

# The Selected Works of Margaret Oliphant

General Editors: **Joanne Shattock** and **Elisabeth Jay**

## *The Pickering Masters*

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*Margaret Oliphant Wilson Oliphant*  
by (Anthony) Frederick Augustus Sandys  
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Margaret Oliphant produced well over a hundred works during a career that spanned half a century. This is the most ambitious scholarly critical edition of Oliphant's work ever undertaken. The sheer scale of her output has meant that selection is essential, but the edition aims to convey the range and variety of her work in both fiction and non-fictional genres. It brings together for the first time her critical writing and other journalism for *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, *The Spectator*, the *St James's Gazette*, as well as her articles in *Atalanta*, the *Contemporary Review*, the *Edinburgh Review*, *Fraser's Magazine*, *Good Words* and *Macmillan's Magazine*.

Much of Oliphant's fiction, including full length novels, short stories and novellas, was first published in periodicals: in *Blackwood's*, the *Cornhill*, *Longman's Magazine*, *Macmillan's*, and *Good Words*. Few of her manuscripts survive, but substantive textual work remains to be done on the editorial changes made between periodical serialization and first appearance in volume form.

The edition places particular emphasis on her shorter fiction, much of which is republished here for the first time, and on her work as a biographer, historian and literary historian.

- The most wide-ranging critical edition of Oliphant's works ever undertaken
- This is the first time that most of Oliphant's non fiction writings have been made available since their original publication.
- Full editorial apparatus including textual variants between serialization and publication

**The Pickering  
Masters**

## Margaret Oliphant

Margaret Oliphant Wilson Oliphant (1828–97) had a wide-ranging and prolific literary career that spanned almost fifty years. She wrote some ninety-eight novels, over fifty short stories, twenty-five works of non-fiction, including biographies and historic guides to European cities, and more than three hundred periodical articles. As the self-styled ‘general utility woman’ for *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine*, often contributing both fiction and literary reviews to the same issue, she became a major critical voice for her generation. Her influence, usually cast on the side of ‘the common reader’, was such that it provoked fellow novelists such as Anthony Trollope, Henry James and Thomas Hardy to savage fictional portraits by way of retaliation.

The scholarly interest that her work now receives is hampered by difficulty in accessing the full range of her oeuvre: whilst her most famous fictional series, ‘The Chronicles of Carlingford’, together with a handful of her tales of the supernatural, have gone in and out of print in recent years, the bulk of her fiction and critical writing remains uncollected.

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Mrs Oliphant and F R Oliphant, *The Victorian Age of English Literature* (1892)

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# The Selected Works of Margaret Oliphant

General Editors: **Joanne Shattock** and **Elisabeth Jay**

*The Pickering Masters*

Margaret Oliphant Wilson Oliphant (1828–97) is one of the most important writers of the nineteenth century. She was both prolific and wide ranging in her career which spanned half a century. Primarily known as a novelist Mrs Oliphant is of interest to scholars today both for her wide popularity in her prime and her influential position as reviewer and journalist which saw her become an important critical voice for her generation. Her high profile in the literary world led to savage satirical portrayals in works by Anthony Trollope, Thomas Hardy and Henry James.

This is the most ambitious and substantial scholarly edition of Margaret Oliphant's writings ever undertaken. In six parts and twenty-five volumes all her important fiction plus substantial selections of her criticism and journalism are collected and edited by a prestigious editorial team.

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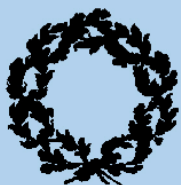
'From a drawing made in 1895, by Janet Mary Oliphant',  
frontispiece in *The Autobiography and Letters of  
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## Part III: Novellas and Shorter Fiction, Essays on Life-Writing and History, Essays on European Literature and Culture

Volume Editors: **Josie Billington, Muireann O’Cinneide, Valerie R Sanders, Joanne Shattock, Joanne Wilkes and Merryn Williams**

*The Pickering Masters*

5 volume set: 2238pp: June 2013

978 1 85196 609 7: 234x156mm: £450/\$795

Part III focuses on Oliphant’s shorter fiction, including two serialized novellas. When *The Curate in Charge* was first published it was greeted as another successful story from Mrs Oliphant’s pen. *Lady Car: The Sequel of a Life* over twenty years later enjoyed a similar reception.

‘Mrs. Oliphant is always at her best in short stories’, declared the *Manchester Guardian* in an 1889 review. The short stories presented here have been selected for their artistic merit, as well as to show the full range of Oliphant’s writing. Her strength, humour and shrewdness are apparent in her stories, which often defy strict categorization, but which can be said to root modernist ambiguity in domestic realism. Her ‘supernatural’ tales follow a different path, one taken in reaction to the growth of scientific materialism and the challenge it presented to Victorian Christianity. They deal with the mystery of life after death and are heavily influenced by her early widowhood as well as the death of her daughter Maggie. The later stories were written in a time of personal crisis, when both her sons died in their early thirties. Though her beliefs became increasingly unorthodox, she never lost her faith in God. These stories are a reflection of a time when a religious belief was expected, but when the trials of life could test it to its core.

Finally, Oliphant’s writing on biography, history and European literature are represented across several journals of the time, most notably *Blackwood’s Magazine* for which she wrote for forty-five years.

