PRE-FEMINIST INDICATORS IN MARGARET OLIPHANT’S
EARLY RESPONSES TO THE WOMAN QUESTION

DISSERTATION

Presented to the Graduate Council of the
University of North Texas in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

By

Sandra L. Spencer, B.A., M.A.
Denton, Texas
December, 1996
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Margaret Oliphant's fiction has generated some interest in recent years, but her prose essays have been ignored. Critics contend her essays are unimportant and dismiss Oliphant as a hack writer who had little sympathy with her sex. These charges are untrue, however, because many influences complicated Oliphant's writings on the Woman Question. She suffered recurring financial difficulties and gender discrimination, she lacked formal education, and most of her work was published by *Blackwood's*, a conservative, male-oriented periodical edited by a close personal friend. Readers who are aware of these influences find Oliphant's earliest three essays about the Woman Question especially provocative because in them Oliphant explored the dichotomy between the perceived and the real lives of women. Oliphant refined her opinions each time she wrote on the Woman Question, and a more coherent, more clearly feminist, perspective emerges in each succeeding article.

In "The Laws Concerning Women," despite Oliphant's apparent position, pre-feminist markers suggest that she is tentative about feminist ideas rather than negative towards
them. "The Condition of Women" offers even more pre-feminist markers, Oliphant's ostensible support of the patriarchal status quo notwithstanding. In "The Great Unrepresented," an article cited by some as proof that Oliphant was against women's suffrage, she argues not against enfranchising women, but against the method proposed for securing the vote. In this article, many pre-feminist markers have become decidedly feminist.

Scholars may have overlooked Oliphant's feminism because her rhetorical strategies are more complicated than those of most other Victorian critics and invite her audience to read between the lines. Although her writing sometimes lacks unity and focus, and her prose is often turgid, convoluted, and digressive, she creates elaborate inverse arguments with claims supporting patriarchy but evidence that supports feminism.

A rich feminist subtext lies beneath the surface text of Oliphant's essays, demonstrating that her perspective on the Woman Question is far more complex than it initially appears.
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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION: MARGARET OLIPHANT
AND THE WOMAN QUESTION

"No one will ever mention me in the same breath as George Eliot. And that is just." So states Margaret Oliphant in her autobiography (17). For the most part, modern critics agree with Oliphant’s self-assessment. For example, Elaine Showalter in *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists From Brontë to Lessing* (1977) discusses Oliphant as one of the minor novelists in the female tradition. But despite her relegation to the ranks of relatively unimportant Victorian writers, Oliphant has generated increased scholarly interest as of late. John Stock Clarke published a bibliography of Oliphant’s fiction in 1986. In 1990, Elisabeth Jay revamped Oliphant’s *Autobiography and Letters*, which had been edited by Oliphant’s cousin Annie Coghill and published posthumously. Elizabeth Langland devotes a chapter to Oliphant in *Nobody’s Angels: Middle-Class Women and Domestic Ideology in Victorian Culture* (1995), describing how Oliphant’s heroines subvert the angel-in-the-house ideal. D. J. Trela edited a collection of essays on Oliphant in 1995; half of the
collection is devoted to her fiction. Jay also composed a recent biography, *Mrs. Oliphant: A Fiction to Herself* (1995), a holistic treatment of Oliphant, but one which devotes considerably more attention to Oliphant's fiction than her nonfiction. At least four doctoral dissertations and one master's thesis have focused on Oliphant. One of these discusses romantic elements in her literary criticism; the others concentrate on her fiction.

The great majority of attention paid to Oliphant's work, then, has focused on her novels, which again are considered relatively minor. Analysis of Oliphant's nonfiction is virtually nonexistent, but in contrast to her fiction, her nonfiction cannot be considered unimportant or uninteresting. Her voluminous canon includes biographies, literary reviews and histories, essays, travel articles, literary and social criticism, and many works which defy categorization. Some Oliphant articles fit into three or four categories, making assessment even more challenging. As she published over three hundred periodical articles, most of which have not been republished elsewhere, accessibility is also a factor.

But probably the primary reason Oliphant's nonfiction is neglected is readability. Victorian essays are challenging to read because they tend to be exhaustingly comprehensive, and Oliphant's essays are no exception. In
addition, she is digressive and often stubbornly opinionated. Yet, as Trela notes, "The range and volume of her criticism mark her as very likely the most important woman critic of the era" (VPR 90). As one of few woman critics, she provides a rare perspective on a culture whose strong gender beliefs are being challenged.

Oliphant's essays discussing the Woman Question contain some of her most provocative writing. The Woman Question, as the Victorians themselves referred to it, was indeed an inquiry in every sense of the word. In brief, the Woman Question encompassed the era-long discourse on the biological, cultural, moral, social, religious, political, and legal status of women. One critic states,

Almost any public statement bearing on the Woman Question—whether an essay, a review, a novel, a poem, a lecture, a cartoon, or a painting—was likely to generate a chain of responses, and to be read as a response to prior statements in an ongoing public discussion. (Helsinger xi)

And because debate was popular with the Victorians, the Woman Question initiated many impassioned articles and much inflammatory rhetoric as writer after writer vied for the last word on the subject.

Oliphant wrote five articles specifically addressing the Woman Question during her career. Written between 1856
and 1866, the first three articles were published by Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine. They offer a wealth of material for a discussion of feminist issues. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the word "feminist" had only been in use since 1846—ten years before Oliphant's first article on the Woman Question—and the term was synonymous with "feminine" at the time. Feminism as it is perceived now originated in Victorian literary circles with women writers who were passionately concerned with the position of women in society, and published works which exposed the hypocrisies, and protested against the injustices, of Victorian patriarchy. For the most part, however, Victorian feminism was a solidly middle-class movement which did not engage with wider analyses of social structures. It also rarely challenged the dominant view that men and women are essentially different, and many feminists still felt that motherhood was woman's supreme function in life. Campaigns around issues of sexuality generally aimed to curtail male sexuality rather than free female libido. For many feminists religion was a strong motivating force. (Bloomsbury 540)
Oliphant's writing reflects both the Victorian and modern concepts of feminism.

Oliphant's feminism is often so covertly woven into her writing that contemporary critics miss it entirely. Many, in fact, accuse her of being anti-feminist, and a cursory reading of her nonfiction supports that accusation. But Oliphant's views on the Woman Question are, as Trela notes, "much more complex and, generally speaking, more progressive than she is generally given credit for" (Essays 13).

Indeed, critics may overlook Oliphant's feminism because her rhetorical strategies are different from and more complicated than those of most other nineteenth-century women's rights advocates. Her turgid prose taxes readers as she composes long, complex sentences and single paragraphs which sometimes extend to four and five pages. Many of her paragraphs have three and four topics as well, and her arbitrary punctuation is often distracting. She sprinkles foreign words and phrases--many of them too esoteric for many readers--throughout her articles. Her vocabulary is extensive.

Oliphant frequently forces her audience to read between the lines, a common rhetorical strategy often attributed to Victorian women writers. Perhaps Oliphant's concealment strategies were very sophisticated because most of her critical work was published by Blackwood's Edinburgh
Magazine, a conservative, male-oriented periodical. Oliphant's ambiguous, suggestive subtext occurs too frequently and too consistently to be pre-Freudian slips; her subtext is often more significant than the text itself.

Many external factors forced Oliphant into writing between the lines as well. She was continually besieged by money problems, she had no formal education, and she suffered gender discrimination. Her husband and children all died young, and both her brothers relied on her financial help. Oliphant's position as a literary critic for Blackwood's and her relationship with John Blackwood and his family also had profound effects on what and how she wrote. Each of these factors affected her perspective on the Woman Question as well.

"The Laws Concerning Women," the first of Oliphant's Woman Question articles, appeared in Blackwood's in April, 1856, early in her critical career. Oliphant wrote the article in response to Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon's publication A Brief Summary in Plain Language of the Most Important Laws Concerning Women, which is often cited as the catalyst for the British feminist movement.

Oliphant's first article on the Woman Questions reveals her inexperience as a social critic. Her reasoning is often flawed while her arguments are convoluted and sometimes specious. She had previously written articles criticizing
literature for Blackwood's, none of which are as poorly argued as "The Laws Concerning Women." The article seems hurried and shallow.

Despite Oliphant's adamant objection to Bodichon's publication, however, a few pre-feminist markers appear in the young critic's article. These markers reveal places where she is tentative about feminist ideas and where her rhetoric consequently wavers. The markers also foreshadow which feminist ideas Oliphant will later incorporate for her own perspective on the Woman Question.

Almost two years later, in February, 1858, Oliphant's second article on the Woman Question, "The Condition of Women," appeared in Blackwood's. Oliphant is much more in control of her rhetoric in this article than she was earlier, which is somewhat surprising because she has more material to cover. She responds to several articles and books about women. Some of her earlier problems in organization resurface, but that, too, has improved. She furnishes more examples and has a more lucid pattern of reasoning than before.

Oliphant has obviously considered the Woman Question in depth since writing the earlier article, and readers again encounter her pre-feminist markers. The markers are more clearly defined in "The Condition of Women," and despite her
support of the patriarchal status quo, Oliphant moves toward feminism.

Oliphant's third Woman Question article is the best known of the three. "The Great Unrepresented" features Oliphant's response to John Stuart Mill's petition for the enfranchisement of women householders; it appeared in the August 1866 edition of *Blackwood's*. Critics often cite this article as proof that Oliphant was anti-suffrage, but she condemns the methodology of Mill's plan more than the premise of women's voting. Her prose is much more direct than in either of the earlier articles, but her view has turned cynical and pessimistic.

"The Great Unrepresented" is laden with subtext, some of it blatantly feminist. Oliphant's rhetoric is sharper, but she seems to have little faith that the political system is capable of settling the Woman Question. In some instances, pre-feminist markers become feminist markers, and at times Oliphant sounds quite radical.

Oliphant viewed the role of women in fiction and nonfiction as well as in society at a critical juncture in women's history. She attempted not only to explain changes, but also to explore dichotomies she saw between the perceived and the real lives of women. Throughout all of her articles on the Woman Question, she tries to coax a
consensus from an audience that may vehemently disagree with her opinions about women's issues.

But Oliphant herself seems to have trouble arriving at a conclusive decision of what she really believes about women. Her opinions are often contradictory and confusing, especially in the first article, and her ambivalence makes her appear indecisive. She refines her opinions each time she composes an article on the Woman Question for Blackwood's, and a more coherent perspective emerges with each succeeding article.

Oliphant's essays were for her, and, to a lesser extent to readers, an epistemological activity which helps one frame opinions, make judgments, and evaluate trends. Whether composing novels, critical articles, or her own autobiography, writing seems to help her make sense of the world around her. The complex arguments she poses when discussing women's issues seem to be a playing out of her own thoughts, an empirical foray into uncharted territory where she is unsure of what she will find. Her earliest attempts to address the Woman Question sometimes result in paradox or self-contradiction, but the complexities exemplify the kind of re-examination and re-evaluation thoughtful, intelligent people make as they are confronted by new and revolutionary ideas.
CHAPTER TWO

"THE LAWS CONCERNING WOMEN": 'A FAIR FIELD AND NO FAVOUR'

The April 1856 issue of Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine featured "The Laws Concerning Women," written in response to Barbara Leigh Smith's (later Bodichon) popular pamphlet "A Brief Summary, in Plain Language of the Most Important Laws Concerning Women: Together with a Few Observations Thereon." The first edition of the pamphlet had been published in 1854, the second in 1856. Contemporary reception to Margaret Oliphant's article is scanty, indicating it generated little reaction. But in the wake of the twentieth-century feminist movement, critics often cite Oliphant’s article because it illustrates Victorian resistance to changing coverture laws, and because Oliphant so pointedly disagrees with Bodichon. But a close examination of "The Laws Concerning Women" reveals many rhetorical ambiguities which suggest that Oliphant is perhaps not as blatantly anti-feminist as she first appears. And while her response certainly is a strident denouncement of the feminist movement, Oliphant does not wholeheartedly support the patriarchal model either, something feminist
critics often overlook. Historical context aside, the article reveals much about the author’s personal struggle to understand gender issues.

British marriage laws had fueled many heated public and private debates before Oliphant’s response to Bodichon in 1856. Historians usually credit Caroline Norton’s much-publicized battle for custody of her children in the 1830s as the catalyst for public discussion of the marriage laws. The Norton debacle focused public attention on some of the problems inherent in the marriage laws, but not everyone—not even all women—agreed that these laws should be changed. Personal injustices motivated some women such as Norton and Anna Jameson to challenge the existing laws. And despite Norton’s crusade to better the legal lot of married women, even she stopped short of claiming that women and men were equal. She declared, “The wild and stupid theories advanced by a few women of ‘equal rights’ and ‘equal intelligence’ . . . . I for one (I, with millions more), believe in the natural superiority of man, as I do in the existence of a God” (qtd. in Herstein 49).

While women such as Bodichon and Harriet Taylor (who later married John Stuart Mill) took a radical stand, others, such as Elizabeth Lynn (later Eliza Lynn Linton), advocated limited legal changes but nevertheless supported the more conservative belief that the traditional role of
women should be preserved. In 1854, Lynn summarized the Norton case and sought change in "One of Our Legal Fictions," an article published by Charles Dickens in Household Words. Lynn called for reform of the marriage laws, reiterating the concern that "the law governing a married woman's property left wives unprotected and vulnerable" (Shanley 29). Indeed, throughout the 1850's readers could not escape the flurry of opinions on the Woman Question.

Yet the response to Bodichon's "Brief Summary" was somewhat different. The pamphlet itself was divided into six categories: The Legal Conditions of Unmarried Women or Spinsters, Laws Concerning Married Women, Usual Precautions Against the Laws Concerning the Property of Married Women, Separation and Divorce, Laws Concerning a Widow, and Laws Concerning Women in Other Relationships. The summary is a straightforward exposition of the legal status of women in each category and, with the exception of the mentally incompetent, encapsulates the status of virtually every adult woman in England. Sheila Herstein says,

It began by explaining the legal conditions of single women--their ability to own property, their position as heirs, their ability to vote on parish questions but not for members of Parliament, their responsibility as property owners to pay taxes
despite disfranchisement. The legal and social restrictions on employment for single women were detailed. (71-72)

On one hand, Bodichon's pamphlet merely summarized laws that had been a matter of public record for a long time. On the other, however, this document had a more powerful effect than anything previously written on women's rights because it "set forth in concise and plain language the laws bearing on women's estate. The cumulative effect of this simple listing of married women's disabilities was devastating" (Shanley 32).

The success of Bodichon's summary is not surprising, given the extraordinarily complex nature of the woman who wrote it. Her grandfather, William Smith, member of parliament from Norwich, was a Rational Dissenter who was a friend of William Wilberforce, Sir Joshua Reynolds, and many other noted artists and politicians. Bodichon's father, Benjamin Smith, also moved in important circles, entertaining people such as Harriet Martineau, Lord Brougham, and the like. The Smith children, unlike most other Victorian youngsters, were urged not only to listen but to share in conversations with these guests.

But for reasons unknown, Bodichon's father never married Anne Longden, the mother of his five children. She died when Bodichon was seven years old. The irregular union
of their parents affected Bodichon and her siblings throughout their lives. Many of their relatives refused to see or even acknowledge "the forbidden family" (qtd. in Herstein 10). Florence Nightingale, Bodichon's first cousin, did not become friends with her until both were well into adulthood. Legally, the children could not bear the Smith name, nor could they use the family coat-of-arms.

The family traveled extensively and, when home, the children were tutored by James Buchanan, a follower of socialist reformer Robert Owen. Buchanan had taught in Owen's utopian New Lanark community, and he urged the children to read and discuss whatever they wanted, as did their father. The reading matter of most Victorian children, meanwhile, was tightly censored by parents and teachers. In her early twenties, Bodichon entered the Ladies' College in Bedford Square shortly after it opened. There she studied art, political economy, and law.

Free-thinking Benjamin Smith was a wealthy man, and he bestowed on each of his children a lifetime income of three hundred pounds per year as each reached the age of twenty-one. This income afforded Bodichon financial security and independence few other Victorian women enjoyed, and she recognized the social power her money afforded. Although wealth did not erase the social stigma of her illegitimacy, having money certainly gave her freedom to voice opinions
and pursue courses that otherwise would have been impossible.

Bodichon's background provided fertile ground for planting the seeds of the feminist movement that sprung from her "Brief Summary." Unlike Norton and Jameson, she personally had no legal inequity to redress, and unlike Lynn and Oliphant, she had no audience on whom her livelihood depended. Bodichon felt no need to conform to societal conventions imposed upon other Victorian women. Her dispassionate presentation of the facts became a catalyst for action, and the pamphlet became a key document in the subsequent political agitation that gradually changed the legal position of married English women, which had remained unaltered since William Blackstone had so approvingly described it a hundred years earlier. Leigh-Smith's simplified explanation of the laws concerning women immediately sparked debate in the press and among political figures who subsequently carried the debate into Parliament and successfully sponsored the Divorce Act of 1857, the Married Women's Property Act of 1870, and its successor act of 1882. These three acts transformed the legal position of married women in England. (Boll 299)
Bodichon's timing is crucial; a quarter-century of lively discussion had drawn the issues into the public consciousness, and her unemotional presentation is articulate and direct. She lists the unvarnished facts, a rhetorical strategy which appears to allow readers to draw their own conclusions but which actually implies that only one conclusion can be drawn. As Bodichon has no personal agenda to pursue, the document is untinged with self-interest. But perhaps the most important feature of the document is its clarity: a testament to Bodichon's intelligence and education. All these factors contributed to the success of the "Brief Summary" and, more importantly, to its publication coalescing the feminist movement in England.

Hence, Oliphant's task in responding to the Summary is quite formidable. Bodichon has virtually no constraints on her composition while Oliphant has many. First, Oliphant must satisfy Blackwood's, her employer; she cannot offend the periodical's ultra-conservative audience. Even if she agrees in principle with Bodichon--and on some points she does--as a good journalist she is aware that her audience dictates the parameters of her response. Oliphant's readers also expect her to say something new about a subject which is becoming rather shop-worn by this time. Furthermore, Oliphant's economic needs in writing for Blackwood's
outweigh any desire for self-expression, although social awareness is certainly a factor in her composition. When she responds to the Summary, Oliphant has been a regular contributor to the periodical for only a year, so she is still proving her worth, especially in commenting on a document more philosophical than literary. Heretofore, her critical writing for the periodical has focused almost exclusively on authors, readers, and books. Hence, her affiliation with Blackwood's creates a multi-layered filter for her response to Bodichon.

A second factor is Oliphant's intellectual and critical background. Only a year apart in age, she and Bodichon may have shared similar intellectual capacities, but their educational backgrounds were radically different. Oliphant grew up in a Scottish family of modest means and was probably homeschooled by her mother and older brothers. Oliphant's learning pales when compared to Bodichon's avant-garde education. Bodichon's background seems to have sharpened her critical thinking skills, giving her an intellectual advantage at this early stage in both women's writing careers.

Finally, Bodichon's life is relatively unencumbered at the time she formulated the Summary, while Oliphant has a full complement of professional and familial duties. In 1855, the year before she wrote "The Laws Concerning Women,"
Oliphant wrote nine critical articles and a serialized novel, Zaidee: A Romance, for Blackwood's; in 1856, the periodical published four other Oliphant articles before the April publishing of her response to Bodichon's pamphlet.

The two years preceding the publication of "The Laws Concerning Women" had been very difficult for Oliphant as well: a daughter was born and died ten months later; her mother, whom she nursed, died after a lingering illness; an infant son was born and died on the same day. And Oliphant, who was again pregnant, was also the mother of a three-year-old daughter when she wrote the article.

The impact of motherhood on Oliphant should not be underestimated, as indeed, Tillie Olsen claims it should not be for any woman writer. "More than in any other human relationship, overwhelmingly more, motherhood means being instantly interruptable, responsive, responsible," Olsen states (37). Hence, she claims, "It is distraction, not meditation, that becomes habitual; interruption, not continuity; spasmodic, not constant, toil" (53), conditions corroborated by many women writers cited in Olsen's book. Disjunctive elements in Oliphant's writing support Olsen's observations.

Oliphant enjoyed motherhood and considered it her primary role, so her writing was most often done at night, after her children were in bed and her household chores were
finished. In the introduction to Oliphant's autobiography, Q.D. Leavis notes, "Mrs. Oliphant could not claim as special consideration, exemption from home duties, and the privilege of privacy, which were accorded automatically to a man in the same position" (Autobiography 14). In later years, Oliphant wondered if her career would not have been more successful had these constraints not been present. Bodichon, meanwhile, appears to have had few claims on her time, energy, and thoughts, so she could focus more intently and devote more intellectual rigor to her writing.

Given the multitudinous factors surrounding Oliphant's composition of "The Laws Concerning Women," her loose focus and confused rhetorical tactics are explainable. Unlike Bodichon, she is a novice at philosophical argument. A paragraph-by-paragraph analysis reveals several interesting factors that illustrate her uncertainty as either a thinker or a writer. A bathetic structure emerges almost immediately, wherein she lays elaborate groundwork for disassembling Bodichon's argument, but on arriving at the crux of an explanation, Oliphant retreats entirely.

Close analysis also reveals a rhetorical cleavage almost midway in the essay. Oliphant spends the first six paragraphs discussing ideological reasons for not changing the marriage laws; much of this discourse is necessarily abstract, and she arrives at most of her assertions through
deduction. In the remaining nine paragraphs, however, she discusses concrete examples of relationships between men and women, parent and child, court and citizen. This discussion shifts from the abstract to the concrete, and many of her conclusions are drawn from inductive reasoning. Most of Oliphant's rhetorical difficulty occurs when she uses deductive reasoning or when she discusses abstract issues. Hence, the first part of the essay is more difficult to understand. Once she shifts to a more pragmatic approach, however, her gender-based claims are not only less biased but in some cases are even quite enlightened.

From the very outset, Oliphant's rhetorical strategies send mixed messages to her readers. She begins with a touch of wry humor, stating that injuries to women "are indeed so good to make novels and poems about, so telling as illustrations of patience and gentleness, that we fear any real redress of grievances would do more harm to the literary world than it would do good to the feminine" (Blackwoods 79:379). This droll comment could indicate that she does not take women's complaints about legal inequity very seriously, but it also suggests a subtextual sarcasm, a subtle black humor even, about the unlikelihood of these wrongs ever actually being righted. Regardless of her rhetorical intentions, however, Oliphant presents a sympathetic persona for her audience. But lest her readers
think the article flippant because of her humor, she abruptly shifts tone, warning them that she finds the Bodichon pamphlet serious business.

Oliphant moves on to a one-sentence précis of the pamphlet which she succinctly describes as "a quiet summary of real laws and positive (apparent) injustices" (379). Oliphant claims that she has no desire to impede any needed changes that are prudent, but her tone abruptly changes as she begins attacking Bodichon's rhetoric. "But words and terms are unchancy things to deal with," she claims, "and half the quarrels in the world come from different interpretations put by different people on the same phraseology" (379). Drawing her audience's attention to how words can be both manipulated and misconstrued may be a little chancy in itself, given her tongue-in-cheek comment about redressing real grievances earlier in the paragraph. Some of her readers might astutely assume, of course, that Oliphant could manipulate words as well as Bodichon. Moreover, Oliphant's assessment of how differently people interpret the identical words could even be an elaborate disclaimer, posing a critical gauntlet for her readers, challenging them to interpret her words on more than one level.

Indeed, her next few sentences invite just such scrutiny. An analysis reveals subtle rhetorical devices for
leading her audience to believe that she supports the status quo. Oliphant uses words and phrases such as "seems," "appears," "at first glance," and "at the surface," suggesting readers weigh each idea, each word carefully to test the validity of her opponent's ideas, hinting that Bodichon's argument may be specious. This rhetorical strategy provides a perfect segue for Oliphant to dissemble the Summary point by point as she moves from the introduction into the second paragraph, but this does not occur. Instead, Oliphant retreats just when she has led her audience to believe she is mounting a successful offensive.

Her reticence to confront Bodichon openly is as confounding as it is revealing. Oliphant may have relied on her readers having a thorough familiarity with the Summary, rendering a point-by-point assault redundant. As the Summary sparked much public debate (see Helsinger, Bell, and others), perhaps someone had already addressed the document in this fashion. If such a discussion had occurred, Oliphant risks insulting her readership if she uses the same tactics unless she can add something new. Her avoidance of the obvious method for addressing the issue, especially when she has meticulously laid the groundwork for it, and her lack of explanation in doing so leaves readers unsure of where her argument is leading.
In addition, Oliphant closes the introductory paragraph by questioning whether or not those seeking to change the laws regarding women are on "just ground." Logic again suggests that she will immediately begin dismantling the opponent’s "just ground"; and again this she does not do. And after raising these issues, she immediately retreats as though she has lost her train of thought or has set her work aside and returned to it less sure and less committed to her original perspective.

This bathos is probably not intentional; Oliphant’s rhetorical skills and her style are simply not that sophisticated. Instead, this structure suggests that while she is sure of Blackwood’s position, she is less sure of how to support it. On these occasions, she makes obvious rhetorical blunders, resorting to logical fallacies, unsupported assertions, and ambiguous pronoun usage, in hopes of convincing her audience that her counter argument is better than Bodichon’s argument.

