

'What's in a name?'

Mrs. Oliphant and her most prized possession

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A man finds himself praised on all sides even perhaps with a kind of enthusiasm by the lips of his publisher himself: he is told (but this not generally by the lips of the publisher) that his book is read everywhere, and that the opinion of the general public coincides with that of his literary friends. To be a little elated, to hold his head in the air, and to expect wealth and distinction to follow, are very natural things; but it must be allowed that in a great many instances they do not follow to any great extent, and the author stands bewildered, hearing perhaps (as happens in some cases) that the publisher has even lost by this successful publication of his. What does it mean?¹

(Mrs. M. O. Oliphant, *Annals of a Publishing House*)

What it means, of course, is that publishers and authors very often have different notions of what constitutes 'success'. However, the category in itself is further put to interrogation when a female author markets her literature primarily as a commodity—a product sold in the literary marketplace to provide the income that might satisfy the demands of her endless and overwhelming family responsibilities. Under such circumstances, her name becomes one of her most prized possessions. It should not come as a surprise then that Mrs. Oliphant attached great importance to the correct usage of her name and furthermore, only