Abstract

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Title:
Papers found in a Trunk: A Descriptive Assessment of the Braddon Family Manuscript Archive.

[I used to] wake in a cold perspiration a few hours later with the horror of a wolf in the shadowy corner between the wardrobe and the washstand . . .
M.E. Braddon, *M.E.M*

Mary Elizabeth Braddon (1835-1915) left a substantial number of unpublished manuscripts, letters, and notebooks at her death. These were inherited in the mid-1990s by some of her descendents. They form what is known in this thesis as the Braddon Family Collection (BFC).

The descriptive assessment of these manuscripts and papers is intended to shed light on the working methods of this prominent Victorian author. She also had a career as an actress in the 1850s, and as editor, critic, serial writer and hack journalist throughout the mid to late-nineteenth century and into the early twentieth century. These other facets of her life and work are borne out by the papers in the collection, and this assessment takes these aspects into consideration.

This thesis is formed in two parts. First, the evaluation of some of her published and unpublished writing, which seeks to represent her within the context of Victorian

literary and theatrical culture. Then, the Appendices with critical and editorial notes and introductions to the text in each section, which offer a full transcript of the unpublished BFC material, including two of the late Notebooks and a transcript of a published article by Braddon that appeared in the *Idler* magazine in 1893.

Access to this collection has provided an opportunity for a valuable and timely appraisal of this important Victorian writer. This thesis attempts to offer an initial critical assessment and contextual study of the material in the BFC and an appraisal of Braddon's work in the light of recent scholarship. The evidence in the collection accompanied by the critical evaluation of her work in this thesis will allow for a shift in focus away from how her career is typically defined, as a writer of sensation fiction.

Grateful acknowledgement goes to the descendents of the Braddon and Maxwell families, without whose generosity this work would not have been possible.

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Contents

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M.E. Braddon, *M.E.M* [1]

INTRODUCTION

The Collection

Mary Elizabeth Braddon (1835-1915) chose to retain and preserve a varied sample of her unpublished work, which remained intact long after her death. The reasons why she pinpointed these particular manuscripts and notebooks for preservation can only be guessed at but they offer a range of clues and information as to how she approached her writing and formulated her vast output of published material. The Braddon Family Collection (hereafter referred to as the BFC), as it is now identified, also shows the range of her work across her career; from outlines for published novels, plans for plays, short stories (complete and fragmentary) and poetry. It comprises two separate preserves of material from the Maxwell and Cobbett families.

What can be surmised from the condition and situation of the BFC is that these pieces of her creative output were important to her for sentimental reasons as well as representing her methods of working. Most were contained in a metal trunk and kept in the bank after her death in 1915. The surviving relatives of Braddon's grandson Henry Maxwell inherited the trunk on his death and it has emerged that Braddon's biographers, Robert Lee Wolff and Jennifer Carnell, knew of its existence and had limited access thanks to Henry to some of its contents. Wolff named it the Maxwell

Collection but did not know the extent of the contents to offer a full bibliographical catalogue. The full extent of the material did not come to light until Henry Maxwell's death in the mid-1990s when it could be completely examined and catalogued. There was also another branch of the family – that of Henry's cousin the late George Cobbett – who inherited a few manuscripts. These include some of the major examples of her play fragments and Braddon's 'Introduction to a costly American edition of *Little Dorrit*' (1903), as well as autobiographical notes ('M.E.M') dating from before she wrote her childhood memoirs *Before The Knowledge of Evil* (1914).

The Maxwell material was kept in the trunk and much of it was carefully filed in envelopes and folders which assisted in its dating. Braddon labelled much of it also and some of it was perhaps preserved and labelled by her son, W.B. Maxwell. The possibility that it had some sort of sentimental value can be gleaned from the other contents of the trunk, which include some of her desk diaries, locks of her children's hair, their childhood drawings, letters from her beloved husband John Maxwell and friends, and souvenirs of her theatrical career including a silk playbill of her comeback performance for a benefit night. It appears that the contents of her desk from the family home in Richmond were cleared out and shut away in the bank when she died. Some of the items suggest this turn of events, such as unused stamps, pocket books, stationery and a prayer book. Perhaps this collection was stored away in anticipation of the day when the contents and manuscripts would prove to be of historical and scholarly value.

That day was certainly a long time in coming partly due to the gradual decline in her popularity as the twentieth century progressed and to the selective formulation of the literary canon, which meant that her writing no longer received the attention or critical exposure it had once enjoyed. Once fashionable, her type of literature no longer appealed to either popular taste or scholarly scrutiny after her death and so, like the carefully stored BFC, much of her published work lay hidden in the recesses until critics uncovered it as part of the vast array of nineteenth-century culture that

had for many years been ignored. The same applies to the elusive nature of her theatrical career, which has now been so carefully pieced together by Jennifer Carnell.

Braddon was therefore doubly unfortunate with her posthumous reputation in that her career had not only involved the lower class of sensation fiction during its early stages in the 1860s but her profession before that was as a member of another forgotten under class of Victorian provincial actresses. She could not have strayed much further from convention until she became the mistress of the married publisher John Maxwell when she left the stage and embarked fully upon her writing career. Towards the end of her life this unconventional vibrant woman kept her treasured possessions close to her. These now offer a record of the phases of her career. The BFC fills in some of the gaps noticed by her biographers and also raises more questions and topics for critical debate.

This critical debate about her work to date has largely been concerned with her contribution to the sensation genre. Until Jennifer Carnell's recent biography Braddon's theatrical career remained largely unrecognised despite some of the evidence in her novels. The BFC foregrounds this theatrical legacy, which she kept hidden even from her close family for a time and in it can be recognised the aspirations and ambitions she once entertained to be a playwright as well as a popular novelist.

The BFC includes objects of sentimental and personal value, keepsakes of her domestic and family life, which in themselves have no literary value but offer a unique glance into her life history and demonstrate the emphasis she laid upon family connections and motherhood in particular. The written material indicates how she planned and developed her ideas in draft form and the emphases she laid upon a vast eclectic mix of influences which she then blended together to form her distinctive written style. It offers a vital critical view of a writer at work throughout the mid to late-nineteenth century and shows how Braddon experimented throughout

transitional phases of her career. The BFC charts these changes, which include her move from acting to writing in the late 1850s, her early writing in the 1860s and her later career when the three-volume novel was in decline and the new century was looming. These manuscripts show her response to the rise of psychological realism in the novel and her search for authorial identity, involving nostalgic elements of earlier Victorian days and autobiography.

Some critical selection has inevitably had to take place, as many of the manuscripts are in partial fragmentary form, in order to assist the reader and make the most of the material contained in the trunk. Therefore for the purposes of this study the BFC bibliography lists the most complete manuscripts, a sample of the letters, details of the relevant material from two of her Notebooks, her scripts and autobiographical writing. This recognises what Braddon and her son left in a rudimentary catalogued form, labelled and laid out carefully in the trunk for later scrutiny. This amount of material cannot be exhaustively studied here; further, the wishes of the Braddon family have had to be respected. This examination seeks to identify the manuscripts (transcripts given in the appendices) that could be seen to 'feature' in the collection in complete or partially complete written and typed form. It also attempts to provide evidence of Braddon's methods of working from the less accessible fragmentary plans in the Notebooks, which indicate the early stages of later published works and abortive plans for stories, plays and novels.

