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Gothic Elements in Margaret Oliphant's Works

Bachelor Thesis

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Olomouc 2020

Zadání závěrečné práce

I hereby declare and confirm with my signature that this bachelor's thesis is exclusively the result of my own autonomous work based on the literature, which is seen in the notes and bibliography.

In Olomouc, 6 May 2020

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I would like to thank my supervisor, Mgr. Pavlína Flajšarová, Ph.D., for her patient guidance, literature provided, encouragement and advice. I am also very thankful to Mgr. Ema Jelínková, Ph.D., for providing me with literature for my thesis. I also want to thank Tereza Špundová for her emotional support and my cat Trixie for her unconditional love and distractions when I needed them the most.

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Introduction

The aim of this thesis is to identify Gothic elements in three short stories written by a Scottish writer, Margaret Oliphant. The selected works “The Library Window” (1896), “The Open Door” (1882) and “Old Lady Mary” (1884) are included from Margaret Oliphant’s *Tales of the Seen and the Unseen* collection. The decision to closely examine these three short stories is based on the assumption that there are not only recurring Gothic features but many different ones as well. The literary analysis has the potential to broaden the reader’s knowledge and understanding of the Gothic genre. The thesis is divided into four chapters with individual subchapters.

The first chapter focuses on the historical development of Gothic fiction throughout the centuries. In order to understand Gothic literature, the reader has to understand the meaning of the term itself. Therefore, a basic historical background of the term “Gothic” is also included in this chapter. Due to the genre’s complexity, this thesis puts an emphasis only on the significant features and events that are fundamental to the understanding of the genre. Additionally, a few notable references to selected authors and their most prominent works are included in this chapter in order to give the reader a basic overview of the Gothic genre, illustrate its historical development and summarize the common features. The second part of this chapter focuses on the development of the genre in Scotland. Similarly, the Scottish subchapter’s purpose is to highlight a limited number of the most influential writers and their works and how Scottish Gothic writing is distinct from the Gothic genre in general.

In the second chapter, the reader gets acquainted with the author of the selected stories, Margaret Oliphant. The chapter is divided into two subchapters; Oliphant’s family background and her literary career. The reader learns about Oliphant’s tragic personal life that inspired many of her most acclaimed novels. In the second section, the thesis highlights Oliphant’s professional life and her literary contributions during the Victorian era.

The third chapter and the fourth chapter concentrate on the selected short stories and their literary analysis with a special focus on the Gothic elements. The third chapter provides the readers with a detailed summary and a subsequent literary analysis of each story. The fourth chapter then examines the literary analyses of the stories and identifies

the Gothic elements within the stories that connect *Tales of the Seen and the Unseen* to the Gothic genre. I chose these three works for their various storylines and the Gothic elements. Their examination brings a deeper comprehension of Margaret Oliphant's writing and the Gothic genre.

Gothic Fiction

“Gothic fiction is the fiction of the haunted castle, of heroines preyed on by unspeakable terrors, of the blackly lowering villain, of ghosts, vampires, monsters and werewolves.”¹

1.1. The Origins of Gothic Fiction

The origins of Gothic fiction date back to the eighteenth century during the Age of Reason, also known as the Enlightenment, which is an intellectual and political movement. During that time, society’s values were inspired by Greek and Roman cultures. Proportion, uniformity and order dominates the artistic production and literature puts an emphasis on intellectual gain. While chaos, emotions and superstition are discriminated, social morals focus on rational thought, civilised behaviour, and harmony.² In contrast, Gothic fiction is set in the world of supernatural where superstition prevails. Gothic novel prides itself with intense feeling of terror, more specifically, a pleasurable kind of terror of the unknown. Gothic literature highlights emotions and thus goes against the rules of the society. Compared to the classical world of simplicity and order, Gothic represents the chaotic wilderness, breaking the rules and pushing the cultural boundaries.³

The term Gothic had negative connotations in the past which then inspired the genre’s features in the eighteenth century. The expression “Gothic” originates from a Germanic tribe that contributed to the fall of the Roman Empire in the fifth century, the Goths. Due to the lack of written works during that period, later generations would know the Goths mostly only as barbaric invaders and destroyers. Gothic would then encompass the idea that the society during the Renaissance is considered to be wild and chaotic since not much is known about life in the Medieval period.⁴ Later on in the eighteenth century, Gothic starts to highlight its past negative connotation and celebrate what the classical world regards with abomination. Gothic literature would adapt the notion of a barbaric rebellion to fight against the enlightened world that denies the existence of supernatural forces.

¹ David Punter, *The Literature of Terror: The Gothic Tradition*, 2nd ed, vol.1. (Harlow: Longman Group Limited, 1996), 1.

² Fred Botting, *Gothic* (London: Routledge, 2005), 15.

³ David Punter and Glennis Byron, *The Gothic* (Victoria: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 7.

⁴ Punter and Byron, *The Gothic*, 3.

1.2. Notable Authors and Works

The rise of the Gothic novel begins when the additional subtitle “a Gothic Story” appears in the second edition of Horace Walpole’s original title *The Castle of Otranto: A Story* (1764). After the first edition’s immediate success, Walpole feels encouraged to produce a second edition with a slight change in the subtitle. The addition “Gothic” is said to be a reaction to a *Monthly Review* article in 1765 along with his interest in Gothic fiction.⁵ The new label sparks interest around the world and the Gothic novel becomes a sensation in the second half of the eighteenth century as readers would enjoy themes inspired by the Gothic age of the late Middle Ages.⁶ Walpole’s house at Strawberry Hill that he transformed into a Gothic castle becomes just as well-known as his works, which prompts others to imitate their houses based on the prime example.⁷ Walpole even admitted that the Castle of Otranto and Strawberry Hill are interlinked, one inspired by the other.⁸

In 1760s, Gothic novel appears to be a link between the emerging features of Romanticism and the disappearing Enlightenment era. Romanticism is a literary movement that contradicts the Age of Reason with its interest in the imagination, freedom, individuality and expression of feelings. Both first and second generation of British Romantic poets incorporated Gothic settings and elements of the supernatural in their poetry. Coleridge’s unfinished lyrical ballad “Christabel” (1816) is predominantly set in a castle and a forest at night-time, where Christabel meets a mysterious lady Geraldine. Although, Geraldine’s real power remains unknown, she can be compared to a vampire or a fairy as it is suggested by her pale appearance and the inability to enter the castle’s iron entrance without a proper invite.

A famous ghost-story competition takes place at the Villa Diodati in 1816, where Lord Byron along with his friends Percy Shelley, Shelley’s soon to be wife Mary Godwin and John William Polidori decide to each write a ghost story. The event is significant for the Gothic genre as two Gothic masterpieces are first introduced during the contest; *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* (1818) by Mary Shelley and *The*

⁵ Jiří Flajšar, “Gothic Fiction Revisited,” in *Scottish Gothic Fiction* (Olomouc: Univerzita Palackého, 2012), 5.

⁶ Jiří Flajšar, “Gothic Fiction Revisited,” 5.

⁷ Punter and Byron, *The Gothic*, 177.

⁸ Montague Summers, *The Gothic Quest; a History of the Gothic Novel* (Mill Press, 2011), 183.

Vampyre (1819) by John William Polidori. Polidori's idea of a vampire-like creature would also later inspire Bram Stoker to write *Dracula* (1897), which turns out to be yet another highly acclaimed Gothic novel.⁹ Lord Byron contributes to the Gothic fiction as well with his creation of Byronic hero that tends to appear in the Gothic genre in the form of a lonely wanderer that carries a burden beyond a rational explanation.¹⁰

Mary Shelley's tragedies in her personal life are reflected in her most famous novel *Frankenstein* (1818), which contains many autobiographical features. The loss of her mother is incorporated in the novel's theme of motherhood and the absence of maternal love. Also, her own wish to bring back her three deceased children that died at a very young age before her fourth child was born may be the reason for Dr Frankenstein's interest in resurrection.¹¹ Though Shelley was brought up to support the Enlightenment ideas, her works say otherwise. Dr Frankenstein's creation has read many books that prove to be educationally fruitless due to the radical ideals they are associated with.¹² In *Frankenstein*, Shelley "offers a profoundly disenchanting commentary on the age of revolution, which ends in a total rejection of the progressive ideals of her own generation."¹³

Another author that shapes the Gothic fiction history is Ann Radcliffe, whose short but highly successful writing career popularizes the Gothic novel in the late eighteenth century. After receiving over 1000£ for *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) and *The Italian* (1797), Radcliffe becomes one of the highest paid novelists in 1790s.¹⁴ Her Gothic romances such as *A Sicilian Romance* (1790) or *The Romance in the Forest* (1791) influence other authors, for example Jane Austen defines her own writing as a contrast to Radcliffe's, mainly in Austen's *Northanger Abbey* (1817), which is a parody

⁹ Greg Buzwell, "Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein* and the Villa Diodati," *British Library*, May 15, 2014, <https://www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/articles/mary-shelley-frankenstein-and-the-villa-diodati.html>.

¹⁰ Jiří Flajšar, "Gothic Fiction Revisited," 9.