Oliphant’s argument begins on a weak note, with a series of couched phrases that would be superfluous if she were arguing a strong case. She asserts that she finds "class legislation" (treating women as a class) somewhat suspect and particularly objectionable because doing so "could make the man an intentional and voluntary oppressor of the woman" (379). She adds "for our own part" and "to
our thinking" when introducing support for this assertion, additions that weaken her claim rather than bolstering it and that cast a tentative tone on the assertion as well. Oliphant stumbles as she moves between assertion and evidence here, and the parenthetical qualifiers resting on first-person plural pronouns do not strengthen her point.

Paradoxically, she may also be guilty of doing the very thing she accuses Bodichon of doing: she relegates her audience to a "one size fits all" category. Her rhetoric wavers, and the essay's focus loses its initial essence of mutual resolve, despite her obvious attempts at inclusiveness. Oliphant also establishes a pattern of using "we," "us," and "our" arbitrarily, an ambiguity which almost always signals lack of evidence for her claims.

In the opening paragraph, for example, Oliphant uses an editorial "we" which subtly draws the reader into her perspective. She lightheartedly aligns herself with her audience as she exclaims in mock horror what righting women's wrongs would do to the literary world. In her next sentence, the first-person plural assumes a very different role, however, one more pointed and exclusive. "We speak with a very serious and well-meaning pamphlet on the subject before us . . ." she continues (379). While still editorial in nature, this usage of "we" and "us" creates an image of reader and writer separately examining Bodichon's pamphlet.
In the very next sentence, the editorial usage abruptly shifts into what can only be described as a thinly-veiled "I" conveying Oliphant's personal opinion, which she attributes to her audience as well. "We have no desire, for our own part, to throw ridicule upon any temperate and well-considered movement of real social amelioration . . ." (379) she contends, but her rhetoric appears much more tentative. This use of "we" is neither subtle nor wholly successful as it is obviously used to buttress her personal beliefs. "We" lacks the needed sincerity for her reader to wholeheartedly concur with Oliphant's point-of-view.

Oliphant also subtly shifts her attack from Bodichon's summary to the new feminist movement in this passage. She claims that polarizing the sexes "is the first grand mistake of a movement which certainly has the appearance of justice on its side" (380). Her couched phrase "the appearance of justice" reveals she does not share the movement's ideology, but it also suggests that Oliphant recognizes her opponent's viewpoint. Oliphant further expounds that all mankind has not conspired against all womankind in creating these laws. Despite the evenhandedness of her assertion, however, her warrant flounders. "The laws which govern human intercourse are for the most part only fixed and arbitrary demonstrations of natural rights and necessities . . ." she says (380).
Alan Ryan comments on Victorian assumptions about “nature” in his book on John Stuart Mill and the history of ideas. Ryan notes that the Victorians had “a widespread belief that social arrangements are ‘natural’ . . . . and had the vulgar habit of confusing social custom with the dictates of God as ‘Nature’” (156). As Oliphant describes no specific natural right or necessity, she probably shares the “vulgar habit” with her contemporaries.

In what seems to be a fit of frustration, she resorts to ad hominem tactics. “Vanity of reasoning . . . fallacious . . . untrustworthy . . .” she says, spewing out accusations that cheapen her argument and weaken her position. Her exasperation may lie in her inability to articulate ideas as much as it lies with the feminist movement itself, however.

Oliphant furnishes an example to prove her claim, but, ironically, the example further reveals the slippery rhetorical slope on which she stands. She downshifts from the antagonism of mankind versus womankind in the objective sense to a more subjective antagonism, that between a particular husband and wife. "Let us grant," she says, "that in most cases they have their differences; that they do a little private fighting quietly under their own roof on various domestic occasions; that Elysian harmony and content is by no means a prevailing atmosphere even in the happiest
households . . . ." (380). But when she attempts to develop her example deductively to show that antagonism works the same way in the abstract as it does in the particular, she fails miserably.

Oliphant’s secondary support also miscarries because she relies on other abstract concepts to support the first. While this tack is not unheard of, especially in Victorian essays, at some point in the explanation the writer must focus on the concrete to facilitate understanding. This Oliphant neglects to do. She theorizes “Marriage is like dying—as distinct, as irrevocable, as complete” and “these two are one person,” because “it is a mere truism of nature” (380), claims which beg for elaboration. She forges no link between dying and marital discord, and she furnishes no explanation of how nature legitimates coverture, retreating once more to the Victorian confusion cited by Ryan. But given the critical skills of her readership and increasing demands for scientific proof, Oliphant’s neglect in further developing her subject suggests she could not provide this reasoning for either herself or her audience.

Oliphant ultimately offers a tangential explanation for husband and wife being considered one, however. “The more independent husband and wife are of each other, the less sure is the basis of society,” she states (380), yet another theory which she does not develop. Hence, the fabric of her
argument unravels by the fourth paragraph as she fails to elaborate on any of her assertions. As Oliphant's prose often borders on prolixity--many of her paragraphs are almost two columns long--her neglected development indicates that she believes her assertion, but she is not sure why, nor can she explain the grounds of her belief.

And once again, the ambiguous use of first-person pronouns signals rhetorical confusion for Oliphant. On one hand, the usage is editorial: She states, "Let us grant . . ." and "Most of us have outgrown the utilitarian principle . . ." and "Our proposition remains unaltered" (380). But on the other, she says, "Under the intolerable sting of injustice, we may chafe and strain at the chain that binds us . . ." (380). The use of "we" here could be editorial, but "we" could also mean wives, husbands, all women, all men, or anyone treated unjustly. Speaking in a male voice seems to interfere with Oliphant's assertion here. Her usage is not only unclear, but each possible referent suggests a different understanding of the sentence itself. If, for example, "we" refers to wives, Oliphant is acknowledging that some women feel constrained by marriage. Leavis notes that Oliphant's fiction contains "A repeated theme . . . that of the wife who suffers disillusionment as to her husband or whose apparently happy married life has actually been a bondage or imprisonment . . ." (28).
Although Leavis speculates that Oliphant's marriage had little connection with this recurring theme, the observation implies that Oliphant is not as naive as many feminist critics assume.

If "we" signifies all women, however, then Oliphant has identified with the very movement she condemns, however slight that identification may be. If she uses "we" in reference to anyone who has been mistreated, the tone of the whole passage changes, and the writer's persona shifts to that of martyr, which causes a tonal change as well. These possibilities dramatically change the reading of this paragraph, and authorial intent is important but is not clear. Perhaps it was not clear to Oliphant herself either.

Last, the paragraph does not really have a conclusion; it careens to a halt with little sense of closure. The final sentence reads,

Nor can we accept individual hardship in a dozen or in a hundred cases as sufficient motive for the alteration of a rule which regulates the fate of millions, which is no invented tyranny, but which, to a plain and visible arrangement of nature, pronounces its emphatic Amen! (380)

Oliphant's convoluted sentence reflects her likewise-convoluted thinking. The three uses of "which" are problematic because they have no clear referents, and the
seven prepositional phrases make finding these referents difficult. She uses "plain" and "visible" dismissively, almost daring her readers to refute her theories, and implying that no right-thinking person could see the issue otherwise. And while she tries building to a crescendo at the end, her sentence lacks the force needed to make this final commentary convincing. The pronoun "its" also has an unclear referent. Who or what pronounces the emphatic Amen that ends the sentence? Context suggests that nature is the referent, but construction of the sentence affords other possibilities. The ending may also simply signify an authorial posturing wherein Oliphant herself intrudes with a "So there" ending, taking the moral high ground trying to eliminate further discussion on a subject she feels passionately about but cannot adequately explain.

Finally, after five paragraphs of prefatory material, Oliphant returns to Bodichon's document. But her return is both muddled and contradictory. Somewhat triumphantly, she notes,

For all the laws complained of as affecting women concern themselves with women married; women unmarried are under no humiliations of legal bondage. It is the wife, and not the woman, whose separate existence the law denies. This is a fiction in one sense, but not in another; in one
Her italics indicate that she will take Bodichon to task about married women's rights, which she does, but the contradictions she poses are never explained.

What is even more extraordinary, however, is that Oliphant overlooks almost half of Bodichon's treatise, the opening of which summarizes the legal status of unmarried women or spinsters. Although the Summary is an indictment of laws regarding married women, those cited for single women are likewise inflammatory. Bodichon mentions that single women cannot vote for members of Parliament, despite having to pay the same taxes to the State as their male counterparts (Bell et al 300). She further states that women have little, if any, opportunity to pursue a career in the church, in government, in the legal profession, or in medicine; what little employment is open to them has almost no opportunity for advancement because women may only "occupy inferior stations" (qtd. in Herstein 23). Financial need, not personal fulfillment, generated concern from single women about employment, as not all of them could hope to marry.

Furthermore, single women have no legal recourse when they have been seduced; their fathers may take legal action, but the victim herself cannot. Bodichon also cites
inequities in inheritance laws, specifically how the laws of
primogeniture and male inheritance generally preclude women
inheriting real estate. Bodichon concludes this section by
noting that single women nonetheless are bound by the same
contractual agreements as men (Bell et al 301). Bodichon’s
other two sections on unmarried women, which focus on laws
pertaining to widows and women in other relationships
(common-law marriages, contractual agreements, women
represented by agents, mothers of illegitimate children,
etc.) are as regressive as her opening section. Oliphant’s
title indicates her response will cover laws concerning all
women; hence, she errs in neglecting to discuss the laws
regarding single women.

This paragraph signals a topic shift in the essay from
marriage to coverture itself. Reiterating her earlier
stance, Oliphant contends that Husband and Wife can not be
considered as anything except a single entity, her primary
assertion throughout the essay. Once again, she makes a
strong claim, and although her support for it is sometimes
weak and even contradictory, Oliphant gains back some of her
lost rhetorical ground in this passage. For example, she
acknowledges the difficulty of discussing, or even
describing, the abstract two-are-one issue: “It is hard to
enter upon this subject without falling into the
authoritative hardness of legal phraseology, or the sweet
jargon of poetic nonsense, on one side or the other," she states (380). She then compares a phrase from Bodichon’s summary—"The wife loses her rights as a single woman, and her existence is entirely absorbed in that of her husband," with a poetic line "A guardian angel o’er his life presiding / Doubling his pleasures, and his cares dividing" (380). Neither description satisfies Oliphant, and she shuns both, claiming, "The one utterance is somewhat humiliating, the other unquestionably pretty; and both fail of the truth" (380).

Oliphant instead proposes a more egalitarian, even androgynous, perspective wherein "The wife is the husband quite as much as the husband is the wife" (381). Her unconventional interpretation is novel for a Victorian writer, but articulating abstract ideas once more proves troubling and results in confusing rhetorical strategies. Nevertheless, the thread of her argument is much more accessible than it was earlier in the essay.

Oliphant begins the explanation by bracketing away the people she considers atypical married folk: those who are temperamental, overly-sensitive, or given to "states of exalted feeling" (381). "The broad general principle crushes over them, regardless of their outcries," she states. And although she admits that injustices or imbalances may be found in marriages of all classes, the
legal system, in principle, must function for the good of the institution itself. She adopts inductive reasoning here, claiming, it is "unjust to fit our regulations to the chance case instead of to the ordinary," further noting that "No law of human origin can reach every possible development of human temper and organisation; injured wives and unhappy husbands are accidents uncurable by law" (381). Hence, Oliphant acknowledges that two people do not always work compatibly as one, and while the law does not, and possibly cannot, address that problem, once a couple decides to marry, their lives are inextricably bound together. Leaving the realm of the abstract as she begins discussing the legal ramifications of marriage bodes well for Oliphant, and her discussion here is much more lucid than it was earlier.

Although her topic and focus are more clear, Oliphant's development in the next paragraph is confusing. She begins by dismissing the notion that women are intellectually inferior to men. "Every individual woman, we presume, is perfectly easy on her own account that she at least is not remarkably behind her masculine companions; and so long as this is the case, we need fear no grand duel between the two halves of creation," she says (381). After that emphatic declaration, however, she retreats to safer ground, the dangers of a couple not functioning as one, her focus for the rest of the paragraph. Oliphant reiterates the biblical
maxim that “A household divided against itself cannot
stand,” contending that this notion “is the very first
principle of domestic existence . . . . it is vain to think
of forming a single home unless it is built upon this
foundation” (381). On this point she is resolute, comparing
the constitution of a household to the constitution of the
state, and her rhetoric is both authoritative and
convincing. This popular maxim resurfaces in her writing
again thirty years later, in 1886, when she authors a three-
footer novel titled A House Divided Against Itself about the
consequences of a marital separation.

But despite her strong feeling on the subject, her
argument flounders as she attempts to explain how the two
realms of husband and wife are not only separate and equal,
but how they are actually one realm. Once again explaining
the abstract plagues her. Oliphant’s support, which finally
relies on specific examples, well illustrates the Victorian
notion of separate male and female spheres. She asserts
that the wife represents the family in one set of duties,
and the husband represents them in another. She scoffs,
And if any one will tell us that the nursery is
less important than the Exchange, or that it is a
more dignified business to vote for a county
member than to regulate a Christian household, we
will grant that the woman has an inferior range of
duty. Otherwise, there is a perfect balance between the two members of this one person. (381)

Once again, Oliphant's first-person pronoun usage is suspect. "Us" and "we" appear to be editorial in nature, but she uses them heavilyhandedly, daring her audience to disagree, implying that to do so would be both unchristian and unpatriotic. Her word choice of "inferior" may allude to the digressive opening of the paragraph, but, if so, her allusion is somewhat faulty in comparing female mental faculties to female duties.

But what is most troubling about this paragraph is Oliphant's contention that husbands and wives are in a state of perfect balance. Given that the entire article is meant as a rebuttal to Bodichon's summary, Oliphant blatantly ignores the imbalances pointed out in the pamphlet. Once again, the situation calls for a direct assault, one wherein Oliphant does not rely on the patriarchal "party line" but instead countermands each and every marital inequity presented by her opponent. She neatly skirts the issue and only mentions the opposing viewpoint tangentially. She says, "In this view--and we defy the most visionary champion of abstract female rights to disprove that this is the ordinary rule of common society--it is a mere trick of words to say that the woman loses her existence, and is absorbed in her husband" (381). Predictably, Oliphant's
rhetoric again falters as she asks the opposition to prove something by negation, and her earlier claim about the "unchancy nature of words" looms ominously over her own composition here, and she ironically overlooks the very thing that troubles her and many other debaters of the Woman Question even as she articulates it—the abstract notion of "rights", female or otherwise.

Oliphant expounds at length about the impossibility of a losing one's existence in another. What being could totally absorb another and remain unaltered, she asks, answering her own question, "There is no such monster of a man, and no such nonentity of a woman, in ordinary life" (381). Again Oliphant provides an ad hominem argument. Worse yet, in comparing the incalculable effects of one personality on another to the prescribed effects of coverture, she creates a false analogy. The Summary focuses specifically on the legal existence of women, not any other aspect of their lives; Oliphant addresses women's lives in various contexts, but she neglects to mention the legal aspect entirely.

Moreover, Oliphant's next sentence reveals a first-person pronoun use different than any other in the essay. "Which of us does not carry our wife's thoughts in our brain, and our wife's likings in our heart, with the most innocent unconsciousness that they are not our own original
property?" she asks. The six pronouns reveal that Oliphant has assumed a male persona, something that has not been obvious previously in the essay. The irony of this shift happening in a paragraph about wives not losing their existence in their husbands was likely lost on the Victorian audience because of anonymous authorship, but the shift was not likely inadvertent. Assuming a male persona, especially that of a husband, could increase Oliphant's credibility with her male readership. Elisabeth Jay notes, "For Oliphant the act of male impersonation had been a professional decision, dictated by her view of Blackwood's Magazine as the 'most manly and masculine of magazines'" (74).

Citing the male personae adopted by Harriet Martineau in the Edinburgh Review and Elizabeth Rigby in the Quarterly Review, Elaine Showalter claims, "Women journalists initially felt that they got better treatment from the public when they published anonymously and assumed male personae" (59-60). Martineau and Rigby were Oliphant's contemporaries, and she almost assuredly read their work as they wrote for rival periodicals. Hence, she, too, could have shifted to a male persona to curry favor with her readers.

Jay refers to the female assumption of a male persona as "critical cross dressing" (75), a phenomenon observed by
many feminist critics. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar note, for example, that "the most rebellious" nineteenth-century women writers "attempted to solve the literary problem of being female by presenting themselves as male. In effect, such writers protested not that they were 'as good as men' but that, as writers, they were men." Gilbert and Gubar point out that George Sand and George Eliot, two of the women writers who used this tactic well, adopted "a kind of male-impersonation to gain male acceptance of their intellectual seriousness" (65). The analyses of these feminist critics are plausible explanations for Oliphant's male persona in this paragraph, although she hardly fits the profile of a rebel. The adopted persona suggests, however, that Oliphant knows her gender poses a problem for her as a critic. Jay actually contends that "Mrs. Oliphant's awareness of the prejudices operating against women coloured everything she wrote" (75).

Oliphant's use of male persona does not detract from her consistent focus on husband and wife as one entity in this paragraph, however. This is her final paragraph in the first stage of the essay before she shifts rhetorical strategies. Closure is again difficult for her, as it was in the preceding paragraph. She arrogates, "If it is either a legal or a poetic fiction to call man and wife one person, then all sacredness, purity, and noble sentiment, departs
from the bond between them" (382). Oliphant violates two basic rhetorical tenets here: she wantonly uses "all" without considering the ramifications, and she creates a post hoc fallacy as well. To assume that consideration of a husband and wife as two instead of one causes "sacredness, purity, and noble sentiment" to disappear from the marital relationship is faulty cause-and-effect reasoning of the worst sort. Her claim would be valid if she had finished the sentence with "then sacredness, purity, and noble sentiment may depart from the bond between them." "May" would serve as a qualifier, suggesting a threatening risk factor instead of implying a sweeping generalization that sophisticated readers could easily detect.

In the next paragraph, Oliphant begins her discussion of the legal system's role in marriage. Oliphant's prose here is both clear and direct. She wants no one to misinterpret what she believes is the law's relationship to marriage. "Let us not mistake," she says, "The law has nothing to do with that union of souls and sympathies of which lovers dream; but it has to do with the common security, the peace of families, the safe foundation of the social world" (382). Oliphant pointedly develops this claim. She illustrates a marital case study from start to finish, showing how, when, and where the law intervenes. Courtship is before the law, she says, and is at the behest
of "love itself . . . the greatest mischief-maker in the world" (382). Her choice of words here is careful and controlled, keeping her audience solidly on the path of her argument. Labeling love as a "mischief-maker," for example, subtly implies that trouble may arise later in a couple’s relationship, and, when it does, “Before the threshold of this uncertain house stands the law, barring all exit” (82).

She then explains why England’s anti-divorce laws are sound, contending, “The nomadic principle has already too much sway over our social arrangements; here it cannot enter” (382). Her claim is a familiar one to her contemporaries, Victorian sentimentalization of the home often being attributed to a rapidly-changing society that desperately craved stability. Preserving that sanctuary concerned many Victorians who relied on both church and state to enforce social conventions. Oliphant hastens to point out that “The law compels no one, either man or woman, to enter into this perilous estate of marriage; but being once within it, it is the law’s first duty to hedge this important territory round with its strongest and highest barriers” (382). She provides an important rebuttal for Bodichon’s supporters here: marriage is a choice, but once that choice is made, society both expects and enforces a commitment of the individuals involved to the union itself, if not to each other.
The remainder of the paragraph focuses on the efficacy of disallowing divorce. Although she specifically mentions neither the Summary nor the feminist movement's petitions, specters of both loom in the passage. But here Oliphant does the unexpected. The begged questions, the sweeping generalities, the histrionic pronouncements earlier in the essay lead readers to expect more of the same, but she rises above those expectations. Instead she focuses on possible ramifications which could result from changing the divorce and custody laws.

First, Oliphant claims, "It is not possible to permit those who have once been man and wife to go forth to the world separate units, uninjured by the failure of so vital an experiment" (382). She makes no pre-Freudian allowances for psychological injury suffered by those who separate. Oliphant is concerned with society, not individuals, a Darwinian perspective without the scientific component. Immediately, however, she shifts to how justice can best be served in such situations, and, in her estimation, justice is impossible. She says,

It seems a harsh saying, but it is a true one--justice cannot be done between them; their rights are not to be divided; they are beyond the reach of all ordinary principles of equity. In the event of a disjunction between the father and the
mother, the wife and the husband, you must choose which of them you shall be just to; for it is impossible to do justice to both. (382)

Here her rhetoric is direct, free of grandiosity, emotional appeal, and ineffective editorializing. Her sentence structure is clear and her organization coherent. The ambiguous referents and convoluted syntax which clouded her earlier paragraphs are absent. Instead, this paragraph reveals a writer in control of her ideas, abstract and otherwise, a writer who has spent much time thinking about her subject matter and who carefully articulates her perspective.

Oliphant's writing strengths continue in the next paragraph, and here she is a rhetorical opponent worthy of Bodichon. Discussing the abstract, which was so troublesome for her earlier, offers no problem in this paragraph as she shifts to inductive reasoning. The paragraph focuses on the dilemma of child custody and the impossibility of justice in such cases. Oliphant ignores her own motherly feelings and examines the issue objectively. The only flaw in the passage is an important omission in her transition from the previous paragraph: she neglects mentioning married women who have no children or whose children are grown. And although this condition was not the norm, including these women would have added breadth to her discussion. The
omission leaves only a slight disjuncture in an otherwise cohesive passage, however.

Children, Oliphant claims, are "living witnesses of the undividableness of the parents" (382). Broaching the subject of parental rights carefully and evenhandedly, she states,

You give their custody to the husband. It is a grievous and sore injustice to the mother who bore them. But let us alter the case. Let the wife have the little ones, and how does the question stand? The ground is changed, but the principle is the same. Still injustice, hard, unnatural, and pitiless; still wrong, grievous and inexcusable. (382)

Here she takes an uncharacteristic turn: she admits the current law is unjust, a concession she has not previously made. But, she asks, "What else can the law be?" (382).

On this point Oliphant argues admirably. She does not resort to sentimentality or histrionics, nor does discussing the abstract nature of the principles of justice muddy her rhetoric. "The native right of father and of mother is as equal as it is inseparable," she states, her voice showing none of its earlier equivocation. Her argument is, of course, a simple one, and, barrister-like, she furnishes an identifiable precedent—the biblical example of King Solomon
settling an argument over the motherhood of a child by offering to split the child in half.

Oliphant presents a three-pronged perspective as she develops her argument, showing the dilemma from the mother's, the father's, and the legal system's point of view. She claims the wife has just as much right to the children as the father does, and she questions how either parent could, in good conscience, separate the other from his or her child. She says,

If we admit the principle of selecting one of the parties for special consideration, there is no more to be said upon the subject, for the husband's rights are quite as valid as those of the wife; but abstract justice in this matter, which is the most important of all, is a clear impossibility. (382)

Thus while Oliphant acknowledges equal rights of husband and wife as parents, she takes that notion a step further in revealing an ironic situation wherein equality does not guarantee equity. This is Oliphant at her rhetorical and philosophical best. The passage is remarkably lucid, insightful, matter-of-fact. Her authorial voice is strong and convincing, and her main premise that two people can only be seen as one after marriage takes on new import. Oliphant's audience, who endured her rhetorical blunders in
the earlier part of the essay, now has a document exuding authority and credibility.

Oliphant finally elaborates on her earlier contentions about nature in the next short paragraph. She states,

Of what importance are the inferior laws which straiten the hands of a married woman, and restrain her from independent action, when this one unalterable law of nature stands at the root of all? . . . The law can secure to the separated woman an unquestionable right to her own earnings; but the law cannot secure to her children. Nature has not made her their sole possessor. (383)

The law can only restore what it has taken away in the first place, Oliphant claims, and if the law awards custody to the mother instead of the father it will merely "favour one unfair claim to the disadvantage of another" (383). She finds the abstract ideas of "justice" and "the right" at an impasse in such a situation, concluding "in this matter right and justice are impossible" (382). Once again, her rhetoric is strong and convincing.

While the tenor of her argument is of primary importance here, Oliphant inadvertently reveals that she shares some of the same ideas embraced by the feminist movement as well. She admits that married women are "restrained from independent action," an ancillary phrase
that could have been omitted from the sentence entirely and not changed the focal point or tone in any way. She also admits that the law has taken chattels real (both she and Bodichon italicize this term) from women and that separated women have an unquestionable right to their own earnings. When added to her admission in the preceding paragraph that parents have equal rights, these inclusions reveal that Oliphant has more common ground with Bodichon than she possibly realizes. Ironically, this contradiction appears when her rhetoric is at its best.

