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Margaret Oliphant's Phantom Scots

Katerina García-Walsh

A *Blackwood's Magazine* review of 1873 once compared Scottish novelist Margaret Oliphant (1828–1897) to Walter Scott, writing that she had 'made the "East Neuk of Fife" in some sort classic ground' as 'Scott's poetry has done for [...] the Highlands'. Indeed, Oliphant used her birthplace of Wallyford and her childhood home of Lasswade across multiple works of fiction, with Fife as the setting of four novels and seven short stories. A further ten of her novels are set in the Highlands. Despite living much of her life in England, the traditions and language of her home country can be traced throughout her prolific *oeuvre*. In her ghost stories, however, Scottish identity, and particularly language, becomes inextricable from the author's engagement with mourning and remembrance. This article argues that in Oliphant's ghost tales Scots and Scottish English become affective, spectral languages that mimic the protagonists' emotional connection to their lineage and cultural past. For instance, the Scottish ghost of 'The Open Door' (1882) is heard but not seen, and his cries require an act of translation. Other ghost stories such as *The Wizard's Son* (1882–84) or 'The Library Window' (1896) further reveal a connection between Scots or Scottish English and empathy. *The Lady's Walk* extends Scots beyond the working-class characters of earlier stories to a young Scottish lady and her family's ancestral ghost. First printed as a short story in 1882 and expanded into a novella in 1897, *The Lady's Walk* illustrates Oliphant's lexical choices, often adding Scots and Scottish English in crucial scenes. The story, however, is narrated by an English character, and the difficulties of translation become a linguistic allegory for both the complications of communicating with the dead and the preservation of Scottish language and culture.

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A *Blackwood's Magazine* review of 1873 compared Scottish novelist Margaret Oliphant (1828–1897) to Walter Scott, asserting that she had 'made the "East Neuk of Fife" in some sort classic ground', doing 'for that far corner, what in larger degree Scott's poetry has done for the scenery of the Highlands'.[1] Her contribution to nineteenth-century Scottish fiction reflected fond remembrances from her childhood as well as later travels to Scotland, particularly Edinburgh, where she worked with her editor, William Blackwood, and to St Andrews, home of family friends Principal John Tulloch and his wife. In her fiction Oliphant used her birthplace of Wallyford and the neighbouring village of Lasswade, both near Edinburgh, across multiple works, with Fife as the setting of four novels and seven short stories. A further ten of her novels take place in the Highlands, illustrating an expansive knowledge of the traditions and language of her home country throughout her prolific *oeuvre*. In her early novel *Adam Graeme, of Mossgray* (1852), set near the Firth of Solway, Oliphant includes the Scots song 'Werena my heart licht, I wad die', a ballad composed by Scottish songwriter Lady Grizel Baillie (1665–1746) that centres endurance and mourning.[2] The same novel features 'Janet Jo', a children's rhyming game that comically describes its eponymous protagonist's death and return to life (II, pp. 79–80). Oliphant's depiction of Scottish tradition engages with death and resurrection. It is perhaps in her ghost stories, however, that Scottish identity, mediated through language, becomes inextricable from the mourning and remembrance of a past national heritage.

Penny Fielding in *Writing and Orality* argues that Oliphant's supernatural fiction 'moves towards the reclamation of the oral', conveying a typically 'Scottish obsession with speech and writing'.[3] Indeed, Oliphant's reviews of her Scottish contemporaries signal a preoccupation with the literary portrayal of Scots. She criticizes the overused 'extreme severity' of J. M. Barrie's dialectical Scots, requesting he follow Sir Walter Scott as a 'model' in future and kindly 'draw the line at Fife!'.[4] Oliphant demonstrates her knowledge of linguistic differences between Highland and Lowland Scots while also signalling an appreciation for Walter Scott, which she references throughout her own literature. Meanwhile, she praised Robert Louis Stevenson's Scots in *The Master of Ballantrae* (1889): 'The writer never for a moment loses his nationality [...]. The construction, the flavour of his language, the individuality of idiom and form, are infinitely more characteristic than any amount of eccentric spelling or provincial

[1] 'Mrs. Oliphant's Novels', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, June 1873, pp. 722–39 (p. 723).

[2] Margaret Oliphant, *Memoirs and Resolutions of Adam Graeme, of Mossgray*, 3 vols (Colburn, 1852), III, pp. 107, 110–11.

[3] Penny Fielding, *Writing and Orality: Nationality, Culture, and Nineteenth-Century Scottish Fiction* (Clarendon Press, 1996), pp. 207, 209, doi:10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198121800.001.0001.

[4] [Margaret Oliphant], 'The Old Saloon', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, August 1889, pp. 254–75 (p. 265).

broken words.' Scottish linguistic 'difference', as Oliphant puts it, permits the survival of a national identity.[5] For Oliphant, Scots and Scottish English thus represent the symbolic life or death of a culture.

In 1919 George Gregory Smith described a Scottish literary tradition he dubbed Caledonian Antisyzygy, common among such authors as Robert Burns, Walter Scott, J. M. Barrie, and Robert Louis Stevenson. This term refers to the tendency among Scottish authors to combine two literary modes that may seem, at first glance, contradictory: a naturalistic style with meticulous attention to detail coupled with supernatural elements that delight 'in the confusion of the senses, in the fun of things thrown topsyturvy, in the horns of elfland'.[6] While Smith does not include Oliphant or, indeed, any woman writer, in this tradition, Caledonian Antisyzygy is present in her supernatural *Stories of the Seen and Unseen*, which imagine points of contact between what she calls the 'seen', the material or mortal, and the 'unseen', the hidden and preternatural. Moreover, Oliphant's use of Scots and Scottish English in her ghost stories heightens the duality present in her writing. Marina Dossena has argued that Scots is inherently uncanny, referencing Sigmund Freud's theory of the *unheimlich* in which doubling produces an unsettling recognition of both self and other:

> The uncanny that is presented in the [Scottish] texts is both heimlich, because the language is familiar, and unheimlich, because it is beyond the rational world in which the story is told. Perhaps paradoxically, Scots is an important tool with which to preserve tradition and also the language that relegates that tradition to the past.[7]

In Oliphant's Scottish ghost fiction, English narrators find Scots and Scottish English both familiar and unfamiliar. Contact with Scottish culture is shown in communication with the working-class locals, speakers of Scots, but also in efforts to communicate with the spectral unseen, a symbol of a marginalized and often silenced Scottish heritage. Oliphant uses Scots in four ghost tales published from 1882 to 1897. Across these texts, she reconsiders the position of Scottish identity in an authoritative English culture. As I will show, the difficulty of linguistic contact between English narrators and Scottish spirits in Oliphant's ghost stories becomes an allegory for the preservation of Scottish language and traditions.