The bibliography, given below, offers an introduction to the contents of the BFC. More extensive introductory material accompanies the range of Appendices which offer as complete a transcript as possible of the deciphered manuscripts. Each of these stands in its own right as an example of Braddon's manuscript drafts that feature in the collection and, on an editorial note, provide evidence of various kinds that contributes to a broader understanding of her working methods, influences and development.

Bibliography of The Braddon Family Collection

Autobiographical Material

This category comprises the following two works:

Before the Knowledge of Evil, unpublished MS (1914), 185pp.

'M.E.M.' Beginning of Autobiography; or an article of her youth, MS unpublished (circa. 1892-3), 5pp.
(See Appendix 10)

The first of these manuscripts, *Before the Knowledge of Evil*, has been well known to earlier critics and is an important source for both Wolff and Carnell. It has an established history and date of completion, based upon Wolff's research into Braddon's diaries and W.B. Maxwell's mention of it in his autobiography *Time Gathered* (1937).[2] Wolff, like W.B. Maxwell, offers surprisingly little reference to it in *Sensational Victorian* (1979) considering its value as primary evidence and the presence of a copy in the Wolff Collection at the University of Texas (Austin). The copy in the BFC is a carbon copy of this one, bound loosely in a paper cover and typed by Braddon with an immediacy and spontaneity about it similar to her handwritten first draft works in the BFC, omitting chapter breaks and including her handwritten amendments. It is quite short, only 185 pages in length and is best described, by Braddon herself, as a 'reminiscence' of her Victorian childhood. It has an informal quality and functions as a paean of praise to Braddon's mother, Fanny White Braddon, summing up the ageing novelist's feelings about her formidable parent.

The other autobiographical manuscript, *'M.E.M.' Beginning of Autobiography; or an article of her youth*, is an earlier piece of only five preparatory pages which can be given a possible date (1892-93) because of the resemblance it bears to a published article by Braddon in *The Idler* of 1893.[3] This article, in turn, is something of a precursor to *Before the Knowledge of Evil* indicating that for at least two decades Braddon had such autobiographical reminiscences on her mind and experimented with the drafting and publication of them in various forms.

Short Stories/Novel openings & fragments

Some passages in the life of Robert Macaire Equ. [*sic*] *Junior of Mont St. Macaire in the South of France, narrated by himself with occasional margin notes by his friend and guardian, Guillaume Bertrand,* MS unpublished (circa. 1852-1860), 9pp.
(See Appendix 7)

This fragment of a story is one of Braddon's attempts, possibly quite early, at transposing the dramatic form into prose narrative. The manuscript is probably contemporary with her other theatrical stories, such as *Circumambulatory*, because the handwriting and weight and quality of the paper is from that phase of her career,[4] the 1850s, when she was still a performer. The Macaire story and characters in this adapted form take their precedent from the original French stage version, the satirical drawings of Daumier and the prose adaptation written by G.W.M. Reynolds, *Macaire in England*. Like other authors, French theatre and satirical writing inspired Braddon but she also had a unique relationship with the material. Whilst she was still a young actress the English stage version, *Robert Macaire,* was in the repertoire of the companies she belonged to and so she experienced it first hand as a company member if not performer. She abandoned this attempt at reworking material in prose form, writing in the first person of Robert Macaire Junior. She was to return to this type of composition, notably with *Circe* in 1867, a story strongly influenced by Octave Feuillet's *Dalila*.

About the Childhood of Tommy & Harry
Introduction 'To the Reader – The History of a Bad and a Good boy.'
(Addressed to: George Augustus Sala Esqu., 14 Clements Inn, London, EC.) MS unpublished (1861), 16pp.
(See Appendix 5)

This story, again incomplete, is contained in an envelope with Braddon's handwritten note 'opening to novel'. The manuscript has the postmark for June 1861. It was sent to Sala as a speculative trial piece for possible publication and thus can be clearly dated to that transitional phase of Braddon's career when she was aiming at becoming known as a writer and hoping to build a life for herself and Maxwell. Sala sent his response to this manuscript after a long wait of fifteen months to Maxwell who by 1862 had been designated as Braddon's representative. Sala rejected it as an out-of-date piece with no promise that had by that time been eclipsed by *Lady Audley's Secret*, *Aurora Floyd* and the story 'Mystery at Fernwood'. Sala published the latter two in *Temple Bar.*[5] He was an enthusiastic fan of Braddon's sensation 'bigamy' novels principally because they made him so much money and enhanced her reputation for his commercial ends. It seems he was against anything she attempted that did not adhere to this successful formula and he tried to encourage her, via Maxwell, to attempt new work that agreed with his view of the market.

Tommy and Harry is based upon what Braddon calls the 'old "spelling book" romance'. Her young villain Tommy was, Wolff suggests, to be rewarded in a 'reverse twist' to the popular tale despite his Jacobite rebel persona. Braddon and Wolff do not suggest anything more specific as her source. *Tommy & Harry* does incline towards the eighteenth-century childhood classic by Thomas Day, *Sandford and Merton* (1783-9), in some of its features such as the 'bad and good boy'. It is this story, although not a 'spelling-book', that she might have been seeking to

rework. She also included a reference to Defoe in this experimental piece and moved towards a romantic depiction of the Irish rebel brother Tommy beloved by his flame-haired cousin.

Circumambulatory; or the adventures of three gentlemen and a lady in search of a British public MS unpublished (circa. 1852-1860), 29pp.
(See Appendix 8)

This finished story, again an early attempt, is conclusively within the territory of Braddon's first-hand experience of the stage. She even offers the portrait of a young actress, Hypatia, a composite portrait of Braddon and the young women she worked with. Its style of direct reportage allows for a revelation of her recent or contemporary professional experience. It is also witty and poignant with some interesting character development within its limited length. It remained unpublished yet carefully preserved and the manuscript resembles those others that can be dated to this period of her life on stage. Wolff had access to it and offers a short reflection upon it after which it remained in the BFC. He views it as contemporary with her comedietta *The Loves of Arcadia* that was produced at the Strand Theatre in 1860. The structure of *Circumambulatory*, with its intimate relationships between the male and female company members, Wolff also regards as Braddon's reflection on her relationship with William Sawyer who worked on the *Brighton Herald.* He was an important influence on her life and burgeoning writing career in the late 1850s.[6] This story offers an early semi-autobiographical approach and stands out as a feature of the BFC, preserved as a completed manuscript, with the mystery remaining as to why it was never published.