The structure of Oliphant’s next paragraph is complicated. She begins with a discussion of women’s nature, then reiterates her beliefs about the inherent injustice of child custody cases, ultimately ending the paragraph with a bold proposal of what she sees as the only real justice in such a situation. Her opening at first appears digressive. She makes several comparisons between women and men to illustrate female character. “Women, as popular opinion goes,” she says, “are more patient by nature, more capable of quiet endurance and passive fortitude, than men” (383). Oliphant utilizes a very interesting rhetorical strategy in this comparison. Early in the essay she fumbles with generalizations, hollow accusations, and over-editorializing to capture her audience. Now she seems to deliberately distance herself
from her readers. Her use of "As popular opinion goes" suggests, for example, that she may not share that position whether her audience does or not. This distancing mechanism strengthens her next statement considerably, establishing a serious tone and making Oliphant the voice of authority. She says,

It may be so; but women are not patient of injustice. This is, indeed, of all trials the most intolerable to a nature sensitive and delicate; and we are glad to suppose that it is the fancied sting of wrong rather than any inherent weakness which makes the number of complaining wives so much larger than that of complaining husbands; for the general mass of women are, we are sorry to say, as actual demonstration proves, no more angelical than their ruder companions; and bad wives are probably very near as common as bad Husbands, though the man makes so much less noise about it. (383)

These four independent clauses separated by semicolons force the reader through the information rapidly. The gist of the first clause is that people of a sensitive nature, regardless of their sex, find injustice the greatest offense of all. Oliphant's choice in not attributing this perception solely to women is interesting: the previous
sentence implies that women will be the focal point of the discussion, her shift to the gender-neutral "nature" perhaps chosen to garner reader sympathy. In the second clause, she subtly draws her audience into sharing both her judgment and her logic. Complaining wives outnumber complaining husbands, she claims, because of perceived injustices, not because women are weaker than men. She thereby prevents readers from jumping to a simplistic solution. The third clause, simply paraphrased, states that women are by no means more saintly than men. This claim reveals her disbelief of a basic angel-in-the-house tenet that women are morally superior to men. In the final clause, Oliphant contends that, although men complain less frequently about their mates, bad wives are probably as common as bad husbands.

Oliphant's circular disclaimer serves a very good rhetorical purpose as she painstakingly establishes common ground in this rambling sentence. She acknowledges that women complain of injustice more frequently than men, but she immediately provides a follow-up, asserting that probably many husbands who could complain do not. Her audience must accept her idea that human nature transcends gender here, and that all humans are equally frail and fallible. Oliphant needs to have her readers see that both men and women suffer, and she provides an interesting
scenario for her readers: Both sexes find injustice intolerable; more wives than husbands complain because women feel they are discriminated against because of their gender; women succumb to human nature just as much as men do; and, the number of bad wives and bad husbands is probably about the same. Ironically, Oliphant has just illustrated gender equalities that patently disagree with patriarchal ideology.

On this note, Oliphant shifts back to women, the paragraph's original subject. Now she has new ballast for her argument that laws should not be redesigned for women. "It seems to us the best policy of all to show the inadequacy of that merely human and limited instrument, the law, to settle those delicate questions," she states (383), merely human having been carefully established. Her reasoning leading to this contention is not so much anti-feminist as it is anti-sexist. She continues, claiming that as the law cannot secure what is dearest to women, their children, human legislation is ineffective. "For our own part, we can perceive no equitable arrangement, no possibility of justice; and until this delicate point is settled, there is little effectual ground for legislation, so far as we can perceive, in the laws which concern women," she asserts (383).

Oliphant does not equivocate on this point; this is an insurmountable impasse in her eyes. But this definitive
pronouncement by no means closes the discussion. She admonishes women that they are not forced to marry, but if they choose to do so, then they know the legal consequences, and “it is alike her duty and her advantage to identify herself entirely with her husband” (383). Her use of “duty” is, of course, problematic, but Oliphant’s word choice of “identify” instead of the more patriarchal “submit” softens the anti-feminism of her statement.

But this admonition does not end the discussion. Instead, she deftly picks up the issue of marital separation once more, positing that “any legislation on the subject must be sharp and trenchant, dividing all those subtle bonds with one keen unwavering blow” (383). And, for those who choose to separate, her suggestion is likewise ‘sharp and trenchant’ as she proposes that their children be awarded to the state. If both parents are equal under the law, then neither has a greater claim. “Let the man and the woman part as they met, solitary and single persons; let the unhappy children, fatherless and motherless, become the children of the State. This is justice,” she claims, (384) almost triumphantly as her use of italics indicates.

Oliphant goes to great lengths to make this paragraph gender neutral, but a hidden agenda may be at work nevertheless. The whole passage may be a veiled warning to women not to push too hard for equality under the law,
because "justice" may not be what they expected and social parity may not be achieved. Oliphant may also have assumed Solomon's mantle here as well. What mother would not prefer that her husband, not the state, raise their children, given the notorious mismanagement of most Victorian orphanages and baby farms? Oliphant's proposed scenario thus contains an element of fear which could readily immobilize any mother thinking of signing the marriage law petition.

The paragraph provides a sense of closure for Oliphant's argument. In this latter part of the essay, she has, for the most part, rationally presented and supported her claims; she has logically organized her argument, building to a climax. Her article could well end here; her audience could close their Blackwood's, either content or aghast that Oliphant has endorsed the status quo. But despite the sense of finality, she goes on for another five more paragraphs.

Oliphant finally responds to what would surely be one of the main objections to her argument in her continuation. She poses a rhetorical question: "It may be asked," she says, "why these restrictions are so entirely laid upon woman--why in every branch of the subject, it is the woman who goes to the wall--and why the harsh regulations of the law are always against her, and never in her favor?" (384). She words her answer carefully, judiciously sidestepping
obvious pitfalls. She could, for example, lose readers if she does not acknowledge and explore objections rationally. She could have also missed an all-important opportunity to develop a denouement, or final revelation, for her scenario.

In framing her answer, Oliphant begins with two brief reiterations. First, she contends, the fact that the legal inequity exists is in itself testament to the law's inability to settle the matter. Second, she relates the timeworn premise that the law can recognize only the public representative of a household. The paragraph, and even the essay itself, takes a rather interesting turn from this point, however. "Everything is his--his own earnings--her earnings--the property of both. Happy husband! unfortunate wife!" she writes. Her use of italics suggests sarcasm and accusation. That tone, however, disappears in the next sentence, which reads, "Yet, in spite of this extraordinary platform of superiority, let us ask how the actual matter stands" (384). The use of "yet" has an ameliorating effect on the stridency of the previous sentence; "yet" also holds reader interest and suggests that more important things will be said on the subject.

Throughout the remainder of the paragraph, Oliphant dwells on the inability of the legal system to create marital equity. The law cannot prevent an extravagant wife from wasting her husband's income, Oliphant says, a tepid
example because the law would not prohibit that same husband from keeping his income from his wife. Nonetheless, Oliphant tries to show that the husband is not always the one at fault in marital suffering. "Bad husbands and bad wives will be in this world, we are afraid, so long as evil people are in the human race," she says. And if the legal system tries to intervene, it will meet the same fate as "those ill-advised friends who mediate between married people," she claims (384). The law cannot help in such situations, and she proposes no solution for couples with such problems. The structure of the paragraph's final sentence suggests, however, that Oliphant may once again be unsure of her claim. She concludes,

For this reserved and separated territory is beyond the reach of law-making; and the only true business of legislation in reality seems to be, either to prevent any one overleaping the barriers, or to make one distinct, bold, terrible road, by which those who cannot endure may, at peril of their lives, escape. (384)

The semicolon signals cleavage in two aspects. The first break is merely punctuation between independent clauses. The second break reveals a different tone and an emphasis shift that suggests the semicolon does not link two closely-related ideas. The usage is forced, an artificial bridge
erected by the author to connect a claim of which she is certain to a claim of which she is uncertain. For example, "in reality" and "seems" indicate a tentativeness that the earlier part of the paragraph did not have, especially given her emphatic use of "true business" in the first clause. The rhetorical force Oliphant tries to achieve adjectivally by stringing together "one distinct, bold, terrible road" likewise flounders; the string suggests muddled support where clarity is needed. "One overleaping the barriers" is likewise unclear. Does she mean the barriers of inequality, of marriage, or of something else? And once again Oliphant resorts to melodrama in the phrase "at peril of their lives." Oliphant's lack of critical thinking skills may be the culprit here, or perhaps explaining the abstract once again plagues her, or perhaps there is no strong response to Bodichon. In any case, her weak rhetorical stance indicates an equally weak analysis.

The next paragraph, although far longer than the one before it, adds relatively little to Oliphant's argument. She returns to her contention that if a couple divorces, the State should rear the children. Again elaborating on the inadequacy of the law regarding marriage, she sympathizes with those in "exceptional instances," once more cautioning against "the foolish and mischievous fallacy of placing the exceptional in the place of the common" (384). Most women
in the British empire, she claims, are not even aware of the marriage laws, and "a still greater majority resent the language of the law more than they feel its injuries" (384-385). Her discourse in this passage is once again thoughtful and direct. She asks what can be done for women in extreme marital situations. The tone shifts here, becoming almost humorous or playful, as she poses rhetorical questions in response to her own inquiry. "What are we to do? Authorise a committee of good husbands to shoot the scoundrel? Leave him to the tender mercies of a jury of good wives?" she asks (385). Oliphant's light-hearted tone is refreshing for her audience who are now on the seventh page of ponderous reading in her essay. Perhaps more important, however, the dramatic shift of tone cushions her upcoming answer.

Oliphant's glibness soon fades, however, and she eases back into her crusade against change. She answers her own rhetorical questions, acknowledging that these "cures" could be undertaken, although redressing the issue through legislation is a serious undertaking. "But society, indeed, must take a very long step in advance, before the general British mind can be impressed with the idea that there is any injustice to women in the fact..." she states (385). The observation rationally furthers her argument although, in another sense, it furnishes a disclaimer of sorts. An
alternative reading of this sentence suggests that the British public is not yet ready for this move, but intimates that such changes may be acceptable in the future.

Once again, however, Oliphant retreats to the relative safety of the two-as-one premise, her frequent reversion to this suggesting that she has investigated every possible facet of the concept. Men do not complain about their wives considering his property as their own, she sniffs, and if they did, she says, society would question the men's characters immediately. "Why, then," she concludes, "is it more bearable when the complaint is made by the wife?" (385). Oliphant's question may be directed to herself as much as it is to her audience.

If Oliphant has any feminist readers, they are probably framing rebuttals by this time, and her next paragraph suggests that she is prepared for them. Theory is easier than practice, she contends, and even if new marriage laws are enacted, Oliphant predicts trouble. "Let the law ordain her fortune and her earnings as exclusively her own as if she were unmarried. What then?" she asks. One likely possibility is that a man will talk a woman out of her fortune, Oliphant says. Failing to get what he wants by talking, she states, "he may take his wife's money, rudely, by force of cruelty, physical or mental," she states. But
men's fortunes are also in jeopardy, says Oliphant, citing "the pleasures of a young wife's caprices" (385).

Thus, in Oliphant's opinion, the law cannot protect individual assets for women any better than it can for men. Indeed, if enacting a law would afford such protection, Oliphant says she would support it. Furthermore, if the language of the current law offends women, changing the wording would be easy, she says, adding that little else would change. "This one great thing the law cannot do--it cannot defend married people from each other," she states (386), maintaining that this premise would hold true even if women, not men, were family heads. Oliphant expounds at length on this, often referring to the notion that nature bestows this household representation on man, but she soon returns to her original paragraph topic.

The law cannot come into the heart of the house. Like an evil spirit, it must be dragged across the threshold, to make injuries bitterer and feuds less appeasable. It can smite with fiercer swords into the hearts of the combatants. It cannot end their quarrels, or defend them from each other. (386)

Oliphant's prose here is deft and to the point.

In this instance, Oliphant's discussion of the limits of law helps her successfully address the more abstract
concepts of happiness, love, and purity of heart. The law can restore more tangible items, she claims, but it cannot restore these intangibles. The law prevents spouses from killing each other, just as public opinion prevents "any very serious mutual wrong," she contends, but "beyond this it [marriage] is a fair field and no favour" (386). Her feminist contemporaries would likely take issue with Oliphant's term "fair field" as many of the examples she presents to support her claim are open to conjecture.

She again claims that the law should not be changed to protect the few women suffering abuse. "Not even to redress such clamorous wrongs can we put the general peace in jeopardy," she says (386). Despite her earlier claim that she has "outgrown Utilitarianism," Oliphant nevertheless relies on the principle of the greatest good for the greatest number. Her remarks indicate she believes that weakening the ties of marriage likewise weakens the bonds of society itself. If present laws may be interpreted to relieve the abuse suffered in particular cases, "honour to the law, and good speed;" Oliphant says, "But if we cannot reach them without infringing up the general rule, then . . . we must leave the victims to their fate" (386). Her judgment is clear and rationally presented, but strikingly harsh.
Once again, Oliphant provides a sense of closure without concluding. Instead, she issues yet another plea, hoping her audience will agree that the present marriage laws are just. She begins by giving some ground to the opposition: she admits that the entailment laws are unfair, but she points out that these laws affect "more than feminine rights" (386). Beyond that, Oliphant contends "there is no injustice . . . real or apparent, in the laws which concern women. It is only wives who are subject to these humiliations--women who have accepted representatives, and consequently cannot expect any longer to represent themselves" (386). Oliphant does not elaborate on the issue of representation, but assumes a Lockean stance in which marriage as a social contract wherein the wife willing consents to be "governed" (or represented) by the husband. As Oliphant sees it, a woman "has the alternative of not marrying at all, and so, without the least trouble, delivering herself from all the threatening perils of legislation" (386-7).

Oliphant's argument ultimately rests on the premise of voluntary submission. Although her support is rational, she neglects to mention, however, that marriage is somewhat of a Hobson's choice for Victorian women. "Spinsterhood was, in fact, rare in the nineteenth century--by the end of the century more than 90 percent of all American women
married, as did 85-88 percent of the women in England and France" (Hellerstein et al 121). Unless women had adequate financial resources available (as Bodichon did), few could survive economically without marriage. Hence, women may have had some choice in whom they married, but the choice of marriage itself was virtually a social and economic non-choice for most women.

Ironically, Oliphant accuses Bodichon of doing what she, herself, is doing: presenting only one side of an argument. "The whole argument of this brochure, however, is one-sided and unequal, as every argument must be which discusses words without first admitting the spirit and inspiration of the same," Oliphant states (387). Her statement suggests that she believes she has adequately ascertained the spirit and inspiration of the "Summary," an assumption Bodichon and her followers might well refute.

Perhaps attempting to show her familiarity with the document, Oliphant then focuses on one short quote from the Observations section of the "Summary." She quotes,

It is cruel . . . when the support of the family depends on the joint earnings of husband and wife, that the earnings of both should be in the hands of one, and not even in the hands of that one who has naturally the strongest desire to promote the welfare of the children. All who are familiar
with the working classes know how much suffering and privation is caused by the exercise of this right by drunken and bad men. (387) [italics Bodichon's]

What, exactly, secures this right? Oliphant asks. Does the law force the woman to turn over her earnings, or does the husband’s power, persuasive or otherwise? Oliphant claims that most of the working class are ignorant of their rights under the law, and if a charwoman gives “her hard-won shillings to her drunken husband . . . She gives them because he would take them . . .” (387). Furthermore, Oliphant claims, “A drunken and bad man will swallow up anybody’s or everybody’s earnings, if he can get them . . .” (387). Legal rights have little effect in such cases, according to the author, who goes on to make yet another claim: in all but the lowest rung of the middle class, the wife manages the family’s income. “This state of things is universal,” she says (387), somewhat smugly repeating Bodichon’s words “‘all who are familiar with the working classes’ must acknowledge that it is so” (387).

Oliphant flings back Bodichon’s words almost triumphantly, but her victory may be as short-sighted as it is premature. She charges that Bodichon’s wish of 'compensating women for the loss of their moral right to their own property and earnings, and for
the loss of the mental development and independence of character gained by the possession and thoughtful appropriation of money, is the merest nonsense which ever looked like reason.

(387)

Oliphant again falls victim to a logical fallacy here, a rhetorical failure she has avoided quite well in the second part of "The Laws Concerning Women." She creates an ad absurdum situation, dismissing Bodichon's argument as "merest nonsense" rather than explaining how that argument lacks reason.

Oliphant summarily rejects the opposing point of view without thoroughly exploring the issue. The support she provides for her claim that women control household expenditure is likewise weak. As evidence, she cites middle-class wives who provide for "ever so many frocks and pairs of shoes" from their household budgets (387), intimating that these wives somehow cheat their husbands or their households by juggling the books. The buying of frocks and shoes hardly equates with the buying and selling of major assets such as real estate and livestock, something all husbands could do without their wives' permission even if those assets came to him through marriage, so Oliphant has created another false analogy as well.
Rhetorically, she fails on yet another front, too, succumbing to "every-ism." She states, "Every one knows," "Every one is aware" and "The absolute matter of fact which is--known to every mind" (italics mine) as she reiterates how much control wives have over family expenditure. In so doing, she commits the same rhetorical mistake that she has disdainfully observed in Bodichon earlier in the paragraph, assuming that some means all. Oliphant likewise neglects to mention Victorian wives presenting meticulously-kept account books to their husbands, a practice routinely described in many household management manuals of the period.

Oliphant's essay trickles to an end in the next short paragraph, and she tries, albeit in vain, to empower women in her conclusion. "Indeed, to tell the truth," she says, "Women are the only born legislators, let them complain of their position as they will," their legislative powers having been bestowed "to every woman of them all" by the Apostle Paul (387). Once again, Oliphant distances herself from her sex, carefully slipping back into her male persona by referring to women as "them" rather than "us." And the logical mind that a few short paragraphs before ably demonstrated how ill-equipped the legal system is to enforce equability once again supports the status quo. She reiterates the stereotypical patriarchal exhortation: "Rule the house," a place where, she claims, a woman is "a
lawmaker, supreme and absolute" (387). But Oliphant is not convincing, because her final exclamatory comments ring with futility. She states, "Oh, inconsistent humanity!—as if those powers and rights were not seated, innate and indestructible, far away out of the reach of any secondary law!" (387). The final exclamation is perhaps as much lament as declaration.

Overall, Oliphant's response is perplexing as she vacillates between naivety and enlightenment, between garbled argumentation and strong rhetoric, and between denying and supporting her own gender. But perhaps most puzzling of all is her disregard of statements in Bodichon's Summary that Oliphant could use to illustrate how women could benefit from coverture laws. In the section entitled "Laws Concerning Married Women," for example, Bodichon states that after marriage "the wife loses all her rights as a single woman, and her existence is entirely absorbed in that of her husband. He is civilly responsible for her acts; she lives under his protection or cover . . ." (Bell et al 25). This is powerful ammunition Oliphant could use if she wants to demonstrate that husbands are also at risk under coverture laws. The Victorians took transgressions of any sort quite seriously; hence, the possibility of a husband having to answer, in court, for his wife's actions was a genuine concern.
A husband is also legally responsible for debts and any breaches of trust his wife incurred or committed before marriage. Oliphant could have made much of these laws. And being one person in the eyes of the law also offered some astounding protection for wives with criminal tendencies. A wife could not be found guilty for stealing from her husband, for example, or for setting his house on fire. And if the law declares a woman insane who does either of these things (or any other irrational act), her husband cannot have their marriage declared null and void. Oliphant may categorize these scenarios as "exceptional cases"; perhaps that is why she chooses to ignore them. Or perhaps, as a writer for a conservative periodical, she finds these possibilities too extreme, or even too incendiary, to mention. Neither of these explanations, however, is adequate.

The Summary provides other strong laws that Oliphant ignores as well. If, for example, a man places a woman in his house and treats her like a wife, he is responsible for her debts. If he marries a woman with children, he must support those children until they are sixteen years old, whether they are legitimate or illegitimate. Widows, meanwhile, have no legal obligation to bury their husbands; that is the duty of the husband’s legal representative. Given Oliphant’s weakness in providing support for her
assertions, omitting examples such as these is interesting. She appears to neglect mentioning some of the very laws that could help her support the patriarchal system, if that indeed is her intent.

Glaring omissions such as these are a predictable feature in nineteenth-century women's writing, say Gilbert and Gubar, and they cite a myriad of feminist critics who comment on this phenomenon, including Carolyn Heilbrun and Catharine Stimpson, who refer to the omissions as the "'presence of absence' . . . the 'hollows, centers, caverns within the work--places where activity that one might expect is missing. . . or deceptively coded'" (qtd. in Gilbert and Gubar 75). Unlike "absences" in the first part of the essay, which usually indicate Oliphant's inability to provide logical explanations, the absences in the latter part of the essay are more perplexing. Oliphant's intellectual and rhetorical abilities in this part indicate sound, thorough reasoning. Her examples are clear and specific. Yet she chooses to ignore support that few readers would refute.

If this is willful disregard rather than an oversight, as the gravity and number of the laws suggest, Oliphant perhaps has a buried subtext. In The Female Imagination, Patricia Meyer Spacks "describes ways in which women's novels are marked by 'subterranean challenges' to truths
that the writers of such works appear on the surface to accept" (qtd. in Gilbert and Gubar, 75). Although the article in question is not fiction, Spacks’s description is appropriate; the omission of seemingly-crucial evidence poses a “subterranean challenge” for Oliphant’s readers. Claiming that a hidden agenda exists, however, overextends the term, because what is hidden from the reader may have been hidden from Oliphant as well.

While struggling to defend coverture and to establish gender equity, Oliphant has experienced a pre-feminist marker in feeling the first pangs of consciousness-raising without even realizing it. She can hide behind a male persona, but she cannot erase her gender. Possibilities of subtext frequently surface, suggesting another message exists. Gilbert and Gubar ask,

> What is the secret message of literature by women, if there is a single secret message? What, in other words, have women got to hide? . . . what literary women have hidden or disguised is what each writer knows is in some sense her own story. . . . in other words, of the woman’s quest for self-definition. (76)

Although this quest is usually identified with fiction, nothing precludes its presence in non-fiction as well. As a wife and mother who writes about laws concerning other wives
and mothers, Oliphant cannot avoid subjective thought even as she tries to maintain an objective point-of-view. Her marital status has defined her, her motherhood has defined her, her employment has defined her, her class has defined her, and her culture has defined her. Although she can, and does, accept each of those imposed definitions, her critical abilities indicate that she nevertheless seeks self-definition as well.

Writing is a discursive act, and Oliphant re-evaluated her subject matter her entire writing life, rethinking her assertions and re-examining her evidence. All these activities lead to a better understanding of self. The nagging problem Oliphant has with evidence, as illustrated in the first part of the essay, for example, lessens over time in both her fiction and her non-fiction. In 1876, *Phoebe Junior*, the last book in her popular *Carlingford Chronicles*, features "a general questioning of 'nature' as a grounding for class and gender distinctions," according to Elizabeth Langland (172). Blithely attributing hierarchical positions to "nature" is no longer good enough for Oliphant. The twenty years intervening between the article and the novel sharpen her critical skills.

One of the first steps to be taken in the quest for self-definition is a thorough examination of what is believed and why it is believed. "The Laws Concerning
Women" suggests such a quest is beginning for Oliphant. The rhetorical blundering of the earlier section as she grapples with abstract reasoning, the pat answers for the complicated questions, the ambiguous pronouns, the contradictory evidence, the disregarded ammunition, and even the overdeveloped latter section all suggest that Oliphant's self-definition is non-narratible at this time. But one of her biographers, Merryn Williams, states,

Her views altered over the next few years, during which time she realised that she agreed with most of the feminists' aims. She believed in a Married Women's Property Act, a mother's right to the custody of her children, women doctors, and university education for girls. (Biography 108)

The "subterranean challenges" of her article had apparently engaged the writer as well as her readers. Had Oliphant responded to the Summary twenty years later, Bodichon would have had a far better rhetorical opponent, but the debate would have been moot because Oliphant's ideology had changed.
CHAPTER THREE

"THE CONDITION OF WOMEN":
EQUALITY, 'THE MIGHTIEST OF HUMBUGS'

In February, 1858, almost two years after "The Laws Concerning Women" appeared, Blackwood's published Margaret Oliphant's second article on the Woman Question. "The Condition of Women" reveals Oliphant's growth as both critic and writer since publication of her earlier article on the topic, although similar organizational problems resurface in the second essay. She again meanders into her subject--how the act of reading for and about women conflicts with actual experience--but on this occasion her windings are neither aimless nor forced. In the earlier article, Oliphant's uncertainty results in a wavering presentation, but focus and unity suffer in the second because she introduces too many broad tangential issues that are potential essay topics themselves, even though each illuminates her main subject. Although she still succumbs to an occasional hasty generalization, for the most part, controlled, thoughtful rhetoric replaces the impassioned pleas and histrionics of the first article, and her claims are solidly supported. Few exclamation points and no obtrusive first-person
pronouns hinder the reader as they did in the earlier piece. Overall, the second article is more coherent and cogent than the first.

Given the rhetorical strengths and the timely topic of "The Condition of Women," one would expect that the article would be often cited by feminist critics and Oliphant scholars, but reference to it is scarce. None of her major biographies (by Merryn Williams, Vineta and Robert Colby, Elisabeth Jay) even mentions the article. Perhaps Oliphant scholars neglect this essay because it pales compared to her article on Bodichon and to her later article on the Woman Question which forcefully attacks John Stuart Mill. In these other articles, Oliphant is clear about who her adversaries are, whether persons or ideas; "The Condition of Women" lacks this clarity. "Civilisation" is a nebulous adversary, and accountability for the ill effects of progress is even more so.