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[5] [Margaret Oliphant], 'The Old Saloon', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, November 1889, pp. 696–723 (p. 702).

[6] G. Gregory Smith, *Scottish Literature: Character & Influence* (Macmillan, 1919), p. 19.

[7] Marina Dossena, 'Scots as the Language of the Uncanny: The Case of Nineteenth-Century Gothic Narratives', in *The Dialects of British English in Fictional Texts: Style, Translation and Ideology*, ed. by Donatella Montini and Irene Ranzato (Routledge, 2021), pp. 11–29 (pp. 25–26), doi:10.4324/9781003017431.

'The Open Door': a tale of cultural recognition

'The Open Door', published in *Blackwood's Magazine* in January 1882, marks Oliphant's first use of Scots in her ghost stories.[8] Its narrator, Colonel Mortimer, had just returned from his service in Shimla, India. Mortimer treats Brentwood House, near Edinburgh, as a temporary space 'until [he] could find a permanent home' for his family.[9] 'The Open Door' thus focalizes its plot through its colonial English narrator, with Scotland as a liminal state of passage for the family. Their peaceable stay in Brentwood is upended when the family's young son hears the moaning cries of an unseen ghost and sympathizes so thoroughly with his suffering, 'gone wild with pity' (p. 17), as to fall into a deadly illness. Pale and feverish, he repeats the ghostly mantra he had overheard, being unable to explain its significance: 'Oh, mother, let me in! oh, mother, let me in!' (p. 5). The boy begs his father to help the spirit, and thus Mortimer seeks a remedy for his son's distress.

Mortimer approaches the town coachman, Jarvis, to uncover the local superstitions, allowing Oliphant to colour her text with Scots-speaking characters. Here we see the interactions between an English narrative voice, palatable for a wider English readership, and the Scottish working class. Jarvis and his wife quarrel over whether to reveal the haunting to Mortimer, producing a patently comical scene, yet their speech is punctuated by gaps. Jarvis begins, but is routinely interrupted by his wife, who ultimately seizes the reins of the conversation:

> 'If the deevil himsel was in the auld hoose, I have no interest in't one way or another —'
>
> 'Sandy, hold your peace!' cried his wife, imperatively.
>
> 'And what am I to hold my peace for, wi' the Cornel standing there asking a' thae questions? I'm saying, if the deevil himsel —'
>
> 'And I'm telling ye hold your peace!' cried the woman, in great excitement. (p. 10)

Jarvis's references to the devil are offset by his wife's calls for silence, where failing to communicate to the Englishman what is known among the Scottish locals provides a sheltering 'peace'. This peace is both financial, insofar as the Jarvises do not wish to scare away their employer, as well as a superstitious act of guarding themselves from 'the deevil'. Indeed, in the Bible, 'The Lord shall fight for you, and ye shall hold

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[8] Her first supernatural story set in Scotland, 'The Secret Chamber' (1876), does not feature Scots, but serves as foundational material for her novel *The Wizard's Son* (1882–84), which I will discuss.

[9] [Margaret Oliphant], 'The Open Door', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, January 1882, pp. 1–30 (p. 1). From the dedication to Emma Blackwood ('E. B. 1881') we can surmise that Brentwood House is based on the Blackwood family's Colinton House and adjoining ruins, Colinton Castle, outside of Edinburgh. John Geddie's *The Water of Leith from Source to Sea* (White, 1896) describes the 'deserted castle' and 'vacant threshold' as one recognizable to 'Readers of Mrs Oliphant' (p. 109).

your peace.'[10] Jarvis seems to alternate between speaking what his wife terms 'a name that shouldna be spoken' and dismissing the haunting for 'the wind in the trees', as 'naebody believes in ghosts' (pp. 10, 11). Their reticence evaporates when Jarvis's wife finally admits

> 'It's no a thing that will hide; and the haill toun kens as weel as you or me. Tell the Cornel straight out, or see, I'll do it. I dinna hold wi' your secrets: and a secret that the haill toun kens!' (p. 10)

Ultimately, they reveal the recurrence of 'inexplicable cries' during the dark winter nights, attributed to the ghost (p. 11). Oliphant uses Scots not to tell the story itself, as this is subsequently summarized through Mortimer's narrative voice, but to underscore a quarrel between husband and wife that hinges on whether to reveal Scottish secrets to an Englishman at all.

The process of communication across class boundaries is central to the plot, as the ghost was a working-class boy in life. Mortimer's approach to the haunting transforms from a dismissal of superstition to first-hand encounters with the spectral voice and, ultimately, sympathizing with its cries. Melissa Edmundson has argued that Mortimer is thus 'exorcised, so to speak, of his narrow views toward the lower classes by his encounter with the ghostly spirit' and thus 'both father and son improve their opinion of those socially and financially beneath them', opening the proverbial door to class consciousness through empathy.[11] Although both Mortimer and his son sympathize with the ghost, I would argue that Oliphant's use of Scots and Scottish English in this story suggests an inability to communicate fully due to a persistent lack of cultural familiarity, embodied by language. Mortimer ultimately enlists the help of his servant (a soldier), the sceptical Dr Simson, and an elderly Scottish reverend named Dr Moncrieff. Each man represents a branch of society: the military, medical, and religious professions. Jen Baker acknowledges how Moncrieff's unique success among these men in communicating with the spirit reflects his position as minister and 'father of the local community', bearing 'a duty toward the boy in life' as well as 'in this liminal space'.[12] I propose that 'The Open Door' depicts the ghost as a familiar, universally accepted presence among the Scottish locals, positioning Mortimer as an outsider who lacks the necessary tools to address the problem on his own. Moncrieff recognizes the spirit, revealing that he was a wayward son calling to his mother, a servant of the castle,

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[10] Exodus 14. 14.

