

Ouida's Publishing History: Prolific Then, Peripheral Now

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This article examines the popular and non-canonical Victorian novelist Ouida (Maria Louise de la Ramée) and her relationship with her publishers. In particular, through the study of nineteenth and twentieth-century criticism as well as correspondence, certain views concerning the writer and her oeuvre will be revised and amended, especially in the context of social and moral standards anticipated from the female artist, the writer. The analysis will concentrate on the author's reputation and sales and the fact that they were not only injured by her ostensibly immoral plots, as many claimed, but also by her publishers'—primarily Chapman & Hall and Chatto & Windus—differing priorities and conflicting opinions in their personal and professional relationship. So, although viewed by biographers and critics as an eccentric person to work with, this article will reveal that Ouida was not treated fairly by her publishers, who chiefly sought for financial security. The examination of Ouida's publishing affairs here will trace one of the paths that led to the gradual decline in her reputation and the posterior obscurity of her works.

*Everybody is so talented now-a-days that the only people
I care to honour as deserving real distinction are those who remain in obscurity.*

Thomas Hardy in *The Hand of Ethelberta* (1875)

This essay will be concentrating on a marginalized Victorian writer, Ouida (Louise de la Ramée). Although this author has played a fundamental role in the lives and works of authors such as Oscar Wilde and Ronald Firbank, and had bestselling novels in her time, she is scarcely mentioned by critics in the twentieth and twenty-first century (Poster 287). It is said that “she appealed to the likes of Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu, Mary Elizabeth Braddon and Mrs. Henry Wood” writers who were recognized for their gothic sensationalism (Marchovitz 240). In his work *A Victorian Publisher*, Royal A. Gettmann notes that for the period between 1865 and 1885 a three-decker novel would be written either by Mrs. Henry Wood (1814-1887), Mary Elizabeth Braddon, Rhoda Broughton, or Ouida (248). In 2000 Talia Schaffer published *The Forgotten Fe-*

male Aesthetes in which she presents certain women writers that were disregarded in the midst of the nineteenth century primarily due to their sex and unethical content of their writings. These women and many others challenged the boundaries of conventional literature, engaging with motifs such as adultery, seduction, physical and mental abuse, sadism and masochism, chauvinism, avarice, and prostitution, subjects which most female Victorian writers evaded. Ouida, being one of them, endured dramatic vicissitudes in her career, since, apart from being a spinster author of unconventional novels, she wrote in a time when the form of the novel and publishing techniques and laws underwent rapid changes; and from a highly popular and profitable writer, Ouida died penniless.

She published forty-seven novels in her lifetime and had two main firms publishing her works: Chapman & Hall, and Chatto & Windus. Her first novel, *Held in Bondage* (1863), was published by the Tinsley Brothers (1854-1887) and was also the only novel she printed with them, since she moved to Chapman & Hall the same year (Newbolt 76). The authoress worked with her first major publishers from 1863 to 1876, and after they sold the copyrights of her books to Chatto & Windus in 1874, the latter became her publishers until 1885, and afterwards sporadically up until 1894. From 1885 and onwards, she published her work with approximately twelve different firms, including more often with T. Fisher Unwin.

Miss de la Ramée was nineteen years of age and lived in Hammersmith, when most probably her neighbor and medical physician Dr. Francis W. Ainsworth introduced the young writer to his cousin, William Harrison Ainsworth (Ellis 234). According to Stewart Marsh Ellis's biography, *William Harrison Ainsworth and his Friends*, Ainsworth, editor and later owner of the magazines *Bentley's Miscellany* (1837-1868) and *The New Monthly Magazine* (1814-1884) was the man who had discovered Ouida: "It is not generally known that Ainsworth 'discovered' Ouida, and that it was under his guidance and editorship that the talented novelist commenced her literary career in the pages of *Bentley's Miscellany*" (234). The magazine was founded in 1837 by printer and publisher Richard Bentley and, according to Brake and Demoor in the *Dictionary of Nineteenth-Century Journalism in Great Britain and Ireland*, the magazine's proprietor sought to publish new work by renowned writers rather than reprinting, and "promising a feast of wit and humour, rather than a diet of political and personal scraps" (50). *Bentley's Miscellany* published and serialized Dickens's first works as well as authors such as Washington Irving and Charles Mackay (51); other prominent authors included George Hogarth, Mrs. Trollope, Mary Howitt, John Stuart, and Charles Reade. As other magazines and newspapers at that time, in several cases, instead of including the author's name in an article or story, *Bentley's* simply referred to a previous work for which the author was known in order to indicate their identity.¹ This "technique" emphasized that the author was al-

