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Double the Novels, Half the Recognition:
Mary Elizabeth Braddon's Contribution to the Evolution of the Victorian Novel

A thesis
presented to
the faculty of the Department of English
East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree
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by
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Keywords: Mary Elizabeth Braddon, Sensation Fiction, Victorian Literature, *Lady Audley's Secret*

ABSTRACT

Double the Novels, Half the Recognition:

Mary Elizabeth Braddon's Contribution to the Evolution of the Victorian Novel

by

Lori Baker

Why do we read what we read? Janice Radway examines works that were not popular in an author's time period, but now are affecting the construction of the canon. In her own words, Radway seeks to "establish [popular literature] as something other than a watered-down version of a more authentic high culture [and] to present the middlebrow positively as a culture with its own particular substance and intellectual coherence" (208). Mary Elizabeth Braddon's novels were considered "middlebrow" and were very popular in Victorian England. Along with this facet, her heroines were considered controversial because they were not portrayed as what would be labeled a "proper female" in Victorian society. The popularity of her novels, her heroines, along with facets of her personal life, keep her from being recognized as one of the foremost authors in the Victorian period.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Why do we read what we read? While some scholars find it important to read the classics, others enjoy popular literature that is now fighting its way back to “cultural legitimacy.” Janice Radway, among other cultural critics, examines works that were not popular in an author’s time period, but now are affecting the construction of the canon. In her own words, Radway seeks to “establish [popular literature] as something other than a watered-down version of a more authentic high culture [and] to present the middlebrow positively as a culture with its own particular substance and intellectual coherence” (208). An example of this type of “middlebrow” work is Eliza Heywood’s novel *Love in Excess* (1719). In its time it sold as many copies as Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe*, yet in many Restoration and Eighteenth-century courses, Defoe is most certainly on the reading list, while Heywood is usually left on the shelf. Because the content of her novel was considered “amatory” fiction, and possibly because she was a woman, her works were dismissed. Like Heywood’s works, Mary Elizabeth Braddon’s novels were also very popular and often went through more editions than some of Charles Dickens’s prominent works. This popularity, along with facets of her personal life, keeps her from being recognized as one of the foremost authors in the Victorian period.

Many theories surround the obscurity of Braddon’s works. She produced an overwhelming amount of literature in her time. Braddon wrote more than ninety novels between the years 1860 and 1915 and she was editor of two magazines, *Belgravia* and *Mistletoe Bough*. She also wrote a number of poems, plays, and essays (Carnell 1). Some argue that because of this vast output Braddon was not taken seriously as a writer. She

wrote more than ninety novels; therefore, critics doubt that every single one is of true quality. This theory is often applied to authors of “popular” literature. What do critics say of Danielle Steele, Anne Rice, and even Stephen King? These writers’ works are not found on the shelves of “great literature” either, so our opinions do not stray far from Victorian thought.

Another Victorian opinion that has led to Braddon’s obscurity is the public scrutiny of her private life. Robert Wolff states, “the story of her life [was] as sensational in its way and for its time as any novel she ever wrote” (xxi). Her first offense was earning a living on the stage. An actress in those days was seen as little more than a common prostitute, which did not help Braddon’s reputation. Furthermore, her “affair” with publisher John Maxwell was the subject of many other authors’ slander and gossip. For example, “Mary Oliphant attacks Braddon because of her adulterous relationship with the publisher John Maxwell, but they were married in 1874, after living together 34 years” (Tromp, Gilbert, Haynie xxiv). Braddon and Maxwell, however, had all of their six children before they were married. These scandalous occurrences encouraged the tarnishing of Braddon’s reputation, but the public overlooked the fact that Maxwell’s wife was in an institution—not deceased or adulterous—and he could not divorce her. Therefore, he could not marry because of the strict stipulations regarding the divorce laws. This explains why many of Braddon’s novels address the issue of bigamy. Nonetheless, Braddon was not an acceptable member of society until she married Maxwell.

Because Braddon’s work did address such issues as bigamy, as well as other “patterns of social injustices . . . concerning the interests of illegitimate children, fallen

women, the mentally ill, the potential for injustice in criminal cases, and . . . the death penalty,” it was often seen as challenging the social norms that the Victorians held onto (Carnell 22). Her heroines were often criticized for their morally corrupt behavior. An example that Jennifer Carnell cites in her recent biography of Braddon is Olivia Marchmont in *John Marchmont’s Legacy*, who prefers more “masculine” jobs like medicine rather than be confined to charity work done only by women. This character could be a reaction to Eliot’s Dorothea in *Middlemarch*, argues Carnell, whose life is consumed by charity work (25). In 1856 Braddon’s contemporary Wilkie Collins described a new way that a heroine could be depicted in his essay, “A Petition to the Novel-Writers”:

I know that five foot eight inches of female flesh and blood, when accompanied by an olive complexion, black eyes, and raven hair, is synonymous with strong passions and an unfortunate destiny. I know that five feet nothing, golden ringlets, soft blue eyes, and a lily brow, cannot possibly be associated by any well-constituted novelist with anything but ringing laughter, arch innocence, and final matrimonial happiness. [...]

Although I know it to be against all precedent, I want to revolutionize our favourite two sisters. [...] Would readers be fatally startled out of their sense of propriety if the short charmer with the golden hair appeared before them as a serious, strong-minded, fierce-spoken, miserable, guilty woman? It might be a dangerous experiment to make this change; but it would be worth trying. (qtd. in Carnell 154-55)

What Collins calls a “dangerous experiment” is precisely the way Braddon portrays her heroines. She sought to challenge the light-haired, blue-eyed type of heroine by incorporating women with dark coloring. This fascination with a dark-haired heroine could stem from Shakespeare’s sonnets about his dark-haired mistress, considering Braddon’s overwhelming respect for him. She knew that she was departing from Victorian moral and social codes, but she chose to challenge the convention and create heroines of her own in addition to exposing the corrupt social climate of the time, perhaps another reason why she was not accepted, until recently, into the literary community and still fights for legitimacy among so many Victorian novelists.

Braddon has plenty of strikes against her in the literary world; however, her writing also has unique qualities that set her apart from her predecessors and contemporaries. One of her biographers, Robert Wolff, states, “She taught herself to satirize so skillfully that her readers need not see her doing it” (9). Because of her distinctive talent, she was also supported by other authors of the time such as, Dickens, Thackeray, Robert Louis Stevenson, and Henry James. Dicken’s daughter, Kate Perugini, remembered that her father’s favorite Braddon novel had been *The Doctor’s Wife* (1864). Thackeray’s daughter, Lady Ritchie, wrote that he particularly liked *Lady Audley’s Secret* (Woolf 9). Charles Reade said that “her fertility of invention is boundless, her industry phenomenal, her style sound and vigorous, and she has rare dramatic instincts” (qtd. in Woolf 9). Henry James admired Braddon a great deal, claiming the following:

Miss Braddon goes to work like an artist. Among her eighty novels, a modern reader will find half a dozen of surprising excellence, all able to stand comparison with the achievements of novelists who are still idolized

while she is forgotten. Immediately below her top level he will distinguish thirty or forty more novels that are unfailingly interesting and entertaining, full of expert character drawing and notable for their sardonic and up-to-date comment on the changing social scene. Although the rest of her novels are less memorable as literature, there are only three or four of the whole number that do not contribute to one's appreciation of Victorian social history. MEB was versatile, observant, satirical, both humorous and witty, sophisticated, and full of shrewd common sense. (qtd. in Wolff 9)

Stevenson said about *Aurora Floyd* that "it is something to be out and away greater than Scott, Shakespeare, Homer, in the South Seas, and to that you [Mary Elizabeth Braddon] have attained" (qtd. in Wolff 10). Finally, twentieth-century novelist and critic, Arnold Bennett, gave her perhaps the greatest compliment of all saying, "That is English, Wilkie Collins could not have done it; ...nor, dare I say, sundry greater men who to name in this connection would be to call forth a protest; nor any other living sensational writer" (qtd. in Wolff 13). Clearly, Braddon had the respect of many of her colleagues, yet the opinion of a few critics and contemporaries has colored Braddon's reputation.

Braddon was well-educated and read a wide variety of literature. She attributes her love for books to her mother, saying,

To my mother I owe my introduction to the great world of imaginative literature. She was a woman with a cultivated mind, a keen wit and a natural taste for what was best in the literature of the time, as well as a devoted student of Shakespeare and Scott. (qtd. in Carnell 88)

According to Carnell, Braddon had a passion for writing as well as reading. At school she shocked her classmates by filling up her notebooks with the beginnings of “exciting romances” (88). At the age of eight she began to write complete fairy tales, which allowed her imagination to come alive within the words on the page. Her first fictional piece, however, “was a story of two sisters, a good sister and a wicked, and I [Braddon] fear [it] adhered more faithfully to the lines of the archetypal story than the writer’s pen kept to the double fence which should have ensured neatness” (qtd in Carnell 87).

Around this time Braddon was introduced “to the cheaper variety of literature” by the cook Sarah Hobbs. She was reading the sort of “literature of the kitchen that [as an] adult . . . [she] would be accused of bringing into the parlor” (Carnell 89). She was yet even more struck by Dickens when she found that “with *Nicholas Nickleby* there was not a dry page. . . The book seemed written for children, so bright and vivid was every page, so full of life (sic) people who talked, and of objects that one could see” (Carnell 88). She, like many of her future readers, enjoyed reading the classics as well as popular literature. This could be why her writing takes on various forms and appeals to many different genres. For example, Charles Dickens might have liked *The Doctor’s Wife* best because it was patterned after the Realism movement, while others enjoyed the “popular” novels like *Lady Audley’s Secret* and *Aurora Floyd*.

In her early teens Braddon was much affected by her reading of Charlotte Brontë, especially *Jane Eyre*. She recalls,

I was laid up with a sick-headache, . . . and the book was given to me for a solace before my mother or elder sister had looked at it. I forgot my headache. The story gripped me from the first page . . . I was enough of a

schoolgirl to be thrilled by the moving scenes at the cruel school; and I had enough of a girl's romantic fancy to fall prostrate before the stern and rugged grandeur of "Mr. Rochester." (qtd. in Carnell 90)

Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* inspired Braddon to write "sentimental" pieces that tended to reflect the "stories of gentle hearts that loved in vain, always ending in renunciation" (qtd. in Carnell 90). Braddon found much of her inspiration for various forms of fiction in Brontë's novel. The wife in the attic is reminiscent of the madness suffered by Lady Audley in Braddon's first great success. Gothic and mystery elements appear in Braddon's fiction as well. What Braddon was reading, and influenced by her mother to read, had an effect on her writing.