Kingdom of Boredom
Prologue; or twenty-five years before
Chapter 1 MS unpublished (circa. 1852-1860), 25pp.
(See Appendix 6)

This unfinished piece, an opening for a novel, dates from her early period again and is contained in an envelope labelled by Braddon with the title. Wolff offers a possible date of 1859 because of a label pasted onto the manuscript when he saw it reading 'J. Gilby Esq. Beverley, Yorkshire'.[7] There is another clue as well as the name of Braddon's 'patron' to suggest that it comes from her early career and that is a Brighton postmark, minus the date. Particularly, and more conclusively, its condition and state, like that of *Circumambulatory, Tommy and Harry* and other manuscripts of the period, suggest that she folded the pages into an envelope for mailing. Because she was touring with the companies she worked for she needed to correspond with prospective publishers and share her compositions with them by mail. These manuscripts bear those characteristics: postmarked envelopes and envelope-folded pages; with short explanatory introductions outlining the stories' main features for publishers.

This story has characteristics of the sensation genre such as doubling, deceit and intrigue as well as a satirical tone aimed at fashionable society. It has features that might be inspired by Bulwer-Lytton's *Pelham*, and an allegorical quality. Braddon launched into a plot that is an early attempt at recreating sensation with a satirical twist. Wolff is fairly disparaging of it, considering it a 'sensible' move of hers never to finish it[8] and he offers a short account of it before moving onto the significant published work of 1860-61, *Three Times Dead/Trail of the Serpent*. Carnell mentions this manuscript calling it 'Kingdom of the Bored' and interpreting Wolff's transcription of the postmark 'Brighton, sp.' as September 1859.[9] She is concerned with it as far as it makes reference to Gilby for biographical detail.

Book the First – Told by the Poet MS unpublished (circa 1852-1860), 16pp.
(See Appendix 4)

This manuscript is also postmarked from both Beverley and Brighton placing it into the same period of the 1850s as those described by Wolff. This also means that Braddon sent the pages to an unrecorded recipient whilst touring in the north and

south of the country. Wolff and Carnell do not mention this manuscript in the biographies.

This story was an attempt at writing in the first person in the guise of an author, in this case a poet. She was possibly writing in an autobiographical style once again; perhaps the twenty-five year old poet is the voice of the twenty-five year old Braddon in 1860. There are also influences of sensation in this piece and 'silver fork' novels of high fashion as well as hefty amounts of literary and artistic allusion reflecting Braddon's reading and theatregoing habits and offering a forerunner to the dense literary allusion in *The Doctor's Wife* of 1864.

Letters

These are not reproduced in the Appendices but a short summary is offered here, showing the range of Braddon and Maxwell's correspondence and representing the sort of epistolary keepsakes she preserved until the end of her life.

To: 'Miss Braddon'
From: Tinsley, 122 Fleet Street, London.
Date: Oct. 17 1862.
On the success of 'Lady Audley' and the agreement for 'Aurora Floyd'.

To: 'Miss Braddon'

From: Charles Warner, Vicar of Clun, Clun, Shropshire.

Date: Oct 28 1872.

On the *Saturday Review* article of Oct 19 (p.509)

To: 'Mrs. Maxwell'

From: Delapierre (2 letters)

Date: 1873 [One envelope marked London March 3 1873, seal intact]

On her work, in particular the play *Griselda.*

To: 'Mrs. Maxwell'

From: Wilkie Collins, 90 Gloucester Place, Portman Square, London.

Date: 26 June 1874.

Requesting a change in their dinner arrangements of Saturday, July 4th.

To: 'Mrs. Maxwell'

From: C.J. Matthews, 59 Belgrave Road, London, S.W.

Date: June 30 1874.

Requesting a rescheduling of their dinner arrangements.

To: 'Mrs. Maxwell'

From: 2nd Lord Lytton, Fontainbleau.

Date: July 20 1874.

A polite 'note of admiration' apologizing for his delay in corresponding.

To: 'Mr. Maxwell'

From: H.E. Bartley (née Graves), 82 Wimpole Street, Cavendish Square, London.

Date: July 21 1889.

On the illness of Wilkie Collins, invalided and unable to correspond.

To: 'Dear Dolly' [Braddon]
From: John Maxwell, Offices of *Belgravia*, 'Miss Braddon's Illustrated Magazine',
Warehouse: 4 Shoe Lane, Fleet Street, London, EC.
Date: July 13 1874.
Domestic arrangements.

To: 'Mrs. Maxwell'
From: Charles Wyndham, Criterion Theatre, Piccadilly.
Date: Feb 4 1895.
Accepting her draft of a first act, in anticipation of the completed manuscript for an unnamed play.

To: 'Mrs. Maxwell'
From: Rev. Mr. Edward Braddon [grandson of R. Braddon of Skisdon, Cornwall]
C/o Rev. Mr. M. Roberts, The Rectory, Luddesdown, Gravesend.
Date: Sept 23 1895.
Letter of introduction from members of extended family.

Plays

Revenge of the Dead
Act the Second, unpublished MS, (circa.1852-1860).
(See Appendix 1)

News from Alma; or The Watchers at Home and the Field of Battle
Act 1, unpublished MS, (circa. 1854-1860).
(See Appendix 2)

Boulevard of the Temple 1720 unpublished MS, (1852-1860)
(See Appendix 3)

Notebooks
(See Appendix 11)

[Notebook A] The 'Black Book', (circa. 1890-1900)

[Notebook B] Notebook 'continued from Black book', (circa. 1900-1905)

These contain, principally, the plans for the novels:
The Venetians (1892)
Sons of Fire (1895)
A Lost Eden (1904)

Material for the background to *Thou Art the Man* (1894)

The plans for the 'lost' plays:
Free Lances (1893)
The Garreteers (1894)
Sigismund (1904)

The plan for the short stories:
The Christmas Hirelings (1894)
Dead Love Has Chains (1907)

Literary Criticism

'An Introduction to a Costly American Edition of *Little Dorrit'*, unpublished MS, 14pp.
(See Appendix 9)

This work was written for F.G. Kitton's 'autograph' series of editions of great novels for the American market probably finished in January 1903 and intended for publication by the American publisher George D. Sproul in 1904. Kitton died in 1904 and the series was left incomplete. Carnell uncovered these background details unmentioned by Wolff. This typewritten manuscript with some of Braddon's handwritten amendments was probably composed on the same machine as *Before the Knowledge of Evil* and was kept with the Cobbett papers.

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[1] Mary Elizabeth Braddon, *M.E.M: Beginning of Autobiography or an article of her youth,* BFC (MS), Appendix 10, 8.

[2] Robert Lee Wolff, *Sensational Victorian: The life and fiction of Mary Elizabeth Braddon,* New York & London: Garland, 1979, 419, n.1.

[3] M.E. Braddon, 'My First Novel: *The Trail of the Serpent*', *The Idler*, 1893, III: 19–30; and Appendix 10, 12-17.