1. Ouida's name was always printed in *Bentley's*, whereas Mrs. Wood was referred to as "from the author of..." a previous work or there was no reference to the author's identity what-

ready famous for another work, therefore a disclosure of the name was deemed unnecessary.²

However, in other cases, such as the one of Mrs Henry (Ellen) Wood in *Bentley's Miscellany*,³ several authors and reviewers remained anonymous or used pseudonyms when publishing for journals and magazines.⁴ Gilbert and Gubar, in an essay included in Domna C. Stanton's *The Female Autograph*, write that "certainly, as we all now recognize, by the mid-nineteenth century the male pseudonym was quite specifically a mask behind which a female writer could hide her disreputable femininity" (28). Marie Louise de la Ramée, in particular, not only used "Ouida" as a pseudonym but also, perhaps deliberately, ignored the fact that she was also presumed a male writer. Bentley sold his magazine to Ainsworth in November 1854 for £1,700, "and its content briefly revived under the new proprietor and experienced editor, becoming somewhat more political and topical [...] while rediscovering its literary distinction, with serials by Ellen (Mrs Henry) Wood and fast stories of military and fashionable life by 'Ouida'" (Brake and Demoor 51).⁵ Although these women contributed to the resurgence of the magazine and published stories in almost every issue, their careers were limited to serialization, which unlike the case of Dickens, was not lucrative. Fortunately, Ouida managed to escape from this rut early in her career and evaded it as long as she could afford to.

Ouida's first contribution to *Bentley's Miscellany* was in 1859, a short story entitled *Dashwood's Drag; or the Derby and What Came of It* (Ellis 234-35).

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- soever. When the magazine used "the author of," the previous work was published by the same magazine, exhibiting a consistency in the relationship of author and magazine. It also identified the work of an author with a certain magazine, thus creating a public identity for both parties. In *The New Monthly Magazine* Mrs. Wood preserved her anonymity, and became "the author of" a previous work after her first work with the magazine was published in 1853, while Ouida's name wasn't mentioned throughout her collaboration with *The New Monthly*. Instead she was referred to as "the author of *Granville De Vigne*" after the magazine published the complete work in 1863 and later as "the author [of] *Granville De Vigne* and *Strathmore*." See *The New Monthly Magazine* issues between 1861 and 1865.
2. However, the reference of Charles Reade's name was not consistent in *Bentley's*; either his name was included, or the name and "the author of," or simply "the author of." See *Bentley's* issues after 1854.
 3. Frances Elliot (*née* Dickinson) also publishes anonymously in *Bentley's* and later in other journals and magazines with the pseudonym "Florentia" (Peters 65).
 4. Eliza Cook (1812-1889) in the *Metropolitan Magazine* and *New Monthly Magazine*, Dilkie Emilia (1840-1904) in the *Westminster Review* (1869-1875), Ella Nora Hepworth Dixon (1857-1932) in Yates's *World*, Wilde's *Woman's World* and Arnold Bennett's *Woman*, Vernon Lee (1856-1935) and Katharine De Mattos (1851-1939), reviewers for the *Athenaeum* (1828-1921). The *Edinburgh Review* (1802-1929) preserved the policy of anonymity for all contributions until 1912. See Brake and Demoor.
 5. Ouida's short stories and novels, up to the 1870s, were preoccupied with the aristocracy and gentry, the nineteenth-century "landed" families, as well as "the middling sort" and "the monied," whereas later in her writing she is concerned with the two brinks, the interaction between upper and lower classes.