### Contents

#### Volume 10: Novellas

*The Curate in Charge*, from *Macmillan’s Magazine* (1875–76) and *Lady Car, The Sequel of a Life*, from *Longman’s Magazine* (1889)

#### Volume 11: Short (Domestic) Fiction

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#### Volume 12: Supernatural Tales

‘The Secret Chamber’, *Blackwood’s Magazine* (1876); *A Beleaguered City* (1880); From *Blackwood’s Magazine*: ‘The Open Door’ (1882), ‘Old Lady Mary’ (1884), ‘The Land of Darkness’ (1887), ‘The Fancies of a Believer’ (1895), ‘The Library Window’ (1896), ‘The Verdict of Old Age’ (1896)

#### Volume 13: Essays on Life-Writing and History

Essays from *Blackwood’s Magazine* (1854–97)

#### Volume 14: Essays on European Literature and Culture

Essays from *Blackwood’s Magazine* (1863–88); Essay from *Cornhill Magazine* (1876); Essay from *Edinburgh Review* (1878); Essay from *Contemporary Review* (1885)



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Volume Editors: **Joseph Bristow**, **Elisabeth Jay**, **Muireann O’Cinneide**, **Lyn Pykett** and **Joanne Shattock**

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5 volume set: c.2000pp: May 2014

978 1 85196 614 1: 234x156mm: £450/\$795

Parts I to III have brought back much of Oliphant’s work as critic, biographer and historian into the contemporary arena and begun the process of selecting the fiction which best represents her multi-faceted achievement as a novelist. The presentation of her finest short stories and novellas in Part III provides an apt introduction to Part IV, devoted to the *Chronicles of Carlingford*, as this provincial saga’s origins also lie in the short story.

When Oliphant’s obituarists approached the formidable task of summing up her long career, even the most diligent among them baulked at a systematic appraisal of her prodigious fictional output. However they all cited the *Chronicles of Carlingford* as amongst her best work.

Part IV offers the first critical edition of the four full length novels and three stories that comprise the *Chronicles of Carlingford*. Each of the five volumes contains a full scholarly apparatus, including the important variations between the serial versions and the first publication in volume format. Oliphant herself certainly saw the instant success of the series as one of the critical turning-points in her long career, and as the series reached its conclusion in *Phoebe, Junior* (1876) offered comparisons which encouraged her readers to judge her contribution to the genre alongside Trollope’s equally popular and long-lasting *Chronicles of Barsetshire*.

### Contents

#### Volume 15

Preliminary Tales: ‘The Executor’, ‘The Rector’ and ‘The Doctor’s Family’

#### Volume 16

*Salem Chapel*

#### Volume 17

*The Perpetual Curate*

#### Volume 18

*Miss Marjoribanks*

#### Volume 19

*Phoebe, Junior*

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General Editors: **Joanne Shattock** and **Elisabeth Jay**

*The Pickering Masters*

*The Selected Works of Margaret Oliphant*

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The six novels contained in these volumes represent some of Margaret Oliphant's most significant work. Darker and more politically motivated than the more comic *Chronicles of Carlingford*, they show Oliphant at the height of her writing powers.

Money, financial crises and social and sexual inequality all feature strongly in these works which find Oliphant sharply critical of materialistic, late-Victorian culture. They mirror her own experiences as a female professional writer having to support her family single-handedly. They also form some of her most popular and enduring works which gained a wide readership through serialization.

The significance of Oliphant as a writer can only be fully appreciated by close study of these novels, which bring to completion this major twenty-five-volume scholarly edition.



Mrs M O W Oliphant

From a photograph by H S Mendelssohn, London

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**Josie Billington**, University of Liverpool

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### Part V

#### Volume 20: *Hester* (1883)

This is a satirical study of a Victorian banking-house. Tensions and frustrations affecting both men and women in Victorian society are explored against a story of changing fortunes. Through the troubled relationship between Hester and the bank's saviour, Catherine Vernon, Oliphant represents a damaging culture of dependency, culminating in a truly shocking climax.

#### Volume 21: *The Wizard's Son* (1884)

This tale of an idle young Englishman, forced to face his demons in the alien setting of the Scottish Highlands, offers an updated version of the age-old literature of spiritual crisis. The novel's reflections on the emotions underlying the soured relationship between a mother and her son, prompted in part by Oliphant's disappointment with her own eldest son, produces some of her finest, if most disturbing, writing.

#### Volume 22: *Kirsteen* (1890)

*Kirsteen* is a novel charting the heroine's attempts to reconcile romantic love, family pride and personal integrity. Set in the early nineteenth century, against the backdrop of the expansion of British interest in India and the Napoleonic wars, Kirsteen leaves her home in the Scottish Highlands for an independent life in London. Oliphant uses these events to explore the contemporary issue of the changing roles of women.

### Part VI

#### Volume 23: *At His Gates* (1872)

This novel is an early investigation of a theme that became increasingly significant for Oliphant – business ethics and financial speculation. Here she focuses on financial reverses and their particular effect on women. She also explores the relationship between truly great art, and art that achieves only ephemeral recognition.

#### Volume 24: *The Ladies Lindores* (1883)

This is a dark tale of a young woman married off by her avaricious father to a violent brute. Her husband's death leads her to embrace widowhood as a blessed release from the servitude of wifedom. The story dissects Victorian middle-class materialist ambition, with its ideals of marriage and domesticity. This mature and admired work shows Oliphant acutely critical of the values of her age.

#### Volume 25: *Old Mr Tredgold* (1895)

Oliphant's last novel offers a scathing appraisal of the materialism which she saw as the overriding sin of the Victorian era. Set in a sharply-observed world created by new wealth and hedonism, this work demonstrates the author's ability to continue taking the measure of the very varied places and people she had met in her five decades as a successful writer.

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