Elginbrod, and his wife and daughter, are described with their environment (a very fit setting for such a gem)' but found 'all that follows concerning other people, all more or less diseased in mind [. . .] not so good to read.' 'Literature: David Elginbrod,' *Globe*, 22 January 1863, 1.

[56] 'Robert Falconer', *Athenaeum*, 4 July 1868, 12–13, 13.

[57] [Edwin Paxton Hood], 'Alec Forbes of Howglen', *Eclectic review*, 122 (September 1865), 222–34, 222.

[58] 'Robert Falconer', *London Review*, 4 July 1868, 19–20, 19.

[59] Oliphant, 'New Books', 634.

'poetry and wisdom' behind 'the veil'.[60]

Sir Edward Troup, an Aberdonian, had quite the opposite complaint: he wondered why MacDonald was not more careful to 'adopt the peculiarities of the Aberdeenshire dialect'.[61] In a 1925 talk given to the Vernacular Circle, Burns Club of London, Troup notes that he had asked MacDonald this very question. MacDonald's response was similar to Oliphant's. MacDonald claimed that he 'wrote for a much wider audience than Aberdeenshire, and if he used the Aberdeenshire dialect people outside the North Eastern counties could not or would not read it, whereas if he used the classic Scots tongue he could appeal to Scotsmen all over the world and to the many Englishmen and Americans who read Sir Walter Scott and Robert Burns'.[62] For Oliphant, MacDonald's Scots was too local, for Troup it was not quite local enough, but for MacDonald it was in the tradition of Sir Walter Scott and Burns.[63]

How much (and what varieties of) Scots an educated Briton should be expected to know was a matter of debate on both sides of the border. Andrew Lang, another Scottish critic, who lived part of each year in St Andrews and part in London, maintained against the *Athenaeum* reviewer of Stevenson's *Weir of Hermiston* (1896) that well educated English citizens can and do read Scots: 'the two hundred Scotch words used by Mr. Stevenson—are of constant occurrence in Burns, Scott, and the Ballads. If this reviewer really does not understand them, he cannot read, without a glossary, books with which every educated man is supposed to be familiar'.[64] Furthermore, Lang claims these Scots words as part of a shared British heritage: '[t]he words themselves, as a rule, are old English surviving north of the Tweed'.[65]

In August, Lang addressed the literary use of Scots more pointedly and addressed how the language affected Scottish literature's perceived value and

[60] Ibid., 635.

[61] Sir Edward Troup, 'George MacDonald's Use of the Scots Tongue,'; repr. in *North Wind: A Journal of George MacDonald Studies*, 2 (1983), 24–32, (24).

[62] Ibid., 24.

[63] The disagreement can be traced to the question of what, precisely, makes for an accurate representation of a dialect. Oliphant seems to be referring mainly to questions of vocabulary, while Troup is more focused on whether the spelling represents the pronunciation. Troup notes, 'If you are an Aberdonian and know your own dialect, you can read his Scottish stories with the Aberdonian pronunciation as easily as if he had used the Aberdeenshire spelling. If you are not an Aberdonian, you are not puzzled and repelled by the Aberdeenshire peculiarities' (24).

[64] Andrew Lang, 'At the Sign of the Ship'. *Longman's Magazine*, 28 (July 1896), 313–22, (321).

[65] Ibid., 321.

its popularity. He objected to the *Academy* reviewer of Stevenson, who claimed that Scots were always partial to their own, and gave numerous examples to counter this claim. While Lang claimed that there was, in fact, no 'arrogance in claiming that persons ignorant of a language are not the best judges of the literature of that language',[66] he also believed that Scottish critics were often more critical of Scottish writers than the English:

> In fact, no man is a prophet in his country, a Scot least of all [. . .] it was a Scot who trampled so noisily on what he called 'The Kailyard School'. [. . .] The English, it appears to me, and not the Scotch, have commonly given to Scotch writers the warmest welcome.[67]

Oliphant may have agreed. In her autobiography, she tries to account for the success of her first novel, *Passages in the Life of Margaret Maitland* (1849), which was reviewed in the *Athenaeum*. As she was later embarrassed by its 'foolish little polemics', she could only conclude that there was 'some breath of youth and sincerity in it which touched people, and there had been no Scotch stories for a long time'.[68] While twentieth- and twenty-first century critics have pointed to English interest in Scottish stories both in the time of Scott and Hogg and in the latter half of the nineteenth century, Oliphant's account is interesting as a temporal outlier, or perhaps a reminder that, despite critical accounts of particular moments of English interest in Scottish stories, such stories were never out of favour.[69]

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66 Andrew Lang, 'At the Sign of the Ship'. *Longman's Magazine*, 28, (August 1896), 416–24, (418).

