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Miss Marjoribanks’s Pronouns; or, the General, the Particular, and the Novel
Erik Gray

Charles Darwin was puzzled by worker ants. In *On the Origin of Species* (1859) he considers the case of “working or sterile ants” as a “difficulty, which at first appeared to me insuperable, and actually fatal to my whole theory.”¹ How can an infertile individual, Darwin wondered, participate in the chief mechanism of natural selection, which involves passing on one’s genetic mutations to offspring? More generally, the existence of creatures that instinctively labor on behalf of others seems to contravene the principle of individual fitness and competition that underpins Darwin’s theory. But Darwin quickly answered his own question. “This difficulty,” he writes, “disappears, when it is remembered that selection may be applied to the family, as well as to the individual, and may thus gain the desired end.”² Darwin thus laid the foundation for later developments of his theory—concepts such as kin selection, altruism, and inclusive fitness—that sought to show how traits and behaviors that are apparently detrimental to the individual can, by benefiting the group, still be reconciled to the idea of the “selfish gene.”³

In the same way, the citizens of Carlingford, in Margaret Oliphant’s *Miss Marjoribanks* (1866), are puzzled by the behavior of the titular heroine. Lucilla Marjoribanks begins the novel determined to organize Carlingford society and raise its tone. To this end she establishes a weekly “evening” at her father’s house to which all the fashionable members of local society are invited and over which she presides. But in a crucial early scene Lucilla perceives that her

evening is in jeopardy of being spoiled by her protégée Barbara Lake, who insists on staying at the piano too long, showing off her fine singing voice. Faced with the crisis, Lucilla acts decisively and offers up her own suitor, the most eligible man in the room:

“My dear Barbara,” she said, putting her hands on the singer’s shoulders as she finished her strain, “that is enough for to-night. Mr Cavendish will take you down-stairs and get you a cup of tea; for you know there is no room to-night to serve it up-stairs.” Thus Miss Marjoribanks proved herself capable of preferring her great work to her personal sentiments, which is generally considered next to impossible for a woman. She did what perhaps nobody else in the room was capable of doing: she sent away the gentleman who was paying attention to her, in company with the girl who was paying attention to him.⁴

As the narrator explains, “This Miss Marjoribanks did, not in ignorance, but with a perfect sense of what she was about. ... But it would be hopeless to attempt to describe ... the unmitigated amazement of the company in general, which was conscious at the same time that Mr Cavendish was paying attention to Miss Marjoribanks, and that he had been flirting in an inexcusable manner with Miss Lake” (100-101). In the context of a traditional marriage plot, Lucilla’s action is indeed amazing and utterly illogical. In the context of Lucilla’s “great work” of organizing Carlingford society, however, and in light of Darwin’s comments, it appears perfectly rational: Lucilla is foregoing a possible individual advantage for the greater good of the group to which she belongs.

In the half-century since Q.D. Leavis’s edition of the novel reintroduced it to critical notice as well as to general circulation, discussion of *Miss Marjoribanks* has tended to center on a small number of binary oppositions. The “battle lines,” as Elisabeth Jay calls them, were drawn early.⁵ Does Oliphant treat her heroine ironically or hold her up for admiration?

Consequently (given Lucilla's wholehearted embrace of conventional bourgeois expectations, including gender expectations), is the novel feminist or anti-feminist? These are central questions that confront any reader of the book, and discussion of them has grown ever more sophisticated, as critics have sought a *via media* between the various poles.⁶ But focus on this cluster of terms has tended to occlude the even more basic binary that the novel negotiates: namely, the particular (or individual) and the general. *Miss Marjoribanks* consciously foregrounds these concepts and consistently challenges the apparent opposition between them. In the scene just described, for instance, Lucilla positions herself simultaneously as a working drone, excluded from the marriage plot in the service of the general good, and as the utterly singular queen of the colony, the "acknowledged sovereign" of Carlingford society (103).

The novel as a genre is always concerned with questions of the general and the particular. It is the genre *par excellence* of particularity, of the minutiae of individual lives and everyday existence. But it has traditionally been seen as wielding those particulars metonymically, as representatives of general truths and characteristics. In its conscious attention to this binary, *Miss Marjoribanks* provides as suggestive a commentary on novelistic methodology as any work of the Victorian period. Many critics have already noted the metafictional qualities of Oliphant's novel, remarking on the way Lucilla resembles an author, as she manipulates the other characters into acting out the narratives she has devised.⁷ In this, however, she resembles the protagonists of many other nineteenth-century novels, from Emma Woodhouse onward. What truly distinguishes *Miss Marjoribanks* is its persistent focus on "the relation between general and particular" that lies, as Catherine Gallagher writes, "at the heart of the novel genre."⁸ That relation is trickier than it might appear, because the two sides of the apparent binary constantly meet and merge: the particular is perpetually becoming the general, and vice versa. Oliphant's

novel reflects on this process frequently and consciously. The words “particular” and “general” reverberate throughout the text, and their interchangeability is evident at both the broadest and the most particular level.

The first half of this essay investigates the phenomenon in general by focusing on a particular detail of *Miss Marjoribanks*, its pronouns. Jonathan Farina has recently expounded the importance of the most commonplace “everyday words” in shaping the character of nineteenth-century novels.⁹ Farina’s work, together with our current cultural attunement to personal pronouns, helps draw attention to how consciously such pronouns are deployed in *Miss Marjoribanks*, and how unusually. Specifically, many characters, including Lucilla herself, use pronouns that hover indeterminately between a general and a specific signification. This linguistic habit is illuminated by the novel’s repeated allusions to the poetry of Alfred Tennyson, which often exhibits a similar tendency. For the interplay of general and particular is by no means limited to the novel, or even to narrative. Rather, as Oscar Wilde observed, “All art is at once surface and symbol”: the particularities of the surface, the generalities of symbolism.¹⁰ Tennyson’s poetry, which frequently exploits the ambiguities of everyday words—pronouns, and even articles—helps reveal, not only how this duality manifests itself in other forms of literature besides the novel, but how it is embedded in language itself.

The same paradoxical conflation of general and particular that obtains at a verbal level is evident as well at the level of narrative. The second half of the essay therefore examines the two main plots of Oliphant’s novel, the marriage plot and the political plot, considering each in turn. Lucilla, as we have seen, subordinates marriage to other concerns; but even in its absence, or deferral, marriage dominates the first two thirds of the novel, as one potential husband after another is introduced. Like the pronouns, these men fill a role that is both generic and highly

specialized. On the one hand, each is introduced first and foremost as a suitor—a function of the marriage plot—before he is an individual. The men are often referred to only by the names of their eligible profession (the Archdeacon, the General), rather than by their proper names. Their role could be filled just as well by any clergyman or officer—they are as fungible as blonde, brunette, and redhead in a cheap romance. On the other hand, because they are actors specifically in a marriage plot, and marriage (unlike romance) is a matter necessarily involving practicalities and domestic details, the suitors cannot remain mere generic functionaries but soon find themselves caught up in a web of particularities. Indeed the word “particular” is repeatedly used in the novel as a synonym, almost a euphemism, for marriage.¹¹ In the case of the political plot, which dominates the final third of the novel and which centers on a parliamentary election, the paradox is even more striking. An election involves choosing a particular person to fulfill a general or representative function; the individual becomes a synecdoche for their constituency. Once again Oliphant highlights this binary through language—not this time through pronouns, but through Lucilla’s use of a political catchphrase, which remains peculiarly hers even as it passes into general circulation. *Miss Marjoribanks* demonstrates how the very building blocks of narrative, like those of language, effectively confound the distinction between general and particular.