[11] Melissa Edmundson, 'The "Uncomfortable Houses" of Charlotte Riddell and Margaret Oliphant', *Gothic Studies*, 12.1 (2010), pp. 51–67 (p. 62), doi:10.7227/GS.12.1.5.

[12] Jen Baker, 'Guardian Hosts and Custodial Witnesses: *In loco parentis* in Women's Ghost Stories, 1852–1920', *Women's Writing*, 28.4 (2021), pp. 548–68 (p. 564), doi:10.1080/09699082.2021.1985291.

to open the door, now a ruined gable, and let him in — both into the building that was once his home and, now, into the kingdom of God. Moncrieff's conversation with the spirit is of particular interest linguistically for his increasing use of Scottish English:

> He went on speaking all the time. 'Willie, if it is you — and it's you, if it is not a delusion of Satan, — Willie, lad! Why come ye here frighting them that know you not? Why came ye not to me? [...] And her too, poor woman! poor woman! her you are calling upon. She's no here. You'll find her with the Lord. [...] If you will lie and sob and greet, let it be at heaven's gate, and no your poor mother's ruined door.' (p. 26)

'You' is replaced by 'ye' while 'not' is shortened to 'no', both features of Scottish English. Moncrieff's address to the ghost is what ultimately liberates him. Both are connected by familiarity, as Baker notes, but the story's climax hinges on direct communication in a common language. While Mortimer comes to sympathize with Willie's cries, only Moncrieff recognizes them as an act of repentance and reassures Willie that God would accept a spirit into Heaven 'if he cried like *yon*' (p. 28). The end of his address is marked by a question, 'Are you hearing me, Will? Oh, laddie', and again 'Are you hearing me?' (p. 26). Oliphant combines Scottish language with a direct appeal to linguistic recognition, making Willie's disappearance at the end of the story a response to Moncrieff's question. Communication is confirmed now that Willie's spirit is laid to rest.

'The Open Door' features Scottish English in two registers, as typified by Caledonian Antisyzygy: first, the quotidian dialect spoken by working-class locals of south-eastern Scotland (Jarvis and his wife); second, the mystical language of recognition required to communicate with a Scottish revenant (Moncrieff and Willie). In both cases, Mortimer, despite his authoritative role as the story's narrator, is excluded from the process of meaning-making, reduced to an outsider listening in. Oliphant thus undermines her narrator's position. For Mortimer, Scots constitutes an insurmountable and uncanny linguistic difference, while the Scottish characters thrive in its familiarity, allowing them to interact with and even heal the wounded past.

The Wizard's Son and the mystical act of union

The same year that 'The Open Door' was published, *Macmillan's Magazine* printed another of Oliphant's Scottish supernatural tales, *The Wizard's Son*.[13] This three-volume novel follows a young, aimless Englishman, Walter Methven, who inherits a haunted Scottish estate, a plot reminiscent of Oliphant's earlier short story 'The

[13] *The Wizard's Son* was serialized in *Macmillan's* from November 1882 to March 1884 and then issued as a book (Macmillan, 1884), reprinted in 1884, 1888, and 1894.

Secret Chamber' (1876). Both texts are set in Scotland, inspired by an amalgamation of the historical Gowrie Conspiracy (the plot against James VI of Scotland in 1600), a description of the haunted Glamis Castle in Walter Scott's *Letters on Demonology and Witchcraft* (1830), and the legend of wicked Scottish Earl Beardie, who played cards with the devil.[14] In both of Oliphant's stories, the protagonist encounters a wicked ancestor who seeks to control his will and drive the landed gentry to unethical, abusive practices. In 'The Secret Chamber', despite rebelling against his ancestral Wizard, the young heir's fate is unspecified: 'I cannot tell the reader what young Lindores has done to carry out his pledged word and redeem his family. It may not be known, perhaps, for another generation.'[15] With *The Wizard's Son*, Oliphant not only expands the story but finds a method for her protagonist to vanquish once and for all the malevolent Wizard, renamed in this novel the Warlock Lord. This is achieved through a mystical union between Walter and his ideal marital match, Oona Forrester.[16]

Oliphant highlights Oona's Scottish identity, elevating her to the social status of local aristocracy. The people of Loch Houran, the novel's Scottish location, treat her as 'Princess Oona', and her mother as 'a sort of queen of the loch'.[17] Her home in the island at the centre of the loch earns her the title of 'Miss Oona of the isle' and the 'young lady of the isle', a likely reference to Walter Scott's *The Lady of the Lake* (1810) (I, p. 164; II, p. 42; III, p. 206). In Canto IV of Scott's poem, titled 'The Prophecy', Loch Katrine's island becomes a shelter from war, an explicitly feminine space of salvation. Similarly, in Oliphant's novel, Walter, tortured by his encounters with the Warlock Lord, finds refuge in Miss Oona's island (II, pp. 14–22). Maureen Martin, whose book *The Mighty Scot* explores the gendering of Scotland, has argued that Oliphant's *Wizard's Son* contributes to a regendering of Scotland as feminine, represented by Oona, in response to the nation's masculine literary depiction in the work of Scott and Burns, among others.[18]

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[14] Walter Scott, *Letters on Demonology and Witchcraft* (Murray, 1830), pp. 397–99. Regarding Earl Beardie, see William Howitt, 'Visits to Remarkable Places', *Howitt's Journal of Literature and Popular Progress*, 2 (1847), pp. 121–23 (p. 122).