¹¹ Richard Davenport-Hines, *Gothic* (London: Four Estate Limited, 1998), 188.

¹² Jane Blumberg, *Mary Shelley's Early Novels: "This Child of Imagination and Misery"* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1993), 21.

¹³ Pamela Clemit, *The Godwinian Novel: The Rational Fictions of Godwin, Brockden Brown, Mary Shelley* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 198.

¹⁴ Robert Miles, "Radcliffe, Ann (1764-1823)," in *The Handbook to Gothic Literature*, ed. Marie Mulvey-Roberts (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1998), 182.

of *The Mysteries of Udolpho*.¹⁵ Similarly to Walpole, Radcliffe would set her novels in Southern Europe in abandoned castles, forests or mountain regions where her heroines would “journey through a mysteriously threatening world composed of an unholy mixture of social corruption, natural decay and imagined supernatural power.”¹⁶ To illustrate just how influential Radcliffe’s writing is, it is worth mentioning that her novels inspire a leading novelist in English Gothic literature, Matthew Gregory Lewis, the author of a Gothic masterpiece *The Monk* (1796). However, male Gothic writers “leave their texts open-ended and irresolute; they are frank rather than coy, about sexual violence; and they frequently pit a rebellious subject against a meaningless and/ or diabolical cosmos.”¹⁷ Radcliffe as a female writer is judged for the fact that all the supernatural occurrences in her novels find a rational explanation by the end of each story. Her explanations undercut the Gothic elements and maintain the eighteenth century values of reason and morality.¹⁸ However, no matter how other authors react to Radcliffe’s work, her contribution to the Gothic genre is invaluable as it is loved by the general public which helps other writers to attract readers’ attention.

During Queen Victoria’s reign between 1837 and 1901, scientific discoveries and technological developments have a significant impact on literature. The Gothic novel’s dominance is slowly overshadowed by other genres. Nevertheless, Gothic remains influential enough for many prominent authors of the Victorian era to incorporate Gothic elements into their works. Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights* (1847) is filled with many Gothic features, such as Heathcliff who is haunted by Catherine’s ghost. In *A Christmas Carol* (1843), Charles Dickens uses three ghosts that haunt Scrooge to teach him proper manners and thus he combines the supernatural forces with society’s moral values of discipline, kindness and charity. Probably the most famous Victorian Gothic novel would be *Dracula* (1897) by Bram Stoker, who takes Victorian society’s most respectable principles and sets them against all the morally corrupting ones. The novel shows the differences between modern London’s scientific development and old European superstitious beliefs. Though Van Helsing uses modern

¹⁵ William Baker, *Critical Companion to Jane Austen: A Literary Reference to Her Life and Work* (New York: Facts on File, 2007), 578.

¹⁶ Botting, *Gothic*, 41.

¹⁷ Robert Miles, “Radcliffe, Ann (1764-1823),” 183.

¹⁸ Botting, *Gothic*, 41.

technology and blood transfusions in order to save Lucy's life, he respects the old folklore traditions enough to reach for garlic and crucifixes to keep Dracula away.¹⁹ Stoker's references to the newest inventions "reflect the rapid technological changes taking place in the late-Victorian period."²⁰

Oscar Wilde and his *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891) novel is another good example of criticism of the Victorian society. The story revolves around a young man whose main focus is superficial vanity. Dorian's obsession with looks slowly kills his soul. When Dorian first sees his own beauty in the portrait, he is willing to sell his soul for eternal youth and beauty regardless of the moral consequences. The slow internal decay of Dorian's character is shown on the portrait which begins to act as a mirror to Dorian's rotting soul. Once Dorian destroys the portrait, the action kills him as well and his body takes the appearance of the portrait. The novel calls out the frivolous manners of the society that associates beauty with privilege. No amount of good-looking appearance can ensure honourable behaviour and happiness.

This subchapter would not be complete without at least one of the most famous American authors whose extensive contribution to Gothic fiction popularizes the genre overseas, Edgar Allan Poe. His probably most famous poems "The Raven" (1845) and "Annabel Lee" (1849) are about what Poe considers to be "the most poetic of all themes"²¹, young and beautiful females that passed away. "Annabel Lee" shows the never-ending love the speaker has for a woman who has tragically died. Benjamin Fisher's comment on "The Raven" mentions that:

The raven alters from a seemingly innocuous bird into a creature from the netherworld – geographic and emotional – whose destructive powers seem to multiply until he represents the very devil figure that folklore has long perceived in him.²²

Poe uses a hypnotizing technique of rhythms and rhymes that "produces monotony deliberately calculated as enchantment for both protagonist and readers."²³

¹⁹ Greg Buzwell, "Dracula: Vampires, Perversity and Victorian Anxieties," *British Library*, May 15, 2014, <https://www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/articles/dracula.html>

²⁰ Buzwell, "Dracula: Vampires, Perversity and Victorian Anxieties."

²¹ Benjamin F. Fisher, "Poe, Edgar Allan (1809-49)," in *The Handbook to Gothic Literature*, ed. Marie Mulvey-Roberts (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1998), 174.

²² Fisher, "Poe, Edgar Allan (1809-49)," 174.

²³ Fisher, "Poe, Edgar Allan (1809-49)," 174.

Poe's most significant Gothic work is probably "The Fall of the House of Usher" (1839) that similarly to *The Castle of Otranto* takes place in an isolated mansion. Poe uses "the terrifying atmosphere, the dark plot, and man's psychological terror to reveal the process of disintegration and annihilation of human mind."²⁴

The twentieth century Gothic has become more diverse and its themes have been translated into other media such as film or music. Fantasy, science fiction or even detective fiction all incorporate elements from the Gothic genre and authors today use some of its original Gothic features from the eighteenth century while branching out and taking inspiration from new genres simultaneously. Contemporary Gothic fiction features are adapted in comic books, TV shows, role-playing games and even fashion. The most prominent names of contemporary Gothic are for example Alfred Hitchcock, Dan Brown or Stephen King.

²⁴ Wenfang Pang, Diqu Wang, and Shanshan Hu, "Gothicism in The Fall of the House of Usher," *Advances in Literary Study* 3, no. 1 (January 22, 2015): 15-20, <https://doi.org/http://dx.doi.org/10.4236/als.2015.31003>

1.3. Scottish Gothic

In 1707, the Acts of Union between Scotland and England creates a new sovereign state, Great Britain. Consequently, the Scottish national identity seems to be “slipping away” since their more powerful partner, England, is according to the general public seen as a synonym to “Britain”.²⁵ The Scottish are viewed by the English the same way the Gothic term is; primitive, uncivilized, and backward. English Gothic novelists would set their stories up in the Scottish North where the distinct social differences between the Highlands and the modern South are easily depicted. Similarly, Ian Duncan states in his chapter “Walter Scott, James Hogg and Scottish Gothic” that:

The thematic core of Scottish Gothic consists of an association between the national and the uncanny or supernatural. To put it schematically: Scottish Gothic represents (with greater historical and anthropological specificity than in England) the uncanny recursion of an ancestral identity alienated from modern life.²⁶

Nation-specific superstitions, legends and myths prevail in Scottish texts and Scottish Gothic literature develops key characteristics to treasure its national identity, history and pre-Union culture. Take for example some of the previously discussed Gothic works such as Radcliffe’s *The Italian* (1797) or Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto: A Story* (1764) that are typically set in the Southern Europe. Even in Brooker’s *Dracula*, in order to depict the difference between old European beliefs and scientific South of England, Dracula origins come from the Eastern Europe. Scotland, more specifically the Highlands, would take on the same role in Gothic literature’s choice of location. The protagonist’s journey to the North, meaning the Highlands, a Gaelic-speaking and primitive “other”, is a typical Scottish motif in English texts.²⁷ The motif can be seen for example in Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, who travelled to the Orkney Islands to perform supernatural deeds. For the English, the North represents a lack of rules, and “the urbane present menaced by primitive, ancestral forces.”²⁸ Nevertheless, a myriad of Scottish writers have a significant impact on the Gothic genre.

²⁵ Douglas S. Mack, “Scottish Gothic,” in *The Handbook to Gothic Literature*, ed. Marie Mulbey-Roberts (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1998), 208.

²⁶ Ian Duncan, “Walter Scott, James Hogg and Scottish Gothic” in *A Companion to the Gothic* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), 70.

²⁷ Kirsty Macdonald, “Scottish Gothic: Towards A Definition,” *The Bottle Imp*, no. 6 (November 2009), <https://www.thebottleimp.org.uk/2009/11/scottish-gothic-towards-a-definition.html>.

²⁸ Kirsty Macdonald, “Scottish Gothic: Towards A Definition.”