Miss Marianabanks: She, He, They, The

Much to Barbara Lake’s disappointment, her initial flirtation with Mr. Cavendish seems to lead nowhere, and he eventually disappears from view. But he reappears by chance one evening opposite her window: “He had paused by instinct under a lamp not yet lighted, which was almost opposite Mr Lake’s house; and it was not his fault if he saw at the upper window a

figure looking out, like Mariana, and sighing, ‘He cometh not’” (177). The reference to Alfred Tennyson’s “Mariana” (1830) is unsurprising: it was one of the poet laureate’s best known lyrics, and Mariana provides a fitting analogy for Barbara. Tennyson’s poem takes its inspiration from Shakespeare’s *Measure for Measure*, in which Mariana is a minor character who, having been abandoned by her lover at the altar after losing her fortune, retires to a “moated grange” to live in solitude. Tennyson represents her in a state of intense isolation, constantly looking out the window at the unchanging walls of her garden, listening for a footstep, and repeating the refrain, “He cometh not . . . I am aweary.” The novel’s allusion neatly conveys Barbara’s comparable experience of abandonment and frustration.

More surprisingly, however, and more subtly, the allusion is repeated a few chapters later. Lucilla is visiting another of her protégées, Mrs. Mortimer, a lonely widow whom she has set up in a small house with a walled garden. Wandering through that garden, which has fallen into disrepair since her last visit, “Miss Marjoribanks could not help observing that the branches of the pear-tree, which was all that the garden contained in the shape of fruit, had come loose from the wall” (203). The image recalls the opening lines of Tennyson’s poem, where an espaliered pear tree has similarly become detached from its supporting wall:

With blackest moss the flower-plots

Were thickly crusted, one and all:

The rusted nails fell from the knots

That held the pear to the gable-wall.¹²

The momentary allusion is reinforced immediately afterward when Mrs. Mortimer is described as “a poor woman all alone [who] looks out across her flowers in the rain, and sees nothing but the wall that shuts her in, and thinks to herself that she has no refuge nor escape from it” (205).

Shortly afterward we learn that Mrs. Mortimer, like the original Mariana, was also abandoned by her lover when she lost an expected inheritance. And the references continue to multiply in the chapters that follow. ““You don’t know how dreadful it is to keep staring at the walls all day and never see any change,”” she tells Lucilla (248). (Compare Tennyson’s Mariana, who spends “All day” “without hope of change.”)¹³ Or again, “it was a tedious business looking out of the window when the rain was drenching the four walls of the garden ... [or] when pleasant sounds came in over that enclosure—voices and footsteps of people who might be called alive, while this solitary woman was buried” (286)—just as for Mariana, “Old footsteps trod the upper floors, / Old voices called her from without.”¹⁴

To Barbara and Mrs. Mortimer can be added Lucilla’s aunt, who has lived so long in solitude that she responds with unexpected pleasure when her brother-in-law (whom she does not much like) enters the dining room: “Mrs John Marjoribanks had been out of all that sort of thing for a long time. She had been living quite alone in a widowed forlorn way, and had half forgotten how pleasant it was to have somebody coming in with a breath of fresh air about him” (350). Most unexpectedly of all, even Lucilla is touched by the Mariana malady. In many ways she is the opposite of Tennyson’s figure: she is social and voluble, and she speaks her thoughts candidly—all surface, with minimal symbol. She is not abandoned by her first lover but, like any good novelistic heroine, refuses his proposal. Yet she too lives in a grange (or at least in Grange Lane, Carlingford’s most fashionable street), and she too at times feels the oppression of solitary enclosure: “even from the windows of Lucilla’s drawing-room the prospect of the garden walls ... was sufficiently doleful. Nobody was likely to call, nothing was doing” (206-7). Mariana is the ultimate symbol of the isolated individual, confined to and defined by the details of her particular setting; yet her condition appears to have become general.

Nevertheless it is Mrs. Mortimer who has the greatest claim to be identified with the archetype, because she shares a remarkable trait. “Mariana” is one of a half-dozen poems in Tennyson’s 1830 volume that bear as their title the name of the woman they describe (the others being “Claribel,” “Lilian,” “Isabel,” “Madeline,” and “Adeline”). The series continues in Tennyson’s next volume (1832) with as many more, and the whole group has come to be known to critics as Tennyson’s “lady poems.”¹⁵ Yet “Mariana” differs from almost all the others in that the central figure is never named within the poem; from the first she is always simply “She.” Similarly, the figure for whom she waits is always simply “he,” without an antecedent. The effect emerges more strikingly in the context of the other lady poems, which, though likewise written in the third person, all invoke the woman’s name repeatedly. It could be argued that no names are needed, since the poem’s two figures are already known from Shakespeare’s play, which is quoted in the epigraph—except that the effect reappears in “Mariana in the South” (1832), the pendant to the earlier “Mariana.” The figures in that poem are clearly not identical to those in the first poem or in Shakespeare, yet they too appear only as “she” and “he.”

Mrs. Mortimer seems to have picked up this linguistic habit. Shortly after her garden has implicitly been compared to Mariana’s, Mrs. Mortimer tells Lucilla how she came to be jilted by her lover. But her story is rendered comically unintelligible by her refusal to name any of the people involved. Instead she refers to them all as “he,” as if that were sufficient, resulting in total confusion:

“[H]e thought he should have made me his heiress; but instead of that, he left his money, you know, to *him*; and then he was dreadfully put out, and wanted me to go to law with him and change the will; but I never blamed him, for my part, Lucilla—he knows I never blamed him—and nothing he said would make give in to go to the law with him—” (209)

The pronoun without antecedent turns out to be a specialty of Mrs. Mortimer's. "Do you think it could be from *him*; or only from him?" she later asks (313-14). It even becomes the object of ridicule to Mrs. Woodburn, the town mimic, who parodies it unmercifully: "Tell him to tell him to go down-stairs ... I want to speak to him, and he is not to hear" (312). Yet Mrs. Mortimer is not the only character in the novel to use pronouns without an antecedent. The effect seems to have rubbed off on her erstwhile suitor: "He was neither related to him, nor connected with him," cried Mr Beverley, with a momentary inclination, as Lucilla thought, to get aground among the pronouns, as Mrs Mortimer had done" (219). Old Colonel Chiley does it too: "*She* sent me," said the Colonel, who did not think his wife needed any other name" (418). So does Barbara Lake: "[S]he must have felt it. Nobody could help feeling it, though she carried it off so well," Barbara exclaims, without bothering to identify either "it" or "she," to the confusion of her sister ("What is it she could not help feeling?" said Rose. 'I suppose it is Lucilla you mean?') (118).

