The Pickering Masters

The Selected Works of Margaret Oliphant

Part III
Volume 11
Short (Domestic) Fiction

Edited by
Muireann O'Cinneide

ROUTLEDGE

THE PICKERING MASTERS

THE SELECTED WORKS OF MARGARET OLIPHANT

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THE SELECTED WORKS OF MARGARET OLIPHANT

Part III: Novellas and Shorter Fiction, Essays on Life-Writing and History, Essays on European Literature and Culture

General Editors

Joanne Shattock and Elisabeth Jay

Volume 11

Short (Domestic) Fiction

EDITED BY

Muireann O'Cinneide

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ABBREVIATIONS

Annals	M. Oliphant, *Annals of a Publishing House. William Blackwood and his Sons. Their Magazine and Friends*, 2 vols (Edinburgh and London: William Blackwood & Sons, 1897).
BM	*Blackwood's Magazine.*
Clarke (1986)	*Margaret Oliphant: A Bibliography.* Compiled by John Stock Clarke. Victorian Fiction Research Guides 11 (St Lucia, Queensland: Department of English, University of Queensland, 1986).
Clarke (2012)	*Mrs Oliphant, 1828–1897: The Rise, Decline and Recovery of a Reputation; A Secondary Bibliography 1849–2005.* Compiled by John Stock Clarke. Online at [http://www.victoriansecrets.co.uk/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/33-Margaret-Oliphant.pdf]. Revised 2012 [accessed December 2012].
CM	*Cornhill Magazine.*
Colby (1986)	V. Colby and R. A. Colby, *The Equivocal Virtue: Mrs. Oliphant and the Victorian Literary Market Place* (Hamden, CT: Archon, 1966).
Jay (1990)	*The Autobiography of Margaret Oliphant. The Complete Text*, ed. and introd. E. Jay (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990).
Jay (1995)	*Mrs Oliphant: 'A Fiction to Herself': A Literary Life* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995).
MOWO	Margaret Oliphant Wilson Oliphant (1828–97).
ODNB	*The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).
Williams (1986)	M. Williams, *Margaret Oliphant: A Critical Biography* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1986).

INTRODUCTION

MOWO and the Short Story

'Mrs. Oliphant is always at her best in short stories', declared the *Manchester Guardian* in an 1889 review. The genre's focus on 'a single character, a single facet of a character,' it says, 'suits Mrs. Oliphant's faculty of turning clever observation into facile but still clever improvisation.'[1] The *Graphic* was crisper: MOWO is 'very much better exhibited in short doses.'[2] Introducing the posthumous collection *A Widow's Tale and Other Stories* (1898), her fellow-Scot J. M. Barrie suggests that MOWO's 'short stories ... contain some of her finest work.'[3] But *The Times*, while praising the supernatural stories, insists that 'it is next to impossible to be mistress in two antithetical *genres*', and characterizes her work as possessing 'a seductive diffuseness'.[4] To further complicate matters, the *Daily Chronicle* in 1898 contends that MOWO's pieces of short fiction 'are not, in the modern sense, short stories; they are short novels. That, of course, is entirely a criticism of method, of form; and it does not in the least refer to any question of mere length.'[5] This review is rooted in the late-century 'vogue for carefully crafted short stories', after decades during which the genre was largely undefined.[6] Should we, then, more accurately view MOWO's short fiction pieces as equivalents of the first monthly episode of a novel,[7] albeit with storylines resolved at the end? MOWO herself might well have endorsed this, since she viewed the genre as 'a great waste of material on the part of the writer' – but she also appreciated short stories as pieces that 'encourage fine workmanship'.[8] Critically speaking, does MOWO do something distinctive with the compressed, focused possibilities of shorter fiction that distinguishes it (without necessarily wholly separating it) from her short factual pieces, on the one hand, and her novels, on the other?

Joanne Shattock and Elisabeth Jay's observation that MOWO never achieved the status of a popular edition of her work in her lifetime is particularly noticeable in relation to the sparsity of nineteenth-century collections of her non-supernatural shorter fiction.[9] But J. S. Clarke points out that even as accusations of 'padding' are increasingly levelled at her in the 1890s, MOWO,

> sensitive as always to changing aesthetic climes, was tightening her style and aiming at greater brevity. She was not always successful with her shorter works; yet through the eighties and nineties she was practicing the art of the short story and produced some really fine examples of the form, showing admirable economy and concentration, and proving, again, that constant work had enriched her talent rather than damaged it.[10]

'Indeed,' as Judith van Oosterom-Pooley contends, 'many a typical Oliphant story line and character fares better when presented in a more condensed form for the boundaries that the concise form of the short story imposes on her writing does much to tighten up a style prone to digression.'[11]

Where MOWO's short stories have truly come into their critically-acclaimed own is in her tales of the supernatural, collected in Volume 12 of this series. Yet this has tended to leave her realist short fiction (except the Carlingford short stories, to be published in the following set, Part IV) in an awkward hinterland: too different in theme to be read comfortably alongside her supernatural tales, yet seen as ephemeral leftovers from her intensive novel-writing. In fact, at her best, the succinctness of the form interacts with the poignantly prosaic domesticity of the settings, producing states of highly individualized psychological intensity and narrative suspense that exist in collision with societal and emotional contexts which are unable to encompass them.

Criteria for Selection

While my primary concern was identifying what I considered the most artistically successful stories, it also seemed important to give a sense of the thematic range of MOWO's shorter fiction, as well as its chronological and aesthetic development. Readers are therefore encouraged to follow up MOWO's many other pieces through Clarke's invaluable 1986 bibliography;[12] for example, I could easily have included all, rather than four, from *A Widow's Tale and Other Stories* (1898). The first tale reprinted here, 'The Two Mrs Scudamores' (1871–2), is a dramatic but uneven story, yet indicates the ways in which MOWO was employing the genre even as it was beginning to come into increasing commercial prominence and critical definition. (MOWO composed short fiction from the early stages of her career, but Pooley points out that it was only around the late 1870s 'that her production of short stories really took off'.[13]) It sets out a range of recurring themes across her fiction: marriage, children, property and finance, male weakness and female sacrifice, women's relationships, class, etc. 'The Scientific Gentleman' (1872), as part of the 'Dinglefield Green' series, offers a glimpse into the type of closely-knit fictional community, narratively interconnected across discrete texts, which MOWO created in the 'Chronicles of Carlingford' series. The story also places the supposedly 'masculine' world

of scientific discovery, research and exploration, and the 'feminine' socialized world of the Green, into collision.