[15] [Margaret Oliphant], 'The Secret Chamber', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, December 1876, pp. 709–29 (p. 729).

[16] While Walter and his mother live in Sloebury and the young man initially lacks ties to Scotland, his Scottish ancestry is evident in his name. Methven is a town in Perthshire, approximately six miles outside of Perth, where a Scott Monument was erected circa 1845. Methven also rhymes with the surname of the historical figure John Ruthven, allowing Oliphant to maintain the reference to the Gowrie Conspiracy from 'The Secret Chamber'. Walter Scott and John Ruthven therefore combine in Walter Methven's name.

[17] Mrs Oliphant, *The Wizard's Son: A Novel*, 3 vols (Macmillan, 1884), II, pp. 43, 228. The estate Walter inherits includes a manor near Loch Houran known as Auchnasheen and a ruined castle named after the nearby Kinloch Houran. These locations are based on the existing Loch Hourn and Kinloch Hourn in the north-west of Scotland. *The Wizard's Son*'s references to Scott thus reflect Oliphant's engagement with the existing canon of the Highland novel.

[18] Maureen M. Martin, *The Mighty Scot: Nation, Gender, and the Nineteenth-Century Mystique of Scottish Masculinity* (SUNY Press, 2009), pp. 14, 132–46.

The malevolent spirit is banished only when Walter and Oona, hands clasped, confront him together, with Oona finally throwing a lamp, the emblem of the Warlock Lord's power, and setting fire to the ruined castle he inhabits. Walter and Oona are cast down in the ensuing explosion and trapped in an underground chamber, a secret passage reminiscent of the liminal room in which the events of 'The Secret Chamber' take place (III, pp. 252–66). When they are disinterred, unharmed, from under the rubble, this symbolic re-entry into the world fulfils Walter's earlier wish 'to be born again' through a spiritual union with Oona (III, p. 136).

The Warlock Lord, symbol of domination under an English ruling class, and Oona, an ideal image of Scotland, function as influences, positive or negative, over Walter's spiritual life. The Warlock Lord aims to manipulate and coerce Walter, in his role as landlord to tenant farmers, into practices that prioritize the accrual of wealth for the sake of his lineage. Though never openly condemning peerage, Oliphant implies that its power structures are contrary to her own values. The religious language that describes Walter and Oona's mystical marriage is mirrored by a Christian socialism that colours Oliphant's socially realist description of tenancy, poverty, and peerage. When Walter discovers that the poorest of his tenants of Truach-Glas Glen are being forcefully evicted from their homes, including an octogenarian lady who is 'Granny to all the glen', he rights the situation in person, carrying Granny's chair all the way back to her house (I, pp. 286, 292). Truach-Glas may be a reference to Walter Scott's Trossachs Glen, location of the battle in *The Lady of the Lake*. For Oliphant, her novel's battleground is the ethical quandary of class inequality. Walter's hands-on willingness to engage with the Scots-speaking working class suggests a desire for greater social commitment, despite the Warlock Lord's influences. This touching moment with Granny's chair gains a religious dimension when the local minister who witnesses the scene dubs Walter a true 'Christian', this representative of the Church standing with him 'heart and soul' (I, p. 220). When Walter later leaves Scotland for the season in London in a failed effort to geographically escape the Warlock Lord, he entrusts Oona to meet with both the minister and strict property manager (dubbed 'factor' in Scotland) on his behalf, hoping she will ensure the fair treatment of his tenants' rent. In Walter's absence the factor dismisses Oona's recommendations, calling her a 'communist'. Oliphant allows a moment of divine intervention: 'a sudden smile from among the clouds lit up [the factor's] ruddy, remonstrative countenance [...] and Oona smiled too' (II, p. 46). Christian forces, for Oliphant, are pointedly aligned with an empathetic class consciousness.

As well as the farmers of Truach-Glas, Oliphant uses Scots for two further groups of lower-class characters: personal servants and transporters. The first description of the malevolent supernatural spirit takes place when Walter travels to Loch Houran

by coach, occupying the same space as Miss Oona and her maid, Mysie, though his identity as the new laird remains unknown to his travel companions. Mysie is preoccupied with the mystical light that has appeared atop the ruins for the previous two nights, showing clear knowledge of the local legend, in which the light calls the 'living lord [...] to meet with' the spirit (I, pp. 157, 160). The driver, dubbed Big John, agrees with Mysie, despite not being 'what ye call credulous [him]sel'; but when it comes to the evidence of a man's ain senses', both believe in this 'auld, auld story', combining knowledge of legend and evidence, fantasy and reality (I, pp. 160, 159). Mysie highlights that 'new lord, no' bein' here away nor of this country at all, how is he to ken?' (I, p. 159). When Walter's identity is discovered at the end of the voyage, Big John feels the younger man has 'deceiv[ed] honest folk' by riding with them 'like ony gangrel body — sitting on the seat just like the rest of us' (I, pp. 165, 164). At the start of the novel, Walter inhabits a position as a listener and outsider, much like Colonel Mortimer in 'The Open Door', separated from the locals by a combination of rank, nation, and language. Walter's Scottish ancestry is a connection lost to him, much like the Warlock Lord, whose interests lie in exploiting labour and opportunity rather than fomenting cultural integration. Upon Walter's first arrival in the coach, Oona is the only passenger to speak English without a trace of Scots, despite being an embodiment of her country; she speaks Walter's language, which facilitates their eventual union. Compared to Mortimer, Walter represents a step towards the English narrator's stewardship of Scottish culture, not only due to his Scottish bloodline but thanks to his affective link with the community.