Above all, Lucilla herself habitually does the same, in her characteristic use of the word "They": "When They were gone—and it may be well to say that Lucilla used this pronoun to signify The Gentlemen, in greater or smaller number as it might happen..." (63). This joke, introduced in the early chapters, recurs through the rest of the novel with almost Dickensian regularity. Whether in direct or, more commonly, free indirect discourse, Lucilla regularly uses "They" as a self-sufficient signifier to indicate either a particular group of men or men as a general category, indiscriminately. When Lucilla sends Barbara off in the company of Mr. Cavendish, for example, "the men did not even find out what it was that awoke the ladies' attention; but then, in delicate matters of social politics, one never expects to be understood by *Them*" (101). Or again, "It makes such a difference to a man," Miss Marjoribanks added, with

that almost imperceptible tone of contempt which she was sometimes known to use when speaking of *Their* absurd peculiarities” (208). And so on through dozens of instances.

It is worth considering the effects of this pronominal practice. The most obvious is the double effect conveyed by Colonel Chiley. When the Colonel refers simply to “*She*,” because he “did not think his wife needed any other name,” Mrs. Chiley is simultaneously debased (deprived of her proper and distinctive name) and exalted (treated as so obviously significant as to need no introduction). This familiar dichotomy receives its most notable illustration in H. Rider Haggard’s *She* (1887), which centers on a “mysterious Queen ... commonly known by the impersonal, but, to my mind, rather awesome title of *She*.”¹⁶ Haggard’s novel offers an iconic example of the patriarchal discourse that represents woman as simultaneously feeble and eternal, monster and goddess, as in its climactic scene:

At last she lay still, or only moving feebly. She, who but two minutes gone had gazed upon us—the loveliest, noblest, most splendid woman the world has ever seen—she lay still before us ... no larger than a big ape, and hideous—ah, too hideous for words! And yet, think of this—at that very moment I thought of it—it was the *same* woman!¹⁷

Lucilla’s “They” carries the same double valence—it unconsciously reveals how much her life depends on and revolves around men, even as it condescends to them by grouping them into an undifferentiated mass—but wittily flips the usual gendering of such discourse.¹⁸

Yet the implications of Lucilla’s “They” (or Colonel Chiley’s “*She*,” or even Haggard’s) are not limited to gender. What all these examples demonstrate is the blurring, at times the total identity, of particularity and generality. The qualities that render an individual eminently distinctive also elevate that individual to exemplary status, thus flattening and depersonalizing them. These contradictory forces are encapsulated in the distinctive nineteenth-century use of

the word “type.” As Matthew Rowlinson explains, “type” has always carried related but antithetical meanings: it can refer to both the original (the piece of type used in a printing press to make an impression) and the copy (the endless pages of type produced by that piece).¹⁹ But as the word increasingly began to figure in scientific discourse in the first half of the nineteenth century, a new complication grew up. “Type” came to mean the preeminent member of a biological group or class, which could be considered representative (or “typical”) precisely because it was distinctive. That which is typical, in other words, carries its distinguishing marks so clearly that it is viewed as paradigmatic. In such a case particular and general are not only interdependent but paradoxically indistinguishable. As Rowlinson writes, “The idea that a species is *typical* because it shows clearly the stamp of a *particular* time or place ... becomes commonplace in nineteenth-century science.”²⁰ The paradox extends beyond the field of morphology. Haggard’s “She,” Mrs. Mortimer’s “he,” Lucilla’s “They” all exhibit the same duality; in Haggard’s words, these designations are simultaneously “awesome” and “impersonal.” Likewise, the very distinctiveness of Mariana’s situation allows it to be iterated and generalized—first by Tennyson himself in the second Mariana poem, then in Oliphant’s novel, where Mariana becomes the type of a recognizable female condition.

In “Mariana” the general and the particular converge in the peculiar use, not only of pronouns, but of articles as well. “The” appears with insinuating frequency in the poem:

With blackest moss the flower-plots

Were thickly crusted, one and all:

The rusted nails fell from the knots

That held the pear to the gable-wall.

The broken sheds looked sad and strange:

Unlifted was the clinking latch...²¹

It would be hard to find a text of any length in English that does not contain a “the.” But what exactly does the word signify? According to Thomas De Quincey in his essay “Style” (1840-41), the definite article has “two general functions”:

1. to individualize, as, *e.g.* “It is not any sword that will do, I will have *the* sword of my father;” and 2. the very opposite function, *viz.*, to generalize in the highest degree—a use which our best English grammars wholly overlook—as *e.g.*, “Let *the* sword give way to *the* gown;” not that particular sword, but every sword, where each is used as a representative symbol of the corresponding professions.²²

The *Oxford English Dictionary* concurs with De Quincey. The first eighteen definitions it offers all show how “the” designates “an individual item” or one that has been “contextually particularized.” But the next five definitions carry the contrary sense: “the” marks a term as being used “generically or universally.”²³

In the nineteenth century, both meanings were even more present than they are now, especially in literary discourse, thanks to two locutions that dropped off markedly after the turn of the twentieth century. The first is the use of “the” to refer to specific, usually self-evidently important or exemplary works of art (*OED* A.5.b). This form persists with works of classical literature—the *Iliad*, the *Timaeus*, even (though decreasingly) the *Agamemnon*; but we have entirely lost the Victorian practice of referring to “the *Paradise Lost*.”²⁴ At the same time, the tendency to use “the” to designate, not particular works, but whole genres of literature has also dwindled, though more slowly. We still use “the novel” to refer to either a particular work or a class of works. But other genres (lyric, epic, pastoral) now generally appear without an article:

the nineteenth-century locution “the comedy” to refer to the genre of comedy has almost completely disappeared.²⁵

The word “the” is strikingly foregrounded in Tennyson’s “Claribel,” the first of the lady poems, which appears shortly before “Mariana” in the 1830 volume. Whereas Mariana is figuratively entombed in her grange, Claribel is literally dead and buried; yet like Mariana she seems curiously surrounded and even exalted by her extreme isolation. The poem ends as follows:

At eve the beetle boometh
 Athwart the thicket lone:
 At noon the wild bee hummeth
 About the mossed headstone:
 At midnight the moon cometh,
 And looketh down alone.
 Her song the lintwhite swelleth,
 The clear-voiced mavis dwelleth,
 The callow throistle lispeth,
 The slumbrous wave outwelleth,
 The babbling runnel crispeth,
 The hollow grot replieth,
 Where Claribel low-lieth.²⁶

The insistent repetition of “the,” including the anaphora near the end, is reinforced by the plethora of archaic “-eth” endings, so that the end of each line offers a phonetic mirror image of the beginning. Together the verbal and sonic repetition draw attention to “the” and its attendant

ambiguity. “The beetle” or “the wild bee” suggests the presence both of an individual insect and of a type of insect. This is by no means an uncommon poetic practice; it happens most often with animals (and occasionally with plants) and is associated with the common tendency to see any individual animal as representative of its type.²⁷ But usually a poet limits the use of “the [animal]” to one or two instances. When the beetle, the bee, the linnet, the mavis, and the thrush all appear in the same stanza, by contrast, we are usually in the depersonalized realm of allegory or beast fable. In “Claribel,” though, the strong tendency toward allegory or generalization is complicated by the copresence of “the” indicating things that are necessarily singular: “the moon” which “looketh down alone,” the hollow grot, and especially the solitary headstone. Under the force of its definite articles, the stanza conjures up a picture that is particular and general at once.