67 Ibid., 416–17.

68 Oliphant, *Autobiography*, ed. Linda Peterson, 27; ed. Elisabeth Jay, 65.

69 Critics have shown interest in giving dates to this reception history. See James Moffatt, who linked MacDonald's 1860s novels with Dr. Alexander's later Johnnie Gibb of Gusheneuk (1871) and a 'movement to exploit the Scottish character in the far North, to use the humour and the dialect of Aberdeenshire and the adjoining shires' (219). Margery Palmer McCulloch points to the desire in the 1880s of the 'capital's periodical press for [Barrie's] small-town Scottish stories' (90). Andrew Nash, on the other hand, notes that 'the statistical tables of best-sellers from 1891–1901 [. . .] indicated no discernable difference between Scotland and England in the consumption of the works of Barrie, Crockett, and Maclaren' (61). Moffatt, 'George MacDonald's Scottish Tales', *Bookman*, 72.430 (July 1927), 219–20; McCulloch, '"Frae Anither Window in Thrums": Hugh MacDiarmid and J. M. Barrie', in *Gateway to the Modern: Resituating J. M. Barrie*, ed. Valentina Bold and Andrew Nash (Glasgow, 2014), 88–102; Nash, 'William Robertson Nicoll'.

Scottish Influences on Oliphant's Non-Scottish Novels

In order to demonstrate the impact of Oliphant's Scottish identity on her non-Scottish work, I wish to discuss briefly two of Oliphant's works that are set outside of Scotland, *Salem Chapel* and *A Beleaguered City*. I choose these two novels above others, not only because Victorian critics often judge them to be among Oliphant's critical successes,[70] but also because *Salem Chapel*, on the one hand, was written at the time of Oliphant's networking on George MacDonald's behalf in 1862, and because *A Beleaguered City*, perhaps Oliphant's highest work of art, contains many affinities with MacDonald's.

Salem Chapel, serialised in *Blackwood's* from February of 1862 to January of 1863, though not at all about Scotland, relies on the Scottish expatriate experience. Oliphant based parts of it on her experience, not in a Chapel, but in a Free Church of Scotland in Liverpool:

> As a matter of fact, I knew nothing about chapels, but took the sentiment and a few details from our old church in Liverpool, which was Free Church of Scotland, and where there were a few grocers and other such good folk whose ways with the minister were wonderful to behold. The saving grace of their Scotchness being withdrawn, they became still more wonderful as Dissenting deacons, and the truth of the picture was applauded to all the echoes. I don't know that I cared for it much myself, though Tozer [the deacon, cheese-maker, and grocer who very nearly runs the congregation] and the rest amused me well enough.[71]

Although Oliphant claims that the 'truth of the picture was applauded to all the echoes', in fact, the reception history of *Salem Chapel* was somewhat bifurcated. Just as *Margaret Maitland* had been praised for the freshness of its Scottish theme, *Salem Chapel's* originality appealed to people. Outsiders, unfamiliar with dissent, believed in her portrayal. The *Westminster Review* critic wrote, '[t]ales of pastoral experience and scenes from clerical life we have had in plenty, but the secret things of the conventicle, the relative position of pastor and flock in a Nonconforming "connexion" were but guessed at

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[70] The *Saturday Review*, in a harsh assessment of Oliphant's writing after the publication of her autobiography, singled out these two works as those with life still in them: '"Salem Chapel," which belongs to 1863, and "The Beleaguered City," of 1880, are still alive, although they are crushed and stifled by the mass of the deceased fiction around them.' *'The Autobiography and Letters of Mrs. M. O. W. Oliphant', Saturday Review*, 20 May 1899, 627–28, (628).