'Queen Eleanor and Fair Rosamond' (1886) is a powerful later story in which MOWO returns to the themes of 'The Two Mrs Scudamores'; the transition between the two stories highlights her changing aesthetic engagement with the genre. 'Mr Sandford' (1888) would be included in any such selection, as one of MOWO's finest works, but also as one of the two stories she re-published in *The Ways of Life* (1897), introduced by her seminal preface 'On the Ebb Tide' (1897) (see below). 'A Widow's Tale' (1893) addresses the ambiguous status of widows in society, in a seemingly light-hearted, yet ultimately remarkably bleak parable on desire, love, marriage and social convention. 'A Story of a Wedding-Tour' (1894) is a psychologically insightful tale that can be read in conjunction with 'A Widow's Tale' as offering a distinctive complement – and to some extent a counterpoint – to MOWO's own longstanding criticisms of campaigns for women's divorce and custody rights. The 'Heirs of Kellie' (1896) represents MOWO's importance and strong sense of self, as a Scottish writer – even as the detachment of historical fiction allows her to explore crucial themes of marriage, duty, masculinity, religion and statehood in alternative societal contexts. This volume closes, chronologically and emotionally appropriately, with MOWO's non-fictional essay 'On the Ebb Tide' (1897), her great lament on the nature of writing, the potential fragility of her future reputation, and her sense of late-in-life loss and unfulfilment.

I remain wary of positing a neat chronological progression to MOWO's literary powers, especially for a woman who was producing short stories of strength, humour and psychological shrewdness for much of her career. But I would contend that MOWO's later stories pay greater attention to the quieter, more subdued ambivalences of human emotion, and to the ways in which the confined space of the short story allows for both the swift establishment of an intensely-charged atmosphere, and its abrupt diffusion in unanticipated ways. Elisabeth Jay analyses MOWO's 'habitual resistance to absolute closure' in her novels, arguing that she produces 'a shrewd deployment of modernist techniques: the full weight of a decisive reading is transferred from the vagaries of the individual character's temperament to the discernment of the reader'.[13] The same can be said of the short stories – except that her later works bring readers face to face with the limitations of their interpretative agency. The development of MOWO's short story technique over the last two decades of the century enables her to root modernist ambiguity in domestic realism; to build her closures from absences and omissions intrinsic to the form; and to turn stories and structures of limitation into a powerful literary aesthetic. In 'On the Ebb Tide', MOWO identifies the crux of her selected stories as 'the psychological moment', in which 'the first discovery is made' of impending failure and disaster (p. 323). Some of

the best stories in this collection set up climactic moments of revelation and realization only to side-step them: confrontations do not take place, mysteries are not neatly solved, deaths do not happen – or happen in unexpected ways. 'The art of omission has no place here;' the *Daily Chronicle* declares, 'the ellipsis ... never occurs',[14] yet MOWO's stories in fact exert a powerful effect precisely through their elevation of ellipsis and omission, uncertainty and unknowability.

Genre and Tragedy

MOWO acknowledges in 'On the Ebb Tide' that she has 'shrunk from ... darker colours' (p. 323). But Dale Kramer sees her as writing domestic tragedy, observing that nineteenth-century novelists sought 'to locate tragic dilemmas and emotions in less austere, more "open" frameworks' than those of classical tragedy.[15] Such frameworks enhance 'the poignancy of ordinariness',[16] a concept which becomes increasingly key to MOWO's invocation of tragedy as a mode. 'The Scientific Gentleman' places a Gothic story of disastrous desire within the confines of a quiet English village. Lured into marriage by the extraordinary beauty of a sensualist, materialistic innkeeper's daughter, the wealthy, well-educated, eminently rational Mr Reinhardt is locked into a desperate cycle of rejection and reconciliation. MOWO's attacks on the popular sensation fiction of the 1860s and 1870s were especially acerbic about the popularity of bigamy as a plot device,[17] yet this did not prevent her from using it. 'The Two Mrs Scudamores' is a story with a powerful sense of atmosphere, and an underlying darkness surrounding the legal vulnerability of women in a world in which property and legitimacy are tied to the sexual and economic choices of their husbands. It suffers, however, from a mismatch between tragic tone and tragic content: the poignant possibility of a young girl being sacrificed to a loveless marriage is somewhat overwhelmed by the classical and biblical scope of the imagery that surrounds this sacrifice. In the transition between the bigamy plots of 'The Two Mrs Scudamores' and 'Queen Eleanor and Fair Rosamond' (1886), we see MOWO's increasing confidence in the subtly affective power of tragedy depicted as a low-key domestic affair.

Discussing Charles Reade's novel *Peg Woffington* (1853), MOWO drew on the historical figures of Eleanor and Rosamond to characterize the meek, wronged wife and the eponymous, glorious actress. She praises Reade for treating the two women 'not technically as injured wife and rival, but as two human creatures', and allowing them to 'see each other, understand each other, know, being creatures of one species, what each has been meaning in her heart'.[18] In her own story, the legitimate wife feels 'almost more for this young life blighted than for her own' (p. 323). Yet since she leaves the house without revealing the truth, the two women never truly 'see each other'. MOWO sets up the expected dramatic confrontations intrinsic to the plot: the abortive one between real

and false wife with its one-sided moment of full realization; the one between betrayed wife and deceiving husband that commences with dramatically emotive speech – 'a cry – a roar like that of a wounded animal – "ELEANOR!"' and fills her with 'a blaze of vehemence' (p. 126), but which abruptly peters out. Instead, MOWO deftly transfers these expectations into a meeting between Eleanor Lycett-Landon and Rose's mother, notable precisely for its *lack* of action at the key moment: 'the two women stood gazing at each other in an awful suspension of all sound or thought' (p. 143).

Standing in her rival's home, Mrs Lycett-Landon is tempted to 'leave the strange little drama – what was it, comedy or tragedy? – to work itself out?' (p. 125). Meeting her husband years later, she finds Mr Lycett-Landon is a 'stout, embarrassed old gentleman' whom she barely recognizes (p. 146). The true tragedy of this story comes from precisely such sedate, undramatic events: 'To see him ... oh so commonplace! ... She could not bear to see him so lowered from his natural place. Tragedy is terrible, but when it drops into tragicomedy, tragic-farce at the end, that is the most terrible of all' (p. 147). The tale moves to a hauntingly ambivalent ending: Mr Lycett-Landon's motives, his future life, even whether or not his supposed wife ever learns the truth – 'all this Mrs. Lycett-Landon lived in ignorance of, and so, in all probability, will die'. The *Daily Chronicle* lacerates the story's 'ugliness', seeing it as lacking 'the inevitableness and the heroic beauty which must be united to justify tragedy'.[19] But the real sorrow of the story is precisely the inability of its characters or events to be labelled as tragic, in a world in which neither dramatic inevitability nor heroic beauty seem to exist to give order or purpose to life. Indeed, the failing artist-protagonist of 'Mr Sandford' finds it hard to grasp impending disaster because his 'heart was unaccustomed to anything tragical' (p. 173). His death is rendered tragic in the sense that it is devastatingly moving, but there is a purposeful ambiguity to this climactic event – he explicitly denies suicide (p. 195), but the fatal accident takes place while he sits passively immersed in the artistic beauty of the scene (p. 192) – that becomes the story's closing tragic irony.