The use of “the” in “Mariana” is more subtle but perhaps (since it does not involve animals) even more significant. Most of the definite articles in the opening lines reflect standard usage: “the flower-plots,” like “the broken sheds,” are major features of the landscape; there is only one “gable-wall” or “latch.” But what are we to make of “The rusted nails”? Surely it would make more sense to say “Rusted nails fell from the knots / That held the pear to the gable-wall.” “*The* rusted nails” seems to assume that the nails are already familiar; they are not being pointed out as details but referred to as something already recognized. Which of course they are: Mariana is caught in an iterative world, in which everything is horribly particular (she has been staring at the same garden so long that she has come to know every rusted nail) while also figuring as part of a symbolic pattern. “*The* rusted nails” functions in the same way as “she” and “he” without an antecedent in the same poem: it assumes a familiarity and thus conveys an iconic status.

Oliphant's allusions to "Mariana" in *Miss Marjoribanks* highlight the pronominal peculiarity that the two works share and the paradoxical duality it conveys. Lucilla's "They," like the unantecedented pronouns of the other characters, carries a strictly parochial meaning—it refers to the gentlemen downstairs, sitting over their wine after dinner—but also a universal meaning, one that extends beyond the gentlemen downstairs and even beyond the fictional world she and they inhabit. Such is the double valence of the novel (meaning both this novel in particular and the novel as a genre): it narrows its focus in order to widen it, gesturing at general truths through fictional particulars. Just as Lucilla's pronouns are both idiosyncratic and representative, so *Miss Marjoribanks* is a singular novel precisely because it is so typical.

The Marriage Plot: Nothing Very Particular

The four potential suitors for Lucilla's hand in the first two volumes of *Miss Marjoribanks*—her cousin Tom, Mr. Cavendish, the Archdeacon, and the General—appear in decreasing order of particularity. The fact that "the General" is actually referred to as such, and rarely as anything else, only underlines the point. (He could scarcely have been a "major," because he is not major; he is general.) It is not that the General lacks characterization; he receives as much as many another flat character in Victorian fiction. But he is introduced from the first merely, and explicitly, to fill a plot function, rather than for any qualities particular to himself.²⁸ As a general, he is of suitable rank to marry Lucilla, and therefore before anyone in the novel has even met him he is already considered in the role of suitor. Mrs. Centum, who introduces him into Carlingford and into the novel, does make a vague effort to provide specific information about him: "And so the General is coming to us to-morrow, Lucilla—General Travers, you know, that was in all the papers for something he did in India"

(232). But Lucilla, although she is delighted by the news, pays no attention to such distinguishing details as name or accomplishments; she merely looks with favor on Mrs. Centum as “the woman who at such a moment produced a live General in Carlingford” (233). When he materializes, however, the General fails to pay due homage to Lucilla, and she snubs him in return, greatly distressing Mrs. Centum: “She felt it, indeed, a little hard that it should be her man who was defied in this alarming way, while Mr Cavendish and the Archdeacon, the two previous candidates, had both been received so sweetly” (241). Mrs. Centum’s response makes explicit what was already clear enough: that the General was never, in her mind, a particular individual, but merely “her man,” whom she could pit against other men.

But the General is the exception. The other eligible gentlemen in the novel not only display a mixture of general and particular but are confronted by the fact that those concepts are continually changing places, depending on one’s perspective. Lucilla’s first suitor, for instance, her cousin Tom, is highly particularized. He is consistently referred to by name, rarely merely as “cousin,” and never by his profession. Even more notably, the narrator refers to him, almost alone among the male characters, by his first name (although this distinction is diminished by the fact that the only other man regularly called by his first name, a servant, is also named Thomas; Tom’s proper name happens to be a common one). Moreover Tom has a body, a particularly obtrusive one that is always making its individual presence felt, usually by bumping into something or knocking it over. Yet particularities do not aid Tom in his wooing; to the contrary, they are his downfall. When Tom arrives in Carlingford, Lucilla is entirely preoccupied with the business of refurbishing her father’s drawing room, as a first step in her grand plan of reorganizing local society. She is so lost in a welter of details that she has no time to think of such things as marriage:

The upholsterers were in the house, and indeed had just finished putting up the pictures on the new paper in the drawing-room ... It was precisely at this moment that his evil genius persuaded Tom Marjoribanks to interrupt ... “[D]o stop a moment a listen to me, Lucilla! what does it matter about furniture and things when a man’s heart is bursting?” cried the unfortunate lover. (69-71).

Tom casts his proposal as being, not only of greater interest than the “furniture and things,” but of broader or more general interest, referring to “a man’s heart,” rather than “my heart.” But in this he is mistaken, and Lucilla quickly sets him straight: “[A]s for furniture and things, they matter a great deal, I assure you, to people’s happiness” (71).

Tom has failed to understand how easily general and particular can be transposed. It is true that in the typical marriage plot, “marriage” is the general term, under which “furniture” and all other details of plot are subsumed. But in this novel, where Lucilla repeatedly dismisses or at least postpones the possibility of her marrying in order to carry out the reorganization of society—for which the refurbishment of the drawing room stands in as index—“furniture” is the broader and more general term, to which the potential marriage of two individuals must be subordinated. Thus Lucilla is not merely indulging in a witty Wildean inversion when she responds to Tom’s more direct and more personal appeal (““Oh, for heaven’s sake never mind the room! ... I love you, Lucilla; you know I love you! how can you trifle with me so?””) by telling him that he has his priorities wrong: “‘It is you who are trifling,’ said Miss Marjoribanks, ‘especially when you know I have really something of importance to do’” (73).

Mr. Cavendish, who succeeds Tom in the role of chief marriage prospect, oscillates between the general and the particular. He begins very comfortably in the former state. Early in the novel everyone remarks that Mr. Cavendish is paying particular attention to Lucilla, yet he

does so in the most general way: “Mr Cavendish confided to Lucilla his opinion on things in general ... He came to her assistance when she made tea, and generally fulfilled all the duties which are expected of a man who is paying attention to a young lady” (80). More notably still, Mr. Cavendish, like Lucilla’s pronouns, has no antecedents. No one knows anything about his parents, who, we later learn, were of low status. But he came unexpectedly into a fortune, changed his name, and was subsequently received into society as “one of the Cavendishes”—a phrase that is continually applied to him throughout the novel (22, and *passim*). Lucilla’s father “being Scotch, and having a turn for genealogy, found the description a little vague” (117). But Mrs. Chiley, Lucilla’s elderly friend, likes Mr. Cavendish all the more for being a man without qualities, blurry around the edges: “He had a nice property, and then he was very nice, indeed an unexceptionable young man; and to add to this, it had been agreed between Colonel Chiley and Mr Centum, and several other of the leading people in Carlingford, that he was the most likely man to represent the borough when old Mr Chiltern, who was always threatening to retire, fulfilled his promise” (80). Mr. Cavendish is “unexceptionable,” for which we might as well read “unexceptional.” And the indistinct distinction he receives from being “one of the Cavendishes” is soon to be traded in for the even more distinguished vagary of being, not an individual, but a representative figure.