[71] Oliphant, *Autobiography*, ed. Linda Peterson, 66; ed. Elisabeth Jay, 147–48.

by the world outside, and terrible is the revelation'.[72] *The Dublin University Magazine* writer found Oliphant's portrayal of dissenters more interesting than Trollope's 'unrivaled' portrayal of churchmen for the same reason: 'to the literary public dissenting ministers are comparatively unknown, while at the same time they are possessed of immense influence over large classes of the community. So we eagerly follow Mrs. Oliphant into the *terra incognita* of congregationalism'.[73]

Dissenting periodicals, on the other hand, did not see their own likeness in Oliphant's work: Edwin Paxton Hood, in *The Eclectic Review*, accurately perceived that although the 'author has been where she has obtained some considerable acquaintance with the ways and means of our Nonconformist churches,' her experience was not first hand: 'we should suppose that she has studied us rather through the spectacles of another denomination, or through hearsay; and we could very well point to her attention many errors of character and of detail'.[74]

Whether Oliphant's representation of a dissenting chapel relied not only on her experience in the Free Church of Scotland, but also on the experiences of her friend, Scottish expatriate George MacDonald, in Arundel, cannot be determined. However, there are intriguing similarities between the experiences of Oliphant's dissenting minister, Arthur Vincent, and those of MacDonald.

MacDonald, as a Congregationalist minister in Arundel, was clearly a much better clergyman and person than Arthur Vincent, whose education, combined

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[72] '*Belles Lettres*', *Westminster Review*, 79 (April 1863), 322–32, (327). American edition.

[73] 'Modern Novel and Romance', *Dublin University Magazine*, 61.364 (April 1863), 436–42, (437).

[74] Edwin Paxton Hood, 'Chronicles of Carlingford—My Lord Deacon', *Eclectic Review*, 4 (March 1863), 222-241, (237). Hood's reception of Oliphant and MacDonald is worthy of further study. Editor and predominant author of the Congregationalist *Eclectic Review* (many issues are solely from his pen), he devoted six full articles to reviews of Oliphant's and MacDonald's work, including Oliphant's *Life of Irving* (June 1862), *Salem Chapel* (March 1863), and the *Perpetual Curate* (December 1864) and MacDonald's *David Elginbrod* (February 1863), *Alec Forbes of Howglen* (September 1865), and *Annals of a Quiet Neighborhood* (January 1867). His initial reaction to *Salem Chapel* was disbelief that the work was from Oliphant's pen; he would have been happier to attribute them to the 'stronger, but more unhealthy and indeed eminently morbid pen of the author of "Adam Bede"' (222). In response to *Alec Forbes*, he asked MacDonald to 'leave the creeds and the sects behind him, leave Mrs. Oliphant to deal with Carlingford and Salem Chapel, and, for himself, if he determine on being a Scottish painter, walk rather in the step and the manner of John Galt' (234). For other dissenting objections to Oliphant's writing, see '*Chronicles of Carlingford*'. *London Quarterly Review*, 20.40 (July 1863), 434–54 and '*The Chronicles of Carlingford*'. *British Quarterly Review*, 41.81 (January 1865), 254–5.

with his pretentions to the higher society of Grange Lane, and more especially, the favor of the glamorous Lady Western, led him to feel superior to his flock of 'greengrocers, dealers in cheese and bacon, milkmen, [...] dressmakers of inferior pretensions, and teachers of day-schools of similarly humble character'.[75] However, the two ministers came from similar Congregational backgrounds and faced similar challenges. Vincent went to Homerton, MacDonald's original first choice for a seminary, though MacDonald later went to Highbury.[76] Both men gave stirring sermons that not everyone understood, and both were subject to congregational meetings in their absence in which their fate was discussed.[77] As William Raeper writes in his biography, MacDonald 'chafed against being at the mercy of a group of tradesmen "in which they regard you more as *their* servant than as Christ's"'.[78] While such a complaint by pastors against congregants is hardly unique, the complaint is precisely Arthur Vincent's in *Salem Chapel*: 'I am either your servant, responsible to you, or God's servant, responsible to Him—which is it? I cannot tell; but no man can serve two masters, as you know' (vol. 2, 306, Chapter 22).

Moreover, both men leave the ministry to 'go into literature'. Vincent was not a good Christian example, too enamored by those of a higher social class, but Vincent's ending position is more promising than his start, and Oliphant seems to approve of his visionary idealism. Nonetheless, Vincent's literary endeavours, apparently confined to periodicals, are a result of his frustration that his ideal remains unrealised, rather than, as with MacDonald, an attempt to bring the kingdom of heaven nearer:

> A Church of the Future—an ideal corporation, grand and primitive, not yet realised, but surely *real*, to come at one day—shone before his eyes, as it shines before so many; but, in the mean time, the Nonconformist went into literature, as was natural, and was, it is believed in Carlingford, the founder of the 'Philosophical Review', that new organ of public opinion. He had his battle to fight, and fought it out in silence, saying little to any one. (vol. 2, 313)

Oliphant's *Salem Chapel* did have some detractors; the sensational element of the story, involving attempted murder and brain fever, did not please

