



universität
wien

DIPLOMARBEIT

Titel der Diplomarbeit

„Female Power and Career
in Selected Novels by Margaret Oliphant“

Verfasserin

Andrea Serdinsky

angestrebter akademischer Grad

Magistra der Philosophie (Mag.phil.)

Wien, 2011

Studienkennzahl lt. Studienblatt:

A 190 344 299

Studienrichtung lt. Studienblatt:

UF Englisch UF Psychologie und Philosophie

Betreuerin:

Univ.-Prof. Dr. Margarete Rubik

Table of Contents

1. Introduction	1
2. The Victorian Era	2
2.1. Queen Victoria – The Icon.....	2
2.2. The Ideal Victorian Woman.....	4
2.3. The Women’s Movement	10
3. Margaret Oliphant	15
3.1. Her Life as a Sister, Wife, Mother and Writer.....	15
3.2. Oliphant’s View on the Woman Question	20
3.3. Oliphant’s Narrative Technique, Fictional Male and Female Characters.....	24
3.3.1. Narrative Technique.....	24
3.3.2. Male Characters	26
3.3.3. Female Characters	27
4. Powerful Victorian Women in Three Selected Novels	29
4.1. Nettie in <i>The Doctor’s Family</i>	29
4.2. Miss Marjoribanks	38
4.3. Phoebe, Junior.....	49
4.4. Concluding Remarks.....	57
5. Victorian Career Women in Three Selected Novels	61
5.1. Diana Trelawny.....	61
5.2. Catherine Vernon in <i>Hester</i>	68
5.3. Kirsteen	78
5.4. Concluding Remarks.....	87
6. Conclusion	92
7. Bibliography	94
7.1. Primary Sources – Novels by Margaret Oliphant	94
7.2. Secondary Sources	94
8. Index	98

1. Introduction

The Scottish author and writer Margaret Oliphant lived in the nineteenth century, at a time when women were generally regarded as weak, fragile, inferior, submissive and subordinate to men. The nineteenth century, however, was also a time of progress and change and this becomes evident in the six novels of Margaret Oliphant discussed in this thesis: *The Doctor's Family*, *Lucilla Marjoribanks*, *Phoebe*, *Junior*, *Diana Trelawny*, *Hester* and *Kirsteen*. These remarkable works of literature portray the lives and accomplishments of six different heroines, who want to achieve more than just become the devoted wives of men. They are powerful women and/or career women, who prove their courage, power, superiority and strength more than once and some of them even decide to pursue a successful career in the public sphere that was traditionally assigned to men. Although for a long time Margaret Oliphant was perceived to be a conventional and conservative writer, she was in reality rather unconventional. She in fact appears to have used her novels as a medium to open the reader's eyes to the limitations women faced in the nineteenth century and she put emphasis on the importance of opportunities for and on the possible achievements of confident, intelligent and talented women. This thesis will explore how Margaret Oliphant portrays these unconventional heroines in the six selected novels and how they often transgress the Victorian traditions prevalent in the nineteenth century.

The first chapter of the thesis will survey some of the images of women prevalent in the nineteenth century ranging from the 1840s to the 1880s in order to give a better insight into the Victorian ideology of middle-class womanhood. Furthermore, this chapter will deal with the demands and achievements of the women's movement. The next chapter will cover Margaret Oliphant's life as a sister, wife, mother and writer and her view on the woman question. Additionally, this chapter will contain a brief introduction to the type of narrator, fictional male and female characters of Margaret Oliphant. The last two and most important chapters will be linked to the first two chapters and will discuss Margaret Oliphant's powerful Victorian women, as portrayed in *The Doctor's Family*, *Lucilla Marjoribanks* and *Phoebe*, *Junior*, and Victorian career women, as portrayed in *Diana Trelawny*, *Hester* and *Kirsteen*.

2. The Victorian Era

2.1. Queen Victoria – The Icon

Victoria was born in May 1819 and was the only child of Edward Duke of Kent, the fourth son of King George III, and of a widowed German princess, Victoria of Saxe-Coburg. She was baptised Alexandria Victoria and was mainly raised in the German religious belief of her mother and governess, as Victoria's father died when she was only eight months old. Victoria received a lady-like education and possessed a talent for dancing, singing, sketching and especially languages, speaking German, French and English fluently. Due to the fact that the first three sons of George III had no rightful children to survive them, Victoria, at the age of eighteen, became queen on the 20th June 1837 after the death of her uncle, King William IV (see Arnstein 835). This is what Victoria wrote in her journal, when she was informed that she would become queen:

Since it has pleased Providence to place me in this station, I shall do my utmost to fulfill my duty towards my country; I am very young and perhaps in many things though not in all things, inexperienced, but I am sure, that very few have more real good will and more real desire to do what is fit and right than I have. (qtd. in Mitchell 5)

Victoria reigned from 1837 until 1901 as the queen of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, including the British possessions overseas. Her nearly sixty-four year reign, which stretched over the majority of the nineteenth century, was and still is regarded as the Victorian Era, a time of progress, expansion and mobility (see Frawley 403).

In 1840, Queen Victoria married her first cousin, Prince Albert of Saxe-Coburg Gotha, and they had nine children. This changed her life and role as a queen significantly and soon she became the symbol and icon of femininity and domesticity for the middle-class (see Arnstein 835). Queen Victoria was perceived as “an apostle of moral propriety, good manners, and domesticity” (Arnstein 836), which focused on the concepts of wifehood and motherhood. In the course of time, the young queen realised that the role of the monarch had an important symbolic character for the nation and its people. Therefore, she made use of royal representations and self-representations in order to effectively construct a highly visible and transparent example and model of domesticity, morality and respectability, which she herself soon came to embody (see Stimpson xiv).

In a lot of portraits of the royal family, Victoria and her husband were depicted in perfect marital and domestic harmony surrounded by their rosy-cheeked children. Victoria was often portrayed in relation to her children, thus stressing her connection with the private female sphere and her identification with the mother role. On a few occasions, Queen Victoria was even represented without a crown upon her head with the probable reason in mind to bring the royal family closer to the British middle-class and thus foster the bourgeois and especially female relation to the Victorian values (see Homans 23). According to Homans,

[s]he did indeed appear to be an ordinary, happily married woman. She represents palatial Balmoral Castel and Osborne House, the settings for some of her and Albert's most impressive performances of domesticated monarchy, as homes and herself as an ordinary woman who adored her husband and took an uncommon interest in raising her children. (5)

Hence, Victoria had a very strong impact on the construction of the middle-class woman of the nineteenth century.

However, Victoria was not as ordinary as she often presented herself. She was the queen of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland for almost sixty-four years of a century and the Empress of India for nearly twenty five years. "Despite notable exceptions, women were never meant to be Britain's monarchs. The throne was patrilineal" (Homans, 1). In a century based on an ideology of male dominance and female subordination and on an ideology of the separation into public male and private female spheres, it was remarkable that a woman held the highest office in the nation for such a long time and was also accepted by the British population (see Homans 1). From the beginning on she was interested in the stately affairs, conferred with the government ministers on a regular basis and exercised her political authority where necessary (see Mitchell 4). Victoria held the most powerful and influential position possible and therefore was also superior to her husband, Albert, and not inferior as she let herself be portrayed numerous times. "She was a queen, a unique role that unites the contradictory realities of public power and womanhood, which historically denotes a lack of public power" (Stimpson xiii). Referring back to the concept of the king's two bodies, it seems that Victoria's maternal body traditionally assigned to the private sphere and her sovereign body customarily assigned to the public sphere often coincided in her person (see Homans 5).

Queen Victoria was a clever woman and used her public role as a queen to influence her nation in a moral way. One of Victoria's greatest triumphs was

[h]er treatment of domestic power. For she aligned, with limpid sincerity and passion, the institutions of the monarchy and the middle-class family. Her family role was that of a perfect wife to her beloved husband [...]. As queen she might be a sovereign, but as a wife she was happily subjugated. As a queen she might be a singular figure, but as a wife she was an exemplary everywoman to and for her subjects. (Stimpson xiv)

In this sense, Queen Victoria can be seen as both the author and role model of Victorian ideology, which prevailed throughout the nineteenth century (see Stimpson xxi). Even “despite the anomaly of her own position” (Arnstein 836), Victoria never ceased to support the separation of the two spheres and to object to the efforts of the women's movement. The Victorian virtues, domesticity, marital stability and harmony, wifehood and motherhood, were perceived as the norm for most of the nineteenth century. Queen Victoria's death in January 1901 did not only signify the end of an individual person, but also the end of an era (see Arnstein 836-837).

2.2. The Ideal Victorian Woman

In early Victorian times, child education was not compulsory and there were many different ways of how children were educated depending on their sex, their parents' financial status, social class, religion and values. In the middle-classes, boys usually attended school and received a thorough education, while girls were customarily trained at home because of the Victorian social traditions and practical situations.

Firstly, the education of boys was seen as more important, since they had to provide for themselves and a family later on, and parents wanted to provide them with the best training possible. The education of girls was perceived as less important and was neglected. Secondly, girls in general were not in need of any preparation for public life, as marriage and the private sphere were to become the centre of their future lives. Like their mothers, girls were trained to be married women. For girls, personal attention instead of intellectual training was regarded as essential. Thirdly, it was the opinion of the Victorian society that girls due to their weak and inferior nature were more in need of social and moral protection than boys. Parents did not like to see their daughters leave their sheltered homes in order to attend a school (see Mitchell 165, 178). In addition, people thought that education would most probably be squandered on girls and

that the responsibility would overpower them, as they were mentally, physically and morally inferior to boys (see Nowak 292).

The education at home was either carried out by the parents themselves, especially by the mothers, or by a governess hired by financially well-established families. If the father was easy-going and interested in instructing and teaching his daughters and if the mother felt pleasure in intellectual pursuits and reading books, the daughters of this home were well taught middle-class women at the Victorian time. They gained enough knowledge and training in order to be independent learners throughout their lives. Mothers who did not have the leisure to teach and train their daughters tried to find an appropriate governess. The governess had to be a model of the traditionally correct values and behaviour and thus her manners were more important than her teaching abilities and intellectual knowledge (see Mitchell 178-179). Mothers wanted

their daughters to acquire some general knowledge – but largely so they would (as women) be able to carry on pleasant social conversations. Posture, speech, manners, taste, and personal presentation were considered more important than knowledge of geometry or philosophy. (Mitchell 179)

Furthermore, girls were trained in domestic economy, the science of the appropriate management of the family home, because on them the families depended “for food, clothing, cleanliness, and comfort necessary to health; and for the good nursing necessary in sickness” (Mitchell 265). In addition, they were expected to sing, draw and play the piano. In general, “[t]he practice of educating middle-class girls in the first half of the century resembled (if it did not represent) a kind of decorative packaging of consumption goods on display in the marriage mart” (Dyhouse 177).

During the Victorian age, marriage was the most important and unquestionable goal of every young woman. In 1840, the author of a book on feminine perfection wrote that “[a] female’s real existence only begins when she has a husband” (qtd. in Dunbar 17). “Marriage, ‘getting settled,’ was her aim; any other future was bleak.” (Dunbar 17). The question of either a marriage or a career was never open to debate in the middle- and upper-classes. The vast majority of young women prepared themselves for marriage by reading conduct books by authors like Sarah Ellis and Elizabeth Sandford. Marrying was the young women’s only chance of attaining a respectable and settled life and thus they tried everything to reach the ideal of feminine perfection, as prescribed by Queen Victoria (see Dunbar 18-20). The ideal expected of women was characterised by

[s]oftness and weakness, delicacy and modesty, a small waist and curving shoulders, an endearing ignorance of everything that went on beyond household and social life. Husbands did not as a rule require brains in their wives; they demanded charm, a high sense of domestic duty, admiration for and submission to themselves, and the usual accomplishments necessary for entertaining friends. (Dunbar 20)

In order to meet their future husbands, young middle-class women were either sent to live with relatives in cities, where the probability was higher to be introduced to men, or they were allowed to attend public events like picnics, musical evenings, parties, dances and teas. This was the young girl's chance to find her future husband and settle down.

Unfortunately, there was a surplus of women in the nineteenth century and therefore a lot of women remained unmarried despite their high expectations of marriage. In England and Wales, the figures show that there were half a million more females than males in the population of the mid-century (see Dyhouse 176). Middle-aged unmarried women were regarded with pity, since they lost their main functions as a wife and mother and had to stay with their parents as long as possible. Afterwards, they spent the rest of their lives as housekeepers, companions and nannies for other family members without having any responsibilities themselves (see Mitchell 143). Many women, however, had no other choice than to search for means of paid work. This also included widows who had to support their children on their own. "A life of considerable hardship undoubtedly awaited many of the middle-class women in Victorian times who needed to earn a living. Women educated for dependence might suddenly find themselves without support, and opportunities" (Dyhouse 176). Most commonly, educated single women of the middle-classes worked as governesses. Another less amiable option was needlework. Although women were often forced to work, Victorian society considered any middle-class woman with paid work as socially unacceptable. They perceived women's work as "a misfortune and a disgrace" (qtd. in Williams, *Women* 9).

In contrast, a married woman had a socially acceptable and respectable status, a position in society, and she was not forced to work for a living, if the husband was financially stable enough to provide for the family and to entrust her with the education of the children and any other domestic duties. In short, "[m]arriage established her rank, role, duties, social status, place of residence, economic circumstances, and way of life. It determined her comfort, her physical safety, her children's health, and ultimately – perhaps even her spiritual well-being" (Mitchell 267). A woman usually married a man

from the family's social circle and the same social class. After the marriage, she was no longer under the authority of her father, but her husband became the new authoritative power in her life. However, one should not dismiss the fact that through the marriage she was also made the mistress of the household and for the first time she could give instructions based on her own responsibility to servants for example. One of her most important domestic tasks was to set up a typical Victorian home for her husband and children (see Dunbar 21-22). "Marriage was seen as a woman's natural and expected role: it satisfied her instinctual needs, preserved the species, provided appropriate duties and protected her from the shocks and dangers of the rude, competitive world" (Mitchell 266).

Once married, the young woman gained the status of a mature and respectable woman, but becoming a mother, entering the stage of motherhood, was what fulfilled a woman to the greatest extent. The mother and her children were traditionally placed at the centre of domesticity. In mid-century, it was normal for a wife to have six children on the average to bear and care for and around one fifth of the families had ten or more children. At this time, traditions changed and it was considered important that the mother showed an emotional connection to her children and that she took time to raise them. Queen Victoria set out the example of what constituted a wife and mother and expected women to follow in her footsteps. The head of the family was the husband, who assumed the complete legal and economic control over his wife and children. As the wife was not allowed to work and did not have any private possessions, the whole family depended on the husband's income (see Mitchell 142). "Ideologically, the middle class home and family represented the essence of morality, stability, and comfort" (Mitchell 142).

The most established image of the perfect Victorian woman was the image of the Angel in the House, based on Coventry Patmore's poem. Wives and mothers were described to be ministering angels and domestic saints, whose entire life was centred on the home. "[T]he Angel in the House [...] was intensely sympathetic. She was immensely charming. She was utterly unselfish. She excelled in the different arts of family life. She sacrificed herself daily [...]. [S]he never had a mind or a wish of her own" (qtd. in Nowak 292). The Angel in the House was selfless and self-sacrificing and devoted her life entirely to her husband and children. She maintained high moral values, protected

her husband's conscience, supervised her children's education and assisted in restoring the strength of society through her daily demonstration of Christianity (see Mitchell 266). "Thus the woman, the very ideal of mother and wife, source of all virtue and purity, appeared as the good conscience of Victorian society" (Basch 8).

In the privacy of the home, the delicate female and motherly instincts, such as sensitivity, selflessness and innate purity, had space to unfold. In the men's eyes, women had to be kept safe in the house, as their ideal, obedient, innocent and refined character traits might otherwise fall victim to the competitive and ruthless public sphere (see Mitchell 266-267). They believed that females were by nature weaker and more susceptible to diseases and thus more suitable for the domestic sphere (see Frawley 415). John Ruskin's view of the home as a safe haven managed by an angel is described in the following excerpt of his 1864 lecture *Of Queens' Gardens*:

By her office, and place, she is protected from all danger and temptation. The man, in his rough work in the open world, must encounter all peril and trial: - to him, therefore, must be the failure, the offence, the inevitable error [...] But he guards the woman from all this; within his house, as ruled by her, unless she herself has sought it, need enter no danger, no temptation, no cause of error or offence. This is the true nature of home - it is the place of Peace; the shelter, not only from all injury, but from all terror, doubt, and division. [...] it is a sacred place, a vestal temple, a temple of the hearth watched over by Household Gods, [...] so far it vindicates the name, and fulfils the praise, of Home. (90-91)

It was the woman's responsibility to turn the family's home into a temple and haven of morality, purity and peace and as a consequence to influence society. "From well-managed homes go forth happy, healthy, wise and good men and women, to fill every position in the world. If a country were made up of such homes, it would be a nation healthy and happy, noble and good, wise and prosperous" (qtd. in Mitchell 265).

Two factors had an impact on the separation of spheres and the growing awareness of the sexual differences. On the one hand, the gap between work and home was increased during the industrialisation and, on the other hand, women were not forced to work, as Victorian middle-class families were wealthy enough to signify their status through non-working women (see Homans 2). This theory of the separate spheres and of the different gender roles was based on the biological argumentation of the two sexes and on the verbatim interpretation of Genesis. While men were attributed with an active nature and seen as the architect, women were described to have a passive nature and

were perceived as the soul of the house and home (see Basch 4-5). With regard to this, Ruskin stated the following in his lecture *Of Queens' Gardens*:

The man's power is active, progressive, defensive. He is eminently the doer, the creator, the discoverer, the defender. His intellect is for speculation and invention; his energy for adventure, for war, and for conquest whenever war is just whenever conquest necessary. But the woman's power is for rule, not for battle, - and her intellect is not for invention or creation, but for the sweet ordering arrangement, and decision. She sees qualities of things, their claims and places. (90)

In contrast to the man, who was primarily concerned with the world of business, the woman's main task was to establish order, comfort and sweetness in the home and only seemed to have an understanding of little things, such as where to place furniture with the greatest effect on homeliness. The women's place was restricted to the private sphere and it was very limited in power compared to the men's public sphere.

Although authors of middle-class advice books, like Sarah Ellis and Elizabeth Sandford, often tried to stress the influence women had in the domestic sphere, as men spent a lot of time away from home due to business, these authors still emphasised the significance of the inferiority and subordination of wives to their husbands (see Reed 35). In the conduct book *The Wives of England: Their Relative Duties, Domestic Influence and Social Obligations*, published in 1843, Sarah Ellis wrote about the inferiority of married women:

[Accepting] one important truth [will make a marriage successful] – it is the superiority of your husband as a man. It is quite impossible that you may have more talent, with higher attainments [...]; but this has nothing whatever to do with your position as a woman, which is, and must be, inferior to his as a man. (24-25)

In the book *Woman in Her Social and Domestic Character*, published in 1833, Elizabeth Sandford focused on the subordination and dependence of women:

Nature has assigned her a subordinate place, as well as subordinate powers; and it is far better that she should feel this, and should not arrogate the superiority of the other sex, whilst she claims the privileges of her own. (71)

In everything that women attempt, they should show their consciousness of dependence. There is nothing so unpleasant in female self-sufficiency, that it not infrequently prejudices instead of persuading. (qtd. in Evans 109)

Their sex should ever teach them to be subordinate; [...] Women, in this respect, are something like children: the more they show their need of support, the more engaging they are. (qtd. in Evans 109)

These conduct or advice books were read by middle-class women and influenced their opinion of their own sex and of their responsibilities to a great extent.

2.3. The Women's Movement

The ideal of the loving, caring and self-sacrificing wife and mother, the Angel in the House, painted a very sweet picture of the female position in the nineteenth century, but in reality the situation of women was far from ideal. “[U]nderneath all the pretense, middle-class women had a real grievance” (Altick 53). They were not as influential as the popular conduct and advice books made them believe. They were inferior to the opposite sex and they were “disadvantaged economically, legally, politically and in terms of access to education” (Frawley 415). In the course of time, women started perceiving themselves as human beings with interests, talents and intellect that requested training. An emotional and biological fulfilment as wife and mother was not enough and, limited to the domestic sphere, they often encountered feelings of monotony, restlessness and isolation from the rest of the world (see Mews 5). Women wanted their talents and intellect to unfold and develop and wished to pursue their vocations. But many women who were obliged to work for a living due to the female surplus at these times found themselves stranded in a world of injustice and male dominance (see Basch 14). In the nineteenth century, all these desires and inequalities that women had to face triggered the women's movement, which was mainly led by the female middle-class. Although women encountered many obstacles on their way to emancipation, they gradually managed to change the traditional ideas and roles of women, their rights, education and work opportunities and they paved the way for the female franchise.

Quite a number of people were interested in the woman question and wrote articles and books on this issue. For instance, in *A Plea for Women* in 1851, Mrs Reid, rejecting men's fear of female domination, described her belief that women's only chance to gain education, justice and civil rights was the female suffrage (see Dunbar 169-170). Especially two particular publications by two different authors can be regarded as milestones and stepping stones in the women's movement towards independence and emancipation. Mary Wollstonecraft wrote down and publicised her opinion about the female position and rights in her book *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* in 1792. In her eyes, women should be viewed and treated as human beings with a right to develop their talents and intellect and to deepen their individual characters. In order to avoid complete dependence on men, women should receive education and should be allowed to work for their own living. It should be open to them to, for example, become

physicians, study politics and enter the world of business (see Mews 13-14). However, Wollstonecraft was so much ahead of her own time that she excited opposition. It was John Stuart Mill's *The Subjection of Women* published in 1869 that carried on Wollstonecraft's belief and became the most important book in the women's movement of the nineteenth century (see Cunningham 7).

In 1865, Mill was elected to parliament and this meant that for the first time women received support from a person, more specifically a man, with political influence (see Basch 14). Mill was a supporter of total equality of both sexes before the law and concerning education, professions and marriage. Being against the confinement of females to the domestic sphere, Mill described in detail the psychological pressures women were exposed to in his book *The Subjection of Women*:

All women are brought up from the very earliest years in the belief that their ideal character is the very opposite to that of men, not self-will and government by self-control, but submission, and yielding to the control of others. All the moralities tell them that it is their nature, to live for others; to make complete abnegation of themselves, and to have no life but in their affections. (132)

They have always hitherto been kept [...] in so unnatural a state, that their nature cannot but have been greatly distorted and disguised; [...] and nobody can safely pronounce that if women's nature were left to choose its direction as freely as men's, [...] there would be [...] any difference at all, in the character and capacities which would unfold themselves. (173)

By saying this, Mill criticised the nineteenth century concept of the fixed nature of women and suggested that if women could disregard these assumptions about their nature, they could work towards any aim they had and there was no limitation to their achievements (see Cunningham 7-8).

However, a lot of people, men and women, were against these revolutionary ideas of female equality, emancipation and suffrage. These people were extremely worried, as they thought they were witnessing the collapse of Victorian traditions and rules, which supposedly improved and united society (see Cunningham 1). In 1870, for instance, Queen Victoria, the embodiment and symbol of the Victorian ideal woman, wrote with concern:

The Queen is most anxious to enlist everybody who can speak or write to join in checking this mad, wicked folly of 'Women's Rights', with all its attendant horrors, on which her poor feeble sex is bent, forgetting every sense of womanly feeling and propriety. [...] God created men and women different – then let them remain each in their own position. [...] Women would become the

most hateful, heartless and disgusting of human beings were she allowed to unsex herself [...]. (qtd. in Strachey 409)

In the late nineteenth century, protests against the female franchise and legal rights grew more and more. In 1889, more than a hundred well-known women published an *Appeal against Female Suffrage*. They opposed the idea and perceived it as dangerous that immoral women should be given the vote and at the same time they emphasised the proper sphere for women. The majority of men described the women's movement as female madness and regarded independent women as evil and dangerously uncontrollable (see Reed 37). However, the women's rights movement was eventually a success and all these critical arguments proved to be wrong. Women strove for social and economic independence, which did not automatically lead to the destruction of the family and society.

Women's rights were limited to a great extent, especially when it came to their rights in marriage. As soon as a woman was engaged or promised to marry a man, she was not able to dispose any of her possessions or property without her future husband's consent and all her income automatically belonged to him. After years of campaigning and a series of parliamentary acts, the Married Women's Property Act came into force in 1882. This act finally provided married women with the legal right over their own income, possessions and properties. In the nineteenth century, the father was regarded as the head of the family and the legitimate guardian of the children. Thus, he was able to take the children away from their mother if he pleased and she was perhaps never allowed to see her children again. Caroline Norton, a mother whose children were taken away by her worthless husband, started a campaign, which eventually led to the Infant's Custody Act of 1839. From then on, it was possible for a non-adulterous wife to gain custody of her children under seven and this was later changed to children under sixteen. Until the 1860s, it was extremely difficult and expensive to obtain a divorce. The Matrimonial Causes Act of 1857 allowed any man to divorce his wife on the basis of adultery, but a woman did not only have to provide evidence of her husband's adultery, but also of an additional offence, such as desertion or cruelty (see Williams, *Women* 6-7). All this shows that marriage did not always mean harmony, affection and stability in the Victorian age and that it took years of campaigning and power of will to improve the rights for married women.

Besides the injustice experienced in marriage, education and employment were the two other major issues the women's movement dealt with in the nineteenth century. In 1851, a census showed that forty-two percent of the women between twenty and forty were not married and had to find other means to provide for themselves (see Rivers 1). The majority of these women had to work for their living and were in desperate need of adequate education and training for the world of work. As a consequence, serious discussions and campaigns about training middle-class women for a career started in the 1840s and led to the establishment of schools for women. The opening of Queen's and Bedford Colleges in London at the end of the 1850s prepared the way for higher education and brought forward well-qualified female teachers. The North London Collegiate School for Girls was founded in 1850 and aimed to provide a high standard of secondary education,

such training as shall place the pupil *en rapport* with the world she is about to enter, and shall inculcate and inspire industry, frugality, self-dependence, self-control, a definite plan of life, the preference of the claims of the future to present enjoyment, and a steady self-advancement for the sake of others as well as for one's own. (qtd. in Dyhouse 178)

In 1869, Girton School was opened, which was the first step towards the future of women studying in Oxford and Cambridge (see Cunningham 4). It was crucial for schools to teach women to find their own personal goals in life in addition to that of marriage and to provide them with self-confidence on the basis of good education. “[M]arriage should not be the first object of a woman's life any more than of a man's, girls should be trained from childhood to the idea that they, like their brothers, must take their share in the work of life [...] they should not only be allowed, but induced to work for their own maintenance” (qtd. in Dyhouse 179).