Yet Mr. Cavendish cannot remain entirely in the realm of the general. Barbara, for instance, appeals to his peculiar susceptibility for a fine contralto, to his own undoing: “After a while the level eyebrows and flashing eyes and magnificent voice of Barbara Lake began to reassert their ancient power. Whatever may be the predisposition of the Cavendishes in general, this particular member of the race was unable to resist these influences” (107). On the other hand Mr. Cavendish is also saved by particularity. The Archdeacon, it turns out, knew him (and

hated him) under his former name and condition, and seeing him now again, received into high society as “one of the Cavendishes,” threatens to expose him. But Lucilla intervenes by telling the Archdeacon that Mr. Cavendish is “one of my—very particular friends” (297)—a loaded phrase, implying a relationship that would involve Lucilla in any disgrace that befalls Mr. Cavendish. The Archdeacon is stymied. To denounce the impostor publicly is to him a matter of principle; but he finds that such general principles cannot stand in the face of Lucilla’s particularity. Thus Mr. Cavendish, the man of generalities, both rises and falls through particulars. The fact is that general and particular converge, as Mr. Cavendish memorably demonstrates when he tries to disguise himself. After seeing the Archdeacon, who has not yet clearly seen him, Mr. Cavendish grows a beard, hoping to avoid being singled out by his old enemy. “[B]ut if such had been Mr Cavendish’s intention, it had utterly failed, since he seemed rather more like himself than before, in Lucilla’s opinion, and certainly was more likely to attract attention” (165). The more he tries to blend in with everyone else, the more individual he seems.

As for the Archdeacon himself, he is introduced into the novel in the same way as the General—as a figure, or a function, rather than an individual. Like the General, he is first mentioned before anyone in Carlingford has yet met him, but he is known to be an Archdeacon and *ipso facto* is discussed as a possible match for Lucilla: “‘My dear, he is a clergyman,’ said Mrs Chiley, putting her hand on Miss Marjoribanks’s arm, and speaking in a half whisper; ‘and you know a nice clergyman is always nice, and you need not think of him as a young man unless you like’” (127). The Archdeacon is not actually named for the first time until he is introduced to Lucilla. But even then Colonel Chiley, seeing them together, immediately reduces him to a type again: “‘We used to have the best of it in our day,’ said the old soldier; ‘but now you churchmen are the men’” (137). Lucilla herself agrees, viewing the Archdeacon, not even as a

“nice clergyman” (like Mrs. Chiley), but merely (like Colonel Chiley) as one of “the men”—and as such, an inveterate generalist. When the Archdeacon begins to describe his old nemesis, for instance, whom he believes he has glimpsed at Lucilla’s house, she stops him: “[Y]ou gentlemen can never describe anybody—you always keep to *generals*” (151; italics in original).

To be sure, Lucilla herself is generalizing when she makes this accusation, and the narrator does the same. The Archdeacon is distinguished by his tendency to speak in broad generalities, but we are also repeatedly informed that all men do the same. On the subject of Lucilla’s party, for instance:

He said again, with the natural obtuseness which is so general among the gentlemen, that it had been a very pleasant party. “She [Lucilla] has a fine clear candid nature,” said Mr Beverley, which certainly was better than pronouncing solemnly that she was a good woman, which was what he said of Mrs Chiley and Lady Richmond, in the lump, as it were, without considering how unlike they were to each other. That was all he, being only a man, knew about it. (157)

It is debatable whether this passage offers Lucilla’s opinion, in free indirect discourse, or the narrator’s. Either way, it is notable that the Archdeacon is granted the distinction of a proper name (Mr. Beverley) when he makes his one semi-discriminating remark, before being once again lumped together with all other men at the end—lumped even as he himself lumps. The same narratorial effect recurs not long afterward, when Lucilla takes him, by chance, into Mrs. Mortimer’s garden:

“Mrs Chiley is a good, pure, gentle woman,” said the Archdeacon. He spoke in a tone which settled the question, and from which there was no appeal; and no doubt what he

said was perfectly true, though it was not a very distinct characterization. Thus they went in together into the bright little garden, thinking of nothing particular. (195)

“Nothing very particular,” as it happens, are the first words that Lucilla speaks to the General upon being introduced to him (240). The phrase sums up Lucilla’s opinion of her suitors as a genus.

But the sight of Mrs. Mortimer, his old flame, shocks the Archdeacon out of generalities. He is outraged to find her reduced to living in the tiny house and garden Lucilla has provided for her. “[F]ancy what my feelings naturally must have been to find her an object of charity—actually of charity!” he exclaims to Lucilla, before recognizing that his personal feelings have gotten the better of his Christian principles: “‘I don’t mean to say,’ said Mr Beverley, controlling himself, ‘that it is degrading to accept succour when given as from man to man—quite the contrary; but you will excuse me from entering into the general question’ (217-18). When the Archdeacon eventually proposes to Mrs. Mortimer, “the general question” once again gives way to specifics. Just as in the case of Tom’s proposal, the Archdeacon ends up subordinating matrimony to domestic décor:

Oddly enough at that moment his Rectory rose suddenly before him as in a vision—his Rectory, all handsome and sombre, without a soul in it, room after room uninhabited, and not a sound to be heard, except that of his own foot or his servant’s. It was curious what connection there could be between that and the garden, with its four walls, and the tiny cottage covered with Westeria. ... “I’ll tell you what we must do, Helen,” he said, confidentially—“we must go back to Basing together, you and I. I don’t see the good of leaving you by yourself here. You can make what alterations you like when you get to the Rectory[”] ... and then he added in a parenthesis, as if she had expressed some

ridiculous doubt on the subject, “Of course I mean that we should be married before we go away.” (310)²⁹

The consequence of this very practical proposal is to provide the Archdeacon with not only a local habitation but a name: he and his wife become “the two people henceforward to be known in Carlingford as ‘the Beverleys’” (319). Whatever the Archdeacon may lose in distinction by marrying the humble widow, he gains in particularity.

The Political Plot: Him or Me

The plot of the final volume of *Miss Marjoribanks* centers largely on a political contest. When the old Member of Parliament for Carlingford finally dies, Lucilla determines, in a sudden flash of inspiration, that his place should be filled by Mr. Ashburton, a local landowner who is now introduced into the novel for the first time. Mr. Ashburton, as it happens, was already planning to stand for the seat, though he had not yet made his intention known to anyone, and he soon accepts Lucilla as the *de facto* manager of his campaign. She experiences a moment of regret when her old friend and admirer, Mr. Cavendish, returns from a long sojourn abroad to run for the same office. But she nevertheless stands by her original choice and, after a tightly contested campaign, sees her candidate through to victory.