[4] Wolff makes some mention of *Circumambulatory*, and offers a pre-1860 date as a speculative possibility. He notes it as belonging to the Maxwell Collection, this very one, as it was one piece of a small sample of the material that Henry Maxwell allowed him to see. He offers a short account of it in *Sensational* 74-5 and a description of its state and alternative title: 'Our Sussex Circuit', 427, n. 29.

[5] Ibid 116.

[6] Ibid 75.

[7] Ibid 82.

[8] Ibid 112-13.

[9] Jennifer Carnell, *The Literary Lives of M. E. Braddon,* Hastings: Sensation Press, 2000, 136.

Chapter 1:

Background: from theatricals and 'penny dreadfuls' to the 'sensation novel.'

Until the early 1990s it was difficult to find even passing references to Mary Elizabeth Braddon (1835-1915) - apart from a small handful of significant critical works - in even the most exhaustive or 'definitive' accounts of Victorian fiction. She was, as the only significant work to deal with her life up to then pointed out, still 'forgotten' or 'still associated with her artless and trashy first great success [*Lady Audley's Secret*]'.[1] This is the voice of her first biographer, Robert Lee Wolff, who accumulated some of Braddon's writing, notebooks and diaries for the Wolff Collection. He was a passionate supporter of Braddon and admirer of some choice examples of her work. However, he does not, in writing so extensively about her, hide his disapproval of many of her novels and unpublished drafts and fragments, sometimes in a similar tone to her contemporary detractors. His critical biography of her is undeniably a valuable resource for the historian of Braddon's life and inevitably, due to the enormous amount of published works, deals sparsely in literary critical terms with her many novels. His contextualisation of her works is variable and mainly historical, but comprehensive, and it was he who first charted the trajectory of her career and recognized, quite often acknowledging in glowing terms, the range and diversity of her output.

Recently Jennifer Carnell has explored the breadth of Braddon's career in detail in *The Literary Lives of M.E. Braddon.*[2] Her biographical study of Braddon's different

phases of work and contribution to Victorian and Edwardian genre fiction also covers Braddon's 'negotiation' of cultural forms: melodramatic fiction, early detective fiction, French realism and penny-part fiction. Carnell brought Braddon's career as an actress to scholarly attention. Just as the critical world was becoming accustomed to Braddon as one of the most prolific and popular novelists of the Victorian age the fact of her eight years as a professional actress, before Lady Audley was even thought of, now had to be regarded in context with what must surely be seen as her second career as a writer. Wolff had referred to this first career, but only briefly - setting it down as a short episode in Braddon's life - in Chapter 2 of *Sensational Victorian*, citing documentary evidence for its commencement in 1857.[3] Carnell addresses this misunderstanding, offering a full range of evidence from playbills of the 1850s that show Braddon entering the profession under the stage name of Mary Seyton in the autumn of 1852. She was employed in every subsequent season until February 1860, according to Carnell's evidence.[4]

Therefore, to represent Braddon's career as a novelist is only to partially consider her professional life in the nineteenth century. To ignore her eight years on stage is to miss a vital context of and connection in her work. Critics do not risk excluding the context of Wilkie Collins's experience in the legal profession, or Dickens's as a parliamentary reporter. Yet for Braddon her prolific output and extensive experience on the professional stage were completely passed over by some of her most sympathetic supporters and by critics who revived interest in her work for significant ideological reasons.

Gradually the academic community has pieced together the details of her career. To Carnell's critical biography can be added the study *Beyond Sensation: Mary Elizabeth Braddon in Context* (1999) edited by Tromp, Gilbert and Haynie, a collection of critical essays that offer more evidence of Braddon's negotiation of genre and forms and further emphasizes the critical significance of her stage career and mediation of literary and dramatic styles. With this critical and historical recognition, including Chris Willis's online material dedicated to Braddon's life and

work,[5] the identification of Braddon with the popular tradition of the dramatic novel and sensational entertainment has been recovered to a great extent. Donald Hounam adapted *Lady Audley's Secret* for television[6] and Douglas Pinchin's biographical play *Secrets and Rumours: The unconventional life of Mary Braddon* had its first performance at the Orange Tree Theatre, Richmond, London in February 2004. This theatre was an appropriate choice of venue by way of a tribute to Braddon's life in Richmond where she made her home for many years. The fashionable town she adopted at the height of her success, along with playwrights, historians and television producers, has thus contributed to the revival of interest in the work of this creative and energetic professional Victorian lady.

In analysing *Lady Audley's Secret* critics have uncovered many heretofore unknown and unseen effects and by-products of sensation literature; for example, the exchanges that took place in the popular marketplace, from the lurid penny 'dreadfuls' to the more 'respectable' three-volume circulating library novels or serial writing.[7] *Lady Audley's Secret* was first published in *Robin Goodfellow*, one of John Maxwell's sixpenny magazines, in 1861. It had an erratic start as that magazine folded and, by popular demand, reappeared in serial form in Ward and Locke's *Sixpenny Magazine* in 1862. Before the serial run finished the Tinsley Brothers brought it out in three-volume form. The example of this novel crossing over the commercial forms in publication and capitalizing on the market has been a main feature of Braddon's critical and artistic contribution to the nineteenth-century canon. She is consistently identified with this novel, for better or worse.

The variety of investigations into this novel is considerable, and valuable. It is a crucial text for the later nineteenth century and the Victorian period at large. Patrick Brantlinger used it to help answer his question: 'What is Sensational about the Sensation Novel?'[8] Feminist critics have utilised it to explain the deviant and difficult heroine and her role within the three-volume novel and the popular literature of the 'high' Victorian period.[9] Lady Audley is a template for madness, or supposed madness, and for how ailing and afflicted outcast and outsider characters

make their mark in the novel and influence the plot.[10] She is also used by critics to assist in the analysis of Victorian marriage and the associations of adultery and bigamy as emblems of female identity and desire.[11] Braddon is also cited as an important figure in the supply and demand exchange between novelists and the largely female readership of the circulating libraries.[12] Lady Audley and other selected heroines from Braddon's novels are offered as the original inspiration behind Shaw's *Pygmalion,* Eliot's heroines in *Middlemarch* and Hardy's Eustacia Vye in *The Return of the Native.*[13] In many ways Braddon's signature style of sensation and in particular her invention of Lady Audley, the chameleon-like heroine, has been consistently reinvented in criticism to explain the various arguments surrounding the malaise of Victorian bourgeois life viewed from the twentieth century. However, confining the view of Braddon to the 1860s sensation and 'bigamy' novels with their strong plots and dangerous 'fast' heroines would be to deny the range of her work in a sixty-year career, or to put it another way, deny the other eighty-four novels she wrote.