In addition, a flurry of pointed commentaries on the Woman Question by writers, reformers, and philosophers, and especially those by other women, in mid century also overshadow Oliphant's comparatively lackluster article. At about the same time, Harriet Martineau penned articles about the lack of vocational and educational opportunities for women, and Bodichon, Oliphant's old foil, published yet another erudite critique, Women and Work, in 1857.
Meanwhile, Elizabeth Barrett Browning's magnum opus *Aurora Leigh*, depicting the frustration of the stifled creative woman, also appeared in 1857. Florence Nightingale wrote her novel *Cassandra* during this period, too, although it was not published until many years later. Other fiction writers such as Elizabeth Gaskell, the Brontës, Julia Kavanaugh, Elizabeth Sewell, Oliphant herself, and a host of others wrote novels featuring heroines who, in varying aspects and degrees, were thwarted by their gender. In fact, few other literary periods offer those examining the Woman Question such rich opportunities as mid-nineteenth-century British fiction. Oliphant's article, therefore, may be overlooked by feminist scholars because so many more accessible and less problematic works are available.

The article itself likewise may be at fault. Although better crafted than her first address of the Woman Question, the second article introduces so many attendant issues that none gets the thorough development it merits. She discusses not only the disparity between women's fictional and real lives but the dearth of employment for both sexes and the failure of education to properly prepare either men or women for life after their school days have ended. A fourteen-page article cannot adequately treat such large, diverse topics.
"The Condition of Women" also suffers because of its topicality. Oliphant responds to ten different works, six of which are generally unfamiliar to modern readers. The remaining four—Clarissa, Pamela, The Spectator, and the Epistles of Paul—she mentions only in passing. And in two instances she refers to the words of "a writer," giving no clue to the work's title or author. While each of the ten supports her topic, none is discussed at length; therefore, contextual material which could illuminate Oliphant's response is virtually impossible to find and assess.

Hence, critical disregard of Oliphant's second article is readily explicable, but nonetheless unfortunate because the document itself is an intriguing part of the Oliphant canon. First, although she seemingly makes light of women's vocational and educational problems, her argument has a breadth not found in the arguments of her more polarized contemporaries. Her authoritative tone suggests a less emotional, more rational approach is called for and that employment and education necessitate a less inflammatory and more inclusive forum for discussion before any remedies can be found. Second, though she appears blatantly callous about class and gender inequities, in fact she obliquely (and perhaps even inadvertently) suggests an equability crossing gender lines. Hence her stance may be more farsighted than those stridently insisting upon reform.
Third, the advice Oliphant dispenses to her female readers is eminently pragmatic. Rather than advocating large-scale reform or bemoaning the lack of choices for women, she suggests that women be aware of all their options and that they exercise them wisely. Fourth, she tries to balance both the abstract and the concrete, something she did not do in her earlier article. This balance gives this article a credibility the first article lacks. And finally, the article’s rhetorical structure and strategies themselves reveal Oliphant’s maturation as critic and writer.

Oliphant’s article differs markedly from those of her contemporaries who are concerned about women’s employment and education, topics figuring prominently in mid-century discussions of the Woman Question. Most writers present either a straightforwardly feminist or patriarchal stance, articulate the situation as they perceive it, and suggest a remedy. Many of these articles essentially address what many modern critics see as the real controversy: “Do we want women to work, or do we want them to stay home?” As Helsinger et al point out, “For many Victorians, this was the Woman Question” (110). Oliphant skirts this issue deftly. Although she herself is a working woman, she upholds the ideal of the stay-at-home, nonworking wife and mother, despite the fact she never had that choice herself.
Oliphant's stance reflects the Victorian norm. Leonore Davidoff and Belinda Westover point out that as late as the twentieth century

Young women started their adult lives steeped in a set of ideas which maintained that their final and proper place was in the home. By the end of the nineteenth century, a girl's goal was marriage and upon marriage she was ideally to be supported by a male breadwinner. The type of work she could expect to do, her expectations and actual work experience, were profoundly affected by this prevailing ideology. It had shaped girls' education and was enshrined in law, political institutions and social policy backed by religious doctrine. (2)

Many Victorians overlooked the reality that many women needed to work, whether they achieved the goal of marriage or not. The prevailing ideology was further complicated by the notion that the ideal woman was an idle woman. Only a very prosperous man could afford an idle wife, and the less work she did either in or out of the home, the more enhanced the husband's (and hence the family's) social position became.

Consequently, many feminist critics claim the notion of ideal womanhood itself retarded educational and occupational
opportunities for Victorian women. Joan N. Burstyn, for example, notes, "While industrial growth brought unprecedented job opportunities to men, social reformers, wishing to raise all women to the ideal of the upper and middle classes, urged a decrease in the numbers of women working" (10). The middle-class's dogged pursuit of this ideal--the lady of leisure who devoted herself solely to the prescribed female sphere--effectively stifled opportunities for women of all classes. Meanwhile, Oliphant, who seems more concerned with the questioners than the questions, personally supports the ideal, but she nevertheless realizes the ideal is not always realistic.

Regardless of her personal feelings about whether women should be idle or employed, Oliphant acknowledges the gravity of the female employment situation. She charges that civilization is guilty for "leaving a large proportion of women, in all conditions, outside of the arrangements of the family to provide for themselves, without at the same time leaving for them anything to do" (141). She mentions frequent journalistic and literary hand-wringing over the problem, readily admitting that many women suffer in such instances. But Oliphant suggests that the case for granting women more employment opportunities may be \textit{prima facie} in many aspects. She pushes her readers to think critically about the reading matter regarding women's rights.
Oliphant's rambling indictment of "civilisation" suggests she is skeptical of whether or not all social changes are necessarily for the better. She ruminates, Civilisation, beneficent, gentle, full of charities and courtesies, the great ameliorator of the world, is no less, as old experience has often proved, the Nemesis of the very race which has cherished him. . . . it would require no particular strain of argument, or rather of the facts on which arguments are founded, to prove that civilisation by itself was the most equivocal of benefits--an influence which increased the comfort of one generation only to bring a greater destruction upon another--a force, in reality, not favourable, but inimical, to man. (139-140)

This passage reveals no overt opposition to women's demands for increased opportunities; it does, however, suggest that Oliphant wants her readers to weigh all the long-term ramifications of granting these opportunities.

Oliphant begins her exhortation by repeating the oft-asked question, "What are we to do with our spinsters?" An anonymous book of essays, Woman's Thoughts about Women, (later attributed to Dinah Mulock Craik), especially concerns Oliphant. Specifically, she finds fault with
Craik’s contention that “‘one-half of our women are obliged to look solely to themselves for maintenance, position, occupation, amusement, reputation, life’” (141). Immediately, Oliphant questions whether or not this statistic is valid. What age groups comprise this half, she wonders, asking if little girls “still in the nursery” are considered in this group of unmarried women (141). Apparently bothered by Craik’s use of the word “solely,” Oliphant asks whether or not half of all English women have no fathers, mothers, brothers, or other family members to whom they may turn. In making such claims, female writers often project their own status onto all other women, she contends, implying that her readers need to examine not only statistics but rhetoric for authorial bias.

Alerting her readers to the arbitrary nature of statistical interpretation is laudable. Had Oliphant followed her own advice, however, she would have learned that census records corroborate Craik’s figures. Meanwhile, Helsinger et al point out that Craik’s book is “far from radical,” noting that

By 1851, for every one hundred women in Britain there are only ninety-six men; of every one hundred women over twenty, only fifty-seven are married—thirteen are widowed, and thirty have not married. Nearly one half of the adult women in
Britain—two and a half out of six million—have no spouses to support them. (135)

These records do not indicate how many of these single women had other family resources on which they could depend, but the figures support Craik’s contention that employment for single women had indeed become a crisis.

The 1851 census also reveals that women constituted 30.2 percent of the paid work force and that 26.6 percent of the total female population was a part of that work force (Hellerstein 273). Many extrapolations can be made from these records. Gaye Tuchman, for example, points out that the census figures underscored two phenomenon[sic]: a surplus of women and few occupational alternatives. So many men had migrated to far-flung portions of the empire to seek new lives that by 1851 there were over half a million more women than men in England. . . . Uneducated and undereducated, they had few occupational alternatives. (51)

Tuchman’s observation illustrates an interesting anomaly: The societal ideal was for women to marry, and women’s education and occupational possibilities were all shaped by that ideal, but at the same time, marriage was virtually impossible for over half a million women at mid century. Work for middle-class women is, therefore, a timely issue in
1858, and Craik's concern that women do not have enough occupational opportunities appears more cogent than Oliphant deems.

Perhaps Oliphant gives little credence to the women's education and employment issue because conditions had progressively improved since the earlier part of the century and had improved markedly since 1850. In fact, by the 1860s (the first time the census records separate the number of people in professions into male and female categories), 72.5 percent of all schoolmasters, teachers, and professors were female. The next occupational category featuring an impressive number of females was that of stage performers; women comprised 40.5 percent of this category (Tuchman, 52). The range between 72.5 and 40.5 percent and the dichotomous nature of the two categories further illustrate the lack of occupational choices for women in mid century. Women were quite visible in the literary and artistic professions as well, comprising 8.7 percent of British authors, 23.9 percent of painters and sculptors, and 17.1 percent of musicians (although the musician figures may include those teaching music as well). Tuchman notes that the percentage of women authors may also be skewed; she suggests that the figure in actuality may have been larger, but that many women may have been reluctant to admit that they wrote for money (Tuchman 52).
Employment conditions for women had also improved since the 1840s with passage of mining and factory acts which limited hours and instituted basic safety regulations. New opportunities for women also arose in the health field after Nightingale’s work in the Crimea, although formal training for nurses did not come about until 1861 with the formation of a nursing school at St. Thomas’s Hospital in London. Until that time, nursing was a haphazard occupation usually filled by women of the laboring class who had little or no training.

Meanwhile, The Governesses Benevolent Institution, organized in 1843 by Reverend Frederick Denison Maurice, also improved the lot of working women. The Institution functioned as a rudimentary employment agency, matching governesses with jobs, as well as providing for those too old or infirm to continue their duties. The Institution also became an unofficial repository for complaints, especially from middle-class employers, about governesses. Ironically, these complaints resulted in the Institution’s playing a major role in securing better educational opportunities for women. Many of the complaints focused on how governesses did not adequately prepare middle-class sons for further schooling. Heeding these concerns, Maurice established a college for the education of governesses. Thus, five years after The Governesses
Benevolent Institution was founded, Queen’s College opened in London in 1848 to prepare women for the teaching profession. Six months after Queen’s College opened, Ladies’ College opened in Bedford, but the mission of Ladies’ College was to provide higher education for women rather than to train them for a profession. In 1850, the North London Collegiate School for Girls was formed, and Cheltenham Ladies’ College was founded shortly after that. In some of these institutions, women served not only as teachers but participated in administrative and governing processes as well.

By the late 1850s, both Oxford and Cambridge sponsored local exams to test teacher competence, and allowing women to take these exams had a ripple effect in higher education. According to Burstyn, the exams were a major impetus in making classroom studies uniform for both sexes as well as pushing women to actively seek knowledge through lecture series, university extension programs, and the like (25-26). The rising current of female educational opportunities crested later in the century with the founding of Girton and Newnham Colleges in 1869 and 1871.

Oliphant, as a well-informed journalist, sees these trends unfolding and forms her own opinions in the midst of the discussions generated by these phenomena. Whether she approves of higher education for women or not, she is aware
of the broadened opportunities for her sex as she pens her article in 1858. Perhaps, then, her seeming reluctance to support feminist demands issued by her contemporaries is nothing more than reticence bred of conservatism. Vineta and Robert Colby maintain that Oliphant's "characteristic approach to political and social problems was one of skepticism and cynicism" ("Virtue" 201). In her failure to support wholeheartedly the cause of increased educational and occupational opportunities for women, she may be much more skeptical than cynical in light of the broadened options for women that she sees multiplying around her.

Oliphant does recognize that single women have a legitimate problem, however, and she sympathetically describes their plight. Her prose is direct and forceful, and she casts her comments against the backdrop of progress. She succinctly summarizes the problem:

Half the women in England are not married, and never will be; consequently a large proportion of Englishwomen have to seek their own maintenance and earn their own bread. But civilisation, while it makes this unnatural and anomalous arrangement, does not unmake the primitive arrangement by which labour out of doors, handicrafts, arts, and manual skill of all kinds, remain in the possession of men. (142)
Oliphant’s observations are astute. She identifies the problem and assigns culpability, but she nevertheless recognizes the incongruity and inequity of the situation. Her observations about this dichotomy illustrate her contention that civilization is not always beneficial because sometimes unforeseen problems arise which actually obviate progress. Hence, she does not plead against increasing opportunities for women; rather, she pleads against shortsightedly making any sweeping changes.

Oliphant acknowledges the magnitude of the unemployment and underemployment problem women face, however. She mentions “crowds of half-starved needlewomen, thousands of poor governesses, and a great many more feminine writers of novels,” finishing with the needleworker who “must starve by inches, and die over the shirt she makes” (142). Oliphant minces no words here, and neither is she maudlin, but she graphically reminds her readers that this social displacement is real, and no one can argue otherwise. At the end of this paragraph, however, she abruptly shifts subjects. “The only thing doubtful is, whether these unfortunate circumstances are peculiar to women, and whether it is mainly upon them that civilisation imposes this necessity and works this wrong,” she says (142).

The inference of a greater problem, a larger puzzle, explains Oliphant’s seeming dismissiveness of “the spinster
problem," although she certainly concurs that work for women is a painful issue. But to explore the dearth of employment opportunities for women is not her agenda. Instead, her article focuses on a greater dilemma, one affecting both sexes, both single and married individuals, and one crossing all class lines. She frames her argument in reaction to the cry for women’s rights, but despite her recognition of sexist bias against women, her complaint focuses squarely on the educational system and not on gender inequity.

In shifting to this broader topic, Oliphant presents a brief example of the famous Brontë family. She has previously mentioned reviews of Mrs. Gaskell’s recently-released biography *Life of Charlotte Brontë*, and she relies on her audience’s familiarity with the family as she specifically illustrates how men are likewise affected by lack of vocational opportunities. Oliphant points out that Branwell Brontë was "equally gifted" with his sisters, and was "in extreme youth the most hopeful of any of them" (142). Despite his promise, however, she notes that his position as tutor paralleled his sisters’ positions as governesses. Oliphant questions why society expresses little compassion for gentlemen who compromise their talents by accepting such lowly positions while sympathy abounds for gentlewomen who do so.
For Oliphant, "The presence of the brother . . . seems to us to change the venue entirely, and make the subject a much wider one" (142). In this family, the brother fared much worse than the sisters, she contends. Oliphant dwells only momentarily on Charlotte, which may surprise Oliphant scholars because she frequently writes about Charlotte and her works. Instead, Oliphant uses the Bronte discussion merely as a segue to the "wider subject" mentioned earlier. She states,

And so far as this example goes, the theory of undue limitation and unjust restraint in respect to women certainly does not hold. The limitation, the restraint, the bondage, the cruel laws and barriers of conventional life, many, notwithstanding, remain as cruel as ever, but their application is certainly not harder upon the daughters of the race than upon its sons. (143)

Although many might argue that the Brontës are not a valid example because they are an anomaly instead of the norm, Oliphant's point is that the problem of "what to do" is not entirely bound to gender or marital status.

Throughout her writing as well as in her own life, Oliphant values the exploration of all options, especially by women. Elisabeth Jay contends, "Her oeuvre as a whole would tend to suggest that women's comparative powerlessness
to dictate their own fate is more likely to force them to
learn the art of the possible" (223). The seeds of
Oliphant's annoyance with those who demand more
opportunities for women may spring from the constant
complaining she witnesses. She is not radical enough to
openly confront the complainers, but her stance indicates
she does not believe they have explored all available
options or looked at alternative points of view. Hence, she
assumes the role of devil's advocate in pointing out how
limitations are not as gender-bound as they may appear.

Oliphant's Brontë example lacks development, however,
especially for modern readers who long for an explanation of
why she believes Branwell is more disadvantaged than his
sisters. She rewords the same primary claim about Branwell
several times but provides only secondary claims as support.
Her evidence is not only vague but questionable. For
example, she contends that women patiently suffer demeaning
circumstances with no loss of dignity, but if men suffer
likewise they are "under penalty of everybody's disdain"
(142). Oliphant's explanation needs elaboration; neglecting
it diminishes the strength of her argument. Although
Oliphant does not develop this part of the essay adequately,
she does provide a novel twist to the Woman Question. While
her suggestion that Victorian society expects more from men
than it does from women is not new, her view of the
situation differs because she does not pit men against women as many of her contemporaries do when discussing gender and society. Indeed, her even-handed treatment of the issue enhances her credibility.

The most interesting aspect of her argument, however, is her inferred line of reasoning regarding civilisation. First, she claims civilisation brings problems as well as progress. She next asserts that society welcomes progress without realizing that it sometimes creates its own Nemesis in doing so; once in motion, progress takes on a life of its own and can seldom be checked, even if problems are detected. She somewhat digresses as she claims that England has emerged relatively unscathed from dangers in the civilizing process because of its dedication to Christianity and to colonialism. "With this balance of healthful savagery in our own possession, sanctified as its natural influence is by the aggressive, invasive, and irrestrainable activity of the Gospel, civilisation, however 'extreme,' loses its usual tendency," she says (140). But, she warns, this balance is delicate, suggesting that the country could well lose the ability to solve its social problems. And, finally, she holds civilization accountable for the current problems "of social economy" (141).

Oliphant sees these economic problems as intricate and difficult to solve. First, many women must provide for
themselves, yet they cannot do so without jobs, and "civilization" is the culprit for placing women in this position. Furthermore, civilization has resulted in many occupations being open only to men, thus illustrating a failure of "progress" to benefit all society. Her Brontë example suggests that this problem is further compounded because society now expects all men to fulfill their economic potential in order to maintain separate spheres for men and women, but in many instances no possibilities exist for men to do this.

Oliphant agrees that England needs to address the issue of opportunities for men as well as for women, and her article suggests that she believes any discussion of increased options for either gender needs to be framed ideologically and economically. Her economic concerns seem somewhat alarming because mid-century England is often seen as the zenith of Victorian prosperity. Historian Richard Altick notes, for example, that "The fifties and sixties were boom times the like of which the nation had seldom known before; Great Britain found herself incomparably the richest nation on earth, the world's foremost banker, shipper, supplier of manufactured goods ..." (12). If ever the "trickle-down" theory of economics worked as Adam Smith had predicted, it did so in mid-nineteenth-century England, as the standard of living rose considerably for
most of the population. Altick adds, "The expanding middle class lived in greater comfort than it had ever done before, and a trickle of the new affluence was reaching at least some of the working class . . ." (13). Yet Oliphant maintains that something is lacking in this rosy scenario, regardless of how incongruent her observations are with the historical overviews.

One way Oliphant sees to ameliorate the economic problems of being either unemployed or under-employed is to reassess the mission of education, and her tone abruptly shifts from lofty skepticism to adamant cynicism. Although England’s High Victorian period saw many educational gains both for women and for the less privileged, Oliphant is still not pleased with what she sees. And while contemporary educational reformers are fighting to ensure that all children have a basic public education (which will not be legislated until twelve years after her article was published), Oliphant’s concerns are more with curriculum than with the principle of universal education. She lambastes the educational system for preparing young men for a privileged life of leisure instead of educating them for some useful occupation. She states,

In this vast London . . . there are crowds of young men, trained to that pitch of bodily perfection and development which English public
schools and universities, without doubt, keep up to a higher degree than any other educational institutions in the world—with a high average of intelligence, and all the advantages which are to be derived from that system of mental training which this country approves as the most complete—who, nevertheless, are as entirely at sea as to the best method of employing themselves and their faculties, as any woman with a feminine education equivalent to theirs could possibly find herself.

(143)

For Oliphant, the problem is not the difference between education for men and women or even between the rich and the poor; the problem is England's concept of education, an ideology which she sees as both outmoded and impractical.

Oliphant buttresses her earlier remarks about society being harder on men than on women with her indictment of education. Women, she claims, are "constrained by special circumstances to labour for their own bread" (144). The Gospel of Work, meanwhile, has decreed that men should toil to the best of their abilities; it is their duty to do so. The educational process has ill-prepared men for this role, but society still expects them to be economically successful, despite their having had little or no training in doing so. No one condemns women when they fail to work,
Oliphant claims, but men get no sympathy whatsoever when they are not prosperous.

Oliphant’s claim may be rooted in personal experience. Throughout their married life, her husband had never fared well financially. Frank Oliphant, a promising artist and glass painter, enthusiastically worked with Augustus Welby Pugin in the Gothic Revival, but the short-lived movement waned just as Oliphant perfected his craft, and his prospects never materialized. When Oliphant later went into business for himself, the venture suffered from his mismanagement of workers and inept bookkeeping. In her autobiography, Mrs. Oliphant relates an incident when the brother of a prospective partner examined her husband’s books. At the close of the evening, the man “congratulated my husband that his circumstances permitted him to be so indifferent to profit” (63). She continued, relating that at that time she was making approximately 400 pounds per novel. Biographers claim that Oliphant’s earnings from her writing exceeded her husband’s earnings and were more regular as well. Hence, the growing family depended on two rather mercurial professions for sustenance. Consequently, Oliphant was in a unique position to empathize with men who could not make a proper living for their families and who suffered disapproval for failing to live up to yet another societal ideal.
The most interesting aspect of Oliphant's reasoning process as she purportedly debunks the gender inequity issue is her creation of an inverse argument wherein her support furnishes de facto evidence against her own claim. In discussing the lack of economic opportunity, for example, she claims, "It is a universal injury, an evil common to the time; it is not a one-sided and new-discovered aggravation of the wrongs and disabilities of women" (144). Pleading with her readers to recognize that women are not what many writers have portrayed them to be, "a distinct creation rather than . . . a portion of a general race" (144), she implores them to see that one law, one God, and one morality governs both the same. Oliphant stops short of suggesting that men and women are the same, however, acquiescing that "essential differences" separate the two (144), but her admission is weak and overshadowed by her stronger comments about equality.

Oliphant overdevelops her case, if possible, as she elaborates on how men and women are alike, but how they inhabit different spheres. And she quickly tries to dispel any notion that she believes that the two are equal. "Let us not be misunderstood," she says, her adoption of first person plural suggesting she wants additional emphasis and authority for her words. "We are not endeavouring to establish the 'equality' of the two. Equality is the
mightiest of humbugs—there is no such thing in existence,” she states (145). Yet “equality” is just exactly what Oliphant has set up in the preceding paragraph. She begins by claiming that women should be treated no differently than men, that to do so suggests that they are not full participants in humankind. She then shifts to a Christian perspective, noting that men and women are equally accountable in the eyes of their Creator. “It still remains true that there is only one law and one Gospel, and that God has made provision for one moral nature, and not for two,” she states, pointing out that men and women share “one fundamental and general ground of humanity,” one hope, one faith, one heaven, and one race. They are born and die in the same manner (144). After meticulously laying the groundwork to show how much men and women are equal, she then undermines those very words when she scoffs at the idea of the sexes being equal.

Oliphant’s strange rhetorical choices suggest she, herself, is confused as she attempts to support her claim that equality does not exist. She returns to her Christian perspective, contending that God ordained separate spheres for men and women, giving them “different constitutions, different organisations, a perfectly distinct and unmistakable identity” (145). But then she abruptly shifts back to her original pattern wherein she compares how much
the two sexes are alike. She compares how the two are alike and contrasts how they are different, supposedly to uphold her emphatic assertion that the two are not equal.

The nature of her claim dictates that she needs more contrast than comparison, however, but she does not provide this. Instead, Oliphant composes only two sentences of contrasting evidence while she has ten of comparison. Her comparative sentences are also much longer and are turgid with information jammed into independent clauses joined by semicolons and dashes. For example, she states:

One fundamental and general ground of humanity is common to men and to women; one faith is propounded to both, without alteration of terms or change of inducements; one hope and one undiscriminated heaven shines on the ending of their days; they are born precisely after the same manner, and by the same event die;--they are, in fact--different, distinct, and individual as every detail of their responsible existence may be--one race; and without the slightest inclination to ignore or lessen the essential differences between them, we can see no true philosophy in any view of this subject which does not recognise the ground they hold in common, as well as the peculiar standing which they hold apart. (144-5)
The preponderance of Oliphant’s proof supports the idea that men and women are more equal than not. Hence, she provides weak evidence to support her claim that she is “not endeavouring to establish the ‘equality’ of the two.” In fact, she provides ample evidence to refute her own argument.

Oliphant carries this inverse argument even further, insinuating that treating women differently than men may be a grave social error. She claims that public discussions of womanhood have suggested that women somehow occupy “a distinct sphere of being, a separate globe of existence, to which different rules, different motives, an altogether distinct economy belong” (144). This information Oliphant uses to introduce her comparison of the two sexes, creating yet another rhetorical anomaly in its wake because this claim should buttress her contention that the two are unequal; instead, it implies just the opposite. She contends that “the new light which new experience throws” makes many believe that women, “this second creation,” should have “more delicate handling” than men (144). Oliphant’s tone and word choice indicate that she not only rejects this reasoning but that subscribing to such ideas also diminishes women. Oddly, Oliphant has followed a line of reasoning here which develops yet more material supporting a counterclaim rather than her own claim.
Moreover, she fails to develop secondary support for her primary claim in the process.