Any narrative involving parliamentary politics, as has been mentioned, necessarily involves questions of the particular and the general, since it involves an individual serving as a type or representative of the community as a whole.³⁰ But in Lucilla’s hands this ever present paradox is brought insistently to the fore and becomes the election’s chief and explicit grounds of debate. Mr. Ashburton sets out, as is only natural, intending to make his specific political opinions known to the electors of Carlingford, but he is immediately and firmly corrected by

Lucilla. Particular opinions will only divide the electorate, she explains to him. The path to victory lies in generality—in convincing everyone, whatever their political inclinations, that he is simply more admirable and suitable than his opponent: “[W]hat does it matter about opinions? I am sure I have heard you all saying over and over that the thing was to have a good *man*. Don’t go and make speeches about opinions” (340). Lucilla soon boils this sentiment down into a pithier slogan, or catchphrase—“Mr Ashburton, it is the Man that is wanted” (341)—and in that form it soon begins to be repeated, not just by Lucilla and Mr. Ashburton, but all over town.

Yet both the phrase itself and its status as a catchphrase are inherently ambiguous. Like Lucilla’s “They,” “the Man” carries opposing implications. Is the Man desirable because he is generally acceptable, having renounced personal opinions and ideologies? Or is the Man desirable because of his individuality—because he is not, like the Liberal or the Conservative candidate, a faceless cog in a political machine, but an independent entity, irreducibly himself? The answer, unsurprisingly, is both, because the one implies the other. “The Man” is recognized as an outstanding individual, but outstanding precisely in his typicality, his ability to represent all people (or at least all other men). In his initial address to his fellow citizens, which he writes under Lucilla’s influence, Mr. Ashburton presents himself in both guises at once. He comes forward as “an independent candidate, unconnected with party,” and hence in his words able to follow “his own judgment”; at the same time, rejecting any “political creed,” whether personal or prefabricated, he proposes only, in the most unspecific way, “to do his duty by his country, his borough, and his constituency” (344-45).

Lucilla appears to have fixed on Mr. Ashburton as her candidate specifically because he is lacking in any distinguishing features. The most that can be said about him is that he is “steady”: “Nothing could have made Mr Ashburton socially attractive, but still there are many

people to whom this steady sort of talk is more agreeable than brilliancy” (374). “[H]e goes at everything in a steady sort of way,” as one of Mr. Cavendish’s advisors observes; “He’s not brilliant, you know, but he’s sure” (385). In a book full of generic male characters, Ashburton manages to stand out as the most nondescript of all:

[H]e never refused to dine with Dr Marjoribanks, and was generally popular up-stairs, where he always paid a little attention to Lucilla, though nothing very marked and noticeable. Mr Ashburton was not like Mr Cavendish, for instance (if anybody remembered Mr Cavendish), a man whose money might be in the Funds, but who more probably speculated. Everybody knew everything about him, which was an ease to the public mind. (336)

This is the first description of the Man we are given, even before Lucilla has experienced her revelation about his candidacy, and it is purposefully vague; the discourse never rises above the level of double negative (“never refused”) or generality (“generally popular”). Yet at the same time that this description strips Mr. Ashburton of any “marked and noticeable” characteristics, it also gives him a solidity and even a sense of distinction that Mr. Cavendish lacks. “Everybody knew everything about him,” not only in general but in particular: “People knew how much money he had a-year ... people knew the kinds [of wine] he had, and how much, and a hundred agreeable details” (371). Hence it is not at all clear which candidate stands out more distinctly in the minds of his fellow citizens; both are distinct and indistinct at once. Mr. Cavendish is certainly more interesting, to the point of being quite dashing and romantic. Yet if no one seems to remember him, that is because his mysterious behavior, which is precisely what makes him so interesting, also renders him vague; even his speculation is only a matter of speculation. Mr. Ashburton, by contrast, is undistinguished in exact proportion as his habits, like his wine, can be

distinctly itemized. The extremes meet and merge, until even the usually discriminating Dr. Marjoribanks cannot tell them apart: “This comparison [between the candidates] went on in the Doctor’s thoughts until the distinction between the two grew confused and faint” (354).

The duality embodied by Lucilla’s catchphrase about “the Man” applies to her catchphrases in general. Lucilla’s habit of repeating certain ideas or opinions, usually *verbatim*, is as distinctive a character trait as her idiosyncratic use of pronouns. Indeed one of her catchphrases, perhaps the most often repeated of all, contains an unantecedented pronoun: “If I had been thinking of that, I need never have come home at all”—meaning that if she had wished for marriage (“that”), she could have accepted an offer while still away at school and never returned to Carlingford. The unexplained “that,” like the equivalent “They,” implies a specific context: the pronoun is intelligible only to someone who already knows the particulars of Lucilla’s situation, and the sentence as a whole could only be spoken by her. Yet other, equally characteristic catchphrases of Lucilla’s quickly escape such specificity and pass into general circulation:

“It is one of my principles always to flirt in the middle of the company,” said Lucilla; and again, as happened so often, ignorant people laughed and thought it a *bon mot*. But it is needless to inform the more intelligent persons who understand Miss Marjoribanks, that it was by no means a *bon mot*, but expressed Lucilla’s convictions with the utmost sincerity. (99)

This particular saying is as peculiar to Lucilla as the other, since no one else in town holds this principle. But this one is received as a *bon mot*, a saying whose value resides in its iterability, its capacity to be generally taken up and transferred. Such is the fate of many of Lucilla’s sayings.

As Hope Rogers observes, “the catchphrases’ repeatability gives them the status of memes, cultural units that can spread through the community.”³¹

Of none of Lucilla’s catchphrases is this more true than of her political one. To focus on “the Man” rather than his opinions is a stroke of political genius of which only Lucilla is capable, as most of the other characters recognize. Yet from the first she declares it common wisdom—“I am sure I have heard you all saying over and over that the thing was to have a good *man*”—and she encourages Mr. Ashburton to take it up as his personal battle cry. Further, she then cunningly fathers it on some of her neighbors who might otherwise have inclined toward Cavendish, convincing each one that he was the originator of the phrase and the idea. ““I have always heard you say, as long as I can remember, that it was not opinions, you know, but a good *man* the people wanted,”” she tells Colonel Chiley (363). Shortly afterward she persuades Major Brown that it was his utterance of those words that induced Mr. Ashburton to run in the first place: ““[A]nd then you said, What did it matter about opinions, if it was a good man?—that was what decided him”” (373). The phrase, like the Man at its center, manages to be particular and commonplace at once.