Along with recent criticism, such as Carnell's and the collected essays in *Beyond Sensation*, Katharine Mattacks has brought critical attention to Braddon's diversity, introducing an awareness of her 'hybrid' style[14] that challenges notions of genre and invention in fiction, and how Braddon contributed to the circulation of sensational storylines, mediating the strong subject matter of popular French literature for an English audience on occasions. Her admissions of various 'borrowing' and derivation of material from other authors throw into stark relief the bustling marketplace of Victorian popular fiction. Braddon might be working on two or three stories at any one time, and so to save herself from the clamour of her publishers' demands, she re-trod the ground that another author had perhaps allowed to lay fallow for a while. In gaining an understanding of her work and her immense popularity critics have been able better to understand the popular market, the reception of new works by the readership, the commodification of fiction and the important 'business' of the novel in the Victorian age

The Braddon Family Collection (BFC) offers a core sample through the remarkable working life of Mary Elizabeth Braddon. It contains examples of her work that chart her career from the 1850s and early 1860s to the final phases of composition in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As critics widely acknowledge, the early years of her work are known as her sensation period, when she was categorized as an author of lurid and risqué tales of desire, crime, bigamy and adventure. She covered a wider range of genres than this throughout her career and the BFC is vital for the opportunity it provides to track and critique this range. It helps to shift the focus of her reputation from that of sensation novelist and 'Queen of the Circulating Libraries' in her early years, and indeed throughout her career, to a deeper view of her place within popular Victorian fiction that takes into account the range of influences, working methods and styles she employed in a long and finally distinguished career. It demonstrates the evolution of her themes and working practices. She wrote of her development:

> The history of my life is for the most part the history of the books I have written and the books I have read . . .[15]

This reflection comes from one of the many fragmentary manuscripts in the BFC: a selection of autobiographical notes, written at some point after 1874 and her marriage to the publisher John Maxwell. This set of notes in manuscript form, with the working title 'M.E.M. Beginning of autobiography or an article of her youth,' is a preparatory piece towards the later, longer account given in the childhood memoir *Before the Knowledge of Evil*, also contained in the BFC. The autobiographical notes help to map out Braddon's influences and working methods and expose ways in which the other material in the BFC can be assessed. The initials 'M.E.M' indicated her newly married status and, after years of living with John Maxwell as his mistress, she acknowledged the final, happy situation in a modest, understated fashion here. She remained 'Miss Braddon' or 'M.E. Braddon' for her readers and publishers, but as a gesture of contentment with her own domestic situation she acknowledged her husband, as did her closest friends, and his support for her career.

> Her marriage . . . finally closed the long era of social ambiguity initiated by her decision to become an actress . . . and made ever more difficult during the thirteen long years of her liaison with Maxwell and the births of their children. In 1875, at the age of forty (Mary Elizabeth Braddon) had lived exactly half her life and had reached its major turning point.[16]

The presence of the autobiographical manuscripts in the BFC indicate the manner in which Braddon contemplated her life up to that point and after her marriage; as Wolff describes it, this 'major turning point'. It is appropriate after such a turning point in her existence that she regarded her life in terms of her writing and acknowledged her influences. The commencement of her career as an author gave her the greatest stability she had known and a position of some recognition in society: she existed as 'Miss Braddon' the lady novelist and maintained respect from her professional peers.

How did this career come about? From where, and why, did Braddon develop her various styles and interests in fiction? When *Lady Audley's Secret* appeared in serial form for the popular market in 1861-62 it seemed that this young writer had appeared from nowhere. A couple of years earlier, in April 1860, she had walked into the offices of the publisher John Maxwell.[17] Within a year she was pregnant by him with their first child, had moved in with him, accompanied by her mother, and had embarked upon a career as a best-selling author. Writing was the outlet by which she articulated her opinions on the world and her fuel for this was her own experiences and the discoveries she had made whilst acting, editing and scripting material, as well as her reading from the vast expanse of the existing literary marketplace. She incorporated influences from all around the globe and the history of literature and drama.

Vigorous and prolific in her output and truly modern, the Victorian marketplace for popular literature became her domain. It is important to regard her, in the first phase of her career when a writer of sensation novels, as an actress turned author. This is the key to assessing her impact upon and contribution to the forms of popular fiction in the 1860s. Her most notable experience to date in 1860 was her stage career. She

had had her mother's support throughout this time and the flexibility and mobility of working with theatre companies had enabled her to spend time developing her writing. In the late 1850s, her career was a combination of performance and authorship.

As an actress Braddon developed a specialist approach to self-reinvention and display. It is useful to note the range and variety of roles she took on whilst acting and especially those that she became known for as the actress Mary Seyton (read 'Satan'). In the late 1850s she was with the Henry Nye Chart Company and appeared at various provincial theatres, including the Brighton Theatre Royal. Samples of the playbills from that period[18] show the professional necessity for range and flexibility in performance. Braddon played Fanny Squeers in *Nicholas Nickleby,* Lesbia in *The Comedy of Errors*, Osric in *Hamlet*, the Widow Melmotte in *The Lady of Lyons,* amongst many other roles. In the early 1858 season the company was at Brighton and on the 12th February they performed Bulwer Lytton's *Money*, with George Melville, Walter Baynham and Henry Nye Chart in the leading roles. On the bill for that night was Townsend's *The Lost Ship; or the Man o'War's Man and the Privateer* with Mary Seyton as Rose Linden the heroine, Ellen Thirlwall as Sally Popple, Roberts Tindell as Ben Trenant (a British Tar), and J.B. Steele as Ned Martin (Mate of a Privateer). Braddon, on the same bill as Melville and Baynham, had definitely made it as an actress by that time in her career and was performing in one of her key roles, that of the heroine in a nautical melodrama. The play demands physical dynamism on the part of the actress, there is a kidnap scene towards the climax of Act 3 when, as Rose, Braddon had to engage in a life-and-death struggle on the edge of a cliff during which she saves her sweetheart Ben. She was familiar with, on the one hand, the exercising of emotion and physicality in the performance of melodrama. On the other hand, another signature role that Braddon developed during her career was that of the older woman 'with a past'.

This type of role, different from the outright melodrama for Townsend's heroine, demanded tight, refined performances. Much of the action for a character, such as

Mrs Hector Sternhold in Tom Taylor's *Still Waters Run Deep*, requires the suppression of emotions, which at times erupt into melodramatic iteration of secrets and feelings. Mrs Sternhold was one of Braddon's most successful roles for the Nye Chart Company. She appeared at the Queen's Theatre in Hull in 1857 in this role and at Brighton and Doncaster in 1858-59. *Still Waters* was a prominent and successful feature of the company's repertoire, aided by her performance. Mrs Alfred Wigan played the role of Mrs Sternhold in 1867, in performances alongside her husband as Mildmay, Charles Wyndham as Captain Hawksley and Ellen Terry as Mrs Mildmay.[19] Within the context of the Victorian popular stage Mrs Sternhold was a prime role for skilful, subtle actresses with flamboyance and poise.