Thus, the women's movement also successfully improved the work opportunities and conditions for women. Throughout the nineteenth century, reformers had to struggle hard and fight against the confinement of women to the domestic sphere, the prohibitions on paid work for middle-class women, the image of the Angel in the House and men's extreme fear of losing their professional privileges and work possibilities (see Rivers 5-8). For most of the century, the only reasonably acceptable work possibility for middle-class women was that of a governess or schoolmistress, but from the 1880s onwards the sphere of employment increased and more and more jobs with a decent pay were available to middle-class women. More and more women began to be

employed as nurses, clerks, typists and shop assistants (see Cunningham 4). Finally, it was possible for women to work and use their talents and intellect with the prospects of an income, which at the same time meant that their first and foremost goal did not have to be marriage anymore. Queen Victoria, despite her strong anti-feminist stance, made the first important step towards female equality by perceiving herself capable of ruling a nation. “That she should [...] take her place as the head of the most powerful country in the world bespeaks her own signal role in the construction of a new feminine ideal” (Langland 63).

On the whole, one could say that the women’s movement created “two new female roles, the celibate career woman and the wife who was an intellectual partner to her husband” (Delamont 184). A slowly increasing number of female novelists of the nineteenth century interested in the roles of women no longer only dealt with the ideal Victorian woman, but also with the new and unconventional woman emerging. The novels of these writers were inspirational for many women and had an influence on their ideas and views of the Victorian traditions and ideologies. As a consequence, the novels also had an impact on the prevalent portrayal of women and the women’s movement. “[T]he feminine novel may be seen as an instrument for changing opinion and moulding behaviour” (Mews 7). The main readership of these female novels were middle-class women, as reading novels was one of their prime occupations during their leisure time at home. This occupation was supported even more by the increasing and advancing print culture and circulating libraries of the Victorian era. Besides newspapers, magazines and pamphlets, novels were one of the most popular methods of communication between middle-class women. The nineteenth century was “the age of female novelists” (qtd. in Williams, *Women* 2), as Margaret Oliphant, herself a very talented and influential novelist of this period, once said.

3. Margaret Oliphant

3.1. Her Life as a Sister, Wife, Mother and Writer

Margaret Oliphant was born in Wallyford, Scotland, in April 1828 and was the youngest child and the only daughter of Frank Wilson, an office clerk, and his wife. Out of six children only Margaret and her two much older brothers, Frank and Willie, survived. While Margaret's relationship with her mother, an intelligent, cultured and competent woman, was very personal, deep and lasting, her relationship with her father was very distant and impersonal from the beginning. Her mother, pleased to have a bright and intelligent girl as a female companion, devoted herself to her daughter, but at the same time also raised her with the severity expected of Victorian mothers (see Clarke 195). According to Victorian traditions and her class, Margaret received her education at home. She acquired and extended her knowledge whenever and wherever she was able to. Margaret's interest and love of literature grew more and more with time, as she was encouraged by her mother's great passion for books. She was "a very small child, indeed seven or eight, but already a confirmed novel-reader, devouring everything that came in the way" (qtd. in Trela 18). Margaret's "voracious appetite for prose and learning in general" (Oosterom 12) was satisfied by a fine selection of books from the local circulating library and by quality periodicals of the day gathered by her mother. The first ten years of her life Margaret and her family spent in Scotland, the country that formed her character and was the setting of some of her novels. However, constant changes in her father's employment meant that the family had to move from time to time (see Oosterom 11-12).

Margaret was ten years old, when her family moved to Liverpool, where she spent her girlhood and most of her adolescence. When she was just a young woman, she got engaged to a good, simple and kind man on the day of his departure to America. But the romantic period was only short-lived, as he soon stopped writing and Margaret's girlish expectations and dreams came to an abrupt end. However, this early experience and loss of love made her stronger, disillusioned her and checked her sensibility, which proved to be advantageous for her life and writings later. In 1852, Margaret married her cousin, Frank Oliphant, and received through marriage the historic and chivalrous surname Oliphant, which fascinated and appealed to her (see Clarke 196-198). They settled down in London, where Frank, an artist by profession, designed stained-glass windows. Frank

was a quite talented artist, but when it came to business he was inexperienced and incompetent and thus also no good financial support for his growing family. Fortunately, Margaret showed a talent for writing very early in her life and soon her career as a writer commenced. In 1853, she was officially connected with the Blackwood publishing company and earned money additionally to the income of her husband. The marriage of Margaret and Frank was only of short duration, as Frank suffered of tuberculosis and was not expected to recover, which Margaret did not know. They travelled to Rome in order to provide Frank with a milder climate for his health, but Frank died in 1859 and left behind Margaret as a widow with two small children, the only ones surviving out of five, pregnant with a third one and heavily in debt. Margaret never really seemed to have considered marrying again and the status and freedom connected to widowhood suited her in every way (see Oosterom 14).

Margaret's two older brothers were a constant source of concern and an additional financial burden throughout her life. Already in early years, Willie was regarded as the black sheep of the family, who tended to be intemperate and consequently often in debt. When Margaret was only little more than twenty years old, she was chosen by her parents to accompany Willie to London and take care of him, which could be seen as evidence of her early maturity and stability of character. Eventually, Willie became a Presbyterian minister in a remote village in England, where he failed and returned to a life full of inactivity, laziness, smoking, alcoholism, newspaper and novel reading (see Clarke 197-199). At the beginning of the 1860s, Willie was exiled to Rome for his own good, but remained financially dependent on Margaret throughout his life. Margaret felt it to be her duty and responsibility as a Christian and sister to financially support her brother until his death in 1885. Margaret's second brother named Frank was a total contrast to Willie, as he was a bright, intelligent and good man. However, Frank was unsuccessful in his career in finance, which ultimately led to his total ruin. This downfall, unsteady employment, his fragile health and his despair after his wife's death were reasons enough for dutiful Margaret to take her brother and his children in and to help them financially. After a nervous breakdown in 1875 Frank died and the father- and motherless children remained in Margaret's care (see Oosterom 12-13). She devoted herself to his intelligent, hard-working and grateful son, Frank, and educated him together with her own sons. After his training, Frank went off to India to work as an

engineer and to start his promising future, but to Margaret's great shock he died from typhoid fever four years later in 1879 (see Clarke 212, 217).

Rome, the city where Margaret lost her husband and one of her brothers, remained to be linked with loss and sadness. Her much beloved and only daughter, Maggie, died after a violent attack of fever in Rome in 1864 at the age of ten. This painful and traumatic experience of her daughter's death and loss had a more profound impact on her life than the death of her own mother or her husband. After the burial of her daughter, Margaret travelled with her two sons, Cyril and Cecco, back to England in 1865 and decided to settle down in Windsor so that her sons could be educated further. She had high hopes for her sons and did everything possible, physically and financially, to provide them with the best education. They both attended Eton College and then went on to study at Oxford. With regard to their academic careers and ambitions, none of her sons seemed to have their mother's strength of character or remarkable talents (see Oosterom 15-16). Later, Margaret blamed herself for leaving her sons in the dark about the financial and physical strains she underwent to educate them and thus depriving them of a model of hard and deliberate work to achieve financial security. Margaret worked a lot to make it possible for her son Cyril to start his career as a barrister. However, Cyril's philosophy of life soon became very similar to that of Willie, Margaret's brother, and Cyril was never able to provide for himself. He died in 1890. Her younger son, Cecco showed symptoms of tuberculosis, the illness his father had suffered from, and Cecco was never able to work. He died in 1894, at the age of thirty-five. Only her younger niece, Denny, almost like a daughter to her, remained as her constant and caring companion (see Clarke 215-224). Margaret's health deteriorated slowly in the course of time and when she lost her last child, she also seemed to have lost her will to live. Shortly after coming back from one of her work travels, she died at peace as a consequence of cancer in Wimbledon in June 1897 (see Oosterom 16).

Margaret Oliphant worked as a writer for half a century and she contributed numerous short stories, over hundred books, such as novels, biographies and popular histories, and hundreds of articles and critical reviews to British culture. She never laid down her writing pen, not even once, although it had worn a hole into her finger with time, which made it painful for her to write (see Clarke 226). It is not quite certain when Margaret Oliphant started writing, but it is believed that she began to occupy herself with writing

while nursing her sick mother in 1845. In 1849, her first novel *Passages in the Life of Mistress Margaret Maitland* was published and she received her first pay cheque at the age of twenty-one. Five years later, she was able to persuade her editors to give her the opportunity to work as a critic, which meant an additional income and prestige (see Trela 18-20). “Her insatiable intellectual needs obliged her to read or sample everything likely to be of interest that came out in fiction, non-fiction and periodical, in poetry and drama [...]. Reporting on what she had read, and evaluating it, came easy to her, being used to serious and lively conversation” (Leavis, *Introduction* 14). With regard to her creative writing, one of her most important assets was her experience of life, “as a struggle and an exposure to all kinds of hardship and disenchantment” (Leavis, *Introduction* 28). This life experience was gradually woven into her stories and novels and made her a great realist and unconventional writer of the nineteenth century. Margaret Oliphant was unconventional in the way she tested the limits of Victorian traditions and in the way she portrayed her fictional characters.

[T]here is about all her work a real distinction, an identifiable Oliphant manner and attitude and tone, more suited to a later age than the ones she lived through. It inheres in her honesty and unflinching realism and her recognition [...] of the lack of idealism in ordinary life (a very unVictorian trait). (Leavis, *Introduction* 27)

It was a challenge to be a female writer in the Victorian era and to deal with the male-dominated publishing business. Many women decided to publish their work under a male name and it happened more than once that a book or article of a female writer was not published because it was written in a ‘sharp’ tone.

Additionally, Margaret Oliphant was not only a writer, but also a wife and mother. She could not shrink from her motherly and domestic duties and ask for some free time and privacy. Her writing was primarily done at night, as she was occupied with her children and visitors during the day (see Leavis, *Introduction* 14-15). Especially men, but also single women, had an advantage over women writers like Margaret Oliphant. They were able to give themselves up entirely to their writings and Margaret quite often asked herself whether her career as a writer would have been different, if she had been protected from all the responsibilities and stress of her life as a sister, wife and mother (see Williams, *Biography* 52-53). Her entire family including her brothers depended on her success and income as a writer. Although she earned a considerable amount of money, she was always striving towards a regular job and income, which would have

relieved her mind and would have meant stability for her and her family. She never received the opportunity to work as an editor though, most probably because of her independent mind (see Leavis, *Introduction* 16, 21). Despite the fact that she had to write in order to be able to support her family, she always emphasised how she enjoyed using her talent to write. Margaret Oliphant said about herself: “I have written because it gave me pleasure, because it came natural to me, because it was like talking or breathing, beside the big fact that it was necessary for me to work for my children. That however was not my first motive” (*Autobiography* 14).

All this shows that Margaret Oliphant was indeed “the most remarkable woman of her time” (Skelton 80). Besides being a caring and loving sister, wife and mother, she also managed to find time to make an impressive career as a female writer and had, like no other writer before, the opportunity to express her opinion in public for half a century (see Leavis, *Introduction* 10). She was a popular writer in the nineteenth century and had “facility, vitality, self-confidence and abundant material” (Leavis, *Introduction* 15) to write a great number of books and articles. However, Margaret Oliphant was often criticised for exactly this over productivity and the consequential decrease of quality of some of her works. It was her habit to write a book every few months and often to write two books at the same time. “Her rate of production averaged about two novels per year, ten articles [...] a short story, and perhaps a single volume of nonfiction” (Trela 21). Critics often accused her of writing books and articles only in order to earn money quickly without paying attention to aesthetic merit. It is understandable that not every work written at such speed could be of high quality, but it is astonishing that a vast number of her books were of remarkable quality (see Williams, *Biography* 51). Margaret Oliphant felt that it was wrong to limit the strength and pleasure of a talented writer. Creativity should not be restricted, but have free reign, even if it eventually led to higher productivity (see Oosterom 22-23). Margaret Oliphant was not only criticised for her over productivity, but also for her seemingly conservative or anti-feminist stance regarding the role of women in society. People at that time and critics were often too fast in assigning people to certain categories and they did not look in detail at the whole picture. Margaret Oliphant’s position with regard to the women question is more complex than commonly portrayed.

3.2. Oliphant's View on the Woman Question

Throughout the second half of the nineteenth century, discussions about the position of women, their legal and educational rights and the franchise grew more and more serious. It was almost impossible for educated people not to be conscious of the women's movement and not to have an opinion and position with regard to the woman question. Especially female writers of the Victorian period were concerned with this debate and wrote numerous articles and novels on the status and role of women. However, it was and is not easy to pigeonhole women writers as anti-feminist or feminist, as the lives, beliefs and fiction of female writers were often contradictory and divided concerning the position of women (see Thompson 2-3). Margaret Oliphant, for instance, was very soon labelled a pure anti-feminist by critics and other people, but her views on the woman question were much more complex and progressive than one would believe (see Trela 13).

Her article *The Anti-Marriage League*, a review of Hardy's *Jude the Obscure* and of Allen's *The Woman Who Did*, was published in 1896 and played a very important role in her reputation as anti-feminist. Both authors strongly opposed the idea of marriage and in their novels presented sexually emancipated characters, the so called New Women of the nineteenth century and they were attacked by Margaret Oliphant on the basis of these depictions (see Williams, *Feminist* 178). Hardy described her article as "the screaming of a poor lady in Blackwood that there was an unholy anti-marriage afoot" (qtd. in Williams, *Feminist* 178). After this article, critics and readers alike believed her to be "prudish, squeamish about honest representations of sex, and a middling talent unable to recognize great writing" (Trela 13). However, not all of these accusations were entirely true and her views were often misinterpreted. Margaret Oliphant regarded Hardy as a talented writer and one of the most important novelists of the late-Victorian era (see Trela 13). She did disapprove of Hardy's tendency to foreground the sex question in his novels, because she perceived it as a contrivance and distortion of the real way of life and because she feared that it would have a negative influence on women in general. According to Margaret Oliphant,

[i]ts result to select, as the most important thing in existence, one small (though no doubt highly important) fact of life, which natural instinct has agreed, even among savages, to keep in the background [...] is to displace love altogether [...]. To make this the supreme incident, always in the foreground to be discussed [...] puts life out of focus altogether, and distorts hopelessly its magnitudes and its littleness. (*Anti-Marriage* 144)

In addition, she was afraid that if marriage and the image of women were devalued, women would be regarded as mere sexual beings. She was suspicious of male novelists who only depicted women as sexually emancipated and were not interested in the legal and social position of females, as she was conscious of the fact that men might use feminist requests for their own advantages. Furthermore, she also raised the question of what would happen to the children of such liaisons (see Williams, *Feminist* 178-179).

Another reason why Margaret Oliphant was pigeonholed as an anti-feminist was her apparent disagreement with the demands of the women's movement. In August 1866, she sent a letter to her publisher John Blackwood about an article she wrote on John Stuart Mill and "his mad notion of the franchise for women" (Oliphant, *Letters* 211). This statement was one of the major arguments why she was criticised by feminists and supporters of feminism. Most of her articles in the 1850s and 1860s, like *The Laws Concerning Women* in 1856 and *The Condition of Women* in 1858, were primarily critical and disapproving of the female suffrage and the women's movement (see Williams, *Biography* 106). In 1866, her article *The Great Unrepresented* was published as an answer to Mill's presentation of a petition signed by a number of well-known women, who requested the franchise for female householders. Although Margaret Oliphant admitted that the request sounded logical, she believed that ordinary women would not want the vote and would feel insulted if it was forced upon them. Interestingly, she seemed to be slightly critical of exceptional women working in the male dominated world at this time, when she wrote: "By chance now and then a woman may be found who is capable of any or all of these things, but if she gives up her own existence to it, then God's purpose is defeated in her. [...] and she is of no more use than if she were a man" (Oliphant, *Unrepresented* 376). She seemed to warn women of giving up their natural role as a mother to their career (see Williams, *Feminist* 167-168). At the same time, however, the quote also shows a radically low and contemptuous view of male uselessness. Despite the fact that Margaret Oliphant herself was an extraordinary woman and writer, she rarely perceived herself that way and wrote in the conclusion of her article:

Twenty literary and other exceptional women in London may speak for a hundred or two more of their like scattered over the kingdom; but we speak for the mass, which is not exceptional, which writes no books, and paints no pictures, and wants no votes [...]. We decline Mr Mill's proposal totally, and without equivocation. (*Unrepresented* 379)

Contrary to some feminists, Margaret Oliphant did not want to be freed from her children and believed motherhood to be one of the most important roles and responsibilities of women. Although she thought that women who were single and not married were able to work like men and could gain equality to men, she made her readers aware of the fact that women, not men, were asked to make a sacrifice to achieve this goal. She was of the opinion that women would never be able to compete with the opposite sex as long as they wanted to become mothers. Margaret Oliphant believed that two of her children had to die, because she was writing continuously at high speed and thus occupied with too much mental work while pregnant. In her eyes, it was more desirable and natural to become a mother than to work (see Williams, *Feminist* 168-169). In her autobiography, she presented herself first and foremost as the nurturing and self-denying mother, who did everything in her power to raise and educate her beloved children. Although Margaret Oliphant was a remarkable and outstanding novelist, critic, biographer and historian, the image of the powerless and hard-struggling mother in the domestic sphere prevailed in the perception of most people and critics and played an important role in the description of Margaret Oliphant as anti-feminist (see Trela 15). This image combined with her opposition to the New Woman and the women's movement was crucial in the perception of Margaret Oliphant by feminist critics like Patricia Stubbs, who wrote:

[T]he superficially emancipated heroines of novelists like [...] Mrs Oliphant [...] remain well within the limits of moral and social convention. Their independent-minded young ladies have shed the fragility and insipidity [...], but they are in no way a serious challenge to patriarchal stereotypes of feminine character or behaviour [...] she remained a consistently conservative attitude towards the emancipation movement. (39-40)

However, what most critics and people did not realise or dismissed was that Margaret Oliphant's ideas and beliefs on the woman question and the women's movement changed over time. Eventually, she supported the Married Women's Property Act, the mothers' rights to custody of their own children and the right of girls to be educated at schools and universities (see Williams, *Biography* 108). In 1876, for instance, she wrote a very critical and emotional response to the editor of *Blackwood's Magazine*, when he published the story *1895: The Lady Candidate*, in which the writer made fun of women who wished to get into parliament:

This sort of glib nonsense has by degrees brought me round to the conviction that however indifferent I may be personally to political privileges the system

which supposes me incapable of forming a reasonable opinion on public matters is very far from a perfect one [...] and as all women are not girls of twenty, and some of us are reasonable beings, it is worth while considering I think whether perpetual impertinence of this kind may not have an effect quite the reverse of that which I suppose its originators intend. I am almost sorry to say that I don't feel myself much sillier than the majority of men I meet. (qtd. in Williams, *Biography* 108)

In her 1882 comment on Mary Wollstonecraft's life and book *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, Margaret Oliphant also put forward the idea that the request for women's rights had risen "almost invariably from women compelled by hard stress of circumstances to despise the men about them" (*Literary History* 248). Although Margaret should have felt offended by Wollstonecraft's atheist belief and affairs outside marriage, she sympathised with her, as Wollstonecraft's father was a heavy drinker and her sister depended on the financial income of her writings, and she regarded her book as very readable and interesting (see Williams, *Biography* 108).

In 1880, Margaret Oliphant published her article *The Grievances of Women*, in which she publicly expressed her resentment about the male devaluation of female work and the proper sphere for women. This view probably originated from her growing frustration about not being able to find a job with regular income as an editor in a male-dominated society and from her experience of worthless and dependent men surrounding her (see Trela 14). In addition, Margaret Oliphant was increasingly of the opinion that women who desired to pursue a professional career should be allowed and encouraged to do so and that widowed women, who raised children on their own and paid taxes, should qualify for the franchise (see Williams, *Feminist* 172). She wrote in her article: "I think it is highly absurd that I should not have a vote, if I want one" (qtd. in Williams, *Biography* 108). However, she believed that the real grievance of women was the men's attitude towards them.

Whatever women do, in general, is undervalued by men in the general, because it is done by women. How this impairs the comfort of women, how it shakes the authority of mothers, injures the self-respect of wives, and gives a general soreness of feeling everywhere, I will not attempt to tell. (qtd. in Williams, *Feminist* 172)

She felt aggrieved by the "ungenerous sentiment" of men towards women and the "strong sense of superiority which exists in the male bosom from the age of two upwards" (qtd. in Williams, *Feminist* 171). Just like Mill, she was of the opinion that

the political rights of women would change little without corresponding changes in the attitudes of men (see Trela 14).

All in all, Margaret Oliphant was a very complex and paradoxical person and proved to be a difficult puzzle for many critics. She was labelled an anti-feminist and an “outraged Victorian matron” (Williams, *Oliphant* 276) for a long time, yet, if one looks more closely, she was concerned with the problems of women throughout her whole life and she wrote several novels on the problematic status and role of women in society. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, her political and social views on the woman question changed increasingly and she started supporting the demands of the women’s movement. Although Margaret Oliphant would probably not have agreed with modern feminists and their opinions, it would be just to say that she was “one of a long and honorable line of women who were known in England between the wars as the Old Feminists” (Williams, *Feminist* 179). Their primary aim was equality of men and women before the law and the opportunity for women to enter the public sphere if they wanted (see Williams, *Feminist* 179).

3.3. Oliphant’s Narrative Technique, Fictional Male and Female Characters

3.3.1. Narrative Technique

In the majority of her novels, Margaret Oliphant prefers to use an omniscient narrator who presents, describes and comments on the story and the different situations from a distant viewpoint. In addition, this narrator gives explanations on the characters’ thoughts and evaluates their behaviour and treatment of other characters. Occasionally, she also makes use of the figural narrative situation in order to describe the characters further. According to the conventions of Victorian novels, Margaret Oliphant’s narrator is merely a voice and is not presented as a character or figure with an individual personality in her novels. The voice of her narrator seems to be primarily feminine and often addresses or inspires a female audience focusing on their female experience and knowledge, as an extract from Margaret Oliphant’s novel *Kirsteen* shows:

I do not myself think that dress was pretty in those days – but every fashion is beautiful to its time. And how the ladies of the early century managed to make themselves comfortable in white muslin gowns in December, even with a cloth pelisse over them, is more than I can divine, though I find in Miss Jean Brown’s copy of the *Ladies’ Museum* that this was the case. However that may be – I do

not suppose Kirsteen was before her time, or more enlightened than the rest of the world [...]. (*Kirsteen* 165)

The narrator talks about female clothes in a way a man would hardly do and refers to the content of a fashion magazine, called *Ladies' Museum*.

Margaret Oliphant likes to use irony, which runs through her novels like a red thread and is “created by a juxtaposition of different viewpoints and by the tension between the figural point of view and the panoramic vision of the authorial narrator” (Rubik 17). Her ironic tone is distinctive and in most cases self-evident and self-explanatory (see Rubik 17-23). In *Miss Marjoribanks*, for example, Margaret Oliphant uses irony in order to ridicule her heroine’s egotism, self-importance and hunger for power. In the following passage, Lucilla Marjoribanks makes a great sacrifice by sending off her rival Barbara Lake with her own suitor Mr Cavendish. By doing this, Lucilla successfully saves her evening dinner from ruin, as Barbara stops to sing all by herself and leaves.

‘My dear Barbara [...] it is enough for to-night. Mr Cavendish will take you down-stairs and get you a cup of tea [...].’ Thus Miss Marjoribanks proved herself capable of preferring her great work to her personal sentiments, which is generally considered next to impossible for a woman. She did what perhaps nobody else in the room was capable of doing: she sent away the gentleman who was paying attention to her, in company with the girl who was paying attention to him [...]. It was the only way of preventing her Evening from losing its distinctive character. It was the Lamp of sacrifice [...]. (*Miss Marjoribanks* 100)

In this excerpt, Lucilla’s action is exaggeratedly described to be a great deed of self-sacrifice and courage. In reality, however, Lucilla does not make any sacrifice when she makes Barbara leave with Mr Cavendish, as she herself has no serious interest in Mr Cavendish. Her only concern is to be the star of her dinner party as part of her mission to reorganise Carlingford society and to become the queen of Carlingford.

In Victorian novels, it is often difficult to differentiate between the author and the narrator, since the author uses the narrator to express his or her opinion. Margaret Oliphant also makes use of this so-called authorial narrator, but her own opinion and beliefs seem to merge more with the narrator than is usual in Victorian novels. “Tolerance and understanding for human weaknesses, a rejection of sentimentality, mistrust of heroic gestures and a realistic attitude to life are values posited throughout her fiction” (Rubik 30). An omniscient narrator is perfect for Margaret Oliphant to make her ideas and beliefs clear to the reader, although she sometimes prefers the situations and characters to speak for themselves (see Rubik 24-31). Throughout her novels,

Margaret Oliphant is concerned with depicting reality and people's real character and emotions, rather than those which are prescribed by Victorian tradition and society (see Williams, *Biography* 55). What is most interesting in Margaret Oliphant's novels is the frequent emphasis put on her often uncommon and advanced opinions and values, the subversion of Victorian principles and clichés and the repeated introduction of unconventional characters alongside 'ideal' characters (see Rubik 72-73).

3.3.2. Male Characters

During the second half of the nineteenth century, the classical heroic male characters lost their importance gradually and the Victorian ideal of men varied due to the changing role of women (see Sanders 96, 98). Life taught Margaret Oliphant that men were generally not of the strong, heroic and superior kind and that they often were not capable of fulfilling the role as the breadwinners of the family. "Mrs Oliphant could never believe in a hero. Her charming young men are, after all, poor creatures. She treats them leniently and either spares them the demanding situations which they are unfit to cope, or extricates them by a flick of coincidence" (qtd. in Sanders 109). Margaret Oliphant was of the opinion that the Victorian novelist altogether lived in a very unheroic time with only few certainties and that men were actually not as good as women when it came to the struggle for supremacy (see Sanders 109). Margaret Oliphant, like many other female novelists, was sometimes accused of not being able to draw a realistic and adequate picture of the male characters, thoughts and emotions in her novels. She herself seems to support this idea, when she writes in her autobiography: "The men of a woman's writing are always shadowy individuals; and it is only members of our own sex that we can fully bring out, bad or good" (*Letters* 178). However, Margaret Oliphant was very good at studying both women and men closely and developed very unconventional male characters in her novels (see Rubik 153-154).

Especially two types of male characters, the domestic tyrant and the weak man, seem to appear regularly in her novels – both of them usually portrayed fairly negatively. The domestic tyrant, who uses his strength and violence against women, is perceived as unsympathetic. The weak man who cannot take responsibilities and burdens women with them instead, is often portrayed as worthless and largely dependent on women (see Williams, *Women* 159). "She was making studies of masculine arrogance and insensitiveness to the capacities and legitimate claims of wives and daughters and

sisters [...], illustrating what she had noted as the ‘inherent contempt for women which is a settled principle in the minds of so many men’” (Leavis, *Introduction* 27). Some of her male character types are based on the men she encountered throughout her life. Margaret Oliphant’s father might be the role model for the violent and frightening husbands and fathers of her novels. While she seemed to know “something of the human brute, she knew little of men who were at once good and strong” (qtd. in Williams, *Oliphant* 278). Her two brothers, Frank and Willie, and her own sons, men she all had to support financially for most of their lives, figure in her novels as characters, too. The experiences she made with the men of her family brought an abrupt stop to her belief of man as a provider (see Williams, *Oliphant* 281). Interestingly, men in her novels sometimes seem to be more interested in and optimistic about marriage than women. The majority of male characters do not achieve success, but are married at the end of her novels, which is the best hope for their future in the author’s opinion (see Sanders 113-114). On the whole, it seems that Margaret Oliphant’s fictional male characters “are the logic counterparts to her superior, dynamic and intelligent heroines” (Rubik 160).