'A Widow's Tale' invokes a self-conscious mutability of genre, initially referencing the poised artificiality of theatre: 'she had no call whatever to provide the scenery, as it were ... for this drama' (p. 213), while the widow considers her position to be 'not at all the *rôle* which she had felt herself to be capable of playing' (p. 213). But Nelly's '*mise en scène*' in her flirtation with Percy Fitzroy gives way to the all-too-real as comedy starts taking a turn towards tragedy. The three published parts of 'A Widow's Tale' each contain the basis for a complete story. It commences as seemingly light-hearted social comedy – 'vaudeville, operetta, genteel comedy' (p. 212); Part II changes to a morality tale of menaced virtue; then with the mutually grudged marriage in Part III the narrative moves much closer to the tragedy it suggests lies dormant in the most seemingly everyday

circumstances: 'we never know how often we touch tragedy as we walk about the world unconscious' (p. 237). Given Nelly's silence on her eventual return, the reader is left to grapple with 'the tragedy of her unknown fate' (p. 248).

'A Story of a Wedding Tour' is in essence uplifting, describing how a gentle young woman takes flight from her crass, selfish husband. Yet the ending segues inexorably into a tragic mode, with MOWO drawing on the Gothic vocabulary of death and terror that she puts to such effective use in her supernatural stories: Janey 'was struck with a great horror which she never quite got over all her life. She had not blamed herself before; but now seemed to herself no less than the murderer of her husband: and could not forgive herself, nor get out of her eyes the face she had seen, nor out of her ears the dreadful sound of that labouring breath' (p. 269). The final story in this volume, 'The Heirs of Kellie' is in all senses of the phrase, as its subtitle suggests, 'an episode of family history'; Merryn Williams argues that MOWO must have seen the earlier MOWO family's dignified acceptance of loss and fading away as 'an emblem for her own life'.[20]

Marriage and Feminism

'Marrying is like dying – as distinct, as irrevocable, as complete.'[21] MOWO's factual writing repeatedly expresses scepticism about the possibility of any just separation or division of marital lives, property and responsibility for children, yet she had a growing sense of 'The Grievances of Women', the title of her 1880 *Fraser's Magazine* article.[22] Her fiction, and her short stories in particular, explore some deeply unhappy marriages. There are extensive discrepancies between the *Blackwood's* and (unusually) first-published American *Scribner's Monthly* versions of 'The Two Mrs Scudamores' (see headnote (pp. 1–2) and Textual Variants (pp. 347–63)). *Scribner's* emphasizes the damage the bigamous dead husband has done to his children and their inheritance, while *Blackwood's* has him abandon his 'first' wife and possibly assume her death – making him, perhaps, a worse husband but a rather less bad father and landowner. 'A Widow's Tale' sets up women as victims of more subtle male selfishness: 'Miss Bampton took the position of her father's wife rather than of his daughter ... If she sacrificed any feelings of her own in doing so, no one found it out' (p. 204). The widowed Nelly's attraction to the caddish Fitzroy is depicted with stark psychological insight: the 'elements of hate were in her love, an opposition and distrust ineradicable took possession of her being: and yet she belonged to him, and he to her, almost the more for this contradiction' (p. 243). Part III suggests a much, much darker world within marriage, hinted at but shown through ellipsis and external perspectives, with its miseries shadowed out but never spoken of, and leaving Nelly 'little more than the ghost of herself' (p. 248).

Unlike Nelly, the protagonist of 'A Story of a Wedding-Tour' is not coerced into marriage: 'Nobody had ever loved her, much less been "in love" with her. Janey consented willingly enough for the magic of these two words' (p. 255). But her boorish husband loves her only 'as wife, servant, and object of beauty'.[23] Pooley highlights the story's preoccupation with marriage as a fundamental loss of privacy.[24] The unexpected opportunity of finding herself alone in France produces a remarkable – and remarkably feminist – moment of self-recognition and self-claiming: 'Janey herself, the real woman, whom nobody had ever seen before' (p. 260). Jay notes that 'A Story of a Wedding-Tour' dispenses with the conventional fictional recourse of marital reconciliation.[25] Its dramatically effective ending seems nevertheless not quite to have satisfied MOWO herself, who wrote three sequels to it, but they focus upon the couple's son and follow Janey no further into the lifelong sense of horror with which she is left.

In 'The Scientific Gentleman', Reinhardt's self-destructive behaviour is not represented simply as male folly: Julia Reinhardt's beauty exercises a powerful compulsion even on the staid and middle-aged female narrator. MOWO clearly has some sympathy for Reinhardt's indecorous anger towards the well-meaning Mrs Musgrave: 'Oh, I like those women's rights! ... to interfere – for ever to interfere – and to be spared the consequences, at any cost to us?' (p. 86). The wife's classic tale of unjust persecution yields to the dawning realization of the husband's bleak side of the story. Yet MOWO retains her ability to see multiple perspectives: as one of the servants observes, 'a fool and a wise man can't walk together – it's hard on the wise man, but maybe it's a bit hard too on the fool' (p. 95). The climactic reconciliation convincingly invokes both passion and dread, with this staple scene of melodrama's happy endings transformed into a cyclical failure of will that hints at a further, even more melodramatic, climax beyond the scope of the narrative: 'He'll kill her some day or kill hisself [*sic*]' (p. 95). Reinhardt is last heard from departing into the depths of Africa. While the Royal Geographical Society lauds 'the sacrifice he was making to the interests of science' (p. 96), the women of Dinglefield Green know that scientific interests and international colonial exploration have been reduced to means through which to try again to escape the terrible power of his desire.

In the opening pages of *Annals of a Publishing House* (1897), MOWO describes England as swallowing up Scottish names and enterprises 'like a husband with his wife'.[26] 'The Heirs of Kellie' depicts a nation that is starting to realize the consequences of their union, although David Finkelstein sees MOWO's writing of Scottishness as an ultimate endorsement of an overall post-union British identity.[27] It is also a story about gendered dispossession: in leaving Kellie Castle to the far-off, uninterested Lord Oliphant instead of to his younger sister Jean, the only remaining Oliphant heir in his direct line, Sir Walter is abandoning both his personal and his true familial responsibilities.