[75] Margaret Oliphant, *Salem Chapel*, 2 vols (Edinburgh, 1863; repr. Leipzig, 1870), I, 6.
[76] Hein, 43.
[77] Ibid., 81.
[78] Raeper, 92.

reviewers. Dissenters, as noted, objected that Oliphant did not understand them and wondered at her goal. The Methodist *London Quarterly Review* writer noted that her very terms were incorrect (448), claimed that no dissenting minister would enamored, as Mr. Vincent was, by a lady clearly outside of his class (447), and complained that it was impossible to tell what Oliphant's purpose was in writing such a story: '[i]t could hardly have been the writer's purpose to show the injustice to which Dissenting ministers are exposed from their congregations, or she would have either found a minister in whom there was more to admire, or a people in whom there was more to condemn'.[79] Nor could it be a sectarian purpose, since her established church clergy was no better than her dissenter (452–3). But is there nothing more in the tale than a gentle satire on all its characters, most of whom, though original 'are characters for whom it would be hard to cherish a feeling of sympathy' (450)? Is the purpose of the novel only to mock?

And it does seem that *Salem Chapel*'s purpose generally is to hold up the flaws of its characters, particularly Arthur Vincent's, but also those of his congregation. There are perhaps two exceptions, Mr. Vincent's capable mother, who though not always wise, nor entirely genuine in her statements, has been a pastor's wife and knows how to manage a congregation, and the mysterious Mrs. Hilyard, whose ability to fascinate Vincent makes her remarkable; she is perhaps the only member of the congregation to whom he makes an effort to act as a pastor should, though his efforts clearly stem more from the impoverished woman's being 'so strangely superior to her surroundings' than from his sense of duty (vol. 1, 35, ch. 2).

In contrast, MacDonald's characters are never subjected to satire for satire's sake; when their flaws are portrayed, MacDonald's purpose is clear. Robert Falconer's grandmother could very well have been subjected to keen satire, but instead MacDonald makes her one of his strongest and even most sympathetic characters, imprisoned by her doctrines but nonetheless loving fiercely.[80] Even with *David Elginbrod's* Euphrasia, who has in her much to criticise, MacDonald asks us to understand her rather than to mock her.[81] Oliphant's lack of sympathy for some of her protagonists, on the other hand, was noticed early, and not only in regards to *Salem Chapel*. John Blackwood wrote Oliphant on

[79] '*Chronicles of Carlingford*'. *London Quarterly Review*, 20.40 (July 1863), 434–54, (448–9).

[80] *Robert Falconer* (London, 1868; repr. Eureka, CA., 1990). See particularly chapter 8, 'The Angel Unawares' and chapter 12, 'Robert's Plan of Salvation.'

[81] *David Elginbrod* (London, 1862; repr. Eureka, CA., 1999). See particularly chapters 38, 39, and 60, 'The Wager,' 'The Lady Euphrasia,' and 'The Lady's Maid'.

March 5, 1865 about *Miss Marjoribanks* that a *Saturday Review* critic was correct that 'the author has not the remotest sympathy with her heroine + it may be worth your consideration to get in a feminine character with whom the author does sympathise. Do not however let this suggestion of mine mislead you'.[82]

I do not claim that sympathy is better than satire; they both have their place. Oliphant's gentle satire of Lucilla Marjoribanks, which sympathizes, at least, with Lucilla's desire to influence, rightly remains critically acclaimed today. However, in Oliphant's 1860s fiction, the narrator's critical remarks regarding her characters are often made, apparently, with the sole goal of illuminating their absurdities, in contrast to MacDonald's approach.

I do think that Oliphant's *A Beleaguered City* (1879), where satire and sympathy are both present, stands above *Salem Chapel* in artistry. The plot of *A Beleagured City* is as follows: when the citizens, particularly the men of the town of Semur, cease to believe in '*le bon Dieu*, whom our grandmothers used to talk about', and instead place their faith in the power of money (with Jacques Richard going so far as to call a one hundred sous piece his God), the more conventionally pious women of the town respond in horror, saying '[i]t is enough to make the dead rise out of their graves!'[83] The dead do, in fact, rise from their graves, turning the July weather cold like winter and the day dark like night. The dead then force the inhabitants from the town, although they are visible to only a few of the living.