3.3.3. Female Characters

By 1855, Margaret Oliphant thought that the typical heroines of Victorian novels were “a sadly featureless class of well-intentioned young women” (qtd. in Williams, *Biography* 58). They were portrayed as young, beautiful, obedient, well-behaved with no particular interests and the only intention of getting married; their wish for marriage being granted at the end of the novels. Any other woman was regarded with pity and disrespect (see Williams, *Biography* 58). In the second half of the nineteenth century, it was time for the emergence of independent-minded, strong and admirable heroines in the Victorian novels. Margaret Oliphant was one of few Victorian authors who took an interest in the role and status of women in the nineteenth century and portrayed her female characters quite differently based on her own life, experience and beliefs and on the women she met throughout her life. Her mother, a very cultivated and strong woman, probably functioned as a role model for her female characters. Margaret Oliphant herself was a very intelligent, hard-working and caring woman, who became a professional writer. Although it was difficult for women to establish themselves as writers, Margaret Oliphant made an extraordinary career as a female writer. Throughout her life, she made acquaintance and established friendships with both married and

unmarried women. She felt drawn to women, and observed them and their handling of relationships in detail. She believed that one could rely more on women than on men and she had the greatest respect for women, their lives and obstacles. She was amazed by “what they managed to get out of the often difficult relationships that their marriages or other ties brought with them” (Oosterom 49-50). Margaret Oliphant also had respect for spinsters, based on her experience with “middle-aged ladies, of the class to which Scotch society owes so much, the rural single woman, individual and strong-minded” (qtd. in Williams, *Oliphant* 58).

Contrary to many Victorian authors, Margaret Oliphant portrayed a wide range of women, such as sisters, daughters, mothers, wives, widows, spinsters, teachers, artists and even professional career women, which was very unusual for Victorian novels. “Oliphant’s females cover the whole spectrum, from the assertive and self-willed, rigid and unrelenting in both their morals and attitudes, to more submissive and docile creatures, with strong leanings towards continuous self-sacrifice” (Oosterom 49). Margaret Oliphant’s female characters are often intelligent, clever, highly articulate, managing, superior and practical women, yet also “magnanimous and tolerant enough of the shortcomings and failings natural to men” (Leavis, *Introduction* 28). These heroines seem “to operate within the bounds of conventionality” (Oosterom 51) and the domestic sphere, but in reality subtly try to achieve their personal goals and sometimes even manipulate men close to them for their own ends. Only a few heroines go one step further and refuse to conform to Victorian traditions and conventions completely by rejecting to marry or by pursuing a professional career. As Margaret Oliphant allowed her heroines to work or/and make a career, she reflected on the problems of an increasing number of women who did not have the opportunity to be married and had to find other means to make a living in the nineteenth century (see Oosterom 50-51). Margaret Oliphant “had fresh and original things to say about self-sacrifice, the claims of a women’s family, work outside home and the problems of marriage and parenthood. Her outlook is so much more sophisticated than that of her contemporaries that she often seems to belong to another age” (Williams, *Women* 159), like all the powerful women and career women in her novels.

4. Powerful Victorian Women in Three Selected Novels

In the short novel *The Doctor's Family* and in the novels *Miss Marjoribanks* and *Phoebe, Junior*, Margaret Oliphant portrays her three female protagonists as powerful Victorian women, who exercise female power throughout the novels. Female power here used is an umbrella term for heroines who are strong, influential, intelligent, practical, self-willed and often superior to men. These powerful Victorian women exert their power and authority mainly in the domestic sphere and possess great managing qualities. They are often in control of people and situations and sometimes even manipulate or use men to reach their own goals. The three novels, which illustrate the lives and accomplishments of these powerful Victorian women, are all part of the series *The Chronicles of Carlingford*, one of Margaret Oliphant's greatest literary achievements. The form of her series was influenced to a great extent by George Eliot's *Scenes of Clerical Life* and Trollope's novels about Barset, a fictional rural southern county in England. The setting of Margaret Oliphant's series *The Chronicles of Carlingford* is a peaceful English country town called Carlingford and the same characters reappear on a regular basis in the three short novels and the three full-length novels of the series (see Williams, *Introduction ix-x*).

4.1. Nettie in *The Doctor's Family*

Nettie Underwood is the female protagonist of the short novel *The Doctor's Family*, first published in 1862. Nettie accompanies her sister Susan and her sister's three children on their way from Australia to England in search of Susan's husband, Fred Rider, who lives with his brother, Edward Rider. When Doctor Edward Rider meets Nettie for the first time, the reader realises that Nettie's appearance and character are quite different to those of the ideal Victorian woman. Nettie is not fragile, lightly skin-coloured, elegant and charming, but she is "thin, dark, eager, impetuous, with blazing black eyes and red lips" (*Doctor's Family* 75). She is a "brown, sparkling, self-willed, imperious creature" (*Doctor's Family* 101), whose sharp and penetrating eyes make people, especially men, feel uncomfortable and keep them under control. Nettie likes being in command, as the meeting scene with Doctor Rider shows:

She put up one hand in warning to the petitioner behind her, and one to call the attention of the bewildered stranger before. Evidently the one thing which alarmed this young lady was that somebody would speak before her, and the conduct of the *situation* be taken out of her hands. (*Doctor's Family* 75)

She is a courageous and self-confident woman and a natural manager, as she says herself, “I can manage everything” and “I am perfectly well able to take care of myself; I am not a London young lady” (*Doctor’s Family* 77-78). An air of determination and readiness engulfs her and often her way of walking and moving around the rooms signifies how decided and firm she is when it comes to her resolutions and tasks. “She, no doubt, had dragged her plaintive sister over the seas – she it was that had forced her way into Edward Rider’s house, taken her position in it, ousted the doctor; and she it was who swept the husband and wife out of it again” (*Doctor’s Family* 82).

Nettie’s main task and responsibility are to take care of her sister and her family, which comprises her sister’s worthless husband, Fred Rider, and their three children. There are clear parallels between the author and the heroine of the short novel. Just like Margaret Oliphant had to financially support and help almost all the members of her family throughout her life, Nettie has family members to support and look out for. Nettie often stays awake until late at night to knit and repair clothes for the family and so did Margaret Oliphant in order to be able to write her books to earn the much needed money for her family. Like Margaret Oliphant, Nettie is the most important person and the head of the family. It is very unusual in the nineteenth century that a woman is portrayed as the provider of the family, a position originally assigned to the husband and father, which in this case would be Fred. Nettie is the one who finds and establishes a comfortable home for the family in Carlingford and pays the bills with her own income. Mrs Smith, the family’s landlady, gets so used to taking the bills to Nettie that she forgets how unnatural it actually is that a woman and not the man in the house pays the rent. Nettie manages all the affairs of the family and has the restless children and their useless parents under her “rigid guardianship” (*Doctor’s Family* 83). To Edward Rider’s amazement, Nettie is the one who takes the presiding place at the dinner table without any hesitation and who decides how much and what the different family members eat. “Everybody seemed to recognise Nettie as supreme” and “it seemed a matter of course to yield to Nettie” (*Doctor’s Family* 88-89).

Although it is a very old-fashioned and Victorian notion to confine Nettie to work and operate entirely at home, the reader clearly sees that Nettie is not a typical self-sacrificing heroine of the nineteenth century, but a strong and powerful woman, who carries the burdens for other people (see Williams, *Biography* 75). Margaret Oliphant

was of the opinion that people had a responsibility to each other and especially to their own family members. However, the author does not idealise this virtue in her novels and shows that it takes a lot of courage, self-will and hard work to live up to the different responsibilities (see Williams, *Introduction* xiv-xv). It is already difficult to take care of three children, who are described as “staring imps” and “little savages” (*Doctor’s Family* 88, 85), but Nettie also has to look after their parents, who are not able to take care of themselves or their own children. Contrary to the weak and submissive Victorian ideal woman, Nettie is a strong and responsible woman and a tough colonial girl, as she describes herself: “I am a colonial girl [...]. Where I was brought up we were used to be busy about whatever lay nearest to our hand” (*Doctor’s Family* 97). Nettie seems to have a very practical way of seeing things. She is aware of the fact that certain work just has to be done, but she also thinks that “one may make the best of it” (*Doctor’s Family* 92).

Thus, Nettie believes that it is simply her responsibility to take care of her sister’s family as there is nobody else around to take over this important position and to the surprise of Doctor Rider and Miss Wodehouse she shows no consciousness of dutifully committing and sacrificing herself to Susan’s family. “If she had ever been grandly aware of sacrificing herself and doing her duty [...]. But Nettie obstinately refused to be said to do her duty. She was doing her own will with an imperious distinctness and energy – having her own way – displaying no special virtue, but determined wilfulness” (*Doctor’s Family* 104). When Miss Wodehouse approaches her on this matter, Nettie explains:

[S]elf-devotion! Stuff! I am only doing what must be done. [...] If I were to say it was my duty and all that sort of stuff, you would understand me, Miss Wodehouse; but one always says it’s one’s duty when one has something disagreeable to do; and I am not doing anything disagreeable. [...] I am living as I like to live. (*Doctor’s Family* 97-98)

By saying this, the self-willed Nettie refuses to conform to the Victorian ideas of duty, self-sacrifice and self-devotion, which are comprised by the image of the Angel in the House. “She came and went [...], busy about a thousand things, always alert, decided, uncompromising – not disinclined to snub either Fred or Susan when opportunity offered, totally unconscious even of the delicacy with which a high fantastical heroine of romance would have found it necessary to treat her dependents” (*Doctor’s Family* 104). She seems to take pleasure in the authority and power she gains through being the

head of the family and does not see it as an unpleasant duty that she is forced to do. Nettie is proud that she can look after the whole family by herself and does not need help from anybody else, which is very unusual for a Victorian heroine.

By adopting her sister's family and assuming the roles of her sister and her sister's husband, Nettie has found a way to become a mother without marrying and sacrificing her independence to any male authority (see Kämper 213). Moreover, Margaret Oliphant decided to portray a single and childless woman as an ideal mother, which was very uncommon for Victorian times, since this role was considered to be the most fulfilling role for a married woman. Nettie perceives her nephews and niece as her own children, when she says, "You are speaking of *my* children" (*Doctor's Family* 123). Susan is the biological mother of these children, but completely fails in her role as a mother. She is not interested in her children and has no emotional connection to them. Susan is a helpless woman and of no use to her family, when, for example, one of her children is knocked unconscious by accident. Susan, "crying, scolding, and incapable, stood at the end of the table, offering no assistance, but wondering when ever Nettie would come back" (*Doctor's Family* 111). At the end of the short novel, Susan even gives up one of her children, named Freddy, without any hesitation, as he prefers to stay with Nettie, the only mother figure he has ever had and needs until he is grown up. However, Nettie never receives any gratitude or thankfulness from Susan, despite the fact that Nettie sacrifices her life and future for her sister's family. Throughout the short novel, Susan even dares to accuse Nettie of showing no feelings and sympathy for her and her husband's situation. After Fred's death, Susan cannot think about doing anything else but blaming Nettie's harshness and Doctor Rider's neglect of his brother for her husband's death and emphasising how badly she is treated. Even though Nettie is approached in an ungrateful and exploitative way by her sister, she understands Susan's situation and excuses her bad behaviour, as it must be very "shocking [...] to feel one's self of no use" (*Doctor's Family* 114).

The relationship between Nettie and Susan is not very cordial or sisterly. Nettie is well aware of her sister's selfishness and egotism and sees through her little cunning acts. Susan is described as a fool and often contrasted with Nettie. Susan "was fairer, larger, smoother than her sister; but these advantages had lapsed in a general fade, which transformed her colour into a washy pinkness, made her figure stoop, and her footsteps

drag" (*Doctor's Family* 85). She is "spiteful and useless, with her poor health, her selfish love, her utter unreason" (*Doctor's Family* 102). Susan is definitely not portrayed as the ideal Victorian woman, but rather stands for the weak and submissive nineteenth century woman, who has to be taken care of by her younger and stronger sister. Susan resents being under Nettie's command and being entirely dependent on her, but sometimes also fears what will happen to herself and her family if Nettie is 'selfish' enough to marry and to leave them to their own resources. Just shortly after her husband dies, Susan decides to marry a Hercules like the Bushman from Australia. By doing this, Susan believes that she will no longer be under the control and dominion of her sister, when she says, "Nettie has always had the upper hand so much that she thinks I am always to do exactly as she pleases [...], but now I have somebody to stand by me." (*Doctor's Family* 190). However, Susan does not seem to realise that in reality she just exchanges the authority of Nettie for the authority of her new husband and that her lifestyle will have to change. "Thinking it over after her first triumph, it occurred to Mrs Fred that the loss of Nettie would make a serious difference to her own comfort. Who was to take charge of the children, and conduct those vulgar affairs for which Susan's feelings disqualified her?" (*Doctor's Family* 197).

Unfortunately, Fred Rider, Susan's first husband, is not of any more help to the family than Susan. He is a perfect example of Margaret Oliphant's weak male characters, who are the logical counterparts to her strong and powerful heroines. Fred is most probably based on Margaret Oliphant's brother, Willie. In the short novel, Fred is introduced as "[a] large man, interpenetrated with smoke and idleness and a certain dreary sodden dissipation, heated yet unexcited, reading a novel he has read half-a-dozen times before" (*Doctor's Family* 69). He is described to be the skeleton in his brother's house and "nobody's enemy but his own" (*Doctor's Family* 69). Fred was once the hope of the whole Rider family, but now lives a useless and passive life as a self-ruined man and burden to other family members, just like the author's brother. Fred, a feckless husband and father, who is incapable of financially supporting his own family, seems to mirror Margaret Oliphant's disbelief in the Victorian concept of the man as the breadwinner of the family. With regard to this matter, Nettie explains, "If Fred, now, was only to be trusted, and would go and work like a man and make something for the children, I daresay I could keep up the house; - but if he won't do anything, you know, it will take us every farthing just to live" (*Doctor's Family* 92-93). Fred seems to be aware of his

useless nature and his complete dependence on Nettie, “but the spur, though it pricked, did not goad him into any action” (*Doctor’s Family* 102). It is not easy for Nettie, “such an alert uncompromising little soul to tolerate that useless hulk – that heavy encumbrance of a man, for whom hope and life were dead” (*Doctor’s Family* 100).

Nettie is of the opinion that “a woman is, of course, twenty times the use a man is, in most things” (*Doctor’s Family* 185), at least when it comes to her own wilful and strong female personality. “Nettie’s energy and courage are particularly remarkable when contrasted with Fred’s idleness and indifference” (Kämper 211). It increasingly aggravates her to see how Fred wastes his life and his endless opportunities as a man, when she says,

To think of a man that could do hundreds of things living like that! A woman, you know, can only do a thing or two here and there. If it were not wicked to say so, one would think almost that Providence forgot sometimes, and put the wrong spirit into a body that did not belong to it. (*Doctor’s Family* 117)

Nettie emphasises how much more influence and opportunities men have in life compared to women. At the same time, Nettie also seems to suggest that Providence sometimes puts the wrong spirit into the wrong body, as in Fred’s case for instance. Towards the end of the short novel, Fred’s life comes to a tragic end, when he falls drunkenly into a canal and drowns. After Fred’s death, Nettie does not mourn Fred himself, but the fact that his life was so entirely wasted.

Nettie gazed with a pity too deep for words at the awful spectacle of that existence lost. That the lifeless thing in the room below could have been a man, and yet have come and gone so disastrously through the world, was terrible to think of, to that living labouring creature, in the depth of her own strange toils and responsibilities. Her heart ached over that wretched, miserable fate. (*Doctor’s Family* 146)

Very similar to Fred, Doctor Edward Rider, the male protagonist of the short novel *The Doctor’s Family*, is also portrayed as a rather weak and uncourageous man, who does not want to shoulder the burdens and responsibilities of other people. Edward decides not to ask Bessie Christian to marry him, because this would oblige him to care for her elderly parents as well. He repents his decision and is ashamed of himself, but he cannot change it. One day, his idle brother, Fred, arrives at his doorstep and Edward has no other choice than to take him in. However, Edward is not prepared to take care of Fred and his whole family and leaves this responsibility to the young and wilful Nettie, who he falls in love with, but restrains from marrying because of her dependents.

He was not a hero nor a martyr [...]. He was an ordinary individual, with no sublimity in him, and [...] no consciousness of lofty right-doing, or of a course of action superior to the world. (*Doctor's Family* 68)

He was, perhaps it is only rightful to say, not very capable of heroism: but he was capable of the heroic in his own composition, and of feeling bitterly his own self-reproaches, and the remarks of the world, which is always so ready to taunt the very cowardice it creates. [...] Dr Rider, eager as love and youth could make him, was yet incapable of shutting his eyes to the precipice at his feet. That he despised himself for doing so, did not make the matter easier. These were the limits of his nature, and beyond them he could not pass. (*Doctor's Family* 119-120)

Even though Edward is aware of the fact that what he is doing is not at all heroic and right and even though the title of the short novel, *The Doctor's Family*, clearly indicates that it is his family and thus his responsibility as a man to take care of his brother and his brother's family, he cannot go any further than the limits his nature poses. Edward is a perfect example of a man who fears to take on any kind of responsibility (see Williams, *Introduction* xiii). The only help he can offer is paying the extra amount of rent Mrs Smith demands, although Nettie specifically asks him not to interfere. By telling Edward that he is "only a man" (*Doctor's Family* 116), Nettie treats him with "patronising forbearance" (Rubik 162). Like many other heroines of Margaret Oliphant, Nettie makes higher demands on herself than on Edward and she has too much pride to burden him with responsibilities he is apparently afraid to take (see Rubik 162). Although Edward is portrayed as a weak and not very heroic man, the reader still sympathises with him and respects him because he is young, poor, hard-working and in the end only a man (see Williams, *Introduction* xiv). Edward "comes across as [...] real, imperfect and convincing" (Williams, *Introduction* xiv), a perfect example of Margaret Oliphant's skill to portray atypical male characters.

Contrary to Edward, Nettie is described as a real heroic and strong person. After Edward's passionate outbreak of love, Nettie has to refuse him and she suddenly finds her life to be changed. She cannot abandon and leave her sister and her sister's family to their own fate, even if she wanted to, as she explains,

I am not free to – to make any change; and I know very well, and so do you, that you never could put up with Fred and Susan and the children [...]. I don't mean I might not have been pleased had things been different. But you know it is just plainly impossible. [...] One may be sorry, but one must do what one has to do all the same. (*Doctor's Family* 123)

As soon as the doctor leaves, Nettie becomes aware of a sudden alteration in her life.

It was her personal happiness, wonderful wine of life, which had suddenly failed the brave little girl. Ah, the difference it made! [...] When the endurance and the labour remain, and the cordial is gone, it is a changed world. [...] She had enough to do, now that the unsuspected stimulus of her life was withdrawn for the moment, to go on steadily without making any outward show of it. She had come to the first real trial of her strength and worthiness. And Nettie did not know what a piece of heroism she was enacting, nor that the hardest lesson of youthful life – how to go on stoutly without the happiness which that absolute essence of existence demands and will not be refused – was being taught her now. (*Doctor's Family* 127)

Although Nettie seems to have lost her happiness, she still has the courage to continue taking care of her sister's family. And this is what makes Nettie a heroic person and what differentiates her from Edward, who is not heroic at all and only interested in taking revenge on Nettie for rejecting him after his confession of love and for hurting his pride. When Fred dies, Nettie has no other choice than to heroically shoulder the hardships and she takes Fred home to their cottage. Nettie realises "how, with fuller certainty than ever, [...] she herself, her mind, her laborious hands, her little fortune, would belong to the fatherless family" (*Doctor's Family* 139). In the end, she decides to ask Edward for help and feels relieved when he assumes the position as the head of the family and does the difficult work for her. This could be seen as Nettie's first step to giving up her power.

At the end of the short novel, Nettie feels increasingly unsure about her former decision to burden herself with the duties of others and to sacrifice her own happiness and future as a consequence. At the beginning of the short novel, Nettie informs everybody of the fact that she will never marry anybody, as "[i]t is only idle people who have time to think of falling in love and such nonsense. When one is very busy it never comes into one's head" (*Doctor's Family* 97). Thus, Nettie does not conform to Victorian traditions, which portray marriage as the most important wish and goal of every nineteenth century woman. Over time, Nettie feels more and more torn between her responsibility to her sister and the children and her own possible future and happiness. When Edward offers to marry her and to carry the burden together with her, Nettie's defences fall for a split second. However, Susan then reminds Nettie of her importance to the family and once again Nettie yields to her fate with unquestionable strength. She decides to accompany Susan and her children back to Australia, where she is ready to take care of them on her own. "No agonies of martyrdom could have made Nettie desert her post and abandon these helpless souls" (*Doctor's Family* 156). But when Susan tells

Nettie of her decision to marry an Australian man named Richard Chatham, who is a much stronger character than Fred, her first husband, Nettie is suddenly relieved of all her responsibilities to the family. Yet,

[w]hen she was thus cast off [...], it was not the delightful sensation of freedom which occurred to Nettie. She fell back with a silent pang of injury swelling in her heart, and, all tremulous and hasty, gave her agitated attention to the simple act of smoothing down her sleeves – a simple but symbolical act, which conveyed a world of meaning [...]. The work she had meant to do was over. Nettie's occupation was gone. [...] Never abdicated emperor laid aside his robes with more ominous significance, than Nettie, with fingers trembling between haste and agitation, smoothed down round her shapely wrists those turned-up sleeves. (*Doctor's Family*, 192)

Nettie does not feel relief in giving up her position as the head of the family, because this decision is taken out of her hands unexpectedly and because she is made redundant. In addition, losing her powerful position also means that she loses her only defence against becoming dependent on men (see Terry 78). In the end, Nettie decides not to accompany her sister and the children anymore, as Richard Chatham is able to take over her position. Although Nettie abdicates, she still successfully shows that women, if necessary, are able to take over the roles, such as provider, protector and head of the family, traditionally assigned to men (see Kämper 217).

As soon as Nettie gives up her responsibilities and decides to stay in England, it is up to Edward to make a move and propose to her. It is very difficult for Nettie “to think that her fate lay undecided in Edward Rider's hands. Though she had not a doubt of him, yet the mere fact that it was he who must take the first step was somewhat galling to the pride and temper of the little autocrat” (*Doctor's Family* 199). Nettie accuses Edward of never contradicting her and explains to him that she does not hold him up to anything and that he is not bound to repeat what he said some time ago. It is Freddy, her sister's son, who is finally able to vanquish Nettie's pride and self-control by saying that he does not want to leave her and Edward immediately seizes the moment. Nettie agrees to marry Edward if Freddy is allowed to live with them. Although the short novel ends with a conventional Victorian happy ending, there is a hint that “the little wayward heroine who, by dint of hard labour and sacrifice, had triumphantly had her own way in St. Roque's Cottage, loved her own way still in the new house, and had it as often as was good for her” (*Doctor's Family* 205). Nettie is the first in a line of powerful, strong and self-willed women and is thus considered to be the forerunner of Miss Marjoribanks and many other unique heroines of Margaret Oliphant.

4.2. Miss Marjoribanks

Lucilla Marjoribanks is the female protagonist of the novel *Miss Marjoribanks*, first published in 1866. It is “Mrs Oliphant’s great comic masterpiece” (Jay, *Introduction* xxv) with Lucilla and her revolutionary mission of reforming Carlingford society through dinner parties placed at the centre of irony. Margaret Oliphant “uses mock heroic as a major linguistic and structural device” (Peterson 72) to describe and view her heroine and her heroine’s actions from an ironic angle, which was quite unusual for Victorian novels. Throughout the novel, Lucilla is, for instance, portrayed as a “revolutionary” or “conqueror” (*Miss Marjoribanks* 30, 46) with a strategic mission and campaign to fulfil and is often compared to a queen in terms of the mock heroic. Lucilla’s plans to reorganise Carlingford are in reality not as serious and vital as the author’s use of language from the fields of leadership, war and sovereignty may suggest and are therefore exaggerated in an ironic way. Although the reader is thus asked to perceive Lucilla and her mission in an amusing and entertaining way, the author sides with her heroine and professes “great regard and affection for Lucilla” (Schaub 200). Lucilla remains a likable and believable person in the eyes of the reader, because, on the one hand, she is described to be superior to all the other characters of the novel and because, on the other hand, it becomes apparent that Victorian society and limitations are the reasons why Lucilla, a talented and intellectual woman, has to confine herself to trivial pastimes such as dinner parties. “Though for some time it seems that it is Lucilla who is to be the subject for ironic examination, it is in fact the nature of the society she operates in that becomes the main object of irony” (Leavis, *Introduction: Miss Marjoribanks* 6). Lucilla really possesses the qualities and skills needed in order to become a good Member of Parliament, but Victorian society does not give her this opportunity. Therefore, Victorian society and not Lucilla is eventually placed at the centre of irony. In her novel *Miss Marjoribanks*, Margaret Oliphant uses “a blend of sharp observation and gentle irony [...] to achieve subtle and realistic portraits that reflect accurately and sympathetically the hypocrisy and double standards of the age she lived in” (Oosterom 30).

At the beginning of the novel, Lucilla seems to be a conventional Victorian heroine, who wants to fulfil societal expectations and her assigned role as dutiful daughter by sacrificing her own feelings and future to be a comfort to her father and to take care of the household after her mother’s death. It “was evidently the duty of an only child to

devote herself to her father's comfort, and become the sunshine of his life, as so many young persons of her age have been known to become in literature" (*Miss Marjoribanks* 4). However, Lucilla is not as conventional as one may think. She does not have the delicate and beautiful figure the ideal Victorian woman is described to have. Lucilla is "large in all particulars, full and well-developed, with somewhat large features, not at all pretty as yet" (*Miss Marjoribanks* 4). In addition, she has "a mass of hair, [...] which was nothing more than tawny, and curly to exasperation. She wore it in large thick curls, which did not, however, float or wave, or do any of the graceful things which curls ought to do; [...] it would not grow long, but would grow ridiculously, unmanageably thick" (*Miss Marjoribanks* 5). Her appearance is not typical of the ideal Victorian woman and her unmanageable hair might already indicate that she also is not to be controlled easily. After the first few chapters the reader slowly realises that Lucilla is not a self-sacrificing, submissive and weak woman of the nineteenth century, but rather a self-confident, practical, ambitious, strong, powerful and influential woman. According to Leavis, "Lucilla is a Victorian anti-heroine, large, strong, unsentimental, insubordinate to men and with a hearty appetite" (*Introduction: Miss Marjoribanks* 2). She can walk through cold, windy and rainy weather without catching a cold and she hardly ever shows any signs of fatigue. She never faints or blushes, because she usually is in control of the situation.