'Marriage is a tie which is curiously elastic when youth is over and the reign of the sober everyday has come in' MOWO comments in 'Queen Eleanor' (p. 111). She shows some understanding for the bigamous husband, who feels the difference between his children's hopeful future and his: it 'is at my time of life that disappointment tells' (p. 108). Indeed, Mr Lycett-Landon's male associates seem readily to comprehend the actions that bewilder his wife: 'It seems as if they must break out – as if common life and duty became insupportable' (p. 136). That said, his self-centredness leaves us with little of the sympathy that we feel for the quiet, ungrudging loneliness of Mr Sandford, in whose loving marriage a distance has grown because his wife thinks it her duty to be constantly with the children (p. 157). On his deathbed, Mrs Sandford 'flung their crowding images from her – those images which had forced her husband from her heart' (p. 196). In 'A Widow's Tale', the young children are disturbingly side-lined by their mother's impulsive, if partly coerced, decision to marry again, although she ends the story reunited with them, while in 'A Story of a Wedding-Tour', Janey's decision to leave her husband means (unknowingly at the time) keeping his son from him, a consequence which MOWO does not treat lightly.

'Widowhood', observes Pat Jalland,

> signified the permanent loss of the status of wife, which was expected ideally to give economic security and social position, as well as personal contentment and companionship. The loss of their position as wife relegated widows to a lower level of the social hierarchy. The elaborate and uncomfortable widows' weeds which they were obliged to wear identified them as members of a distinct, inferior group to which they usually belonged for life. There was, however, a more positive dimension to this apparently bleak picture[28]

In 'A Widow's Tale', Nelly's cousins relegate her sight unseen to the status of pitied relative who will now 'begin to live a subdued life by proxy' through her children (p. 205). Part of Nelly's mistake lies in not being willing to accept widowhood as a satisfactory state,[29] she is punished harshly for desire. Yet MOWO also portrays Nelly's 'sense that after all her existence was not over' (p. 213). In 'The Two Mrs Scudamores', after the death of the dissipated husband, neighbours 'adjured her to remember that such partings were not forever (which made the poor woman shudder)' (p. 6); as Margarete Rubik observes, MOWO 'sometimes even approaches death with a degree of entirely un-Victorian black humour'.[30] Likewise, MOWO's novel *The Ladies Lindores* (1883) has the newly-widowed Caroline cry out in relief at news of her husband's death. By contrast, the dying Mr Sandford touchingly rejects the concept of widowhood altogether – 'you are, my dear, my wife. We don't understand anything about widows, you and I. Death's nothing, I think' (p. 196) – although Mrs Sandford, like her creator, does eventually regain hope and strength in 'the new inevitable solitary life … which was not solitary at all, but full of the stir and hum of living' (p. 199).

Masculinity in Crisis

MOWO, repeatedly driven into the role of chief provider by the fecklessness of her brothers, husband and sons, frequently depicts weak male characters.[31] Her later short stories pay increased attention to men 'who are facing some sort of crisis in their lives and not making a very good job of coping with it'.[32] In 'Queen Eleanor', the Lycett-Landons confront each other: '"Well!" she cried, "stand up for it like a man! Say you are sick of me, of your children, of living honestly these fifty years. Say something for yourself. Don't stand there like a whipped child"' (p. 126). His silence suggests his failure to rise to her challenge, or to confront the implications of his actions. Nelly's deceased husband in 'A Widow's Tale' died 'giving very little thought to the comfort of his wife and children after he was gone' (p. 213). This echoes MOWO's account of her own husband's death in Rome in 1859: 'Frank died ... quite, quite free from anxiety, though he left me with two helpless children and one unborn, and very little money.'[33] Mr Sandford is another failed – or failing – male provider, albeit one acutely aware of his responsibilities, and his sons turn out to do well once deprived of his support; we can see here an echo of the *Autobiography*'s devastating queries as to whether, after all her work and suffering, MOWO's own sons might have been better off left to their own initiative.[34]

It is perhaps not surprising, then, that one of MOWO's most positive portrayals of a male relative, Peter ('Pate') MOWO in 'The Heirs of Kellie', requires the distance of historical fiction. Pate's refusal to send the family's followers to their deaths for his and Jean's inheritance rights offers a reworking of the Oliphant family motto, and of traditional ideas about masculinity, courage and the responsibilities of a provider: 'To provide for all, that's what it means – not to devote them to death and ruin in our service' (p. 300). Pate Oliphant is positioned at a turning-point in Scottish ecclesiastical and national history – the aftermath of the Scottish Reformation and the 1603 unification with England – but also at a transition point in the nature of the modern British state, whereby local and clan allegiances, and blood ties, can no longer exert power in a world of increasingly centralized rule in which any chivalric battles fought will have to be in the law courts. Embedded in the story's apparent historical remoteness, therefore, is a parable for Victorian middle-class masculinity: the key to living an honourable life is rejecting self-indulgence in favour of the care and protection of family and wider social community.

Class, Space and Movement

Working in a genre itself defined by space, MOWO's short stories create internal scope by making effective use of the physical and metaphorical crossings of distances. In 'The Scientific Gentleman', she is gently ironic about the Green's

close-knit social world. 'Queen Eleanor' is set amidst the extremes of poverty and wealth in 1830s and 1840s Liverpool,[35] where the exotic hothouse flowers at a magnificent dinner 'cost as much as would have fed a street full of poor people' (p. 112). Later, as the wife arrives at the 'strange, still, secluded town of villas' (p. 126) just outside London, she finds only 'the things [flowers] that everybody had', yet is forced to admit to 'a great deal of brightness, and the look as of a home' (p. 121). Julia Bampton in 'A Widow's Tale' insists that 'Nothing which is within ten minutes of town by the railway can be called the country' (p. 218), encapsulating the ambiguous essence of nineteenth-century suburbia. The rigid requirements of the railway timetable give Fitzroy an opening for his attempted seduction, while the compromised couple's miserable discussion of their future takes place in the bustle of a London railway station. Finally, the ease with which Nelly can catch a train makes her disastrous second marriage seem like an easier option than facing the Rector's wife (p. 244). In 'A Story of a Wedding-Tour', however, the railway and its fixed timetables become unexpected agents of marital liberation; 'the most friendly, idle, gossiping little train' (p. 262) on which Janey makes her second, voluntary flight suggests the warmth and community which she is about to find. Yet the railway is also explicitly identified as the instrument of eventual tragedy in this story: the 'whole tragedy was of the railway, the noisy carriages, the snorting locomotives' (p. 269).