Braddon thought that writing was a great discipline for any young girl. She says, "What does surprise me is that every girl who is well educated and endowed with imagination does not long to express herself with her pen" (qtd. in Carnell 87). Braddon expressed herself very well with her pen. She was able to look at the literary trend of the time and use aspects of this trend to help her sell novels. She had to support her mother, so she did not have the luxury of writing slowly or not as often like Kingsley, Reade, Collins, and some of her other contemporaries. When her fame was rising, she said (after being compared to Sir Walter Scott), "To speak of myself in the same breath with Walter Scott, the man I worship as second only to Shakespeare! Odious idea!" (qtd. in Carnell 148). Even with this shining comparison, her writing is still dismissed because she was writing to sell books. Later in her life when she married John Maxwell, she was not necessarily writing for money, but those later works, along with anything other than her best-selling sensation novels, are rarely found or taught today. This is ironic considering

the stir the novels made in Victorian England, but maybe that is why they are unavailable to the public today. Since *Lady Audley's Secret* and *Aurora Floyd* went through many editions, they are easier to find and preserve. Thus many other great novels and short stories by Braddon have been impossible to find, even though they are as worthy of republication as her more famous works.

Braddon's reputation in the literary community does not reach any further than her first sensational best-sellers. Robert Woolf states the harsh reality: "Unfortunately for her reputation, Miss Braddon all her life remained 'the author of *Lady Audley's Secret*.' Even today, when she is remembered at all, she is still associated with her artless and somewhat trashy first great success" (8). None would be able to get past the first unconventional heroines and plot twists, so that each new novel would be compared to the first two, leaving no room for exoneration. *Aurora Floyd*, in particular, "challenges the construction of domestic order and harmony. It exposes the division of the separate spheres and the education of women as helpmeet as a dangerous construct for women" (Tromp, Gilbert, Haynie 104). Braddon's social commentary, along with her experimentation in other genre conventions, made the literary world uncomfortable with her strides toward originality and invention. If today's literary critics could look past the activist aspects of her sensation novels, they could see that she is the creator and precursor of elements that were used in crafting the present form of the detective novel.

Braddon also followed the trend of the gothic in Victorian fiction. Elements of this genre, first made popular in the late eighteenth century, were creeping into major Victorian works. The Brontë sisters were fond of using gothic elements in the scenery and characterization of the heroine in their novels. Elizabeth Gaskell's "The Old Nurse's

Story” (1852) is often considered a ghost or horror story, along with J. Sheridan Le Fanu’s “Green Tea” (1869), and Collins’s “A Terribly Strange Bed” (1852). David Punter and Glennis Byron attribute

their popularity . . . to the rise of positivistic science and the decline of religion in the increasingly materialist and secular 19th –century. A growing interest in spiritualism and the occult, along with proliferation of societies for psychical research, prompted the publication of numerous stories of supposedly “true” hauntings, including Catherine Crowe’s *The Night Side of Nature* (1848). (98)

So it is no surprise that Mary Elizabeth Braddon was in the thick of this trend. Both “The Shadow in the Corner” (1879) and “Good Lady Ducayne” (1896) demonstrate the new knowledge of science, medicine, and spiritualism in a realistic horror story. Other short stories such as “At Chrighton Abbey” (1879), “The Cold Embrace” (1860), and “Eveline’s Visitant” (1867) reflect the style of her sensation works and contain many of the same elements as works by the Brontës, Gaskell, Collins, and others. The real horror is that Gaskell is included in the *Norton Anthology of British Literature*, Collins is most certainly well-known, and, of course, the Brontës have always been respected in the literary community, while few know that Braddon even wrote any ghost or gothic-inspired stories.

Another trend that Braddon explored was the Realist novel. One example is her novel *The Doctor’s Wife*, which explores the form of French realism. This novel is an adaptation of the controversial novel *Madame Bovary* by Flaubert, with an English audience very much in the back of Braddon’s mind. While the opening and description of

both heroines and their husbands have a strong resemblance to each other, “from the renunciation of temptation onwards, however, Miss Braddon reverts to the familiar moralizing tradition of Scott, Bulwer-Lytton, and George Eliot” (Heywood 152).

Braddon was well aware of the debate and status of Flaubert’s novel, so she took great care to show the English reader that virtue would indeed be rewarded in her novel while vice was punished. By taking on this form, Braddon showed her audience that she could be as skilled at character development as she had been in creating suspenseful plots. Braddon used this novel as a mouthpiece not only for social change, but for literary change as well.

The cycle that Braddon follows in her writing is very distinctive. She adheres to the “popular” literature forms as they come and go, but she is also a leader and forerunner in many of these genres as well. Her well-educated background, along with the struggles in her “sensational” life, are reflected in her works. If Braddon had taken on a male pseudonym like many of her contemporaries, if she had not made an appearance on the stage, if she had been able to marry John Maxwell, then maybe her works would be seen as serious literature, not merely as historical references to the culture, and most definitely not as “trashy successes.”

CHAPTER 2

SENSATION AS A PRECURSOR FOR DETECTIVE FICTION

According to Patrick Brantlinger, “The sensation novel was and is sensational partly because of content: it deals with crime, murder as an outcome of adultery and sometimes of bigamy, in apparently proper, bourgeois, domestic settings”(1). There were prominent male writers in this genre (Wilkie Collins, George Payne Rainsford James, Sheridan Le Fanu, and Charles Reade were the leading male exponents); however, much of the criticism was centered on the fact that women were writing these types of novels as well. Braddon and Mrs. Henry Wood were seen as the leaders of the genre, but the “most venomous criticism was usually reserved for Braddon” (Carnell 167). The women writing these novels were titled “domestic sensationalists,” while the men were referred to as “newspaper sensationalists” (Poster 293). Men, such as Wilkie Collins and Charles Dickens, are credited with introducing detective elements into their fiction. Braddon should also be recognized as an important contributor to the history of detective fiction, but instead the most credit is given to Wilkie Collins as the father of the detective novel. More specifically, her novel *Aurora Floyd* (1863), which most certainly contained many of the same detective elements as Collins’s *The Moonstone* (1868), is not considered a precursor to the detective but rather a domesticated sensation novel. So Collins is placed among the more well-known writers (even credited with the first detective novel), while Braddon is pushed to the margins.

Even today, it is hard for Victorian scholars to mention the name Mary Elizabeth Braddon without grouping her into the “sensation” novel category. While modern critics have grown to appreciate the “sensation” novel as a genre that has many current

offspring—including, modern mystery, detective, and suspense fiction and films—it is also a genre that is rarely taken seriously or granted cultural significance. Braddon’s biographer, Robert Woolf, states the harsh reality: “Unfortunately for her reputation, Miss Braddon all her life remained ‘the author of *Lady Audley’s Secret*.’ Even today, when she is remembered at all, she is still associated with her artless and somewhat trashy first great success” (8). Woolf’s analysis of Braddon’s reputation may stem from the less than flattering definition given to the genre. The sensation novel was “thought of as a diseased, feminine genre, relying more on plot complications than on artistry, and more on shock potential than on any solid ethical foundation” (Tromp, Gilbert, Haynie xvii). This is a degrading definition, but it is the opinion held by Victorian critics, as well as by many critics today. These critics were also concerned with the commercialization of the sensation novel. For these, the sensation novel was “dangerous in its evocation of corrupt mass tastes, and the fear that those tastes would in turn corrupt the upper classes who shared the ‘appetite’ for sensation with their social ‘inferiors’” (Tromp, Gilbert, Haynie xviii). Furthermore, Robert Woolf provides an account of Victorian contemporary opinion by quoting *The Spectator*’s view of Braddon: “Readers of the class who would once have read Mrs. Radcliffe ‘now pore over stories as absurd as hers’” (qtd. in Woolf 6). Woolf himself gives only faint praise for Braddon’s work:

MEB had appreciated the popular taste, and constructed a story as wild as a Gothic novel, but modern in its machinery, and in the language in which that machinery is described . . . she should be entitled to rank as the first of lady novelists . . . [that show] such even excellence of passion, of character, and of diction. (6)

While Woolf recognizes that Mary Elizabeth Braddon is read in the same way and by the same audience as the Gothic novel was in the eighteenth century, he sets her apart from that “popular” genre and places her in a category of her own (“first” among “lady novelists”). Woolf seeks to validate Miss Braddon’s work on one hand but confines her by her gender on the other. He must have some respect for her, as he wrote a biography of Braddon, yet even he holds back from complete admiration of her work.

So why is Mary Elizabeth Braddon always placed in this “sensation” category? According to a recent study in a book of critical essays entitled *Beyond Sensation: Mary Elizabeth Braddon in Context*, most agree that “critical and cultural ambivalence about the sensation genre and its gendered implications at the time of its production have done much to contribute to Braddon’s obscurity, and it is important to be aware of the reasons for this” (Tromp, Gilbert, Haynie xviii). One reason critics give is that “female aspirants to literary genius tend to be cast in particularly humiliating sexual or somatic terms” (Tromp, Gilbert, Haynie xvi). Braddon’s classification as a writer of sensation novels reflected the subject matter she addressed. As the quote above suggests, the genre was under critical watch and disapproval. As a result, the controversial themes addressed—crime, passion, and sensuality—while essential to the structure and overall effect of the “sensation” novels, were viewed as “disrupting the boundaries that had been established by ‘proper’ literary endeavors” (Tromp, Gilbert, Haynie 101).

In addition, most of Braddon’s female protagonists lacked the qualities that were conventional in Victorian society. Instead, her heroines took the role of the Byronic hero. As Elaine Showalter points out, “the bigamist is no longer Rochester, but the demure little governess” (165). The year of *Aurora Floyd*’s publication, “an essay excoriated

Aurora's identity as a violent, unnatural, and dangerous creature, and condemned sensation novels for their dangerous heroines and effects" (Tromp, Gilbert, Haynie 94). The most notorious scene in the novel (in the opinion of the Victorians) is when Aurora whips Softy, the stable help, for abusing her beloved dog, Bow-wow. Braddon describes Aurora as "a beautiful tigress . . . her cheeks white with rage, her eyes flashing fury, her hat fallen off and her black hair tumbling about her shoulders, sublime in her passion" (Braddon 138). Most Victorian critics were not comfortable with Braddon's "masculine" female characters, another reason her reputation became tarnished and her works relegated to the "sensation" category.

"Sensation" meant "second-rate," not only in Victorian times, but also until very recently. The male "newspaper sensationalists," including Charles Dickens, Wilkie Collins, and Charles Reade, dealt with the same subject matter as the female authors of the genre. Yet "leading female practitioners were seen to concentrate more on what might be termed 'domestic sensationalism'" (Poster 294). Therefore, the category itself is not devalued, rather, it is the subject matter as much as the gender of women writers like Braddon and her contemporaries Mrs. Henry Wood and Ouida (294). While critics promote Wilkie Collins as the authority of the genre, they write off Wood, Braddon, and Ouida "as imitators, not worthy of preservation" (293).

Yet Braddon's works contain elements of "newspaper sensationalism," as well as characteristics of detective fiction. As stated by Jennifer Carnell,

Sensation fiction frequently presents the reader with a puzzle, a detective figure and a solution, even if this was not the primary aim of the author.