After his wife's death, Doctor Marjoribanks longs for quietness and peacefulness and is not in need of a new mistress in the house. He decides to send his daughter back to the boarding school Mount Pleasant for some further education. Lucilla persuades her teacher to teach her political economy in order to be able to manage everything later. "Since the day when she began to read political economy [...], Lucilla had exercised a certain influence upon the school itself which was very satisfactory" (*Miss Marjoribanks* 14). Lucilla is evidently an authority at school and an eloquent and self-confident speaker. After three years of further education, she goes abroad for one year "to complete her education, and fit herself [...] for an illustrious and glorious reign at home" (*Miss Marjoribanks* 18), as it is her first and utmost aim to revolutionise Carlingford society. Contrary to the typical nineteenth century heroine, Lucilla does not perceive marriage and getting settled as her most important goals in life. She intends to revolutionise and harmonise the chaotic society in Carlingford, especially the society living in Grange Lane. Carlingford is in need of "a master-hand to blend the different

elements" (*Miss Marjoribanks* 22). Although it was considered as a valuable task to reorganise and unite society in the nineteenth century, it was not customary to portray a Victorian heroine as a woman who wishes to reign over Carlingford society and takes pleasure in her task. Lucilla feels more and more "that she who held the reorganisation of society in Carlingford in her hands was a woman with a mission" (*Miss Marjoribanks* 18).

When Lucilla arrives at home, she feels "that now at last she was coming into her kingdom, and entering the domain in which she intended her will to be law" (*Miss Marjoribanks* 26). The inhabitants of Grange Lane already know "that the Doctor's daughter was not a mild young lady, easy to be controlled; but, on the contrary, had all the energy and determination to have her own way" (*Miss Marjoribanks* 13). As soon as she is back in Carlingford, she sets out to conquer and dethrone her father and the housekeeper and cook of the house named Nancy. Although her father is able to briefly resist Lucilla's will, he soon gives in and lets her take the place at the head of the table.

She was down to breakfast, ready to pour out the coffee, before the Doctor had left his room. He found her, to his intense amazement, seated at the foot of the table, in the place which he usually occupied himself, before the urn and the coffee-pot. Dr Marjoribanks hesitated for one momentous instant, stricken dumb by this unparalleled audacity, but so great was the effect of his daughter's courage and steadiness, that after that moment of fate he accepted the seat by the side where everything was arranged for him and to which Lucilla invited him sweetly, though not without a touch of mental perturbation. The moment he had seated himself, the Doctor's eyes were open to the importance of the step he had taken. [...] he became aware [...] that he had abdicated, without knowing it, and that the reins of state had been smilingly withdrawn from his unconscious hands. (*Miss Marjoribanks* 29)

Nancy is surprised and dismayed at the apparent change of reigns in the house and encounters the same fate just a few hours later, when Lucilla consults her about dinner. Lucilla lets Nancy know that she does not want to take the authority out of her hands, but wants to work together with her on the dinners and other matters, when she says, "I don't mean to let down your reputation, Nancy. [...] Now we are two women to manage everything, we ought to do still better" (*Miss Marjoribanks* 31). Nancy is completely unprepared for this way of disarmament and dethronement and gives in just like her former master. Lucilla is very pleased with herself, as she perceives it as a great victory to be able to conquer a woman. After these two triumphs, Lucilla feels that the foundations for her reign are laid.

According to Langland, “Lucilla carefully sets the stage for her reign by attending with punctilious exactness to each of those signifying realms through which she will establish control and pre-eminence in Carlingford: architectural design, dining rituals, dress, and etiquette” (157). After the first two important victories over her father and Nancy, Lucilla immediately changes the meals for dinner and starts measuring and refurbishing the drawing room in detail. She chooses the colours of the drawing room to go with her own complexion and regards “everything around her with the eye of an enlightened critic and reformer” (*Miss Marjoribanks* 27). She successfully introduces the Thursday Evenings to Carlingford society, which are not parties, but evenings with dinners superintended by Lucilla herself. In addition, Lucilla introduces the fashion of wearing a high white dress, which from then on is perceived as the appropriate dress for the Thursday Evenings. The house of Dr Marjoribanks and especially the drawing room become the centre of Carlingford society, where Lucilla exercises her main influence and where she harmonises and revolutionises the society of Carlingford. In order to entertain her audience, she tries to introduce new elements to her evenings, such as duets with Barbara Lake, the art of Rose Lake and an evening in the garden. The Thursday Evenings are such a great success that Mr Cavendish congratulates Lucilla on her “conception of social politics”, which is “masterly” (*Miss Marjoribanks* 90). He is even of the opinion that Lucilla ought to become Prime Minister, a position unthinkable for a woman of the nineteenth century and only open to men at this time. “And then there was something in the very idea of being MP for Carlingford, which moved the mind of Lucilla. It was a perfectly ideal position for a woman of her views, and seemed to offer the very field that was necessary for her ambition” (*Miss Marjoribanks* 93).

The Thursday Evenings soon become an institution in Carlingford and Lucilla is said to be the queen of Carlingford. Already from the very beginning on, it is clear that Lucilla possesses “by nature some of the finest qualities of a ruler” and has “a mind made to rule” (*Miss Marjoribanks* 17, 62). Lucilla is portrayed as a “conqueror” and “young revolutionary”, who becomes “the young sovereign of Grange Lane” (*Miss Marjoribanks* 30, 46, 255). By using terminology taken from the fields of leadership, sovereignty and royalty to describe Lucilla, Margaret Oliphant evokes the image of Queen Victoria, the image of a powerful female leader of the nineteenth century, in the readers. Just like Queen Victoria, Lucilla starts her “victorious career” (*Miss Marjoribanks* 53) at a very early age and becomes a strong and inspiring queen in her

“kingdom” (*Miss Marjoribanks* 27). Queen Victoria held the highest position in her nation and thus was superior to every single man and woman. Margaret Oliphant seems to emphasise the power and influence Lucilla possesses and exercises in public by the indirect comparison she draws between Lucilla and Queen Victoria. The author seems to equip Lucilla with masculine characteristics, such as power, control and leadership qualities. In addition, Margaret Oliphant allows Minerva, the Roman goddess, who was especially important to men fighting for victory in war, to inspire Lucilla and compares Lucilla to Joan of Arc, a female military leader. Lucilla is a heroic personality, who takes on every challenge. She has a “delightful sense of power and abundant resources with which she was mastering” (*Miss Marjoribanks* 72) any difficulty. She is a courageous woman and always able to take care of herself.

Lucilla possesses the “powers of persuasion” (*Miss Marjoribanks* 163) and manipulation and controls the people close to her in a skilful way. She often works within the bounds of Victorian convention and she uses Victorian ideology and traditions for her own ends. This enables her to manipulate men and women into doing what she wishes them to do. And exactly this talent of subtle manipulation is one of the reasons why Lucilla becomes such a powerful and influential person in Carlingford. Lucilla “has hoarded the clichés of her culture like candy, and she serves them back to a gullible public” (Langland 155). Lucilla, for instance, keeps repeating throughout the whole novel that “it is the object of her life to be a comfort to papa” (*Miss Marjoribanks* 52) and to provide him with a cheerful home, whereas in reality she uses this as a disguise for reorganising society and for becoming the leader of Carlingford society. She does not sacrifice her happiness and life for her father, as she tries to make everybody in Carlingford believe. Lucilla “significantly challenges the notion of the Angel in the House not by rejecting it altogether but by carefully exploiting the position in which it places her” (Tange 165). One day the Reverend Bury suggests that Mrs Mortimer, an elderly widowed woman, should become the chaperon for Lucilla, as he believes Lucilla to be too young to be left alone without a mother in the face of temptation and too inexperienced to have the authority in her father’s house. This poses a threat to Lucilla’s position and influence, but Lucilla has it “in her power to turn the tables on the Rector, and she did not hesitate as a weaker woman might have done” (*Miss Marjoribanks* 65). She pretends to misunderstand the Reverend Bury’s intention to provide her with a chaperon on the grounds of female naivety and reproaches him for

his rather inappropriate suggestion of Mrs Mortimer as the new wife of her father, when she says “with a look of artless surprise, bending her earnest gaze” on her victim, “Do you mean you have found some one for him to marry? [...] It is very dreadful for me that I am so young to go against *you* [...] but if it is *that*, I cannot be expected to take any part in it – it would not be natural” (*Miss Marjoribanks* 65). Lucilla prefers to choose her own chaperone, but only when and where it pleases her to have one. She convinces Mrs Chiley to be her chaperone to her father’s evening dinner party, although her father thinks that a chaperone is completely unnecessary. Lucilla explains to her father, “I must have a chaperone, you know [...] I don’t say it is not quite absurd; but then, at first, I always make it a point to give in to the prejudices of society. That is how I have always been so successful” (*Miss Marjoribanks* 51). The novel *Miss Marjoribanks* “dramatizes the process by which a young woman seizes control of local society through a dexterous manipulation of domestic discursive practices and a clever staging of class and femininity” (Langland 156).

Lucilla Marjoribanks is portrayed as superior to the other women in Carlingford. She definitely “was not a person who could be classed with ordinary girls, in the general acceptation of the word” (*Miss Marjoribanks* 132). Lucilla is, for example, contrasted to Barbara Lake, a talented singer and the daughter of an artist. Although Lucilla has a remarkable voice herself and is used to applause, she is willing to sacrifice this prominent position “for the enhanced and magnificent effect which she felt could be produced by the combination of the two voices; and the sacrifice was one which a weaker woman would have been incapable of making” (*Miss Marjoribanks* 38-39). One Thursday, Barbara, however, decides to sing on her own and is close to ruining the evening, because she does not comprehend the concept of social politics, as Lucilla does. This passage in the novel is of course intended to be ironic, as it is completely exaggerated and as it is fairly unlikely that Barbara, a gifted singer, is able to ruin the evening by her singing. In reality, Lucilla always has to be at the centre of attention and cannot accept anybody who meddles with her mission. Lucilla is superior to Barbara in more than one way. She has a realistic and practical view of the world and does not dream of a romantic marriage to some kind of hero. She does not weep, as Barbara expects her to, when Barbara steals away Mr Cavendish, one of Lucilla’s admirers. Instead, she proves her superiority by the friendliest behaviour towards Barbara. Eventually, it is Barbara who is heartbroken and incapable of doing anything, when her

suitor, Mr Cavendish, suddenly leaves Carlingford. Lucilla can only feel sorry for Barbara, as she “has no mamma to set her right” (*Miss Marjoribanks* 125). At the beginning of the novel, it is Mrs Woodburn, one of Lucilla’s neighbours, who poses a slight threat to Miss Marjoribanks. However, Lucilla “snubbed the caricaturist who kept all the good people in terror of their lives [...] and took the words out of her very mouth” (*Miss Marjoribanks* 41) at their very first meeting. When Lucilla visits Mrs Woodburn one day to ask a few precarious questions about Mrs Woodburn’s brother, one realises that Lucilla’s talents are superior in the case of an emergency to Mrs Woodburn’s talents, which “were not of a nature to do her any good in such a strait. She collapsed entirely, and looked round her in a flutter of fright and despair, as if to find some means of escape” (*Miss Marjoribanks* 230). Lucilla is a person of high spirits and energy, who is able to recover from any shock quickly and who can cope with any challenge offered to her.

In the nineteenth century, it was even more unusual to portray a woman as superior to men than to portray a woman as superior to other women, since women were perceived to be weak and inferior creatures dependent on men. Lucilla understands “all about [...] men [...] and how to manage them, and take full use of their powers” (*Miss Marjoribanks* 145). She frequently refers to men by the pronouns “*They*” and “*Them*” (*Miss Marjoribanks* 61, 106), thus emphasising the difference and opposition between women and men. She exercises a considerable influence over the men of Carlingford and feels pleasure in it. Lucilla “overrules her father, she bosses Tom Marjoribanks, she scorns Mr Cavendish, and even General Travers on one occasion is cut down to his proper level” (Terry 92). When she says that “it is frightful to belong to a family where men are so stupid” (*Miss Marjoribanks* 49), she refers to her cousin, who is incapable of measuring the drawing room. Mr Cavendish is not the man in charge of Carlingford society, but only “Lucilla’s right hand” (*Miss Marjoribanks* 106). In her opinion, Mr Cavendish would make a perfect candidate for parliament one day, but then she finds out that he is accused of committing a minor crime in the past and that he faces exposure as a social pretender. If the secrets of Mr Cavendish were revealed to the citizens of Carlingford, his social position would be destroyed, his sister’s relationship to her husband would be at stake and the love between Mrs Mortimer and Mr Beverly would be lost forever (see Langland 161-162). Mr Cavendish is a weak man, who cannot cope with the problematic situation, and he is in need of help. Lucilla, who

knows all the details regarding Mr Cavendish's past, offers him this help. Mr Cavendish, discouraged and in total panic, "made the best of his unhappy position, and threw himself upon Lucilla's charity" (*Miss Marjoribanks* 131). Lucilla with a mind of a genius is the only one who can solve the problem and she invites all the people concerned to the next Thursday Evening. When Mr Beverly recognises Mr Cavendish, alias Mr Kavan, the social pretender, who allegedly cheated Mrs Mortimer out of her inheritance, at the dinner table, Mr Beverly is furious and is on the verge of unmasking Mr Cavendish. However, "a young woman's eye was enough to keep him down" and "for fear of Miss Marjoribanks" (*Miss Marjoribanks* 302), who seems to know everything, Mr Beverly does not dare to expose Mr Cavendish publicly. Thus, Lucilla heroically saves the life of Mr Cavendish and solves the problems of all the other people involved.

After reorganising Carlingford society successfully, Lucilla finds a new field of action and begins "the second period of her career" (*Miss Marjoribanks* 333) as a supporter and adviser in Mr Ashburton's campaign to become the Member of Parliament for Carlingford after the death of the former Member, Mr Chiltern. Lucilla is the one who suggests Mr Ashburton, a respected man of no secrets, as the suitable candidate for Carlingford. Although she, as a woman, is not allowed to be part of his committee, she plays a very important role in his parliamentary campaign and election. Mr Ashburton is "not a man of very quick understanding" (*Miss Marjoribanks* 340). He believes Lucilla's ideas regarding the campaign and election to be the ideas of an ignorant and inexperienced woman, who has no profound knowledge of politics. However, he soon realises that it is he who is the fool and not Lucilla and he starts to perceive Lucilla and her ideas as very clever. Lucilla is of the opinion that not the colours of the political parties, but new colours should be used for Mr Ashburton's campaign. She suggests her own colours, green and purple, to him, which he gratefully accepts. The colours "work through association, allowing him to draw upon her power in Carlingford" (Langland 167). Moreover, Lucilla puts forward the idea that Mr Ashburton should not side with any specific party or make his opinions public, as this would lead a lot of important members of Carlingford to vote for another candidate. With regard to this issue, she explains the following to her chosen candidate:

I am sure I have heard you all saying over and over that the thing was to have a good *man*. Don't go and make speeches about opinions. [...] I would never mind about anybody's ways of thinking, if I were you. After all, [...] what does it

matter what people think? I suppose when it comes to doing anything, the Whigs and the Tories are just the same. Mr Ashburton, it is the Man that is wanted. (*Miss Marjoribanks* 340-341)

Mr Ashburton follows Lucilla's advice and Lucilla supports him even further by persuading people to vote for him. Her skill in manipulating people comes in handy during her campaign for Mr Ashburton. She is able to manipulate Mr Brown, for example, into voting for her candidate, when she says, "Of course, you are on Mr Ashburton's committee [...] you must be, or going to be, after what you said the other day at lunch" (*Miss Marjoribanks* 372). Mr Brown, however, seems to remember that it was Lucilla who actually said that Mr Ashburton was the man for Carlingford. Lucilla counters seemingly naively, "Please don't make fun of me [...] as if anybody cared what I say about politics. But I know that was what decided poor Mr Ashburton" (*Miss Marjoribanks* 373). It would be embarrassing for Mr Brown to take back what he apparently said at lunch and thus he is persuaded by Lucilla to vote for Mr Ashburton.

Lucilla is the person behind the brilliant campaign of Mr Ashburton and it shows that she would make a perfect and very influential Prime Minister, if she only had the opportunity. At the age of twenty-nine, she would have been old enough to go "into Parliament herself had there been no disqualification of sex, and when it was almost a necessity for her to make some use of her social influence. [...] and when a woman has an active mind, [...] it is a little hard for her to find a 'sphere'" (*Miss Marjoribanks* 389). In the nineteenth century, it was not possible for women to vote at parliamentary elections or to go into politics. Margaret Oliphant successfully manages to weave this problematic topic into her novel, when she allows Lucilla, for example, to say, "I am sure I wish I had a vote [...] but I have no vote, and what can a girl do? [...] If we were going in for that sort of thing, I don't know what there would be left for the gentleman to do" (*Miss Marjoribanks* 367). Towards the end of the novel, Lucilla shows a growing desire to put her talents and experience to use in another sphere than the sphere naturally assigned to women. She becomes "conscious that her capabilities were greater than her work. She was a Power in Carlingford, and she knew it; but still there is little good in the existence of a Power unless it can be made use of for some worthy end" (*Miss Marjoribanks* 390). By advising and electioneering for Mr Ashburton, Lucilla is able to extend her influence from the domestic sphere to the public male sphere. However, already this small act of trespassing into the public sphere is resented by the male population in Carlingford, as illustrated by her father's pleasure, when he observes

her reaction to the sudden candidacy of her former admirer, Mr Cavendish (see Rubik 133).

‘If you had kept your own place it would not have mattered; but I don’t see how you are to get out of it. You see, young ladies should let these sort of things alone, Lucilla.’ [...] When she saw the triumph with which her embarrassment was received, and that she had no sympathy nor aid to look for, she recovered herself as if by magic. [...] and that determination not to be beaten [...] sprang up in an instant in Miss Marjoribanks’s mind. [...] If she was ever to hold up her head again, or have any real respect for herself, she must win. (*Miss Marjoribanks* 351-352)

In the end, Lucilla’s candidate wins the election and as a consequence Lucilla also wins and is portrayed as successful in her own right. The novel *Miss Marjoribanks* seems to demonstrate to a certain extent the struggle and right of a woman “to enter traditionally male domains” (Rubik 133).

For about ten years, Lucilla successfully manages to stay single and not to marry any of her suitors in order to have her own way and to reorganise Carlingford society. As soon as she returns from school to be a comfort to her father, she feels “that now at length she was emancipated, and at liberty to exercise her faculty” (*Miss Marjoribanks* 26). During the ten years of her reign, Lucilla repeats that she does not want to marry, when she says, “I don’t think I shall marry anybody for a long time. I want to amuse myself.” “I have not the least intention of marrying anybody” (*Miss Marjoribanks* 15, 75). She always finds an excuse not to marry, when she, for example, explains, “I don’t mean to be any man’s wife just now. [...] I’m too busy electioneering” (*Miss Marjoribanks* 347). Her father’s wealth and widowed status give her all the freedom and independence she needs to establish her reign in Carlingford (see Jay, *A Literary Life* 69). Dr Marjoribanks “had money enough to keep *his* child luxuriously, and make her the leader of Carlingford society” (*Miss Marjoribanks* 349). He does not realise that his daughter’s lovely devotion to him would preserve her from accepting any marriage proposal and that she really intends to postpone her marriage until the age of twenty-nine, when she starts to age, as she thinks. A few people, like Mrs Chiley and Tom Marjoribanks, do not understand why Lucilla sacrifices her own happiness and future for her father and do not realise that Lucilla uses her father as a pretext to disguise her mission. Towards the end of the novel, a few people seem to grasp Lucilla’s reason for not marrying. It strikes Mrs Woodburn “with a pang of envy” to find out that “Lucilla did not marry because she was too comfortable, and, without any of the bother, could have everything

her own way” (*Miss Marjoribanks* 367). Mrs Woodburn is aware of the disadvantages marriage can pose to a woman and envies Lucilla for her independence.

Mrs Woodburn knew very well that marriage had its drawbacks, and had come to an age at which she could appreciate the comfort of having her own way without any of the bother. She gave a furtive glance after Lucilla, and could not but acknowledge to herself that it would be very foolish of Miss Marjoribanks to marry, and forfeit all her advantages, and take somebody else’s anxieties upon her shoulders, and never have any money except what she asked from her husband. (*Miss Marjoribanks* 368)

By writing this, Margaret Oliphant hints at the inequality and the problems women faced in the nineteenth century due to the loss of right over their own income, possessions and property as a consequence of marriage.

At the end of the novel, Lucilla, however, suddenly finds herself to be robbed of her independence, freedom and protection as a consequence of her father’s sudden death. Her plan to go abroad and live a comfortable life as a single woman on her moderate inheritance evaporates as soon as she is informed of the fact that her father was actually one of the poorest men in Carlingford. “Instead of the heiress, in a good position, who could go abroad or anywhere, and do anything she liked, was it possible that she was only a penniless single woman with nobody to look to, and nothing to live on?” (*Miss Marjoribanks* 407). She envies her servant Thomas, who decides to start his own business, as she “would have been very glad if she could have taken a little business too” (*Miss Marjoribanks* 421), and her housemaid Betsy, who wants to accompany Thomas. “It was life the housemaid was about to enter on – active life of her own, with an object and meaning [...] independent life; whereas her mistress knew of nothing particularly interesting in her own uncertain future” (*Miss Marjoribanks* 422). Lucilla can only escape her financial crises through marriage, although she would have the skills to become a great doctor, for example, as her father once mentions, “If you had been a boy [...], you might have carried on my practice, Lucilla – and even extended it, I shouldn’t wonder” (*Miss Marjoribanks* 391). Her father has “the respect for his daughter’s genius, which only experience could have impressed upon him” (*Miss Marjoribanks* 188).

Thinking about marriage and an outlet for her power, Lucilla can only come up with two future possibilities:

Gleams of possibility, it is true, crossed her mind, such as that of marrying the Member of Carlingford, for instance, thus beginning a new and more important career. [...] And there did occur to her, among other things, the idea of making a great Experiment which could be carried out only by a woman of genius – of marrying a poor man, and affording to Carlingford and England an example which might influence unborn generations. (*Miss Marjoribanks* 390)

Eventually, Lucilla chooses the experiment and decides to marry Tom Marjoribanks, her cousin, who really loves her and who provides her with the opportunity to be useful to society again. Although marriage is a very conventional ending and is often linked to the loss of female power in the nineteenth century, Lucilla by no means loses her influence and superiority because of marrying Tom. Tom is the perfect husband for Lucilla, as he is inferior to her and as he would do everything for her. She persuades Tom to buy an Estate named Marchbank, where she can reform the society of Marchbank village, and she plans a campaign for Tom's election to parliament.

It gave her the liveliest satisfaction to think of all the disorder and disarray of the Marchbank village. Her fingers itched to be at it – to set all the crooked things straight, and clean away the rubbish, and set everything, as she said on a sound foundation. (*Miss Marjoribanks* 486) Then there rose up before her a vision of a parish saved, a village reformed, a county reorganised, and a triumphant election at the end, the recompense and crown of all, which should put the government of the country itself, to a certain extent, into competent hands. (*Miss Marjoribanks* 495)

In addition to her new sphere of work, she is able to keep her surname Marjoribanks and thus also “symbolically her own identity” (Sanders 34).

4.3. Phoebe, Junior

Phoebe Beecham is the female protagonist of the novel *Phoebe, Junior*, which is the last book of *The Chronicles of Carlingford* series and which was first published in 1876. Phoebe is “a pretty young woman”, who possesses “in perfection the hair of the period. She had, too, the complexion which goes naturally with those sunny locks – a warm pink and white, which, had the boundaries between the pink and the white been a little more distinct, would have approached perfection” (*Phoebe, Junior* 33). Contrary to Nettie and Miss Marjoribanks, Phoebe seems to resemble closely the ideal Victorian woman in appearance. Furthermore, Phoebe is portrayed as a dutiful and devoted daughter, who travels to Carlingford in order to take care of her sick grandmother. “Was not this the ideal young woman, the girl of the storybooks, who cared about nothing but her duty?” (*Phoebe, Junior* 125). Although duty and self-devotion seem to render Phoebe to be an ideal woman of the Victorian century, one should not forget that

Phoebe looks after her grandmother primarily because she wants to secure the inheritance of her grandparents from Mrs Tom, the sister of Mrs Beecham. Duty in this novel, just like in *Miss Marjoribanks*, is “the rubric under which the heroine covertly pursues her own interests [...] while passing herself off as the very pattern of feminine propriety” (Langland 176-177). Throughout the novel, the readers are made to understand that Phoebe is not a humble-minded, submissive and weak woman, but a powerful, confident, complacent, worldly and intelligent one. She is admired for “[h]er cleverness, her ease, her conversational powers, her woman of the world aspect” and, according to Reginald May, she is “the cleverest girl [he] ever met; not like one of [the] bread-and-butter girls” (*Phoebe, Junior* 207, 228).

Contrary to many heroines of nineteenth century novels, Phoebe is described to have “had every advantage in her education” (*Phoebe, Junior* 31). Besides learning how to speak different languages and how to play music instruments, Phoebe also

attended lectures at the ladies’ college close by, and heard a great many eminent men on a great many different subjects. She had read, too, a great deal. She was very well got up in the subject of education for women, and lamented often and pathetically the difficulty they lay under of acquiring the highest instruction; but at the same time she patronized Mr. Ruskin’s theory that dancing, drawing, and cooking were three higher arts which ought to be studied by girls. It is not necessary [...] to account for the discrepancies between those two systems [...]. Phoebe was restrained from carrying out either to its full extent. (*Phoebe, Junior* 32)

Phoebe is not allowed to take part in Cambridge examinations, as her father fears that people might think he wants his daughter to become a schoolmistress, and she is not allowed to be trained in cooking, as her mother objects to the idea that her daughter is educated in such a messy and slave like occupation. This means that Phoebe is trapped between conventional education and the advancements of education in the nineteenth century. “But she did what she could [...]. She read Virgil at least, if not Sophocles, and she danced and dressed though she was not allowed to cook” (*Phoebe, Junior* 32). Phoebe is an example of women who received better education due to the struggle of the women’s movement in the second half of the nineteenth century. Phoebe reads a lot and has a wide knowledge of the theories prevalent in the century, which helps her to achieve her aims in life. At that time, education was increasingly perceived as an important foundation for women to break free from their limited sphere. Even if Phoebe, like Lucilla Marjoribanks, is not able to free herself from the domestic sphere

and the Victorian conventions, she at least manages to work subtly in the public sphere with the help of her future husband.