If Oliphant wants a clear, convincing argument for her readers, her argument should be rearranged to provide more in-depth support for her primary claim. This entire passage suffers from shifting focus, lack of unity, and disorganization. Perhaps the greatest flaw here, however, is that her purpose has become obscured for her audience. Although Oliphant's purpose may have been clearly in her mind as she began the article, she vacillates, leaving the impression that she, herself, is not convinced of her own argument. In concluding this passage, for example, she states, "The two creatures are as different as creatures made for different vocations, and different offices, can well be; yet in all the great fundamental principles of their mind and nature, the two are one" (145). Perhaps some of the "new light" she cited earlier is beginning to shine into her own experience, revealing concepts she can only subconsciously perceive and cannot yet consciously articulate.

Further complicating the issue, she slips into a pattern of using the first person pronoun immediately after this passage. In her first article on the Woman Question, this usage occurs when Oliphant seems least sure of her ideas, an explanation which also fits the second article as
well, although usage in the later article is not as
blatantly ambiguous as earlier. Oliphant has occasionally
used we, our, and us in this article, but she has done so
sporadically, judiciously, and unobtrusively. As she makes
the transition to the next topic, however, she
indiscriminately moves between first and second person,
between author and audience, creating a stilted effect. She
says,

At all events, most dear and impartial reader,
whether you agree with us or not, we are bound to
declare we think so--and, thinking so, we cannot
avoid thinking that there is a perfectly
preposterous quantity of nonsense spoken about
womankind by most of those people who profess to
have studied the subject. (145)

"Most dear and impartial reader" reeks of affectation,
insincerity, and condescension, and her superfluity does not
hide the fact that she is hedging here.

Her rhetorical choices indicate that Oliphant does not
have the courage of her convictions, and she sounds almost
like a politician greeting an audience with "My dear
friends," trying to garner support without really earning
it. And not only does she seem unsure that she can convince
her audience without resorting to these tactics, she also
wavers in setting forth her position. It almost seems she
wants her audience to reassure her, or perhaps even convince her, that she has a valid argument.

Surprisingly, Oliphant moves quite deftly from this, her weakest rhetorical stance in the entire article, to a strong rhetorical position. Her next claim not only brackets away the whole issue of equality but makes it moot as well. She sets up her hypothesis with a series of "if"-beginning questions which provide a unity that has thus far been lacking in her article.

If there is one-fourth of our population in these astounding circumstances . . . . If it is true that so large a proportion of women stand in circumstances of isolation so entire, and self-responsibility so complete . . . . If the half of British women have to support themselves . . . . If female work, which is always so much cheaper, is available in such a quantity as to enter into real competition with the work of men, we may safely trust the employers of Great Britain to know their own interests; if it is not, no sentiment is likely to have the slightest effect upon them. (145-6)

She fleshes out each of these deductive statements accordingly, each building on the statement before it, as she describes her final conclusions.
Ultimately, Oliphant deduces that all the debate over women's employment is superfluous. She claims that changes in a country's occupational configuration are not the result of philosophy but of economics. Her observation is an enlightened one, and she develops the ramifications of her perception of the situation with the skill of a veteran debater. Granting women access to additional occupations will not ameliorate their employment problems, she claims, as too many women need jobs that only increased demands in the marketplace can provide. "Trade," she says, "like civilisation, is an irrational and abstract influence, upon which individual hardships make no impression whatever. It has no particular regard for men, none for women, and very small concern for the general interests of the race" (146). Her reasoning, which may have seemed cynical to many of her ardent-feminist contemporaries, is quite sophisticated and astute for a young woman having no formal education in sociology or economics.

Oliphant also chides those who are demanding that women have greater employment opportunities. "Let no one suppose it--there is no conspiracy of mankind to keep women excluded from the workshop or the manufactory," she says (146), an even-handed admonition to those who blame men for this problem. Her tack diffuses anger and allows her audience, both male and female, to attack the problem and not each
other. Although Oliphant's final statement on the subject reveals her own quite narrow view of women's occupational possibilities as she claims "delicate labor for delicate hands is not capable of more than a certain degree of extension," she quietly reminds her women readers that women "are neither the only nor the primary sufferers" (146). Her tone, showing neither bitterness nor disdain, is more important than her limited perception in this passage. Her non-judgmental stance shows she genuinely sympathizes with both sexes, implying that as both suffer together, they should work together to solve the problem.

After presenting an opinion that partially supports the patriarchal status-quo, Oliphant adopts a very enlightened, feminist perspective as she makes the transition to her final topic, women as students and readers. Given her theories regarding a market-driven economy and woman's divinely-ordained role, it comes as little surprise that she first discusses marriage. Her recommendations, however, are somewhat surprising. Women, she contends, spend far too much time philosophizing about relations between the sexes. "This volunteer occupation of women is a more disagreeable symptom of the time than the want of legitimate employments for them," she contends (147). Women are preoccupied with thoughts of marriage, Oliphant says, and many thus assume they are experts on the topic. Oliphant sees this claimed
expertise as dangerous because it diminishes objectivity and sometimes prevents women from recognizing their own feelings about being married.

A woman needs to examine herself and her choices when she thinks about marriage, Oliphant says. She urges a woman to marry only if she "is certain that she is more fitted to be the mistress of a house, and the mother of a family, than anything else, and that this is her true vocation . . . ." (147). If she chooses to marry because she thinks it is the socially advantageous thing to do, she errs, Oliphant reasons. Considering her earlier response to the problems of single middle-class women, Oliphant’s recommendation is a bit unusual. She has seemingly upheld the Angel in the House ideal. Hence, one would expect her to promote the idea of marriage for all women, but this she does not do. And after her frank portrayal of starving unmarried dressmakers, her suggestion that singlehood should be a viable option seems likewise out of character. But Oliphant champions individual choice for women, a rather avant-garde idea in 1858, especially for a female critic employed by an ultra-conservative periodical.

Oliphant had introduced the idea of female choice early in her essay, but only now, after discussing the marital and economic status of women does she elaborate on how education has influenced these choices. As a self-educated woman, she
realizes that not all learning is formal in nature, which is particularly important as she discusses women choosing to remain single. She urges her audience to remember that "the maiden lady is not an invention of these times. There were unmarried women long ago, before civilisation made such fatal progress . . ." (147), her adjective revealing both cynicism and how pejoratively she views the advance of civilisation for women. She says, "Our age, which likes so much to declare itself the origin of changes, is not the inventor of feminine celibacy. There were unmarried women before our time, and there will be unmarried women after it" (148). She mentions the biblical Miriam and novelists such as Charlotte Brontë, Jane Austen, Maria Edgeworth, and Susan Ferrier as examples, stressing the contributions each made to her society.

Informal education, not formal education, has failed women, claims Oliphant, despite the current complaints. She compares formal female education to Don Quixote's windmill, stating,

There must be something terribly wrong with that famous windmill, which has borne the assault of so many fiery knights . . . . yet, judging from the undiminished fervour with which is it still assaulted in the present day, we conclude that no
Formal education has not exactly made women unfit for their post-school lives, she says, intimating that schooling has done so for men. She contends instead that informal education is women's mischief maker.

Oliphant particularly finds fault with books such as *Friends in Council*, authored by a Mr. Helps, which criticizes the current state of female education. Helps claims that women are "inaccessible to reason, considering all the homage and false worship with which they are surrounded" when they are young, "which is all calculated to persuade them of their own superlative and angelical gifts, and elevation above ordinary fact and information" (148). Oliphant scoffs at this idea, commenting that this only happens if the girl is extremely pretty, and even then if she has younger brothers, they dispel any notion of superiority she might display. Oliphant also derides another writer who claims girls are trained "to understand that helplessness is feminine and beautiful; helpfulness . . . unwomanly and ugly" (149).

Where are all these girls? Oliphant asks. The average young woman would be insulted by such adulation, and most are not going "to be dazzled out of their wits by the flattery of society," she comments dryly (149). And
Oliphant herself is insulted by the suggestion that women are victims of learned helplessness. Where are these parents who indulge their daughters' every whim?, she queries. The girls Oliphant knows present a very different image, especially if they are from a large family. She notes,

Nobody need fear that young women brought up in these [large families] will be educated in undue idleness, or with false ideas of their own angelic qualities . . . . Every one who knows family life, knows very well that it is the girls who are in reality the helpful portion of the household . . . . (150)

The authors of these books project images of women that conflict with reality, Oliphant claims, and she cautions readers about accepting these written accounts at face value. Not only do many of these books depict women erroneously, they neglect to recognize what contributions women are making to their families and to society, an omission which angers Oliphant. "It is a view out of a corner which is given to the public as the general aspect of womankind," she claims (150). She simply asks that her readers test the opinions presented by writers with what the readers themselves observe in the world around them.
Far too often, Oliphant says, women readers especially do not question what they read. Instead, they regard authors of popular philosophical works (which she refers to as "wise" books) as experts. Women do not learn to trust their own judgment when they rely on books for their perceptions of humankind, she believes, noting that books tend to present a very one-sided and often negative portrayal of classes and relationships. "Is it to this extent of wisdom and superiority that we desire to see our daughters grow?" she asks (150).

If women are going to develop world views based on their reading, Oliphant suggests that works such as Clarissa, Pamela, and the Spectator be revived. She says, If our young people are to be instructed in the social vices, by way of establishing their own morality, let Richardson once more be the support of virtue. It is better to tell the story of the much-tried milkmaid, which is visibly a fiction, than to preach philosophical suggestions of universal wickedness, which are supposed to be true. (262)

These works are not purportedly "the Truth" as some of the "wise books" pretend to be, she suggests. Oliphant also implies that readers usually rely on an active, not passive,
critical principle for understanding fiction, a principle not always employed when reading nonfiction.

Some of the so-called wise books are even more overtly harmful than novels in Oliphant's opinion. She specifically cites Catherine Beecher's book *Letters to the People on Health and Happiness*, a work shocking her with its "surgical lectures upon the construction of the human frame; and . . . a sort of morbid dissection of the health and morals of the United States, full of hints and implications of the most unbelievable evil" (151). Oliphant gives no more clues about the book's content, although she spends several sentences condemning the work. The Beecher book she finds even more pernicious than French novels, which she contends are mischief-makers that suggest scandal is an everyday part of life. All these books, Oliphant claims, skew feminine perception and interfere with moral development. She also questions why women need such reading when no like reading is directed to a male audience.

Oliphant dwells very briefly on the problem of male versus female audiences. No one writes books for young men, she states, "instructing them how to arrange their love-affairs, and informing them what the young ladies think of their general conduct," wryly adding, "The unfortunate boys have to collect their information on this subject at first hand, or to take the hints of their favourite novels . . . ."
Although she does not openly claim so, she clearly implies that women readers would benefit from being treated more equally as an audience.

But rather than elaborating on the idea she has introduced about woman as audience, Oliphant shifts topics abruptly, acknowledging that her column is drawing to a close and possibly trying to be as comprehensive as possible about the condition of women, as her title suggests. She spends over a page discussing her opinion of the recently-passed Divorce and Matrimonial Causes Act of 1857, an act which may well be seen as one of the most revolutionary pieces of legislation to be passed in nineteenth-century England. The Act moved divorce proceedings from the ecclesiastical courts to the civil courts. Previously, the only way to obtain a civil divorce was through a private act of Parliament, a costly, complicated process which was difficult for the upper class and a few wealthy middle class men; divorce was virtually impossible for everyone else. The Act, which made divorce more attainable for both sexes, still operated with a double standard as men could divorce their wives on ground of adultery while women had to prove cruelty, bigamy, incest, or bestiality when charging their husbands with adultery. Another provision of the Act granted deserted women the rights of feme sole, removing them from the legal stricture of coverture. The Act itself
was most revolutionary, however, in that it set a precedent for civil redress of marital inequities.

Oliphant, like many other conservatives, was alarmed by this legislation and the precedent it established, and her page-long diatribe about the Act echoes the position she took in her earlier article of April 1856. Although her perspective has not changed, her critical thinking skills and rhetorical strategies have matured in the intervening two years, resulting in a much more lucid, controlled discourse in the second article. She apologizes for leaving so little space to discuss “the married woman, for whose benefit law itself has been moving, and Parliament talking itself hoarse” (152). Her wry subtlety becomes more pointed as she suggests that men are the real beneficiaries of this law. Yet her tone is balanced and light as she very briefly summarizes the changes this legislation brings, and her word choice is remarkably free of value judgments; hence, implications of her observation may be easily overlooked. She says, “It is not very much with divorce, however, that women have to do. Save in cases horrible and extreme, that is not the woman’s way” (152). Her comment is more inference than complaint as she suggests that the Act which is touted as a legal coup for women actually benefits men far more than women. “Very few even of the wives most
bitterly insulted would desire . . . to adopt this last means of escape," she continues (152).

Oliphant contends that women's reluctance to divorce their husbands again demonstrates what she sees as the fundamental difference between women and men, a position "which no law can alter" (152). She reiterates the same argument, using the same example, as she had done in the first article: the indissoluble issue of parental rights. For Oliphant, this is the insurmountable problem of divorce and the bulwark for her contention that civil equality between the genders is impossible no matter how desirable it may be. She states,

The present state of affairs is not just--is cruel, frightful, almost intolerable--but national legislation, and all the wisdom of the wise, can find no arbitrary and universal law which could be juster. There is none, let us seek it where we will . . . so long as there are divorced and separated parents, there must be in one way or other, on one side or another, a certain amount of painful and bitter injustice. Women, so far as the law goes, are at present the sufferers, and not the benefited parties; but if the arrangement were reversed, the principle would still be
Oliphant's opinion of divorce legislation is unchanged from that set forth in her earlier article, but her presentation of that opinion has markedly changed. "Cruel, frightful, almost intolerable" is strong criticism of patriarchy, especially coming from someone often labeled anti-feminist. Now she readily acknowledges that the social position of women is painfully inequitable and unjust, an idea she peremptorily dismissed in her earlier article. Her perspective on the Woman Question has not changed entirely, but her outlook has undergone an appreciable shift in two years' time. The pre-feminist markers she experienced earlier have illuminated her thinking.

Oliphant's use of logic and tone also changes in the second article. She relies far less on abstract support for her claims than she did in the earlier article. She still contends that nature has created different roles for men and women, but she does not press this idea continually as she did earlier. Instead, she sparingly uses this explanation, gradually leading up to it only after she has presented concrete observations, as she does in the preceding quote. Her improved inductive reasoning thus enhances her rhetorical strategy.
When discussing nature in the later article, Oliphant avoids the irksome overuse of exclamation points which plagued her earlier work. While this punctuation tactic certainly leaves no doubt about how strongly she believes her own explanation, it likewise makes her rhetorical skills appear somewhat sophomoric. The typical Blackwood's audience was quite sophisticated, and her frequent resorting to exclamation marks may have well cost her some credibility. In the succeeding article, however, Oliphant makes none of these rhetorical blunders. Hence, her reasoning appears much more sound and her material much better controlled.

The tone of Oliphant's second article is also superior to the tone in the first work. Although emotional appeal is a valid strategy in argument, Oliphant relied on this overmuch in the earlier article, resulting in an almost overwrought authorial persona. Her message may have been obscured by her melodramatic presentation. The careful control of emotion in the second article, however, builds credibility for her audience. Oliphant may still feel the same passion for her subject, but she presents it more dispassionately.

Feminist critics could argue that the controlled emotion, carefully-executed rhetoric, and dispassionate tone evident in the second article indicate that Oliphant is
learning "to write like a man." In discussing particular constraints suffered by woman reviewers, Margaret Atwood attributes this phenomenon to the Quiller-Couch Syndrome, a label she derives from turn-of-the-century essayist Arthur Quiller-Couch's definitions of certain writing traits as masculine or feminine. "The 'masculine' style is, of course," Atwood points out, "bold, forceful, clear, vigorous, etc." compared to "the 'feminine' style [which is] vague, weak, tremulous, pastel, etc." (75). Although demonstrating a few feminine attributes, "The Condition of Women" illustrates the masculine style for the most part while "The Laws Concerning Women," her earlier article, exhibits every characteristic of the feminine style, despite the male persona.

But to assume that because Oliphant writes "like a man" she must, therefore, share the prevailing patriarchal viewpoint is erroneous. She may have changed her writing style because of cultural conditioning, of course, but a more plausible explanation is that the shift was occupationally expedient. According to the Wellesley Index, only four women wrote nonfiction articles for Blackwood's in the 1850s; by 1858, Oliphant was a regular contributor having at least one article in virtually every issue since 1856. Three of the women contributors each had written one poetry review. The fourth contributor, Caroline Bowles
Southey, wrote a short series of articles about English churchyards which appeared sporadically. Southey's articles were usually less than five pages long while Oliphant's articles averaged about fifteen pages each. Jay notes that periodical employment should have attracted women writers because it could be done in the home. "Yet," she says, in the Wellesley Index to Victorian Periodicals only 11 women, out of 11,560 authors indexed, have more than fifty entries to their name. Margaret Oliphant easily tops this list with a total of 252 entries, two-and-a-half times as many as her nearest female competitor. (245)

Journalism, as Oliphant knew it, was a "man's" world, and she ably demonstrated her ability to function in that world.

Oliphant's observations about women workers in a market-driven economy also indicate she is well aware of how competition affects business. Adopting a 'masculine' way of writing is a conscious choice, a way of sharpening her competitive edge, especially as a woman writer on women's issues. She probably senses that if her writing seems more 'masculine' she may have more numerous, more varied, and perhaps more lucrative writing projects from the periodical. If she wants to be taken seriously as an author and critic, she cannot be viewed as merely one more "scribbling woman."
By exhibiting boldness, force, clarity, and vigor in her writing, Oliphant also dispels the notion that these are exclusively masculine characteristics. Throughout the second article she has illustrated how women's lives frequently deviate from the ideal and from what is written in books. If she expects her female readers to heed her advice about critically analyzing what they read about women, her own writing must exude strength and confidence, traits which the 'masculine' attributes exemplify. These same readers will demand that her writing authenticate their personal experience; her credibility rests on that premise.

But Atwood furnishes yet another possible explanation which may account for Oliphant's changed tone: no critical vocabulary exists for the concept of a "'good/female'" writer. Atwood says,

The assumption is that women are by nature soft, weak and not very talented, and that if a woman writer happens to be a good writer, she should be deprived of her identity as a female and provided with higher (male) status. Thus the woman writer has . . . two choices. She can be bad but female, a carrier of the 'feminine sensibility' virus; or she can be 'good' in male-adjective terms, but sexless . . . . 'Maleness' is exemplified by the 'good' male writer; 'femaleness,' since it is seen
... as a handicap or deficiency, is held to be transcended or discarded by the 'good' female one.

(76)

Throughout her entire career, Oliphant tried to be that 'good/female' writer. As Atwood's conclusions are drawn from a survey of twentieth-century reviewers, one can assume that reconciling these two aspects is still difficult; it may have been even more so in Oliphant's time with so few women writing nonfiction.

The divergent topics covered in Oliphant's article merge into one as the work comes to a close. Civilization, progress, gender issues in employment and education, single and married women, women as literary topics and as writers and readers: all these topics finally coalesce into Oliphant's Jungian-like analysis of what it means to be a woman in mid nineteenth-century England. Civilization and progress have lulled people into "the false idea that there is a remedy for everything, and that no pain is inevitable," she says (153). But pain is inevitable, she avers, and some inequities will never be redressed. Unfortunately, she continues, far too much writing dwells on the inequities suffered by a few women, and many of these inequities are far more complicated to solve than the writers indicate.

The real danger of this literature, Oliphant asserts, is that it creates dissension and lowers literary standards.
"All the greater questions of existence are common to men and women alike, and common to the higher literature which belongs equally to both," she declares (153). No like literature is targeted specifically at men, but perhaps it should be, she says, noting that

Perhaps, if some pedagogic genius of 'the male sect' were to address moral volumes to the husbands and brothers of England--to instruct them in the rights, privileges, and duties of their sex, and expound their true and wisest position towards the other, the eyes of female moralists might be opened to the true nature of their own prelections. (153)

But, according to Oliphant, this is not likely to happen. Men instead develop their world view from more varied sources, literary and otherwise, and this is exactly what she believes women should do as well. "Life in its truest sense, and experience of all those greatest incidents and events which guide it, belong to women as fully and as freely as they do to men," she states (153). Her entire conclusion shifts on that note, becoming an implied and yet de facto argument for that very thing: equal treatment of the sexes.

She retains her focus on women's reading matter to the very end, but a subtextual, and perhaps subconscious,
argument resounds through her final discussion. People of either sex can be "well-read, well-informed" and can read "the loftiest poetry, the highest philosophy, the purest eloquence," she claims (154). And this can be understood without knowing Latin or Greek, the only subjects young men study that young women do not, she adds, noting that young women are also capable of acquiring these languages.

As women have demonstrated that they are just as capable as men in understanding these intellectually-challenging works, why is a "supplementary literature" needed for women? she asks. "It is as much to say, over and over, that what is enough for the brother is not enough for the sister . . . and that a secondary course of morals is the necessary food for the less noble capacity," she insists (154). Oliphant's topic has shifted almost imperceptibly. Women's reading matter has become the subordinate topic; women's moral development now becomes the primary focus of her argument. Both she casts against the backdrop of equality.

Oliphant struggles to answer her own inquiries. With clarity and logic she tries to validate why a supplementary female literature is necessary, but she concludes it is not and that it is even harmful. But she cannot find a clear resolution to the puzzle of why this literature has come to be, and she finds this lack of resolution troubling, not
just for her personally, but for her society as well. "We should think it a very miserable prospect for the future," she says, "... that while literature in general, and their Bible, is all we adopt for the moral guidance of our boys, our girls required the artificial bolstering of a quite additional support of virtue" (154). This "artificial bolstering" leads Oliphant to an even greater puzzle. If women do indeed need an additional propping up of their morals, she reasons, this creates a philosophical problem. She asks why her society persists

... to hold fast still by the old assertion that womanhood is purer by native right than manhood, and that women still are next to the angels? If they are, they ought to need rather less than more lecturing than falls to the share of the more obdurate rebel; either one thing or the other must be untrue. (154)

On those words, her article ends.

Oliphant's argument is implicit, and it may be even more powerful and provocative than if it were stated. Her readers must now rely on their own reasoning to decide which philosophy is true: does womankind need additional, gender-specific moral instruction, and if so, how does this correspond to the angel in the house philosophy? If woman has indeed had a special nature conferred upon her, a pure,
salvatory nature that supposedly makes her the moral guide of her society, why does this nature need constant shoring up from without? Oliphant has posed the hard questions for her readers, and she has also provided ample thoughts for them to explore possible answers. She leaves the options for resolution open, but she reminds her audience that both philosophies cannot prevail concurrently.

It could be assumed that because Oliphant has opposed having a specialized literature for women she then supports the opposite, the angel-in-the-house philosophy. But her entire article has been a plea against sexism. It is more likely that she rejects both philosophies, and she may be either very clever by not openly shunning both, or she may not really know what to believe about the paradoxical issue she has raised. In either case, she has once again created an inverse argument wherein she provides ample evidence for her audience to decide that women should indeed be equal to men.

"The Condition of Women" does not illustrate that Oliphant holds a radically different perception of women and the woman's sphere than she held in her earlier article. This second article does not reveal a critic suddenly transformed into an ardent feminist or an adamant anti-feminist. It does reveal, however, a woman who is questioning gender issues and articulating her rhetoric in a
precise, thoughtful manner. It also reveals that Oliphant senses the gender problem is not exclusively a female problem. Martha Vicinus claims, "Both women and men were trapped by an ideology that proclaimed roles for each sex that were often at odds with the realities of daily life" (4), something Oliphant recognizes a century earlier. Some issues, such as the spinster problem and women's employment, she neglects to explore fully, but her rigorous questioning of other paradoxes inherent in the Woman Question serves as another pre-feminist marker, the seed of a new awareness, so to speak, that may later bear fruit.

Oliphant's reasoning process as she grapples with the many issues in this second article also illustrates her immense growth as a social critic since her earlier article. Rare is the critic who can identify the societal hobgoblins of his or her own time; rarer still is one who can objectively discuss the ramifications thereof. Oliphant attempts both in this article. Despite her proclamation that equality is "the mightiest of humbugs," her rhetoric suggests she finds that humbug a prized fantasy, whether attainable or not.
CHAPTER FOUR

"THE GREAT UNREPRESENTED": MILL'S 'MAD NOTION'
FOR 'AN ODD AND IMPERFECTLY UNDERSTOOD TRIBE'

In August, 1866, Margaret Oliphant wrote a letter to John Blackwood, editor of *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, proposing an essay on John Stuart Mill and his "mad notion of the franchise for women" (*Autobiography* 211). The following month, Blackwood published the essay, "The Great Unrepresented," which is Oliphant's third and probably best known article on the Woman Question. Oliphant departs markedly from her earlier style in this article. She displays directness coupled with a deepening cynicism, and she gives her wry sense of humor free rein. The combined result is an almost flippant candor which produces an uneven, strained tone throughout. She frequently catches her reader off guard with her droll comments, many of which exhibit anger masquerading as humor, especially when she speaks of men.

