Introduction

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What is silenced within discourses—and what remains unprinted, untaught, and virtually unread within institutions—is inseparable from what is written and from what remains "real and remembered" within a canon.
—Tricia Lootens, *Lost Saints*

She is a part of England, she has woven herself into it; without her it would be different.
—Arnold Bennett

For the past several years, Victorian studies conferences have prominently featured the name of Mary Elizabeth Braddon in their programs. Indeed, it was following a panel on Braddon's novels that the three of us began to discuss the ways in which Braddon had become increasingly important to our research and, as we believed, to a rich understanding of the latter half of the nineteenth century. One of the most popular and prolific novelists of the period,[1] her evident significance to the Victorians themselves—and to the market economy that made *Lady Audley's Secret* the bestselling novel of the period and kept Braddon in business producing an abundant variety of fiction until the turn of the century—necessitates an examination of the role she played in literary history and culture. Braddon's fiction, through which she offered a revisioning of Victorian codes of behavior and narrative, along with her unorthodox life, attracted the attention of the public and contemporary scholars alike. W. Fraser Rae lamented, in an early review of Braddon, that despite

the "low type of female characters" depicted in her novels she might *still* "boast, without fear of contradiction, of having temporarily succeeded in making the literature of the kitchen the favourite reading of the Drawing room" (Wolff 196–7).[2]

Rae's commentary suggests a variety of tensions that make the study of Braddon's work rich and provocative. Her career not only spanned the century, making her writing a far-reaching presence in the period, but crossed boundaries in readership, style, and the politics of socioeconomic identity. Popularized when Mudie's circulating library had established itself as an arbiter of middle-class morality, even Braddon's most "shocking" fiction was packaged and regularly delivered to the homes of those middle-class readers whose attitudes, writings, and behaviors we have studied for decades—and, as Rae's remarks claim, Braddon's was writing that somehow seemed to reflect an intimate appeal to those who labored in those households, a suggestion that begs for analysis. In addition, though known today as primarily a sensation novelist, after establishing her reputation and generating a stable income, Braddon secured the freedom to experiment with other stylistic approaches, to create the "art" in addition to the "sensation" that had inaugurated her career.[3] The discursive diversity that appears in this movement across so many fields of significance has provided Braddon scholars with multiple points of entry for analysis.

Though there have been critics who have questioned the legitimacy and significance of Braddon's work, we have often found, in their dismissals, fertile ground for inquiry as well. Some critics have suggested that Braddon's historical marginalization derives from the concerns expressed in foregoing decades about Charles Dickens: her productivity. She simply generated "too many" novels to seem worthy of serious academic consideration. Joseph O'Mealy, in his examination of Margaret Oliphant, argues that "Steeped as we are in the late-twentieth century belief that less is more, and conditioned by the modernist examples of lapidary and or slowly gestated novels, [voluminous publication] not only discourages the modern reader but probably gives rise to a mild contempt for the author of such excess" (65). Further, this "excess" may explain some of the contemporary and Victorian attention to Braddon's life that has led to her neglect. Tricia Lootens suggests that a woman writer's sullied social reputation may have been constituted, in part, in her literary success, arguing that "female aspirants to literary genius tend to be cast in particularly humiliating sexual or somatic terms" (49).[4] These patterns and their often gendered nature, however, pose intriguing questions for the student of the period and have already begun to generate inquiry like that contained in this collection.