At the beginning of the novel, Phoebe's identity is threatened by the social status of her grandparents. Her grandfather was in trade and owned a buttermilk shop in Carlingford, which indicates the status of very low middle-class in society. Although Phoebe believes to have fully prepared herself for the encounter with her grandparents, she is under complete shock, when she meets her grandfather and grandmother, who wear shabby clothes. As soon as she is back in her room, she feels depressed and discouraged and starts crying. Her first impulse is to run away and never to come back, but "her temperament did not favour panics and giving in was not in her" (*Phoebe, Junior* 120). It is just a passing moment of weakness and Phoebe recovers quickly. Phoebe's parents have faith in their daughter, as Phoebe is able to manage this challenging situation and can "be safely trusted to take care of herself anywhere" (*Phoebe, Junior* 111). Phoebe tells herself repeatedly, "I am myself whatever happens; even if poor grandmamma's habits are not refined [...]. A lady must always be a lady wherever she is" (*Phoebe, Junior* 104). The young woman has the power to remain independent from her grandparents' social class and creates and projects her own image and identity in Carlingford society. She is with them, but not one of them (see Langland 178). Mrs Hurst, for example, is completely irritated and surprised, when she sees Phoebe, "so nicely dressed, nothing vulgar or showy, [...] in a twenty-guinea dress" with Mrs Tozer, "looking like an old washerwoman" (*Phoebe, Junior* 132-133). Phoebe's identity is mainly built on "dress, manner, and speech" (Langland 177) and especially "the question of dress was not a mere frivolity with her" (*Phoebe, Junior* 32), as she is aware of the fact that dress can be a very important social influence. She does not hide the social status of her grandparents, but embraces her social origin, even though it is difficult for her. "No disguise was possible to her. The only way to redeem the position was to carry it with a high hand, as she did, holding her head erect, and playing her part so that all the world might see and wonder" (*Phoebe, Junior* 159). What seems to set Phoebe apart

is not merely her ability to utilize the signifying system of the middle classes with consummate skill, but the strength and tenacity with which she insists that others accept her interpretation of herself. She stands her ground and refuses to capitulate to the shame and weakness suggested by her position, and which she feels in private. (Jones 165)

Phoebe is portrayed as superior to most of the other characters in the novel. She is socially superior to her own grandparents, because her mother married the Reverend Beecham, son of a respectable family and minister of the dissenting congregation in Carlingford, and rose in class especially after their movement to London. When Phoebe arrives at the train station in Carlingford, she realises that her grandfather “would call her ‘Ma’am,’ [...] and think her one of the quality” (*Phoebe, Junior* 115). Her grandfather immediately perceives the contrast between his own wife and his granddaughter, who is a young princess in his eyes. Phoebe is also described to be superior to her own parents, especially her mother, in manners and breeding. Mr and Mrs Beecham elevated their daughter above themselves by providing her with good education and raising her in a community superior to their former acquaintances. Phoebe’s way of dressing is superior to her mother’s and she is often admired for her appearance and dresses in public (see Langland 174). Even Ursula is charmed by Phoebe, although Ursula, as a daughter of the Anglican clergyman in Carlingford, is actually superior to a dissenting shopkeeper’s grandchild, like Phoebe. At the end of the novel, Phoebe rises in social rank and superiority, when she decides to marry Clarence Copperhead, a member of the genteel upper middle class.

When Phoebe is not socially superior, she is often portrayed to be intellectually superior to the other characters, especially to the male characters, of the novel. Phoebe is more intelligent than both her suitors, Reginald May and Clarence Copperhead. Although Reginald May is a very intelligent “Oxford man, with the best education, [...] he was a simpleton all the same” (*Phoebe, Junior* 277). Contrary to Phoebe, Clarence “was not clever; he had none of the energy of his race, and promised to be as useless in an office as he would have been in a cutting or a yard full of men” (*Phoebe, Junior* 24). Having breakfast with her grandfather and Clarence, Phoebe is described to have “more brains than both her interlocutors together, and half-a-dozen more added on” (*Phoebe, Junior* 411). Clarence is aware of the fact that Phoebe is the clever one in their relationship and understands that only with her help will he make a career in the future. Phoebe is also intellectually superior to Mr Copperhead, Clarence’s father, who is one of the greatest contractors for railways and other works in England and all over the world. Despite his great professional success, he is just a stubborn and offensive elderly man, who “had no more than an ordinary education, and no manners to speak of” (*Phoebe, Junior* 21). In addition, it takes him considerable time to comprehend that Phoebe, despite her lower

middle class status, is the perfect wife for his son and of great importance for his son's career prospects.

Throughout the novel, Phoebe is often contrasted to one particular person, namely Ursula May. This contrast between the two women is already made clear at the beginning of the novel, when they are both invited to the same ball in London. While Phoebe decides to wear a black dress, which makes her stand out as one of the most interesting women at the ball, Ursula is "in a white frock, the sort of dress which Phoebe had rebelled against" (*Phoebe, Junior* 37). "Ursula was as different as possible from Phoebe Beecham" (*Phoebe, Junior* 47). Contrary to Phoebe, Ursula has no great pretensions to be intellectual and seems to represent mainly the ideal Victorian woman by sacrificing herself to her family, being passive and submissive to men, especially to her father, and dreaming of romance and marriage. Apart from being able to read and write, she just has pretty little manners to offer. Ursula is a dutiful and self-sacrificing daughter, who looks after her motherless brothers and sisters, prepares the dinners, mends the family's clothes and manages the servants in the house. In reality, Ursula does "not find her position as elder sister and housekeeper a very congenial one" (*Phoebe, Junior* 47), but she never rebels against it. Margaret Oliphant seems to use Ursula to implicitly illustrate the limitations of women in the nineteenth century, when she allows Ursula to say, "If I could earn any money I am sure I would [...] and only too glad. I am sure it is wanted badly enough. But how is a girl to earn any money? I wish I knew how?" (*Phoebe, Junior* 99). At one point in the novel, Ursula wishes "with a sigh that there were sinecures which could be held by girls. But no, in that as in other things 'gentleman' kept all that was good to themselves" (*Phoebe, Junior* 101). She envies her brother for his paid work opportunity and independence, but accepts and does not rebel against her prescribed role as a woman in the nineteenth century. Contrary to Phoebe, Ursula decides to marry a man who really loves her, but in the end only becomes "a detail in the story of Northcote's self-development" and "a footnote to [his] career" (Peterson 77).

Phoebe shows her superiority, power and management skills, especially when she is confronted with crises. When, for instance, a crisis is caused by Reginald May, a typical Anglican, and Mr Northcote, a typical Dissenter, meeting on the streets in Carlingford, it is up to Phoebe "that clever young woman to keep them from flying at each other's

throats [...]. The situation pleased Phoebe who liked to ‘manage’” (*Phoebe, Junior* 233). Throughout the novel, Phoebe faces an even more serious crisis provoked by Mr May, Reginald’s and Ursula’s father, a very intelligent and admired clergyman, who is unfortunately constantly in debt. Other men who have the same income as Mr May manage to maintain their families without getting into debts, but Mr May “had always a bill coming due” and “[h]is money, when he had any, ‘slipped through his fingers’, as people say” (*Phoebe, Junior* 172, 173). Mr May always asks Mr Cotsdean, a humble member of his congregation, to sign his bills as security and he would sacrifice Mr Cotsdean if necessary one day. When Mr May is unable to pay the next debt, he forges the name of Mr Tozer as security on a bill for £150, which he again is not able to pay for in time. Mr May is not able to deal with this critical situation in his life and as a consequence has a breakdown. Phoebe is “the only one in possession of her faculties” (*Phoebe, Junior* 374) and is able to solve the mystery of Mr May’s sudden hysterical breakdown. Since she is friends with the May family and has always felt welcome in their house, she appoints herself as “the saviour of the family” (*Phoebe, Junior* 377). Mr May is “absolutely in her power” (*Phoebe, Junior* 390), as nobody else in Carlingford is able to protect him from the evident disgrace, ruin, shame and loss of position and to manage the crisis except Phoebe herself.

Contrary to Mr May, Phoebe proves to be equal to this difficult and delicate situation and once again Phoebe feels a certain kind of satisfaction “in the great role she herself was playing” (*Phoebe, Junior* 398). It seems “natural to her to do whatever might be wanted, and to act upon her own responsibility. Her self-confidence reached the heroic point” (*Phoebe, Junior* 397) during this crisis. Phoebe takes the bill, the only evidence that can link Mr May to the deed, from her grandfather and hides it in her room. When her grandfather finds out that his own granddaughter has undermined him, he approaches her furiously and violently.

But Phoebe’s nerves strung themselves up again in face of the crises. She took him off suddenly with unexpected strength, and moving to a little distance, stood confronting him, pale but determined. ‘I am not your daughter; how dare you treat me so? [...] If grandpapa has anything more to say against me, he can say it to Clarence.’ Saying this, she turned around majestically. (*Phoebe, Junior* 414)

Although Phoebe is shocked by her grandfather’s violent behaviour and rage, she does not allow him to threaten and intimidate her. When Phoebe reveals the mystery of the bill to her grandfather later, he asks her to burn it and never to mention it again. In the

end, Mr Northcote, the future husband of Ursula, will pay the outstanding amount of money to Mr Tozer. Phoebe thus successfully manages to save Mr May and his family from disgrace. In addition to her sense of power and superiority, Phoebe also experiences for the first time in her life the feeling of independence:

She went up Grange Lane [...] feeling her own extraordinary independence more than anything else. Phoebe felt like a man [...] who has his own future all in his hands, nobody having any right to explanation or information about what he may choose to do, or to expect from him anything beyond what he himself may please to give. Very few people are in this absolute free position, but this was how Phoebe represented it to herself [...]. (*Phoebe, Junior* 394)

This, however, is only a glimpse of independence for Phoebe, as she does not have the opportunity to be financially independent like men and to follow her dream of her own career in the nineteenth century. “Phoebe felt it a matter of course that she should marry, and marry well” (*Phoebe, Junior* 104). Contrary to many Victorian heroines, Phoebe is “no husband-hunter. She contemplated the issue with calm and composure, however it might turn out” (*Phoebe, Junior* 108). She has her own theories on marriage and does not pressure herself into marrying the first man that proposes. At the end of the novel, she has to choose between two suitors, Reginald May and Clarence Copperhead, who both promise a very different outlook into the future. Phoebe is not the kind of woman who bases her decision on her first emotional impulse. She weighs her options and the advantages and disadvantages of each admirer carefully and makes a decision based on reason rather than emotions (see Sanders 35). Reginald May is a clever, capable and talented young man and is able to discuss Greek poetry and philosophy, which Phoebe appreciates. Reginald believes Phoebe to be a woman who “is much better worth talking to than most of the girls one meets with, whoever her grandfather may be” (*Phoebe, Junior* 202). He truly falls in love with Phoebe, but apart from true love and intellect he has not a lot to offer to Phoebe, since a chaplaincy, a sinecure, is not the proper outlet for Phoebe’s powers. Although Clarence Copperhead is neither intelligent nor romantic, he has to offer money, a higher social status and a career, which are very attractive incentives for Phoebe. When Clarence sees Phoebe in her black dress for the first time at the ball in London, he immediately falls “a hopeless victim to her fascinations” (*Phoebe, Junior* 35). If it was not for her theories on colours and dress, Clarence perhaps would never have noticed Phoebe among all the other girls at the ball. When Clarence tries to decide whether he prefers Phoebe or Ursula, he says that Phoebe “is worth twenty the other. As sharp as a needle, and plenty to say for

herself. This is the kind of girl [he] like[s]" (*Phoebe, Junior* 109). As soon as Phoebe anticipates a proposal by Clarence, she starts to consider the disadvantages and advantages of marrying Clarence.

She did not dislike Clarence Copperhead, and it was no horror to her to think of marrying him. [...] He was not very wise, nor a man to be enthusiastic about, but he would be a career for Phoebe. She did not think humbly of this, but with a big capital – a Career. Yes, she would put him into parliament, and keep him there. She could thrust him forward (she believed) to the front of affairs. He would be as good as a profession, a position, a great work to Phoebe. He meant wealth (which she dismissed in its superficial aspects as something meaningless and vulgar, but accepted in its higher aspect as an almost necessary condition of influence), and he meant all the possibilities of future power. (*Phoebe, Junior* 306)

Clarence means an active life for Phoebe, who will support and help him to become a member of parliament. Wealth is not important to her with regard to luxury, but with regard to the power and influence it can buy. With Clarence "she will have the power to teach and to lead, intellectually and socially" (Peterson 75).

It does not take Phoebe long to choose Clarence as her future husband. She is not interested in true love and romance, but in a career, an outlet for her intellect and power in the public sphere. Phoebe feels "more like an applicant for office kept uncertain whether she was to have a desirable post or not, than a girl on the eve of a lover's declaration" (*Phoebe, Junior* 349). As soon as Phoebe accepts Clarence's rather unromantic proposal, she realises, however, that marrying Clarence will not be an easy matter, since Clarence's father, Mr Copperhead, will oppose their marriage, due to Phoebe's social inferiority. If the struggle for their right to marry failed, Phoebe knows that this would not only mean a kind of ruin to herself, but to everybody else involved, including her own father, whose leading member of his congregation Mr Copperhead is. When Mr Copperhead receives the first hint of a possible engagement between his son and Phoebe, he feels confused and powerless. "Was it possible that she defied him, this Minister's daughter, and measured her strength against his? Mr Copperhead felt as if he could have shaken the impertinent girl" (*Phoebe, Junior* 345). Even when Mr Copperhead threatens to disinherit his son and tries to talk Phoebe into giving up Clarence, Phoebe is strong enough not to yield and she stands by Clarence, as she thinks it is her duty to do. When Clarence is approached by his father, even Clarence, the usually submissive and timid boy, faces his father with incredible will-power. He explains to his father, "Here is the one that can make something of me. I ain't clever,

you know it as well as I do – but she is. I don't mind going to parliament, making speeches and that sort of thing, if I've got her to back me up. But without her I'll never do anything [...]. Let me have her, and I'll make a figure, and do you credit" (*Phoebe, Junior* 425). Mr Copperhead finally gives his consent to their engagement and marriage, since it has always been his dream to see his son in parliament. Although Phoebe might never publicly be perceived as the perfect match for Clarence due to her inferior class origin, she at least will always know that Clarence can consider himself very lucky to have secured her for himself and his professional future. With Phoebe's considerable support and help, Clarence eventually

got into Parliament, and the reader, perhaps (if Parliament is sitting), may have had the luck to read a speech in the morning paper of Phoebe's composition, and if he ever got the secret of her style would know it again, and might trace the course of a public character for years to come by that means. (*Phoebe, Junior* 440)

Thus, Margaret Oliphant, who seems to understand and sympathise with women's needs to face intellectual challenges, "deliberately turns the romantic clichés upside down" and allows Phoebe to find "fulfilment [...] in mastering intellectual challenges and pursuing a career" (Rubik 122).

4.4. Concluding Remarks

Margaret Oliphant is definitely not a conventional writer of the nineteenth century, but a rather unconventional one as is seen, for example, in her portrayal of her female protagonists. The appearance of the two female main characters, Nettie Underwood and Lucilla Marjoribanks, is already very untypical of the ideal Victorian woman. Nettie is tanned, has red lips and sharp black eyes that keep everyone under control. Lucilla, on the other hand, is large in all proportions and has a mass of curly hair, which is as unmanageable as herself. In addition, Lucilla has an unwomanly appetite and is in perfect health, which allows her to take walks even in the most horrible weather conditions. The only one who seems to fit the ideal appearance of a Victorian woman is Phoebe Beecham with her perfect hair of the period and her ladylike figure. However, one must not be blinded by this, as Phoebe like the other two heroines is very unconventional in her reasoning and behaviour.

In the novels *The Doctor's Family*, *Miss Marjoribanks* and *Phoebe, Junior*, the reader will search in vain for a hero, as Margaret Oliphant's powerful, energetic, self-willed,

talented and self-confident heroines are not in need of any hero. Nettie, Phoebe and Lucilla are portrayed as stronger, more intelligent, active and competent than most of the other characters and especially the male characters of the novels, which was uncommon in the nineteenth century. Contrary to Nettie and Lucilla, Phoebe is additionally portrayed as socially superior to certain characters in the novel *Phoebe, Junior*. Men are primarily portrayed as inferior to the female protagonists and as weak men, who are in desperate need of help and not equal to crises often triggered by themselves. Nettie, Lucilla and Phoebe “are unusual in that they assume responsibility for others as a matter of course at a time when unmarried women were supposed to be in need of guidance themselves” (Kämper 243). While Nettie financially supports and takes care of Fred, her brother-in-law, and his family, Lucilla and Phoebe help men either to get through certain critical situations in life or to win a seat and succeed in parliament. The way Dorothea Brooke in *Middlemarch*, for example, assists her husband Mr Casaubon, a Member of Parliament, is entirely different to Lucilla’s and Phoebe’s support, as Dorothea devotedly and submissively supports her husband’s unsuccessful project. In contrast, Lucilla organises a successful election campaign and Phoebe writes parliamentary speeches. They both show that they possess skills usually attributed to men. All three heroines of Margaret Oliphant are often characterised by attributes traditionally assigned to the opposite sex, such as heroism, honour, power and control. Phoebe’s and Lucilla’s intellect and heroism are essentially to be found in facing challenges and crises.

Margaret Oliphant deals with the limitations of women in the nineteenth century especially in the novels *Miss Marjoribanks* and *Phoebe, Junior*. *Phoebe, Junior* was published in the year, when Margaret Oliphant also criticised the story *1895: The Lady Candidate*, as explained in more detail in chapter three of this thesis. In Victorian times, women were confined to the domestic sphere and thus also Margaret Oliphant’s heroines are not allowed to pursue their own careers in parliament or to vote. Although Lucilla and Phoebe, for example, have political influence to a certain extent, none of the three different heroines can make a successful and independent career, as Victorian society withholds this opportunity from them. When Lucilla once mentions that she would like to have a vote, her neighbour Mrs Woodburn answers, “You have influence, which is a great deal better than a vote” (*Miss Marjoribanks* 367). This is a typical example of an argument often put forward to women who asked for more freedom and

rights in the nineteenth century. It did not, however, satisfy the women's hunger for equality before the law and for an outlet for their intellects, powers and talents. In her novels, Margaret Oliphant does not primarily focus on what women could not do, but on what women could do (see Langland 181). "[I]nstead of complaining about the limitations imposed on their talents" (Kämper 247), Margaret Oliphant's heroines rather put emphasis on the opportunities open to them. Lucilla and Phoebe, for instance, are careful not to rebel overtly against the ideologies and conventions of the century and seem to remain within the domestic sphere, but at the same time "try to push back the restrictions they are confronted with to the utmost limit" (Kämper 248).

Both Lucilla and Phoebe work within the bounds of conventionality, but gain power and influence through manipulation of their surrounding environment. Contrary to Nettie, they receive a very good education and the knowledge they gain helps them to achieve their aims later. The two heroines are aware of the limitations imposed on them by society, but also realise the advantages their positions offer to them (see Kämper 241). "The discourse of filial duty, womanly submission [...] function as a kind of smokescreen behind which they can hide their far-reaching ambitions" (Kämper 248). While Lucilla carries out her mission by reorganising Carlingford society and eventually becomes the queen of Carlingford, Phoebe is interested in marrying a man through whom she can work in the public sphere of politics. Phoebe is often described to have perfected Lucilla's strategies of manipulation, as "a girl even more capable of wending her way through the complex net of conventions and prejudices without jeopardizing either her claims to femininity in the eyes of her contemporaries or the room for manoeuvring she needs" (Kämper 240). Nettie is the only one who does not use manipulation and does not really pursue any specific aim. However, Nettie, being a strong woman and the head of her sister's family, can be seen as the forerunner of powerful and influential women such as Lucilla and Phoebe. All three heroines gain a certain degree of independence by consciously adopting the roles of mother, daughter or wife (see Kämper 247) and derive great satisfaction from their powerful positions. Probably one of the most remarkable elements is that Margaret Oliphant writes her novels in a way that the reader is asked to sympathise and identify with these unconventional heroines, who prove that they are, for instance, "capable of organizing successful election campaigns, of masterminding parliamentary careers [and] of managing other people's lives" (Kämper 249).

Nettie, Lucilla and Phoebe all marry at the end of the novels, which at first seems to indicate that Margaret Oliphant's heroines are more conventional than one expected them to be. One explanation why Margaret Oliphant decided to end her novels with marriage could be that she tried to increase the acceptance and readership of her novels by conforming to Victorian conventions and reader expectations as much as possible. Yet it seems she "was not prepared to make too many concessions, certainly when her own plots demanded and, as she saw it, deserved a different outcome" (Oosterom 47). Margaret Oliphant's view of love and marriage was very disillusioned and unsentimental due to her own life experiences and therefore marriage does not play the most important role in her novels. Lucilla, for example, even refuses to marry for ten years in order to be able to remain independent and to complete her mission without any disturbances. At the end of the novels, Margaret Oliphant always shows that her heroines do not lose their authority and powers through marriage, but are offered new tasks and opportunities to put their intellects, talents and powers to good use. Lucilla, for instance, decides to marry a man she can guide and through whom she can pursue a parliamentary career in the future. "What remained only a gleam in the eye of Lucilla Marjoribanks becomes a reality for Phoebe" (Langland 181), whose parliamentary speeches can be read in newspapers. Although Nettie is not driven by such motives when she marries Doctor Rider, she also remains powerful even after getting married. Marriage seems to be acceptable to Margaret Oliphant as long as it provides her heroines with a proper outlet for their powers. Her heroines "reform marriage from within, rejecting the life of childbearing and submission that their mothers suffered, and subtly adjusting the balance of power, so that the estate management or parliamentary speech-writing fall to their lot, while their husbands provide the public facade" (Sanders 34). Nettie, Lucilla and Phoebe are not the submissive wives of the nineteenth century any more, but new wives who are intellectual partners to their husbands.

5. Victorian Career Women in Three Selected Novels

In the novels *Diana Trelawny*, *Hester* and *Kirsteen*, Margaret Oliphant portrays her three female protagonists as Victorian career women, who work and thus pursue their vocations. They are able to put their talents and intellects to good use and successfully manage to make a career in the public sphere traditionally only accessible by men. These heroines are financially independent and gain a lot of responsibility and authority due to their work. Having valuable work and pursuing a career are the most important factors in their lives, as they define themselves through their work. They are not only career women, but powerful career women, who also incorporate the notion of female power. These heroines are strong, influential, self-willed, intelligent, self-confident, practical and often superior to the people surrounding them. They have great managing skills and exert their power and influence in the public sphere, contrary to the powerful Victorian women of chapter four, who primarily stay in the domestic sphere. All in all, the three novels mentioned illustrate the lives and accomplishments of three different powerful Victorian career women, who become successful in the fields of estate management, bank management or dressmaking.

5.1. Diana Trelawny

Diana Trelawny is the protagonist of the novel *Diana Trelawny*, which was first published in 1892, fifteen years after it was actually written. Margaret Oliphant and her publishers must have forgotten about it for years, but it faithfully represents the author's preoccupations in the 1870s (see Williams, *Biography* 111). Diana is described to be a beautiful young woman with dark hair, "shining with a soft gloss, yet ruffled over her forehead by a tendency to curl which had often disturbed Diana: her eyes of the lustrous and dewy grey which is so rare: her face as perfect in its somewhat long oval as if it had been painted by Luini, but not weak as Luini's faces sometimes are" (*Diana Trelawny* 49). Although Diana is a beauty, she does not quite resemble the Victorian ideal woman due to her curly hair. Moreover, her face does not show any signs of weakness, as was often expected in the face of an ideal Victorian woman. Diana does not mind travelling around other countries all by herself. In contrast to many Victorian heroines, Diana is described to be a woman, who does not need more than a night's rest to recover from her long journeys. She is not an angelic young girl, but a "woman of thirty, with some talents, a great deal of character, and a most desirable position" (*Diana Trelawny* 1), as

she luckily inherits an estate at the beginning of the novel. She unexpectedly meets Mrs Trelawny and her husband, who are related to her and in search of an appropriate heiress of their estate. Eventually, Diana becomes Miss Trelawny of the Chase and rises from her poor middle class status to the upper middle class. Diana “came into it full-grown, full-blown, beautiful, stately, independent, neither to be snubbed nor patronised nor put down” (*Diana Trelawny* 8). She is a strong and intelligent woman, who enjoys reading books and broadening her horizon, which Margaret Oliphant seems to support and to regard as a positive character trait in her heroine (see Rubik 116). Diana is able to cite Shakespeare, when she once says, “We are such stuff as dreams are made of”, and is described to be “so like a gentleman sitting there with [her] book” (*Diana Trelawny* 282, 152).

Throughout the novel, Diana is often said to be a queen, who “came to her kingdom” (*Diana Trelawny* 17). Both men and women admire her and are portrayed as subordinate and inferior to Diana, who has already been “reigning for full two years” (*Diana Trelawny* 22). With regard to devotion, it seems to be of advantage to be a woman for once, when Margaret Oliphant writes: “The county was more proud of her, more devoted to her, than it would have been to any male potentate. It made a kind of queen of her, always in dutiful and loyal subordination to the real mistress of these realms; but Diana was the queen of the county” (*Diana Trelawny* 3). By calling Diana a queen, Margaret Oliphant implicitly evokes the image of Queen Victoria in her readers. In the nineteenth century, Queen Victoria held the highest and most important position in the country and was faced with difficult problems and decisions every day. By indirectly comparing Diana with Queen Victoria, the author of the novel seems to stress the high status and importance of Diana and the valuable work Diana does in her county. Margaret Oliphant perhaps also wants to emphasise the power and influence Diana possesses and exercises over people. Even in Italy, Diana “was seated calmly, like a queen, in the centre of so many people who looked up to her” (*Diana Trelawny* 143).

Before Diana inherits the estate and becomes Miss Trelawny of the Chase, she worked as an English governess at a school, a position that gave her a certain degree of independence in the nineteenth century. At the beginning, Diana does not want to give up her independence for her relatives, but “[i]t was Lady Trelawny’s tears that

persuaded Diana, against her will, to leave her independent position and become a nurse and companion of the old people” (*Diana Trelawny* 7). At that time, however, Diana does not realise that due to the inheritance she will become financially independent again and will have a more influential position than before. As soon as she receives her inheritance, her life changes altogether. Diana is offered the great professional position of an estate manager and she immediately claims “full independence, which was as fully accorded to her. She had no tastes or inclinations to make that independence unlovely: and no theory of emancipation which demanded exceptional boldness of fact to justify it – a thing which gets many women into trouble” (*Diana Trelawny* 2). By saying this, Margaret Oliphant seems to warn and to advise women who are independent and enjoy their independence not to be too open about it in public (see Kämper 249).