The character encourages a view of men, in her recently married niece Mrs Mildmay, that is based upon her bitter experiences of love and romance and is disdainful of her niece's husband, his crass and dull habits (such as falling asleep after a good dinner), his love of market gardening and inability to appreciate Beethoven. Mrs Sternhold is also the lynch pin in the scandalous plot of Hawksley's pursuit of Mrs Mildmay. As part of the climax of Act 1 Mrs Sternhold confronts Hawksley and they play off one another's ability to banter and manoeuvre. She weeps, and threatens him with a paper knife, and finally faints in the arms of Mrs Mildmay who has discovered them together. Act 2 involves Mrs Sternhold in a tumult of emotion and anxiety, which she must keep hidden for much of the action. She knows the terrible truth of Hawksley's attempts to seduce her niece, and suspects Mrs Mildmay of succumbing to the villain's fatal, Byronic appeal. All the while the other characters suspect Mrs Sternhold of carrying on an affair with the handsome captain.

In the biographical critiques and material amassed by Carnell and Wolff some of the archetypes of Braddon's fiction are attributed to the real-life characters she encountered in her career. John Gilby, a Yorkshire squire, was her patron whilst she was still acting and recommended her as a young writer to publishers, financing her early attempts at poetic composition whilst maintaining the hope that she would

marry him. He could have been the basis for Mellish, the Yorkshire squire, in *Aurora Floyd* (1863). William Sawyer, the journalist and friend of Braddon from her time in Yorkshire, is perhaps the model for the hardworking and loyal Richard Thornton in *Eleanor's Victory* (1863). There is a clear autobiographical strand contained in her work arising from her years on stage[20] using locations and professional experiences that would have been familiar to her as a touring actress.

Her experience of having played roles and her possession of expert knowledge of a vast range of melodrama, comedy, farce, European drama, Shakespeare and pantomime are of equal importance in tracing Braddon's influences and the formation of her literature as the activity of locating the autobiographical figures in her fiction. Deborah Wynne has recently examined, via the example of *Eleanor's Victory* (1863) as it was published in *Once A Week*, Braddon's 'didactic' style in her combination plots. Wynne decides that Braddon had a mission, reinforced by her campaign of defending 'light' literature whilst editor of *Belgravia*, to 'educate' her readers.

> Braddon's didactic project in *Eleanor's Victory* works in two ways: alongside her tendency to allude to mainstream writers and artists, she also attempts to educate her readers to appreciate popular cultural forms (if they do not already do so). While her novels abound with references to Byron, Scott, Shakespeare, Tennyson, Balzac, Flaubert, Millais, Holman Hunt, Turner, Raphael, and Beethoven, it also reverberates with references to the *roman feuilleton,* 'Jack Sheppard', 'Wagner, the Wehr Wolf', pantomime, 'God Save the Queen', Scottish ballads, melodrama, fairy-tales, and the sensation novels of Paul Féval and Fréderic Soulié. Braddon presents all these cultural forms as pleasurable and worth engaging with.[21]

Wynne lists here the popular literary, artistic and theatrical determinants in Braddon's career that influenced her writing in conjunction with 'high' literary culture. Mildmay in *Still Waters* as the loyal and pragmatic husband has to protect his domestic and romantic interests in the face of the amoral seducer Captain Hawksley and the disdainful Mrs. Sternhold. He has his imitators in the patient husbands found in *Aurora Floyd, Eleanor's Victory*, and *The Lady's Mile* (1866).

This gallery of men, upper class, professional, or socially privileged, has to sustain feelings for their wives when all the signals indicate that these independent and wilful women are unfaithful. In *Aurora Floyd* Mellish does so in the face of the realization that his young wife is a bigamist. Gilbert Monckton in *Eleanor's Victory* has to maintain his belief in Eleanor surrounded by mystery and secrecy as she tries to track down the man she sees as responsible for her father's death.

The last in this sample trio of early novels investigating modern marriage, *The Lady's Mile*, is significant in Braddon's career as a work that marks a point of departure from the genre that she was best known for at the time. As Wolff points out, after five years of producing two three-volume novels per year, Braddon devoted almost the entire year of 1866 to the composition of *The Lady's Mile.*[22] This is a novel about three love stories in fashionable society, in which husbands and suitors protect their interests in a variety of ways and ultimately offers a very subtle treatment of the frustrations women have to endure in the face of social propriety. There are no 'sensation' crimes of any kind in this story. Instead, it is a work that offers intimate social portraits of relationships, conversations and fashionable gatherings centred upon the image of the 'Lady's Mile' where characters ride out and display their status in carefully controlled public surroundings.

Braddon's intense period of composition of sensation novels, covering the ground that she is best known for, lasted throughout most of the 1860s, but she shifted her focus during this period with this novel. She had taken deliberate and self-conscious inspiration from G.W.M. Reynolds for her early work, *Three Times Dead* (later published as *The Trail of the Serpent*), and from Wilkie Collins she had gleaned her ideas and structure for *Lady Audley's Secret*. *The Doctor's Wife* (1864) was founded very clearly on *Madame Bovary*. But with *The Lady's Mile* she articulated female discontent and desire in a more understated way delivered unmediated from her own perspective. As Wolff describes:

> . . . *The Lady's Mile* – [Braddon's] first 'social life novel' – proved neither 'light' nor 'flimsy.' It was her best novel so far and contained in embryo many elements of her 'new manner' that would later puzzle the critics whenever she abandoned the sensation stories that they insisted were all she could write.[23]

He suggests that *The Lady's Mile* was partially a product of Braddon's anxieties as her relationship with Maxwell evolved. She and her 'taskmaster' were experiencing the inevitable stresses and strains felt by any couple, but exacerbated by the fact that Braddon felt very keenly the difficulties of her status as his mistress and mother of his illegitimate children. Added to this were her feelings about her work. These were expressed in her letters to Bulwer Lytton throughout the 1860s. She hoped to accomplish works with more 'artistry' to 'please' him, her mentor. However, as early as 1863 she related to him 'I go on grinding and grinding until I feel as if there was nothing left in me but the stalest and most hacknied [*sic*] of ideas.'[24]

The pressures of composition came from different quarters. At home she had Maxwell, at the offices of his magazines, such as *Temple Bar* in the early 1860s, there were both Maxwell and George Sala, accepting and rejecting, approving or disapproving of her ideas. She was Sala's goldmine, as long as she pursued the sensation form and followed up her successes of 1862-63. She was his 'Miss Aurora' – his name for her since *Aurora Floyd*. She was reading Dickens and Balzac at this time, enthusing about their masterpieces to Bulwer and herself desirous of writing a modern masterpiece novel of character and 'poetry'. Simultaneously, in 1864-65, she was producing her typically 'strong' works such as *Henry Dunbar* (1864) and *Sir Jasper's Tenant* in *Temple Bar* (1865) in direct competition to Collins's *Armadale* in *The Cornhill Magazine*.[25]

The departure that *The Lady's Mile* represents in the following year came as a respite from the pressures of commercial publication for the popular market. As she had reported to Bulwer at the start of their correspondence: 'I have never written a line that has not been written against time – sometimes with the printer waiting outside the door.'[26] After four years the pressures of family life and the grind of

publication took the shine off the commercial and popular success. The contrast when writing *The Lady's Mile* is discernible in her tone, 'I have been working very little for the last six months, during which time I have done nothing but the Lady's Mile – a wonderful falling off from the four separate romances upon which I have been wont to work alternately.'[27] *The Lady's Mile* was a signal of what was to come in her career. Whilst the importance of her sensation novels cannot be critically, commercially, or socially underestimated, representing as they do the staple for critical appraisal of her career, the low-key, intimate social novel was her desired form, once she had found a fictional voice in the 1860s.