Another source of criticism (ironically countering the charge of

"sensationalism," which implies resistance to accepted codes of narrative) has concerned Braddon's "conventionality." Ellen Miller Casey suggests that, in her concern for maintaining Victorian codes of propriety, Braddon sacrificed the possibility of political inquiry and "feminine rebellion," "succumb[ing] to the pressure of other people's prudery and [producing novels] which [are] therefore less interesting as a finished work[s] of art than for what [they] reveal about [their] age" (81). We would argue that although many of Braddon's novels may seem to capitulate to normative Victorian standards of morality in their closing moments, the resistance depicted throughout the novel as a whole provides a form of "revelation" other than the one Casey identifies here—a subversive variety of revision that allows figures like the infamous Lady Audley to confound and, thus, call into question notions of gendered identity and the domestic order. Indeed, Lynda Hart finds this complexity in the presence of these tensions and the "pathological repetition [in *Lady Audley's Secret*] of a profoundly paranoid culture that ironically displays what it suppresses" (22).[5] Increasing numbers of critics have found the questions produced by the irony of Lady Audley's placid execution of profoundly non-Victorian and unwomanly crimes, and, the final "recuperation" of the Audley home and her formerly wayward nephew by her interment in a Belgian *maison de santé* a fruitful sites for investigation, and we would argue that their reexamination of this novel provides an apt model for the study of Braddon's life and the corpus of her work.

In the face of various forms of resistance, we have discovered, in our preparation for this collection, many devoted Braddon scholars pursuing these and other lines of inquiry. The public's voracious desire for an engagement with Braddon's work during her own lifetime was evidenced by the widespread, and often unauthorized, reproduction of her novels in various forms (*Aurora Floyd,* for example, immediately appeared on stages all over London, produced by at least four different companies); likewise, intellectual conversations concerning Braddon and her work—which have been taking place for decades—have often been staged outside the powerfully legitimated realms of academic discourse. The enthusiasm with which analysis has continued in the hallways at conferences, even after the doors to the session have closed, bespeaks the demand for accessible, current research on Braddon. The dearth of resources on Braddon has not silenced her voice in the active scholarship of literary and cultural critics and historians, whose interests include a range of issues as rich and diverse as economics, sexuality, madness, art, identity, imperialism, canonization, social policies, publication history, theater, and the law—explorations that attest to the complexity of her work and the importance it has in our study of the period. As Tricia Lootens suggests in the epigraph to this introduction, the previous lack of critical

attention does not indicate insignificance, nor can it serve as a continuing justification for her neglect.

Although we wish to strongly argue that Braddon cannot be satisfactorily summed up simply as a sensation novelist, it may be useful to recall that the reason for that insistence is precisely because that is how she is usually identified. 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. As most of the essays in the collection either assume familiarity with this information, or ignore it in favor of other approaches, it seems useful to briefly review the history of reception of the sensation genre itself.

Braddon's earliest, and perhaps greatest public impact was as a sensation novelist, the author of *Lady Audley's Secret* and *Aurora Floyd*. That typecasting was early on injurious to Braddon—the sensation novel, a genre category of the 1860s, 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. Interestingly, for many years in the late twentieth century, Wilkie Collins was the only representative of the genre in print, though the Victorians considered the genre itself to be feminine, and certainly the great bulk of sensation novels were produced (and consumed) by women. Victorian critics responded with alarm to what seemed to them a frightening new manifestation of female aggression and cultural decay.

Victorian anxiety about the sensation novel tended to be articulated in terms of the sexual and economic improprieties of the women they depicted. Mrs. Oliphant's condemnation is the best known:

> Now it is no knight of romance riding down the forest glades, ready for the defence and succour of all the oppressed, for whom the dreaming maiden waits. She waits now for flesh and muscles, for strong arms that seize her, and warm breath that thrills her through, and a host of other physical attractions, which she indicates to the world with a charming frankness . . . were the sketch made from the man's point of view, its openness would at least be less repulsive. The peculiarity of it in England is, that it is oftenest made from the woman's side—that it is women who describe these sensuous raptures—that this intense appreciation of flesh and blood, this eagerness of physical sensation, is represented as the natural sentiment of English girls. (259)

The physicality of the women described in sensation novels certainly was disturbing to many critics. But even more disturbing was the answering physical response in its readers. The sensation novel, as the

name implies, was defined by its ability to cause a physical sensation in the reader—a thrill, a gasp, a creeping of flesh. The *Quarterly Review* defines sensation novels as novels that produce "excitement, and excitement alone" by "preaching to the nerves," "There are novels of the warming pan, and others of the galvanic battery type—some which gently stimulate a particular feeling, and others which carry the whole nervous system by steam" (Mansel 481, 487). Many critics were also distressed by the blatant commercialism of the sensation novel. Henry Mansel characterized the sensation novel as a diseased product incident to degenerate mass production: "A commercial atmosphere floats around works of this class, redolent of the manufactory and the shop. . . . There is something unspeakably disgusting in this ravenous appetite for carrion, this vulture like instinct which smells out the newest mass of social corruption, and hurries to devour the loathsome dainty before the scent has evaporated" (483–506). For these critics, 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."