Walter Scott, a Scottish Gothic poet, novelist and playwright, is one of the most influential writers of his age. Scott uses the history and folk-culture of Scotland as an inspiration for his writing, which then inspires others. Fiona Robertson notes that Scott's writings "were central to developing and popularising an identifiably Scottish Gothic."²⁹ Apart from his many historical novels that are known as "Waverly" novels due to the most famous novel *Waverly* (1814), Scott is also the author of *The Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*, a collection of ballads written in 1802 and 1803. Even though *Waverly* may contain some Gothic elements, it is mainly the ballads that connect Walter Scott to the Gothic genre. One of the most prominent ballads, "The Wife of Usher's Well", is about a woman who loses her three sons and even though her constant prayers bring them back, the children are not the same. The ballad shows elements of supernatural in form of a resurrection of sorts. The wife realizes that even though grief is an essential part of moving on, the living should not cling to those who have passed for the dead do not belong in the mortal world. "Wandering Willie's Tale" (1824), "The Tale of the Mysterious Mirror" (1828) and "The Tapestry Chamber" (1828) are the three tales of terror that still serve as models of the Gothic and link Walter Scott to the genre.³⁰ Moreover, Gothic themes can also be found in Scott's two plays, *House of Aspen* (1799) and *Doom of Devorgoil* (1817). In his publication *Letters on Demonology and Witchcraft* (1830), Scott focuses on the historical belief in the supernatural in terms of demonology and witchcraft from the Old Testament to the nineteenth century. He examines Scottish folk-culture throughout the centuries which proves "inseparable" from his fascination with the supernatural.³¹

James Hogg, also known by his nickname Ettrick Shepherd that is featured in *Blackwood's Magazine*, is another leading figure of the nineteenth-century Scottish literature. Hogg is a self-educated poet and novelist that does not receive much praise during his time, but he still manages to spark Walter Scott's interest. Hogg looks up to Scott and helps to supply material for Scott's successful historical novels and poetry,

²⁹ Fiona Robertson, "Gothic Scott," in *Scottish Gothic: An Edinburgh Companion*, ed. Margaret Carol Davidson and Monica Germanà (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017), 104, <http://jstor.org/stable/10.3366/j.ctt1g0500t.11.html>.

³⁰ Punter and Byron, *The Gothic*, 163.

³¹ Punter and Byron, *The Gothic*, 164.

while Hogg himself struggles to make a name for himself.³² Hogg's most acclaimed novel *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1824), which gained popularity long after his death in twentieth century, is a Gothic tale about a mass murderer that finds justice in his sins. Hogg's fascination and respect for the spiritual world, demonic possession and supernatural in general is present to a certain extent in most of his works, for example, his poems "Kilmeny" and "The Witch of Fife" have unquestionable supernatural elements.³³ Hogg's Gothic features are much like Scott's based on Scottish folk traditional ghost stories and tales about the Devil, though in Hogg's writings, the stories are not mere legends but rather "an aspect of common life."³⁴

Robert Luis Stevenson is generally said to be one of the most prominent Scottish writers. Instead of following in his father's footsteps as an engineer, Stevenson travels the world and focuses on his passion for writing. Stevenson's contribution to the Gothic genre appears to be the most fruitful in the 1880s, when most of his supernaturally oriented tales are published along with his most influential Gothic novel *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886). The events of Burke and Hare murders that take place in Edinburgh in 1828 are an inspiration for *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* and a direct reference in a short story "The Body Snatcher" (1884), whose name already suggests the theme of digging up bodies from graves and stealing them.³⁵ Dr Jekyll's experiments and his split personality are similar to a real-life doctor Robert Knox, a scientist as well, who passively participates in the Burke and Hare murders by purchasing the dead bodies for dissection purposes since there is a shortage of corpses for his students to learn anatomy on. Another example of a Stevenson piece written during his Gothic phase would be "Markheim" (1886), a short story about a killer who is being persuaded by a supernatural creature to murder again. The creature is of unknown origin makes the reader think that the Devil himself is luring Markheim to commit another murder to secure his place in Hell. Before *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, the

³² Ema Jelinková, "'The Small Beginnings': Scottish Gothic Fiction in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century," 19.

³³ Graham Tulloch, "Hogg and the Novel," in *The Edinburgh Companion to James Hogg*, ed. by Ian Duncan and Douglas S. Mack (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012) 123, <http://jstor.org/stable/10.3366/j.ctt1g0b1dr.22.html>.

³⁴ Graham Tulloch, "Hogg and the Novel," 124.

³⁵ Douglas S. Mack, "Scottish Gothic," 210.

theme of split personality previously appears in a short story “Thrawn Janet” (1881), where in the public eye, a powerful minister acts fiercely against sinners, yet in private, the minister is actually a very shy person. The Scots dialect suggests Stevenson’s national pride and interest in Scottish folklore.

Even though one could examine Scottish Gothic literature solely based on the location of the written piece, not the author’s nationality, this subchapter focused on authors with Scottish origin to point out distinct features of the Scottish Gothic literature. Scottish literature develops into a blend of English Gothic elements with a Scottish twist, which contain Scottish historical events, folk stories and myths. It is an understatement that the authors mentioned earlier are only a few examples of the most influential figures in the Scottish Gothic literature, many more Scottish authors have an impact on the genre.

2. Margaret Oliphant

*“I am a wonder to myself, a sort of machine, so little out of order, able to endure all things, always fit for work whatever has happened to me.”*³⁶

2.1. Life and Family Background

Margaret Oliphant was a Scottish writer, born just outside Edinburgh in Wallyford in 1828. She spent her childhood in Glasgow and Liverpool, and because of her mother’s persistence, Margaret was lucky enough to receive education and support for her writing that most young girls in the nineteenth century could not have. In 1852, Oliphant married her cousin Frank Wilson Oliphant and they settled in London. Margaret Oliphant was an extremely prolific writer; one of the most important female writers in the Victorian era, she had written over one hundred literary works in her lifetime and she was said to be Queen Victoria’s favourite novelist.³⁷

Though her literary career had been a global success and provided for her financial needs to support her family, her personal life was filled with one tragedy after another. Not only did she outlive all her children, three of their six children died during infancy, and her husband died soon after from tuberculosis in 1859.³⁸ After Frank’s death, Oliphant became dependent on her writing to provide for her remaining children, her alcoholic brother, William, and also three children that she took in to help her other brother, Francis. In 1864, her daughter Maggie died too, and she was buried next to her father in Rome. Margaret decided to settle in Windsor to be near her sons who studied at Eton college. When both of her remaining sons died in 1890 and 1894, her health and general interest in life started to decline and Oliphant died in 1897.

³⁶ Margaret Oliphant, *The Autobiography of Margaret Oliphant*, ed. Elizabeth Jay (Canada: Broadview Press, 2002), 96.

³⁷ Punter and Byron, *The Gothic*, 153.

³⁸ Oliphant, *The Autobiography of Margaret Oliphant*, 9.

2.2. Career

Margaret Oliphant produced over hundred books during her lifetime that secured her a reputation of one of the best novelists in the Victorian era. Her first novel *Passages in the Life of Mrs. Margaret Maitland* (1849) gained enough success to be praised as one of her best Scottish novels along with *Merkland* (1851), and a novel *Kirsteen* (1890), which was written in her later years. Between 1861 and 1876, Oliphant anonymously published a seven-volume *The Chronicles of Carlingford*, which were novels about a small-town life in nineteenth century. Most notable from the series were *Salem Chapel* (1863) and *The Doctor's Family* (1863).³⁹ In 1851, Oliphant made an acquaintance with William Blackwood, which led to her regular contributions to the *Blackwood's Magazine*. Over two hundred articles, essays and short stories were published anonymously in Oliphant's name to *Blackwood's* along with a serialised novel *Katie Stewart* (1853), which is inspired by Oliphant's personal life. Other significant works include *A Literary History of England* (1882) or *A Child's History of Scotland* (1895).

In 1890, Oliphant wrote one of her most complex novels, *Kirsteen*, about a young woman who refuses to marry as women at that time were expected to. Instead, she wants to succeed in life on her own. *Kirsteen* gives up her place in the family and society to fight for freedom and independency. However, her single status gets in the way of establishing herself in the society. *Kirsteen* is forced to take responsibility and make a living on her own, for which, ironically, she criticised her brother-in-law earlier in the novel. During Oliphant's time in the nineteenth century, *Kirsteen* could be considered a quite progressive novel. It was not common for a woman to sacrifice her emotional relationships and life as a Victorian wife and choose independence.

Another highly acclaimed novel by Margaret Oliphant would be *Miss Marjoribanks* (1866) which is one of the seven-volume *The Chronicles of Carlingford*. Similarly, as discussed in *Kirsteen*, this novel is about an unmarried woman finding her place and power in Victorian society. Oliphant again provides her opinion and disagreement with women's position in society and their limitations when it comes to privilege and power that women lack compared to men. It is generally believed that Oliphant was not a women's rights supporter, yet her female characters are usually "far

³⁹ Punter and Byron, *The Gothic*, 153.

from the Victorian ideal of submissive and nurturing wife and mother.” The fiction she wrote could have reflected her opinion on men that had been a disappointment in her personal life.⁴⁰ Oliphant had a strong will and ability to support not only her husband before his death but her sons as well after they failed to make a living for themselves despite receiving the best possible education at Eton. Oliphant’s brothers were also financially dependent on her and she took on the burden of supporting their children when they were unable to.