After his encounters with the Warlock Lord, Walter becomes increasingly desperate. Hamish, the boatman, appears like an 'angel', saving Walter from a suicidal impulse at the water's edge (III, p. 106). Hamish offers to escort 'your lordship hame', worried that Walter's developing 'madness' may 'put Oona [...] [at] risk' of harm (III, p. 107). Later, when Hamish transports both Oona and Walter in his boat, across the loch from her island to his castle, Oona finds herself in a state of 'holy passion', a religious ecstasy of love and selfless commitment towards Walter, the object of her devotion (III, p. 137). Hamish 'hastened [them] back to ordinary existence', suggesting there is something extraordinary about the liminal, watery passage by boat (III, p. 138). Indeed, Hamish, seeing their 'two heads draw very close together', wonders 'what will she be saying to him' and concludes that 'she will be winning him out of yon transport. She will be puttin' peace in his hairt' (III, p. 137). Transport here has the double meaning of a system of moving a person from one place to another and of an overwhelmingly strong emotion. For Walter to be transported, to be 'won' in marriage with Oona, is as much a victory for the two lovers as a triumph over the Warlock Lord, as their union is Walter's salvation. Big John and Hamish both transport Walter and Oona from one realm to

another, be it by coach from Edinburgh to the Highlands or by boat across the loch. Just as Oliphant introduces Walter to the unique topography of Scotland, describing his initial impressions of the landscape and people as in a piece of travel literature, language transports the reader into a new cultural context through linguistic signs. In these liminal moments, however, Oona and Walter are bound together, sharing a love both terrestrial and divine, both English and Scottish.

As the story develops, Walter's valet, Symington, develops a close emotional tie to the young gentleman. In the morning following an encounter with the Warlock Lord, Symington finds Walter 'sleeping like a bairn' and, overcome by a 'great and almost tender compassion', advises the gentleman's mother, Mrs Methven, to take her breakfast without disturbing him (III, pp. 172, 171). Mrs Methven protests,

> 'I can eat nothing,' she said, 'when my son is in trouble.'
>
> 'Oh, canny, canny, my lady. I am but a servant, but I am one that takes a great interest. He's in no trouble at this present moment; he's just sleeping like a baby, maybe a wee bit worn out, but not a line o' care in his face; just sleepin' — sleepin' like a little bairn. It will do you mair harm than him if I may mak' so bold as to speak.' (III, p. 172)

Symington's Scottish diction alternates between 'baby' and 'bairn', 'sleeping' and 'sleepin''. His linguistic variance signals an effort to communicate with Mrs Methven in language more recognizable to her. Though his advice constitutes 'an extraordinary liberty for a servant to take', she accepts it 'almost with humility' as Symington is more familiar than she is with the 'mysterious circumstances' that trouble her son (III, p. 173). Symington's affective tie to Walter as well as his epistemic authority as a local subdue Mrs Methven. When Oona and Walter recover from vanquishing the Warlock Lord, the 'old servants, who had borne for many years the presence of a secret which was not theirs, felt in this general commotion a relief which words could not express' (III, p. 285). Symington, who had never encountered the Warlock Lord himself but had nonetheless 'borne' his oppressive, supernatural presence, both understands and does not, speaks and cannot:

> 'No,' old Symington said, 'it's not ghosts or any such rubbitch. […] "Ding down the nests and the craws will flee away." What am I meaning? Well, that is just what I canna tell. It's a' confusion. I know nothing. Many a fricht and many an anxious hour have I had here: but I am bound to say I never saw anything worse than mysel'.' (III, p. 285)

Symington's idiom suggests knowledge beyond his rational comprehension. Walter and Oona do indeed defeat the Warlock Lord ('the craw') by tearing down ('ding down') the ruined tower (his 'nests'). Symington is haunted indirectly through his empathetic bond with his young master. His emotional proximity to Walter thus places him in a dual role, attempting to make sense of both the real and the fantastical aspects of the story's Caledonian Antisyzygy.

The Wizard's Son thus places Scots not just as an explicitly working-class modality but also as a language of empathy and mobility, permitting contact between characters by crossing existing geographic, social, and even liminal borders. While 'The Open Door' permits Scottish characters, albeit impelled by an English outsider, to speak with each other, but does not feature the English narrator's direct communication with the Scottish ghost, *The Wizard's Son* represents a step forward for the English protagonist. In this novel he successfully immerses himself in his new Scottish home, a process he achieves through a mystical union with the embodiment of a poetic, ideal Scotland, the rejection of supernatural forces that would prevent his ethical behaviour towards his tenants, and a continuous engagement with the Scottish characters that facilitate his cultural transition.

Non-verbal phantom Scots

Later, Oliphant's celebrated story, 'The Library Window' (1896), set in the fictionalized town of St Andrews, renamed St Rule, hinges on the Scottish ghost's inability to communicate verbally. The narrator, a nameless young girl visiting her Aunt Mary for the summer, gazes across the street at the window of the College Library, watching an academic at work. In the end it is revealed that the window is false and painted, and the scholar a ghost.[19] This Scottish tale, set in Fife, alludes twice to Walter Scott. First, the narrator, told she is 'fantastic and fanciful', says she 'sounds like Madge Wildfire', a reference to Scott's seventh Waverley novel, *The Heart of Midlothian* (1818).[20] Second, the girl sees the story's spectral scholar at his writing desk 'throw down his finished sheet on the floor, as somebody looking into a window like me once saw Sir Walter do' (p. 14). Oliphant engages yet again with Scottish literary tradition.

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[19] A window tax was imposed in Scotland as of 1748 and abolished in 1851. The quantity of windows for which a property could be taxed excluded false windows, which were often bricked and sometimes painted black to resemble a true window from a distance.