In the twentieth century, with the exception of those critics—most notably Audrey Peterson—who positioned Braddon firmly at the foundation of the Victorian detective novel, though as a "minor writer," and of enthusiasts such as Sadleir and the collector, Robert Lee Wolff, whose biography of Braddon remains the *vade mecum* of Braddoniana, Braddon was virtually neglected, her readership limited to two main groups: feminists in search of a female literary tradition, such as Showalter, and those interested in sensation fiction itself. To Showalter and others who worked in her mode, we owe an incalculable debt of recovery. These scholars were followed by feminist critics (and others) interested in revising—or dispensing with—canonical modes of aesthetic evaluation, and that influence is very evident in the current "Braddon explosion," including most of the work included here. In tandem with this trend was a reevaluation of "minor genres." Early on, this discussion acceded to the general opinion of the low aesthetic value of sensation and treated it as a topic primarily of historical importance. By the 1980s, however, scholars such as Winifred Hughes, Jonathan Loesberg, and Thomas Boyle came to see it as increasingly central to an understanding of the period and were more interested in how the aesthetics of sensation worked culturally than in evaluating it against dominant realist aesthetics.

Hughes argued that sensation was a truly new genre, "What distinguishes the true sensation genre, as it appeared in its prime during the 1860s, is the violent yoking of romance and realism, traditionally the two contradictory modes of literary perception" (16). Its appeal, she contends, was based in part on the setting, which was contemporary and

domestic (18). Hughes believes that the sensation novel is a response to the stringencies of Victorian respectability. Boyle, however, finds little difference between sensation fiction and Victorian life described in other genres. He notes that the average Victorian newspaper "was sensational to say the least, [and] certainly not supportive of an image of domestic tranquility" (3). Boyle, therefore, opens up the study of sensation discourse to extend over a wide range of texts, of which the novels are only a part. Other studies of sensation tend to focus on gender and class implications of apprehensions about their production and reception. Jonathan Loesberg argues that the defining characteristic of sensation fiction is anxiety over the loss of class identity, which he relates to the debates over the second Reform Bill. Most recent studies of sensation have particularly concerned themselves with gender issues. In her excellent 1988 study of Wilkie Collins, Jenny Bourne Taylor notes that the appetite for sensation was linked to anxieties about cultural degeneration, observing that the physiological referents of "sensation" operated "to articulate anxiety about imminent cultural decline by referring to an image of an explicitly 'feminine' body that was at once its product and metonymic model" marked by a neurotic susceptibility to excitement that was a reaction to modernity (4). Kate Flint argues that the primary source or anxiety about sensation novels has to do with their primarily female audience, but notes that the female author is implicated in this equation as well, and observes the special hostility shown toward female authors with sexually aggressive female characters. Lyn Pykett's recent work compares the cultural production of sensation to the more explicitly feminist production of New Woman fiction at the end of the century, and focuses also on the role of readers. She argues that, "By being positioned as the spectator (especially of a female character) the female reader is offered a culturally masculine 'position of mastery' . . . [I]n sensation fiction this mastery is also an effect of the specularity of the melodramatic style [which offers the female body as object while simultaneously inviting an identification of reader and protagonist]. . . . It is this contradictory process . . . which opens a space for oppositional readings" (80). Ann Cvetkovich's excellent book is also concerned with the female reader, and the offer of emotional relief from a possibly transgressive expression of affect, a "telling" of pain that might seem to offer ways to effect social change, although she sees that "relief" as often illusory. She positions the sensation novel firmly back in the mainstream of Victorian literary development, moving seamlessly from Braddon to Eliot in her exploration of sensational discourse. Examining the icon of the transgressive or suffering woman that pervades sensational literature, Cvetkovich traces the construction of affect as both natural and particularly female, and as therefore potentially transgressive, requiring regula-