Art and Money

In the *Annals of a Publishing House*, MOWO quotes a letter to John Blackwood from George Eliot, whose critically-acclaimed and domestically nurtured career both fascinated and infuriated her: 'I don't want the world to give me anything for my books except money enough to save me from the temptation to write *only* for money.'[36] Earlier feminist criticism of MOWO perceived her career as largely thwarted by ever-present financial demands,[37] yet this may be to underestimate the potentially beneficial effects of temporal and financial pressures on an author who always wrote at high volume. Short stories offered a time-effective way to make money, though they tended not to pay especially well.[38] 'How different now was daily bread' (p. 176), muses Mr Sandford, contemplating the aesthetic, commercial and emotional strains of supporting a family with your art. The phrase clearly had a powerful personal significance for MOWO, whose last letter to William Blackwood III, as she was dying, tells him 'You know that I have been working for a long time for daily bread.'[39] The ending of the story, in which death has made 'a Sandford … a thing with a settled value' (p. 199), has ironic resonances with MOWO's own assessments about the posthumous commercial worth of her works.[40]

Art, Realism and Reputation

In 'On the Ebb Tide', MOWO's great elegiac preface to *The Ways of Life*, she critiques 'the everlasting treatment of the primary problem of youth' and 'the monotonous demand for a love-story which crushes out of court all the rest of life', arguing that 'the ebb has its poetry, too' (p. 322). MOWO perceived her own representational domestic realism as antithetical to dominant *fin-de-siècle* literary trends – a perception underlined by the attacks on her *The Victorian Age of English Literature* (1892) from the Aesthetic poet and critic Arthur Symons.[41] Given the increasing masculinization of literary culture, Jay ties MOWO's own sense of being 'on the ebb tide' to both gender and content, 'as a producer of fiction which still attended mainly to domestic life'.[42] Mr Sandford's work is compositionally impeccable, yet he lacks the originality of genius, or the capacity to adapt to the *fin-de-siècle* movement away from rigid compositional frameworks and realist detail. There is an edge to MOWO's depiction of the opinionated young critic who dismisses 'those ridiculous old days when the subject was everything' (p. 161), but Mr Sandford's failed attempt at an impressionist sketch makes him realize the artistry required to recreate '*that unreal scene which was so indubitable a fact*' (p. 166, italics added). Looking at his own historical painting, he 'recognised in a moment the jogtrot, the ordinary course of life, and against it the flush of the sudden inspiration, the stronger handling, the glory and glow of the colour' (p. 175) that he has achieved in a tragically brief moment of creativity. Penelope Fitzgerald characterizes MOWO as 'a woman with a strong visual imagination', despite her disclaimers of artistic feeling.[43] As he is dying, Mr Sandford – and his author – seem to move onto a whole new plane of aesthetic appreciation:

> It was like an exhibition got up for him alone, relieved by that black underground, now traversed by gigantic ebony figures of a horse and a man, moving irregularly across the moor. A star came out with a keen blue sparkle, like some power of heaven triumphant over that illumination of earth. What a spectacle it was! And all for him alone! (p. 193).

Although Clarke sees 'The Anti-Marriage League' (1896), in which she attacks writers such as Thomas Hardy, as indicative of MOWO's late-in-life tendency 'to take fright and over-react against the new writers',[44] 'On the Ebb Tide' identifies and praises other current literary trends, such as male novelists able to go beyond constraints of romantic attachments to write stories of adventure. These were clearly not stories that MOWO herself was going to tell – or sell. Yet her increased attention to older characters, and to moments of small-scale failure and loss, in some ways allows MOWO to enter into this masculinized world, not by rejecting the domestic realism in which her writing had always been rooted, but by tying it to the 'psychological moment' of the ebb tide whereby adventure,

drama and tragedy emerge from the choices and problems of seemingly commonplace lives.

Despite George Meredith's 1857 prescription in the *Westminster Review*,[45] compression is *not* necessarily MOWO's missing aesthetic tool – at least not when it comes to her short fiction. The most powerful of her domestic stories allows her seemingly leisurely pace, her attention to scenes of apparently lesser significance, to build a world within the genre that meditates upon the ebb tides of human life, even while the curtailment of plots and settings required by the lessened word count enhance the effects of ambiguities and ellipses. Between them, the chronology of 'On the Ebb Tide' and MOWO's *Autobiography* have provided a powerful, and perhaps overly-tempting, lens through which to read MOWO – even as her stories themselves stand in opposition to the elegiac view of her work, positioning her not as a writer trapped by her own scale of production, but as one who writes her way towards mastery; who engages with the current literary trends of her day while retaining her own distinctive voice; and for whom the boundaries of short fiction accentuate, rather than obscure, the prosaic moments of daily life through which tragedy, loss and sorrow – as well as joy, happiness and emancipation – come into being.

Notes

1. 'Books of the Week: Novels', *Manchester Guardian*, 5 March 1889, p. 10.
2. *Graphic*, 16 March 1889, p. 290.
3. J. M. Barrie, 'Introductory Note', to MOWO, *A Widow's Tale and Other Stories* (Edinburgh and London: Blackwood, 1898), pp. v–viii, on p. vii.
4. 'Recent Novels', *The Times*, 23 August 1898, p. 8.
5. 'Mrs. Oliphant and the Short Story', *Daily Chronicle*, 7 June 1898, p. 3.
6. Jay (1995), p. 276.
7. J. van Oosterom-Pooley, *The Whirligig of Time: Margaret Oliphant in Her Later Years* (Bern; Oxford: Peter Lang, 2010), p. 117, and see pp. 118–9 for further discussion of this issue of definition.
8. MOWO, 'The Old Saloon', *BM*, 145 (June 1889), p. 833, quoted Jay (1995), p. 276.
9. J. Shattock, and E. Jay, 'General Introduction', Volume 1, pp. xi–xvii, on p. xiv.
10. Clarke (2012), p. 41.
11. Pooley, *Whirligig*, p. 118.
12. 'Shorter Fiction, Collected and Uncollected', Clarke (1986), pp. 82–6.
13. Jay (1995), p. 185.
14. *Daily Chronicle*, 1898, p. 3.
15. D. Kramer, 'The Cry that Binds: Oliphant's Theory of Domestic Tragedy', in D. J. Trela (ed.), *Margaret Oliphant: Critical Essays on a Gentle Subversive* (Selinsgrove, PA: Susquehanna University Press, 1995), pp. 147–64, on p. 148.
16. Ibid., p. 152.
17. MOWO, 'Novels', *BM*, 94 (August 1863), in Volume 1, p. 318.
18. MOWO, 'Charles Reade's Novels', *BM*, 106 (October 1869), in Volume 1, pp. 421–48, on p. 428.
19. *Daily Chronicle*, 1898, p. 3.