Diana rejects Victorian conventions completely by pursuing a professional career in the male public sphere as a manager of an estate, since Victorian ideology actually prohibits middle-class women to work in the male domain and ridicules and looks down upon those who want to work or have to work because of financial reasons. Margaret Oliphant, however, seems to understand the intellectual needs of women and is sympathetic to women who want to put their talents and intellects to use in an occupational way. Diana starts off working as a governess at an English school, but becomes the manager of an estate in the end. She “was a great proprietor and landowner [...]. She had a fine estate, a fine old English house, and a great deal of money in all kinds of stock and securities” (*Diana Trelawny* 1). Diana is a great manager and thoroughly enjoys managing the estate on her own. Diana “was not, indeed, chairman of the quarter-sessions, as she might have been had she written herself Daniel instead of Diana” (*Diana Trelawny* 1-2). By writing this, Margaret Oliphant stresses the inequalities women faced in the nineteenth century and the opportunities women could have had. Diana, however, does not complain and is completely satisfied with her work, the management of her estate. She “lived in the great house a cheerful and busy life, working at her estate as few landlords take the trouble to work, making a profession of it which cannot be said to be usual” (*Diana Trelawny* 11). It is very uncommon in Victorian times to portray a heroine as a career woman and as a woman working in the field of estate management. For a long time, the only profession that was open for unmarried middle-class women in the nineteenth century was to become a governess or a needle worker, but certainly not the manager of an entire estate.

Diana is a business woman, who derives total satisfaction from her occupation and feels completely fulfilled by the work that is offered to her. Diana

had abundance to do – occupations important and valuable and necessary, not the things done for the mere sake occupation which are the lot of so many women, and indeed also of many men. The work of the estate, taken up for the first time for many generations with genuine enthusiasm, exercised all her powers; and as she had the advantage over most reformers of being able actually to execute a great many of the reforms she had planned, her work kept her going as perhaps no other work could have done. [...] Diana's 'work' occupied her like a profession. [...] The next Trelawny who should succeed her would find an unencumbered estate, and an improved one [...]. This was the intention of her life. (*Diana Trelawny* 40-41)

She proves to be a better administrator of the estate than the former owners and reforms it to a great extent. Even when she is in Italy on holidays, she cannot leave her work behind, as she has responsibilities due to her "profession". She is not one of the women who have only a limited budget and thus she has to keep up a correspondence even when she is overseas. She is involved "in the real business of life" (*Diana Trelawny* 60). Diana has to write letters to her steward, to some of her dependents and to her lawyers. She

sat down at her writing-table to read her letters and to ponder some proposals from her lawyers which required thinking of. Her lawyers, as has been said, were in a state of perpetual resistance to her schemes of liberality, holding back with all their might, and throwing every obstacle they could in her way: and her correspondence with them was interesting by reason of this long-continued duel, which was carried on now on their side with a respectful consciousness of her power and ability to hold her own in the argument, which had not existed at first. (*Diana Trelawny* 210-211)

Although it takes a lot of effort and time, Diana successfully manages to build an equal business relationship between herself and her lawyers, who finally accept her as a full partner in negotiations (see Rubik 117). Diana is active, confident, authoritative, intelligent, strong and independent-minded and thus possesses character traits traditionally attributed to men.

Just like Margaret Oliphant, Diana has many different dependents, who she financially supports throughout their lives. Contrary to Margaret Oliphant, however, Diana chooses to have these dependents and regards it as her responsibility to make other people's dreams come true, because she was poor once and knows how it feels to yearn for things one can never afford to have. Among these dependents are Mrs Norton, a clergyman's widow, and Sophy, a clergyman's orphan child, the niece of Mrs Norton

and a former student of Diana. They are two “peevisish, humble-minded, weakly little gentlewomen, with nothing remarkable about them” (*Diana Trelawny* 15). Although they should be very thankful for being allowed to live in the Red House on Diana’s land for free, they are rather ungrateful and always feel pleasure when they find fault with Diana. Despite the fact that Diana is socially and intellectually superior, Mrs Norton and Sophy often perceive themselves to be superior to Diana, as, for example, when Mrs Norton stresses that neither she nor anyone else of her family has ever worked as a governess. They constantly complain behind Diana’s back and they are selfish, always cunningly planning how to get what they desire. When Mrs Norton and Sophy are informed of being allowed to accompany Diana to Italy, Sophy’s terrible cough suddenly disappears and is never to be heard of again.

Diana from the great house looked on at the movements in the little one with that amused observation [...]. That Sophy’s cough was better, that Mrs. Norton was no longer frightened to expose her niece to the cold winds, and even bore with equanimity Sophy’s adoption of the ‘short cut’ across the park, which would have alarmed both of them a few weeks before, and that Mrs. Norton herself had no neuralgia [...] – all this was very apparent to Diana. (*Diana Trelawny* 38-39)

Although Diana is perfectly aware of the fact that Mrs Norton and Sophy use her and do not show much gratitude, she is “lonely, and very grateful for kindness of any description simply offered. She liked the prattle of the two innocent creatures, the aunt not much wiser than the niece” (*Diana Trelawny* 16). Mrs Norton and Sophy amuse and refresh “their hostess in her loneliness with their pretty foolish ways. They were like kittens to Diana, their harmless gambols gave her pleasure” (*Diana Trelawny* 17-18). It seems that Diana has her “own way by letting every one have theirs” (*Diana Trelawny* 62).

Throughout the novel, Diana is often contrasted to Sophy, “a soft, smiling golden-haired creature, unobtrusive and gentle like a little bird” (*Diana Trelawny* 15). Contrary to Diana, Sophy seems to be the ideal Victorian woman, delicate, sensitive and always in need of somebody to look after her. Sophy is “a pretty little thing, and a man would be very well off [...] with such a fresh soft innocent creature always looking up to him” (*Diana Trelawny* 173). Her looks and everything that she does and says seems to be angelic in the eyes of most observers. In reality, however, Sophy is a very self-interested, cunning and mean person, who does not care about anybody else than herself. Yet, Diana, who is often described to be too unwomanly and determined, is the generous and understanding one of the two (see Rubik 137). Contrary to the

independent Diana, Sophy is said to be “a clinging, sweet, dependent creature” (*Diana Trelawny* 180), which makes her the perfect wife for the Italian noble man Pandolfini according to the opinion of Mrs Norton, for instance. While Diana is an intelligent, realistic, generous, independent and self-confident woman, Sophy, in the end, just turns out to be “the most charming blank sheet of paper on which a man could desire to inscribe his name” (*Diana Trelawny* 174). Although Pandolfini falls in love with Diana at first sight, he is eventually forced to marry Sophy due to an incredible misunderstanding caused by his confidant, Mr Hunstanton. “A lover was like a new doll to Sophy: it was more. It gave her importance, made somebody of her in a moment” (*Diana Trelawny* 230). As soon as Sophy is engaged to Pandolfini, she perceives herself to be the most important person and only thinks of herself, being completely ignorant of Pandolfini’s changed and dismissive behaviour towards her. After their marriage, Sophy rises in social class and becomes the Contessa Pandolfini, thus truly seeing herself superior to Diana. “Diana might be richer, and had been always more splendid than she – but Diana had no coronet” (*Diana Trelawny* 270). Diana, however, can only feel sorry for Sophy, as Sophy is about to enter into a very cheerless life. Pandolfini is never really a companion to her, leaves her alone a lot and even christens their baby Stella without consulting his wife.

Contrary to Sophy, Diana “declared from the beginning that she would not marry” (*Diana Trelawny* 8). Love, romance and marriage are not at the centre of Diana’s life, but her profession is. She enjoys the power, influence and freedom she gains through her professional work. It offers her a useful occupation and makes it possible for her to improve the county.

She said in so many words that she did not mean to marry. There was a great deal to do on the estate, she said, which was true; for the old Trelawnys had done little [...]. The farming was bad, the cottages were bad, everything was behind in the Trelawny parish. She had a belief in celibacy [...] that unmarried persons [...] were an advantage here and there to their fellow-creatures. The question was discussed continually between her and her neighbours [...] to whom such rebellion against all the rules which regulate human life seemed monstrous, and not to be put up with. It was un-English, they said – it was wicked; but Diana only smiled. (*Diana Trelawny* 9)

Diana’s neighbours have the strong Victorian belief that a husband is “the one thing needful” (*Diana Trelawny* 8) for a woman and cannot comprehend why Diana refuses to marry. They often tell Diana that a gentleman could do all that work so much better than she, as a woman, can do, but Diana just counters that it is her business and not the

business of any gentleman. The only possible and acceptable motive her neighbours can come up with for her unwomanly behaviour regarding one of the most important concepts of Victorian ideology is that Diana simply does not want to lose her unique position through marriage. According to her neighbours, this is a more reasonable explanation than “any foolish fancy about work to be done or personal responsibilities to be upheld” (*Diana Trelawny* 10). “Perhaps she did like the importance of her position [...]. So Queen Elizabeth did too, I suppose, whatever were the real motives of that astute sovereign for declining to share her throne. Diana did not want her throne to be shared” (*Diana Trelawny* 10). Diana likes the financial independence her profession offers to her and smiles and laughs at people who believe that it is the first and utmost goal of any woman to find a husband (see Rubik 130). Diana’s “imagination had been caught by that ideal of the virgin princess, which had something captivating in it, though it is rarely recognised by the world” (*Diana Trelawny* 41). Margaret Oliphant understood and sympathised with women who wanted to remain unmarried in order to keep their independence. She did not condemn spinsters, as she was aware of the advantages such a position could pose to women. Margaret Oliphant often envied unmarried writers, since they had the opportunity to give themselves up entirely to their writings and to achieving their aims. Diana knows how it feels to be free and thus “[t]here will never be a Prince Consort” (*Diana Trelawny* 67) in her life.

Diana is not the typical woman a man would like to take as a wife in the nineteenth century. According to Mrs Norton,

there is no doubt that gentlemen always do prefer women to be dependent: they don’t like a girl to say like Diana that she does not want assistance, that she can manage her affairs, and all that sort of thing. (*Diana Trelawny* 89)
 [G]entlemen don’t care for such clever women. They like some one to look up to them, not a person who is always standing on her opinion. No, [...] Diana will never attract a man of fine feeling like dear Mr. Pandolfini. (*Diana Trelawny* 180)

Although Diana apparently is too independent, self-confident and intelligent for men living in Victorian times, she is courted to a great extent and Count Pandolfini, for example, falls hopelessly in love with her. Diana is “such a woman as he had been looking for all his life” and she is “*dei Sogni*, one of the dream-ladies, queens of earth and heaven” (*Diana Trelawny* 49, 87). Pandolfini does not want to have a dependent wife, who is a burden to him. Mrs Hunstanton, a friend of Pandolfini’s, tries to persuade Diana to accept Pandolfini as a future husband, but fails. Diana answers Mrs

Hunstanton, “No there could not be any chance – not if I wished it myself, which I do not. [...] Because must I explain further? – I have got a trade, an occupation. Women with that are better not to marry; and this would make me refuse any one” (*Diana Trelawny* 205). This might also mirror Margaret Oliphant’s belief that a woman can either become a career woman or a mother, but not both at the same time. Margaret Oliphant often blamed herself for losing two of her children because of too much mental work during her pregnancy. Moreover, neither the profession nor the role of being a mother could be fully attended to if a woman was both mother and career woman. Although Mrs Hunstanton would like to see Pandolfini to be married to Diana and feels sorry for him for being refused by Diana, she is also

a little proud of Diana – among all the girls who married, the one unmarrying woman, placed upon a pedestal, a virgin princess dispensing good things to all, and above the common weaknesses. [...] And if Diana had willingly stepped down from her pedestal, a sense of humiliation would have filled her friend’s mind. (*Diana Trelawny* 136)

In the end, the people living in Diana’s county do not want Diana to get married, as “[n]othing could go on without Diana. [...] [They] did not like her to move: even when she went to London, it was never without fears that somebody might snap her up, and marry her before any one could interfere” (*Diana Trelawny* 286-287). Therefore, Diana continues to be the virgin princess of the county.

5.2. Catherine Vernon in *Hester*

Catherine Vernon is the central female character in the novel *Hester*, which was first published in 1883. Catherine is the granddaughter of John Vernon, who managed to help Vernon’s bank ascend to one of the most successful and famous banks in England. After her grandfather’s death, Catherine becomes the chief partner in the bank, while her cousin, John Vernon, becomes the head of the bank. John Vernon, like many other men before, undervalues the capabilities and skills of women and believes that they should stay in the domestic sphere assigned to them. Margaret Oliphant perceives exactly this attitude of men towards women as the real grievance of women in the nineteenth century. John Vernon believes Catherine to be “a girl who knew as much about money as her pony did” (*Hester* 8). When the lawyers of the bank ask John Vernon to involve Catherine in the management of the bank, he just counters, “What should she think? What should she know? Of course she leaves all to me [...] how can a girl understand banking business?” (*Hester* 8). Catherine, “who was not by any means

an ordinary girl” (*Hester* 6), is in reality deeply interested in the banking business, but avoids taking any responsibility in the bank, because she is not at ease with her cousin.

In the end, John Vernon turns out to be a bad manager of the bank, as he misappropriates the money of the bank in order to live a luxurious life. However, suspicion and panic soon arise among the citizens of Redborough and Mr Rule, the head clerk of the bank, expects a run upon the bank any day. When John Vernon leaves the country and forsakes the bank, it is up to Mr Rule to find help. Mrs Vernon in her naivety offers the bank clerk twenty pounds in order to save the bank, but then Mr Rule finds the help he is searching for in the person of Catherine Vernon. When Mr Rule tells her about the problematic situation the bank is in, Catherine reacts in a very masculine way. “[H]er face was not awe-stricken; it was that of a soldier springing instantly to the alert, rallying all his resources at the first word of danger” (*Hester* 18-20). Catherine uses her own little fortune to help the bank and is present the next morning. As feared, there really is a run on the bank, “but when Miss Vernon was seen at the door of the inner office smiling, with her smile of triumphant energy and capability, upon the crowd” (*Hester* 22), the run and excitement declines. From then on, the bank remains in the capable hands of Catherine, “who it turned out, had more than her grandfather’s steady power of holding on, and was, indeed, the heir of her grandfather’s genius for business. The bank throve in her hands as it had done in his days, and everything it [sic] touched prospered” (*Hester* 22). Catherine proves her power and talent for business when she saves Vernon’s bank from ruin caused by her irresponsible cousin. She successfully shows that “[w]omen – when they do take to business – are sometimes better than men” (*Hester* 80).

It is very unusual for the nineteenth century to portray a woman as working, especially in such a high position as a director of a bank. Although the women’s movement managed to widen the sphere of employment for middle-class women in the 1880s, being the head of a bank was a completely unthinkable work opportunity for women at that time. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, Margaret Oliphant grew more and more supportive of the women’s movement and in her novel *Hester* she seems to demonstrate that women can manage and achieve a lot in the public sphere if they are just given the opportunity. Catherine is a remarkable woman, who is “heroically successful in that most masculine of profession, banking,” (Davis and Nellist viii) and

who derives great fulfilment and satisfaction from her work, as she can put her intellect and talent for business to use.

Miss Vernon's was a reign of great benevolence, of great liberality, but of great firmness too. As she got older she became almost the most important person in Redborough. The people spoke of her, as they sometimes do of a very important man, by her Christian name. [...] Her name was put to everything. Catherine street, Catherine square, Catherine places without number. (*Hester* 23)

She manages to become one of the most powerful and influential people in Redborough and is often said to be “a kind of queen” (*Hester* 171), which emphasises her unique position, superiority and power in society. Catherine is not the typical Victorian woman, who is timid, weak, helpless, passive and emotional, as described by Ruskin. The citizens of Redborough believe her to have a “masculine mind” (*Hester* 329). She is a woman of reason, who is self-confident, active, calculating, independent-minded and strong (see Rubik 115). She is able to take care of herself and does not need help when critical situations arise, as she courageously masters these challenges on her own. Thus, Catherine adopts characteristics and traits normally attributed to men, which in the end render her a rather masculine than feminine heroine of the novel (see Peterson 78). Catherine makes a victorious career in the public sphere, possesses male character traits and remains unmarried. All that stands in complete opposition to the appropriate behaviour, aims and field of action Victorian ideology tried to teach middle-class women. She “is a woman who, through her actions and capability, repudiates” (Jones 174) the traditions of the nineteenth century.

Just like Margaret Oliphant, young Catherine has to experience how it feels to be rejected by her suitor and how her dreams and expectations come to an abrupt end. Her cousin, John Vernon, “preferred a woman that could not hold the candle to her, not so pretty, not so clever, altogether inferior. That must be rather a blow to a woman!” (*Hester* 85). Although Catherine is heart-broken, this experience also strengthens and disillusioned her, which is advantageous for her life and career later. Catherine remains unmarried for the rest of her life and becomes an old maid in the eyes of most people. Old maids were in general pitied and undervalued in Victorian times. However, Margaret Oliphant has respect for them based on her own life experiences and sometimes even decides to give an ‘old maid’ the most important and influential role in a novel such as *Hester*. Margaret Oliphant writes in her novel that “Catherine Vernon was like Queen Elizabeth” (*Hester* 24), the Virgin Queen, and thus not only emphasises

Catherine's unmarried status, but also her evident genius, popularity, power, influence and dedication to the people surrounding her. Catherine is financially independent and free to do whatever her heart desires. She is not subordinated to a husband and can become the head of Vernon's bank, which fulfils her completely, more than a marriage and a husband could ever have fulfilled her. Catherine does not merely devote herself to the care of relatives and acts of charity as prescribed by Victorian ideology, but enjoys her independent life in a cheerful and witty way (see Rubik 131-132).

However, such a single life can sometimes be very lonely and as a consequence Catherine invites members of the Vernon family to live with her in Redborough. After thirty years, she retires at the age of sixty and her two nephews, Harry and Edward, take over the bank for her. While Edward lives in Catherine's house, Harry lives in the former house of John Vernon with his sister Ellen, who rebels against Catherine's rule and cannot wait to be independent from her. Just like Margaret Oliphant, Catherine burdens herself with the responsibility to support the members of her family financially throughout her whole life. Catherine refurbishes a local house renaming it Vernonry, which becomes the home for the poorer relations of the Vernon family, such as spiteful Mr Mildmay, the gossiping sisters Vernon-Ridgways, friendly Captain Morgan and his wife as well as the newcomers, Hester and her mother, Mrs John Vernon. According to most of the residents of the Vernonry, Catherine Vernon "was a woman who, being richer than they, helped them all with an ostentatious benevolence, which was her justification for humiliating them whenever she had a chance, and treating them at all times as her inferiors and pensioners" (*Hester* 58). The majority of her dependents take advantage of Catherine and are overall ungrateful, malicious and gossipy, talking behind her back. When Catherine, for example, wears a less elegant and beautiful dress and decides not to wear any diamonds in order to make the contrast between her and her dependents not too evident, her friendly act is misinterpreted and seen as offence by her poorer relations, who think that they are apparently not worth dressing up for. In the course of time,

Catherine, though she did not become misanthropical, became cynical, in spite of herself. She tolerated everything, and smiled at it; she became indulgent and contemptuous. What did it matter what they said or felt? If they learned to consider her gifts as their right, if they comforted themselves in the humiliation of receiving by mocking at the giver, poor things, that was their misfortune – it did not harm her upon her serene heights. (*Hester* 60)

Catherine amuses herself at the expense of her dependents and often smiles and laughs at them. She enjoys it even more when she confides in her favourite nephew, Edward, telling him her little entertaining stories of the Vernonry. According to Catherine, “[h]uman nature [...] is as good, nay, far better, than a play” (*Hester* 162). “The Vernonry has always been as good as comedy” (*Hester* 62-63) for Catherine.

From the beginning, the relationship between Catherine and Hester, the daughter of Mrs John and the other female protagonist of the novel, is primarily characterised by opposition, hostility, hatred and rivalry. When Hester meets Catherine for the first time, “the instinct of opposition [...] sprang up in her mind to this first new actor in the new life [...]. It seemed to her [...] that here was an enemy, some one to be held at arm’s length” (*Hester* 36). Hester is ignorant of her father’s deeds in the past, but she “felt in every nerve of her that” (*Hester* 41) she and Catherine were in opposition. Catherine, on the other hand, is completely shocked, as

[f]ew people opposed her or met her with suspicion, much less hostility; and the aspect of this girl standing in the doorway, defending it, as it were, preventing her from entering, was half comic, half exasperating. Keeping her out of her own house! [...] She began to laugh, bewildered, half angry, yet highly tickled with the position [...]. (*Hester* 36)

“The candle flickered between the two antagonists” (*Hester* 37) and it soon becomes apparent that these two women stand in “natural antipathy” (Peterson 79) to each other. Even later, Catherine is still outraged at the inappropriate behaviour of Hester, when she says, “The little firebrand! [...] the little spitfire! Facing me on my own ground, defying me, Catherine Vernon, in the very Vernonry, my own creation!” (*Hester* 40). Although Hester does not have any authority, it is not exaggerated “to say that Catherine, with all of these advantages, instinctively looked upon her as a rival power” (*Hester* 257). This first meeting can be perceived as the foundation of a very ambivalent relationship between the two protagonists, because from then on Hester regards Catherine “with interest, and antagonism, and attraction. She could never think of any one else when Catherine was near, though all her instincts were in arms against her” (*Hester* 83). Although Hester sees a rival and opponent in Catherine because of their age difference, their different social and financial status and their divergent perception of the world (see Uglow x), she cannot help but feel intrigued by Catherine. At the end of the novel, Catherine comes to the following conclusion: “I think you and I have hated each other

because we were meant to love each other, child” to which Hester responds “I think I have always done both” (*Hester* 442).

It seems that “misunderstanding, resentment and jealous independence mask similarity and attraction” (Uglow ix) between the two female protagonists of the novel, as there are many parallels to be found between Hester and Catherine. They are both “large, hungry, healthy, restless [and] associated with words like ‘triumph’, ‘energy’ [and] ‘pride’” (Uglow xx). Just like Catherine, Hester is “one who was apparently of the old stock, with a head for business, and a decision of character quite unusual in a child” (*Hester* 29). Like Catherine, Hester also ends up “contemplating the world from a pinnacle of irony, chill but smiling” and perceives “the ridicule and the meanness of these miserable pensioners with a touch of the same cynicism which was the elder woman’s great defect, but was unpardonable in the younger, to whom there should as yet have been no loss of ideal” (*Hester* 71). She is often said to be as clever as Catherine and, according to Harry, she “might even find out dodges in the bank, like Aunt Catherine did” (*Hester* 96). Catherine was the same type of girl as Hester is “– masterful – very sure that her own way was the right one – obstinate as a mule in her mind, but not so difficult to move by heart” (*Hester* 84). Catherine even realises at the end of the novel that Hester is very similar to herself, when she says to Hester, “I think you are like me Hester” (*Hester* 455). In the course of time, Hester learns to admire Catherine and as a consequence Catherine, not Hester’s mother, seems to become her role model. For Hester, “Mrs John represented all the timid opinions and obstinate prejudices of weakness; all that is gently conventional and stereotyped in that creature, conventionally talked about as Woman from the beginning of time” (*Hester* 308). Catherine, on the other hand, embodies independence, power, wealth, courage and the opportunity of useful and important work, everything that Hester’s heart desires.

If she had been in the same circumstances she would have acted like Catherine. The story of her mother in her gentle ignorance, which the old clerk thought so much of, did not affect the high-spirited girl as did the picture of the other putting herself in the breach, taking upon her own shoulders the weight of the falling house. Hester felt that she too, could have done this. Her breast swelled, her breath came short with an impulse of impatience and longing to have such an opportunity, to show the mettle that was in her. (*Hester* 300)

This evident contrast between Hester’s mother and Catherine seems “to establish Catherine Vernon as the role model for Hester” (Peterson 78). Catherine and Hester “are

united in their pride, their abundant energy, their emotional fervour and their desire to work, to be of use in the world” (Uglow x).

Already at a very young age, Hester expresses her wish to work and to put her talents to good use. She wants to open a school for teaching foreign languages, such as French, Italian and German, and wants to give “*cours*” (*Hester* 48) in the belief that she can make a fortune and become financially independent. The opportunities of work for middle-class women improved slightly in the 1880s, which is illustrated by the following comment of Ellen Vernon, the sister of Harry Vernon: “[I]t is the fashion now for girls to do something [...] the best girls do it; they paint, and they do needlework, and they sing, and they write little books, and everybody is proud to be able to earn money” (*Hester* 66). Hester sees her dream come true with Ellen Vernon’s offer of support, but soon realises that she cannot expect help from anyone. Despite the efforts of the women’s movement, a lot of people still thought according to the Victorian traditions and conventions in the nineteenth century. Neither Hester’s mother nor Catherine allow Hester to work as a teacher. Hester “had to yield, as most women have to do. She had to consent to be bound by other people’s rules, and to put her hand to nothing that was unbecoming a Vernon, a member of the reigning family” (*Hester* 73-74). Hester asks herself, “Why was not she a man?” (*Hester* 79), as this would be the solution to all her problems. When Hester enquires why Catherine, herself a female member of the Vernon family, was allowed to make a living, Catherine responds, “That was different. I did not stoop down to paltry work. I took the place which – others had abandoned. I was wanted to save the family, and thank Heaven I could do it. For that, if you were up to it, and occasion required, you should have permission to do anything” (*Hester* 72). Hester is ready to do any work offered to her in order to escape the domestic sphere, “a world of petty feminine accomplishments that leave her perpetually dissatisfied” (Jones 172). Hester would preferably like to do what Catherine did years ago, when she says,

I should like to step in when ruin was coming and prop it up on my shoulders as she did, and meet the danger, and overcome it – [...] I should like to do what she did. Something of one’s own free will – something that no one can tell you or require you to do – which is not even your duty bound down upon you. (*Hester* 306-307)

However, Hester is once again confronted with the traditions of the nineteenth century, when one of her suitors, Roland Ashton, responds to Hester’s wish with an argument

often put forward to women who asked for an opportunity to fulfil their wish to work in the public sphere: “Pardon me; but don’t you think that is far less than what you have in your power? You can make others do: you can inspire [...] and reward” (*Hester* 307). Yet, Hester does not want to inspire and help somebody else to become successful.