tion and control. The political potential of sensation lies in the way affect (e.g., readers' sympathy) generated by the sensational representation of power relations can be mobilized, as, for example, Marx attempts to direct readers' energies. Pamela Gilbert continues the focus on the body as the locus of the construction of sensation, and examines the way in which sensation is constructed as a genre out of anxieties about the grotesque and permeable body of culture, a body literalized in the body of the middle-class woman reader. Examining the way in which reading, ingestion, and sexual penetration are metaphorically aligned in critical discourse of the period, she seeks to position sensation as a genre constructed by its readers within a larger network of cultural discourse and historical circumstance. The work of these critics suggests that the study of the "minor" genre of sensation has become an important part of the scholarly discourse on Victorian cultural issues as a whole.

However, despite this newfound interest that has revived scholarship on Braddon, it is important to realize that Braddon's production extended beyond the sixties and beyond the conventional understanding of the sensational. Although few critics today remain unaware of *Lady Audley's Secret,* we believe this collection can diversify the study of this complex and often controversial author. It explodes the predominating conception that Braddon's work is summed up in this single novel. In offering this broad foray into her work, representing many texts and theoretical approaches, we hope not only to furnish some response to the enthusiasm for Braddon that already exists, but generate fertile ground for future study.

In 1867, at the height of an astounding popularity that would last almost forty years, Mary Elizabeth Braddon found herself the target of a series of stinging reviews that condemned both her "sensation" novels and her life. Although Braddon was neither glamorous nor criminal, reviewers assumed that the attractive and unconventional heroines/villains of Braddon's sensation novels were based on the author's own experiences and character. Even Robert Wolff, her biographer, claims that, "the story of her life [was] as sensational in its way and for its time as any novel she ever wrote" (3). The most famous of her contemporary reviewers, Margaret Oliphant, suggested that the author of *Lady Audley's Secret* has "brought in a reign of bigamy . . . and it is an invention that could only have been possible to an Englishwoman knowing the attraction of impropriety, and yet loving the shelter of the law" (203). This was clearly an attack on Braddon's adulterous relationship with the publisher John Maxwell, who published reports of his "marriage" to Braddon in 1864 while his own wife was in an insane asylum in Ireland. Although Braddon lived with Maxwell for thirty-four years (they were married in 1874) and eventually established a rather conventional middle-class

domestic arrangement, Braddon suffered from a taint of disreputability that took years to dispel.

Who was this woman, the author of over eighty novels, who elicited such violent condemnation from many reviewers and staunch and affectionate support from fellow writers such as Dickens, Thackeray, Robert Louis Stevenson, and Henry James? She is still known primarily as the author of her first bestseller, *Lady Audley's Secret* (1862), which ran through eight editions in three months, was a staple of Victorian theater, and was even made into a musical comedy in the United States in the 1970s. However, the fierce popularity of this early novel tends to overshadow the growth and development of her later fiction.

Mary Elizabeth Braddon was born in London in 1835, the third child of "a failed Cornish solicitor of good family" and an Irish Protestant mother. In her unpublished memoir, *Before the Knowledge of Evil,* Braddon remembers her father as a shadowy figure, a "well-groomed," handsome man who was "nobody's enemy but his own" (Wolff 22). Braddon found out later, after her beloved mother's death, that her father had been an unfaithful husband; whatever the motive, her parents separated when Braddon was five, and she and her mother lived in reduced circumstances, eventually moving to a poorer suburb of London and taking lodgers.

After her brother, Edward, left the family to make his fortune in the Indian civil service, and her sister, Margaret, married an Italian and moved to Naples, Mary became the sole provider for her mother and decided to supplement her mother's meager income by going on stage, "a thing to be spoken of with bated breath, a lapse of a lost soul" (45). From 1857 to 1860, Mary Braddon, as "Mary Seyton," played a number of minor roles in the theater, usually middle-aged women—an aunt, a spinster, or a wife. This experience fueled her descriptions of theatrical life in her later novels.