Ainsworth was so satisfied with the story that before the end of 1860 he had published seventeen tales by the new writer. Even though most of them have not been reprinted after the nineteenth century, “it was these short stories which brought the young authoress her first fame, and by the end of 1860 she was one of the chief attractions in *Bentley’s Miscellany*” (235). In the magazine’s annual Epilogue for 1860, written possibly by the current editor, Ainsworth, he writes as a representative of *Bentley’s*: “We offer not our own opinion, but that of a host of critical commentators, when we say that few periodical writers have suddenly achieved a greater success than the contributor who has chosen the fanciful designation of ‘OUIDA’; whose sketches of society, both in England and the Continent are as graceful as they are accurate” (*Bentley’s Miscellany* 651-52). Ouida published precisely twenty short stories in Bentley’s magazine from 1859 until 1862 before publishing her first three-decker novel in 1863.⁶

Acquiring fame rapidly, Ouida published her first long novel in serial form, *Granville de Vigne, a Tale of the Day*,⁷ in *The New Monthly Magazine*, from January 1861 until June 1863, once again thanks to Ainsworth who was the magazine’s owner and editor at the time.⁸ *The New Monthly*—first owned by an established publisher—along with the *Metropolitan Magazine* (1831-50) was one of the most expensive monthly magazines when serial publications began to appear regularly, priced at 3s 6d per issue, attesting the magazine’s status as well as Ainsworth’s confidence in Ouida’s works (Law 16-17). Deborah Wynne in *The Sensation Novel and the Victorian Family Magazine* argues that numerous women writers were exploited by Ainsworth including Ouida and Wood who were paid small amounts for their serializations; he refused to publish their novels in order to avoid standard rate but they eventually threatened to publish their short stories with another magazine if he did not serialize their novels (36). Ainsworth possibly delayed this from happening intimidated by the possibility of the two women becoming more famous if proceeding with the serialization of novels instead of stories and then subsequently transferring to publishing houses and the three-decker novel. Wood willingly remained unpaid for eight years for her contributions to the *New Monthly Magazine* and Ainsworth initially refused to publish *East Lynne* (63, 36). However, the fact that he accepted the publication of Ouida’s first serial novel, only two years after she had begun publishing in the magazine, exhibits a fair amount

6. “Commentators” either refers to the reviewers and editors of the magazine such as Ainsworth, Dickens, and Albert Smith, or to comments concerning Ouida’s works with *Bentley’s* from 1859 when she began publishing with them. Periodicals that refer to Ouida and her short stories within these two years are the *John Bull and Britannia* and *Bell’s Life in London and Sporting Chronicle*.

7. *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* mistakenly cites the novel as serialized by Bentley’s magazine in 1863.

8. Ainsworth bought *The New Monthly* in 1845 and sold it to Chapman & Hall in 1870. See Ellis II: 112, 267 and Brake and Demoor 444. He also bought *Bentley’s* in 1854 and was the owner until its last issue in 1868. See Brake and Demoor 51.

of confidence in her work since she was clearly less experienced than Mrs. Wood.

Ouida began her writing career in *Bentley's Miscellany* in 1859 at a time when "serialized sensation fiction filled the pages of the shilling magazines during the 1860's and into the 1870's" (Palmer 9). This is hardly coincidental since, although not as sensational as Braddon or Marryat, Ouida's stories shared the rhetoric of the gaudy, the body and the risqué, attributed to sensation literature. Wynne argues that the serialization of sensation fiction in monthly magazines enriched the cultural authority of both serial writers and the periodical press: "The fact that the sensation genre and the cheap middle class magazine emerged together as 'modern' forms sharing the same cultural space is scarcely coincidental. The discourse which was forged by this partnership was useful to both serial novelists and journalists as a way of articulating problems of modernity" (2).⁹ Ouida's fiction, like Braddon and Collins's, examined supposed immoralistic motifs, increasingly defiant and assertive female characters, femme fatales, marriages of convenience and matrimonial/divorce law, and social issues that were prevalent in mid-Victorian era.