[20] [Margaret Oliphant], 'The Library Window', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, January 1896, pp. 1–30 (p. 2). Tamar Heller attributes the description of Scott to John Gibson Lockhart's *Memoirs of the Life of Sir Walter Scott* (Cadell, 1838), though the citation to Lockhart seems incomplete. Tamar Heller, 'Textual Seductions: Women's Reading and Writing in Margaret Oliphant's "The Library Window"', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 25.1 (1997), pp. 23–37 (p. 27), doi:10.1017/S1060150300004605. Scott's *Letters on Demonology and Witchcraft* may provide an alternate source for Oliphant, in which Scott describes being tricked by the light of a library hall into seeing a spectral image of Lord Byron (p. 38).

Aunt Mary, her visiting friends, and her maid Janet, all speak Scottish English, but the ghost communicates with the protagonist only at the end, when the girl begs him to 'Say something to me!' (p. 24). His response, however, is non-verbal. He rises from his seat, 'speechless, incapable of anything but this mechanical movement' and approaches the window, looking at the girl. He smiles at her, then, with effort, 'at last he forced [the window] open with a sound that echoed all along the street' (p. 24). The only way to prove this exchange has occurred is to call a witness from the street, a young boy who validates the events:

> 'It was naething to make a wark about. It was just yon windy yonder in the library that is nae windy. And it was open — as sure's death. You may laugh if you like. Is that a' she's wantin' wi' me? [...] I'm tellin' nae lees — it was standin' open just like ony ither windy. It's as sure's death. I couldna believe it mysel'; but it's true.' (p. 26)

Caledonian Antisyzygy best describes the contrast here between concrete realism, with fixed attention to the material, and the fantastical. The boy's speech combines both, granting credence to the supernatural with his insistence that 'I'm tellin' nae lees'. The ghost's presence, the sound of the window which calls the boy's attention upwards, is ratified in his Scots speech, and the supernatural is thus made real, tangible, through Oliphant's use of dialect. Speakers of Scottish English remain firmly in the realm of the real in 'The Library Window', much as in 'The Open Door' or *The Wizard's Son*. However, this only heightens the difficulty of communicating with the Scottish ghost, a silenced speaker whose highly empathetic communication is restricted to the non-verbal. Proof of the ghost's existence is mediated through the young boy, who hears the window opening, the ghost's only voiceless aural production. The exchange itself, however, is heightened by an empathetic engagement between ghost and girl. True communication requires, in Oliphant's literature, an affective link. 'The Library Window' permits a girl with Scottish heritage but raised in England to form a connection across boundaries of nation and time. For the first time, the ghost has someone 'watching him, looking for him, believing in him' (p. 24). When the young protagonist is grown up, finding herself widowed and friendless, he appears to her in a crowd, his smiling gaze an expression of companionship and wordless understanding (p. 30). The ghost circumvents linguistic repression, achieving contact with the living through affective connection.

The Lady's speech

Shortly after the start of *The Wizard's Son*'s periodical run in November 1882, Oliphant explored a Scottish ghost who communicates aurally with the living in her short

story 'The Lady's Walk', published in *Longman's Magazine* in December 1882 and January 1883. A year after 'The Library Window' (January 1896), Methuen published an expanded and revised version of *The Lady's Walk* (1897). The changes between the two editions illustrate the development of Oliphant's approach to writing a speaking Scottish ghost, as the amount of Scottish English increases in key parts of the 1897 novella.

The story's narrator is the English Mr Temple, who meets the Scottish Campbell family while travelling through Switzerland. He instantly admires the eldest sister, Charlotte, aptly nicknamed Chatty, who acts as a maternal figure to her younger siblings after the death of their mother. Charlotte and her brothers invite Mr Temple to come visit them for the shooting season at their Highland seat, Ellermore. This setting mirrors *The Wizard's Son*, with a Highland estate beside a loch near Glasgow.[21] As Oliphant was writing both *The Wizard's Son* and the first version of 'The Lady's Walk' at the same time, she includes the Campbells of 'The Lady's Walk' in *The Wizard's Son*, with a time lapse between the events of both texts. For instance, in *The Wizard's Son*, when Walter visits Oona's mother, Mrs Forrester, he hears a waggonette full of 'the young Campbells of Ellermore' with whom Oona has been 'spending last night' (I, p. 203). Mrs Forrester later entertains the Campbells, including 'young Colin of Ellermore', 'and Tom, the youngest, who was at home reading (very little) for his coming examination' (I, p. 234). In *The Lady's Walk*, both Colin and Tom are much older, suggesting this story takes place ten or twenty years after *The Wizard's Son*. Contrary to the wicked Warlock Lord in *The Wizard's Son*, Oliphant sets up *The Lady's Walk* within a Scottish world in which ghosts do not encroach on the living, but accompany and watch over them, as in 'The Library Window'.

The Campbells are Oliphant's first Scottish gentry to speak Scottish English. Oliphant further chastises her narrator's English gaze, doing so through language:

> There was a flavour of the North in the speech of all; not disclosed by mere words, but by an occasional diversity of idiom and change of pronunciation. They were conscious of this and rather proud of it than otherwise. They did not say Scotch, but Scots.[22]

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[21] The ruined Kinloch Houran in *The Wizard's Son* bears similarities to Kilchurn Castle on Loch Awe. According to John Stephenson, Ellermore is based on Ederline House on Loch Ederline (not thirty miles from Kilchurn), which once housed a family of Campbells. John B. Stephenson, *Ford: A Village in the West Highlands of Scotland* (Harris, 1984), pp. 53–54.

[22] Mrs. Oliphant, *The Lady's Walk* (Methuen, 1897), p. 10, hereafter *LW*, where necessary for clarity; Mrs. Oliphant, 'The Lady's Walk: A Story of the Seen and Unseen', *Longman's Magazine*, December 1882, pp. 229–364 (p. 231), hereafter LW (1882), where necessary for clarity.