The marital and political narratives converge in the novel’s final chapters, when Mr. Ashburton makes up his mind to propose to Lucilla. The two plots have already overlapped. The Archdeacon, for instance, is repeatedly referred to as a “candidate” for Lucilla’s favor (156, 170, 241). And Lucilla seriously considers Mr. Cavendish as a marriage prospect because it is assumed that he will someday be a Member of Parliament:

“[A]s for your conception of social politics, it is masterly,” the future MP added, in a tone which struck Lucilla as very significant; not that she cared particularly about Mr Cavendish’s meaning, but still, when a young man who intends to go into Parliament

congratulates a young lady upon her statesmanlike views, and her conception of politics, it must be confessed that it looks a little particular; and then, if that was what he meant, it was no doubt Lucilla's duty to make up her mind. (90)

This passage mingles the language of politics with the novel's peculiar idiom of marriage: the repeated mention of "particular[s]"; the unantecedented "that" at the end. But Mr. Ashburton is both more politic than Mr. Cavendish—he is a real rather than just a potential MP—and also more particular. When he starts to consider proposing, shortly before the election, his thoughts naturally turn to matters of home décor: "Mr Ashburton took a walk through his own house that evening, and examined all its capabilities—with no particular motive, as he was at pains to explain to his housekeeper" (434). Once he is actually elected, he dispenses with the pretense of having "no particular motive" and attends to the details of his home furnishings in earnest: "[T]he new Member felt himself truly a lover; and late as the hour was, he took up a candle and once more made a survey all alone of his solitary house. ... There were the odd little spider-legged stands ... and the old sofas" (460). Just like Tom's proposal and the Archdeacon's, Mr. Ashburton's is inevitably bound up with questions of furniture.

Yet just as Mr. Ashburton is beginning his carefully prepared speech to Lucilla the next day and the two plots are about to join and so conclude, in bursts cousin Tom after a ten year absence. Mr. Ashburton breaks off and leaves the scene, and Tom, having overturned the furniture in his rush to get up to the drawing room, reduces the whole situation to a pair of unantecedented pronouns: "'Lucilla,' said Tom, and there was decision in his eye, 'somebody came down-stairs as I came in. I want to know whether it is to be him or me?'" (472). Lucilla, for once, is at a loss. The question, in contrast to Mr. Ashburton's delicately roundabout proposal, is so direct yet at the same time so unspecific. She points out that Tom has never met

“him” and has no reason to think that “he” wanted to marry her. But Tom persists, turning his question into a sort of catchphrase: “[Y]ou can’t be left by yourself in the world. Will you have him or me?” ... ‘Will you have him or me?’ repeated Tom” (472-73). Tom succeeds, in part because he instinctively adopts Lucilla’s language and her tactics. He declines to give particular reasons why he would be a suitable candidate for her hand but presents himself simply as the better Man. Yet in doing so, he also marks himself out as signally different from the rest of Them. Tom maintains the same idiom when he presses her to name a date, referring to their marriage simply as “It” (without antecedent, of course)—“‘The thing is, Lucilla, to decide when you will ... let It be’”—to which Lucilla responds in kind: “[I]f we were to do exactly as *he* [her father] wished, I don’t think It would ever be” (481). Tom’s unorthodox proposal is perfectly worded: it uses language so general in its reference that it ends up forming a shared language particular to the two of them.

In this sense Tom’s pronouns, like Lucilla’s, speak volumes. *Miss Marjoribanks* constantly reminds us how easily the distinction between generality and particularity collapses. That collapse occurs in the first place, as we have seen, at the level of individual words (pronouns, articles)—which is why the phenomenon is not restricted to the realist novel but appears just as prominently in lyric poetry like Tennyson’s. And it occurs as well at the level of narrative. The interplay between general and particular in narrative works derives not only from what Gallagher calls “the strife between type and instance”—that is, between general, recognizable plot types, like the marriage plot, and their particular instantiation in any given work of fiction.³² Rather, as Oliphant’s novel demonstrates, the “types” themselves—the marriage plot, the election plot—already conflate the two categories. In its elucidation of this tendency of the novel, and of art in general, lies the particular genius of *Miss Marjoribanks*.

¹ Charles Darwin, *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection* (London: John Murray, 1859), p. 236 (chapter 7; chapter 8 in later editions).

² *Ibid.*, p. 237.

³ On the history of these concepts, which remain debated, see David Sloan Wilson, *Does Altruism Exist? Culture, Genes, and the Welfare of Others* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015).

⁴ Margaret Oliphant, *Miss Marjoribanks*, ed. Elisabeth Jay (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1998), p. 100; all subsequent citations refer to this edition and are given parenthetically. Lucilla repeats her action at the end of the second volume when she once again, with some regret, relinquishes Mr Cavendish, this time definitively: “She had sacrificed her own inclination ... to what she believed to be the general good” (322-23).

⁵ Elisabeth Jay, “Introduction,” *Miss Marjoribanks*, p. xxv. Jay herself was at the forefront of those critics who, in the 1980s and 1990s, followed Leavis’s lead and helped reestablish Oliphant’s reputation.

⁶ In a recent analysis Hope Rogers usefully lists those who argue that Lucilla “unreflectively embodies the conventions she uses,” those who believe she “consciously subverts” them, and those who find the question ambiguous. See Hope Rogers, “The Flat Heroine: Character and Agency in *Miss Marjoribanks*,” *Victorian Literature and Culture* 47 (2019), 691-721, pp. 692 and 716, n. 4.

⁷ In addition to Lucilla, critics have pointed out a number of minor characters who similarly contribute to the novel’s self-conscious treatment of narrative and representation. On these topics see especially Gail Turley Houston, *Royalties: The Queen and Victorian Writers*

(Virginia, 1999), pp. 154-57; Melissa Schaub, "Queen of the Air or Constitutional Monarch?: Idealism, Irony, and Narrative Power in *Miss Marjoribanks*," *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 55 (2000), 195-225, pp. 204-11; Emily Blair, *Virginia Woolf and the Nineteenth-Century Domestic Novel* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2007), pp. 137-70, esp. 163-64; Tamara S. Wagner, "Marriage Plots and 'Matters of More Importance': Sensationalising Self-Sacrifice in Victorian Domestic Fiction," in *Anti-Feminism and the Victorian Novel: Rereading Nineteenth-Century Women Writers*, ed. Tamara S. Wagner (Amherst, NY: Cambria Press, 2009), 137-57, pp. 137-38; and Susan Zlotnick, "Passing for Real: Class and Mimicry in *Miss Marjoribanks*," *Victorian Review* 38 (2012), 173-92, p 176.

⁸ Catherine Gallagher, "George Eliot: Immanent Victorian," *Representations* 90 (2005), 61-74, p. 61. Gallagher's essay provides perhaps the most compact and compelling critical treatment yet of the novel's negotiation of generals and particulars. In my account of how *Miss Marjoribanks* exemplifies this process, I am often building on points or ideas raised by Gallagher.

⁹ See Jonathan Farina, *Everyday Words and the Character of Prose in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017). I am indebted throughout to Farina's study, especially chapter 2 on "Jane Austen in 'particular' and in 'general'" (pp. 38-93) and chapter 4, which among other things considers the "charge" carried by "pronouns ... lacking clear and immediate antecedents" (p. 137).

¹⁰ Oscar Wilde, "The Preface," *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (London: Ward, Lock, 1891), p. vii.

¹¹ In addition to the instances cited below, see pp. 354 ("If it is a very particular friend, I can understand it"), 364 ("If you have any *particular* reason, Lucilla, you ought to tell me"), and 464 ("I suppose there is no doubt he will have something very particular to say"); in each case, particularity means marriage, or the intention to marry.