After *Granville de Vigne's* magazine publication was concluded, the firm Tinsley Brothers published it in a three-decker volume under a new title: *Held in Bondage*, preserving the former title as a subtitle. According to Graham Polard it seems that during the whole of the Victorian period, a substantial bulk of novels, before being published in three-decker volumes, had formerly appeared in monthly or weekly magazines in the form of installments (271y-77). According to Brake and Demoor, volume publication was considered a risk by publishers due to its high expenditure whereas "[...] serialized fiction is far more economically sensitive to reader response, as the purchase of a poorly written serial can be dropped by readers part way through in a way that volume publication cannot" (32). Therefore, Ouida's ardent circumvention of serialization for almost a decade thereafter denotes that she was a "risk" worth taking by publishers who circulated her novels in the form most revered, and costly to all: the three-decker.

The Tinsley Brothers was founded in 1854 by brothers William and Edward Tinsley and went bankrupt in 1887. The house published works by many popular writers such as William Harrison Ainsworth, Thomas Hardy, Mary Elizabeth Braddon, Rhoda Broughton, George Meredith, and Anthony Trollope. Before publishing Ouida's first novel a dispute had risen between the two brothers. Apparently, unlike Chapman & Hall and Chatto & Windus's employment of readers (editors), the Tinsley Brothers read the works they were considering for publication themselves. Edward did not approve of a certain excerpt in the novel where a man saves a dog from drowning, and demanded a reversal of roles. Ouida, however, would have it no other way. William Tinsley openly suggests that his brother was biased against Ouida: "No doubt, some of my brother Ed-

9. Wynne is referring to the ascension of the middle class and the social transformation and conundrum it brought about.

ward's feeling against Ouida's work was increased because he was a great friend and admirer of G.A. Lawrence, of whose 'Guy Livingstone' he was of opinion Ouida's earliest work was but a poor imitation" (83-84). Edward never acknowledged "the folly of his interference about the dog, nor his worse than folly in refusing Ouida's second novel" (83). His resentment towards Ouida became even more evident when William had purchased *Strathmore* (1865), her second novel, and was forced to break the contract in order to elude a second disagreement with Edward. In any case, the sum of £50 which Ouida received for the book rights of *Held in Bondage* must have been a very satisfying amount for Ouida, according to William Tinsley's comments regarding the novel: "I have very little hesitation in saying that, had we chosen to have driven a hard bargain with the young authoress, we could have had the copyright of the book included for the sum we paid her for the three-volume right (O'Connor 427 and Tinsley 82)."¹⁰

According to Peter Newbolt's biographical note in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Hardy himself admitted to William Tinsley's insight with young writers, while William had an intuitive sentiment for Thomas Hardy's fiction as well, which was rejected by more established publishers. Indeed, regarding Ouida, in his autobiography, *Random Recollections of an Old Publisher*, William Tinsley, unlike his brother and Chapman & Hall, openly acknowledges the author's writing abilities and his and his brother's erroneous decision to refuse undertaking the publication of Ouida's second novel:

Mr. Frederick Chapman had not at the time much belief in Ouida's works; but he found out later on that there was plenty of money to be made out of the little lady's novels, although he very unwillingly consented to publish her second book. I was very certain in my own mind at the time—or, at least, as certain as any publisher can be in such uncertain matters—that Ouida would make a name as a novelist; and, in the absence of my brother, I purchased her second novel for the same sum and on the same terms as we had published "Held in Bondage." My action in the matter led to a rather disagreeable dispute between my brother and myself, and rather than have a book in our list which might cause unpleasantness between us, I asked Mr. Marsh,¹¹ Ouida's agent, to let me off my bargain. (82-83)

10. Obtaining the copyright of a book included the three-volume right and every other form of publication unless agreed otherwise. According to Patterson and Lindberg, "[t]he rights of the copyright owner of a book were limited to the rights to print, reprint, publish, and vend, that is, to print it for the market" (147).