Sensation fiction's preoccupation with secrets, and the revelation of those

secrets and of crime, are often so intrinsic to the plot that they must be considered as the antecedents of the emergent detective novel. (235)

Indeed, Collins, a contemporary of Dickens, has been named by many critics as “the father of the detective novel.” These two men, along with Edgar Allen Poe in America, are the most respected and well-known in the field. The question remains, however, as to why their works are classified as “detective” and not always “sensational” when the genres share many characteristics. George Dove states:

The four qualities of the tale of literary detection [that] set it apart, in the opinion of critics past and present, from other popular fiction are as follows: the detective story is transitory, without long-range goals or purposes; it is fundamentally an intellectual undertaking; it is recreational, intended primarily to relax; and it is a disciplined, delimited literary form. (4)

Other features of the detective novel, according to Robert Ashley, include the “fair-play method, the least-likely-person motif, and the humanized detective” (53). These elements, along with the transfer of information through letters, were introduced into detective fiction by Collins himself. Yet these structural elements connect the sensation work of Braddon and the detective work of Collins.

Collins’s *The Moonstone* is perhaps the best example of a novel that combines the elements of the sensation and detective genre but is often classified as “the best detective tale in the world” (Chesterton 57). While many of his other works, such as *The Woman in White* (1860), *No Name* (1862), and *Armadale* (1866), are categorized more as sensation, *The Moonstone* is seen as the “mystery-cum-detective novel which set a standard of

perfection that later mystery writers have failed to meet” (Brantlinger 3). Collins took many of the conventions of detective fiction and made them his own; however, he is most famous for his “skillful handling of the least-likely-person motif”(Ashley 52). By using multiple narrators, Collins keeps his audience guessing until the final clues are revealed. Writers of detective fiction still imitate his technique today.

The “1860s was a time before professional detectives could be seen either as hero or as the leading character in a novel” (Carnell 238). But Collins challenged this notion by making Sergeant Cuff the main character for a good portion of the novel, even if his role is not primarily that of professional detective. However, “Cuff’s absence [as the primary detective] works no irreparable harm to the narrative, for even then there is hardly any letup in detective activity” (Ashley 53). Through the many twists and turns in *The Moonstone*, almost every member of the Verinder household is accused of stealing Rachel’s diamond. This forces other characters to fill the role of detective, not just the detective himself. When implicated, each character rushes to defend himself or herself by getting to the bottom of the mystery or shifting the blame to someone else. Franklin, ironically the only person not accused, plays a major role in the discovery of the thief. It is when he finds himself suspected as the guilty party that he becomes the key detective, stopping at nothing to find out who has set him up.

This conflict of excluding the professional detective from the crime scene “is further represented by the preference of Braddon, and most succeeding crime writers, to use an amateur detective to investigate mysteries within and affecting the family” (Carnell 238). Braddon employs this strategy in *Aurora Floyd*. In the novel, the role of detective (especially the amateur detective) is played by many different characters.

Amateur and professional detectives frequently appear in her work and are in disagreement with each other more than with the criminal. Usually, she presents a male amateur detective, often a gentleman from the upper class, but there are also a number of women. Perhaps even more interesting, both the reader and the narrator play the part of detective, spying on and dodging the wrongdoer in a similar way to the detective in detective fiction. Because of Aurora's elusive past, she is constantly watched by those around her. Everyone wants to know her secret and, perhaps more importantly, whether it is a motive for murder. Bulstrode, Stephen Hargraves, John Mellish, and James Conyers all play the role of detective in one way or another. Hargraves constantly follows James when he meets with Aurora, hoping to gain knowledge about their relationship. He knows that James is blackmailing Aurora and needs this piece of information so that he can exploit money from Aurora as well. Bulstrode and Mellish speculate about who murdered Mr. Conyers. Bulstrode states, "we shall find the murderer" (Braddon 419). Indeed, after many dead ends and wrong turns, that is exactly what he, along with a little help from Joseph Brimstone (the actual detective), does.

Another interesting facet of the detective figure in Collins's and Braddon's novels is how the wealth and position of the family affect the investigation. The power of the wealthy individual is demonstrated in *The Moonstone* with the hindrances Cuff encounters within the family household before he is fired. Certainly one of the "disadvantages of a policeman like Cuff was that he could be hired or sacked at will. He was not allowed to be a genius who will enter a family and restore the order of society. If he had done so in the 1860s, it would not have seemed credible to the reader" (Carnell 242). The family seems, instead, to place the responsibility of the investigation in the

hands of the “trustworthy” Franklin Blake primarily because he is family. Whatever family secret may be exposed during the investigation will be kept secret if discovered by the wealthy gentleman who plays the role of the amateur detective.

In the same way, Joseph Grimstone of Scotland Yard appears late in the investigation of the murder of Aurora’s first husband, but he is also paid by Aurora’s husband, John Mellish. This is a “reminder of the difficult position of a detective employed by the authorities who then hired him out to a private patron, as is the case with Dickens’s Mr. Bucket who works for the villain Tulkinghorn” (Carnell 243). This also applies to the specific suspicion of Aurora. Although Aurora is the prime suspect in the murder, and probably should be arrested for questioning, Grimstone does not even speak to her. So another mistress of the house is safe from the authority of the police because of the wealth and position of her husband. Grimstone’s role is “relegated to some minor detecting concerning some buttons which will implicate the Softy” (Carnell 243). The introduction of Grimstone does not really add anything, except as a realistic plot requirement that an official investigator has to become involved at some point. Thus, Grimstone suffers the same fate as Cuff. The families have a greater power within the home than the police, forcing law enforcement to take a lesser role in the investigations and be left out of any family “secrets.” Furthermore, Braddon could very well be credited with the first appearance of an amateur detective in a familial investigation with her 1862 best-seller. The most noteworthy example is Robert Audley’s persistent investigation into Lady Audley’s past and the disappearance of his friend George in *Lady Audley’s Secret*. Jennifer Carnell provides further evidence of this, citing R.F. Stewart’s book *...And Always a Detective*, in which he

describes *Lady Audley's Secret* as “the sensation novel to begin all detective novels.” He justifies this on the grounds of Robert Audley’s methods of detection, but it should also be stated that Robert Audley sets the pattern for many later gentleman amateur detectives since he is a barrister with a small private income (qtd. in Carnell 251).

However, Braddon does not assign this role exclusively to Robert Audley. The role of the amateur detective is also filled by Bulstrode in *Aurora Floyd* as he is the one who inevitably solves the mystery and keeps the family secret within the family. Both men are prominent examples of a technique credited to Braddon and may have added to her popularity with the middle-class reader.

Correspondence is a convention that can be used either to add mystery or reveal information to the reader. In *The Moonstone*, Cuff tells Franklin who he believes is guilty of stealing the moonstone by writing it down on paper. However, he gives strict instructions to Franklin Blake concerning his conclusion: “Wait to open the envelope, Mr. Blake, till you have got at the truth. And then compare the name of the guilty person, with the name that I have written in that sealed letter” (Collins 659). The use of letters is a common strategy in Victorian fiction, and Collins employs it here to create suspense.

Braddon also includes letters in the structure of her novel to create tension. One of the most dramatic scenes in *Aurora Floyd* is a reaction to a letter. When Mellish hires a horse trainer, he receives a letter from Mr. Pastern about the man who is coming to work for them. Mr. Pastern describes the man as “only thirty years of age, but met with an accident some time since, which lamed him for life . . . His name is James Conyers, and he can have a character from...” (Braddon 171). Mellish stops reading the letter because

he hears a horrible gasp from Aurora. She screams and becomes panicked, saying “ ‘that name! I tell you, it *can't* be. Give me the letter’ ” (172). After a few moments of looking at the name that is clearly printed on the page, she faints. Thus another element of mystery is introduced: Who is James Conyers?

Another characteristic of detective fiction is that the person who possesses a very important clue that would solve the case disappears or is murdered. Dove explains:

One of the most useful recurrent conventions of the tale of detection is the one we will call the death warrant, in which anybody who makes an appointment with a detective for the purpose of delivering vital information will probably be murdered before the appointment can be kept. (6)

An example of this technique in *The Moonstone* is the death of Rosanna Spearman. She seems to have some knowledge about who has committed the crime. She buys material to make a new nightgown before the detective has time to examine her wardrobe (the nightgown would have exposed her as the guilty party). Rosanna also seems to go for walks on the beach just when Cuff wants to question her. Then, just as Cuff becomes certain of her involvement in the case, she kills herself and leads the reader down another dead end.

Braddon applies this convention to her novel as well. However, her characters generally do not die; they simply disappear. An example of this occurs in *Aurora Floyd* when Captain Prodder comes to visit Aurora. He watches Aurora and Mr. Conyers in the woods having a heated conversation. After he leaves the scene, he hears a gunshot and thinks, “What was that which his niece said a quarter of an hour before, when the man

had asked her whether she would like to shoot him?” (Braddon 286). Out of fear that questions asked of him may lead to the conviction of Aurora, he flees. Then, when Captain Prodder returns to Mellish Park at the end of the novel after Talbot has found the real murderer, he says, “ ‘him! Why, the double-dyed villain: it was him that put it into my head that it was my sister Eliza’s chi—that it was Mrs. Mellish’ ” (Braddon 457). Braddon’s application of the “death warrant” strategy is clever, perhaps even better than the conventional approach. She has the witness disappear from the action yet not disappear from the novel. The reader knows the character has essential information and is left in suspense as to whether or not he or she will reveal this clue to the right person before time runs out.

While Jacques Derrida argues that it may be “impossible to mix genres,” it is obvious that conventions from different genres tend to intermingle (Derrida 204). Brantlinger contradicts Derrida’s theory by describing the “sensation” category as

A genre of fiction that stands midway between romanticism and realism, Gothic ‘mysteries’ and modern mysteries, and popular and high culture forms—a genre, in other words, that like all genres is itself a mixture of sometimes contradictory forms, styles, and conventions. (3)

If Brantlinger’s definition of the genre had been applied in her lifetime, Braddon may not have dropped into obscurity. However, if the genre had been acknowledged as a blending of all these methods, would it matter? Wilkie Collins would still be the “father of the detective novel,” and Dickens would still be on every Victorian Novels syllabus. Is it really the genre that needs redefining or Braddon’s works themselves?

The striking similarities between Mary Elizabeth Braddon's best-selling novels and those of Wilkie Collins are hard to ignore, particularly when reading *The Moonstone* and *Aurora Floyd* side by side. Why is Collins credited with the first detective novel when *Aurora Floyd* was written five years earlier? What many critics call "conventions of detective fiction" appear—in their precise definition—in *Aurora Floyd*. So why are the characteristics in Braddon's novel considered "sensational" while Collins's novel is clearly detective? Why do critics overlook the many elements contained within sensation fiction, focusing only on the reputation of the genre itself? Braddon quite possibly invented (or at the very least made popular) the role of the amateur detective. The use of letters in Braddon's novel creates more suspense than the narrative set-up in Collins's work. Many praise Collins's structure because he has multiple narrations, but does that make it detective fiction? If Braddon's *Aurora Floyd* employs the same conventions as Collins's *The Moonstone*, then what other reason could critics have for not giving Mary Elizabeth Braddon the "cultural legitimacy" that she deserves?