The continuous tragedies in Margaret Oliphant’s personal life sparked her fascination with the beyond and inspired her most prominent contribution to the Gothic genre, a compilation of her best supernatural stories known as *Tales of the Seen and Unseen*. The loss of her children and husband prompted Oliphant to find peace in the form of writing about reuniting with the dead. It was not uncommon for adults to outlive their children in the Victorian era, and Oliphant’s stories offer a sort of comforting idea of what happens to our loved ones when they die.⁴¹ Couple of the most known stories from the collection that is discussed later are “The Library Window” (1896) and “The Open Door” (1882). Oliphant’s inspiration for the supernatural stories also came from the traditional Scottish Ballads that are typically focused on the fight between good and evil, destiny and free will, loss and strange events. The Gothic had already been proved a favoured genre in the early nineteenth century, which prompted Oliphant to write in that genre even more.⁴²

Although Oliphant travelled quite frequently and only lived in Scotland for short periods of time, her writing still remained predominantly Scottish considering the prevailing themes, settings and links to Scottish traditions. Oliphant’s numerous romance novels also show her interest in women’s position in the Victorian society, their injustice and lack of power is criticised in great length as well.

⁴⁰ “Oliphant, Margaret (1828-1897),” Encyclopedia.com, last modified March 18,2020, <https://www.encyclopedia.com/women/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/oliphant-margaret-1828-1897.html>.

⁴¹ “Oliphant, Margaret (1828–1897).”

⁴² Jenni Calder, “Introduction,” in *A Beleaguered City and Other Tales of the Seen and the Unseen* (Edinburgh: Canongate Books Ltd, 2000), x-xi.

3. Margaret Oliphant's works

3.1. "The Library Window"

The short story "The Library Window" is one of Margaret Oliphant's last published works and it first appears in *Blackwood's Magazine* in January 1896. The story is highly praised and to this day it is considered to be one of the best short stories Oliphant has ever published. Although her writings are usually based on her real-life experiences and "The Library Window" is no different, in this story the spirit is earth-bound and there is no religious subject nor tone as that is present her other Gothic stories.⁴³

The protagonist of "The Library Window" story is an unnamed young woman who is visiting her aunt, Aunt Mary. The reader gets an insight into the girl's mind and emotions as she is also the narrator. The story is divided into five parts and is predominantly set in Aunt Mary's house on the High Street in a St Rule's, which is a fictional city in Scotland. The main focus of the story is a mysterious window in the Old Library, which is on the opposite side of Aunt Mary's house.

The story begins at Aunt Mary's house where the narrator overhears a group of old ladies discussing a peculiar library window that does not quite look like a regular window. The ladies bicker about whether or not the window is a proper glass one or just painted black to avoid the window duty that required owners to pay additional taxes per windows in the past. The young female narrator spends most of her time in a window recess that has a view of the library window on the opposite side of the street. After she overhears the conversation from the old ladies, her interest in the window grows.

On a June night, the girl looks up from her recess and for the first time she notices a change in area behind the library window. Suddenly, she is able to recognize a shape of a dimly lit room. As days go by, the room starts to reveal itself more and more. The narrator starts to recognize the individual furniture in the room behind the window, but only on certain days at a specific time of the day when the sun is down, though it is not completely dark yet. She does not understand why no one else is able to see inside that particular window, she questions the sight of the old folk and

⁴³ Margaret Gray, "Notes: The Library Window," in *A Beleaguered City and Other Tales of the Seen and the Unseen* (Edinburgh: Canongate Books Ltd, 2000), 411.

pities them for losing an ability that she as a young girl still has. The girl starts to obsess over who may be occupying the room since there are multiple sheets, books and papers on a large writing desk. Every now and then, she notices a stir in the air, subtle movements, and her days start to revolve around the room within the window. The narrator's hope of seeing an actual human comes true around Midsummer Eve, when a shape of a man appears behind the desk. The unknown man never comes to the window, he is constantly writing, hidden in the shadows and does not seem to move much. Every once in a while, his head moves but never enough for the girl to catch a glimpse of his face. However, that does not stop the girl from getting lost in the world beyond the room only she can see.

A few days later, the narrator and Aunt Mary get invited to a party in the library, where the girl's new reality is shattered when she finds out there is no stranger and no library window. While her companions are concerned about the girl's sanity, she is desperate to make them believe in the stranger's existence. Once she returns to her recess, she is astonished to see the man opening the library window and for the first time ever, the stranger acknowledges the girl. However, that is also the last time she has ever seen the library window and the realm within the window. The ending indicates that the protagonist gets married, has children and is later on widowed, yet she does not live her life as fully as she did when she watched the life behind the library window.

3.1.1. Literary Analysis of “The Library Window”

We had taken a turn in the garden after dinner, and now we had returned to what we called our usual occupations. My aunt was reading... As for me, I too was at my usual occupation, which at that time was doing nothing.⁴⁴

“The Library Window” is narrated from the first point of view by a young female. The girl is also the central character in the story, yet the reader never learns her name. No matter how perceptive the girl is, how distinctive her ability to see beyond the ultimate reality of St Rule’s is, she remains anonymous. The narrator scarcely leaves her aunt’s house, always reads a book or lurks around the room and tries to keep herself busy with ordinary female occupations. Seeing how indulged the stranger is in his work compared to her lack thereof, the library window may be simply reflecting the female’s own loneliness and misery. Oliphant is often quite vocative in her works about her opinion on Victorian society values and how women’s life options are limited in that time.

Reflection of light plays an important role in “The Library Window”. Oliphant repeatedly describes in detail the importance of ambient light in which the girl is able to see the room within the library window. It is established that the girl’s perception is the strongest when the sun has set but the darkness has not come yet. “For it is daylight, yet it is not day, and there is a quality in it which I cannot describe, it is so clear, as if every object was a reflection of itself.”⁴⁵ There is no complete darkness on June evenings in Northern Scotland and it is said people can sense and see supernatural beings during that time of the year. Therefore, it is no coincidence that the girl’s peculiar encounter happens in summertime. Oliphant even mentions that the girl first sees the man around midsummer, which is believed to be time for humans to experience the strongest supernatural activity. It feels as if the girl’s perception allows her to peel off a layer of a reality and step into another one: “... the moment when the veil seemed to fall and the clear radiance became less living.”⁴⁶ The continual change of light corresponds to the girl’s deepening perception. Finally, she is able to see both the equipment of the room and the stranger acknowledge her.

⁴⁴ Margaret Oliphant, *A Beleaguered City and Other Tales of the Seen and the Unseen* (Edinburgh: Canongate Books Ltd, 2000), 369.

⁴⁵ Oliphant, *A Beleaguered City*, 373.

⁴⁶ Oliphant, *A Beleaguered City*, 373.

“The Library Window” is full of Scottish references that give the reader clues about the narrator’s possible identity. Margaret Gray notes that the fictional city St Rule’s is a replica of St Andrews due to St Rule’s Tower, a famous St Andrews landmark. What is more, the midsummer fair that is briefly mentioned corresponds to a fair that takes place annually in summer outside the old library in St Andrews. The inspiration for the infamous library window on the High Street is said to be the rows of windows in the old University Library building, which is on the South Street in St Andrews.⁴⁷ Oliphant’s admiration for the Scottish writing legend, Walter Scott, who reminds the narrator of the vigorously working stranger, does not go unnoticed: “I trembled with impatience to see him turn the page, or perhaps throw down his finished sheet on the floor, as somebody looking into a window like me once saw Sir Walter do, sheet by sheet.”⁴⁸

The lack of narrator’s identity and the precise descriptions of what most probably is St Andrews prompt the reader to think that Margaret Oliphant herself may be the actual protagonist. Once the reader knows about Oliphant’s personal life and her burden to keep her family financially stable, the story’s immediate theme of supernatural transforms into a “complex expression of loneliness and longing.”⁴⁹ Oliphant represents both the girl and the stranger for she is taking an inspiration from not only her childhood memories of St Andrews but also her adulthood experiences. One may think that the girl’s persistent attention to the stranger awakens him and serves as a distraction from his never-ending burden of writing, which he is bound to do for eternity. Same applies to Margaret Oliphant, who in order to support others, sacrifices own life and traps herself in the room behind the library window to produce more and more literary works.

⁴⁷ Gray, “Notes: The Library Window,” 411.

⁴⁸ Oliphant, *A Beleaguered City*, 380.

⁴⁹ Calder, “Introduction,” xvii.

3.2. “The Open Door”

“The Open Door” is another supernatural story from *Tales of the Seen and Unseen*, first published in *Blackwood’s Magazine* in January 1882. The short story is narrated from the first point of view by an adult male. The narrator’s name is Colonel Mortimer, he is a tenant of a house in Brentwood, which is a fictional village on the outskirts of Edinburgh, and also the primary setting of the story. The title “The Open Door” is a reference to an old entryway of a collapsed building, whose ruins are located near Mortimer’s premises.