20. Williams (1986), p. 180.
21. 'The Laws Concerning Women', *BM*, 79 (April 1856), pp. [370]–87, in Volume 1, pp. 141–54, on p. 144.
22. *Fraser's Magazine*, 101 (n.s. 21) (May 1880), pp. 698–710, see Part I, Volume 3, pp. 213–30.
23. Jay (1995), p. 119.
24. Pooley, *Whirligig*, p. 135.
25. Jay (1995), p. 119.
26. MOWO, *Annals*, vol. 1, p. 4.
27. D. Finkelstein, '"Long and Intimate Connections": Constructing a Scottish Identity for *Blackwood's Magazine*', in L. Brake, B. Bell and D. Finkelstein (eds), *Nineteenth-Century Media and the Construction of Identities* (New York and Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2000), pp. 326–38.
28. P. Jalland, *Death in the Victorian Family* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 249–50.
29. Pooley, *Whirligig*, p. 129.
30. M. Rubik, 'The Subversion of Clichés in Oliphant's Fiction', in Trela (ed.), *Margaret Oliphant*, pp. 49–65, on p. 61.
31. Jay (1995), p. 80.
32. Pooley, *Whirligig*, p. 121.
33. Jay (1990), p. 78.
34. Jay (1990), pp. 79, 117.
35. See Williams (1986), p. 5.
36. Quoted *Annals*, vol. 2, p. 442.
37. See esp. V. Woolf, *Three Guineas* (1938; London: Hogarth Press, 1968), p. 166); E. Showalter, *A Literature of their Own*: *British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing* (London: Virago, 1977), p. 47.
38. H. Orel, *The Victorian Short Story*: *Development and Triumph of a Literary Genre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 2.
39. MOWO to William Blackwood III, Blackwood MS 4664, 16 June 1897.
40. See Jay (1995), p. 283.
41. See Clarke (2012), p. 26; A. Symons, *Academy* (4 February 1893), p. 100; 'The Victorian Age of English Literature', *Athenaeum* (7 January 1893), pp. 9–10; and see Shattock and Jay, 'General Introduction', pp.xi–xii.
42. Jay (1995), p. 79 and see pp. 78–82.
43. P. Fitzgerald, 'Introduction', to MOWO, *The Rector and The Doctor's Family* (London: Virago, 1986), pp. v–xvi, on pp. vi, vii.
44. MOWO, 'The Anti-Marriage League', *BM*, 159 (January 1896), pp. 135–49, in Volume 5, pp. 457–76; J. S. Clarke, 'The "Rival Novelist" – Hardy and Mrs Oliphant', *Thomas Hardy Journal* (October 1989), pp. 51–61, on pp. 51, 52.
45. George Meredith, *Westminster Review*, 68 (October 1857), quoted in G. S. Haight, 'George Meredith and the *Westminster Review*', *Modern Language Review*, 53 (January 1958), pp. 1–16, on p. 11.

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'THE TWO MRS SCUDAMORES'

'The Two Mrs Scudamores', *Blackwood's Magazine*, 110 (December 1871), pp. 710–27 and 111 (January 1872), pp. 46–57.

The text for 'The Two Mrs Scudamores' is taken from its publication, in two parts, in *Blackwood's Magazine* (December 1871–January 1872): Part I, *BM*, 110 (December 1871), pp. 710–27; Part II, *BM*, 111 (January 1872), pp. 46–57. Unusually for MOWO, the story's first chronological publication was in the American literary periodical *Scribner's Monthly: An Illustrated Magazine for the People* which ran from 1870 until 1881 (the later *Scribner's Magazine* ran from 1887 to 1939): Part I, 3:1 (November 1871), pp. 85–95; Part II, 3:2 (December 1871), pp. 198–209; Part III, 3:3 (January 1872), pp. 297–304. The story was also later published in *Tales from Blackwood*, second series, 7:14 (Edinburgh and London: Blackwood, 1879). As the title implies, the story turns on the theme of a bigamous marriage, taking up the 'bigamy plot' so popular with 1860s sensation fiction, and which MOWO herself criticized, noting sardonically that 'Books about bigamy are not generally works of high art.'[1] (See also 'Queen Eleanor and Fair Rosamond' (1886) in this volume, pp. 97–147).

The textual variants for this story have been traced for the considerably altered American periodical version in addition to the later *Blackwood's* volume publication, which is not standard practice for the other texts in this volume. 'The Two Mrs Scudamores' is distinctive in both the timing and the variation of its American and British publications: it was unusual for one of MOWO's stories to be first published in an American journal, and those versions subsequent to British publication tend to contain minimal, if any, variation from the initial publication. Although the practice in this volume has been to favour the first-published periodical editions for the text, here the *Blackwood's* periodical version has been chosen over the fractionally earlier *Scribner's* one. This is partially to retain consistency with other stories in the volume, especially given the earliest version's Americanized spelling. It is also, though, because the extent of the changes between the two periodical versions is sufficient to make it possible that the *Scribner's* version may have been substantially edited by someone else.

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(By contrast, the *Blackwood's* 1879 volume edition, in *Tales from Blackwood's*, is largely unchanged from the periodical version.) MOWO's 'Norah, the Story of a Wild Irish Girl' was published solely in *Scribner's* a few months before (May–June 1871), so this could indicate a temporary arrangement with the magazine. But although 'Norah' technically belongs to the series later collected as *Neighbours on the Green* (1889) (see the headnote for 'The Scientific Gentleman' in this volume, pp. 47–9), it was not republished in that book. Clarke suggests that MOWO may simply have forgotten this early contribution, which, whilst hardly surprising in so notoriously prolific an author, might imply rather less intellectual or editorial investment in these *Scribner's* stories.[2] The extensive editing may, however, also have emerged from MOWO's own embarrassment at the story appearing in *Scribner's* and *Blackwood's* almost simultaneously. *Scribner's*, having apparently decided to take her novel *At His Gates* (1872), unexpectedly opted to publish both the novel and 'The Two Mrs Scudamores', leaving MOWO having to apologize to John Blackwood: 'I don't suppose that anybody in Great Britain except myself gets Scribner's Monthly Magazine, but still you must judge whether under the circumstances Maga will condescend to share with the Yankee.'[3]