11. William Tinsley identifies in his letters "a Mr. Marsh" as Ouida's agent. He notes that Mr. Marsh was one of the major managers of Chapman & Hall at that time, before Ouida transferred to the latter's firm (Tinsley 82-83). It is quite probable that, through Marsh, Ouida met Frederic Chapman. It is also likely that Ainsworth introduced her to the new firm since Chapman & Hall published *Bentley's Miscellany* for him (Ellis 258). William Tinsley and critics Peter Newbolt, Elizabeth Lee, and Eileen Bigland all mention Ouida's agent as "Mr. Marsh," without referring to his first name. Despite all this information I have not been able to find any biographical references to "Mr. Marsh" in any criticism or nineteenth-century British periodicals.

Personal sentiments were precisely what differentiated publishers such as Tinsley from firms such as Chapman & Hall and Chatto & Windus. As R.C Terry states in his work *Victorian Popular Fiction 1860-1880*, "The Tinsley Brothers may not have been the soundest of businessmen but they are a good example of the thrust of the new commercial publishing in which hunches were played, risks taken and deals with authors set in ways that shocked the older men" (29). Therefore, the popularity of Ouida's short stories and new novel were not enough for the Tinsley brothers who seemed to be driven by instinct and intuition rather than financial motives.

Ouida's books were often viewed inappropriate for the general public and especially young women and, apparently, Edward Tinsley was not the only publisher and adviser who deemed her writing indecorous. Chapman & Hall's biographer, Arthur Waugh, in his *A Hundred Years of Publishing: Being the Story of Chapman & Hall* (1930), claims that: "No doubt there was a certain prudishness over the firm's (Chapman and Hall) choice of books in those days, but it was a prudishness built upon a deliberate policy. The firm was not anxious to shock, and at the same time it declined to be dragooned" (146). The firm's moralistic choices of literature were reinforced by George Meredith, Chapman & Hall's main literary adviser. Meredith ardently disapproved of both Ouida and Mrs Lynn Linton, the former apparently because of her laxity concerning ethics, and the latter because of her aversion of liberation of young women from "the ancient rules" (146). Meredith also declined Samuel Butler's *Erewhon* and George Bernard Shaw's *Immaturity*, which "indeed went begging all over town. But both these authors confessed that Meredith's verdict was in accord with the taste of the time" (128). Mrs. Henry Wood's *East Lynne* (1861) was another refusal of Meredith's, who considered the novel "foul" and "the worst style of present taste." Again the novel became very popular under Bentley's publication. Edward Chapman was a man of rigorous morality according to Waugh, and the publisher's elder daughter Mrs. Gaye had said that her father regarded the tone of the book inappropriate for the general public (146). Therefore, Ouida's often unsavory plots might have eventually been one of the secondary reasons the firm decided to sell her copyrights to Chatto & Windus.

The issues of immorality and promiscuity in Ouida's texts were in the forefront of her problems during her writing career, although it is mainly believed that her personal and financial eccentricities injured her reputation and led to her transfers from one publisher to another. However, it seems that Chapman & Hall, seeing Ouida's rapid success, decided to compromise their ethical image and disregarded George Meredith by signing Ouida with their firm. Waugh writes: "Ouida, in particular, was a gold mine to the firm. It seems strange now to remember that fifty years ago she was considered a highly improper writer, whose books were at once confiscated from the studies of schoolboys, and read surreptitiously by young ladies" (128). Apparently, economic profits came first in Chapman & Hall's business hierarchy, as will be evident through the firm's dealings with their Ouida and other writers.

Amongst other reasons, Ouida earned the epithet “eccentric” and “erratic” mostly through her lifestyle and certain incidents in her relationship with her publishers, which have often been taken as evidence of these traits. Chapman’s biographer mentions that Ouida:

[...] was a quarrelsome author to publish for; and in later years grew very suspicious of everyone with whom she did business. There is an authentic story of her sending a MS. to a typewriter, with every page mis-numbered. The typescript was to correspond, page for page; and, when she had it all, she would fit it together in a consecutive whole. In the meanwhile she believed that she had defeated the probable plot of the typewriter to steal her story before it could get to the public! (128).