¹² “Mariana,” lines 1-4; in *The Poems of Tennyson*, ed. Christopher Ricks, 2nd ed (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987). All subsequent quotations from Tennyson’s poetry refer to this edition. The “pear” in Tennyson’s poem was a “peach” in the poem’s first edition (1830), and was changed only in 1862, shortly before Oliphant began writing her novel. By contrast “gable-wall” was “garden-wall” as late as 1868, in keeping with the novel’s repeated invocation of a walled garden.

¹³ “Mariana,” lines 61, 29.

¹⁴ “Mariana,” lines 67-68.

¹⁵ For a history of criticism on the lady poems, see Linda H. Peterson, “Tennyson and the Ladies,” *Victorian Poetry* 47 (2009), 25-43.

¹⁶ H. Rider Haggard, *She: A History of Adventure*, ed. Andrew M. Stauffer (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2006), p. 101.

¹⁷ Haggard, *She*, p. 263.

¹⁸ Gail Turley Houston, one of the few critics to have mentioned this feature of the novel, views it as entirely condescending: “Consistently referring to men as ‘they’ or ‘them,’ the narrator constructs the masculine sex as a group of lesser, alien beings who cannot do without the guidance of women” (Houston, *Royalties*, p. 157). But Lucilla herself concedes that the condescension masks an underlying dependence: “As for Miss Marjoribanks herself, she confessed frankly that she did her best to please *Them*. ‘For you know, after all, in Carlingford, one is obliged to take them into consideration,’ she said, with a natural apology” (*Miss Marjoribanks*, p. 105). Although it is tempting to relate Lucilla’s use of the pronoun to the twenty-first-century use of “they” as a gender-neutral signifier, its effect is almost exactly the

opposite: her “They” may turn the tables on Victorian gender assumptions, but it remains strictly gendered and binary.

¹⁹ Likewise, in theological discourse, “type” can refer either to a divine archetype or to that which figures it forth. See Matthew Rowlinson, “History, Materiality and Type in Tennyson’s *In Memoriam*,” in *Darwin, Tennyson and Their Readers*, ed. Valerie Purton (London: Anthem, 2013), 35-48, esp. pp. 35-40.

²⁰ Rowlinson, “History, Materiality and Type,” p. 39, emphasis added. For an example of the use of “type” to mean that which is simultaneously the most distinguished and the most characteristic, consider Wilde’s dictum, “[T]he type of all the arts is the art of the musician” (“Preface,” p. vi).

²¹ “Mariana,” lines 1-6.

²² Thomas De Quincey, “Style,” *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine* 48 (September, 1840), 387-98, p. 397. Note that De Quincey is speaking here of the definite article in ancient Greek, although he says that its function there is “very much the same as in English” (*ibid.*). I am grateful to Sarah Weaver for drawing my attention to this passage.

²³ *Oxford English Dictionary Online* (oed.com), “the,” A. I, A. II; accessed November 16, 2019.

²⁴ An unscientific search of ProQuest’s *British Periodicals* database (proquest.com/britishperiodicals; accessed November 20, 2019) turned up 179 hits for “the *Paradise Lost*” from 1850-60; 42 hits from 1900-10; none at all from 1950-60. The practice of putting “the” before the name of eponymous Greek tragedies (“the *Antigone*”) faded fitfully over the course of the twentieth century. In a standard mid-century translation, “*The Medea*” appears in the same volume as “*Alcestis*” and “*Hippolytus*”; see *Euripides*, vol. 1, ed. Richmond Lattimore (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956)—though note that “*The Medea*,” with

the article included as if it actually formed part of the title, would have been considered incorrect at any time.

²⁵ The decline of this usage is both more recent and more uneven than the other. Some genres require the article (“a history of the sonnet”), some require its absence (“a history of tragedy”), some are equivocal (“a history of (the) elegy”).

²⁶ “Claribel,” lines 9-21.

²⁷ Thus “the gray squirrel” means at the same time “the gray squirrel I see right in front of me” and “the gray squirrel, common to all parts of North America.” On nineteenth-century perceptions of animals as both individual and typical of the species, see Matthew Margini, “Incoherent Beasts: Victorian Literature and the Problem of Species,” PhD Dissertation (Columbia University, 2018).

²⁸ On “functional” characters, see Alex Woloch, *The One vs. the Many: Minor Characters and the Space of the Protagonist in the Novel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), pp. 89-97.

²⁹ Lucilla’s response to the Archdeacon’s marriage is very much the same as her response to Tom’s proposal. Happy though she is to see the conclusion of the marriage plot that she herself has all but scripted, she cannot help being annoyed by its disturbance of the household arrangements she has likewise arranged: “I am very glad about Mrs Mortimer, to be sure, that she is to be settled so nicely, and that they are going to be married at last. But, after all, when one thinks of it, it is a little vexatious. Just when her house was all put to rights, and the garden looking so pretty” (319).

³⁰ Oliphant explicitly recognizes that voting confounds the general and particular. In “The Great Unrepresented,” an article published in the same year that *Miss Marjoribanks* finished its serial

publication and in the same journal, Oliphant responds to John Stuart Mill's attempt as a recently elected member of parliament to extend the franchise to female householders. Oliphant vehemently rejects Mill's proposal, on the grounds that it generalizes what is or ought to be particular, in three distinct and equally objectionable ways. First, it lumps women, even those who are proud of "our distinctive character as women," together with men into a single category. Second, it extrapolates from the demands of a few women to assume that all women desire the franchise, without recognizing "how great and grievous a mistake it would be to legislate for one half of humanity on the basis of the wants and wishes of a small and exceptional class." Finally, the offer is inherently indiscriminate: "It looks like the kind of vague, benevolent desire to give a *protégée* something, which occasionally stirs the mind of men who are imperfectly acquainted with women. What would she like? It must be something general—a present to the sex." See Margaret Oliphant, "The Great Unrepresented," *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, vol. 100 (September, 1866), 367-79, pp. 372, 377, 378. On this topic see Michelle Mouton, "Margaret Oliphant and John Stuart Mill: Disinterested Politicians and the 1865 General Election," *Dickens Studies Annual* 35 (2005), 209-239. See also Melissa Schaub's illuminating discussion of Oliphant's resistance to idealization, gendered or otherwise (Schaub, "Queen of the Air," esp. 217-25).

³¹ Rogers, "The Flat Heroine," p. 703. Lucilla's catchphrases have received slightly more attention than her pronouns. In addition to Rogers's excellent article, which considers them as indicative of Lucilla's status as a flat character (pp. 702-5), see also the briefer treatments by Linda Peterson, "The Female *Bildungsroman*: Tradition and Subversion in Oliphant's Fiction," in *Margaret Oliphant: Critical Essays on a Gentle Subversive*, ed. D.J. Trela (Selinsgrove:

Susquehanna University Press, 1995), 66-89, pp. 71-72, and Mouton, "Margaret Oliphant and John Stuart Mill," pp. 222-23.

³² Gallagher, "George Eliot: Immanent Victorian," p. 67.