The changes between *Scribner's* and *Blackwood's*, while extensive, are largely minor ones for the majority of the text; passing clarifications of the house's layout or characters' movements may suggest a story initially written in some haste. The really substantial variations come in the heavily rewritten final chapter: the *Blackwood's* version adds a much stronger visual element to the climactic scene, particularly as regards the respective positioning of the two 'wives'. The *Scribner's* version places more emphasis on matters of property and inheritance (see the Introduction to this volume for further discussion of this). The *Blackwood's* version omits some slightly awkward clarifying sentences regarding the entail status and ultimate disposal of the Scudamore property. This ambiguity is heightened by textual variants earlier in the story even between the largely-congruent *Blackwood's* editions: the 1879 *Blackwood's* one-volume edition makes the park and lands part of the presumably entailed estate to pass to the nearest (legitimate) male heir. While this would be more in accordance with the conventions of upper-class inheritance practices, Scudamore Park being a disposable part of a wife's inheritance makes the final fate of the property more feasible. (*Scribner's* avoids the issue with 'even then more than half the property would still be in her hands' (3.1.86)). The story itself was praised in the *Daily Review* for the energy of its plot, but was not reissued in any of MOWO's future collections other than its *Tales from Blackwood's* publication.[4]

Notes

1. MOWO, 'Charles Reade's Novels', Volume 1, *Selected Works*, p. 432.
2. Clarke (1986), p. 83.
3. MOWO to John Blackwood, Blackwood MSS. 4280, n.d., and see Colby (1986), pp. 149–50.
4 'The Magazines', *Daily Review*, 4 December 1871, p. 5.

'THE TWO MRS SCUDAMORES'

PART I

CHAPTER I.

Scudamore Park is in Berkshire, in the heart of one of the leafiest and greenest of English counties. There is nothing very beautiful in the house itself. It is of the time of Queen Anne,[1] with red brick[a] gables and gleaming lines of windows straight and many. The centre of the *corps du logis*[b] is crowned with a pediment,[2] and the house stands upon a broad green terrace, broken by flights of white stone steps.

The garden surrounding one wing has been kept up in the old-fashioned trim which belonged to the period in which it was made. There are clipped yews and formal parterres – parterres, however,[c] which can scarcely be called more formal than the ribbon beds of the modern flower-garden[3d] at the other end of the house.

The park has always been kept up in the very best style, and the newest and most fashionable kind of gardening, as of everything else,[e] is to be found there. Whatever the Scudamores may have sacrificed, however they may have wasted their goods, they have never been indifferent to their 'place,' and on the summer day when this story begins it was in its full beauty. The lovely green lawn stretched from the foot of the terrace till it disappeared in the woodland greenery of the park.[f] On the terrace great rustic baskets of flowers were standing, all ablaze with red and yellow. The windows were open, the white curtains moving[g] softly in the breeze. The air was sweet with the delicate fragrance[h] of the limes and with the sound of bees. Except that sound, everything was still in the languid afternoon. The prospect from those open windows was of nothing but greenness and luxuriance. The lines of trees thickened and deepened from the feathery-footed limes close at hand, to the great oak standing with 'knotted knees' 'muffled deep in fern,' in the distance.[4] Afternoon was in all[i] the languid sounds and sights, and it is in such a place that the languor of the afternoon is most sweet.

But the last novelty which had been erected at Scudamore was one which hung suspended on[j] the front of the house, – a doleful decoration – the hatchment which announced to all the world that the lord of the place had betaken himself to another; and the family in the great drawing-room were all in deep mourning.[5]

There were but three of them, – the mother, a handsome woman about forty, a son of twenty and a daughter of eighteen – all in mournful[a] black, weighted with the still more sombre darkness of crape.[6] The white cap which marked Mrs. Scudamore's widowhood was the most cheerful article of toilette among them. They were very still, for the man whom they mourned had not been more than a fortnight in his grave, and Mrs. Scudamore, who had been ill of exhaustion after his death, had resumed the old habits of her life only that day. She was seated with a book in her hand in a great chair; but the book was a pretence, and her looks[b] wandered far away from it. With eyes which saw nothing, she gazed into the park among the great trees. In that still way[c] she was going over her life.

But there was not much in this widow's look of the prostration and despondency common to most women when they face existence for the first time by themselves, after a long life spent in conjunction with that of another.[d] Mrs. Scudamore had a vague sense of exhaustion hanging[e] about her – the exhaustion of great and long-continued fatigue and endurance. Nobody quite knew how much she had borne during that last illness. The dead Scudamore had not been a good man, and he was not a good husband. During all the earlier years of her married life he had neglected her; more than this, he had outraged her in the way women feel most deeply. She had acted like a Stoic[7] or a heroine throughout; having once made up her mind that it was not for her children's advantage or her own that she should leave him, she had remained at Scudamore, making no complaints, guarding her children from the contamination of his habits, and overawing him into decency. His extravagance and wickednesses after a while were confined to his expeditions to town, in which she did not accompany him; but at home, as he grew older and his son approached manhood, Mr. Scudamore[f] was understood to have sown his wild oats and to have become a respectable member of society. People even blamed his wife, when a passing rumour of his dissipations in London was brought down to the country, for not going with him and 'keeping him straight.' And nobody realised that *that* had happened to Mrs. Scudamore which does happen much oftener than the world wots of[8] – she had become disgusted with her husband. Love can support a great deal, but love in the mind of a woman can rarely support that vast contempt of love which lies at the bottom of systematic immorality. In this case the man had disgusted the woman, and he suspected it. This is the last offence of which a woman is capable towards a man. That she should find him otherwise than agreeable, whenever he chooses to come back, from whatever scenes he comes, is a sin which the best-tempered of sinners could scarcely be expected to put up with.[g]

And Mr. Scudamore was not good-tempered. His wife did all that a high-spirited woman could do to conceal the impression he had made upon her; but he divined it, and though not a word was said between them on the subject, it filled him with a secret fury.[h] His temper, everybody said, grew worse and worse

before he died, especially to her; yet he would not suffer her to be absent from him, and made incessant demands upon her with the most fretful irritability. He thus deprived her even of the softening impressions which a long illness often brings. He would not allow her to forget the troubles he had brought her by his sick-bed, but carried on the struggle to the very edge of the grave. Her strength had been so strained that, when the necessity for exertion was over, she had fallen like one dead; and for days after had lain in a strange dreamy peacefulness, in which something that was not quite sorrow, but sufficiently like it to answer the requirements of her position, mingled.

She was sad, not for his loss, but for him – profoundly sad to think that the man was over and ended for this world, and that nothing better had come of him; and self-reproachfully,[a] as every sensitive spirit is, wondering wistfully, could she have done more for him; had she fulfilled her duty?

But underneath this sadness was that sense of relief which breathed like balm over her, for which she blamed herself,[b] and which she tried to ignore, but which was there notwithstanding, dwelling like peace itself. Her struggle was over; she had her life and her children's lives as it were in her hands to mould to better things. This was what she was thinking, with a faint, exquisite sense of deliverance as she sat gazing out dreamily over the park.