Ouida’s fears were other than groundless or imaginary. Clare Pettit in *Patent Inventions: Intellectual Property and the Victorian Novel* claims that “British copyright legislation was powerless when confronted by the ‘piracy’ of British texts in North America and more widely” (281). Indeed, there were no British laws protecting British authors’ rights against piracy especially overseas, and plagiarism, due to literary industrialism, became a common phenomenon. Ouida’s concern with these matters haunted her even towards the end of her life, possibly exacerbating her reputation all the more. In her penultimate work before her death, *Critical Studies* (1900), she writes:

In the course of a literary or artistic life, or any other life from which the blessing of privacy has been lost, there are many wrongs met with which are real and great wrongs, yet which must be endured because they cannot be remedied by law suits, and there is no other kind of tribunal open; nothing analogous, for instance, to the German Courts of Honour in military matters. There is, for example, a habit amongst some editors of seeking the expression of opinion, on some political or public question, of some well-known writer; printing this expression of opinion, and, before it is published, showing the proof to some other writer, so that an article of contrary views and opinions may be written in readiness for the following number. Now this seems to me an absolutely disloyal betrayal of trust. In the first place, the proof of an article is of necessity entirely dependent on the good faith of the editor. It is an understood thing, a tacit, unwritten law, that no one except the editor is to see it until the public does so. It is never considered necessary to stipulate this to show it to a third person to obtain a refutation, or—a burlesque, of it before the article is published, seems to me a distinctly incorrect thing to do; an extremely unfair thing to do. Yet it is becoming a common practice; and a writer has no redress against it. (189, 190)

Here Ouida shows her mistrust in editors who in some cases shared manuscripts or proofs with others, often leading to plagiarism, imitation, parody, or illegal edition of a certain work. Ouida also saw many illegal dramatizations of her works which again could not be controlled.

Another reason for Ouida’s frustration and cautiousness were illegal foreign

reprints of British novels which were shipped back into the UK, damaging sales of the three-decker novel. James Barnes mentions in *Authors, Publishers and Politicians: The Quest for an Anglo-American Copyright Agreement 1815-1854* that the triple-decker in London would cost 14 to 20s whereas the reprint 3s and 2d in the 1840s (101). Plagiarism and piracy were not on the forefront of concerns of British publishing laws as Ouida hoped for, and although little has been written addressing these issues in mid and late nineteenth century and in later criticism, it seems as if it was during that century the “invention” of plagiarism perhaps even came about. Indeed, Marilyn Randall in *Pragmatic Plagiarism: Authorship, Profit, and Power* writes that: “For whatever reasons, plagiarism-hunting in the English tradition has generally been a function of source studies focused on individual author or on studies of literary periods, and has rarely been carried out for its own sake” (113). In Ouida's case, plagiarism and piracy did not concern her publishers since both happened mostly outside the United Kingdom (in Canada and the US)—thus their profits remained unaffected. For Victorian writers like Ouida it was more a matter of authorship and authentic work rather than ownership and earnings.

Ouida began sharing her concerns regarding piracy early in her writing career. She wrote three articles with reference to international copyright and three articles on the subject of dramatic thefts to the editor of *The Times*. In 1876 Ouida writes:

Sir, —Your dramatic critic assumes quite rightly that the production of the “original” drama *Ethel's Revenge*, founded on my novel of “*Strathmore*,” was neither permitted by nor known by to me. I received the first intelligence of it in the columns of *The Times*. Whatever form of redress the unhappily imperfect state of the copyright laws may accord I shall endeavor to take. I have at all times refused permission to dramatize my works, considering as I do that in the present state of the English stage a novel must be alike caricatured in its characters and vulgarized in its incidents by any theatrical representation of it. I protest against this travesty of “*Strathmore*” as the grossest and most injurious form of plagiarism, and shall be deeply indented if you will give this expression of my opinion publicity in your pages. (8)

Ouida often protested against the dramatization of her novels which she considered an unauthorized act since it was her mental property. She sent several letters to the editors of *The Times* throughout her career, concerning dramatizations of her works. Therefore, what was considered the whim of a literary “hypochondriac” by some, in the beginning of her career, would stain Ouida's name, and eventually, Chapman & Hall's transactions with Chatto & Windus would later be attributed to her “quarrelsome” nature and not the already established opinion of Frederic as an untrustworthy publisher.