In 1860 Braddon secured the patronage of a Yorkshire squire, Gilby, who paid her to complete a long epic poem in Spenserian meter. However, Mary Braddon soon began writing for half penny journals in London and from 1862 to 1866 had published nine three-volume novels. She continued to write virtually nonstop through the 1880s, always concerned that her haste might damage the literary quality of her novels. In her correspondence with her literary mentor, Edward Bulwer-Lytton, she offered self-deprecating evaluations of her work: "I have learned to look at everything in a mercantile sense, & to write solely for the circulating library reader whose palette [sic] requires strong meat, and is not very particular as to the quality. . . . Can the sensation be elevated by art, & redeemed from all its coarseness?" (155). One wonders about the sincerity of her disparagements of her work, since these seem to be the

terms upon which her friendship with Lytton depended. In any case, Braddon was supporting the Maxwells: William, his five children by his first marriage, and their own growing family. In addition to managing a large family and producing a steady stream of best-sellers, in 1866 Braddon became editor of Maxwell's magazine, *Belgravia.* Her life during this period was marked by an intense, driven productivity that left little time for the typical leisure pursuits of an upper-class Victorian woman: "[I have] little inclination for spending money & positively no time to be extravagant, if I wished to be so. I go nowhere where I require fine dress—I can't drink wine. I am not able to stir from London, or would spend my money in traveling; but am altogether bound hand and foot by hard work" (134). In 1868, after the birth of her fourth child and the death of her mother, Mary Braddon suffered a nervous breakdown. This occasioned the only nonproductive period in her adult life: for the next two years, she ceased writing. Yet she recovered, gradually resumed writing, and published a book, *Fenton's Quest,* in 1871, after which her pace never again flagged.

In 1874, after the death of his wife, Maxwell and Mary Braddon were finally legally married. However, despite attaining this formal seal of respectability, Braddon again faced the condemnation of public opinion: when her servants found out that their employers had been unmarried, many of the staff left the house. Yet, other than this slight upset, Mary Braddon began her life of respectability and entered what Wolff has termed "the years of fulfillment." Between 1875 and 1885 Braddon became the *grande dame* of her social circle and Lichfield House became a social center for many writers and intellectuals, including Robert Browning, Oscar Wilde, Whistler, the du Mauriers, Henry Irving, and Bram Stoker. In addition to her social duties, she published twenty-one books and studied French, German, and Italian, and Greek literature. In fact, Braddon studied the French realist writers—Flaubert, Balzac, and Zola—extensively and wrote a long critical essay on Émile Zola that was never published (Wolff 317–20). Critics such as Ellen Miller Casey see the 1870s as a transition period for Braddon's novels: she moved from the "sensation" novel to producing more "novels of character," or realist novels. Robert Wolff claims that, "from the early sixties to the early nineties the trajectory of her writing was generally upward," and claims that her literary masterpieces were her later novels: *Joshua Haggard's Daughter* (1876) and *Ishmael* (1884) (Wolff 8).

Braddon's diaries during this period record her social engagements, but not her thoughts. Much of what we know about the later part of Braddon's life comes from the biography of her son, William Maxwell, and from the comments of her contemporaries. Despite her reputation as a writer of scandalous books, her adulterous affair with Maxwell, and

her humble background in the theater, the lasting image that many had of Braddon is of a comfortably established matron. Ford Maddox Ford, describing an eighty-year-old Braddon at her home in Richmond, likens Braddon to Queen Victoria: "The good sea-coal fire shone on the gleaming steel and gilt accoutrements. So there you had the clean fire, the clear hearth, and the vigor of the Victorian game" (in Wolff 11). Braddon seemed to have finally inhabited those country estates that her novels were so adept at portraying. As Arnold Bennett describes them: "Let us have riches and bright tempers, and eat and dress well, and live in glorious old mansions. The life of the English country house, with its luxurious solidity—with what unaffected satisfaction she describes it!" (in Wolff 14).