Mrs. Scudamore had been an heiress, and all through her married life had felt the additional pang of inability to perform the duties she owed to her own people. Now that was removed, and in some rare fit of better judgment, her husband had left all his disposable property to her, and made her guardian of the children, and his executrix. Her partner in this responsibility[c] was the family lawyer, who had known her all his life, and who had never yet got over his astonishment that the girl whom he recollected so well should have grown so clever, and so able to understand business. In his hands she was very safe. She had real[d] power for the first time in her life. True, as far as part of the Scudamore estate went, that could only last till Charlie[e] was twenty-one, an event not much more than a year off. But even then[f] she had the park and some of the lands, besides her own property, to manage, and her younger children to care for.[g] It would be hard to say that it was happiness that was stealing into her heart as she sat there in her crape and widow's cap; and yet it was strangely like happiness, notwithstanding that the gravity of her face and the subdued stillness of her thoughts made it possible for her to receive condolence without any apparent breach[h] of the ordinary proprieties.

'Mrs. Scudamore looks exactly as a person in her position ought to do,'[i] was what Mr. Pilgrim, her fellow-executor, said. 'We cannot expect her to be overwhelmed with grief.' And yet in its heart the world objected to her that she was not overwhelmed with grief, and offered her scraps[j] of consolation, such as it offers to the broken-hearted. They said to her, 'It is sad for you; but oh, think what a blessed change for him!' They adjured her to remember that such partings

were not forever (which made the poor woman shudder); and when they had left her they shook their heads and said: 'She is very composed; I don't think she feels it very much.' 'Feels it! She feels nothing. I always said she had not a bit of heart.' 'But then she always was[a] a quiet sort of woman.' This was what the world said, half condemning; and nobody, except old Miss Ridley in the village, who was eccentric,[b] ventured to say, 'What a blessed riddance for her, poor soul!'

While she sat thus dreamily looking out, with her new life floating as it were about her, Charlie and Amy went out without disturbing their mother. There were only these two and two very small girls in the nursery. The long gap between meant much to Mrs. Scudamore, but to no one else; for the little hillocks in the church-yard bore little meaning to the children. The brother and sister were great companions – more so than brothers and sisters[c] usually are; and the delight of having Charlie home from Oxford had soon dried up the few facile[d] youthful tears which Amy wept for her father. They strolled out arm in arm by the open window upon the green terrace. Charlie had a book in his hand, the last new poem he had fallen into enthusiasm with, and Amy read it over his shoulder, with both her arms clasped through his. It would have been difficult to find a prettier picture. The boy was very slight and tall, not athletic as his father wished, but fond of poetry[e] and full of enthusiasm after a fashion which has almost died out, the fashion of a time before athletics had begun to reign.[9] The girl was slim and straight too, as a girl ought to be, but more developed than her brother, though she was two years younger. Her hair was lighter than his, her complexion brighter.[f] She was an out-of-door girl and he had been an in-door young man, but yet the likeness was great between them. Amy leant half over[g] him, hanging with all her weight upon his arm, her bright face bent upon the book, which he was reading aloud. 'Is not that glorious – is not that fine?'[h] he asked, his cheek flushing and his eye sparkling; while Amy, intent with her eyes upon the book, ran on with it while he stopped and rhapsodised. They were standing thus when they attracted the notice of some people in a carriage which was driving up the avenue. There was no door in the terrace-front of the house, but the avenue ran past it under the lime-trees, gaining a passing peep of the lawn.[i] Two people were in the carriage – one a lady in deep mourning, the other a man with a keen sharp face. The sound of their passage did not disturb the young people; but the travellers looked out at them with deep interest.[j] The lady was a pale little woman, between forty and fifty, wearing a widow's cap, like Mrs. Scudamore. She was in a tearful condition, and leant half out of the window. 'Ah,[k] Tom! Tom, there are the children, you may be sure, and how can I do it! how can I do it,' she said with excitement. 'Nobody wants you to do it. You must keep still, and keep your papers ready, and I'll look after the rest' said her companion. He was a man of about thirty, rather handsome than otherwise, but for the extreme sharpness of his profile. He too was in mourning, and in his hand he carried a lit-

tle letter-case, which he gave the lady as they alighted at the door. He had to give her his arm at the same time, to keep her from falling, and he pulled down her crape veil, almost roughly, to conceal the[a] tears which were falling fast. She was very much frightened, and quite dissolved in weeping. Her poor little dim eyes were red, and so was her nose, with crying.[b] 'Oh, please, don't make me; for the last time, Tom, dear, don't make me!' she said[c] as she stumbled out of the carriage. He seemed to give her a little shake as he drew her hand through his arm.

'Now, Auntie,' he said in her ear, 'if there is any more of this nonsense I shall just go right away and leave you here; how should you like that? You foolish woman, do you care nothing for your rights?'

'Oh, Tom!' was all the answer she made, weeping. This conversation was not audible to the servant, who stood amazed, watching their descent; but he could not help seeing the little conflict. It gave him time to recover his wits, which had been confused by the novelty of this unlooked-for arrival. When he had watched the two unknown visitors' descent[d] from the queer[e] vehicle, which was the only hackney-carriage of the neighbourhood, he made a step in advance, and said calmly –

'Missis receives no visitors at present. Not at home, sir,' and held the door as with intention to close it in the new-comers' face.[10f]

'Your mistress will receive this lady,' said the stranger, pushing unceremoniously into the hall. 'There, there, I understand all about it. Go and tell her that a lady wishes to see her on very particular business – must see her, in short – on business connected with the late Mr –.'

'Oh, Tom, don't say that, please.'

'Your late master,' said the stranger; 'now come, quick! – the lady can't wait, do you understand? and if you keep her waiting, it will be the worse for you – Tell your mistress – your present mistress – that we must see her at once.'

'Oh, Tom, don't be so – My good man, if you will be so good as to give the message, we can wait here.'

'You shall not wait here,' said her companion;[g] 'show us in somewhere. Your late master would never have forgiven you for leaving this lady in the hall; neither[h] would your present mistress, you may be sure. Show us into some room or other. Now,[i] look sharp! Do you think that we can be kept waiting like this?[j]

Jasper was a young footman not long entered upon his office, and he turned from the strange man to the weeping lady with absolute bewilderment; and probably if the butler had not at this time made his solemn appearance, he would still have been standing between the two, in consternation. But Woods, who was the butler, was a very serious and indeed alarming person, and I have always thought that the sharp stranger took him for the moment for a clergyman visiting at the house, which subdued him at once. Woods received their message very gravely, and then, without a word, with only a wave[k] of his majestic hand, put them into a little room off the hall, and shut the door upon them. His gesture