Mortimer is a father of three who learns that his son Roland is severely sick, thus Mortimer comes rushing home to Scotland from his work trip in London. Roland insists that every time he travels to school, he repeatedly hears painful cries for help in the woods. However, Doctor John Simson dismisses Roland’s tale for a simple shock in his brain followed by hallucinations. When Mortimer finds out that the real reason behind Roland’s ill health is supposedly a lost spirit in trouble, Mortimer is sceptical as well. Nevertheless, Mortimer promises Roland that he will help the creature in need so that his son’s anxiety subsides, and he can fully recover.

When Mortimer asks his staff, Jarvis and his wife, if they have experienced similar events in the past, both are reluctant to admit that they believe the place is indeed haunted as to not scare their new tenant away. Jarvis then rejects Mortimer’s invitation to go and find the source of the voice. ““He believes in it, Cornel, and you dinna believe in it.””⁵⁰ Jarvis does not want to interact with a spiritual being out of superstitious beliefs. Therefore, Mortimer decides to take his butler Bagley instead. However, considering Bagley’s reaction when he hears the voice for the first time, no amount of stamina and bravery stands against a non-living supernatural being. Mortimer’s reaction is not as strong since he is already accustomed to the weeping sound because he heard the voice the night before. Though the voice itself is harmless, it is never-ending, and its pain is palpable for any living being in close proximity.

On the third night, Mortimer persuades Dr Simson to go look for the voice again with him since the doctor can offer a rational explanation. Mortimer realizes the scenario is exactly the same each and every night and it feels like a re-enactment of

⁵⁰ Oliphant, *A Beleaguered City*, 187.

an event that could have happened in the past; a child trying to get their mother to open the door, but she never does. Every night they find themselves standing by the empty door where: “A creature restless, unhappy, moaning, crying, before the vacant doorway, which no one could either shut or open more.”⁵¹ Even the doctor, a non-believer, starts to question the whole scene and looks for any scientific evidence that could prove the event is a hoax, yet there is none. Instead of feeling scared, Mortimer sympathizes with the trapped soul and he is desperate to free the creature from its suffering.

Dr Moncrieff, an old priest, joins the party for the final night. As a new member, others expect him to feel terrified upon experiencing the creature’s presence for the first time. However, Dr Moncrieff does not hesitate to take action the second he hears the moans because he recognizes them. Mortimer’s prediction of what may happened was correct; a young lad kept knocking on his mother’s door, though he had no idea she had passed a few days before. Finally, Dr Moncrieff performs a successful exorcism and leads the wandering spirit to Heaven where he can be greeted by the Lord. No one hears the voice ever again after that night and Roland makes a full recovery.

⁵¹ Oliphant, *A Beleaguered City*, 193.

3.2.1. Literary Analysis of “The Open Door”

There was a strange suggestion in the open door – so futile, a kind of emblem of vanity – all free around, so that you could go where you pleased, and yet that semblance of an enclosure – that way of entrance, unnecessary, leading to nothing. And why any creature should pray and weep to get in – to nothing: or be kept out – by nothing!⁵²

The title of the story, “The Open Door”, foreshadows the importance of a seemingly ordinary door that has long lost its purpose or so the reader may think. Oliphant describes in detail both the background story of a child that begs his mother to open the door and the visual contrast of the door years later. One can question why is it that the door survives in the ruins of the old house and is not completely destroyed. If the reader takes the creature’s supernatural origin into consideration, the door may appear to be an entrance to another realm, the realm of the dead. In addition, the brief confusion between Mortimer and Dr Simson about whether the juniper-bush is on the right or left side supports the notion that the doorway is actually a mirror. In that case, both men would be correct, and Mortimer stands on the other side of the entrance. The reader may even suspect that Mortimer crosses the boundary between the two worlds and steps into the other realm. There is also a brief note about an animate living creature, an owl, which does not hurt a human the same way an inanimate voice full of misery does. Though the creature has long been dead, its feelings, agony and “a power somehow of expressing itself” remain the same.⁵³

The reader is able to deduce Oliphant’s opinion on science and religion based on the main characters’ actions throughout the story. Mortimer is the rational character that changes his opinion on the unexplainable event based on the gained knowledge as the story progresses and he is not afraid to accept that he has been wrong in the beginning. Dr Simson, the man of science, remains sceptical until the very end and keeps to his prognosis that there is no supernatural activity in the woods. To support that notion, Dr Simson uses the sudden disappearance of the juniper bush as an excuse and goes an extra mile to prove others wrong by searching the area to find evidence. Even though there is a tramp nest found nearby, Dr Simson is unable to explain why the

⁵² Oliphant, *A Beleaguered City*, 201.

⁵³ Oliphant, *A Beleaguered City*, 189.

juniper bush changes sides. Unlike the other men, Dr Moncrieff, the man of God, does not hesitate during his first encounter with the spirit, he accepts its presence and takes action immediately. It is mostly Dr Moncrieff's kind heart and compassion for the lost soul that drives him to help rather than his religious background.

Oliphant's view on science versus religion can also be seen on Dr Simson's and Dr Moncrieff's choices of light source for the final night. Whereas Dr Simson chooses torch and its fire is flickering chaotically in the wind, Dr Moncrieff opts for an old lantern that provides the party a stable stream of light. Mortimer's lantern provides just enough light to guide him onwards. Together with Dr Simson, they supply light on the sides of the doorway while Dr Moncrieff's lantern is the main source. Dr Simson's torch ineffectiveness reflects his own lack of stability in the situation, which showcases Oliphant's belief that religion is superior to science. Simson does not have complete faith in his rationalization and after the exorcism, for a split second he appears to be questioning his beliefs as he: "...put out that wild little torch with a quick movement, as if of shame."⁵⁴ Feeling humbled by the events and out of respect towards the elder, he offers to carry the old lantern for Moncrieff but that is the extent of Simson's non-sceptical and non-cynical self.

There is a moral to every supernatural story written by Margaret Oliphant and this one shows that no matter how hard a person tries to find a rational reason for every aspect of their lives, religion and faith do have an upper hand over science. One can fully understand the connection between the living and the dead when they open their minds to the possibility and accept the existence of the spiritual world.

⁵⁴ Oliphant, *A Beleaguered City*, 207.

3.3. “Old Lady Mary”

“Old Lady Mary” first appears in *Blackwood’s Magazine* in January 1884. The short story is divided into fifteen parts and an omniscient narrator focuses predominantly on the main characters, Lady Mary and Mary Vivian. Lady Mary recently passed away and her spirit travels from the world of the dead back to the world of the living to correct her mistake. Mary Vivian is Lady Mary’s goddaughter who struggles to find her place in the world after her godmother’s death.

In the first two parts, the reader learns about Lady Mary’s life. She grows up in comfort and wealth that stays with her throughout her whole life. Lady Mary is kind and loved by many. She is considered a curiosity because even in her old age she remains strong and in good health. From time to time, Lady Mary’s lawyer, Mr Furnival, presses her to write a will, secretly hoping that Lady Mary would include her beloved goddaughter, Mary Vivian, in her will since the young lady is dependent financially on Lady Mary. As Lady Mary slowly approaches the age of ninety, she repeatedly refuses to write another will, for that would mean she has to accept the fact that she will die soon. Finally, Lady Mary decides to write a will, only to spike Mr Furnival the next time he asks her about the document. However, she chooses to hide the paper in a secret drawer of her Italian cabinet and tells no one about its existence before her death.

When Lady Mary wakes up in the world of the dead, she finds herself stuck in a sort of Purgatory: ““We are here for that; this is the fire that purges us, – to see at least what we have done, and the true aspect of it, and to know the cruel wrong, yet never be able to make amends.””⁵⁵ She realizes how her frivolous action of not telling anyone about the will affects Mary Vivian’s future. Mary Vivian has no money of her own, no proper education to make a living for herself and no relatives to go to. Lady Mary is desperate to send a word about the hidden will to ease the pain and hardness of life casted upon Mary Vivian. Lady Mary meets other souls that cannot enter Heaven just yet since they also have an unfinished business in the world of living, and she asks them for help.

⁵⁵ Oliphant, *A Beleaguered City*, 231.

An officer she used to know in her life gives her a permission and Lady Mary returns to the world of the living as a ghost. As expected, Lady Mary soon realizes the living cannot see or feel her presence, thus she is unable to interact with them in any way. Only a new-born baby and a dog sense Lady Mary wandering around aimlessly. As time goes on, a new family moves into Lady Mary's old house and a young girl, Connie Turner, is the only other living creature with the ability to see the ghost of the old lady, though no one believes her.

Mary Vivian's struggle to find a new purpose in life continues until she befriends the new tenant of her old home, Mrs Turner, who instantly offers Mary Vivian a job as a governess to Connie. When Mary Vivian learns that the ghost's appearance matches her deceased godmother, she is certain Lady Mary is not resting in Heaven as she should, and Mary Vivian is desperate to help her find peace. The rumours of a ghost haunting the house spread quickly and the staff starts to share untruthful supernatural experiences, which undermines the possibility that Lady Mary is actually among them. Months go by and Connie stops seeing or at least mentioning the old lady's ghost. Finally, when Connie mentions to Mary Vivian the gossip about Lady Mary's ill intentions that she often hears, Mary Vivian's agitation grows, and the ghost appears once more. The spirit tries to show Connie the Italian cabinet where the will is hidden and Connie's urgent cries torment Mary Vivian enough to kneel down in pain and talk to God himself: "...she cried, 'I do not know where she is, but Thou art everywhere. O God, let her know that I have never blamed her, never wished it otherwise, never ceased to love her, and thank her, and bless her. God! God!'"⁵⁶

Mary Vivian's forgiveness is all it takes for Lady Mary to be released from her suffering and be able to return to the world of dead in peace. In the end, most of the furniture in the deceased lady's old house is sold along with the Italian cabinet. Young lads solve the mystery of the secret drawer and ultimately the will is found.