In 1895 William Maxwell died, ending their thirty-four years together and four years later, in 1899, Braddon's daughter Rose died. Despite these personal tragedies, Braddon remained very active, traveling abroad and continuing to write until her stroke in 1908. This grande dame of the Victorian era became a citizen of the twentieth-century: she bought an automobile, saw an aeroplane, and even saw the film version of *Aurora Floyd* in 1913. Mary Elizabeth Braddon died in 1915. Her last book, *Mary,* was published posthumously in 1916.

During the course of editing this collection, we have become aware of the work of an astonishing number of impressive scholars; regrettably, only some of that work can be represented here. We have arranged the collection with an eye toward indicating the variety and richness of Braddon scholarship. Often, that richness results in contradictory readings; we have made a special effort to respect the diversity of positions articulated by the scholars whose work appears here, choosing to highlight disagreements by juxtaposing opposed arguments rather than seeking to smooth over differences. Because *Lady Audley's Secret* is now the "canonical" Braddon novel, we begin with a series of essays modeling a range of approaches to this well-known text. The extant scholarship suggests that Braddon's work is particularly crucial for understanding the representation of domesticity in the middle-class family and the idealized country house. Elizabeth Langland begins by reading *Lady Audley's Secret* against the other best-known sensation novel of the period, Wilkie Collins's *Woman in White.* Using the Enclosure Acts as a point of departure, Langland explores the way in which Braddon's "more morally ambiguous" tale highlights the gendering of enclosed domestic space. Enclosure's use to display wealth, she argues, paradoxically necessitated that the domestic woman's privacy also be put on display, made visible and penetrable. Improprietous "secrets" are concealed by the seamless transfer of the Lady from one kind of enclosure to another, "asylum" having an ironic double meaning. Gail Turley Houston is interested in the novel as a

commentary on the inequities in the legal status of married women. Examining Blackstone and Dicey, she reads the "trial" at Audley Court as a commentary on this legal debate and critique of the inadequacies of the prevailing system. Lillian Nayder, on the other hand, reads the novel as a conservative affirmation of the rights of men under the marriage laws, examining the novel's use of racial and national imagery associated with the so-called Indian Mutiny of 1857, in order to expose the novel's endorsement of a backlash that compares disobedient wives to rebellious sepoys. Katherine Montwieler is also interested in the interpenetration of contemporary cultural discourses with the novel. Attentive to the genre's display of anxieties about class, she surveys the place of material culture in the advertising of commodities and the way in which novels became conduct books in the training of socially ambitious women to utilize commodities "properly." Aeron Haynie examines the most significant and vexed of those status symbols, the country estate itself. Placing Audley Court in the contexts of the picturesque tradition and Victorian tourism, she discusses the import of the declining fortunes of the Audley family and its relevance to the symbolism of the English country house in this period, evoking some aspects of a potential nineteenth-century reader response that have been overlooked.

Aurora Floyd, Braddon's "other" best-selling sensation novel was serialized and released contemporaneously with *Lady Audley's Secret.* It is Braddon's second-best-known work, and one often contrasted with its better-known sister. Jeni Curtis and Marlene Tromp both concern themselves with the representation of the woman's body in this novel, with its constant theme of violence, both suppressed and enacted. Curtis discusses the construction of the woman's body as vegetative, and the gendered tropes of control that eventually turn the eponymous protagonist into an "espaliered girl." Tromp traces the novel's veiled treatment of male violence and spousal abuse, its persistent representation of Aurora as erotically orientalized, and considers the discourse surrounding the disciplining of "aberrant" women through the Contagious Diseases (CD) Acts in relation to Aurora's "domestication."

As an extremely professional and prolific author, Braddon and her work provide fertile ground for studies of the history of publishing; part III of this volume attends to those issues. Toni Johnson-Woods explores the roots of Braddon's immense popularity among the colonial readership in Australia. Drawing on both publication history and the history of her reception, she identifies thematic and material elements that made Braddon the undisputed Queen of the Antipodean market for British novels. Graham Law and Jennifer Carnell, similarly, are engaged by Braddon's remarkable career for the insights it gives into Victorian publishing. Looking at the relationship of Braddon and her husband with the

Tillotson publishing couple, their work gives new insights into Victorian book marketing and the role of women within it, in addition to its detailed study of aspects of Braddon's publishing history. Heidi Holder sheds light on an area of Victorian culture both central to an understanding of the period and often neglected by scholars, tracing Braddon's relationship to the stage, recuperating and reading several of her plays within the contexts of their production.