At the end of the novel, Hester has to accept the fact that she will never be allowed to step into Catherine’s shoes. Although Catherine feels sorry for Hester and for the evident waste of talent, it is not in her power to change Victorian traditions. Catherine explains to Hester, “It is a great pity [...] that [...] you should not go to Vernon’s, as you have a right to do, and work there. [...] A few years’ work, and you would be an excellent man of business; but it can’t be” (*Hester* 454). When Catherine was confronted with the ruin of the bank years ago, she was already an old maid and the only person who had the means of saving the bank. This implies that society made an exception in Catherine’s case. The only solution Catherine has to offer to Hester’s wish for work is that Hester marries Harry and supports him in his work at the bank, when she says, “It could be in one way – if you could make up your mind to marry Harry” (*Hester* 454). Hester, however, responds to this suggestion by saying “I could not! I will never marry” (*Hester* 454). Although Harry is a weak, nice and docile man, he is not any better than her other suitors. All her admirers, Edward, Harry and Roland, “are self-centred and self-important; all view women in stereotypical and demeaning ways; and all assume a sense of their inevitable superiority. None sees Hester as she really is or appreciates her truly distinctive qualities” (Jones 171). Both Stuart Mill and Margaret Oliphant blame the misogynistic culture these men were raised in for their behaviour towards women (see Jones 169). Harry, for example, knows “that Hester had no right to look for such good fortune as that of being the object of his affections [and] that he was bringing in his hand everything a girl need [sic] wish for” (*Hester* 91). Edward, who “piqued her curiosity and her interest” (*Hester* 143) to the greatest extent, does not search for an intelligent wife to discuss the banking business with, but a woman who he can lean upon, who sympathises, thinks of him, feels for him and believes in him. Hester is completely shocked that her understanding, her intelligent advice and help are entirely ignored and that nothing else is wanted “but a kind of doggish fidelity” (*Hester* 372). She eventually refuses to elope with Edward, because he does not appreciate her skills and qualities and because he does not want to take responsibility for his deeds. At the end of the novel, “there are two men whom she may choose between, and marry

either if she please [sic] – good men both, who will never wring her heart. [...] What can a young woman desire more than to have such a possibility of choice?” (*Hester* 456). Thus, the novel ends “with an ironic query which points to the impossibility of true love or fulfilment for a woman such as Hester” (Jones 176). Margaret Oliphant seems unable to provide Hester with either a work opportunity in the public sphere or with a husband who she loves and who regards her as an equal partner in their relationship (see Peterson 78).

The two men who Catherine chooses to take over the bank after her retirement turn out to be weak and irresponsible men in the end. Harry is “a weak, good-natured, genial fellow”, “who will never set the Thames on fire” (*Hester* 91, 346). Although he does not possess a great talent for the banking business and leaves most of the decisions and work to his partner Edward, he understands enough to work steadily at the bank. He is “not great indeed or noble, but honest and kind in his simple way” (*Hester* 114). Catherine “had made up her mind that Harry was her great failure. He and his sister [...] had considered their elevation to the White House, and the honours of the bank, as owing to their own merits, and had set up a sort of heir-apparent establishment always in opposition” (*Hester* 123). Catherine blames Harry’s weak nature for this behaviour, as he cannot stand up to his sister’s independent and strong will. Catherine does not like Harry primarily because he does not please her. But he at least “had a tender regard for Catherine, a sort of stolid immovable force of gratitude” (*Hester* 388), contrary to Edward. Edward “was her confidant [...]. No son was more attentive to his mother, and all his habits were so nice and good. A young man who gets up to botanise in the morning, who will sit at home at night, who has no evil inclinations” (*Hester* 62). He “was a true son to her, studying her wishes, and thinking of nothing so much as how to please her” (*Hester* 189). Edward “was, as it were, Catherine Vernon’s son and representative” (*Hester* 110). However, Catherine is not aware of the fact that Edward longs for freedom and independence. “[W]hile other men could taste the sweetness of freedom and of love, he was attached to an old woman’s apron-stings, and had to keep her company and do her pleasure, instead of taking the good of his youth like the rest” (*Hester* 129). He regards himself to be “the slave of an old woman” (*Hester* 130), contrary to Harry, who lives a life fairly independent from Catherine. Edward feels constantly spied on and always under the surveillance of Catherine when she, for example, watches him leave the house or personally takes a cup of tea to his room. He

completely misinterprets her affectionate kindness and admiration as inquisitiveness and supervision.

Edward is soon attracted by the excitement, challenge, sudden wealth and financial independence speculation offers to him and decides to speculate and risk the money of other people, although Catherine warns him about speculation, which she perceives as the “pleasure of balancing on the point of a needle, over the bottomless pit” (*Hester* 245) and as inevitable ruin. “Step by step he went on, sacrificing, jeopardising, gradually, slowly, without being himself aware of what he was doing, the funds he had under his control” (*Hester* 382). When Edward is informed that he has lost everything, he does not prove to be equal to the crisis he triggered himself. He cannot face the creditors and flees, deserting his post and leaving everybody in ignorance. It is a great shock for Catherine to find out that Edward, her chosen son, is a traitor. This is “the one delusion of Catherine’s soul. Miss Vernon had believed in no one else. She had laughed and seen through every pretence – except Edward” (*Hester* 410-411). Just like Margaret Oliphant, whose eldest son increasingly became estranged from her, Catherine has to experience the feeling of estrangement and betrayal by the one she loves the most (see Uglow xvi).

[T]hat his life should have been intolerable, a monotony, a bondage, that change had been what he longed for – change from her house, her presence, her confidence! She gave a cry like a cry of a wild animal, full of horror and misery and pain. [...] to hear [...] that freedom was what he longed for – freedom from her! The whole fabric of her life crushed together and rocked to its foundations. (*Hester* 411)

Although Catherine would give him all the freedom he desires and would even forgive him for the treachery, Edward does not come back and leaves the crisis for others to manage.

In the end, it is once again up to Catherine to save the bank from total ruin, as nobody else, not even Harry, the only director of the bank left, knows “what to do in an emergency” (*Hester* 389) like this. Although Catherine is heartbroken, she shows extraordinary courage, strength and stamina during this crisis. She “put away her emotions from her as a workman clears away all encumbering surroundings. [...] Catherine showed no signs of disablement” (*Hester* 413). Both Hester and Harry help her to restore the credibility of the bank. Harry collects information and examines papers with Catherine, while Hester writes down everything that is dictated to her.

Catherine's "humiliation would be complete. The boy she had scoffed at, the girl she had disliked, turned into her confidants" (*Hester* 417). After a night of endless work, Catherine "was not tired – her colour was as fresh and her eyes as bright as ever, her mind full of impatient energy; but the power of the others had flagged" (*Hester* 419). "She stands like a tower. [...] She needs no sleep, no rest" (*Hester* 433) and "[h]er old look of command, the energy and life of old, seemed in her face" (*Hester* 422).

She alone showed little anxiety and no distress. [...] She bore those repetitions of the old objections with composure. She did not get impatient, twisting and turning in her chair like Mr Rule, or crushing her impatience under foot like Harry. She was like an Indian at stake: or rather like a prime minister in his place in Parliament. (*Hester* 424)

Catherine is "ready to die fighting" (*Hester* 447) and she eventually manages to win the fight. Wealthy people are persuaded to invest their money in the bank in order to stabilise it and a new enterprising manager is introduced, who supervises Harry and Ellen's husband, the directors of the bank. Although Catherine could stay in her house, she decides to move into the Vernonry with her other pensioners, as the bank is more important to her than luxury. Before she can move out, however, she peacefully dies in her own house with the knowledge that for the second time she has successfully managed to save the Vernon family bank from "imminent bankruptcy induced by irresponsible men" (Rubik 117).

5.3. Kirsteen

Christina Douglas, often called Kirsteen, is the protagonist of the novel *Kirsteen: The Story of a Scotch Family Seventy Years Ago*, which was first published in 1890 and is set in Scotland in the early nineteenth century. It is based on the memories of the author's own childhood, when coaches were the main form of transport, letters were scarce and expensive and London seemed unimaginably far away (see Williams, *Introduction: Kirsteen* vii). Kirsteen and her family live in Drumcarro, "in the wilds of Argyllshire" (*Kirsteen* 1). She is "a girl of nearly twenty, a girl of the hills, strongly built, not slim but trim, with red hair and brown eyes and a wonderful complexion, the pure whiteness like milk which so often goes with those ruddy locks" (*Kirsteen* 3). Thus, Kirsteen's appearance is not typical of the ideal Victorian woman, who is, for example, known for her delicate figure and her perfect hair style. Kirsteen's curly hair is unmanageable and this might indicate that she is not a woman to be controlled easily.

It was so abundant and so vigorous and full of curl that it cost her all the trouble in the world to keep it moderately tidy, whereas 'smooth as satin' was the

required perfection of ladies' locks. Her eyes were brown not nearly dark enough for the requirements of the time, a kind of hazel, sometimes so full of light that they dazzled the spectator and looked like gold – also quite out of accordance with the canons of the day. She was slightly freckled. She was strongly built; [...] her proportions were scarcely elegant [...]. (*Kirsteen* 3)

Kirsteen is not angelic, weak, timid, helpless and passive like the ideal Victorian woman is described by Ruskin. She is a strong young woman, who likes to take long walks in the Highlands by herself and never catches a cold despite being dressed lightly. “The air of health and brightness and vigour about her altogether, made her appearance like that of a burst of sunshine into this very shady place” (*Kirsteen* 3).

Kirsteen is raised in an environment primarily determined by her violent father, Mr Douglas of Drumcarro, “an impoverished but noble and fiercely proud lord of the Douglas family” (Jones 177). In his neighbourhood, he is known to be “an auld slave-driver” (*Kirsteen* 32), as he went to the West Indies when he was a young man and managed a slave plantation in order to make a fortune and regain his forefathers' land and possessions, which were lost after the failed rebellion of Prince Charlie in 1745. In the West Indies, he worked in every possible way “with a dogged and fierce determination in spite of many failures, never giving up his aim, until at last he had found himself with a little money, not by any means what he had looked for and wanted, but enough to buy a corner of his old inheritance, the little Highland estate and bare little house at Drumcarro” (*Kirsteen* 32). Drumcarro, as he likes to be called, is an “arbitrary and high-tempered man, whose will was absolute in the family, who took counsel with no one, and who [...] let his wife drop into a harmless position of a nonentity” (*Kirsteen* 2). He is a patriarch, tyrant and brute, one of Margaret Oliphant's typical unsympathetic male characters, most probably based on her own father. He uses his strength and violence against women and inflicts pain on both the psychological and physical level (see Rubik 155).

After their marriage, Mrs Douglas is said to have sunk “as soon as possible into the feeble and fanciful invalid, entirely subject to her husband's firmer will and looking upon him with terror [...]. Poor Mrs Douglas had not vigour enough to make the least stand against her fate” (*Kirsteen* 32). She is a weak woman, who is subordinated and submissive to her brutal and tyrannical husband. She constantly has to face her husband's statements, like “Hold your tongue, woman!” or “You're very keen to die –

in words; but I never see any signs in you of keeping to it” (*Kirsteen* 8, 49). Mrs Douglas “had no spirit, no health, little brains to begin with and none left now, after thirty years of domestic tyranny and a ‘bairn-time’ of fourteen children. What could such a poor soul do but fall into invalidism” (*Kirsteen* 2). Marg’ret Brown, the housekeeper, cook, lady’s maid and general manager of the house, “had gradually become more and more the deputy and representative, the real substitute of the feminine head of the house” (*Kirsteen* 1-2). Not Mrs Douglas, but Marg’ret, a strong and capable woman, seems to become the only possible female role model in Kirsteen’s life. Marg’ret is not afraid of the master in the house and dares to speak to him when something is needed. While the seven sons are treated in the best possible way by their father, the daughters receive hardly any attention and care. Drumcarro is proud of his sons and he “set his whole heart upon these boys – struggling and sparing to get a certain amount of needful education for them [...]; and by every means in his power [...] contrived to get appointments for them, [...], either in the King’s or the Company’s service for the West Indies” (*Kirsteen* 33). In them Drumcarro’s hopes lie to regain the land and possessions of his forefathers. The girls, on the other hand, “were left without any care at all. They were unlucky accidents, tares among the wheat, handmaids who might be useful about the house, but who had no future, no capabilities of advancing the family, creatures altogether of no account” (*Kirsteen* 33). Drumcarro feels that every penny spent on “the useless female portion of his household” (*Kirsteen* 34) would be more wisely spent on the boys. As a consequence, his daughters are raised without even the little education that was considered normal at that time. After the incident with Anne, who ran away and eloped with a doctor of low status, the other daughters are kept in isolation at home, safe from any temptation. The outlook into the future for Drumcarro’s daughters is very dull, monotonous and bleak. “But Kirsteen with her quick temper and high spirit and lively imagination was little adapted for a part so blank. She was one of those who make a story for themselves” (*Kirsteen* 36).

When her father wants Kirsteen to marry Mr Henry Campbell of Glendochart, “a most kind and pleasant old gentleman” (*Kirsteen* 62), he is completely surprised by his daughter’s refusal to obey his will. Kirsteen resists to this kind of “patriarchal domination” (Young 134), as she believes to have a say in who she wants to marry or not. “‘It cannot be settled without me,’ said Kirsteen, growing first red and then pale, but standing firm” (*Kirsteen* 86). In secret, she has already given her word to a young

man called Ronald Drummond, before he left to fulfil his service in India. Kirsteen promised Ronald that she will wait for him and she means to keep this promise. Thus, she cannot consent to her father's will and stands in front of him clasping "her hands before her with a gesture which was Marg'ret's, which had long been known to the young people as a sign of immovable determination" (*Kirsteen* 84). When Kirsteen offers to talk to Glendochart in order to solve the problem, Drumcarro counters with a threat: "Dare to say a word but what I tell ye, and I'll dash ye – in pieces like a potter's vessel!" "[O]ne word! I'll just kill ye where ye stand! I'll drive ye from my doors" (*Kirsteen* 103, 86). Although "Kirsteen's heart fluttered to her throat with a sickening terror; [...] she looked him in the face with what steadiness she could command, and a dumb resolution. The threat gave her back a sense of something unconquerable in her" (*Kirsteen* 104). Kirsteen cannot agree to marry Glendochart, even if this means that her father will kill her or turn her out of the house. Kirsteen is not an ordinary Victorian heroine, but rejects the Victorian traditions, which involve female submission and subordination by resisting her father's command with firmness and resolution.

In her despair, Kirsteen goes to Marg'ret in order to ask for her advice in this delicate matter. Her mother and sisters approve of the possible marriage, because for them it means a chance to escape from Drumcarro from time to time. Kirsteen does not want to be regarded as selfish for refusing Glendochart, but at the same time she does not want to break her vow and be miserable until the end of her life. She does not know what to do when she suddenly comes up with a solution. "Marg'ret, I will just go away. [...] I see it all in a flash of lightening. I am going to London to your sister Jean" (*Kirsteen* 107). "I'll fend for myself; and your sister Jean will show me the way" (*Kirsteen* 108). Kirsteen has always wanted to go out into the world like her brother Robbie and this is her chance. Marg'ret "saw the sudden flash of the resolution, the clearing away of all clouds, the rise of the natural courage, the Kirsteen of old whom nothing could 'dauton' coming back" (*Kirsteen* 108). Kirsteen proves her extraordinary strength and courage by taking this step and leaving her home and everything she knows in order to find work and make a story for herself. The journey to Glasgow is not easy and poses dangers Kirsteen has never encountered before. An old soldier, for example, threatens to kill her if she does not give him her purse. But Kirsteen "had a great deal of courage [...]. She was not at first afraid. She faced round upon him with a rising colour and bade him be content" (*Kirsteen* 122) with the money she has already given to him. She will fight if

necessary, but she is eventually saved by the appearance of a gentleman called Lord John. She recognises Lord John from a ball she once went to and perceives herself to be in even greater danger, as he believes her to be a “country lass” (*Kirsteen* 124) and does not want to leave her side. In Glasgow, she decides to visit her sister Anne, the outcast and traitor of the family since her marriage to Doctor Drewar, connecting “the name of the old Douglases, [...] with a name that was no name, that of a common person – a doctor, one that traded upon his education and skill” (*Kirsteen* 131-132), and eventually learns to overcome her prejudices based on Victorian traditions. From Glasgow she takes a coach to London without showing any trace of fear, as she knows that “nobody meddles with one that respects herself” (*Kirsteen* 145). The journey from Drumcarro to London, which she undertakes all by herself, proves that Kirsteen is a courageous, strong, active, self-confident, independent, open-minded and self-willed woman, who is able to take care of herself. Thus, Kirsteen possesses characteristics and traits normally attributed to men, which again make her a rather masculine than feminine heroine (see Peterson 82). Later, she proves her courage and strength once again when she returns to Drumcarro and faces her father in order to say farewell to her dying mother. Kirsteen “was prepared to risk any encounter, any hardness or even insult in order to answer her mother’s call. She was not reluctant like Anne, nor did she grudge the trouble or pain” (*Kirsteen* 256).

In London, Kirsteen finds shelter in the house of Miss Jean Brown, who is Marg’ret’s sister and a well-known mantua-maker. Kirsteen plans to work for a living and to make a fortune and a career if possible. Miss Jean is unsure about Kirsteen’s high aim, as “that’s all very well in a lad, – and there’s just quantities of them goes [sic] into the city without a penny and comes out like nabobs in their carriages – but not women, my dear, let along young lassies like you” (*Kirsteen* 157). This does not discourage Kirsteen, as she is eager to start working and to be useful in the world. Although thinking of her mother and sisters makes a tear escape her eye, “it never fell, so quickly did her heart rise to the excitement of the novelty around her. She said to herself that even if there was no Glendochart she would not now go back. She would stay and work and make her fortune, and [...] be a help to every one that bore her name” (*Kirsteen* 158). She is excited about the new life ahead of her, a life full of work and challenges, and she will not return to Drumcarro. She wants her family to be proud and thankful one day that “there was Kirsteen among the lassies, as well as seven sons to make Drumcarro great

again! Oh, maybe not Drumcarro but the old Douglas country!” (*Kirsteen* 159). After a week of sightseeing in London, she finally wants to start working “and not to be a cumberer of the ground. I want to learn to be a mantua-maker to support myself and help – other folk. [...] I cannot be idle anymore” (*Kirsteen* 161). Margaret Oliphant likes to show what women can achieve if they just put their mind and will to it. The author is sympathetic towards women who need to work and who need to find an outlet for their powers and talents and thus grants Kirsteen her wish. Kirsteen “felt the activity and occupations of the new life to be much more congenial to her own energetic and capable spirit than the dull quiet of the old, in which there was no outlet” (*Kirsteen* 177). Kirsteen violates the traditions of her family and the Victorian conventions by deciding to work as a dressmaker in London. Although this means disgrace and shame for a woman of Kirsteen’s social position, she does not regret her decision and does not feel ashamed of her work. Yet, she chooses to be called Miss Kirsteen and does not “put [her] father’s name in it, for he is old-fashioned and he would think shame” (*Kirsteen* 162-163).

Kirsteen soon turns out to have a natural talent for dressmaking and business management. She is a skilled and creative dressmaker, who

developed a true genius for her craft. She had never forgotten Miss Macnab’s little lecture upon the accuracy of outline necessary for the proper composition of a gown – and thus had acquired the first principles almost without knowing it. She followed up this [...] by many studies and compositions in which her lively mind found a great deal of pleasure. She was [...] independent and original, little trained in other people’s ideas and full of fancies of her own [...]. [...] Kirsteen tried her active young powers upon everything, being impatient of sameness and monotony, and bent upon securing a difference, an individual touch in every different variety of costume. She was delighted with the beautiful materials [...]. (*Kirsteen* 164-165).

Just like Margaret Oliphant, Kirsteen does not only work because it is necessary for her to make a living, but also because she takes great pleasure in her work. Her profession fulfils her and satisfies her to a great extent. After some time, Miss Jean asks Kirsteen to help her out in the show-room, as she perceives Kirsteen’s talent for special dresses and effects. Kirsteen has a sense of business, when she, for example, wants customers to come to her “with petitions not with orders” (*Kirsteen* 180). Kirsteen wants to teach a lesson to “the folk with money and nothing else, that come in as if they were doing us a favour” (*Kirsteen* 214). This is a very good business tactic, as Miss Jean and Kirsteen are soon known all over London and have plenty to do both during and out of the

season. At the same time, Kirsteen also manages to invent and introduce “a new mode” for example “by the looping up of a train or the arrangement of a scarf which had dazzled all beholders, and had become at once the object of a rage of imitation” (*Kirsteen* 222). Miss Jean eventually asks Kirsteen to become her partner in business, since

everything prospered with Kirsteen. Miss Jean’s business became the most flourishing and important in town. Not only commoners, whom she had so haughtily rejected, but persons of the most exalted pretensions had to cast away their pride and sue for the services of Miss Brown and Miss Kirsteen; and as may be supposed, the more they refused, the more eager were the customers at their door. Before Kirsteen was twenty-seven, the fortune which she had determined to make was already well begun [...]. (*Kirsteen* 220-221)

Kirsteen makes a successful career and her fortune increases with every single day. She becomes a financially independent woman, who runs a fashionable business in London. Kirsteen is a woman of abundant energy, who works “with the rapidity of an inventor” (*Kirsteen* 226). After six years of work, Kirsteen

was now a power in her way, supreme in the house in Chapel Street, in Mayfair, feared and courted by many people who had once been sufficiently haughty to Miss Jean. At twenty-six when a young woman has gone through many vicissitudes of actual life, when she has been forced into independence, and stood herself against the world, she is as mature as if she were twenty years older [...]. (*Kirsteen* 224)

Kirsteen establishes herself as an authority in her business and manages it with great success. As soon as Kirsteen is informed of the tragic death of her fiancé in India, she realises that she “was independent of all the world, and bound to that work for ever” (*Kirsteen* 241). “And thus life was over for Kirsteen; and life began. No longer a preparatory chapter, a thing to be given up when the happy moment came – but the only life that was to be vouchsafed to her in this earth [...]. [...] Her career was determined [...]. She took up her work with fresh vigour” (*Kirsteen* 241) and immediately starts to refurbish and reorganise the house and work-room according to her ideas. After Roland’s death, her profession is no longer just a chapter in her life, but becomes the centre of her life.

Kirsteen remains unmarried and independent for the rest of her life. Although she refuses Glendochart primarily because of her promise to Roland, there is no hint in the novel that Glendochart would have been the right husband for Kirsteen. The novel does not focus on marriage in general or on Kirsteen’s eventual marriage in the future. Her fiancé is sent to India and not heard of for a long time. Even after the death of her

fiancé, Kirsteen is not interested in marrying any of her other suitors, like Miss Jean's friend, a doctor, "who would very willingly have made a sensible matrimonial alliance with a young person getting on so very well in the world" (*Kirsteen* 225), or Miss Jean's nephew, who soon is to become Lord Mayor. Thus, Kirsteen rejects the Victorian traditions of the nineteenth century. For Kirsteen it is not the first and utmost goal to secure a husband and settle down. She objects to the idea that she is "[a] creature of no account. A lass that has to obey her father till she gets a man, and then obey him" (*Kirsteen* 86). She enjoys the freedom and independence that her profession offers to her. There is no need for her to marry, since she makes a fortune with her work as a mantua-maker and since she is financially independent. Throughout the novel, Kirsteen encounters many admirable women, such as Aunt Eelen, Marg'ret, Miss Jean and Miss Macnab, who are all unmarried, but strong and independent women. Aunt Eelen lives a comfortable and independent life, while Miss Jean has her own business and an independent and financially secure life. Marg'ret is the power in the house and grateful not to be married, when she says, "I'm nae man's wife, the Lord be thankit" (*Kirsteen* 42).

Contrary to Kirsteen, her sisters follow the Victorian conventions by securing themselves husbands. They believe it is "better to be a married woman in your own good house, than a lass at home [...] or even an Old Maid" (*Kirsteen* 201). Although they gain a position of respect and superiority through their marriages in the nineteenth century, they are portrayed as inferior to an unmarried woman like Kirsteen (see Williams, *Biography* 160). "The lives of Kirsteen's sisters are, like those of all conventional Victorian heroines, defined and controlled by men" (Jones 134). The oldest sister, Anne, is highly dependent on her husband, never makes a decision without consulting him and rarely leaves the house. Although Kirsteen has a very positive picture of her sister's marital life at the beginning, her eyes are soon opened to the real and rather negative picture of marriage:

Was this the effect of marrying and being happy as people say? The little plump mother with her rosy face no longer capable of responding to any call outside of her own little circle of existence, the babies delving with their spoons into the porridge, covering their faces and pinafores, or holding up little gaping mouths to be fed. It had been a delightful picture [...] but now it was sweet no more. (*Kirsteen* 254)

Compared to Kirsteen, Anne is presented as a coward, who would rather stay at home than face her father in order to see her dying mother for the last time. Mary, on the other

hand, is a selfish and cunning woman, who only thinks of herself and persuades an old gentleman to marry her so that she can escape her dull life at home. The youngest sister, Jeanie, “the beauty of the family” (*Kirsteen* 15), is a weak and emotional girl, who is tempted and seduced by a man and thus in danger of inflicting shame on the family. “To be tempted was the one thing which in her austere and spotless womanhood, a widowed maiden, Kirsteen could not understand” (*Kirsteen* 289). Jeanie is eventually saved and marries Major Gordon. Her sisters and brothers “all deplored the miserable way of life [Kirsteen] had chosen, and that she had no man” (*Kirsteen* 341). According to her brother, Sir Alexander Douglas, “[a]ny sort of man, if he had been a chimney sweep, would have been better” (*Kirsteen* 341) than an unmarried and professional life. Among his sisters, “[t]he one whom he found it hardest to approve was Kirsteen” (*Kirsteen* 341). Their mother, on the other hand, is grateful that one of her daughters remains unmarried, when she says, “So you have no man? [...] It’s maybe just as well; you will be a stand-by for them all, Kirsteen, my bonnie woman. I’m thankful there’s one that is not marriest” (*Kirsteen* 262). Margaret Oliphant does not disapprove of spinsters like Kirsteen and supports her decision to start working as a dressmaker.

When Kirsteen returns home for her mother’s approaching death, her presence is only accepted and endured by her father on the grounds that she has “brought no canailye into [his] house” (*Kirsteen* 263). Her father is even more relieved when Kirsteen explains to him that she has not used her surname in her “miserable trade”, when he says, “I’m glad at least that ye have not brought disgrace upon the name of Douglas” (*Kirsteen* 296). At the end of the novel, Drumcarro summons his daughter in order to persuade her to buy back the long lost land of his forefathers, as “[t]he Carmichaels of Rosscraig are just ruined with feasting and wasting, and their place is to be sold” (*Kirsteen* 338). Kirsteen agrees to her father’s suggestion, since “there was a fine strain of tradition in Kirsteen’s veins” (*Kirsteen* 339), too. Kirsteen “herself as eager for the elevation of the family as he could be [...] had at once opened negotiations for the purchase of Rosscraig, though on terms that would cripple her for years” (*Kirsteen* 341). According to her father, “[t]hat’s the first bargain [...] was ever made between father and child to the father’s advantage – at least, in his house. And a lass, - and all my fine lads that I sent out for honour and for gain!” (*Kirsteen* 339). Drumcarro is surprised that in the end it is one of his daughters and not one of his sons that buys back the family land. He believes the world to have turned upside down. It even startles her brother,

Alexander, “a little to find that he owed Rossraig to that mantua-maker” (*Kirsteen* 341). Kirsteen does not receive any gratitude from her family members for regaining the Douglas land and “was not a very welcome visitor in the house she had redeemed” (*Kirsteen* 341). Although her family perceives her to be an old maid and disregard her, she is a respected and distinguished woman in London and Edinburgh.