As in detective fiction, all the evidence points to her gender as the cause of her insignificance in Victorian literary culture. There is no other reason for her fiction to be labeled "domestic sensation" other than the fact that she is a woman writing about women in a non-traditional sense. Her style and structure mimic (or perhaps surpass) the male writers that address the same subject matter. Clearly, Mary Elizabeth Braddon was a catalyst for popular genres like mystery, modern detective, and suspense fiction. Yet she is not given cultural credit for this influence; instead, Collins, Dickens, and Reade are given the recognition she deserves. All the evidence should be reexamined so that the

case for Braddon and the “sensation” genre as a catalyst for the detective genre may be argued and won.

CHAPTER 3

MADWOMAN EXPOSED: BRADDON'S DOMESTICATED GOTHIC AND GHOST STORIES

Braddon never completely strays from the formula of the sensation novel. She instead adds elements to different novels and stories to adapt to the popular writing style of the time. She was, after all, trying to support herself and her mother, since she could not marry John Maxwell. Using her childhood favorite, *Jane Eyre*, Braddon introduced gothic elements such as the madwoman in the attic, the tyrannical male, and the budding sexuality of a female heroine into her fiction. She wrote many ghost stories using supernatural elements, the sublime, family rivalry, and extraordinary medical conditions. In her short stories Braddon had to rely on these elements to provide suspense in the plot, since she did not have three volumes in which to build an elaborate story. She was not the only woman to experiment with the newly popular ghost story; however, she is probably the least known for using this popular convention.

Elizabeth Gaskell's ghost tale "The Old Nurse's Story" can be found in the *Norton Anthology of English Literature* (volume 2). Gaskell draws on many of the same conventions of the gothic in her story that Braddon uses in her ghost stories, yet Gaskell is canonized in the anthology and Braddon is not. Again, Braddon's literary genius is probably overlooked because of her reputation. The neglect of Braddon's works cannot be blamed entirely on her gender because other women have gained respect in the literary world by using the same principles and are often called the leaders of the "new gothic." By looking at the stories "The Cold Embrace" and "Eveline's Visitant," along with some elements in *Lady Audley's Secret* next to Gaskell's story and *Jane Eyre*, it is apparent that

Braddon should be recognized and credited for her work in the gothic genre in company with other well-known women writers of the same time period.

The madwoman in the attic is best known as a device used by female authors to provide social commentary on the status of women (Gilbert and Gubar *The Madwoman in the Attic*). However, this element can also be used to provoke suspense in what has been labeled by critics like Henry James the “domesticated Gothic.” Charlotte Brontë includes this convention in her characterization of Bertha Mason in *Jane Eyre*. Braddon illustrates this principle indirectly in *Lady Audley’s Secret*. However, both employ the device as a way of describing their heroines as women who “assume the roles of both heroine and monster, and provoke anxieties about the instability of identity and the breakdown of gender roles” (Punter and Byron 26).

In Brontë’s novel, Jane Eyre is a girl who is very passionate but does not possess the qualities that would allow her aunt to call her a “proper lady.” She is sent to Lowood boarding school in hopes that she will become submissive, read her Bible, and learn skills that will make her a suitable woman in society. Not only does this introduction into Jane’s life provide the reader with what will be a striking contrast to the woman that Jane becomes, but it also introduces the gothic element of a damsel in distress. Jane is not loved by her aunt and is often locked into a “red-room” when, in her aunt’s view, she has misbehaved. Here she thinks that her uncle’s presence haunts the room, and she faints from being frightened. Jane explains her apprehension about the red-room:

Mr. Reed had been dead nine years: it was in this chamber he breathed his last; here he lay in state; hence his coffin was borne by the undertaker’s

men; and, since that day, a sense of dreary consecration had guarded it from frequent intrusion. (Brontë 8)

From the opening scenes of the novel, Brontë establishes suspense and a feeling that Jane's troubles are far from over even though she is leaving the Reed household.

Braddon's female protagonist begins her life in a similar fashion. Lucy Graham's father is rather non-existent in her childhood while her mother is locked away in an institution. Lady Audley explains what her circumstances were like as a child:

I was not happy, for the woman who had charge of me was a disagreeable woman, and the place in which we lived was a lonely place. . . My father, who was in the navy, only came now and then to see me; and I was left almost entirely to the charge of this woman . . . who vented her rage upon me . . . so you see that at a very early age I found out what it was to be poor. (Braddon 348)

Just like Jane, Lady Audley had a difficult childhood at the hands of a woman who hated her. Braddon follows Brontë's outline by illustrating the poor circumstances that her protagonist comes from and painting her as a damsel in distress.

The similarities between Jane and Lucy stop with their jobs as governesses. When Jane gets a job at Thornfield, she is content to remain plain and submissive. She has truly been transformed, not in the sense of complete independence, but certainly in her overall manner. She remains modest in the presence of Mr. Rochester and he takes notice of this saying, "Oh, don't fall back on over-modesty! I have examined Adèle, and find you have taken great pains with her: she is not bright, she has not talents; yet in a short time she has

made much improvement” (Brontë 112). Jane is a good teacher and capable in Rochester’s eyes, which is a far cry from what she was upon entering Lowood.

Lady Audley, by contrast, only grows more vain when she attends school. She recalls,

I did remember this [the first time she was told she was pretty]; and it was, perhaps, this that made me selfish and heartless; for I suppose I am heartless. As I grew older I was told that I was pretty—beautiful—lovely, bewitching. I heard all these things at first indifferently; but by-and-by I listened to them greedily, and began to think that in spite of the spite of the secret of my life I might be more successful . . . than my companions.

(Braddon 350)

Braddon takes great care to show that vanity is what triggers the downfall of Lady Audley, whereas Jane remains humble. Furthermore, Braddon’s description of Lady Audley’s sexual awakening shows her real intentions, which is to marry well. When her first marriage does not provide her with the wealth that she had hoped for, she exploits her beauty in order to win another husband, one with greater wealth and a title.

The trope of the madwoman in the attic is used very differently by both authors. In *Jane Eyre* the secret that Rochester keeps—his mad wife locked up in the attic—is a real horror for Jane. Brontë shows a striking contrast between Bertha Mason and Jane Eyre by describing Bertha as a madwoman, as well as by demonstrating the effect that a tyrannical male like Rochester can have on women. Karen Stein explains,

men have split the concept of Woman into pairs of stereotyped antitheses: saint/sinner, virgin/whore, nurturing mother/devouring stepmother, and

angel/witch. Objectifying women and casting them as praiseworthy or blameworthy types diminishes the threatening power which women hold for men. (124)

So the apprehension that Rochester feels about Bertha probably originates in her “excesses of passion,” and he thinks he needs to, quite literally, keep her trapped upstairs (Stein 128). Furthermore, the reader can infer that Jane might have suffered the same fate had she not been able to control her fits of rage. Also, the novel creates more suspense and terror because of its domesticated setting where such events could really have taken place. Brontë makes the point that the society she lives in sees passion and self-assertion as “mad.”

In Braddon’s case, the madwoman and the heroine are one and the same. The protagonist may seem to be a respectable Victorian woman, but behind her is a murderous and bigamous woman. When Robert Audley tries to blame Lady Audley’s actions on monomania, the doctor exclaims, “The lady is not mad; but she has the hereditary taint in her blood. She has the cunning of madness, with the prudence of intelligence. I will tell you what she is, Mr. Audley. She is dangerous!” (Braddon 379). The doctor does not agree that Lady Audley is a passive victim but an active, willing participant in her bigamous plan. He serves as the voice of Braddon here. Braddon wishes to expose the society around her as quick to judge the peculiar actions of a woman as insanity. The doctor evaluates the actions of Lady Audley and initially dismisses the idea that she is mad. He concludes,

There is no evidence of madness in anything that she has done. She ran away from her home, because her home was not a pleasant one, and she

left it in the hope of finding a better. There is no madness in that. She committed the crime of bigamy, because by that crime she obtained fortune and position. There is no madness there . . . she carried out a conspiracy which required coolness and deliberation in its execution.

There is no madness in that. (Braddon 377)

The doctor sees that Lady Audley is trying to make the best out of her unfortunate circumstance. Her bigamy, leaving home, not raising her child, and trying to kill George are actions that Robert Audley sees as signs of madness, but the doctor disagrees with him. Just as Brontë wants to make the point that too many women are diagnosed with monomania, Braddon goes a step further in making this point. She says that not only are women diagnosed with this condition too often, but the real cause for a woman's "mad" actions are overlooked. When faced with adversity and a bleak life, it is possible that a woman can be as conniving and vindictive as a man.

Perhaps what is so terrifying about Lady Audley is that she is both the Virgin and the Whore, the Angel and the Demon, those opposites that Stein elaborates on above. She is what Rochester was afraid that his first wife would become and why he locked her away. Braddon makes it clear that without the realization of her beauty and the power of her sexuality, Lady Audley would not have been as vindictive as she was. Brontë makes the same point in reverse. If Jane Eyre had not transformed into the humble lady that she did, the lady that would not be Rochester's mistress, then she would have suffered the same fate as Bertha Mason. Both women authors are making similar comments about the status of women and the kind of real horror that they experience in the Victorian era. They incorporate gothic elements in domestic scenes as a way not only to tell a

suspenseful story but also to make social commentary. Henry James best explains this transformation of the Gothic story in his essay entitled “Miss Braddon”:

The innovation gave a new impetus to the literature of horrors . . . Instead of the terrors of “Udolpho”, we were treated to the terrors of the cheerful country house and the busy London lodgings. And there is not doubt that these were infinitely more terrible. (qtd. in Punter and Byron 27)

The subtle gothic elements in these two novels succeed because the damsel in distress is a poverty-stricken girl, without any parental figures, and at the mercy of a wicked caretaker. The tyrannical male in Jane’s story is an upper-class man who could represent anyone in society, but who has a horrible secret that is even kept from members of his household. In Lady Audley’s case her father is the one who initially deserts her, but then she is forced to take care of him when her husband leaves her. The madwoman in the attic may differ quite a bit in the two novels, but the outcome is essentially the same. Braddon seems to tell a more disturbing story because her damsel and her madwoman are the same person. For a Victorian reader this might strike more terror than a woman who has already been locked away and can essentially do no harm to the society outside of Thornfield. Braddon and Brontë manage to take a genre from the late eighteenth century and transform it to relate to their nineteenth-century reader, yet the characteristics of the Gothic provoke the same “sensations” they did a century earlier.

A major shift takes place in the portrayal of Braddon’s heroines when she begins writing ghost stories. In the past her heroines actively represented the façade of the Angel in the House (Gilbert and Gubar *The Madwoman in the Attic*). Lady Audley’s act backfires, and she is sent to an institution. Aurora Floyd manages actually to become the

Angel in the House in the last chapters of the novel as is illustrated in the last scene when she is standing over her baby's crib. The heroines of her ghost stories, however, are passive, submissive creatures. They embody what is supposedly "acceptable" for Victorian women. Rather than adore them, the men in their lives commit transgressions that cause these "Angels" to suffer. John Mellish worships Aurora, thus she evolves from the appearance of the Angel in the House to actually being a "proper" woman. In contrast, the women of the ghost stories are punished for the man's sin, while the man moves on with his life.