Our fourth and longest section broadens the focus of the collection to include other texts, contexts, and approaches to Braddon's work. Pamela Gilbert and Tabitha Sparks both address Braddon's work as a realist author, and both wish to complicate the apparently simple dichotomy between sensation and realism, although they disagree about the status of sensational discourse itself within Braddon's work. Gilbert examines a later realist novel, *Joshua Haggard's Daughter,* observing the ways in which Braddon takes up the question of generic difference, exploiting references to sensation novels, including her own, to position her realist text as a text that eschews the use of a woman's body as a sensational focus and examines the male body and male anxiety directly. Sparks examines Braddon's first and most famous realist novel, *The Doctor's Wife.* Sparks sees the evidence of "competing epistemologies" of gender in the melange of narrative genres brought together in this novel, and uses that confusion productively, to open to examination the emergence of conflicting models of femininity in fiction of this era.

Lauren Goodlad, Eve Lynch, and Heidi Johnson are all interested in other examples of what might, like sensation, be termed "genre fiction": Braddon's vampire story, her ghost stories, and her tales of detection. All three use these foci as starting points to discuss larger issues than are often admitted of in discussions of these popular and enduring forms. Goodlad examines Braddon's short vampire tale, "Good Lady Ducayne," and finds in it a carefully textured consideration of capitalism and the places of professionalism and femininity within it. Within the reliably saleable form of the ghost story, Eve Lynch argues, Braddon found the perfect platform upon which to explore issues of social critique and reform that the public sometimes shied away from in realist novels. Lynch surveys several of the ghost stories to trace Braddon's interest in a number of social issues. Heidi Johnson surveys the rich and largely untapped vein of Braddon's later detective fiction, and pursues a detailed analysis of Braddon's recurrent theme of the daughter's need to overcome inappropriate attachment to the father. The essays collected here clarify the unique gift of Braddon's work. They also help us to understand the England that, as Arnold Bennett stated, without Mary Elizabeth Braddon, would have been quite different.

NOTES

1. Robert Wolff indicates in his biography of Braddon, *Sensational Victorian,* that she published over eighty novels and that the sales of *Lady Audley's Secret* outnumbered those of any other novel in the period.

2. One of her most prominent reviewers, Margaret Oliphant, described sensation fiction like Braddon's as potentially "dangerous and foolish work, as well as false, both to Art and Nature" (567) in her 1867 essay, "Sensation Novels." She also defined serial publication, the format in which most of Braddon's novels appeared, as a "violent stimulant . . . with [a] necessity for frequent and rapid recurrence of piquant situation and starling incident" (568), a stylistic choice that might excessively stimulate an unsuspecting reader and lead him or her into moral turpitude. Most of Braddon's critics took up this kind of moral standard in their critiques of her work, a trend in contemporary criticism we discuss below.

3. Her letters, particularly those to Edward Bulwer-Lytton, one of her most important mentors, indicate that this was a concern of Braddon's throughout her career. As the Oliphant review indicates, critics and writers alike have traditionally seen these categories, "art" and "sensation," as mutually exclusive. Some of the arguments in this collection call that dichotomy into question, positing additional bases for the study of sensational fiction, as well as Braddon's later work.

4. Lootens points out that, in the blurred line between woman and devil that both she and Nina Auerbach discuss, the woman writer as a Victorian ideal was always in danger of collapse into her opposite. Thus, they note, the apotheosis of a literary career for a woman is death, what Lootens calls a "punitive" form of canonization, an argument also advanced by Angela Leighton's discussion of Victorian women poets. The evacuation of the woman writer in "everything and nothing" may help explain the "invisibility" of significant writers, like Braddon.

5. Beginning with Elaine Showalter's 1976 discussion of *Lady Audley's Secret,* "Desperate Remedies," feminist critics have grappled with the political "subversions" of Braddon's writing.

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