While Ouida made her opposition to the serial form abundantly clear, she also expressed her distrust towards the American market and its publishers numerous times. So, when Chatto discussed about the serialization of one of her

novels, *Princess Napraxine*, in an American newspaper and lowered the usual price of payment per novel, this must have been rather anticlimactic for Ouida. American laws forbade the purchase of copyrights of English novels by American publishers; thus, when publishing English novels, piracy was flourishing precariously in the American literary marketplace. Sutherland writes about these circumstances:

The astonishing fact remains that the huge and technologically sophisticated American industry drew on the superabundance of English fiction [...] Since copyright was not legally enforced until 1891 the rich harvest of English fiction was open to piracy. Even the honourable houses who paid for early sheets tended to give much lower prices to the English authors who were almost always selling more for less in America than they were at home [...] Still they took what they were offered for, as Trollope pointed out, the alternative was nothing. (70-71)

Indeed, the inundation of English fiction and lack of international copyright laws in the United Kingdom and America permitted American publishers to rampantly print overseas literature. The reason why English writers received “lower prices” from American publishers was due to the fact that the copyrights of their works, when published in America, did not belong to a sole firm. This means that they were susceptible to piracy and this automatically reduced their value. As a result, English fiction was worth less to American publishing houses, since the works they agreed to publish were not lawfully theirs and could be copyrighted and consequently sold in a much cheaper edition.

In July 1883 Ouida writes to the editor of *The Times* to express her concern about the American laws pertaining to the publication of English fiction in the country:

I beg to express my hearty agreement with your opinion that no steps which are taken without the publishers’ concurrence on both sides of the ocean will bring about any practical results. As an ounce of fact is sometimes more useful than a pound of argument, I will here state exactly what I lose myself by the absence of any copyright law between Europe and America. From the time that my second novel¹² was published Lippincott’s firm, of Philadelphia, always gave me £300 (sterling) for the advance sheets of each romance, and the head of the house repeatedly said that were there a copyright law he could give me as many thousands as he gave under present circumstances hundreds of pounds. (“International Copyright” 3)

Ouida’s vexation is undoubtedly justifiable since she is ill-treated financially and aesthetically as a writer by the downgrading of her work through American cheap editions and piracy. R.C. Terry suggests that after Chapman sold Ouida’s copyrights to Chatto, the writer “distrusted publishers henceforth, writing to her literary adviser and friend, J. Anderson Rose on 27 July 1884, ‘I am very distressed about everything and in these days publishers play sadly into one another’s hands

12. *Strathmore* (1864).

to get novels cheap' ” (36). Ouida states this at a time when she is obviously still troubled by the matters that surrounded *Princess Napraxine*'s publication.

Penniless and aged, Ouida in a letter written in 1904 discloses to her last publisher, Frederick Macmillan, that she had been “ill served by her publishers” (qtd. in Weedon 151). In the same letter she also writes: “Fred Chapman was a pleasant fellow but his passion for sport and society made him dishonest, Chatto and Windus I never liked; he [Chapman] turned the copyrights over to them on their bankruptcy.”¹³ Nonetheless, Elizabeth Lee in her book *Ouida: A Memoir* and Alexis Weedon in *Victorian Publishing: The Economics of Book Production for a Mass Market, 1836–1916* mention Ouida as old friends with Edward Chapman and William Hall and disappointed by their betrayal. Similarly, John Sutherland comments that Chapman & Hall “never refused a book and never haggled at a price [...] were the easiest going, and in many ways, the kindest of firms to old friends” (4). So, while twentieth-century material regarding Ouida's relationship with Frederic Chapman shows that the writer had a very amiable and professional relationship with the publisher, nineteenth-century correspondence shows that the dissolution of their contract was a result of minor, but nonetheless substantial, economical problems as well as potential antipathies.