Oliphant educates readers through her English narrator. Ellermore's ghost is a lady whose characteristic walk over a certain stretch of hilly countryside near the house can be heard except when death is near. She serves as a beloved ancestral mother, the opposite of *The Wizard's Son*'s Warlock Lord. Where his presence portends evil, it is her absence that signals misfortune. Oliphant inverts the association between lower-class characters and superstition she had suggested in 'The Open Door' and *The Wizard's Son*. The coachman's wife, when asked about the ghost, responds, 'Eh, sir, ye maun be joking' and argues, instead, that the steps heard must have a human cause (*LW*, pp. 61–62; LW (1882), p. 249). Oliphant also modifies 'nobody' in the periodical to 'naebody' in the novella, and the word 'lady' becomes (on four occasions in this same passage and more elsewhere) a Scottish 'leddy', showing a concerted effort to underscore the speaker's linguistic identity.

Charlotte and Temple hear the Lady's footsteps, but the ghost speaks to the narrator only when Charlotte is out of earshot. Though the coachman and his wife confirm that they 'have seen no leddy', the spirit's usual invisibility is offset by an ironic visibility of the written word on the page (*LW*, p. 62; LW (1882), p. 249). Oliphant's lexical choices through the graphic medium allow the reader to most clearly 'see' the ghost when she speaks. It is in this lexical embodiment that the Lady first appears to Temple. As she explains to him, she cannot speak to the Campbell family directly, only through an intermediary, a friend. While in the periodical version, the Lady asks Temple if he is 'a friend to the Campbells' (p. 243), in the novella this line changes to 'I cannot speak to them' and 'I must not speak' (p. 45). Her fervid repetition of this phrase signals a quashed desire to communicate directly with her family. Precisely because she finds herself at the mercy of an intermediary, the 1897 edition not only depicts the Lady as both speaking and silenced but also inserts recognizably Scottish words in her speech. When she reveals that the eldest son, Colin, riddled with financial difficulties, is in grave trouble, she calls him 'the bonnie boy, the bonnie boy!' (*LW*, p. 46), which is omitted in the periodical version (p. 243).[23] Just as in 'The Open Door' or 'The Library Window', love and empathy become a central impetus in this narrative for connections between the living and the marginalized ghost. Later, when Colin takes his own life, her footsteps are silenced, all aural mark of her disappeared, as if in mourning. Directly after, Mr Campbell suffers a stroke from the shock, plunging him into paralysis, unable to either move or speak. The family is incapacitated, and

[23] Though Oliphant increases the use of Scots in the 1897 edition, there are two editorial changes likely aimed to ease an English reader's comprehension. First, the maid's name, spelled 'Marg'ret' with an apostrophe to signal syncope (omission of the second syllable), is spelt out as 'Margaret' in the novella. Second, 'no' when it is the Scottish word for 'not' is written as 'no'' with an apostrophe.

their fortunes turn yet bleaker when the Campbell children discover their imminent bankruptcy, which will force them to sell Ellermore. Tragedy seems to rob the Campbells of their Highland home and of their very voice.

Independent Scotland

The Lady's Walk offers a new direction in Oliphant's Scottish ghost stories. Where Mortimer in 'The Open Door' is an outsider to the exchange between Willie and the Reverend Moncrieff, Temple in *The Lady's Walk*, unable to prevent Colin's suicide, seeks out a financial means to support the Campbells. When he suddenly comes into significant wealth, he gives this to the Campbells, saving Ellermore and the family from ruin. The relationship between Temple and the two ladies (Charlotte and the ghost) differs significantly from the other texts described so far. In *The Wizard's Son* the supernatural lineage of the Warlock Lord represents a tyrannical past, but also a future tyranny to the estate's tenants, the Scottish working class where Scots is yet alive and preserved. The text's antidote to this villain is the politically significant union of Oona (a feminine idealization of Scotland) and Walter (an Englishman with ties to Scotland). The union is not perfectly balanced, for Oliphant, as Valerie Sanders has aptly put it, 'always maintained that women were the more capable sex'.[24] Walter needs Oona's religious purity and strength to defeat the Warlock Lord; Scotland is England's salvation. In Maureen Martin's reading of this novel, the Warlock Lord represents a 'mythic Scottish masculinity' against which Oliphant offers 'a more modern view of Scotland than Victorian novel readers were generally exposed to' (pp. 146, 138). Adding to Martin's reading of *The Wizard's Son*, I propose that *The Lady's Walk* serves as its continuation and tacit inversion. In *The Lady's Walk* Scottish heritage, represented by the ghost, fails to meddle in the modern world, foiled both by God's will and by her dependence on an English intermediary. If *The Lady's Walk* is a response to *The Wizard's Son*, it seeks to undo the Act of Union presented by the marriage plot. *The Lady's Walk* offers a view of Scotland struggling to reconnect with her past and reliant on England's friendship, but, simultaneously, as a modern, independent nation when Charlotte rejects Temple's marriage proposal.

For Carol Margaret Davison and Monica Germanà, Scottish literature following the Act of Union engages with an inherently uncanny 'Scottish condition', caught between two merging national identities.[25] I would argue that, in *The Lady's Walk*, Oliphant

[24] Valerie Sanders, *Margaret Oliphant* (Root, 2020), p. 49.

[25] Carol Margaret Davison and Monica Germanà, 'Borderlands of Identity and the Aesthetics of Disjuncture: An Introduction to Scottish Gothic', in *Scottish Gothic: An Edinburgh Companion*, ed. by Carol Margaret Davison and Monica Germanà (Edinburgh University Press, 2017), pp. 1–13 (p. 2), doi:10.3366/edinburgh/9781474408196.001.0001.