⁵⁶ Oliphant, *A Beleaguered City*, 271.

3.3.1. Literary Analysis of “Old Lady Mary”

But when she came to that last frivolity of her old age, and saw for the first time how she had played with the future of the child whom she had brought up, and abandoned to the hardest fate – for nothing, for folly, for a jest – the horror and bitterness of the thought filled her mind to overflowing.⁵⁷

The short story “Old Lady Mary” shows how every action in our lives matters. Even though Lady Mary lives her life to the fullest, is overall a good person and is expected to die in peace, one final deed dooms her soul to Purgatory. It is worth mentioning that the people in her life respect her and have only nice words for her, yet the mistake Lady Mary makes immediately changes people’s opinion on her. The only person whose faith and love for Lady Mary has not changed is her goddaughter, Mary Vivian. Young Mary is fond of her late friend, she is forever grateful for all the care and comfort Lady Mary provided her. Mary Vivian knows Lady Mary has no ill intentions and understands why her godmother keeps postponing writing the will. If Lady Mary were to write the will, she would have to accept the fact that her death is slowly approaching. What is more, the reader learns that Lady Mary already wrote a will in the past. However, every person included in the document had passed away before her. From that experience, Lady Mary may simply be cautious about adding Mary Vivian’s name to the list as not to cast bad luck upon her goddaughter’s name.

Oliphant’s view on loss is that the dead are the ones that suffer, not the living. Lady Mary’s personal form of Hell is looking at the consequences of her actions: ““It was my pride, because I have had my own way all my life. But now I have no way and no place on earth, and what I have to tell them will never, never be known. Oh make it right! – but never, never can she hear that word.””⁵⁸ Only when Lady Mary is trapped on the “other side” does she realize how she jeopardized Mary Vivian’s future. A twenty-first century reader is well aware of the fact that women should not be dependent solely on their inheritance, but Oliphant points out the reality of women’s lives in the nineteenth century; either marry rich or hope to be included in someone’s will.

⁵⁷ Oliphant, *A Beleaguered City*, 228.

⁵⁸ Oliphant, *A Beleaguered City*, 264.

The reader may also focus on how the characters react differently to the possible existence of a ghost. Though Mary Vivian is sceptical about the spirit's presence, with time and more facts presented the new governess changes her mind and starts to believe Connie's claims. When Mrs Turner finds out her daughter may be seeing a creature not from their world, she is immediately scared for her daughter's life. Mrs Turner believes it is a sign from the God that Connie's life is in grave danger and she begs the doctor to explain what to do. The doctor tending to Connie refuses to accept any other explanation than his scientific reasoning. According to him, the young girl simply saw a picture of Lady Mary and her vivid imagination leads her to believe that the woman is indeed among them. The doctor remains sceptical even after others contradict his opinion. There are no photos of an older version of Lady Mary, and therefore Connie would not be able to describe the ghost as perfectly as she does. The doctor's bluntness and narrow mind is yet another Oliphant's subtle comment on her indifference towards science.

Oliphant decides to allow only a selected few living beings to be able to see the ghost of Lady Mary. Interestingly enough, only children and a dog can sense the soul's presence. To enhance a person's perception and be capable of breaking the barrier between the realms, their heart must be pure and innocent with no hurtful motives. Once dead, the souls are fully dependent on the actions of their loved ones left behind to release them from their pain. It is the love, forgiveness and goodness of Mary Vivian's heart that sends Lady Mary's soul free.

4. Gothic Elements

The three supernatural stories “The Library Window”, “The Open Door” and “Old Lady Mary” have common features in terms of the setting, atmosphere and the theme of supernatural that tie them to the Gothic genre. Margaret Oliphant is known for taking inspiration from her personal experiences and applying them into her literary works. All three stories are then set in the Victorian era and located in Scotland. The difference between the upper social class and the working class in Scotland is represented by the various dialects in each story. The Scottish setting also helps to create the supernatural atmosphere and Gothic elements that will be discussed in this chapter.

4.1. The Setting

Oliphant sets the scene for “The Library Window” at a frequently visited street in a fictional Scottish city. The location suggests that the supernatural events are seemingly available for everyone to experience. However, only those with a deep perception would be able to observe a paranormal activity. The library ambience is easy for the reader to relate to and libraries in general have sort of an ancient aura that easily blends in with the Gothic theme. Another Gothic element is accomplished by using a traditional event of Midsummer Eve as the central timing of the story since the supernatural forces are at their strongest, especially at night-time.

The setting in “The Open Door” has a typical Gothic element as it takes place in the woods at night. Oliphant uses the outskirts of Edinburgh as an inspiration for the fictional village of Brentwood. The local residents of the area are strong believers in the existence of an otherworldly creature that haunts the woods every winter. The rumours about the origin of the voice are spread from person to person vocally as a tradition, similarly to Scottish Gothic myths and legends.

In terms of the setting, “Old Lady Mary” seems to be the most Gothic story out of the three, since it is partly set in the world of the dead, an embodiment of the supernatural. The other part of the story is set in a house haunted by a spirit, which is another typical Gothic feature. Oliphant sets a great example of a traditional Gothic tale setting when the main character crosses the boundaries multiple times, first during Lady Mary’s death and then again as she goes back in a ghost form.

4.2. The Atmosphere

In “The Library Window”, the reader is not entirely convinced whether the library window genuinely exists, or it is just the narrator’s imagination that makes them believe in the window’s existence. The uncertainty creates a suspense in the reader’s mind and thrives them to turn another page as the story progresses. The reader may also question whether or not the stranger behind the window is slowly luring the girl towards her death. There is a brief mention in the story about the regress of the girl’s appearance, which may prompt the reader to think the ghost is slowly sucking the life out of her. With an open ending and inconclusive answers, Oliphant creates an ambiguous atmosphere that connects this story to the Gothic genre.

Oliphant’s choice of words to describe the scenes in “The Open Door” is essential to create the Gothic atmosphere: “...when suddenly, in a moment, the blood was chilled in my veins, a shiver stole along my spine, my faculties seemed to forsake me.”⁵⁹ The unforeseen change of the mood and detailed description of the protagonist’s feelings help the reader to relate to the situation and to acquire similar emotions while reading the story. It is also worth noting Jarvis’s reaction to an invitation to accompany Mortimer in the woods, his sudden nervousness and fright is palpable for he genuinely believes in the unseen. The conversation indicates that the characters are about to be exposed to a supernatural activity.

In “Old Lady Mary”, the reader may feel the most eerie atmosphere during Mary’s awakening in the world of the dead. Oliphant presents her view of what may happen after a person dies. The main character’s moment of reckoning makes an impact on the reader’s emotions because they are aware that death is inevitable, and each person will eventually face the same fate. “... to come out of a world in which everything could be changed, everything communicated in the twinkling of an eye, and find a dead blank before her and around her, through which not a word could go, was more terrible than can be said in words.”⁶⁰ Lady Mary’s realization of just how great her loss is and what death really means is terrifying. It dwells on the reader and compels them to sympathize with the character.

⁵⁹ Oliphant, *A Beleaguered City*, 188.

⁶⁰ Oliphant, *A Beleaguered City*, 230.

4.3. Life Beyond Death

People have been fascinated with death and the beyond since the beginning of time. We have no definitive answers to the question of what happens to a living creature after their decease, yet people have been trying to explain their view on death in literature for centuries. In *Tales of the Seen and Unseen*, Margaret Oliphant gives the readers her own idea of what comes after death, different realities and how those worlds are connected.

There may not be a mention of a non-living realm in “The Library Window” per say, nevertheless the room behind the window is of supernatural origin. In order for the female narrator to see into that realm, her sight has to penetrate two layers of glass, her own window and the library window. Both may serve as the entrance to the other reality that grants a permission to see inside only to those with a deep perception. The more the girl believes in her ability to see through the glass, the more the room reveals its contents.

In “The Open Door”, Oliphant talks about a literal door that may or may not connect the world of the living and the dead. “A door that led to nothing – closed once, perhaps, with anxious care, bolted and guarded, now void of any meaning.”⁶¹ Oliphant repeatedly states that the door leads nowhere, which prompts the reader to contradict the notion and form their own theories. The fact that the crying child begs for his mother to open the door from the living side, yet she already passed away and could not reach him from the other side, supports the idea that the door has a purpose. However, it probably remains closed and souls cannot simply pass through as they please.