The Victorian ghost story became popular around the middle of the century. These stories are typically centered on the disruption of "the supernatural into the familiar, comfortable and – as suggested by the very titles of such stories as J. Sheridan Le Fanu's 'Green Tea' (1869), Collins's 'A Terribly Strange Bed' (1852), and Elizabeth Gaskell's 'The Old Nurses's Story' (1852)- the mundane everyday world" (Punter and Byron 28). The prevalence of ghost stories at this time has been regarded as one result of the challenging or questioning of the authority of science and reason. Also, "a growing interest in spiritualism and the occult, along with proliferation of societies for psychical research, prompted the publication of numerous stories of supposedly 'true' hauntings" (Punter and Byron 29). With these growing social changes and the resistance to faith in the Victorian era, it is no surprise that the fiction turned from "gothic domestic" to pure ghost stories.

Ghost stories also address family secrets, stories, and traditions. Gaskell's "The Old Nurse's Story" is based on the Furnivall family secret. Miss Grace Furnivall is haunted by the phantoms of her older sister, her sister's child, and her father. When alive,

the father was a tyrant, much like the strong male figures in the Gothic tradition, and ran the older sister off the estate after discovering her marriage to a foreigner (a man Grace loved as well) and the child that has resulted from this marriage. The mother and child froze to death in the snow and the old Lord Furnivall died soon after. The relationship between the haunter and the haunted separates the Gothic from ghost stories: while the Gothic focuses on a secret that is hidden and would stay hidden if no one spoke of it, in ghost stories, the ghosts reveal their own secrets from beyond the grave. These are then made publicly known either by the victim or by the ghosts that haunt her. So in the case of Gaskell's story, Miss Furnivall is not who initially reveals the family secret, but rather the ghost of the young child who leads Rosamond out into the snow to witness the phantoms of the other family members reenact the tale.

Gaskell also blames the dispute among two sisters over a man as the basis for the bad blood between them. Once Grace finds out that her sister has stolen her true love, she swears she will get her revenge. She may indeed get this said vengeance, or at least believe she is getting it, as she peacefully and serenely watches her father force the mother and child into the harsh winter weather. In return, the older sister comes back to disturb the peace and seek revenge upon Grace.

Braddon incorporates these conventions as well in her ghost stories "The Cold Embrace" and "Eveline's Visitant." In the latter story, a spat and eventual duel between two cousins, André de Brissac and Hector de Brissac, over a woman results in André's death. André swears that he will haunt Hector during the happiest time in his life. Hector's life is very dark and bleak for some time, like Miss Furnivall's life by herself. However, unlike Miss Furnivall, Hector marries a beautiful, lively young woman named

Eveline Duchalet. Similar to Gaskell's story, when a young woman enters the story, the haunting begins. Eveline speaks of seeing a noble-looking man in the woods as she goes to her favorite spot to read novels. Just like Rosamond, Eveline is doubted and thought of as a "silly girl" who reads too many romances.

Braddon highlights the supernatural elements by casting doubt on rational medical knowledge, something that Gaskell does not address. In the case of "Eveline's Visitant," Eveline mysteriously begins to fall more and more ill after she reports seeing the mysterious nobleman in the woods. The doctors cannot explain what is wrong with her because "she had no reason for sorrow or discontent, . . . she seemed sad without a motive, I [Hector] must forgive her sadness and consider it as a misfortune rather than a fault" (Braddon 118). Furthermore, Hector observes that "[he] could see she had no hope or belief in the healing powers of medicine" (119). This is because she believes that the phantom in the wood, that she sees everyday, "is that which is killing [her]" (119). Her husband, however, thinks her mad and calls upon a physician to inspect his wife's condition. Ironically, the doctor believes her, which may very well be more social commentary by Braddon on the misdiagnosis of "monomania" during this time.

Skepticism of women, especially young women, is a common element in these ghost stories. When the doctor describes the man Eveline sees, Hector finally believes her and realizes the horrible truth. The doctor questions, "Is there any kinsman of your steward, or hanger-on of your household,—a young man with a fair womanish face, very pale and rendered remarkable by a crimson scar, which looks like the mark of a blow?" (Braddon 120). Hector then knows that he must face the truth:

Go where we would, the ghost of Andre de Brissac followed us. To my eyes that fatal shadow never revealed itself. That would have been too poor a vengeance. It was my wife's innocent heart which Andre made the instrument of his revenge In vain did I watch her; in vain did I strive to comfort her. (Braddon 121)

Although Hector still cannot see the ghost, he now believes in it because the doctor reinforced his wife's story. In Gaskell's story, the entire estate finally sees the family phantoms reenact what happened the fatal day that Miss Maude was turned out of the house. Just as with Eveline, Rosamond is doubted when she alone sees the little girl. However, when others can see what is happening, they believe her story.

The ends of these two stories show some subtle similarities; one is that the victim and the culprit both meet their deaths in unexplainable ways. In Eveline's case, she suffers for quite some time before the end of her life, and medicine cannot find a cure for her illness. Miss Furnivall dies almost instantly after the phantoms reenact the horrible night that has plagued her all her life. The difference, however, is that Gaskell includes a moral to her story. The narrator explains, "Miss Furnivall died that night, before that she cried: 'Alas! Alas! What is done in youth can never be undone in age! What is done in youth can never be undone in age!'" (1333). Braddon's protagonist also suffers from some guilt at the end of the story, but a lesson is not really learned. After Eveline confesses that "for a year I have lived but to see him [the ghost]," she asks forgiveness from Hector; however, Hector responds, "What had I to forgive? Was the fatality that overshadowed us any work of hers?" (Braddon 122). Maybe Hector does at last realize that she is afflicted because of his transgression, but he does not seem to be entirely

remorseful, nor is his behavior the subject of a moral lesson. The difference in the endings of the two stories may have made Gaskell's more acceptable for the Victorian reader. If at the end of a horrible story the culprit learns a lesson, then the reader may find the piece more satisfying. The same is true of *Jane Eyre*. Brontë rewards Jane for *not* becoming Rochester's mistress. Jane and Rochester are able to be together in the end only because of his reform and her morally acceptable choice. On the other hand, Braddon's story is more disturbing, not just because it lacks an explicit moral, but also because an innocent woman suffers because of the actions of a guilty man. This moralizing may very well be why Gaskell remains in anthologies and Braddon does not make an appearance.

"The Cold Embrace" is another one of Braddon's ghost stories that employs many of the same supernatural elements as "The Old Nurse's Story" and "Eveline's Visitant." This story involves doomed lovers, the death of a young woman, and her haunting the love she left behind. However, in this story Braddon separates her English reader from the action by making the male protagonist a foreigner. She begins, "He was a German—such things as happened to him happen sometimes to Germans" (Braddon 45). By doing this, Braddon has put in a disclaimer as if to say, "this could not happen to you because you are not German, so do not be offended by my story." She also offers the reader an immediate sign foreshadowing the doom of the young betrothed couple. Braddon describes the ring that the unnamed male protagonist gives Gertrude, his betrothed, in great detail:

This ring is a peculiar one, a massive golden serpent, its tail in its mouth, the symbol of eternity; it had been his mother's, and he would know it

amongst a thousand. If he were to become blind tomorrow, he could select it from amongst a thousand by touch alone. (45)

The ring is supposed to be a “symbol of eternity,” but its serpent shape warns the reader that anything that comes from this man is poison and that the couple is doomed from the beginning.

As was popular of the Victorian ghost story, Braddon includes the mystical or what was referred to as “spiritualism” in her story. The young student, described as an “enthusiastic adorer of the mystical,” asks his love

Can death part us? I would return to you from the grave, Gertrude. My soul would come back to be near my love. And you—you, if you died before me—the cold earth would not hold you from me; if you loved me, you would return, and again these fair arms would be clasped round my neck as they are now. (Braddon 46)

In “Eveline’s Visitant” Braddon explains that the skepticism of mysticism is what causes the downfall of Hector. When Andrè says that he is going to haunt him at his happiest moment, Hector does not believe him. The young student, however, does believe in mysticism, and he is punished as well. Yet Hector is punished entirely through Eveline, while the student and Gertrude suffer.

The despondency and bleak circumstances surrounding the young female protagonist, after her love leaves to go abroad, is another element of the ghost story that Braddon incorporates into “The Cold Embrace.” Gertrude waits and longs for his letters, but “How many times she hopes, only to be disappointed! How many times she despairs, only to hope again! But the real despair comes at last, and will not be put off any more”

(Braddon 47). This is reminiscent of Gaskell's tale in which the departure of Miss Maude's husband causes her ultimate suffering. The real despair for Gertrude, however, is that her father forces her to forego her lover and instead marry a rich suitor. Like many gothic heroines, Gertrude is controlled by a tyrannical father. Being trapped in a loveless marriage leaves Gertrude so distraught that she drowns herself; however, an allusion to Ophelia makes the suicide appear beautiful. Her lover even states, "Suicides are always handsome" (Braddon 49). Despite this idealistic image of a peaceful death, Gertrude's spirit will not die.

Braddon draws on more supernatural elements in the haunting of the male protagonist than she does in any of her other ghost stories. By making the apparition felt and not seen by the protagonist, Braddon provokes greater terror. Braddon describes the presence, saying, "and though he feels, he cannot see the cold arms clasped round his neck. It is not ghostly, this embrace, for it is palpable to the touch—it cannot be real, for it is invisible" (51). Because Braddon describes the more intimate act of touching, she makes the protagonist feel he is being violated. Eveline's haunter is a distant presence who can be seen. While Eveline suffers the same fate as the male protagonist, she does not experience the same infringement of privacy that he does. By including this element of something that is only felt, not seen, Braddon adds to the suspense and overall alarming effect of "The Cold Embrace."

In the early gothic tradition, authors tend to "tidy away the fantastic by giving us rational explanations for the apparent supernatural events" (Milbank 200). For example, Radcliffe takes 200 pages to tell the reader why Emily must go into a certain chamber of Udolpho and what, precisely, she finds there. At the forefront of a new genre, writers like

Radcliffe and Walpole had to explain their fantastic elements in order for the events to be more believable to their audience. Braddon, however, was writing at a time when “to be modern also mean[t] that science is the metaphor that rules human interactions with the universe,” so she parodies this belief in science at the conclusion of her ghost story (Spenser 201). She speaks of the artist as “a genius and a metaphysician—grief, true grief, is not for such as he” (“The Cold Embrace” 49). Then, as if in a direct reaction to his “genius,” Braddon makes him break down physically, mentally, even monetarily, for no scientific reason at all:

Many months have passed since his cousin’s death—autumn, winter, early spring. His money is nearly gone, his health is utterly broken, he is the shadow of his former self, and he is getting near to Paris. . . He need never, surely, be alone, never feel that deadly caress; he may even recover his lost gaiety,health,[and] once more earn fame and money by his art. (“The Cold Embrace” 53)

Gertrude afflicts him in a way that cannot be explained in his mind, yet he hopes to regain what he has lost by going to Paris. However, he is wrong. Instead, he physically gets weaker and weaker. Braddon leads the reader to the climax of the story by describing everything that the artist sees around him. Perhaps the most fantastic element of this description is when the partner with whom he dances, Debardeuse, mystically fades away: “He looks her in the face. How the brightness of her eyes dies out! Again he looks her in the face. How white that face has grown! Again—and now it is the shadow of a face alone that looks in his” (54). This scene with Debardeuse is perhaps the only physical contact that Gertrude has with the artist, but her contact with him now occurs

through someone living. Adding to the final horrors that the male protagonist experiences before he dies, the cold embrace he has felt but not seen, has manifested itself in a living woman only to disappear. As he sees the deterioration of a person who mirrors himself, he dies from utter terror. When the artist is found, however, the narrator states that he “has died from want of food, exhaustion, and the breaking of a blood-vessel” (55). Braddon’s ironic reference to the scientific mocks the audience’s desire for a realistic cause for death.