The elements of satire in Oliphant's story are still present, particularly in the character of the mayor, who claims he is 'a man of my century, and proud of being so; very little disposed to yield to the domination of the clerical party, though desirous of showing all just tolerance for conscientious faith, and every respect for the prejudices of the ladies of my family' (*A Beleaguered City*, 10). Satire can also be clearly seen in the character of the mayor's mother, who writes near the beginning of her narrative,

> I have long felt that the times were ripe for some exhibition of the power of God. […] Not only have the powers of darkness triumphed over our holy church […] which might have been expected to bring down fire from Heaven upon our heads, but the corruption of popular manners (as might also have been expected) has been daily arising to a pitch unprecedented. (*A Beleaguered City*, 89)

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[82] NLS, Blackwood Papers, MS 30361, 296 (5 March 1865)

[83] Margaret Oliphant, *A Beleaguered City and Other Stories*, ed. Merryn Williams (Oxford, 1988), 7, 5.

Nonetheless as the story continues we meet Agnès, the mayor's wife, whose religion is true and genuine, a character with whom Oliphant could genuinely sympathise as both the fictional and the actual woman had lost their ten-year-old daughters, making the return of the dead to the town very personal to Agnès. Agnès's vision of her dead daughter is similar to Oliphant's speculations in her autobiography about the doings of her own children after their deaths.[84] The story also moves away from satire in its discussion of the priest, who, though religious, cannot see the dead and is forced out of the town like everyone else. And at times, the mayor too has moments that engage readers' sympathies. The mayor could not see the dead, but as he looked toward the town he could see empty boats moving on the river, including his wife's boat the *Marie*. 'They came near to me who were my own,' the mayor narrates, 'and it was borne in upon my spirit that my good father was with the child; but because they had died I was afraid' (*A Beleaguered City*, 40). Though the mayor could not see them, he did look upon the river and the town, saying,

> 'Oh God,' I cried, 'whom I know not, am not I to Thee as my little Jean is to me, a child and less than a child? Do not abandon me in this darkness. Would I abandon him were he ever so disobedient? And God, if thou art God, Thou art a better father than I.' It seemed to me that I had spoken to some one who knew all of us, whether we were dead or whether we were living. That is a wonderful thing to think of, when it appears to one not as a thing to believe, but as something that is real. (*A Beleaguered City*, 43)

MacDonald's ideas, as expressed in his writings and his conversations, had a clear appeal to Oliphant, an appeal rooted in her life experiences, including her mingled faith and doubt in the face of the death of her children. The two writers shared a Scottish heritage; a similar religious temperament; and abiding interests in Scottish and English literature, the fantastic, and speculative theology. They were also similarly prolific, and the volume of their writing continues to provide a significant challenge to researchers who would compare their work or put it in the larger context of Scottish or British literature, Victorian print culture, or the history of ideas. Thus, while this article contributes to a better understanding of MacDonald and Oliphant's mutual

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[84] *Autobiography*, ed. Elisabeth Jay. See particularly pages 39–41, on Oliphant's daughter, but Oliphant discusses all of her children in turn. All six of Oliphant's children and her husband predeceased her.

help and influence. Though *A Beleaguered City* is not a Scottish novel, in scenes like this one, where Oliphant deals with relationships with God as familial, she comes closest to the writing of George MacDonald, some of whose ideas had clearly interested her. Scottish novelists though they both were, their writing overlaps most in its speculative theology.[85] Thus, Oliphant, in her review of *Malcolm*, wished to get past MacDonald's use of Scots and the unreality of some of his characters in order to focus on the 'beautiful bits, without too much to do with the story—pure crystals, reflecting a hundred delicate prismatic gleams of poetry and thought'[86] such as the mad laird's 'yearning wistfulness of nature, looking in perpetual longing hope yet despondency for the God who will not show Himself'.[87]

Oliphant's final message to MacDonald, sent four months before her death through her friend Anne Thackeray Ritchie, conveys that, though nationality united the two writers, still more did their deeper spiritual concerns. After asking Ritchie to visit George MacDonald at Bordighera, Oliphant writes, 'Tell him I am not so patient as he is, but longing very much for the new chapter of life, where I hope we shall meet and talk all things over with better light upon them than here'.[88] offers a glimpse of the importance of Scottish expatriate networks in London, and introduces the ways in which MacDonald and Oliphant's writings were received on both sides of the Scottish border, it also opens many avenues for future research. Many relevant physical archives remain unvisited, and many key sources remain undigitised. As the number of titles digitally available increases and methodologies become more sophisticated, fuller accounts of Oliphant's and MacDonald's reception histories will be possible, and further connections between them will be uncovered.