upends the Union discourse of *The Wizard's Son* through Charlotte's refusal to marry Temple, through her dogged independence. In the 1897 edition Oliphant emphasizes the connection between the ghostly Lady and Charlotte Campbell, making them doubles of each other, feminine symbols of Scotland past and present, respectively, and fierce guardians of the family. In the periodical edition the Lady is 'some one whom [Temple] had never seen before' (p. 242), while in the novella Oliphant compares her to 'Charlotte, for the outline was like hers' (p. 44). Though the similarity between the two women is already hinted at in the periodical version when Temple compares Charlotte's anxious hand-wringing to the ghost's spectral movements (p. 246), the 1897 edition insists on this further (p. 53). Charlotte tends to her ailing father, while Temple and another Campbell son attend Colin's funeral, a scene added to the 1897 version absent in the original edition. At that moment, Temple sees a veiled figure (the ghost) with a 'face not unlike Charlotte's', once again 'wringing her hands', and 'the face — the gesture was like Charlotte' to such a degree that he believes 'Charlotte herself in the spirit [...] had come forth in sheer longing to her brother's grave' (*LW*, pp. 135, 137). Charlotte and the Lady are doubles because, as Charlotte explains, 'we are of one stock [...] and the same heart', both guardians of their Scottish lineage.[26]

As well as emphasizing their similarity, Oliphant underscores Charlotte's Scottish identity through linguistic markers, which seem to increase as the novella progresses. When Temple returns to Ellermore, Charlotte has 'more of the lingering cadence of her national accent [...] — or perhaps it struck me more after these months of absence' (*LW*, p. 153; LW (1883), p. 349). Only when her voice, overwhelmed by emotion, loses altogether the veneer of English, 'returning [...] to the full simplicity of accent and idiom, the soft, native speech to which she was born', does the Lady return to her walk, with 'not a cry, but a sigh', 'a sigh, personal, heart-rending' as 'tears dropped from [Charlotte's] full eyes' (*LW*, p. 163; LW (1883), pp. 351–52). In a scene mirroring Moncrieff's one-sided speech to the ghostly Willie of 'The Open Door', Oliphant finally permits Charlotte and her spectral doppelgänger a moment of linguistic contact. Affect, expressed through language, conjures the connection between the living and the dead, present and past versions of a common persona. Charlotte begs 'my bonnie lady' to return to Heaven and be freed from her burden of watching over the living, that the family may 'trouble you no more' (*LW*, p. 163; LW (1883), p. 352). In this scene Scottish identity endures, achieving an 'afterlife', not only by yearning for contact with the antiquarian, the ghostly past, but by embodying the same spirit, 'the same heart' in Charlotte's living body.

[26] *LW*, p. 164; Mrs. Oliphant, 'The Lady's Walk: A Story of the Seen and Unseen', *Longman's Magazine*, January 1883, pp. 341–64 (p. 352), hereafter LW (1883), where necessary for clarity.

Oliphant's edits to *The Lady's Walk* seem to undermine the romantic plot line set up in her earlier version. In 1883 the Lady says to Temple that she approached him 'because you loved her' (Charlotte) (p. 359), but Oliphant changes this in 1897, repeating merely that the ghost is not permitted to speak directly to the Campbells but requests that Temple 'wish them well' on her behalf (p. 183). This edit suggests that, by 1897, Oliphant is downplaying Temple's romantic attraction to Charlotte, which she rejects out of a desire to remain with her family, to not leave Scotland as his wife but live the rest of her days at Ellermore. She acts, in life, as the ghost does in death, replacing the Lady as a modern-day guardian of the Campbell lineage, refusing to leave her siblings motherless by marrying an Englishman. The supernatural element in *The Lady's Walk* serves as a metaphor for modern Scotland's connection with the past, with cultural preservation. Haunting permits, as in 'The Library Window', an affective link with heritage. While in the periodical version, the Lady tells Temple he 'may help' and 'may save' the family by, implicitly, contributing financially to their survival (p. 359), Oliphant changes this too in the novella to a sigh of 'if you will — if you will' (p. 183). Likewise, Temple's determination 'to hear her message' in 1883 (p. 359), becomes an effort 'to understand' in 1897 (p. 184). Temple is no longer the saviour of *The Lady's Walk* in Oliphant's final edition, just as his role is not to hear the ghost's message but to fully understand her language. He aims, now, not only to hear her voice but to comprehend her intention, her history, and her commitment to preserving her family and heritage. Oliphant leaves England responsible, as a labour of love, for respecting Scottish sovereignty and independence, helping only selflessly as a friend without ulterior motives.

Oliphant's Scottish ghost stories seem, at first, to position Scots and Scottish English solely in the dialect speech of working-class characters. However, as her ghost fiction develops an ethos of empathy, encouraging communication between the real world and the supernatural, a Scottish linguistic identity becomes increasingly legible and communicable. The trajectory of her stories shows a reworking in Oliphant's literary process of Scotland's past and future, illustrated through the symbolic language of communion with the hidden, marginalized, and ghostly. Willie's Scottish voice is fully intelligible only to other Scots in 'The Open Door'. Meanwhile, in *The Wizard's Son*, the mystical Union of Scotland and England, represented by Oona and Walter's marriage, vanquishes an oppressive past, permits class consciousness, and produces a modern, unified nation. In 'The Library Window', a young ghost-seeing protagonist communicates with a non-verbal Scottish ghost through the power of her empathy, understanding, and faith in the spectre. Each of these texts embodies Scottish culture as a mystical and marginalized force that seeks

contact with the present-day world. The difficulties of communication presented in each of these narratives find their zenith in *The Lady's Walk* when the ghost, for the first time, is granted extensive verbal ability. The aural haunting of *The Lady's Walk* clashes with the graphic literary medium, wherein the spoken word is, in fact, written, and therefore visible, part of the seen. By granting the Lady her own speech, her body becomes embedded in the literary manuscript through her pointedly Scottish mode of communication. Contact with the dead, for Oliphant, is deeply personal, a process of empathy and recognition, a yearning for the past. *The Lady's Walk* ultimately releases Scotland's embodied past from the responsibility of protecting her future progeny. The modern Scotland represented by Charlotte, as her language takes on the cadence and diction of her Scottish identity, has greater independence than Oliphant had imagined in her previous ghost stories. Oliphant's use of phantom Scots in her ghost fiction highlights the dialectic struggle of granting Scottish language and culture an afterlife through the immortal body of the text.