The change in Braddon’s heroines from sensation novels to ghost stories is rather interesting. Lady Audley is not portrayed as the innocent victim suffering at the hands of a man like Eveline and Gertrude; instead she represents both the madwoman and the angel of the house figure. Using elements that were so familiar to her audience, Braddon evokes what Henry James has referred to as “those most mysterious of mysteries, the mysteries which are at our own doors” (qtd. in Milbank 201). She places Lady Audley in England, not Italy as many of the first Gothic writers did to soften the effects of their fiction. She characterizes Lady Audley as a commoner, a governess, then as a woman who marries to gain position in society, all of which were realities in the Victorian period. Whereas in *Jane Eyre*, Bertha Mason and Jane are opposites, Lady Audley is opposite of herself, thus making her more terrifying and dangerous. She delves into the psyche of a dangerous woman, which might have disturbed many readers during the Victorian era. Braddon does an excellent job at focusing on character analysis as the basis of gothic elements, not just plot and setting alone. Her social commentary on the appearance that women must uphold versus the reality of their situations would have been familiar to her reader.

In Braddon's more traditional ghost stories, however, she keeps women in what would seem to be more acceptable roles, only to show how this results in suffering. The female protagonists in "Eveline's Visitant" and "The Cold Embrace" are strictly the victims of a careless action by their love interests. Hector duels with and kills his cousin, but he does not suffer directly. Instead, the innocent female dies at the hands of the ghost of Hector's cousin. The fickleness of the artist in "The Cold Embrace" is what causes the death of Gertrude. Unlike Eveline, Gertrude gets her revenge; yet she is not seen as vindictive, like Lady Audley, because the male protagonist is so detestable and brings the punishment on himself. Eveline and Gertrude want to be wives and mothers, unlike Lady Audley, but are still not left to lead a life of domestic duties. Braddon exposes the difficulties of the life of a Victorian woman in these stories. She indirectly brings to the surface issues that could be a reality for many women. For example, a reader could infer that because Hector has been in a duel before, he could be violent enough to harm his wife. Thus Braddon comments on domestic violence that occurs in the privacy of the home while the couple may appear to be happy. Gertrude suffers from the folly of an inconstant lover. She and the artist are betrothed, but because he loses interest in her and does not come home, she is forced to marry someone else. Braddon could very well be commenting that whether a woman marries out of duty or out of love, she may still end up miserable. The plights of these two submissive, acceptable women illustrate Braddon's views on the problematic social status of women and the issues they faced.

CHAPTER 4

CLEANING UP THE FRENCH: BRADDON'S ENGLISH ADAPTATION OF MADAME BOVARY

Braddon did not stop experimenting with other genres of literature. While she loosely adhered to the conventions of the sensation novel throughout her career, she also branched out into the newly popular Realism genre. She accomplished this by eliminating the gothic, supernatural, and detective elements in a “sensation” piece to show the harsh realities of everyday life and to pay close attention to the development of the characters. The best example of Braddon’s attempt at realism lies within the pages of *The Doctor’s Wife*, a novel that is mostly known for its likeness to Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary*.

Braddon is said to have modeled the novel after the controversial French realist piece, but the result of her attempt is much more complex. Braddon censors the “affair” along with other “immoral” aspects to appease her English audience. She also satirizes the kinds of sensation novels she herself had written. *The Doctor’s Wife* thus becomes a vehicle not only for the social change that Braddon sees around her but for literary changes as well.

Realism arose in reaction to Romanticism that came before it. While Flaubert employs the romantic with an ironic tone, Braddon uses some examples of Romanticism to show the foolishness of those who use novels and popular literature as a map for their life. Braddon’s ironic treatment of her heroine may reflect bitterness or cynicism because of the criticism she had received while writing sensation fiction. Flaubert believed that irony “was not a method of intrigue, but an inevitable outcome of the creative act . . . And thus the occasional ironies of dramatic discord become a permanent condition of [his] realism” (Thorlby 41). For Flaubert, life is full of ironies, and that is the reality of it. Braddon’s ironic tone was meant more as commentary on the genre of the novel rather

than everyday life. In addition, “Braddon’s increased realism was also an acknowledgement that sensation fiction was no longer such a novelty and that characterization was as important as incident” (Carnell 219). So Braddon was trying to write in a new form, but she also knew that her once best-selling sensation novels were becoming a thing of the past.

Emma is conniving, and Flaubert illustrates her moral struggle and ultimate end. Braddon’s heroine, Isabel, also faces adversity, but her story is one of a girl who grows into a woman. First she is a foolish child, but after tragedy strikes, she becomes a sensible young woman. Her morality is defended throughout the novel, whereas Emma’s innermost desires are exposed. After the critical reactions to *Lady Audley’s Secret* and *Aurora Floyd*, Braddon was well aware that her audience would never accept a woman so outwardly “immoral.” She avoided overtly exposing the wickedness and sin of Isabel by showing her childish nature and depicting her desires as fantasies out of a book, not anything attainable. Next to *Madame Bovary*, Isabel is a saint.

The two heroines initially are similar to one another. Some of those likenesses include: The description of their romantic literary habits, the fact that they both fall in love with a squire, their fascination with the aristocratic lifestyle, and their disgust for their husbands and the lives they must lead. However, certain slight differences in each of these incidents illustrate the intricacies which Braddon worked to retain moral high ground to Flaubert’s story. When George first meets Isabel, she is living in her father’s house. He witnesses her time and again

[r]ead[ing] her favourite novels over and over again, and wr[iting] little extracts of her own choosing in penny account books . . . she knew whole

pages of her pet authors by heart, and [would] recite long sentimental passages to Sigismund Smith in the dusky summer evenings. (Braddon 28)

From the first meeting George sees Isabel as a somewhat foolish school girl with her nose buried in books and wild fantasies dancing about in her head. He keeps his admiration to himself, however, until he finds the proper opportunity to ask her to marry him. Charles Bovary's first meeting with Emma is somewhat different. Charles is married to Heloise Dubuc, a wealthy widow, when he first meets Mademoiselle Emma. From the beginning, Charles is not quite as morally upstanding as George Gilbert. He may not actively pursue his interest in Emma, but his wife takes notice of his fondness for her and becomes jealous. She begins to think, "So that's why he brightens up when he goes there! That's why he wears his new waistcoat, even in the rain! Ah! So she's at the bottom of it!" (Flaubert 20-21). While Flaubert constructs that Charles is married when he first meets Emma, Braddon leaves this detail out of her story because she needed to make both George and Isabel as well-mannered and upstanding as possible if her novel were going to have a chance of being accepted in Victorian society.

Emma and Isabel are quickly disgusted with their everyday life as the wives of surgeons. They fantasize about what their life might have been like based on their familiarity with sentimental novels. Emma often asks herself, "Why—*why*—did I ever marry?" (Flaubert 50). She contemplates what might have been if she had not married Charles:

She wondered whether some different set of circumstances might not have resulted in her meeting some different man; and she tried to picture those imaginary circumstances, the life they would have brought her, the

unknown other husband. However she imagined him, he wasn't a bit like Charles. (Flaubert 50)

Emma's first complaints and dreams are a direct result of her current situation and life experiences. Later in the novel, when she becomes an avid reader, her fantasies are fed with novel sentiment. More so than her exposure to novels, however, contact with the aristocratic lifestyle she has dreamt of corrupts her. While Isabel's childish fantasies remain within the pages of books for the majority of her life, Emma's desires are fed by the glimpses of the life she wants to have.

Flaubert believed that realism is supposed to appear objective by nature and that "the lyrical material has to be attributed or attributable to a character—a procedure that keeps it under narrative control, keeps it judged" (Smalley 73). Flaubert places his social commentary in the thoughts of Emma and the narrator's reaction to those thoughts. Here, Emma is contemplating how what she has just done is no better than her affair with Rodolphe, thus showing the degree of her moral corruption

And besides, should [Rodolphe] hesitate to come to her assistance, she would know well enough how one single glance would reawaken their lost love. So she set out towards La Huchette, unaware that she was hastening to offer what had so angered her a while ago, not in the least conscious of her prostitution. (Flaubert 350)

Mr. Raymond serves this purpose for Braddon. His warnings to Roland and ability to see how people's circumstances may play out are entirely Braddon's views. Like Flaubert must put his own speeches in the mouths of Emma and the narrator, Braddon must create

a character to convey her thoughts. In this case, it is Mr. Raymond who foresees a possible disaster in George marrying Isabel, saying

Poor little orphan child! Will any body ever fathom her fancies or understand her dreams? Will she marry that good, sheepish country surgeon, who has fallen in love with her? . . . She's so pretty—*so* pretty; and when she talks, . . . her face lights up . . . I can see her like this; and then, when I remember what her life is likely to be, I being to feel sorry for her. (Braddon 83)

Through Mr. Raymond, Braddon shows her heroine as a victim of circumstances and reveals her doom even before she says, “I do.”

Each heroine is affected differently by a similar aristocratic experience. The experiences themselves are quite similar in their structure; however, each woman's reaction to the event is what sets her apart from the other heroine. Emma Bovary is invited to the ball at La Vaubyessard, which proves to be a corrupting power that leads to her “antecedent moral and emotional collapse” (Heywood 156). But Emma has complained of her life before this event ever takes place. Heywood explains, “The decay of married joy and her outspoken protest against this state of affairs precede the invitation from the Marquis d'Andrevilliers. The ball thus becomes a symbol of her state of mind” (156). Braddon reverses the order of this transformation by making Isabel recognize “how poor and miserable” her life has been after her visit to Warncliffe Castle (115). She may complain about her life to a degree, but she does not realize what she could have or what exactly she is missing until her brunch at Mordred Priory. When she realizes that

“all the dishes in the banquet were of ‘such stuff as dreams are made of’” her imagination runs wild. Braddon makes it clear that

Isabel’s open rejection of her marriage appears, by its position after the visit to Warncliffe Castle, as the consequence rather than the cause of her infatuation with luxury. Her mind, till now inert, is pushed into action by the visit to the castle. (Heywood 156)

This incident strengthens Braddon’s case to make her heroine the victim of circumstance, in contrast to the condemnatory tone which Flaubert takes with his heroine.