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[85] Other critics have pointed to the similarities of Oliphant's and MacDonald's fantasies rather than their realistic Scottish novels. Douglass Gifford distinguishes between the traditional supernatural of Burns, Hogg, and Barrie, and the 'related, rich, but less traditional fantasy and supernatural work of Victorian Scottish writers such as MacDonald, Oliphant and Munro' (79). Marshall Walker links the two authors' "amateur theology of the supernatural' (167). Gifford, 'Barrie's Farewells: The Final Story," in Gateway to the Modern, 68–87 (79); Walker, *Scottish Literature Since 1707*, (London, 1996).

[86] Oliphant, 'New Books', 636.

[87] Ibid., 637.

[88] *Autobiography*, ed. Linda Peterson, 290.

Table 1

George MacDonald Novels First Serialised in Scotland	**Periodical**	**Dates**
Malcolm London: Henry S. King, 1874	*Glasgow Weekly Herald*	Begun 10 January 1874 (BNA)
The Marquis of Lossie London: Hurst and Blackett, 1877	*Glasgow Weekly Mail* *Lippincott's* (Philadelphia)	Begun 7 October 1876 in the Glasgow Weekly Mail (BNA) The Lippincott's serialisation appeared from Nov. 1876–Sep. 1877 (Bulloch, p. 29).
Sir Gibbie London: Hurst and Blackett, 1879	*Glasgow Weekly Mail* *Manchester Weekly Times*	12 October 1878–March 1879, simultaneous publication in both periodicals (BNA). Bassett (ATCL) gives different March end dates.
Mary Marston London: Sampson Low, 1881	*Aberdeen Weekly Journal* *Manchester Weekly Times* Later in the *Daily Gazette for Middlesbrough*	Begun 2 October 1880 in both weekly papers (BNA). Bassett lists the Aberdeen paper as ending June 4 and the Manchester paper as ending April 16; the Middlesbrough serial ran daily from July 3 to Sep. 15, 1883 (Bassett, ATCL).
Castle Warlock London: Sampson Low, 1882 (Published in 1881 as *Warlock o' Glen Warlock* by Lothrop in Boston)	*Glasgow Weekly Mail* *Wide Awake* (Boston)	Begun 29 January 1881 (BNA). I am unaware of the dates for Wide Awake. (See Shaberman 66.)
Heather and Snow London: Chatto and Windus, 1893	*Glasgow Weekly Mail*	Begun 14 January? 1893 (BNA) 9 January–1 May 1897 (Bulloch 42). Start date verified in BNA.
Salted with Fire London: Hurst and Blackett, 1897	*Glasgow Weekly Mail*	9 January –1 May 1897 (Bulloch 42. Start date verified in *BNA*

Newspaper advertisements verifying the serialisation start dates above were found in the British Newspaper Archive:

Malcolm: The Glasgow Weekly Herald start date is based on the language the "second Saturday of the New Year" which appears in multiple regional newspaper advertisements from early 1874. (*Londonderry Journal, Belfast Weekly News, Preston Herald*).

The Marquis of Lossie: 'New Scottish Story' [*The Marquis of Lossie*], *Edinburgh Evening News*, 5 October 1876, 4.

Sir Gibbie: 'From the *Athenaeum*', *Cornish and Devon Post*, 5 October 1878, 3. *Mary Marston*: *The Aberdeen Weekly Journal and General Advertiser for the North of Scotland* is digitised in British Newspaper Archive (under the title *Aberdeen Press and Journal*).

Mary Marston's start date in the eight-page literary supplement of the *Manchester Weekly Times* is advertised in *The Manchester Weekly Times*, 25 September 1880, 4.

Castle Warlock: *Dundee People's Journal*, 22 January 1881, 8. For more on the American publication, see Raphael B. Shaberman, *George MacDonald: A Bibliographical Study* (Winchester: St. Paul's Bibliographies, 1990), 66.

Heather and Snow: The John O'Groat Journal appears to have accidentally run the first chapter too early (27 December 1892), 2. However, the majority of the *Heather and Snow* advertisements point to a 14 January 1893 start date: Advertisement, *John O' Groat Journal*, 10 January 1893, 1; Advertisement, *Glasgow Evening News*, 11 January 1893, 3; Opening chapter. *Aberdeen People's Journal*, 14 January 1893, 8; Opening chapter. *Inverness Courier*, 10 January 1893, 3.

Salted with Fire: Bulloch's start date is confirmed in the *Saint Andrews Citizen*, 2 January 1897, 1.

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