Even though there are no physical entrances between the worlds in “Old Lady Mary”, souls are able to travel in between them spiritually. Oliphant suggests that there are more levels of the non-living world, but the reader can only experience the Purgatory, where souls await their atonement before they are able to enter Heaven. On a positive note, the souls retain their former youthful appearances and health and they can reunite with their loved ones that passed away as well.

⁶¹ Oliphant, *A Beleaguered City*, 174.

4.4. The Supernatural

Ghosts desperate for vengeance, monsters ready to attack, vampires thirsty for human blood and many other mystical creatures are generally associated with the Gothic genre. In comparison, Oliphant's choice of supernatural creatures can be seen as rather tame. There may be ghosts, but none of them are "desperate for vengeance". Ghosts and spirits in the selected stories are looking for redemption. They haunt the living world not out of spite, but because they are lost or unable to move on and find peace. Apart from the existence of ghosts, this subchapter focuses on other supernatural events that have an essential role in the Gothic tales.

There is a previously unexplored theory about supernatural powers in "The Library Window". Lady Carnbee acts suspiciously throughout the whole story as if she knows more about the window than the rest of the old ladies. Towards the end, Aunt Mary explains that the female protagonist is not the first one to have such visions: "She waved at him and waved at him to come over: and yon ring was the token: but he would not come. But still she waved and waved – till at last her brothers heard of it."⁶² The reader gets a sense that Lady Carnbee was once in the narrator's situation herself since there are several mentions of her diamond ring, which corresponds to the token ring. The power of deep perception may be passed on to new generations. Later on, the narrator inherits the diamond ring, even though she is terrified of the object due to the imaginary pain it inflicted on her skin in the past. This might indicate that the girl inherits not only a piece of jewellery, but also a token that symbolizes her potential supernatural power.

The old doorway in "The Open Door" story may not only be an actual entrance to the world of the dead, but also a mirror that reflects the two realms. "Was that something dark huddled in a heap by the side of it? I pushed forward across the light in the doorway, and fell upon it with my hands; but it was only a juniper-bush growing close against the wall."⁶³ When Mortimer walks through the door, he is able to see the spirit of the crying child. Once he falls back through to the side of the living, his sight accustoms to the other reality and creates a vision of a juniper-bush that is mirroring the spirit's actual position. Dr Simson later notices that there is no

⁶² Oliphant, *A Beleaguered City*, 400.

⁶³ Oliphant, *A Beleaguered City*, 192.

juniper-bush the next day and it may be because the spirit only comes at a specific time at night, so in the daytime there is no creature to create the mirror illusion.

In general, ghosts in “Old Lady Mary” cannot interact with the living. Adult humans are unable to see or feel the spirits’ presence unless they are sleeping. Though Lady Mary tries to contact Mary Vivian in her sleep as it is the only time the young girl’s rational thinking is subsided and her mind is open to accept the idea of an otherworldly creature, the second Mary Vivian wakes up, the connection is severed. However, Connie Turner, the new tenants’ child, can see Lady Mary’s ghost even when she is fully awake. They may not communicate vocally, but Connie sees the old lady as she would any other living being. Connie’s supernatural power lies in her childish innocence and vivid imagination. Due to her young age, Connie’s mind is open to believe in the existence of supernatural beings unlike the narrow-minded adults that tell her otherwise.

Conclusion

The main purpose of this thesis was to identify Gothic elements within the selection of three short stories written by Margaret Oliphant. The analysed stories were “The Library Window” (1896), “The Open Door” (1882) and “Old Lady Mary” (1884). The stories had some Gothic features in common, for example the recurring appearance of ghosts in various forms or Scottish setting. However, each story had its own unique supernatural elements in which the spirits were portrayed. The analysis gave an insight into seemingly straightforward Gothic stories and the reader gained more information about the Gothic genre. The thesis was divided into four chapters, each subsequently divided into subchapters with elaborative information related to the Gothic genre.

The first chapter focused on the historical development of the Gothic literature. The reader learnt that the original meaning of the term “Gothic” was connected to the barbaric Germanic tribe The Goths and that its negative connotations were used to develop one of the leading genres in the eighteenth century. Due to the complexity of the genre, the chapter only briefly introduced names of the most prominent figures of the Gothic literary genre from the Age of Enlightenment to the present days. Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* published in 1764 was the first honorary mention as he was generally said to be the father of the genre and his Gothic works inspired other authors. Walpole's setting choices and occurrence of supernatural forces were similar to Ann Radcliffe's Gothic novels, such as *The Italian* (1797) or *A Sicilian Romance* (1790). The thesis also noted that one of A.E. Poe's most Gothic work “The Fall of the House of Usher” (1839) took place in an isolated mansion, similarly to *The Castle of Otranto*. Possibly the most significant novels that I mentioned in this chapter were Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* (1818) and *Dracula* (1897) by Bram Stoker, who popularized John William Polidori's original idea of a vampire from *Vampyre* (1819). In the second part of the first chapter, I concentrated on the development of the genre in Scotland. Similarly to the previous section, my goal in Scottish subchapter was to highlight a limited number of the most prolific writers and their works. Walter Scott belongs to this group as he compiled ballads *The Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* in 1802 and 1803 that connected him to the Gothic genre. The Gothic features in James Hogg's writing were much like W. Scott's based on Scottish folk ghost stories. I also pointed out that Robert Luis Stevenson contributed to the genre

many a time, especially with his Gothic novel *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886). The subchapter also focused on how distinctive Scottish Gothic is compared to the Gothic genre in general. Scottish culture, national pride and history played a key role in characterizing the genre based on a geographical origin.

The second chapter introduced Margaret Oliphant, the author of the previously mentioned short stories “The Library Window”, “The Open Door” and “Old Lady Mary”. The chapter was divided into two subchapters. In the first one, the reader learnt about Oliphant’s tragic personal life that inspired many of her most acclaimed novels. She had a strong will and ability to provide financially for all her relatives, including her husband, children and later on her brothers and their children. The second subchapter highlighted the success of Oliphant’s professional life and her literary works during the Victorian era. Her contributions to the *Blackwood’s Magazine*, including a serialised novel *Katie Stewart* (1853), secured Oliphant’s a prolific career. The section also stated that in her novels, Oliphant would often provide her opinion and disagreement with women’s position in society and their limitations when it comes to privilege and power, which women lacked compared to men.

The aim of the third chapter was to summarize the selected works by Margaret Oliphant and then provide a literary analysis for each story. The decision to analyse these works emerged from their connection to the Gothic genre, and therefore a possible enhancement of the reader’s comprehension of the genre. Each summarized and analysed story stood for one subchapter. The analysis of “The Library Window” showed how Oliphant’s personal life influenced her writings and reflected her feelings about the vicious circle of a never-ending writing career that excluded her from social life. The Scottish setting and brief references to Scottish national newspapers showed how Oliphant’s writing was relevant to the Scottish Gothic genre. “The Open Door” gave an invaluable insight into Oliphant’s opinion of science versus religion. The typical characteristics of stereotypical qualities that men of scientific and religious beliefs have were portrayed through Dr Simson’s and Dr Moncrieff’s actions. Oliphant’s decision about religion’s dominance in terms of power and success showed her ultimate dismissal of science. Oliphant’s loss of her loved ones influenced her ideology of the afterlife and the importance of finding peace in “Old Lady Mary”. It was suggested in the story that it is the dead that suffer, and the living are obliged to end

their suffering by kindness and forgiveness. Oliphant's ideas depicted in the story about life beyond death are relevant to this day.

The final chapter represented the examination of the literary analyses from the previous chapter in order to identify Gothic elements. Each analysed Gothic feature stood for one subchapter. The subchapters focused on the setting of the short stories, the atmosphere described in the tales, the theme of life beyond death and the connection between the two realms, and individual supernatural events that took place in the stories. Although the tales were set in the same time period of the Victorian era, they all comprised Gothic features that presented themselves in many different forms. In both "The Library Window" and "The Open Door", folk traditions played a key role in creating the Gothic atmosphere. The rumours and beliefs in the supernatural spread vocally, from generation to generation. Some were about a ghost behind a library window or a spirit crying in the woods at night. Oliphant created the Gothic suspense by not giving a full explanation of the mysterious token ring in "The Library Window" and not clarifying whether or not the stranger behind the window was a ghost or an illusion, which motivated the reader to draw their own conclusions. "The Open Door" and "Old Lady Mary" had the ultimate Gothic settings; dark woods where a supernatural door connected two different realms, and the eerie world of the dead where the spirit of Lady Mary travelled to after her death. "Old Lady Mary" depicted that Oliphant believed in the afterlife and Heaven that souls were allowed to enter once they atoned for their sins. To conclude, the thesis broadened the reader's knowledge related to life and literary works of Margaret Oliphant and the Gothic genre.

Resumé

Hlavním cílem této bakalářské práce bylo identifikovat gotické elementy, které se vyskytují ve třech povídkách napsaných Margaret Oliphantovou. Rozhodli jsme analyzovat “The Library Window“ (“Záhadné okno”, 1896), “The Open Door” (“Otevřené dveře”, 1882) a “Old Lady Mary” (“Stará paní Marie”, 1884). Příběhy měly mnoho společných prvků, například opakující se výskyt duchů v různých podobách nebo skotské prostředí. Každý příběh měl však své vlastní jedinečné nadpřirozené znaky, které povídky rozlišovaly. Analýza poskytla nahlédnutí do zdánlivě prostých gotických příběhů a čtenáři získali více informací o gotickém žánru. Bakalářská práce byla rozdělena do čtyř kapitol, z nichž každá byla následně rozdělena do podkapitol s podrobnými informacemi týkající se gotické literatury.