These factors create a radically different persona for Oliphant. In the Bodichon article, written in 1856, Oliphant's persona was that of an ingenue, both in writing and in life; as such, she argued passionately if somewhat naively. In her second article, written in 1858, her
persona was that of a dynamic, astute observer of society whose passion had been somewhat tempered by experience. In the Mill article, however, her persona is that of an aloof, crone-like sage who sees and judges all. Her outlook on society and politics has darkened considerably. Her first two personae convey sincerity and genuineness, despite her naiveté and rhetorical shortcomings. Her third persona is less trustworthy or likable than either of the earlier personae, although the perspective is more erudite and the writing more skilled.

Oliphant also shrouds herself in the mantle of old age in "The Great Unrepresented," a pose which seems obvious, forced, and artificial. At age thirty-eight, she may indeed have aged prematurely, but this explanation is not sufficient because her other writing during the period does not reflect this voice. She may have deliberately adopted this persona as she writes on behalf of female householders, many of whom are older women. As their spokeswoman, she may be less vulnerable to criticism if she, too, appears old.

It may also be advantageous for her to appear older, hence wiser, in opposing the eminent Mill, who is more than twenty years older than she. Oliphant may hope that the words of an aged woman will seem like common-sensical, homespun wisdom compared to Mill's scholarly, philosophical logic. Oliphant's perspective as an older person
representing the traditional woman’s sphere also distances her from Mill’s female supporters who are dissatisfied with the domestic role.

But the most marked change in Oliphant’s persona is her shift to a female voice. In the earlier articles, she assumed a male voice, which was also a Blackwood’s standard. Elisabeth Jay claims Oliphant used male voice to achieve authority and “to receive male endorsement” from Blackwood, who was “noted for his conservative views on feminist issues” (47). In the third article, however, Oliphant adopts a female voice, but rather than increasing her credibility, the voice sometimes has a false ring which diminishes Oliphant’s reliability. She often seems to pander to her male audience, telling them what she thinks they want to hear a woman say rather than speaking honestly. The resulting insincerity is just one of many paradoxes in this article.

Oliphant’s changed voice, tone, and persona have a cumulative effect in “The Great Unrepresented.” She emerges as a more aggressive, more self-assured, and less conciliatory commentator than earlier, and her rhetorical skills have likewise improved. Her writing is much more controlled and direct than in the past. But organization, an ongoing problem in Oliphant’s prose, suffers in this article, although not to as great an extent as in the
earlier articles. Her long, ponderous paragraphs often have three and four topics. Outlining her articles virtually impossible. Following her argument is challenging for modern readers, although her rhetorical format is not very different from that of many other Victorian essayists. Oliphant again struggles with evidence, as she has in the past, but the problem occurs less frequently and is of less magnitude than in earlier articles.

Some of the new traits emerging in Oliphant's article may reflect the dramatic changes which had occurred in the eight and a half years following her second article. She enjoyed financial prosperity with The Chronicles of Carlingford published between 1861 and 1876. Her two most successful novels, Salem Chapel, serialized from February 1862 through January 1863, and Miss Marjoribanks, serialized from February 1865 through May 1866, were part of this series. Blackwood's published both.

But while Oliphant's professional life prospered during this period, her personal life plummeted. In 1859, her husband died, leaving her pregnant, heavily in debt, and with a young family to support. Willie, Oliphant's alcoholic older brother, also began his life-long dependence upon her during these years. In 1864, her only daughter, ten-year-old Maggie, died unexpectedly when the family was
on holiday in Italy, where, ironically, Oliphant’s husband had died as well.

Jay discusses these important events in Oliphant’s life. The first turning point Jay cites is Oliphant’s realization that her husband’s illness was serious. Another crucial moment in her personal life occurs when Oliphant decided to return to England from Europe, where she and her two sons traveled around aimlessly for nineteen months after her daughter’s death. Oliphant herself frequently mentions the inception of *The Chronicles of Carlingford* as the most crucial event of her writing career. In her autobiography she states, “John Blackwood sent me back paper after paper and driven half desperate I dashed at the first story of the *Chronicles of Carlingford* and wrote it in two or three days feeling as if it was my last chance. It was the turning point” (Autobiography 3).

The turmoil of these events surprisingly seemed to have a good effect on Oliphant’s writing. Her self-confidence, for example, is one of the most striking differences between this article and the two previous articles. Her new self-assurance may have resulted from the success she was enjoying from *The Chronicles of Carlingford*, or, having now been a regular contributor to Blackwood’s for twelve years, she simply may have been more confident of her intellectual and writing abilities. Using a female persona in this
article may have also liberated her writing somewhat, although both the persona and perspective are problematic in many places. Her tragedies and hardships, as well as maturation itself, may have also increased her confidence. Regardless of the cause, her writing exhibits a new strength and certainty.

Oliphant presents her topic and confronts her opposition early and openly in “The Great Unrepresented.” Ordinarily, she takes several pages to obliquely wander into her topic, a tack which suggests tentativeness about her position or authority. None of that ambiguity is evident in the third article, however, as she boldly states her position: “The present writer has the disadvantage of being a woman. It is a dreadful confession to put at the beginning of a page; and yet it is not an unmitigated misfortune” (367). Forthright and to-the-point, the opening effectively captures the audience, tantalizing them to read on. The reader knows the writer’s gender (something Oliphant often hides) and senses the self-irony of such an admission. Rarely is an Oliphant lead so engaging.

Oliphant’s directness also helps maintain focus, especially in the introductory passage. She compares the relative positions of women and men in her society, noting that in many respects women have been historically short-changed by legal systems, double standards, and lack of
opportunity. Women feel, she says, "Wrong, in short, by the mere fact of being women. But," she continues, "it has not as yet become by any means a popular grievance among women that they have no votes" (367).

Oliphant's declaration was a miscall, however, because women's suffrage was a frequently-discussed topic in the newspapers and periodicals of the time. Universal suffrage was a very high-profile issue as Parliament debated upcoming reform legislation in 1865 and 1866. Concerns about the vote for women were nothing new, of course, as the issue predated the great Reform Bill of 1832 which enfranchised some middle-class men. Although revolutionary at the time, the Reform Bill of 1832, in retrospect, was quite conservative. In 1866, more radical voices called for reform, and the enfranchisement of women formally came before Parliament.

Ironically, Mill's father, James Mill, had been instrumental in the wording of the 1832 bill when he revised a draft which originally read "persons" to read "male persons." Constance Rover claims that "It was the inclusion of the word 'male' . . . which provided a focus of attack and a resentment from which, in time, the women's suffrage movement grew" (3). Thirty-four years later, John Stuart Mill consciously tried to quell the indignation his father had aroused. On June 7, 1866, Mill, who had been elected
M.P. from Westminster a year earlier, and Henry Fawcett presented a petition formally codified as the “Petition of Barbara L. S. Bodichon, for extension to all householders without distinction of sex. 747” to the House of Commons. Rover points out, “This event marked the commencement of a continuous campaign for women’s suffrage, organized by women, extending until the vote was won” (5). This petition reached Oliphant when it had a mere twenty names on it, arousing her ire and culminating in her writing “The Great Unrepresented.”

Supporters had prepared the groundwork for the petition for a year before Mill presented it to the House of Commons. Spearheading the movement were Barbara Leigh-Smith Bodichon, Emily Davies, Elizabeth Garrett, Mrs. P.A. Taylor, Rosamond Davenport Hill and others. They discussed their proposed petition with Mill, and he agreed to present it if they could secure one hundred signatures. Millicent Garrett Fawcett points out, “After a fortnight’s work they secured 1499, including many of the most distinguished women of the day, such as Mrs. Somerville, Frances Power Cobbe, Florence Nightingale, Harriet Martineau, Miss Swanwick, Josephine Butler, Lady Anna Gore Langton, and Mrs. William Grey” (20). Oliphant’s first article on the Woman Question had targeted Bodichon, of course, so their rivalry was well established before the petition crossed Oliphant’s desk.
Fawcett relates an interesting anecdote about the logistics of getting the petition to Mill. She writes,

Miss Garrett and Miss Emily Davies took the petition down to the House, entering by way of Westminster Hall. They were a little embarrassed by the size of the roll in their charge, and deposited it with the old apple-woman, who hid it under her stall. The ladies did not know how to find Mr. Mill, when at that moment Mr. Fawcett passed through Westminster Hall and at once offered to go in search of him. Mr. Mill was much amused on his arrival when he found the petition was hidden away under the apple-woman’s stall; but he was greatly delighted by the large number of names which had been obtained, and exclaimed, ‘Ah, this I can brandish with great effect.’ (20)

And Mill did indeed brandish the petition with ‘great effect’: his efforts crystallized the Women’s Suffrage Movement which finally secured the vote approximately fifty years later, after World War One.

But Mill’s efforts to enfranchise female householders angers Oliphant, and by the time readers are midway through her first paragraph, they know her subject, her stance, her opposition, and the nature of her objection. Usually one must read through an entire Oliphant article to identify
these elements. She maintains this directness throughout the article which creates a refreshing change for her readers who no longer must speculate about her digressions or her feelings. Her frankness is a welcome change from the ambiguity of the earlier articles. As a result, her writing seems more controlled and mature.

Oliphant's tone also exudes self-confidence as her sense of humor surfaces. Many of her witticisms show contempt for the opposite sex, however, and their preponderance reveals an irritation which sometimes borders on bitterness. Her first droll observation is relatively inoffensive. After describing the similarity of women's and men's private lives, she states,

But so far as public action is concerned, women in England have hitherto been confined to the office of Queen, which it is evident is one which can be very satisfactorily filled by them. Except as queens, the British Constitution takes but small notice of the female part of the community, and the world in general, which is half made up of women, has accepted the tacit conclusion with great and general equanimity. (367)

The irony of a male-dominated society having a woman on the throne had often been noted by the Victorians, and neither men nor women readers would probably find Oliphant's
observation objectionable, but she does remind her readers that a woman is capably filling England's highest public office. Her observation also suggests that her society underestimates women.

Many of Oliphant's other ironic comments echo the tone of the passage above, but all remind the reader that women must continually face a double standard. She says, for example, "This petition, some time since, was forwarded to Ourselves (if, indeed, a woman's pen may venture upon that sublime pronoun) for our signature" (368). Her parenthetical inclusion adds virtually nothing to her subject. The tone can be described as either playful or sardonic, but in either case, conferring gender upon her pen also denotes a sense of Otherness.

"The woman's pen" is currently, of course, an important component of phallic criticism. Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar discuss the woman's pen at length in The Madwoman in the Attic, claiming the pen is a metaphorical penis for the woman writer who "fathers" a text. Gilbert and Gubar attribute this idea to Gerard Manley Hopkins who once declared that writing was "'a kind of male gift, and especially marks men off from women, the begetting of one's thoughts on paper . . . . The male quality is the creative gift'" (qtd. in Gilbert and Gubar 3). Oliphant's quasi-apologetic mention of "a woman's pen" indicates deference to
her male readers, but she nonetheless claims the masculine generative power of authorship. This is a bold statement for a woman in Oliphant’s position. Ironically, she could have avoided this admission had she not used a female voice in this article, but her disclosure nonetheless reveals a new rhetorical acuity.

Mary Eagleton further elaborates on Gilbert and Gubar’s metaphor, observing that they “believe the woman writer is involved in a complex balancing act between apparent conformity to certain patriarchal literary norms and a trenchant critique of those standards,” (41). Oliphant’s parenthetical comment reveals, almost painfully, that same balancing act. As a critic, her writing must demonstrate an equanimity between male and female, radical and conservative, journalist and editor.

Oliphant’s acknowledgment of her “woman’s pen” also provides a classic example of Gilbert and Gubar’s oft-cited “anxiety of authorship” experienced by women. Gilbert and Gubar maintain this anxiety is more pressing for women writers because their literary precursors are overwhelmingly male.

- On the one hand, therefore, the woman writer’s male precursors symbolize authority; on the other hand, despite their authority, they fail to define the ways in which she experiences her own identity
as a writer. . . . Her battle, however, is not against her (male) precursor's reading of the world but against his reading of her. (Gilbert and Gubar 48-49)

Oliphant's anxiety seems to stem from a precursory reading of her and of her world view. Hence, her anxiety as a writer of social criticism is twofold, and her concerns about "a woman's pen" reflect this anxiety.

Eagleton also refers to the anxiety of authorship for women in patriarchal societies, claiming, "The problem for the woman writer lies not only in the production of writing; an equally fraught area is its reception," claiming further this anxiety "has been created and maintained in part through the practices of reviewing and literary criticism" (41). Once again, Oliphant bears a double burden because she not only experiences the anxiety of authorship, she in turn creates it for other women writers when she reviews or criticizes their works. Jay also comments on Oliphant's apprehension in her introduction to Oliphant's autobiography. "In her case," Jay says,

the confusion of gender-defined roles intensified the anxiety of authorship experienced by so many nineteenth-century women, who experienced the need to justify their public persona against the
traditional expectations of female behaviour and practice fostered by their upbringing. (xiii) Oliphant always claimed motherhood, the most obvious of gender-defined roles, was her primary function; she integrated writing into that role although doing so usually meant working far into the night and writing amidst family activities. She did not have a room to use as an office or study until her later years. For Oliphant, the stress of authorship may have equaled the anxiety of authorship.

Oliphant's acknowledgment of her gender creates other problems for her writing as well. She patently resists change and supports the traditional female role, but paradoxically she subverts the femininity she so tenaciously defends. In "The Great Unrepresented," Oliphant's most striking attributes are those Elaine Showalter categorizes as stereotypically male. Showalter describes these gender-based stereotypes found in literary criticism, noting:

We find that women writers were acknowledged to possess sentiment, refinement, tact, observation, domestic expertise, high moral tone, and knowledge of female character; and thought to lack originality, intellectual training, abstract intelligence, humor, self-control, and knowledge of male character. Male writers had most of the desirable qualities: power, breadth, distinctness,
clarity, learning, abstract intelligence, shrewdness, experience, humor, knowledge of everyone's character, and open-mindedness. (90)

Paradoxically, Oliphant, who pleads throughout this article that women not be seen as men, has moved from the stereotypically female qualities evident in her earlier articles, when she used a male persona, to stereotypically male qualities in her third article, when she uses a female persona.

Oliphant's subversion of femininity has other implications as well. Langland claims that Oliphant sometimes subverts societal values in her fiction. Langland specifically cites Oliphant's subversion of duty in Miss Marjoribanks, which Oliphant had finished shortly before writing "The Great Unrepresented." Here, Langland says, "Oliphant gives us 'duty' recycled, used to subvert the values it usually supports" (156). Oliphant's use of femininity in her attack on Mill appears to be a similar subversion, revealing female strength instead of the expected weakness. This tactic is a subtle empowering of her gender by Oliphant.

When using a male voice, Oliphant often obscures her gender with pronouns. Her choice of "Ourselves" poses a problem of ambiguity for readers of this article as well. Does Ourselves mean the Blackwood's journalistic staff, a
select group of female householders, or Oliphant personally? As the chief contributor to the radical *Westminster Review* at the time, Mill could have indeed suggested that the petitioners circulate the document with rival periodicals. Oliphant could also have discussed the proposition with other female householders, which is entirely plausible as she led an active social life in the community. And, of course, she was much in the public eye as a successful single woman maintaining both a household and a career.

Oliphant further complicates the issue by describing Ourselves as a "sublime pronoun," leaving her readers to wonder what exactly is sublime about this usage. Perhaps she implies that other women share her opinions about the petition. If so, "Ourselves" is sublime because she represents a collective opinion, a collectivity which may somewhat compensate for her sense of Otherness. "Ourselves" also suggests the security of a group which, to a degree, shields the individual.

Many of Oliphant's ironic comments also focus on stereotypes, and about half of her commentary illustrates her attitude about women's abilities. For example, in discussing Mill's rationale for giving female householders the vote, she says, "It may be only by accident that it [logic] makes what may happen to be its last stand in the cause of that half of the world which is certainly supposed
to be least accessible to logic" (369). Clearly Oliphant does not "certainly suppose" anything of the sort herself. She has already demonstrated that women are as competent as men in their private lives and that the most public life in the kingdom, that of the Queen, is being capably filled by a woman as well.

Conversely, when commenting on male stereotypes, Oliphant focuses on men's lack of abilities. She notes, for example, that women "have acquired a certain tolerance of man in the abstract, as of a creature who, on the whole, considering all his disadvantages, can be made something of" (372). Oliphant does not say that women are the ones who "make something of" men, but she implies as much. Although whimsical, her remark is nevertheless a gentle barb. Jay notes that Oliphant always saw men as "a race apart," and "Her contempt for men is tempered always by her sense of them as the necessary raw material upon which women practice the daily self-denial which will sharpen their moral faculties" (73). Jay's observation explains the ambiguity of tone in Oliphant's remark, which is both contemptuous and indulgent.

Other remarks are not so gentle, however. Oliphant claims that most men are not excited in the least about their voting privileges. She asks,
If our brother . . . has sunk into the mildest indifference to the vote of which he has been long in full possession, and seldom takes the trouble to make any use of it, how should we, who always looked upon it with more reasonable eyes, be expected to excite ourselves on the subject? (373)

She notes that if women had the vote they probably would be as apathetic as men about the privilege. But her condescending tone when she charges that men "seldom take the trouble" to exercise this privilege is unmistakable. Her appositive phrase "who always looked upon it with more reasonable eyes" also suggests resentment, although whether this is Oliphant's personal feeling or her expression on behalf of other women is unclear.

On many other occasions in this article Oliphant makes barbed comments about men, some of which are not obscured by humor. She makes no attempt to hide her derision when she says,

Does anybody really suppose that the twenty women who thus boldly place themselves in the breach, and raise a maiden standard on behalf of the women of England, are less able to decide between Mr Jones and Mr Smith than are the tallowchandler and the butterman who have that momentous issue actually in their hands? Men are full of
prejudices and prepossessions on this subject, which obscure the little judgment which they may be allowed to possess by nature . . . . It is our tradespeople who are generally so kind as to elect for us our Members of Parliament; and these twenty lady petitioners are certainly in advance of any tradespeople with whom we have the pleasure of being acquainted. (368)

Oliphant minces no words here: in her estimation, the petitioners are more capable of voting intelligently than the tradesmen now voting. But she interjects yet another gibe at men in the midst of this strong claim, accusing them of having little innate power of judgment. Her accusation implies those arguing against women's suffrage are not being rational.

Again and again Oliphant resorts to comments that are at best mildly grating and at worst blatantly sarcastic. In addition to charging men with poor judgment, prejudice, and prepossession, she suggests they have a few other weaknesses as well. She notes, for example,

By degrees, it occurred to us [women] to be anything but envious of men--to find that most of them, in reality, instead of being the free, bright, brave creatures we had dreamed, required a
vast deal of propping up and stimulating, to keep them with their front to the world . . . . (372)

Although her comment is not blatantly derogatory, she intimates that men actually need much help from women to maintain a masculine facade of freedom, optimism, and bravery.

In another passage, she claims that men pay little attention to the female householders because the group does not "possess those charms of dependence and helplessness and clinging weakness which are supposed to be so attractive to the lords of the creation" (369). Oliphant's derisive comment belittles both genders: it acknowledges that women manipulate men, and it ridicules men for foolishly succumbing to these manipulations. Oliphant's condemnation is only marginally objective, however, as she portrays women as the active agents and men as the passive reactors. She displays disdain for both genders, but she successfully overturns stereotypes in the process.

In most of Oliphant's other gender comparisons, men fare much worse than women, however. "We are far from being in general such fools as men," she scoffs (371). In another passage she compares the feelings of younger women and older women, commenting that young women often "thought it hard that a blockhead in whiskers should be considered capable of protecting or directing us" (372). "Blockhead" was as
pejorative in Oliphant's time as it is today, according to the Oxford English Dictionary; her usage of the term is out of character and creates an uneven tone as well.

Oliphant's final gender comparison again attempts to elevate women at men's expense. She notes,

When we happen to be compelled, by force of circumstances, to do things that are generally reserved for men, we have, in most cases, found that we were able to do them, heaven be praised! If the poor souls were to try ours, the result might be different indeed. (379)

Oliphant probably wants her male readers to imagine themselves in the role of female householders and to think about how they would cope with their circumstances; she could, however, also be speaking for all women. The latter possibility makes her comment quite caustic.

Unfortunately, after labeling men fools and blockheads, as well as accusing them of being prejudiced, prepossessing, apathetic, lacking in judgment, and having to be both propped up and made something of by women, she has probably lost a lot of the male empathy she might have had by this juncture. Perhaps Oliphant attempts cleverness when she makes these comments, perhaps she tries to add color and force to her writing, or perhaps she strives to lighten a heavy subject. But regardless of intent her innuendo--
ironic, humorous, or otherwise—barely hides her hostility. Such remarks alienate not only a male audience but a sizable portion of her female audience as well.

But despite Oliphant’s general disparagement of men in the article, she surprisingly treats Mill quite kindly. She compliments him and lets her audience know that she respects him, declaring that he is “one of the greatest thinkers of modern times. He is a man who has devoted his life to some of the highest subjects which can occupy the human intellect” (368). Her praise tempers her criticism. Oliphant briefly mentions Mill’s Syllogism to let her audience know she understands his reasoning, but she admits sharing neither his reasoning nor opinion about female suffrage. “But still less do we understand the fashion of mind which can treat him with contemptuous criticism,” she says, quoting the charge that he is “’too clever’,“ which she finds unjust (368). This is not the case, she says, claiming,

He is a champion of whom any cause might be proud. He is sans peur, for he does not hesitate to throw the mantle of his reputation over doubtful questions, and to take up subjects all but hopeless. And he is also sans reproche. He has no public career behind him marked by human inconsistencies. His past occupation has been to
think, and he has thought deeply, and expressed his thoughts with noble clearness and unity. (369)

Her lavish praise sets the tone of the argument. Her high esteem of Mill’s reputation suggests that she finds it almost painful to criticize him.

Oliphant makes no straightforward indictment of female suffrage, despite the direct, confrontational style she displays throughout the article. She instead attacks Mill’s logic. She charges him and his followers with falsely seeing “unmitigated reason as the chief mover of the affairs of man” (369). She tries to convince both Mill and her audience that logic is not the sole consideration in decision making. She notes, “Life in the simpler shape cannot be managed upon strictly logical principles . . . pure reason has to give way every day to the perplexing arrangements of Providence and the perverse dispositions of men” (376). Oliphant’s use of “men” rather than “Man” provokes speculation about gendered discourse. Perhaps Oliphant arbitrarily damns both sexes here. Given her disparagement of the male sex throughout the article, however, she may be negatively stereotyping men once more.

Again and again, Oliphant emphasizes that Mill does not suggest all women should be given the vote. She reviews the current voting situation as it pertains to women, but her comments neither condemn nor support the present system.
Married women are each "in possession of a Representative of her own," she says (369), although she sardonically adds that she has observed that those "who are supposed to be one flesh" sometimes are of two different opinions (370). And she reminds her audience that many of the petitioners will likewise be denied the privilege of voting should Mill's amendment pass.

Oliphant does not suggest that Mill should spearhead a movement for enfranchising all women, however, although much of her article has provided the warrant for his doing so. As always, she resists the idea of reforming social institutions hastily, and her rhetoric is once again transformed into an inverse argument. She claims to be shocked at the idea of women voting, but her examples all point to the efficacy of that very thing. She predicts if women begin voting they will soon want to play an even more active role in government. She says,

The one privilege follows naturally upon the other. Many women are possessed of the highest administrative gifts, as history has proved over and over again; indeed, it is one of the forms of genius most possible to women. There are also among them many individuals with a very pretty gift of eloquence. Why should they be excluded
from the House of Commons? Why should they be excluded anywhere? (378)

Her questions are rhetorical, of course. Previously, Oliphant’s inverse arguments suggested a subconscious or preconscious search for answers to some of the hard feminist questions; these rhetorical questions suggest that possibility as well.

Oliphant allows that Mill has good intentions because he bases his proposed enfranchisement of women on present legislation which accords voting privileges to “every citizen who rents a house above a certain rate, and who pays his taxes, and does nothing to which the law can take exception” (370). Mill recognizes that many women belong to this group. “Thus it has happened, that it is to Us, and not to womankind in general, or to a class more open to general appreciation, that the philosopher has devoted his thoughts,” she notes (370). Oliphant follows his logic, but the irony of the situation does not escape her.

Oliphant’s anger spills out at this point, and Mill, the petitioners, the ‘hot-headed’ younger women, and society all bear the brunt of her wrath. She accuses Mill of proving “how cruel and weak and foolish and shortsighted a thing was that logic which would fain establish itself as a power among men” (375). She agrees that, outwardly, female enfranchisement seems appropriate and fair. “The Syllogism
is perfect, but the conclusion is insane and ridiculous,” she avers (375). Throughout this passage Oliphant undermines Mill’s logic by creating a tacit comparison with “female logic,” relying on self-deprecation to convince her audience that such female logic is superior to Mill’s syllogistic formulas. She says,

We are too deeply aware of the illogical character of our feminine understanding to dream of opposing anything that might pretend to be reasoning to a conclusion come to by Mr. Mill. . . . It is for Mr. Mill—who knows about it so much better than we or any woman does, who has given his life to the consideration of those wonderful complications of thought which leaven all error with a little truth, and almost all evil with a little good—to show how it happens that a thing which is irresistible as a logical proposition, may be utterly impossible and absurd as a human act.