In Weedon's readings of Chatto's correspondence with Ouida it seems that her early novels, written at the time of her collaboration with Chapman & Hall, were her most popular and profitable works. In May 1880, Chatto writes to Ouida about three of her novels that have depressed her sales: *In A Winter City* (1876) (the last book she published with Chapman & Hall), *Friendship* (1878) and *Moths* (1880). *Moths*, one of Ouida's most famous and harshly criticized novels, caused quite a stir, since it openly attacked upper-class society for its vulgarity. Critics Sally Mitchell and Andrew King consider *Moths* the first English novel depicting a divorced woman living happily ever after (Mitchell 140 and King 237). And this is precisely what led to negative appraisal of the novel upon its publication. Considered a daring social commentary of high society and after receiving hostile reviews from several newspapers, it was nearly banned by Mudie's library, “the most important and at the same time biggest circulating library [...] Mudie's stock had been carefully chosen and books would be free from immoral content” (Plietzsch 164). In a review published in 1880 in the *Saturday Review* concerning *Moths*, the reviewer caustically comments that the women depicted by the writer are representative of the women in her “epoch,” an epoch of “silly and vicious female writers” (287-88). Although this is the stance of a single reviewer, it is undoubtedly an indication of how the literature world viewed Ouida since the *Saturday Review* was one of the leading newspapers in the late nineteenth century.

Concerning *Moths*, in the aforementioned letter Chatto also prompts Ouida to “avoid such painful social conditions” and “to return to such models as you

13. The first letter is from the Berg Collection at the New York Library and the second one belongs to the British Library. Both letters are quoted from Philips 211.

have given us in *Dog of Flanders* or *Ariadne*” (qtd. in Weedon 150). Chatto’s tone here may not be censorious but the letter is more in the vein of a demand for change in style rather than a suggestion or request. One cannot but wonder why Chatto & Windus allowed the novel to be published since its context was so unethical that even Mudie threatened to remove it from his circulating library after it received negative reviews. This implies that neither the publishers nor their readers (editors) read the novel before its publication—which may also indicate their confidence in Ouida’s work—or it may suggest that they merely changed their view concerning the novel after Mudie’s and the reviewers’ censure reduced their profits. Weedon writes that Chatto & Windus “found innovative ways to utilise the economies of mass production and make the most of their investment in copyrights and to capture transient popular tastes” (142). Therefore, the difference between Chapman & Hall and Chatto & Windus is evident, since the latter seemed to be more concerned with the financial matters rather than the literary ones.

Indeed, Mr. Mudie urged Chatto to take certain actions regarding the sales of *Moths*, and the publisher eventually decided to publish the novel in a cheap one-volume edition not even a year after the three-decker novel was published, a fact which enraged Ouida.¹⁴ She wrote to her publisher bitterly attacking Chatto’s literary adviser and celebrated author, James Payn: “I am sorry Mr. Payn is your adviser. I trust you never speak with him of my works for so commonplace a writer as he is can be no judge of such works as mine” (Bigland 155). So, unlike Edward Tinsley, whose feelings determined his opinion, Chatto & Windus trusted his reader’s suggestions. Chatto tried to quieten Ouida, but “no amount of abusive letters, however, could remedy the breaking-up of *Moths* type and Ouida sank back into gloom” (155). This gradual shift from the three-decker volume to one, around the 1890s, was another blow for Ouida’s literary career and Chatto’s sales. Ouida cared for the romance, beauty and terror of life, which although thrilling to the readers, was too unprofitable in a three-decker form for her publishers to continue endorsing; thus, her sales dropped.

Critic R.C. Terry professes in his book that Ouida was paranoid about her manuscripts and contracts with her publishers. Some might suppose that she was merely cautious. The truth of the matter is that Ouida had been ill-sorted with her publishers, a fact which made her suspicious since, amongst other incidents, she was handed over by a friend publisher to an unknown publisher and was deceived by native and foreign firms concerning her rights in fiction and theater. Although these actions were not considered illegal at the time, Ouida deemed them unethical and a usurpation of one’s mental property. These facts along with the decline of the three-decker volume injured the sales of Ouida’s novels, rendering her work ostracized towards the end of the nineteenth century and forgotten anon.

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14. See Bigland 152 and Weedon 151.

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