[T]here lived in one of the most imposing houses, in one of the princeliest squares of Edinburgh, a lady, who was an old lady, yet still as may be said in the prime of life. [...] She drove the finest horses in the town, and gave dinners in which judges delighted and where the best talkers were glad to come. Her hospitality was almost boundless, her large house running over with hordes of nephews and nieces [...]. [...] Her figure had expanded a little like her fortune, but she was the best dressed woman in Edinburgh [...]. [...] There was no one better thought of. And so far as anybody knew, most people had entirely forgotten that in past times [...] her name had appeared on a neat plate in conjunction with the name of Miss Jean Brown, Court Dresser and Mantua Maker, as MISS KIRSTEEN. (*Kirsteen* 342-343)

At the end of the novel, Margaret Oliphant once again stresses that Kirsteen decided not to put her family name, but her first name into the dressmaking business. This might indicate that it was entirely by means of her own effort and courage that she survived and made a fortune in order to be a stand-by for her family and to buy back the land of her forefathers. “As she made her way in the world, so she has chosen her name” (Jones 181).

5.4. Concluding Remarks

The three female protagonists, Diana, Catherine and Kirsteen, are all prime examples of Margaret Oliphant’s unconventionality. Contrary to the ideal Victorian woman described by Ruskin, these heroines are strong, intelligent, practical, self-willed, confident, courageous, independent and influential women, who possess a talent for business management and prove equal to any challenge offered to them. All these characteristics are normally assigned to men and thus Diana, Catherine and Kirsteen are rather masculine than feminine heroines. Diana, for example, has a talent for estate management and is courageous enough to stand up to her lawyers, who eventually accept her as an equal partner in negotiations. Catherine saves her family’s bank from bankruptcy twice and becomes the most influential and powerful person in Redborough. Kirsteen leaves behind her home and everything that she knows in order to embark on a dangerous travel to London, where she wants to live an independent life and become a dressmaker. In addition, Kirsteen stands out due to her rather unconventional

appearance. In contrast to the ideal Victorian woman, Kirsteen is strongly built, has unmanageable red and curly hair and dazzling brown eyes.

In the novels *Diana Trelawny*, *Hester* and *Kirsteen*, the reader will search in vain for a hero, as Margaret Oliphant's self-confident, intelligent, powerful, talented and independent heroines are not in need of any hero. Diana, Catherine and Kirsteen are portrayed as more intelligent, energetic, active and competent than most of the male characters surrounding them, which was uncommon in the nineteenth century. Men are often presented to be weak and inferior to the female protagonists of the novels. Count Pandolfini, for instance, cannot hold a candle to Diana, the woman of his dreams, and is too shy and weak to propose to her. The novel *Hester* shows two prime examples of weak and irresponsible men, namely John and Edward Vernon. Vernon's bank is almost ruined by John Vernon's need for luxury and Edward's liability to speculation. They are not able to take responsibility for their deeds, forsake the bank and leave it up to other people, like Catherine, to find a solution and save the bank. In contrast to the other novels, *Kirsteen* comprises a domestic tyrant called Drumcarro, who abuses women both physically and psychologically. Marg'ret, the housekeeper, maid and cook, and Kirsteen are the only two women who are strong enough to oppose his patriarchal domination. The only possible hero, Roland Drummond, is sent off to India at the beginning of the novel and is never seen again due to his death on a battle field.

In the Victorian era, work was not acceptable for middle-class women and it was often linked to shame and disgrace. Margaret Oliphant, however, helped to make the notion of work acceptable and possible through her novels. She herself was a very intelligent, hard-working woman and a professional writer. In her novels *Diana Trelawny*, *Hester* and *Kirsteen*, she reflects on the problems of an increasing number of women to find work in order to make a living. Margaret Oliphant came to believe that women who desired to pursue a professional career should be allowed and encouraged to do so, as she herself grew increasingly frustrated at not being given the position editor with a regular income. Diana, Catherine and Kirsteen refuse to conform to the Victorian traditions by working and pursuing a career, an option traditionally open only to men. While Diana rejects the Victorian conventions completely, Kirsteen has to overcome her prejudices first and Catherine still supports the Victorian traditions with regard to *Hester* despite herself transgressing them. Diana becomes successful in estate

management, whereas Catherine asserts herself in the field of bank management. Both professions were quite unusual employment possibilities for women of the nineteenth century. For a long time, the work possibilities open to middle-class women were to become governesses or dressmakers and from the 1880s onwards they could only apply for a job in an office as a typist or secretary, for instance. Diana and Catherine enter professions which were traditionally only available to men. Although Kirsteen as a mantua-maker has a rather traditional work, it is still uncommon that a lady decides to work for a living. Kirsteen eventually makes a career and a fortune in the dressmaking business and becomes a partner in the prospering business. In the end, she has not lost social status but is widely respected in Edinburgh.

It is not easy for these heroines to start working in the fields of estate management, bank management and dressmaking, as they constantly have to encounter obstacles posed by people thinking and acting according to Victorian traditions. Diana, for example, has to struggle to be accepted as an equal partner in negotiations with her lawyers. At the beginning, Catherine's talent for the banking business is entirely undervalued by her cousin and thus she prefers not to pursue her vocation. Even though Kirsteen makes a victorious career as a mantua-maker, her brothers and sisters do not appreciate her work and efforts. Diana, Catherine and Kirsteen all experience a sense of satisfaction and pleasure through their work. Their professions eventually become the centre of their lives, which is the reason why they do not only invest a considerable amount of their money in their dependents, but also in their businesses. Moreover, they gain responsibility, power, influence and authority through their work. While Kirsteen, for instance, establishes herself as an authority in the world of fashion and constantly invents new styles of dresses, Diana is perceived as the queen of her county and Catherine's name is put to everything, to streets, places and buildings. Diana, Catherine and Kirsteen all make a successful career in the public sphere and therefore they are able to unfold their talents and intellects. Margaret Oliphant understands the needs of intellectual women to find an outlet for their powers and talents and therefore she fulfils her heroines' wish to work. According to a critic in the *Spectator*, "Mrs. Oliphant loves that kind of strong, half-masculine clear sighted woman, blind to nothing, not even her own foibles, and loves, too, to place her in the position of a man, and show how much better she can control both circumstances and people than a man" (qtd. in Rubik 117).

The majority of people living in the nineteenth century were “of the opinion that the aim of every woman, however elevated, was to ‘catch’ a man, one way or other” (*Diana Trelawny* 256). The powerful career women of Margaret Oliphant, however, do not perceive love, romance and marriage as the first and utmost aims and desires in their lives. With regard to this, Margaret Oliphant once wrote: “I have learned to take perhaps more a man’s view of mortal affairs [...] to feel that the love between men and women, the marrying and giving in marriage, occupy in fact so small a portion of either existence and thought” (qtd. in Williams, *Oliphant* 280). Diana, Catherine and Kirsteen all reject the Victorian traditions, as they decide to remain unmarried and to live independent lives. While Diana and Kirsteen refuse to marry, Catherine loses interest in marriage after being rejected by her cousin John and after her profession has become the most important factor in her life. At this point it is worth mentioning, however, that most Victorian middle-class men disliked strong women and would have been embarrassed to marry a working woman. Pandolfini, Diana’s suitor, does not appear to mind, but Catherine does not seem to have received any proposals after John’s rejection and the reader does not know, for example, how Kirsteen’s fiancé would have reacted if he had ever returned home.

When Margaret Oliphant compares her unmarried women with married women, she often points out the advantages a single life poses to her three heroines. In contrast to Sophy Norton or Kirsteen’s sisters, for example, Margaret Oliphant’s heroines are financially independent and free to do whatever they wish. They are not distracted from their careers by their responsibilities towards their husbands and do not have to be submissive to men often less intelligent than themselves. In this respect, women with careers may perceive an unmarried life as a blessing. Margaret Oliphant was definitely “one of the first writers to see the unmarried woman as a positive figure” (Rubik 129). Diana, Catherine and Kirsteen do not become the typical old maids of the nineteenth century, who were the housekeepers, companions and nannies for their family members and who were pitied by everyone. The three heroines are fulfilled through their work and surround themselves with dependents and family members in order not to feel too lonely. Their dependents and relatives, however, are often intolerant, simple-minded and spiteful and hardly ever thank their beneficiaries for the charity they give. Diana and Catherine have dependents primarily to amuse and entertain themselves. “An almost cynical ability to accept people the way they are, not to expect anything from

them and to laugh even at ingratitude and meanness, are remarkable traits shared by” (Rubik 123) these two heroines. Kirsteen eventually manages to become the stand-by of the family when she buys back the land of the forefathers. She appreciates the company of her nephews and nieces and even more importantly her nephews and nieces, as opposed to their parents, seem to appreciate Kirsteen’s company in return. Diana, Catherine and Kirsteen are not at all the typical Victorian submissive and domestic wives, but examples of the new “celibate career women” (Delamont 184) appearing at the end of the nineteenth century.

6. Conclusion

Margaret Oliphant was a remarkable Scottish author of the nineteenth century. Besides being a caring and loving sister, wife and mother, Margaret Oliphant managed to find time to make an impressive career as a female writer. She had, like no other British female writer before, the opportunity to express her opinion in public for half a century and probably influenced many women through her novels, as novels were the main instrument of communication for women in the nineteenth century. In the Victorian era, at the time when Margaret Oliphant lived and worked as a writer, middle-class women were trained to become wives and mothers and marriage was their utmost goal in life. The image of the angel in the house, of women as domestic saints, was prevalent and people believed in the separation of spheres. While men were assigned to the public working sphere, women were confined to the private domestic sphere primarily due to their supposedly weak nature. Women were regarded as inferior and subordinate to men. However, in the second part of the nineteenth century, women were increasingly dissatisfied with the status and role of women and the women's movement emerged as a consequence. Many middle-class women desired equality of men and women before the law. They tried to improve the education for girls and the legal rights of married women and they tried to expand the working opportunities for single or widowed women. Margaret Oliphant's views on the woman question were more complex than most critics believed them to be, and towards the end of the century she supported most of the demands of the women's movement.

In the six selected novels, Margaret Oliphant tested the limits of Victorian tradition and beliefs and portrayed her fictional characters in a very unconventional way. Especially two types of male characters, the domestic tyrant and the weak man, seem to appear regularly in her novels. Her male characters are the logic counterparts to her superior, intelligent, independent, talented, energetic and strong heroines. Margaret Oliphant presents a wide range of female characters, such as sisters, daughters, mothers, wives, widows, spinsters, teachers, artists and even professional career women, which was highly unusual for Victorian novels. In her novels *The Doctor's Family*, *Miss Marjoribanks* and *Phoebe, Junior*, Margaret Oliphant portrays her female protagonists as powerful Victorian women, who are intelligent, clever, highly articulate, managing, superior and practical. They exert their power and authority mainly in the domestic

sphere, since Victorian society does not give them any other option. Two of these heroines, however, only seem to operate within the boundaries of conventionality and the domestic domain, as in reality they subtly try to achieve their personal goals and sometimes even manipulate men close to them for their own ends. Although all three heroines marry at the end, they do not lose their authority and power through marriage, as they are offered new tasks and intellectual challenges. In her novels *Diana Trelawny*, *Hester* and *Kirsteen*, Margaret Oliphant portrays her heroines not only as powerful women but as powerful career women, who pursue their vocations, take a profession and decide to live an independent life. They gain a lot of responsibility and authority through their work and perceive their careers as the most important factor in their lives. These female characters completely refuse to conform to Victorian traditions and conventions by rejecting to marry and pursuing a professional career as a manager of an estate, owner of a bank and partner of a famous London dressmaking business. In her novels, Margaret Oliphant does not only focus on what women are not allowed and not able to do, but on what women can do and achieve if they are just given the opportunity. In contrast to Victorian heroines such as Jane Eyre, Dorothea Brooke and Tess, Margaret Oliphant's heroines do not live in the shade of remarkable men, as they are often only opposed to weak and inferior men. Her heroines do not support men devotedly, but, for example, plan election campaigns or write parliamentary speeches in order to fulfil their own desires and needs. They do not simply work, they are successful and make a career. Even more interestingly, Margaret Oliphant does not condemn her heroines for transgressing Victorian traditions, but seems to understand them and sympathise with them. Ultimately, the six selected novels by Margaret Oliphant seem to reflect the need for strong, superior, independent and successful heroines in the second half of the nineteenth century and thus she has helped to shape the image of the intelligent wife and celibate career woman emerging at the end of the century.

7. Bibliography

7.1. Primary Sources – Novels by Margaret Oliphant

Diana Trelawny. Kessinger Legacy Reprints. Breinigsville: Kessinger Publishing, 2010.

Hester. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2009.

Kirsteen: The Story of a Scotch Family Seventy Years Ago. London: Dent, 1984.

Phoebe, Junior: The Last Chronicle of Carlingford. Gloucestershire: Nonsuch Publishing, 2007.

Miss Marjoribanks. London: Penguin Books, 1998.

The Doctor's Family and Other Stories. Oxford, New York: Oxford UP, 1986.

7.2. Secondary Sources

Altick, Richard D. *Victorian People and Ideas*. London: Dent, 1974.

Arnstein, Walter L. "Victoria, Queen of England (1819-1901)." *Victorian Britain: An Encyclopedia*. New York: Garland, 1988.

Basch, Françoise. *Relative Creatures: Victorian Women in Society and the Novel 1837-67*. Trans. Anthony Rudolf. London: Allen Lane, 1974.

Clarke, Isabel C. *Six Portraits: Madame De Stael, Jane Austen, George Eliot, Mrs. Oliphant, John Oliver Hobbes (Mrs. Craigie), Katherine Mansfield*. London: Hutchinson, 1935.

Cunningham, Gail. *The New Woman and the Victorian Novel*. London, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1978.

Davies, Philip, and Brian Nellist. Introduction. *Hester*. By Margaret Oliphant. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2009. vii-xxvi.

Delamont, Sara "The Domestic Ideology and Women's Education." *The Nineteenth-century Woman: her cultural and physical world*. Ed. Sara Delamont and Lorna Duffin. London: Croom Helm, 1978. 164-187.

Dunbar, Janet. *The Early Victorian Woman: Some Aspects of Her Life (1837-57)*. London: George G. Harrap & Co., 1953.

Dyhouse, Carol. "The Role of Women: From Self-sacrifice to Self-awareness." *The Context of English Literature*. Ed. Laurence Lerner. London: Methuen, 1978. 174-192.

Ellis, Sarah S. *The Wives of England: Their Relative Duties, Domestic Influence and Social Obligations*. London: 1843.

- Evans, Joan. *The Victorians*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1966.
- Frawley, Maria. "The Victorian Age, 1832-1901." *English Literature in Context*. Ed. Paul Poplawski. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2008. 403-518.
- Homans, Margaret. *Royal Representations: Queen Victoria and British Culture, 1837-1976*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998.
- Jay, Elisabeth. Introduction. *Miss Marjoribanks*. By Mrs Oliphant. London: Penguin Books, 1998. xi-xxxv.
- . *Mrs Oliphant: 'A Fiction to Herself' A literary Life*. Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1995.
- Jones, Wendy S. *Consensual Fictions: Women, Liberalism, and the English Novel*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005.
- Kaston Tange, Andrea. "Redesigning Femininity: Miss Marjoribanks's Drawing-Room of Opportunity." *Victorian Literature and Culture*. 36.1 (2008): 163-186.
- Kämper, Birgit. *Margaret Oliphant's Carlingford Series: An Original Contribution to the Debate on Religion, Class and Gender in 1860s and '70s*. European University Studies: Anglo-Saxon Language and Literature XIV. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2001.
- Langland, Elizabeth. *Nobody's Angels: Middle-class Women and Domestic Ideology in Victorian culture*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell UP, 1995.
- Leavis, Q.D. Introduction. *Autobiography and Letters of Mrs Margaret Oliphant*. By Margaret Oliphant. Ed. Mrs Harry Coghill. Leicester: Leicester UP, 1974. 9-34.
- . Introduction: Miss Marjoribanks. *Chronicles of Carlingford: Miss Marjoribanks*. By Margaret Oliphant. London: Zodiac Press, 1969. 1-24.
- Mews, Hazel. *Frail Vessels: Woman's Role in Women's Novels from Fanny Burney to George Eliot*. London: The Athlone, University of London, 1969.
- Mill, John Stuart. *On Liberty with Subjection of Women and Chapters on Socialism*. 1989. Ed. Stefan Collini. Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995.
- Mitchell, Sally. *Daily Life in Victorian England*. Westport: Greenwood Press, 1996.
- Nowak, Helge. *Literature in Britain and Ireland: A History*. Tübingen: Franke Verlag, 2010.
- Oliphant, Margaret. *Autobiography and Letters of Mrs Margaret Oliphant*. Ed. Mrs Harry Coghill. Leicester: Leicester UP, 1974.
- . "Anti-Marriage League." *Blackwood's Magazine* 159 (January 1896): 135-149.
- . *The Autobiography of Mrs Margaret Oliphant*. Ed. Elisabeth Jay. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1990.
- . "The Great Unrepresented." *Blackwood's Magazine* 100 (September 1866): 167-179.

- . *The Literary History of England in the End of the Eighteenth Century and Beginning of the Nineteenth Century: Volume 2*. London: Macmillan, 1882.
- Oosterom, Judith van. *The Whirligig of Time: Margaret Oliphant in Her Later Years*. Switzerland: Peter Lang, 2010.
- Peterson, Linda. "The Female Bildungsroman." *Margaret Oliphant: Critical Essays on a Gentle Subversive*. Ed. D.J. Trela. London: Associated UP, 1995. 66-89.
- Reed, John R. *Victorian Conventions*. Ohio: Ohio UP, 1975.
- Rivers, Bronwyn. *Women at Work in the Victorian Novel: The Question of Middle-class Women's Employment, 1840-1870*. Lewiston, New York: Mellen, 2006.
- Rubik, Margarete. *The Novels of Mrs. Oliphant: A Subversive View of Traditional Themes*. New York: Peter Lang, 1994.
- Ruskin, John. *Sesame and Lilies: Two Lectures Delivered in Manchester in 1864*. London: Smith, Elder, 1865.
- Sandford, Elizabeth. *Woman in Her Social and Domestic Character*. London: Kessinger, Legacy Reprints. 1833.
- Schaub, Melissa. "Queen of the Air or Constitutional Monarch?: Idealism, Irony, and Narrative Power in Miss Marjoribanks." *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 55.2 (September 2000): 195-225.
- Skelton, John. "A Little Chat about Mrs Oliphant." *Blackwood's Magazine* 133 (1883), 73-91.
- Stimpson, Catharine R. Foreword. *Royal Representations: Queen Victoria and British Culture, 1837-1976*. By Homans Margaret. Chicago: Chicago UP, 1998. xiii-xv.
- Strachey, Lytton. *Queen Victoria*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1921.
- Stubbs, Patricia. *Women and Fiction: Feminism and the Novel 1880-1920*. Brighton: Harvester, 1979.
- Thompson, Nicole Diane. "Responding to the Woman Questions: Rereading Noncanonical Victorian Women Novelists." *Victorian Women Writers and the Woman Question*. Ed. N.D. Thompson. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999. 1-23.
- Terry, R.C. *Victorian Popular Fiction, 1860-80*. London, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1983.
- Trela, D.J. Introduction: Discovering the Gentle Subversive. *Margaret Oliphant: Critical Essays on a Gentle Subversive*. By Trela. London: Associated UP, 1995. 11-32.
- Uglow, Jennifer. Introduction. *Hester*. By Mrs Oliphant. London: Virago Press, 1984. ix-xxi.

- Williams, Merryn. "Feminist or Antifeminist? Oliphant and the Woman Question." *Margaret Oliphant: Critical Essays on a Gentle Subversive*. Ed. D.J. Trela. London: Associated UP, 1995. 165-180.
- . *Margaret Oliphant: A Critical Biography*. Basingstoke, London: Macmillan, 1986.
- . "Margaret Oliphant" *A History of Scottish Women's Writing*. Ed. Douglas Gifford and Dorothy McMillan. Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 1997. 274-290.
- . Introduction: Kirsteen. *Kirsteen: The Story of a Scotch Family Seventy Years Ago*. London: Dent Everyman's Library, 1984.
- . Introduction. *The Doctor's Family and Other Stories*. By Margaret Oliphant. Oxford, New York: Oxford UP, 1986. vii-xviii.
- . *Women in the English Novel, 1800-1900*. Basingstoke, London: Macmillan, 1985.
- Young, Arlene. *Culture, Class and Gender in the Victorian Novel: Gentlemen, Gents and Working Women*. London: Macmillan, 1999.

8. Index

- 1895: The Lady Candidate* (Blackwood's) 22, 58
- Angel in the House 7, 10, 13, 31, 42
- anti-feminist 19-22, 24
- domestic economy 5
- education 4, 5, 8, 10, 13, 15, 39, 50, 52, 59, 80
- Elizabeth Sandford 5, 9
- franchise 10, 12, 20, 21, 23
- Infant's Custody Act 12
- irony 25, 38
- John Ruskin 50, 70, 79, 87
- Of Queens' Gardens* 8, 9
- John Stuart Mill 11, 21, 23, 75
- Married Women's Property Act 12, 22
- Mary Wollstonecraft
- A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* 10, 23
- Matrimonial Causes Act 12
- Middlemarch* (Eliot) 58
- mock heroic 38
- Oliphant's articles
- The Anti-Marriage League* 20
- The Condition of Women* 21
- The Great Unrepresented* 21
- The Grievances of Women* 23
- The Laws Concerning Women* 21
- Queen Elizabeth 70
- Queen Victoria 2-5, 7, 11, 14, 41, 62
- Sarah Ellis 5, 9
- separation of spheres 8
- surplus of women 6
- The Chronicles of Carlingford* (Oliphant) 29, 49
- Thomas Hardy 20
- woman question 10, 20, 22, 24

Deutsche Zusammenfassung

Diese Diplomarbeit befasst sich im Detail mit der Darstellung von außergewöhnlichen und karrierebewussten Frauen in sechs ausgewählten Romanen von Margaret Oliphant, einer bemerkenswerten schottische Autorin des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts. Neben ihren Aufgaben als fürsorgliche und liebevolle Schwester, Ehefrau und Mutter, fand Margaret Oliphant auch noch die Zeit eine eindrucksvolle Karriere als weibliche Schriftstellerin zu machen. Wie noch keine andere weibliche britische Schriftstellerin zuvor, hatte Margaret Oliphant die Möglichkeit ihre Meinung rund fünfzig Jahre lang der Öffentlichkeit preiszugeben. Sie beeinflusste dadurch wahrscheinlich viele Frauen, da Romane die Hauptkommunikationsquelle der Frauen im neunzehnten Jahrhundert waren. In der viktorianischen Zeit, in der Margaret Oliphant lebte und als Schriftstellerin arbeitete, wurden Frauen aus dem Mittelstand dazu erzogen Ehefrau und Mutter zu werden und die Ehe war ihr wichtigstes Ziel im Leben. Das konservative Ideal des "Angel in the House" von John Ruskin war vorherrschend und schränkte die Frauen auf häusliche Tätigkeiten ein, während die Männer ihren Berufen im öffentlichen Bereich nachgingen. In der zweiten Hälfte des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts jedoch zeigten mehr und mehr Frauen ihre Unzufriedenheit mit ihrer Rolle in der Gesellschaft und die Frauenbewegung wurde ins Leben gerufen. Die Vorstellungen von Margaret Oliphant in Bezug auf die Stellung der Frau in der Gesellschaft waren komplexer als viele Kritiker meinten und gegen Ende des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts unterstützte Margaret Oliphant die meisten Forderungen der Frauenbewegung.

In den sechs ausgewählten Romanen geht Margaret Oliphant an die Grenzen der viktorianischen Traditionen und Meinungen und stellt ihre fiktionalen Charaktere in einer sehr ungewöhnlichen Art und Weise dar. Vor allem zwei Arten von männlichen Charakteren, der häusliche Tyrann und der schwache Mann, sind regelmäßig in ihren Romanen zu finden. In ihren Romanen *The Doctor's Family*, *Miss Marjoribanks* und *Phoebe, Junior* präsentiert sie ihre weiblichen Hauptcharaktere als starke Frauen, die intelligent, einfallreich, wortgewandt und praktisch veranlagt sind, die gute organisatorische Fähigkeiten haben, aber sich nur schwer unterordnen können. Sie üben ihre Stärke und Autorität vor allem im häuslichen Bereich aus, da die viktorianische Gesellschaft ihnen keine andere Möglichkeit gibt. Obwohl alle drei Protagonistinnen keine richtigen Karrieren im öffentlichen Bereich anstreben können und sie letztendlich

heiraten, verlieren sie ihre besondere Stellung in der Gesellschaft nicht, weil ihnen ständig neue Aufgaben und intellektuelle Herausforderungen gestellt werden. In ihren Romanen *Diana Trelawny*, *Hester* und *Kirsteen* präsentiert Margaret Oliphant ihre weiblichen Hauptcharaktere nicht nur als starke Frauen, sondern als starke Karrierefrauen, die ihren Begabungen nachgehen, einen Beruf haben und ein unabhängiges Leben führen. Sie erlangen Respekt und Autorität durch ihre Arbeit und stellen ihre Karriere in den Mittelpunkt ihres Lebens. Diese Protagonistinnen wehren sich gegen die viktorianischen Traditionen, da sie sich gegen die Ehe entscheiden und da sie eine erfolgreiche Karriere als Verwalterin eines Anwesens, Inhaberin einer Bank oder Teilhaberin an einem berühmten Londoner Modehaus vorweisen können.

Im Gegensatz zu viktorianischen Hauptcharakteren anderer Autoren wie zum Beispiel Jane Eyre, Dorothea Brooke und Tess stehen die sechs Protagonistinnen von Margaret Oliphant nicht im Schatten bemerkenswerter Männer. Ihre weiblichen Charaktere unterstützen Männer nicht hingebungsvoll, sondern organisieren Wahlkampagnen oder verfassen Parlamentsreden um ihre eigenen intellektuellen Bedürfnisse und Wünsche zu erfüllen. Sie arbeiten nicht nur, sie sind erfolgreich und machen Karriere. Margaret Oliphant verurteilt ihre Protagonistinnen für ihre Missachtung der viktorianischen Traditionen nicht, viel mehr zeigt sie Verständnis und unterstützt sie in ihrem Vorhaben. Letztendlich scheint Margaret Oliphant das Verlangen nach starken, unabhängigen und erfolgreichen Protagonistinnen in der zweiten Hälfte des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts widerzuspiegeln und sie hat daher geholfen das Bild der intelligenten Ehefrau einerseits und das Bild der unverheirateten Karrierefrau andererseits, die beide Ende des Jahrhunderts aufkamen, zu formen.

Lebenslauf

Name: Andrea SERDINSKY

Geburtsdatum: 10.05.1988

Nationalität: Österreich

Schulausbildung

1994/95 – 1997/98	Piaristenvolksschule Maria Treu
1998/99 – 2005/06	Piaristengymnasium, BG VIII
WS 2006 – SS 2011	Universität Wien Lehramt Englisch und Psychologie/Philosophie Modul Teaching English for Specific Purposes (TESP) Modul Deutsch als Fremd- und Zweitsprache
SS 2010	Erasmus: University of Aberdeen, UK