(375-76)

She criticizes Mill soundly but obliquely, a tack which places Mill’s logic in question more so than Mill himself.

Oliphant then retreats to familiar territory, claiming that God has different purposes for man and woman. She has frequently resorted to this explanation in the past, assigning responsibility for woman’s lot to either God or
Nature. She makes this excuse only once in this article. Mill frequently denounced prescribed gender roles, and he criticized the notion that nature decreed men were superior to women. Perhaps Oliphant does not belabor this idea as she has done before because she is aware of Mill's objections. But her hedging also may indicate that she is not as sure as she once was about this tenet. Her word choice reveals a new tentativeness: "So far as the designs of God may be judged from His works," (376) she says in an introductory clause, suggesting that other explanations could be possible. In another phrase she says, "Equality of place or of rights is evidently not the chief thing our Maker was thinking of in our creation" (376), "evidently" and "chief" leaving the explanation open for possible discussion. These statements are more conjectural than doctrinaire, and Oliphant does not appear as certain about gender roles as she had been in the past.

Oliphant's uncertainty about these roles may account for her complimentary treatment of the petitioners. These women, Oliphant admits, are successful in their own right. When their petition crossed her desk, she says, it was signed by at least twenty names, and these not names of nobodies . . . . The names that were appended to this document were chiefly names more or less known to the public--names which we have
been used to seeing on title-pages of books and in the new magazines. (368)

The petitioners, none of whom Oliphant mentions by name, should be taken seriously, she claims. The collective image of the petitioners as active, intelligent women contrasts sharply with the passive, unsophisticated, yet observant old woman of Oliphant's persona.

Although Oliphant recognizes the petitioners' intelligence and influence, she makes it quite clear that these women are not the norm. Yet, she says, "This exceptional woman is often, strange as it may seem, a very womanly and lovable person" (377). Although Oliphant does not share their political aspirations, neither does she fault these women for their zeal. She is even somewhat flattered by being associated with them. "It is a compliment, no doubt, in one way, for we are far from being, in general, so clever as they are," she says (377), although her tone is somewhat patronizing.

But Mill has spent so much time with women such as these that he mistakenly assumes they are representative of their sex, Oliphant declares. She claims,

He has found among them, no doubt, an amount of lively and bright intelligence which nobody dreams of denying to them, and he has accepted them as the type of universal womankind. It is a
compliment, no doubt, in one way, for we are far from being, in general, so clever as they are... They are too clever to be accepted as our representatives. (377)

Although somewhat cloying, the passage suggests Oliphant is somewhat in awe of these women as well. Were the petitioners allowed to vote, Oliphant claims, the consequences would be very different from allowing the householders to vote. "There is nothing in the hustings to frighten them;" she says, predicting, "and with them, as with men of their own class and education, the true zest of politics would soon be found to lie in the privilege, not of being represented, but of representing" (378). Thus Oliphant issues an implied warning to her male readers: these women are not only too clever to represent all women, they are possibly clever enough to try representing men as well.

Despite the petitioners' intelligence, cleverness, and fearlessness, however, Oliphant still objects to Mill's proposed amendment. She declares, "It is a strange failure of the broad and philosophical view which we have a right to expect from Mr. Mill, that he should accept without question as our representatives, persons who represent us as little as he represents the fox hunters of England" (377).
Oliphant challenges Mill to learn more about women who are not so exceptional. She pleads with him to explore "the real springs of life which move within the hearts of women" (377). Ever mindful of Mill's reputation, she issues these challenges tactfully. She grants that if any man can understand the female heart, Mill is that man. Women, she claims, are "something more and something else than a mere shabby repetition of the other half" (377), her pejorative view of males once again sneaking into her argument. She reiterates her unaltered view that women have a different disposition and duty than men. Woman is created for a different purpose, she claims, and that purpose is "not to jostle man in everything he is doing, and contend with him for a miserable equality" (377). Oliphant's comment suggests that equality would be more debasing than elevating for women, a comment once again revealing her contemptuous view of men.

Oliphant's anger with Mill and the petitioners is more about the perception they have created of the householders than about female suffrage. She finds it particularly troubling that Mill and his supporters have singled out a specific group of women and made their position a cause célèbre. Outraged, she notes, "It is upon the women who are householders, and not on the indiscriminate sex, that his favours are to fall" (371). Oliphant objects to this group
being singled out; they have not pleaded for any special treatment. She describes the householders as "women who have nobody belonging to them, who are their own protectors, and sometimes their own bread-wonners, but who pay their rents and parish-rates as punctually as their male neighbours, and can read and write, and (presumably) do sums in the Rule of Three" (370). Her description indicates that these women are intelligent and capable of managing their own affairs.

Oliphant especially wants her male readers to think about the householders and Mill’s proposal. Addressing these men directly, she says,

> It is We, gentlemen, with whom you will have to do; we who have withered on the stalk, or taken many a buffet from the world; who are respectable, but no longer charming; whose hair is growing grey--whose cheeks are not unconscious of wrinkles--who inspire esteem or awe, and not any softer sentiment. It is only right that this distinctive line should be clearly and deeply drawn. (370)

Oliphant’s observation is loaded with ambiguity. The women she depicts could be a passive group who pose little threat in the polls or elsewhere, but they could also be rather formidable because they are persevering and self-reliant.
They have already overcome social odds by succeeding in a man's world. Hence, men may find that these women are not as pliant as impressionable young women or dutiful wives.

Mill should have at least consulted the people concerned, when he formulated this philosophy, she claims. "It is not we, the objects of Mr Mill's practical benevolence, who ask for any compensation or make any outcry about our deficiencies," she declares, adding that "it is the hot-headed young women . . . who make ridiculous claims on our behalf on the pity of the world" (371), and Oliphant further resents the householders' being used as a political gambit. Although she does not want the vote for herself, Oliphant does not object to other women pursuing this goal; in fact, she has furnished ample evidence of why women should be allowed this privilege. She vehemently objects, however, to being placed in a position of pity, even scorn, merely to further someone else's agenda. "His uncalled-for championship continues to expose us to the smartness of newspaper articles, and the gibes of honourable members, and all the little witticisms of all the little wits," she complains (379). Should Mill's proposal succeed, she warns, "He might find that he had reckoned without the principal party concerned" (375).

The image of the householders which the debate has created especially angers Oliphant. "Time and Providence
have had their will of us [female householders], and we stand apart before the world, almost--horrible thought! as if we were men," she says (375), her infrequent use of an exclamation point indicating something more than mock horror. The misrepresentation of the female householders genuinely affronts her. She explains, "We are not, as other women, cared for and ministered to," and she continues "It is, then, only justice that compensation should be given us, and that we should be as other men" (370). In her previous Woman Question articles, Oliphant has hidden her gender behind ambiguous pronouns when it has suited her purpose; she makes a similar word play here with "other" as she subverts her female persona. Her readers slow down and think about her gender and question her word choice.

Oliphant probably counted on that rhetorical maneuver to prepare her audience for the crux of her argument: Mill has cast the householders into the role of lesser men, something they are not and something they have no desire to be. She says, "He has classified us and given us a new place in creation. He has made us out to be something less than woman, something almost man" (371). This neither-fish-nor-fowl classification angers Oliphant much more than the actual issue of voting itself. "In our case Logic demands that the penalties of sex should be abolished, and this is how Mr. Mill means to do it," she continues with more than
a hint of rancor (371). Oliphant clearly recognizes 'the penalties of sex' in her society; all of her writing on the Woman Question thus far reveals that she finds the logic underpinning this system faulty, but she finds Mill's proposed legislation even more objectionable.

Oliphant acknowledges that Mill's plan may be logical, but she finds it insulting nonetheless. All the rhetoric aimed at ameliorating women's condition revolves around a single premise, she says, the "champions and defenders" demanding reform share a common, erroneous presupposition:

'Woman is the lesser man,' is their universal sentiment—or rather, woman is a creature who has been deeply, fundamentally injured by not being made a man. For ourselves and our adherents, we beg to give the most unqualified contradiction to this popular fallacy. We are not men spoiled in the making, but women. . . . This affectation . . . is entirely founded upon the curious delusion that we ought to have been men, and that it is to our unending humiliation and disadvantage that we are not men. But as it happens, that is not our opinion. We are used to being women. On the whole, strange as it may seem, we like it. (376)

She desperately craves validation as a woman, not as a 'lesser man,' and she craves this not just for herself
personally (as twentieth-century women writers will), nor
does she crave this just for the householders, but for all
women.

Oliphant argues that women should be valued in their
own right, but she does this rather lamely. She notes that
people of differing sizes and heights have different duties
and roles, despite what logic might dictate (376). But her
example flounders, and she returns to her original
complaint: "We protest that a woman is a woman, and not a
spoiled and imperfect man" (376). Here Oliphant leaves her
readers wanting and expecting more. She veers away from a
thorough explanation, leaving the impression that she had
more to say but chose silence instead. This presence of
absence makes her persona suspect, and readers might well
question if Oliphant deliberately holds her personal opinion
in check here.

If men are to assume that women want to be 'lesser
men,' Oliphant says, let them at least not make hasty
generalizations that all women want this. If women are to
be thought of as "an odd and imperfectly understood tribe,"
she admonishes Mill and his supporters to make sure that
"the curious assemblage of detached women who choose to
present themselves before the world as representatives of
their sex" are that 'tribe' and not all womankind (376).
She does not fault the petitioners for their choices, but
neither does she want women content with the status quo to be ostracized for someone else's cause.

Ironically, Oliphant's implied argument has more feminist overtones than her stated argument. She wants women to be validated for themselves, not as relative creatures. But she also wants women to have freedom of choice about whether they want traditional roles or nontraditional roles. She may or may not have desired equality with men; her equivocal point of view leaves that open to speculation. She does not equivocate when she discusses choices for her sex, however; there she demands equality.

Oliphant is a woman of many paradoxes in this article. She labels the petitioners "exceptional women" and portrays herself as a commonplace woman. Nothing could be further from the truth. It was surely no accident that the fateful petition crossed her desk with only twenty names on it: her name was sought as she, too, was considered exceptional because she was in an occupation usually filled by men, and because she was a popular novelist. She uses a female persona but as such presents an unreliable point of view.

But Oliphant's greatest paradox lies in her argument itself. She says, "It scarcely needs to be pointed out how great and grievous a mistake it would be to legislate for one half of humanity on the basis of the wants and wishes of
a small and exceptional class” (377). She does not specify who should legislate for this half of humanity, however. Her concern is appropriation of voice—not by men, but by other women. Hence, she shares the same concern as the petitioners, except they focus on male appropriation of voice.

Appropriation of voice is a term that entered feminist lexicon in the twentieth century; hence, Oliphant’s shadowy perception of the concept had no language to express her feelings. She also had no language to express the corresponding concern of definition. Oliphant did not want the petitioners to define her any more than she wanted Victorian men to define her and other women. Although she lacked the language to express these concerns, her perceptions are more sophisticated and farsighted than those of her contemporaries actively seeking reform.

The rhetoric of reform is often problematic, and nowhere more so than in discussions of women’s suffrage. Muddled arguments plagued both pro-suffrage and anti-suffrage groups, and striking paradoxes arose which blurred issues even more. Brian Harrison notes, for example, that the Anti-suffragists

Sometimes simultaneously voiced mutually contradictory arguments—and argued both that Parliament already meets women’s legislative needs
and that enfranchised women will unite against men
to redress their grievances: or that women do not
want the vote, yet will outvote the men once they
get it. (37)

The early suffragists were likewise mired in paradox as
Liberals pushed for voting privileges for female
householders who would probably vote Conservative.

This polarized rhetoric built to an interesting climax,
however, and a unified movement grew from divisiveness. As
one social commentator notes, "The growth of democratic
institutions from which women were excluded paradoxically
helped to politicize women. . . . English, French, and
American women responded by founding feminist organizations
to protect their rights and promote their interests"
(Hellerstein 2). Mill later reflected in his *Autobiography*
that the amendment to enfranchise women was the highlight of
his career. He stated:

This assertion of my opinions on Personal
Representation cannot be credited with any
considerable or visible amount of practical
result. It was otherwise with the other
motion which I made in the form of an
amendment to the Reform Bill, and which was
by far the most important, perhaps the only
really important public service I performed
in the capacity of a Member of Parliament: a
motion to strike out the words which were
understood to limit the electoral franchise
to males, thereby admitting to the suffrage
all women who as householders or otherwise
possess the qualification required of
male electors. (179)

Oliphant did not have Mill's foresight in 1866, but she
did see his reform attempts differently in later years. She
casually mentions in her correspondence that she attended
Parliamentary discussion on Mill's proposed reforms. Three
years after "The Great Unrepresented" was published,
Oliphant reviewed Mill's book The Subjection of Women.
"Here," as Merryn Williams points out, "although she does
not accept his picture of one sex cruelly oppressing the
other, she does agree with many of the reforms he suggests.
She concedes that if female householders really want the
vote, they should have it" ("Feminist" 169). Oliphant had
exercised her personal freedom of choice. John Stock Clarke
observes that, "the myth--or paradox--has been that she was
consistently out of sympathy with the women's movement.
Though initially scornful of women's rights, she became more
and more radical as the years passed" (44). Ironically, she
had subconsciously sympathized with the movement for longer
than she realized.
CHAPTER FIVE

'WE KNOW WELL ENOUGH, BUT DARE NOT BETRAY OUR KNOWLEDGE'

Margaret Oliphant's paradoxical perspective on the Woman Question between 1856 and 1866 is complex and can probably never be thoroughly understood. Many influences on Oliphant at the time simply cannot be quantified; effects of the growing women's movement and changes in the publishing field exemplify two such influences. Her relationship with her primary publisher, John Blackwood, and his family is equally difficult to assess. Even when other firms published her works, Oliphant turned to Blackwood for ideas and advice. Finally, her radical Scottish upbringing, her independent nature, her early widowhood, and her role as a working woman all factored into her complicated perspective in her first three articles on the Woman Question. But perhaps the most intriguing--and conjectural--element influencing her opinions during this ten-year time frame is her often clumsy and usually abortive attempts at self-definition. These attempts made the Woman Question a personal exploration for Oliphant and contributed to her decidedly feminist outlook by 1870.
The years between 1856 and 1866, when Oliphant composed her initial three responses to the Woman Question, were crucial to the women's movement in Britain. "Pragmatic feminism before 1865 hardly paid any attention to women's political rights, . . ." states Françoise Basch (13). By the time Mill submitted his famed petition to Parliament, the ranks of the movement had swelled, and demands had become more strident. And the timing for such activism could not have been better as radicalism swept through the highest intellectual and religious circles of the country in the 1860s.

Even after feminists formally organized, however, the movement lacked clear focus in many aspects. According to Basch, as late as 1868, the movement "remained vague on the very points where wives suffered most: rights over possessions, earnings, children, and suing for divorce" (47). Political redress was clearly the solution; the problem, however, was considerably less clear, and the Movement had trouble formulating a direct response to the Woman Question.

Oliphant's inability to clearly articulate her feelings on the Woman Question is not surprising, especially when the most ardent supporters of the women's movement could not themselves articulate a unified, coherent policy. Unlike many of her contemporaries, however, Oliphant listened to a
polyphony of opinions on the subject and carefully tried to weigh the merit of each individually and in concert with the others. Unfortunately, trying to understand all facets of the problem and remaining objective in doing so created many critical difficulties for her. She tried to predict the ramifications of the most conservative and the most radical proposals while still foregrounding the opinions of the average man and woman. And coloring all was consideration of her two audiences: the Blackwood's readership and her editor himself, John Blackwood.

Unfortunately, in trying to present an all-inclusive focus on the Woman Question, Oliphant often appears simply muddled. Her efforts to embrace the contrarities are admirable, but they obscure her personal opinion, perhaps for herself as much as for her readers. The conglomeration of thoughts she presents are also so disordered that modern readers, even those familiar with the historical context, have trouble following her arguments, a task her contemporaries must have found almost hopeless. Finally, her inverse arguments which present evidence contrary to her claims leaves readers perplexed about Oliphant's beliefs and feelings about the Woman Question.

Understandably, one of Oliphant's major concerns in articulating her opinions was John Blackwood, the editor who had introduced her to periodical publication, but Blackwood
had major concerns of his own in the 1850s and 1860s. The periodical press was in turmoil at the time, suffering both growing pains and a change of focus. The power of the mighty triumvirate—the *Edinburgh Review*, the *Quarterly Review*, the *Westminster Review*—remained strong throughout the century, but other periodicals were not as fortunate.

In the late 1850s, the market shifted as the review format waned and a more diversified fare became popular, and many periodicals did not survive this transition. *Blackwood's* weathered the change quite well as the firm sensed the shift early and changed its format accordingly. Other publishing houses rapidly adopted the new format, however, and new periodicals such as *Macmillan's*, *Temple Bar*, and *The Cornhill Magazine* joined the market and soon competed with *Blackwood's* for subscribers. Founded in 1859, *Macmillan's*, “a magazine combining political and religious articles with travel sketches, fiction, and poetry,” strongly resembled *Blackwood's* (Wellesley Vol. I: 554). *Macmillan's* sold ten thousand copies in a week's time and went into a second printing. According to *The Wellesley Index*, “The *Blackwood's* circle was alarmed” (Vol. I: 554). *The Cornhill Magazine*, founded in 1860 under the editorship of Thackeray, had broad audience appeal, its initial issue selling one hundred twenty thousand copies. *Cornhill* avoided the popular controversial fare featured in
Blackwood's, providing instead "beautiful illustrations and a high standard of literature" (Jacobs 592). Also making its debut in 1860, Temple Bar, edited by the colorful George Augustus Sala, became a serious rival of Blackwood's, claiming thirty thousand subscribers in its first year of operation and targeting "the comfortable, literate, but ill-educated middle-class" (Wellesley Vol. III: 387). Many non-literary monthlies also appeared mid century, all fighting for a share of the market.

The increasingly competitive periodical market had a two-fold effect on writers such as Oliphant. On one hand, the expanded market provided new outlets for publication, and Oliphant took advantage of this opportunity, publishing in both Macmillan's and The Cornhill as well as several other periodicals. But on the other hand, as Gaye Tuchman notes,

because there was a large pool of authors, most novelists were potentially replaceable. . . . This possibility of replacing published authors with aspirants meant that for much of the nineteenth century most novelists could not dare to challenge the terms of contracts that publishers had established. (34)

Tuchman's assessment applies to periodical contributors as well as novelists. Publishers at all levels were in a
buyer's market that was becoming increasingly profession-
alized by mid century; authors such as Oliphant, whose sole
support was writing, had little power in financial
negotiations because so many people were writing. "Most of
them were at the mercy of publishers," Tuchman notes (35).

Hence, by 1861, when Oliphant returned to England after
her husband's death, Blackwood's had experienced a dramatic
increase in competition, which triggered a two-year
fluctuation in circulation. Although Maga's circulation
numbers ultimately recovered, at the outset of the 1860s the
periodical market experienced upheaval as readers sampled
different magazines before committing themselves to one or
two periodicals.

Fearing the uncertain market, editors became even more
concerned about their audiences, and the editorial role
assumed new importance. Great care was taken to monitor
essays for every possible nuance prior to publication, for
example. As almost all Victorian essays were on
controversial subjects, periodical editors faced a
particularly daunting task in this aspect. Editors began to
cast a cold eye on opinions that might have only raised an
eyebrow a few years earlier. And conservative periodicals
such as Blackwood's became even more conservative in hopes
of protecting and increasing their share of the market.
Regardless of their personal feelings for the writer,
successful editors, such as John Blackwood, could ill afford to publish marginal articles.

With these market considerations in mind, Blackwood rejected everything that Oliphant submitted when she came back to England, plunging the young widow into depression. Blackwood had provided Oliphant twenty pounds per month, the family's only steady income, in Italy during her husband's fatal illness. This money, she relates, "Mr. Blackwood had engaged to send me on the faith of articles" (Autobiography 52). As Oliphant frequently relied on advances from Blackwood and from her other publishers, their agreement was not unusual, but it nonetheless obligated her to submit articles to the firm. She also recounts that, at Frank's death, Blackwood encouraged her to "draw upon him for whatever money I wanted," (Autobiography 63), which further increased her indebtedness to the magazine.

On her return, Oliphant tried to fulfill her obligation and submitted several pieces to Blackwood, but none met with the editor's approval. Jay notes, "The articles and fiction written during her miserable sojourn in Italy are among her weakest and it must have looked as if her talent had been extinguished by the weight of her troubles" (253). But Blackwood's rejection of her work, which Oliphant poignantly describes in her autobiography, led to what she later deemed the turning point in her career. Oliphant describes the
fateful meeting with John Blackwood and his father, William (the Major), founder of the firm. John informed Oliphant that her latest submission was unacceptable, and she recounts that the father and son were so jealous of the Magazine, and inclined to think nothing was good enough for it. . . . But I was in their debt, and had very little to go on with. They shook their heads of course, and thought it would not be possible to take such a story,--both very kind and truly sorry for me, I have no doubt. I think I see their figures now against the light, standing up, John with his shoulders hunched up, the Major with his soldierly air, and myself all blackness and whiteness in my widow's dress, taking leave of them as if it didn't matter, and oh! so much afraid that they would see the tears in my eyes. (Autobiography 70)

Disappointed but determined, Oliphant returned home and, after putting her children in bed that night, began another story, one which became the first in her popular Carlingford series. Meanwhile, John Blackwood, sensing her desperation, provided a translation project for her. The job was essentially an act of charity.

Although the Blackwood family had been very good to Oliphant, she often felt that she was inadequately paid for
her services, and her financial dealings with Blackwood's are complex because the relationship between her and John Blackwood was personal as well as professional. Oliphant and Isabella Blackwood, the editor's unmarried sister, were life-long friends; Isabella often was Oliphant's houseguest for weeks and even months at a time. Oliphant and her family in turn frequently visited and dined with the Blackwood family. Both families zealously cherished their Scottish roots, especially after settling in London. After Frank's death, according to the Colby biography, "In every subsequent family emergency Mrs. Oliphant turned to them [the Blackwoods] for help" (154). In later years, Oliphant also asked John Blackwood to serve as her sons' guardian in the event of her death. Blackwood's was a family firm, but Oliphant was almost a member of that family.

Being "almost" a family member is not the same as being a family member, however, and according to many sources Oliphant's career may have suffered because of her personal and professional relationship with the Blackwoods. Oliphant usually submitted her work to Blackwood's first out of loyalty. She always found financial negotiations difficult, and her indebtedness to and friendship with the family made her negotiations with John Blackwood even more arduous. Oliphant's practice of asking for advances on the promise of
articles and books sometimes in their most embryonic stages also weakened her bargaining position.

Oliphant was not the only woman writer having trouble with the business aspect of authorship at the time. Tuchman asserts,

What writing meant to women as wage earners may have been different from what it meant to men, who from earliest childhood knew they were expected to earn money to support a family. Gender socialization may also have affected men's and women's ability to deal shrewdly with publishers and to negotiate significant payment for their work. (102)

As a young widow with dependent children, Oliphant was forced into financial negotiations for her writing, and her correspondence and autobiography reveal her discomfort and frustration in the role. In her exhaustive analysis of Macmillan's records, Tuchman further notes that "authors who most needed money had least negotiating power with Macmillan (and presumably with other publishers)" (150). Perpetually in need but observant nonetheless, Oliphant was acutely aware of her powerlessness, which may have had a bearing on her feelings about the Woman Question; she was also aware that her relationship with Blackwood was "essentially one of patronage" as Jay notes (248).
In Oliphant's case, patronage was not conducive to promotion. As her career progressed, Oliphant repeatedly solicited Blackwood's help in securing a periodical editorship which would have provided the steady income she sought. Although Blackwood let her serve as editor for selected series in the magazine, he apparently did not help Oliphant find a better position. Blackwood's management was staffed by male family members, so she had no hope of advancement in the firm, yet, despite these evident drawbacks, Oliphant remained affiliated with Blackwood's for her entire writing career of almost fifty years.

Oliphant's loyalty as well as her habit of drawing on her capital as a writer hampered her financial negotiations and strengthened Blackwood's position. Blackwood was a widely-respected businessman whose primary concern was the family firm. Trollope once noted that Blackwood "never let anything worth doing slip through his fingers. . . ." (qtd. in Jay 280). The magazine weathered an unstable market situation that ruined many lesser companies, which suggests Blackwood was a prudent financial manager as well as an able editor. The Colbys observe from correspondence between Oliphant and Blackwood that he appeared "benevolent, generous, yet shrewd and canny in all business operations" (140). The financial scales clearly tipped in Blackwood's favor throughout Oliphant's career with the magazine.
But the complex relationship between Oliphant and Blackwood exceeded mere financial matters. Spectre-like, Blackwood's presence pervades all three of Oliphant's seminal articles on the Woman Question. The contradictory nature of her opinions reflect her concern with Blackwood's conservative viewpoint, a viewpoint she playfully referred to as his Tory-ism. In later years she argued with him over many questionable plot elements and tonal problems in her writing, but she was younger and less experienced when she wrote the Woman Question articles for *Maga* and was less inclined to stand up for her own point of view, especially in her social criticism.