První kapitola se zaměřovala na historický vývoj gotické literatury. Jelikož je žánr velmi komplexní, tato kapitola stručně představila výběr nejvýznamnějších osobností gotického literárního žánru od období osvícenství až po současnost. Jako první byl zmíněn Horace Walpole a jeho *The Castle of Otranto* (*Otrantský zámek*) publikovaný v roce 1764, protože je obecně považován za otce žánru a jeho gotické prvky inspirovaly mnoho dalších autorů. Prostor děje a výskyt nadpřirozených sil v pracích od Walpoleho byly inspirací pro romány od Ann Radcliffové, jako například *The Italian* (*Ital*, 1797) nebo *A Sicilian Romance* (*Sicilský román*, 1790). Také jsme poznamenali, že jedno z hlavních gotických děl A.E. Poeho “The Fall of the House of Usher” (“Zánik domu Usherů”, 1839) se odehrává v izolovaném sídle, podobně jako v *Otrantském zámku*. Pravděpodobně nejvýznamnější romány zmíněné v této kapitole jsou *Frankenstein* (*Frankenstein*, 1818) od Mary Shelley a *Dracula* (*Drákula*, 1897) od Brama Stokera. Ve druhé části první kapitoly jsme se zaměřili na vývoj gotické literatury ve Skotsku. Podobně jako v předchozí části, cílem bylo zmínit jen vybranou část nejvýznamnějších spisovatelů a jejich děl. Do této skupiny mimo jiné patří Walter Scott, který v roce 1802 a 1803 sepsal sbírku balad *The Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* (*Minstrelsie ze Skotska*). Tato sbírka patří k jeho nejpodstatnějším gotickým dílům. Gotické prvky v dílech Jamese Hogga byly podobně jako u W. Scotta založené na skotských lidových pověstech a duchařských příbězích. Další významný skotský autor, Robert Luis Stevenson, přispěl do gotického žánru zejména svým románem *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (*Podivný případ Dr. Jekylla a pana Hyda*, 1886). Podkapitola se také zaměřila na to, jak se liší skotská gotická literatura od

gotického žánru obecně. Skotská kultura, národní hrdost a historie hrají klíčovou roli při charakterizaci gotického žánru na základě geografického původu.

Druhá kapitola představila Margaret Oliphantovou, autorku již zmíněných povídek “Záhadné okno”, “Otevřené dveře” a “Stará paní Marie”. Kapitola byla rozdělena do dvou podkapitol. V první podkapitole se čtenáři dozvěděli o tragickém osobním životě Margaret Oliphantové, který inspiroval mnoho jejích nejuznávanějších románů. Oliphantová měla silnou vůli a možnost finančně zajistit své příbuzné, včetně jejího manžela, dětí a později i dětí jejího bratra. Druhá podkapitola vyzdvihla úspěch profesního života Margaret Oliphantové a literární díla, která napsala ve viktoriánské éře. Její příspěvky do časopisu *Blackwood's Magazine*, včetně postupně vydávaného románu *Katie Stewart* (*Katie Stewardová*, 1853), zajistily Oliphantové plodnou kariéru. V této podkapitole bylo taky mimo jiné zmíněno, že Oliphantová ve svých románech často projevovala svůj nesouhlas s postavením žen ve společnosti a jak jsou jejich privilegia a moc omezené v porovnání s muži.

Cílem třetí kapitoly bylo shrnout vybraná díla Margaret Oliphantové a poté poskytnout literární analýzu každé povídky. Rozhodnutí analyzovat tato díla vyplynulo z jejich spojení s gotickým žánrem a očekávání, že příběhy pomůžou čtenářům přiblížit rozsáhlý literární žánr. Každá podkapitola se skládala ze shrnutí a analýzy jednotlivých příběhů. Analýza povídky “Záhadné okno” ukázala, jak osobní život autorky ovlivnil její literární práci. V povídce se projevují pocity autorky ohledně začarovaného kruhu nekonečné práce spisovatelů, který Oliphantové brání ve společenském životě. Skotské prostředí a letné zmínky skotských národních novin naznačily, jak byla tvorba Oliphantové relevantní pro skotský gotický žánr. Povídka “Otevřené dveře” odhalila názor autorky na vědu a náboženství. Stereotypní vlastnosti lidí s vědeckým a náboženským vyznáním byly vyličený prostřednictvím Dr. Simsona a Dr. Moncrieffa a jejich reakcemi na paranormální aktivity. Oliphantová upřednostnila náboženství z hlediska moci a úspěchu, což odkazuje na její neuznání vědeckých názorů na nadpřirozené události. Úmrtí autorčiných nejbližších rodinných příslušníků ovlivnila její ideologii posmrtného života a jak je důležité najít po smrti klid. Příběh “Stará paní Marie” naznačil, že po smrti netrpí živí, ale mrtví. Živí mají možnost ukončit utrpení mrtvých svou laskavostí a odpuštěním.

Poslední kapitola zkoumala literární analýzy z předchozí kapitoly za účelem identifikace gotických prvků. Jednotlivé gotické elementy byly analyzované v samostatných podkapitolách, které měly různé zaměření. Podkapitoly zkoumaly prostředí děje, popis atmosféry, téma života a smrti a jak jsou tyto dva světy propojené, a jednotlivé nadpřirozené události objevující se v povídkách. Ačkoli se příběhy odehrávaly ve stejném časovém období viktoriánské éry, obsahují gotické prvky, které se prezentují v mnoha různých podobách. Jak v příběhu “Záhadné okno”, tak v “Otevřených dveřích” hrály lidové tradice klíčovou roli při vytváření gotické atmosféry. Pověsti o nadpřirozenu se šířily mezi lidmi z generace na generaci, například o duchovi za oknem knihovny nebo o duchovi, který po nocích naříkal v lese. Oliphantová docílila gotického napětí tím, že nevysvětlila původ prstenu v “Záhadném okně” a nestanovila, zda cizinec za oknem byl opravdu duch nebo pouhá iluze, což motivovalo čtenáře k tomu, aby si vyvodili vlastní závěry. “Otevřené dveře” a “Stará paní Marie” měly ideální gotické prostředí; temné lesy, kde dveře s nadpřirozenou schopností spojovaly dvě různé říše, a svět mrtvých, kam se po smrti staré paní přesunul její duch. “Stará paní Marie” znázornila autorčinu víru v posmrtný život a v Nebe, kam duše putují, jakmile odčiní své hříchy. Došli jsme k závěru, že tato bakalářská práce přiblížila čtenářům život a literární díla Margaret Oliphantové a rozšířila vědomosti vztahující se ke gotické literatuře.

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Annotation

Author: Lucie Křístková
Department: The Department of English and American Studies
Title of thesis: Gothic Elements in Margaret Oliphant's Works
Thesis supervisor: Mgr. Pavlína Flajšarová, Ph.D.
Number of pages: 47
Number of signs: 87 890
Number of sources: 23

Key words:

Margaret Oliphant, literary analysis, Gothic novel, Scottish literature, "The Library Window", "The Open Door", "Old Lady Mary"

The main purpose of this thesis is a literary analysis of Margaret Oliphant's short stories; "The Library Window", "The Open Door" and "Old Lady Mary", with a focus on the Gothic elements. The thesis is divided into four chapters, which are then divided into several subchapters. The first chapter focuses on the historical development of Gothic literature in England and Scotland with an emphasis on a selected number of prominent authors and their works. The second chapter focuses on Margaret Oliphant's life and literary career. The third chapter provides the reader with summaries of the selected short stories and their literary analyses. The final chapter identifies the Gothic elements within the selected stories.

Anotace

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Název práce:	Gotické prvky v dílech Margaret Oliphantové
Vedoucí práce:	Mgr. Pavlína Flajšarová, Ph.D.
Počet stran:	47
Počet znaků:	87 890
Počet zdrojů:	23

Klíčová slova:

Margaret Oliphant, literární analýza, gotická literatura, skotská literatura, “The Library Window”, “The Open Door”, “Old Lady Mary”

Hlavním cílem této bakalářské práce je literární analýza povídek “The Library Window”, “The Open Door” a “Old Lady Mary” od Margaret Oliphant se zaměřením na gotické prvky. Práce je rozdělená do čtyř kapitol, které se následně dělí do dalších podkapitol. První kapitola je zaměřená na historický vývoj gotické literatury v Anglii a ve Skotsku s důrazem na vybrané významné autory a jejich díla. Druhá kapitola se zabývá životem a literární tvorbou Margaret Oliphant. Třetí kapitola se zaměřuje na shrnutí vybraných povídek a jejich literární analýzu. Poslední kapitola identifikuje gotické prvky v daných povídkách.