The greatest contrast between the two novels occurs after the women meet their lovers. Braddon strays from Flaubert’s plot after this point, making her novel more socially acceptable than his because her heroine stays true to her husband. Even the squires that the women fall in love with differ greatly from the English and French versions of the novel. Rodolphe “is not a pattern of manly virtue, but he is at no point placed in the position where the reader must decide, as the reader of Lansdell’s words must, whether he is a fool or a knave” (Heywood 155). Rodolphe’s character is questionable. However, Braddon’s squire is set up as a Byronic hero of sorts, at least in Isabel’s mind, and is naive in his pursuit of Isabel. Where Rodolphe is a “sensual opportunist and no more,” Roland clings to his best intentions when questioned about Isabel (Heywood 155). Roland exclaims, “Degrade her! Degrade Isabel! There can be no degradation in such a love as mine” (Braddon 246). He does not see that the relationship could ruin Isabel’s reputation, only “the immortal right of two free souls, who know that they have been created for each other” (Braddon 246). His notions are entirely as romantic and childish as Isabel’s; the only difference is that he has the money and power

to act on his emotions. Rodolphe, on the other hand, does not respect Emma in the same way that Roland seems to respect Isabel. Rodolphe has had more sexual experiences with women; therefore

He had heard such stuff so many times that her words meant very little to him. Emma was just like any other mistress; and the charm of novelty, falling down slowly like a dress, exposed only the eternal monotony of passion, always the same forms and the same language. He did not distinguish, this man of such great expertise, the differences of sentiment beneath the sameness of their expressions. (Flaubert 185)

Braddon clings to any notion of virtue that may still exist in her characters, while Flaubert openly exposes them for the immoral creatures that they are.

The “affairs” in the two novels vary tremendously as well. Braddon most certainly takes the morals of Victorian England into consideration when she writes about the relationship between Isabel and Roland. Isabel’s feelings for Roland are little more than worship of a god, poet, or the like. She thinks their relationship is like the books she has read. She simply explains to him,

I never thought that you would ask me to be more to you than I am now: I never thought that it was wicked to come here and meet you. I have read of people, who by some fatality could never marry, loving each other, and being true to others for years and years—till death, sometimes; and I fancied that you loved me like that . . . I . . . never believed that you would think me like those wicked women who run away from their husbands. (Braddon 273)

This is perhaps the most important passage in *The Doctor's Wife*. Braddon explains Isabel's innocence in the affair by revealing what she thinks of their relationship. This segment also seems to be a statement to the English reader that Braddon is not going to follow Flaubert's characterization of the heroine from this point forward. In fact, this episode seems to criticize Emma directly and, perhaps, Flaubert for drawing his heroine in such a demoralizing way. By doing this Braddon would have been siding with many of Flaubert's harshest critics. Baudelaire was most vocal about celebrating the character of Emma despite what he calls "the systematic hard-heartedness of the author" (qtd. in Smalley 54). Flaubert does seem to be against his heroine in many passages, whereas Braddon is sympathetic and takes great pains to show her heroine's ignorance of the world outside her.

The fates of their heroines clearly state the authors' social purpose in writing their novels. Flaubert sums up the fate of his character's existence in one passage in which Emma wishes that her child will be a son because

[a] man, at least, is free; he can explore all passions and all countries, overcome obstacles, taste of the most distant pleasures. But a woman is always hampered. Being inert as well as pliable, she has against her the weakness of the flesh and the inequity of the law. Like the veil held to her hat by a ribbon, her will flutters in every breeze; she is always drawn by some desire, restrained by some rule of conduct. (Flaubert 101)

This episode illustrates how Flaubert employs realism to make social commentary. By looking at woman in the abstract, he immediately draws the reader to the reality of the position of women of the time. Thus Flaubert makes a bold statement concerning the fate

of his heroine. However, he seems to lose respect for Emma and no longer considers her a victim when she is begging for money to pay her debt. Money for sex is offered to her many times, but she does not accept it. Instead, she uses her sensuality to obtain the poison from Justin to end her life. When she approaches the pharmacy to get the poison, Justin sees her through the window, “[s]he seemed to him extraordinarily beautiful, majestic as an apparition from another world” (Flaubert 356). Because Justin is so taken with her, he allows her to take the poison without telling the apothecary. She convinces him that “there’s no use bothering him: I’ll tell him later” (Flaubert 357). Flaubert describes in great detail the ultimate punishment that his heroine must suffer for her transgressions: her death.

Soon she was vomiting blood. Her lips pressed together more tightly. Her limbs were contorted, her body was covered with brown blotches . . . Emma began to laugh—a horrible, frantic, desperate laugh—a spasm flung her down on the mattress. Everyone drew close. She had ceased to exist. (Flaubert 370)

He describes her death much like he describes her life, long and excruciating.

Braddon would not write a scene like this for her English audience, for they would never have approved of such a graphic death. Instead, her heroine is rewarded for her virtue:

She [Isabel] passes away from me into a higher region than that in which my story has lain,—useful, serene, almost happy . . . she is altogether different from the foolish wife who neglected all a wife’s duties while she sat by the mill-stream at Thruston’s Crag . . . It is strange, then that the

chastening influence of sorrow has transformed a sentimental girl into a good and noble woman. (Braddon 402-403)

So Braddon was trying to make her reader happy by tying up loose ends, and everyone seems to live an abundant life from that point forward. Everyone's happiness revolves around Isabel's newfound sense of self. The town now has no reason to gossip.

Sigismund can marry now that he no longer has to look after George. Mr. Raymond is saddened by Roland's death, but he finds another male to whom he can give guidance. Roland's cousin finds solace in her friendship with Isabel. The change in Isabel has resulted in a positive change in the society around her.

Overall, both Flaubert and Braddon seem to be reacting to women's issues, economic problems, and the literature of their own society in their own time; thus the skeleton of the novels remains similar, and the details differ immensely. Flaubert seems to criticize the bourgeoisie in which Emma is confined. Flaubert himself did not care for the rise in this class, since he himself was among the elite, which may be why his representation of Emma is not entirely flattering or sympathetic. Braddon, too, may be making a point about class distinctions in her novel, but her focus lies in the young woman as a reader of novels. By pointing out that the authors whom Isabel reads, "are no more dangerous than Bulwer Lytton, Thackeray and Dickens," Braddon was probably arguing that

attributing such damaging influence on a young girl to the triumvirate rulers of 19th-century fiction showed how ridiculous such claims were when they were made about her own work. If Braddon had been serious

she would have had Isabel reading Penny dreadfuls and French fiction.

(Carnell 215)

Braddon uses Sigismund Smith's story of a sensation writer who finds inspiration in everything around him, does not marry until late in life, and makes very little money even on the pieces that sell well, as a vehicle for her thoughts on how Penny pieces were to be written, what the author should be like, and even how much money s/he makes. Braddon's subtle satire is within the description of Mr. Smith and his life. By poking fun at him, she is not only making fun of herself but also commenting on those who criticize her. She even ends *The Doctor's Wife* with the conclusion of Sigismund's life. Braddon explains that he has taken interest in one of the orphan girls. Mr. Raymond has taken good care of the girls, so the girl is not without a dowry. Braddon further reveals that he has invested himself all these years, explaining that a man who "lives chiefly upon bread-and-marmalade and weak tea" would be glad to amass some wealth from his bride in order to have "a very comfortable little independence from the cultivation of sensational literature in penny numbers" (404). This ending illustrates Braddon's additional intentions in writing *The Doctor's Wife*. She takes the entire focus away from Isabel and ends with Sigismund's, or rather her, story.

It would not be fair to say that one author is more skilled at conveying points about the social climate surrounding the novel. Nonetheless, most critics pair Flaubert with George Eliot, saying that *Middlemarch* is the first English novel that uses realism similar to *Madame Bovary*. Barbara Smalley suggests that "Both novelists in their prime masterpieces, *Madame Bovary* (1857) and *Middlemarch* (1872), occupy themselves with the inner life of their protagonists to a degree that takes them markedly beyond their

predecessors” (v). What Smalley overlooks, however, is Braddon’s novel. Smalley suggests that *Middlemarch* was the first novel of its kind in England, which is not the case. Braddon uses this form seven years before Eliot, so to leave her out of the list of forerunners of Realism is to deny her the credit that she deserves.

CHAPTER 5

FINIS

Mary Elizabeth Braddon received far more criticism in her lifetime than she did praise. She was given what was thought to be constructive criticism on occasion. For example, Collins and Bulwer-Lytton wrote her letters and told her how they thought a heroine should be portrayed and commented on the lack of sentiment in her work. She responded,

I have begun to question the expediency of very deep emotion...it is this feeling, or rather this incapacity for any strong feeling, that, I believe, causes the flippancy of tone which jars upon your sense of the dignity of art. I can't help looking down upon my heroes when they suffer because I always have in my mind the memory of wasted suffering of my own.

(Carnell 164)

In her response, Braddon makes it clear that she liked to draw from her own experiences in her writing. She does not write of suffering because she herself has suffered and thought it in vain. Emotions, she believes, are inconstant and muddle the art form. Braddon's sensationalism frighteningly makes sense, and she pursued it with level-headed steadiness, insisting on "the right of the imaginative writer to choose his subjects from that field whence all the great writers of the past derived their fables—that is to say the tragic, criminal, and exceptional situations of life" (Carnell 163).

Considering the quote above, it would be hard to ignore the subjects that Braddon chooses to write about and their origin. Braddon read an impressive amount of literature in her lifetime and drew from these authors a sense of style that she made her own.

Braddon once said that “the history of my life is for the most part the history of the books I have written and the books I have read” (Woolf 35). The same could be said of her literature as a whole. As Braddon fills her pages with references to Shakespeare, Sir Walter Scott, Byron, and Tennyson, she seems to be establishing her credibility and education. This convention can be traced back to medieval literature, when writers sought to establish their authority and credibility by quoting other great authors before them, such as Virgil or Saint Augustine. Braddon quotes from this impressive list of authors that she read and found worthy of mentioning in the majority of her novels, whether sensation, detective, gothic, or realist. Braddon’s most prominently referenced author is Shakespeare. As Braddon’s writing progresses, she mentions Shakespeare more and more. In *Lady Audley’s Secret*, there are only a few references to *Macbeth* when the doctor is trying to diagnosis Lady Audley. After he leaves, Robert says, “Do you remember what Macbeth tells his physician, my lady? . . . Mr. Dawson may be very much more clever than the Scottish leech; but I doubt if even *he* can minister to the mind that is diseased” (265). *Aurora Floyd* has several more mentions of Shakespeare, and the beginning of the novel contains commentary on the stage and the writing of plays. Mr. Floyd goes to see *Romeo and Juliet*, which leads to the following comment about the lead actress Eliza Percival: “I do not believe that Miss Percival was a good actress, or that she would ever have become distinguished in her profession” (11). It is obvious that Braddon is writing about what she knew best: the stage. She also makes mention of the authoring of plays during this time:

It was not the fashion in those days to make “sensation” dramas of Shakespeare’s plays. There was no “Hamlet” with the celebrated water

scene, and the Danish prince taking a “header” to save poor weak-witted Ophelia. In the little Lancashire theatre it would have been thought a terrible sin against all canons of dramatic art, had Othello or his Ancient attempted to sit down during any part of the solemn performance. (11-12)

Braddon reacts to those who insist that Shakespeare be performed the way it was originally. Later in the novel she refers to the change in Shakespeare’s characters on the stage. Talking about the hatred that Mrs. Powell has for Aurora, she compares her to Iago:

In the great dramas of life, it is the quiet people who do the mischief. Iago was not a noisy person; though, thank Heaven! It is no longer the fashion to represent him as an oily sneak, whom even the most foolish of Moors *could not* have trusted. (Braddon 134)

Also, in *Aurora Floyd* Braddon makes reference to the time of year by relating to “Shakespeare’s birthday [which] had come and gone, and the high festivals at Stratford were over, when Archibald Floyd took his pale daughter to Leamington” (115).