Blackwood's had published most of what she had in print at the time; hence, she could ill afford to endanger her main source of income, but the friendship influenced her as well. She had few people she could turn to during a crisis, and the Blackwood family always helped Oliphant when she needed assistance. Her letters, autobiography, and *Annals of a Publishing House* all indicate she genuinely liked the Blackwoods, making it even more difficult for her to express an opinion they did not share—an opinion she also expected them to publish. Oliphant's formative years had been spent in a Radical Scottish household, however, and she may have yielded to Blackwood's more conservative point of view out
of respect for the family as much as she did for financial expedience.

Several critics also contend that nineteenth-century female writers, because of their gender, experienced an entirely different relationship with their publishers than male writers. Jay theorizes, for example, that the male-to-male relationship between writer and publisher had a "clubland" aspect which allowed both parties to move freely between a professional and personal association. The ease with which men could make this shift accorded them more occasions for collaboration which ostensibly resulted in more opportunities for male writers. In a sample taken from the Dictionary of National Biography, Tuchman notes, for example, that men profited more than women from the expansion of literary opportunities (110). Disproportionate numbers of male writers assumed the more coveted roles as editors, readers, and other positions in publishing houses. The socialization skills learned in school and on the playing fields allowed men to develop a clubland relationship with each other which helped male writers bargain for the more prestigious positions.

Women and their publishers had no clubland, however, because gender precluded any possibilities of such an association. Hence, all discussions between female writers and male publishers were predicated upon the formality of
their professional relationship or the informality of their friendship. This gendering of discourse impaired the free flow of ideas which could have benefited both parties. Tuchman notes that the relationship between male writers and publishers contributed to men edging women out as novelists in the nineteenth century. While no evidence directly points to Oliphant being edged out by any specific male writer at Blackwood's, the gender issue is omnipresent in correspondence between her and Blackwood and in her autobiography as well.

Accounts of the Oliphant-Blackwood relationship reveal stress that a clubland relationship could have alleviated. Although Oliphant competed in a man's world, obviously she was not "one of the boys" at Blackwood's. It is unlikely, for example, that Blackwood would have been as generous to one of his male contributors as he was to Oliphant when she nursed her husband through his final illness. Blackwood also made allowances for her family duties when they interfered with her writing obligations, although this situation rarely occurred.

On occasion, Oliphant did not hesitate using her gender when she thought it might help her situation. She frequently reminded Blackwood of the family she had to support and that she was a woman alone against the world. Twice during the period in which the three Woman Question
articles were published, she mentioned her "womanish style" in correspondence to Blackwood. On the first occasion, in 1855, she notes that "'a womanish story-teller like myself' might prove 'wearisome' in the magazine's 'manly' pages" (qtd. in Jay 75). Declarations of this type almost demand a response from the recipient. Perhaps Oliphant hoped such a gendered statement would force Blackwood to disagree with her, perhaps garnering reconsideration of an unacceptable essay.

More importantly, Oliphant's invocation of gender suggests manipulation of discourse in the hope of empowering herself in the writer/editor relationship. Two of her novels in the Carlingford Chronicles (Miss Marjoribanks, 1866, and Phoebe Junior, 1876) feature heroines who consciously manipulate discourse to accomplish their social objectives. Elizabeth Langland notes, "Miss Marjoribanks, like Phoebe Junior to follow, 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" (156). Oliphant's manipulations were less grandiose than those of her heroines, but she, like they, used femininity to get what she wanted.

Perhaps the most unfortunate consequence that gender posed in her relationship with Blackwood, however, is that
the cultural construct prohibited open dialogue between writer and editor. Gendered discourse probably circumvented the two finding any common ground on the Woman Question. Nothing in surviving documents suggests they explored or compared their world views; had they done so, both would have been hampered by their culture's gender prescriptives.

Another factor that placed Oliphant under obligation to Blackwood and hindered gender-free discourse was her role as critic for Maga. Being a critic was more prestigious than being a novelist at the time, and Blackwood's gave Oliphant an outlet for her criticism as well as her fiction. The roles differed widely. According to Tuchman, writing novels was not considered a professional activity at the time. She states, "Nineteenth-century novelists did not control their fee structure, training, recruitment, or expulsion. But with critics, and sometimes as critics, they began to define the nature of their work" (36). As a critic, Oliphant had power she lacked as a novelist, but this power had a price. The standards for critical writing were not only higher than for fiction, those standards were more clearly delineated as well, and while markets existed for poorly-written fiction, few markets accepted poorly-written criticism in the 1850s and 1860s. Oliphant apparently cherished her role as critic and went to great lengths in safeguarding it.
Oliphant’s literary criticism reveals her concerns with both standards and canon. In her earliest articles critiquing Thackeray and Dickens, et al, which predate her Woman Question articles, Oliphant presents cogent, thought-provoking ideas about the literary lions. Her assessments reveal she was not intimidated by either’s reputation. Her literary criticism has a strength and credibility that her social criticism lacks, however, and she was probably aware of this deficiency. Hence, she likely made a special effort to align her opinions with those of Blackwood and Maga’s readership so she would not risk losing any of her critical assignments for the periodical.

As one of the few women writers for a mainstream periodical, Oliphant’s position at Blackwood’s was also tenuous. Despite being a regular contributor, she could ill afford the luxury of expressing an unpopular opinion because, even after eight years as contributor, she was still an anomaly on the staff. Jay notes, “At the start of her Blackwood’s career she was well aware that she was in danger of exciting the ire or professional contempt of such long-established Maga hands as Professor Aytoun” (75). Oliphant apparently had little respect for Aytoun, the magazine’s chief literary reviewer and prominent professor of belle lettres at the University of Edinburgh. In her autobiography, Oliphant relates an incident when she and
Isabella Blackwood tricked Aytoun, whom Oliphant found pompous, into making a fool of himself. The two young women then collapsed in laughter as soon as his back was turned.

Such antics could not have endeared her to her Blackwood's male colleagues with whom, as Jay points out, she had already acknowledged being a direct competitor by posing as a male reviewer. Although she wrote at home, Oliphant could not isolate herself or her writing from the criticism of other Maga contributors, and her disparaging comments about men could not have endeared her to her male colleagues.

Although Oliphant was a regular and prolific contributor to Blackwood's, (she was rumored to have once written an entire edition of the magazine), money was an ongoing problem for her. The constant pressure of her financial situation overshadowed everything she wrote. In later years she admitted,

It was always a struggle to get safely through every year and make my ends meet. Indeed I fear they never did quite meet; there was always a tugging together, which cost me a great deal of work and much anxiety... If I had not had unbroken health, and a spirit almost criminally elastic, I could not have done it. (Autobiography 127-128)
Oliphant faithfully met all her obligations, as well as supporting her brother and his three children after her sister-in-law's death and contributing to her other brother's welfare his entire adult life. She also financed an elite Eton education for her nephew and her two sons. But Oliphant's precarious finances were a constant source of worry to her, as much of her autobiography and correspondence indicates. She candidly states,

> My publishers were good and kind in the way of making me advances, without which I could not have got on; but they were never--probably because of these advances, and of my constant need and inability, both by circumstances and nature, to struggle over prices--very lavish in payment.

(Autobiography 129)

As she aged, Oliphant overcame to some degree her reticence to haggle, but she always acquiesced rather easily when trying to get more money and bargaining clearly made her uncomfortable. "I never could fight for a higher price or do anything but trust to the honour of those I had to deal with," she explains (Autobiography 70). On another occasion when she was negotiating the price of a novel with Macmillan's she remarked, "One can write a good slice of another in the time it would take to haggle" (Jay 282). Her
comment illustrates her industriousness, but it also reveals her poor business sense and lack of self-worth.

Working under constant economic pressure had several plausible effects on Oliphant's reaction to the Woman Question. She longed for economic security, something most middle-class women gained in marriage. Her apparent support of the status quo, especially regarding divorce and women's employment opportunities, may actually reflect a desire to protect other women from the stress she experienced in the public sphere. Her feelings about writing for a living are ambiguous: "Writing ran through everything," she once commented (Autobiography 23). But devotion to her children also ran through everything, and Oliphant sometimes appears to long for a simpler life, one where she can devote all her time and energy to her family and not have to stay up until two and three in the morning to write. Although she seems to have fused the roles of mother and writer quite well, the stress of the dual role sometimes surfaces, especially in her critical work.

Oliphant's perspective on the Woman Question shifted rather dramatically between Blackwood's publication of "The Great Unrepresented" in 1866 and her review of Mill's Subjection of Women in 1869. The fissures in her earlier arguments become more pronounced; in Oliphant's later years, her arguments for women's rights become quite radical.
As a fledgling writer in the 1850s, Oliphant had tried to please her editor, perhaps even at the expense of her own ideas and opinions. Pleased with her critical coup in writing for a prestigious periodical, Oliphant took the didactic function of criticism very seriously. But despite being well-read and intelligent, she was still young, naive, and impressionable, which her opinions and her articulation of them reflect. As a young widow in the 1860s, her situation changed drastically, although her perspective on women appears to have changed little. She was both financially and emotionally dependent on the Blackwoods during the early sixties, which likely militated her criticism. Oliphant’s schedule was also most rigorous during this period as she juggled the demands of young children with the demands of her career. Often working into the early morning hours, she seldom revised anything she wrote and was rarely alone; therefore, she had little time for self-examination or concentration on the Woman Question or anything else.

By 1868, after Oliphant had achieved success with the Chronicles of Carlingford, a different perspective on the Woman Question emerged in her writing. By this time, Blackwood’s was rejecting more of her writing than they were accepting. Coincidentally in 1868, Queen Victoria awarded Oliphant a pension of one-hundred pounds per annum.
Recognition of her talent, lessened dependence on Blackwood's, a measure of economic security, and perhaps a measure of maturity as well (Oliphant celebrated her fortieth birthday that year) may have contributed to her newly-expressed outlook in 1868. In any case, Oliphant spoke her mind more freely and avoided confrontation less often thereafter.

The effect of Oliphant's relationship with Blackwood on her perspective and on her writing is, by nature, ambiguous. Victorian cultural imperatives, such as women's sphere and presumptions of both sexes about womanhood, must be considered but cannot be quantified. Other factors can be quantified: how many women contributed articles to periodicals, how many of those articles were published, how much writers were paid. These factors can be compared with a like experience for men and can provide statistical generalizations about female writers and male publishers in mid century. But at best, statistics can merely provide a gloss for understanding the relationship between Oliphant and Blackwood.

Other factors are even more ambiguous in assessing the impact of the relationship on Oliphant's writing. The interpersonal dynamics of respect, admiration, dependence, loyalty, and trust, factors in all relationships, cannot be quantified. The effects these produced on Oliphant are
speculative but are no less important than more discernible factors. Other factors, such as their families, their financial considerations, and their Scottish roots also affected the relationship to a degree that cannot be ascertained.

Although many factors, most of which are ambiguous, affected the relationship between Oliphant and Blackwood, to what degree any or all influenced her perspective on the Woman Question is open to conjecture. Ignoring these factors, however, results in a diminished understanding of Oliphant and a reductive view of her feminist tendencies in the 1850s and 1860s.

Oliphant’s seminal articles on the Woman Question reveal a woman on the threshold of self-awareness. All three articles have pre-feminist markers which suggest Oliphant’s perspective on women is changing. But acquiring a new perspective on a value-laden concept is a complicated process. Perhaps Oliphant should not be categorized as anti-feminist or as feminist in the 1850s and 1860s; perhaps she should be seen instead as one who moves, sometimes consciously, sometimes unconsciously, between these polarities as she works through her beliefs and feelings about women and about herself. Hence, Oliphant could well be viewed as a watershed figure exemplifying an entire generation’s changing ideas about women.
One of Oliphant's most noticeable pre-feminist markers is her growing sense of Otherness. In the first article, Oliphant displays little feeling of separation from the ideals of her culture. For the most part, she reflects her society's prevailing attitude toward women, yet she frequently slips into inverse arguments, suggesting a subconscious questioning of that attitude. Although she espouses the same world view as her society, she is becoming aware that her experience is incongruent with the Victorian ideal of womanhood. Nevertheless, she sees her environment as all-inclusive and exhibits little discomfort with gendered imperatives.

By the time Oliphant composes the second article, however, her sense of incongruence has intensified into Otherness. She creates fewer inverse arguments, indicating that, as a writer, she is more aware of lapses in logic. She relies less on grandiose pronouncements punctuated with exclamation points, but a cynical tone has crept into her essay. Oliphant has begun analyzing how and why her society treats women differently than men. Her world view diverges somewhat from that expressed by her society, and she acknowledges that women are marginalized. As yet, however, she is unable to puzzle out how this Otherness has occurred; she attributes the marginalization to "nature"--an oversimplistic explanation which seems dissatisfying even to
her. Her pointed question as the second article concludes reveals the extent of her dissatisfaction: if women are indeed morally superior to men, why is cultural posturing necessary to ensure that superiority? Although Oliphant cannot adequately explain why marginalization has occurred, she comprehends the enormity of the problem.

Oliphant’s sense of Otherness has intensified by the time she pens the third article, revealing her personal alienation from the dominant male culture. She strikes back with the only weapons at her disposal, words, venting her frustration in a barrage of cutting remarks against men. She revels in her Otherness in this article, shunning Mill’s attempt to include women householders in the franchise. Oliphant wants no part of being a “lesser man,” and she is furious at Mill for what she sees as a feeble consolation prize for women being marginalized.

Oliphant has come full circle with the notion of woman as Other. Her pre-feminist markers have blossomed into feminism. She has moved from ignorance to awareness of marginality, and the trip has been painful. Awareness has not made her into a radical supporter of the women’s movement, but it has made Oliphant angry with the social system that has allowed this to happen, and she is sympathetic with those who have been marginalized. Oliphant’s refusal to support Mill’s proposal indicates that
she believes being "elevated" to the status of "lesser men" is no elevation at all: it is further marginalization.

Oliphant does some sophisticated marginalization of her own in the third article. In refusing Mill's "promotion," she denies him--and by extension, all men--the right to define women. This right belongs to women. She pushes men out of the discourse arena by virtue of their gender, an elaborate turning of the Other table. This maneuver is revolutionary for a woman who readily accepted her society's view of women just ten years earlier.

Oliphant's change of voice is synonymous with her recognition of self as Other. In the first two articles, she has assumed a male persona, but her male voice wavers in places, creating confusion for both writer and reader. In the third, she assumes a female persona, but her rhetoric again falters. Carol Gilligan's psychological study of voice and women's development elucidates Oliphant's problem with voice in these two articles. Briefly, Gilligan contends that male and female voices represent two different modes of thinking, indicating that socialization has gendered interpretation skills. Although Gilligan examines voice as it manifests itself in moral development, the gender implications are clear. She declares, "In tracing development, I point to the interplay of these voices within each sex and suggest that their convergence marks times of
crisis and change" (2). The problem voice causes for Oliphant in these three articles suggests both crisis and change.

The issue of voice and male versus female persona was not a problem for Oliphant in articles not focusing on the Woman Question. In fiction, she suffered no gendered constraints on voice, and in her nonfiction roles as biographer, literary critic, travel writer and the like, voice was of little consequence. In deference to Blackwood's masculine overtones, however, she often used male voice in her reviews for the magazine. Jay contends that Oliphant even learned "to use the male voice against itself" in Maga (295). While she may have been successful in using male voice as a literary critic, she was less successful using male voice as a social critic. Discussion of gender problems foregrounds voice, a factor not usually present in literary discussions. This foregrounding forces Oliphant to consider two often contradictory perspectives, and such consideration in turn prompts reassessment of gender differences.

Oliphant's adoption of male voice in the first article is often obvious to the modern reader, but that may not have been the case for her contemporary readers, since the article was anonymous. The periodical press relied on anonymous publication, reasoning that the practice
encouraged intellectual integrity on the part of the author and forced the reader to focus on the issues and not on the author’s reputation or personality. Jay maintains that as a reviewer Oliphant

set great store by the personal invisibility guaranteed by anonymity. . . . She became firmly wedded to Blackwood’s policy, notably old-fashioned by the closing years of the century, of anonymous reviewing. The ‘anonymity principle’, as she called it, was equally helpful to reviewer and reviewed, in her opinion, since it upheld the ‘dignity of opinion’ without recourse to the discounting process which came into play when personalities became involved. (244)

Anonymity made it possible for Oliphant to use the male voice, but Oliphant did not always make this shift successfully. Showalter notes, “Women journalists initially felt that they got better treatment from the public when they published anonymously and assumed male personae” (66). Despite this theory, however, Oliphant’s first two Woman Question articles suffered because she did not use the male voice convincingly.

Assumption of a male persona implies that Oliphant experienced an ensuing convergence and crisis based on Gilligan’s model. Even though Oliphant probably failed to
use the male voice against itself in the first two articles, the experience was not without merit: when the assumed voice converged with her own submerged voice, she had to reconcile the two, precipitating an identity crisis and forcing her to rethink gender and gendered discourse. Only after these ideas converge and after she works through a crisis of rethinking can she change.

The male voice in the second article reflects some of Oliphant's rethinking of gender. The voice is neither as stilted nor as forced as it is in the first article, although its assumption once again becomes obvious. Oliphant remains unconvinced that women are powerless and that political change can remedy the situation, but she makes her claims much more calmly and reasons more logically than she did in the first article. Perhaps writing in a male voice has caused her to "think like a man," illustrating a popular notion of gender difference in thought processes at the time. If so, she may have consciously chosen calmness and logical reasoning to demonstrate her assumed masculinity.

One would expect, then, when she uses female voice in the third article that Oliphant's perspective would be easier to determine since no male filter is obviously in place. But the covert filter of John Blackwood was in place, and Oliphant cannot free herself from this filter in
the articles. Hence, she listens to multiple voices which comprise multiple filters, and the voice that emerges in the article suggests that her own opinion is once again muted by others.

Oliphant was continually aware of her society’s perceptions of gender and of the complexity of one sex understanding and depicting the other. She once wrote to Isabella Blackwood about her fictional characterization of men, saying,

the reason why, as you say, I give softness to men rather than to women, is simply because 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 and good. Even George Eliot is feeble in her men, and I recognise the disadvantage under which we all work in this respect. Sometimes we don’t know sufficiently to make the outline sharp and clear; sometimes we know well enough, but dare not betray our knowledge one way or other. . . . (Autobiography 178)

Her admission to Isabella reveals Oliphant’s sophisticated perception of a writer’s use of gender. Oliphant’s letter is dated October 11, 1861, a date falling between her second and third articles on the Woman Question and midway in the
ten-year span between the first and third articles. Hence, her admitted concealment occurs rather early in her feminist journey.

More importantly, Oliphant's voice in this letter reveals a striking contrast with the voice she uses in her third Woman Question article. Her voice suffers when she shifts from private to public discourse, an understandable casualty of Victorian notions of gender. Joyce Carol Oates notes, "For a practicing writer, for a practicing artist of any kind, 'sociology,' 'politics,' and even 'biology' are subordinate to matters of personal vision, and even to matters of craftsmanship" (10), and Oliphant certainly tried to subordinate gender, but her task (and that of other nineteenth-century writers) was more difficult than it is for twentieth-century writers such as Oates. By the time the third article was composed, Oliphant was well aware of voice issues in writing and in her society. She is aware that her society devalues women's discourse. Trela contends, "Oliphant was clearly aware of the devaluation of her work simply because it was the work of a woman" (VPR 91). She realizes public discourse is male discourse and that her gender has marginalized her; this realization angers her even further when she senses that her voice is being appropriated yet again, this time by members of her own sex.
Oliphant has learned much about voice and about what it means to be a woman in Victorian society through writing the Woman Question articles. Overall, her different tactics to achieve voice in the articles were futile, but they were not entirely fruitless because Oliphant sensed, as did the authors (Belenky, Field, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule) of *Women's Ways of Knowing* over a century later, that "voice" has many complex connotations. These authors note that "'speaking up,' 'speaking out,' 'being silenced,' 'not being heard,' 'really listening,' 'really talking,' 'words as weapons,' 'feeling deaf and dumb,' 'having no words,' 'saying what you mean,' 'listening to be heard,'" all have a bearing on a person's "mind, self-worth, and feelings of isolation from or connection to others" (18). None of these elements exists in isolation, something Oliphant also perceives. Although she experiments with the voice, she cannot, given the constraints on her writing, implement the full range of her knowledge on the subject. In this aspect, her gender thwarts her when she composes the first articles on the Woman Question. Hence, although little changes in her effectively achieving voice, she does gain knowledge about her situation. In doing so, she passes yet another pre-feminist marker in her development.

Oliphant's cynical confession to Isabella has another feminist implication as well. Oliphant's concealment, in
this illustration at least, is a conscious choice. Gilbert and Gubar search for a common thread in the evasive tactics of women such as Oliphant, and they ultimately conclude “what literary women have hidden or disguised is what each writer knows is in some sense her own story. . . . It is the story, in other words, of the woman’s quest for self-definition” (75-76). Once again Oliphant encounters a prefeminist marker in confronting an essentially twentieth-century feminist concept of female self-definition.

Oliphant begins the process of self-definition as she moves through these three articles, although her quest is ultimately abortive. She certainly describes herself: mother, friend, novelist, and “general utility woman” for Blackwood’s, but the descriptors are all relative terms. Any sense of Oliphant as a person remains nebulous. Gilligan’s study once again elucidates Oliphant’s dilemma. Citing Erik Erikson’s psychoanalytic studies of development, Gilligan notes that the female develops identity later than the male. Gilligan says, “She holds her identity in abeyance as she prepares to attract the man by whose name she will be known, by whose status she will be defined, the man who will rescue her from emptiness and loneliness” (12). Based on Erickson’s criteria and Gilligan’s observation, Oliphant begins identity development when she and Frank become engaged to marry. His death in 1859 precipitated an
identity crisis for her. This crisis occurred midway in the ten-year period when she composed the Woman Question articles.

Oliphant's autobiography reveals little about this period in her life, or about her marriage, and it reveals nothing about her identity crisis. An autobiography should be particularly telling in this aspect, yet Oliphant's is strangely silent on the subject of self. Patricia Meyer Spacks contends,

To tell a story of the self is . . . to create a fiction. . . . The capacity of the autobiographer to achieve an image and a fable that can even partially express himself depends finally on his literary artistry and his mastery of the techniques of evocation. (309)

Oliphant's literary artistry is not in question. Her mastery of evocation, however, is problematic in the Woman Question articles as well as in her autobiography. Spacks notes that autobiographers experience a "special set of tensions, risks, and pressures . . . . [which] comes from the drive to preserve and convey a given essence of selfhood, and from the tension . . . between the desire to express and to conceal" (312). Oliphant especially suffers as she tries to make her manufactured self congruent with
her received self (as seen by society) in each of the four works.

Jay, in titling her biography Mrs. Oliphant: 'A Fiction to Herself': A Literary Life, comments that Oliphant saw herself "as silhouetted figures that were her various selves" (306). If Jay's analysis is correct, then Oliphant's definition of self was again received because she pictured herself the same way she saw her fictional characters, as plot features rather than holistically. This fragmentation is especially prevalent in her autobiography and in the three Woman Question articles.

Langland claims that "destabilization of gender opens to view the multiple discourses through which subjectivity is constructed" (161). The fragmentary nature and abstract claims of Oliphant's first two articles and the clumsiness of speaking in a female voice in the third indicate Oliphant's struggle with multiple discourses. Recognition of her Otherness and her search for voice, markers of feminism rather than pre-feminism, suggest she has begun a quest for self in the third article. She makes some progress toward this end, but the disjointed nature of her autobiography, written late in life after the death of her two sons, suggests that much remained undone.

Unfortunately, one of the reasons Oliphant's reputation suffers today is that she never fully achieved self-
definition. Her critics must rely on fragmented accounts to form a complete picture of her. Hence, those who quickly dismiss her as a hack writer or as a woman unsympathetic to her sex are cheating themselves if they do not examine her work more carefully, because her Woman Question articles suggest a complex point of view that a literal, cursory reading does not reveal. Considering her internal conflicts and the external influences on her and her work, Margaret Oliphant's stance on the Woman Question could be nothing less than fragmented and paradoxical.
NOTES

"Coghill's edition was seriously flawed because she scrupulously deleted anything she felt would be unflattering to Oliphant. Jay restored as much of Oliphant's autobiography as possible, but unfortunately the Jay edition does not include the letters of the original edition, and so they remain unrestored.

Showalter claims that Sarah Ellis practiced this strategy in her infamous treatises on Victorian womanhood. "Her female audience would both read the messages between her lines and refrain from betraying what they deciphered," Showalter says (16).

Jameson's husband moved to Canada, where he assumed an important role in provincial government. He refused to honor a court order to provide financial support for his wife and family.

None of the major biographical sources has concrete information on Oliphant's education; most suggest that she had no formal education. Several sources note that Oliphant's mother was a woman of lively intellect and that Oliphant herself was a voracious reader from the time she was a small child."
The Oxford-English Dictionary cites usage of "unchancy" as "dangerous or risky" in mid-nineteenth century. "Chancy" is the preferred choice today.

In December 1855, Bodichon coordinated the Married Women's Property Committee, which was the first organized effort by women as a political group. The group, which gathered signatures on petitions to change property laws, is the movement to which Oliphant refers.

'Anxiety of authorship is a derivation of Harold Bloom's "anxiety of influence" theory.
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