Perhaps the most allusions to Shakespeare’s works are found in *The Doctor’s Wife*. Isabel fantasizes about suicide, thus Ophelia is mentioned to illustrate how beautiful suicide can be when represented in a play or on a canvas. This further illustrates Isabel’s naivety about life as well as death. A quote used to illustrate Isabel’s first aristocratic experience is from *Midsummer Night’s Dream*: “Such stuff as dreams are made of.” This demonstrates how Isabel’s first taste of the finer things in life will further spur her fantasies and dissatisfaction with her common life. Furthermore, in *The Doctor’s Wife* Isabel compares her love triangle with the relationship of Othello, Desdemona, and

Cassio. Isabel fantasizes one day as she is walking with Sigismund that Mr. Landsdell is jealous and plays out a scene of *Othello* in her head:

The jealous delusions of a monomaniac could scarcely have transformed Mr. Smith into a Cassio. Desdemona might have pleaded for him all day long, and might have supplied him with any number of pocket-handkerchiefs hemmed and marked by her own fair hands, without causing the Moor a single apprehensive pang. (Braddon 192)

Braddon uses this story to foreshadow the relationship that will unfold among Isabel, Roland Landsdell, and her husband. It is also a way to illustrate how Isabel's fantasies could become a reality, even if she never becomes conscious of it. She begins by fantasizing that her husband is jealous of Landsdell, but this fantasy soon becomes a reality when Landsdell asks her to run away with him, thus giving her husband a real reason to be jealous. She also compares herself to Desdemona when she fancies that she will be an actress someday. Isabel thinks,

she was more like Juliet, or Desdemona. She lowered her eyelids, and then lifted them slowly, revealing a tender penetrating glance in the golden black eyes. "I'm *very* sorry that you are not well!" she whispered. Yes, she would do for Desdemona. (Braddon 155)

Braddon illustrates what could happen to Isabel if she were to act out *Othello* in her real life. The play serves as a comment on how quickly Isabel's life could change from fantasy to real-life horrors.

As a whole, the Shakespeare allusions in Braddon's novels serve a certain purpose beyond building her credibility. She uses *Macbeth* references to illustrate Lady

Audley's madness and the blame that Aurora will face for Mr. Conyer's death. She places Iago in direct reference to the quiet way that Mrs. Powell shows her dislike for Aurora. It could also be a foreshadowing of the stable hand "Softy," who is lurking in the background to cause trouble. The play *Othello* is the best example of the relationship triangle that occurs in *The Doctor's Wife*; however, beyond that Braddon is making the comment that Isabel is inevitably innocent of any real wrong just as Desdemona was. While Braddon may make mention of Tennyson's *The Lotus Eaters* or Isabel's love for Byron, it is Shakespeare's work that illustrates the plot and characters in her novels.

She also mentions contemporary authors (sometimes as part of her satire), such as Wilkie Collins, Charles Reade, Butler-Lytton, and Mrs. Henry Wood. These authors are referenced particularly when Braddon is making social commentary about "penny hopefuls." As Robert Audley is trying to figure out the mystery behind his friend's disappearance, he says, "I haven't read Alexandre Dumas and Wilkie Collins for nothing, . . . I'm up to their tricks, sneaking in at doors behind a fellow's back, and flattening their white faces against window panes'" (Braddon 402). In this case Braddon is suggesting that because Robert Audley has read these authors, that he will be more knowledgeable about how to solve this mystery. When talking about outward beauty verses inward ugliness in *Aurora Floyd*, Braddon mentions George Eliot. She says, "With what wonderful wisdom has George Eliot told us that people are not any better because they have long eyelashes!" (Braddon 181). This is, of course, a reference to *Adam Bede* when Arthur Donnithorne argues that just because a person has longer eyelashes does not mean he has have better morals or vice versa. In *Aurora Floyd* Braddon comments on the characterization in Rev. Charles Kingsley's works. She says,

I think the Rev Charles Kingsley would have delighted in this big, hearty, broad-chested young Englishman, with brown hair brushed away from open forehead, and thick auburn moustache bordering a mouth for ever ready to expand into a laugh. Such a laugh, too! (Braddon 57)

She strategically places remarks like this in the mouths of non-threatening characters such as Sigismund Smith, an author of sensation fiction in *The Doctor's Wife*. Braddon comments on the subject of "penny numbers" by describing Sigismund's inspiration for his next novel: "He was thinking that a father who ill-used his daughter would not be a bad subject for penny numbers; and he made a mental plan of the plot for the new romance" (Braddon 34). Braddon parodies her own profession and contemporaries very subtly, but effectively makes the point that motherless daughters, tyrannical fathers, and suspense are what interest people and sell books.

A theme found in her novels is the feelings and behavior of daughters toward neglectful, dishonest, incapacitated, or unloving fathers. This is especially prominent in *Lady Audley's Secret* and *The Doctor's Wife*. Braddon uses Lady Audley's unfortunate circumstance with her father as a way to provoke sympathy for her villainous heroine. In the story of Helen Talboy's life, it is obvious that George rescued her from her poor, uncaring father when he married her. Lady Audley describes him as "not what the world generally calls a good man" (Braddon 349). However, George does end up leaving her to live that life with her father again. She explains, "I resented it [George's departure] by hating the man who had left me with no protector but a weak, tipsy father, and with a child to support" (Braddon 353). Isabel's father plays a more direct role in her future happiness. Because of his illegal profession and reputation, Isabel's family must try to

hide his identity. When Isabel finds out about her father's reputation, the narrator explains that "To Isabel the horror of being a forger's daughter was something very terrible" (Braddon 359). However, the height of Isabel's unfortunate circumstance occurs when her father is back in the picture and causes the death of Roland, Isabel's "lover." "Jack the Scribe" confronts Roland, "I said, if ever I came out of prison alive, *I'd kill you*; and I'll keep my promise" (Braddon 353). Again, Braddon uses this situation to initiate sympathy for Isabel because she has been a foolish girl for the majority of the novel. These tragic events are what shape her into a woman and inevitably cause the reader to have more respect for her than the character after whom she is modeled, Madame Bovary. Another unfortunate circumstance that occurs because of a neglectful father occurs in *Dead Sea Fruit* (1868), where Braddon's heroine Lucy Alford is forced to take a place on the stage after her father, a former Oxford scholar, becomes penniless and a drunkard (Woolf 64).

The situation of these heroines is not confined to the relationship that they have with their fathers. The fact that these women have been motherless from infancy has as much of an influence on their circumstances as their inattentive fathers. For instance, when Aurora and Bulstrode argue about the secret that Aurora is keeping from him, "I was motherless from my cradle, Talbot," she said, in a half-stifled voice. "Have pity upon me" (Braddon 104). Because she did not have a mother-figure, Aurora is exploited by James Conyers and marries him. If she had a mother, she would have sought her guidance and perhaps avoided keeping a terrible secret. Braddon explains her behavior by saying, "But one act of mad folly has blotted her motherless youth, and she has a terrible harvest to reap from that lightly-sown seed, and a cruel expiation to make for that

unforgotten wrong” (Braddon 117). In *Lady Audley’s Secret* Braddon again tries to explain the actions of her heroine by elaborating on Lady Audley’s past relation or non-relation with her mother. When Lady Audley confesses to all her atrocities, she explains, “I asked where my mother was. I had a faint remembrance of a face, like what my own is now, looking at me when I was very little better than a baby; but I had missed the face suddenly, and had never seen it since” (Braddon 348). Presumably, because of her lack of maternal presence, Lady Audley does not have the feminine qualities that women usually have. This could explain her terrible actions and bouts of madness. Finally, in *The Doctor’s Wife* Isabel is without her mother and does not have the qualities that one would consider to be proper “feminine” characteristics. The narrator provides that, “Isabel’s only memory of her mother was the faint shadow of a loving, melancholy face; a transient shadow, that come to the motherless girl sometimes in her sleep” (Braddon 26). What these heroines share are circumstances and improper qualities that reflect a childhood without a mother and with a negligent father. Braddon utilizes their family background to provoke sympathy in readers who otherwise would have found these heroines unacceptable.

Braddon employs many of the same conventions as her contemporaries and creatively makes them her own. She experiments with the trend of the gothic and madwoman in the attic like Charlotte Brontë, but her heroine encompasses both the character of Bertha Mason and of Jane Eyre. Thus Braddon’s female protagonist is more terrifying and controversial than Brontë’s. The popular ghost story is a genre in which Braddon experiments; however, she relies more on the supernatural and sublime than the

renowned Elizabeth Gaskell. Braddon is not found in any anthology despite this fact, while Gaskell most certainly is.

Mary Elizabeth Braddon is also a precursor to and influence on many genres and authors. She includes many detective elements in her novels, especially in *Aurora Floyd*, that are used in mystery novels today. Many of these conventions are similar to those employed by Wilkie Collins, who is said to have invented these elements, but what we know as mystery today seems to reflect the way that Braddon uses these components in her fiction. Collins is given the credit as precursor of detective fiction, while Braddon is labeled sensation writer.

While Flaubert may have been a pioneer in the realism movement, it is Braddon who makes his ideas acceptable for an English audience. She is also the author who inspires the realist form to take hold in England, and she proves to be influential to authors such as George Moore who modeled her form. Most scholars compare Flaubert to George Eliot, thus giving her the credit for the realist novel in England. While George Eliot relies much on sentiment, Braddon sticks to the true realist form. However, it is Braddon that is criticized for not showing enough sentiment in her novels, not the other way around.

Braddon is an inventive writer who can be appreciated by a wide range of audiences. Robert Woolf describes her best as follows:

A modern reader, jaded with crime and its detection, mystery and its solution, still finds even her sensation-novels strong in the accuracy of her eye for detail, the sensitivity of her ear for speech. Her other novels, her

other manners, provide a constantly rewarding exploration of the mores of the era. She's a master of ambiguity. (Woolf 18)

Finally, Braddon is an intelligent writer who embodies qualities that have been highly praised in other authors. She can be a miniaturist like Jane Austen. She can employ great literature and philosophy in her writing like George Eliot. She can use conventions such as the amateur detective like Charles Dickens and Wilkie Collins. Her characterization of the female heroine is as strong as the Brontës'. All of these characteristics define who Braddon is as a writer. It would be a shame to dismiss this strong female author as merely a writer of historical significance because of her reputation, subject matter, and mass production of literature. Mary Elizabeth Braddon possesses all the strengths of many Victorian novelists wrapped up into twice as many novels.

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