She knew that the shelf life of her 'piratical' stuff was limited and lapses in popularity here and there were a foreshadowing of what was to come in the life of certain popular genre styles in the late nineteenth century. Her instincts as a novelist - which she tried so hard to articulate in her letters to Bulwer - her only outlet to do so in her early career, were telling her that the public could only take so much of the sensation formula before its palate became jaded. Wynne reinforces this in her chapter on Braddon's *Eleanor's Victory*. *Once A Week* was a more 'high-brow' magazine, with a more 'intellectual' style. Wynne suggests that Braddon sought to crack the formula for writing in publications such as this alongside more 'respectable' novelists such as Harriet Martineau, whilst at the same time challenging the 'reductionist' agenda of conservative critics behind the harshest attacks on popular and sensational literature.[28]

Braddon described her professional instincts in her early novels of character in the 1860s. Both *The Doctor's Wife* and *The Lady's Mile* consider the appetite for fashion and fiction that the female reader in particular possessed at the time and Isabel, in *The Doctor's Wife*, is that very same reader whose tastes mature as she enters adult life. From her adolescent yearnings for romance and escapism, she becomes a more controlled, mature reader when she can no longer avoid confronting the harsh realities of life, and death. She has to forswear her most romantic and impulsive inclinations, for a diet of biographies, histories and social novels. It is no

coincidence that both these novels contain the trajectory of the career of Sigismund Smith, later Smythe, the writer of penny fiction. It is he, described by Wolff as Braddon's 'fictional alter ego', who commentates upon the cultural and social status of the novel and its effects on the reader.

In *The Doctor's Wife* he is the embryonic novelist, who, like his creator, is pestered by the printer to complete the requisite numbers of his penny serials on time. He contemplates his 'magnum opus' but realizes that he must pursue his calling within the sub-culture of penny fiction, of which he is not ashamed. Whatever the readers like he will supply, his commercial imperative is thought to be that of Braddon by most critics. Braddon did not impel Smith to dwell on the depressive grind of supplying the market; she was instead very blunt with her own views on the labelling and categorization of literature that impeded wider critical recognition and approval. Her direct address to the reader comes early in the first novel in which he appears:

> Mr Sigismund Smith was a sensation author. That bitter term of reproach, 'sensation,' had not been invented for the terror of romancers in the fifty-second year of this present century [when the novel is set]; but the things existed nevertheless in divers forms, and people wrote sensation novels as unconsciously as Monsieur Jourdain talked prose. Sigismund Smith was the author of about half a dozen highly-spiced fictions, which enjoyed an immense popularity amongst the classes who like their literature as they like their tobacco – very strong.[29]

Smith is a charming and dynamic young man, working through his plots energetically and deviously and admitting to borrowing a little here and there from other authors, not just from one but browsing the work of others to come up with his 'combination', hybrid plots: 'Don't empty one man's pockets, but take a little bit all round.' He adores melodrama, especially Pixérécourt, 'the father and prince of melodrama'. He contemplates the rise and fall of popularity on stage or in the literary marketplace, how Pixérécourt 'who reigned supreme' and whose gallery of

characters still populates the stage, but 'Who ever quotes any passage from the works of Guilbert de Pixérécourt, or remembers his name?'[30]

Recognition and acclaim are fleeting experiences and the marketplace is fickle, Smith knows this, and through him Braddon articulated her knowledge of this fact. An author or dramatist is only recognised as long as the popular audience enjoys his or her output, and they must keep up with the times. This was Braddon's outcry at the pressures piled upon her by editors and publishers and she used Pixérécourt as her exemplar model, a great and popular playwright, who was synonymous with success on stage in England and France, but whom no one quoted or acknowledged anymore. Braddon's revelations about her feelings on the popular marketplace were not the sudden realisations of an immature artist. They were the steadily acquired knowledge of a young actress turned novelist.

Without the recognition of her stage career her experiences can only be dated to 1860-62 when her name was made in the literary profession. The eight years spent in the acting profession back up her opinions of the popular entertainment industry and she made the logical step into writing using the principles of the theatrical marketplace. That she sets *The Doctor's Wife* in the early 1850s, specifically dating the meeting between Isabel, George Gilbert (the country doctor) and Sigismund Smith to the 21st July 1852 – when she had probably just entered the company at the Theatre Royal in Bath at the close of the season – is significant as an indicator of the opportunities she had to contemplate her 'hidden' past and reflect upon the turns her life had taken to date:

> I like to think of these three people gathered in this neglected suburban garden upon the 21st of July 1852, for they were on the very threshold of life, and the future lay before them like a great stage in the theatre; but the curtain was down, and all beyond it was a dense mystery.[31]

Sigismund Smith reappeared in *The Lady's Mile*, having changed his name to the more bourgeois and affected spelling of Smythe. This novel describes the 'rule of fashion' which compels 'millions of people who never in all their lives have spoken

to one another to wear the same order of garments, and talk the same slang, and ride in the same kind of carriages, and eat the same class of dinners, and congregate in the same places, at the same hour, year after year, century after century, from the earliest dawn of civilization until to-day'.[32] Smythe has 'abandoned the penny public to court the favour of circulating-library subscribers'.

As an author of 'two dozen three-volume novels' Smythe feels able to diagnose the malaise of his friend Foley the painter who suffers from an unrequited passion at the start of the story. The writer has become more like his creator, mirroring her career with the trajectory of his own. Smythe offers a long speech on the enthusiasms of the modern age and the rapid pace of society. This 'rhapsody',[33] which effectively opens the novel, condensed Braddon's use of her alter ego to set out some of her views in this work before launching into the romantic problems of the characters. The painter and the novelist are watching the performance of fashionable society as it parades from Hyde Park Corner to the Serpentine and back again. This conveyor belt of fashion is the setting in which women feel the pressure to conform and repeat their choreographed moves attired in the right sort of costume and transported in the right sort of vehicle. Smythe appeals to his friend:

> Don't rail against the women, my dear Philip; the women are – what the men make them . . . The lives of the women of the present day are like this drive which they call the Lady's Mile. They go as far as they can, and then they go back again. See how mechanically the horses wheel when they reach the prescribed turning-point. If they went any farther, I suppose they would be lost in some impenetrable forest depth in Kensington Gardens . . . There are women who lose themselves in some unknown region beyond the Lady's Mile, and whom we never hear of more . . . let us pity those benighted wanderers whose dismal stories are to be found amongst the chronicles of the Divorce Court, whose tarnished names are only whispered by scandal-loving dowagers . . . On this side, the barrier seems so slight a one – a hedge of thorns that are half hidden by the gaudy tropical flowers that hang about them – a few scratches, and the boundary is passed; but when the desperate wanderer pauses for a moment on the other side to look backward, behold! the thorny hedgerow is transformed into a wall of brass that rises to the very skies, and shuts out earth and heaven.[34]

Braddon showed with this 'oration' that it takes a novelist who can perceive what life is like on the other side of the barrier to describe it for readers and characters, as a forewarning of the potential fate that awaits those women who transgress. Eve M. Lynch in her essay 'Spectral Politics: M. E. Braddon and the Spirit of Social Reform', refers to this 'fashionable treadmill' of the Mile and the 'unknown region' beyond as Braddon's accessing of not just the preoccupations of the idle rich but the 'political, social, and economic issues directing the lives of Victorian women of all classes'.[35]

Isabel, a member of the middle classes in *The Doctor's Wife* after her marriage to George Gilbert, comes very close to transgressing in this fashion, but is rescued by her own refuge of romance and the inspirational message of a popular preacher. Smythe, having been witness to the dereliction of the marriage of his friend the Midlandshire doctor and the beautiful Isabel can bring that wisdom to the fashionable domain of the artists, lawyers, and aristocracy of London in this sequel novel. He does not bear any resentment towards the women, the fatal sirens of society; they are constructed by the masculine desire for archetypes and ideals. Foley is not as generous, and is consistent with his own ideal of the artist pining for the unrequited love of his ideal muse, Florence Crawford, the daughter of his painting tutor. Kate Flint, in *The Woman Reader, 1837-1914*, describes *The Lady's Mile* as 'strictly speaking, a society novel with a melodramatic near-elopement in it which could readily belong to sensation fiction'.[36] This indicates Braddon's inclinations that remained in her work, but also the desire of modern critics to pursue the protocols of reading her work that embed in it the sensation conventions.

These two novels, *The Doctor's Wife* and its companion *The Lady's Mile* – linked together as they are by Smith/Smythe – occur at the time in the Victorian novel's history described by Michael Wheeler as 'High Victorian'.[37] This is in common with the architecture of the time. Wheeler cites Robert Furneaux Jordan's labelling of the prevailing Gothic revivalist architectural style with its 'massiveness of output, proportions and confidence', and ascribes it to the novels and novelists of the 1860s.

Braddon's tandem social novels are dissimilar in key ways from her sensational output but, like those, belong in this period – as much a 'confident' product of their time and her career to date as *Lady Audley's Secret* or *Aurora Floyd*. She had prepared for these novels as assiduously and conscientiously as she had prepared for her sensation novels, by adopting the tone and style of the early century 'silver fork' novel and examining social manners and mores in some of the manuscripts dating from around the late 1850s and early 1860s found in the BFC. Her trial, experimental narratives in manuscript form in the Collection, *The Kingdom of Boredom*[38] and *Told by the Poet*,[39] demonstrate the outline form of such social novels and the introductory chapters of potential publications.

Wolff considers *The Kingdom of Boredom* a weak story that begins promisingly enough, as a sort of allegory, but fades into the conventional sensation style with the story of vengeance and family secrets.[40] It can be compared in its plot devices of secrecy and identical twin brothers to her *Mystery at Fernwood* published by George Sala in *Temple Bar* in 1861. Although *The Kingdom of Boredom* does undoubtedly, like *The Lady's Mile* from a later date, begin to adopt sensation devices, it is nonetheless a very clear experiment in social satire like its successor. Braddon had begun to draft this sort of work for publication at the same time as she was writing her most lurid and obviously sensational early works, such as *Three Times Dead*. This novel was published after some cuts and alterations as *The Trail of the Serpent* in 1861.

> The Beverley printer suggested that my Warwick Lane serial should combine, as far as my powers allowed, the human interest and genial humour of Dickens with the plot-weaving of G.W.R [*sic*] Reynolds; and, furnished with these broad instructions, I filled my ink bottle, spread out my foolscap, and, on a hopelessly wet afternoon, began my first novel – now known as 'The Trail of the Serpent' – but published in Warwick Lane, and later in the stirring High Street of Beverley as 'Three Times Dead'.[41]

This was a combination story of Dickens and Reynolds with, depending on the perspective, either a tempering of sensational plotting with the sensibilities learnt

from Dickens, or a bolstering of the 'genial' approach with lurid and gruesome plot devices learnt from Reynolds. In *Told by the Poet* from the BFC, Braddon used the experiences of a young poet to experiment with the perceptions of the young artist trying to meet the demands of the modern publishing world, whilst navigating his own anxiety over his compositions and society's treatment and acceptance of his work. Braddon elaborated upon the trials of the young writer with the clear knowledge of her own perspective and that of the professional magazine publisher and editor. She depicted these factors as a dilemma for the young author; a struggle with the various choices and the influence of the Muses whilst trying to achieve the means to live:

> I will not dwell on my early struggles, my foolish hopes, & heart rending disappointments, the verses which I wrote at midnight with the flush of triumph upon my face & a feverish delight in my heart; & which I delivered the next morning at the office of some popular periodical with the aspect & the sensations of a detected thief. I think I became familiar with [the] handwriting of every editor in the metropolis, & I really blush when I reflect what unnecessary expense I have occasioned [with local] proprietors in the matter of stationary. I shudder when I think of myself in the character of a scourge. Given a young man with literary aspirations, a decent education, & a small competency, & let the editors of London look to it. The man who has to earn his bread cannot go on pouring out verses forever, to find them declined with thanks. He must live, and after a certain number of disappointments he will abandon the Muses as an unprofitable company and will turn his attention to some other trade. The ignorant poet may be annihilated by the ruthless castigation of his original ideas about grammar & orthography & though apt to prove an ugly customer, will in due time retire from the field. But the decently educated young [man] with a moderate income is the real Hydra headed monster. No sooner have you cut off one of his heads than there arises another.[42]

This story has highlights to it that are reminiscent of Braddon's *Circe* (1867), for which she used Octave Feuillet's melodramatic story *Dalila* (1857) as the basis for her composition. She knew well and kept up to date with the output of French novelists, some of which were banned or certainly not authorized as recommended reading for middle-class English girls in the 1850s and 60s. As Kate Flint points out, in reference to Rhoda Broughton's and Braddon's works, the referencing of French

novels was a short-hand signifier to readers in Britain that 'presupposes' their knowledge of them and assumes their collusion in the debate around the 'ridiculous and hypocritical nature of masculine prohibition in this area' through the (feminine) accessing of this material as contraband.[43]

Braddon was active in the cultural and moral arguments surrounding the production and consumption of literature, as novelist, adaptor and reader in her own right; and she credited her readership with an active participation in this argument, despite their perceived passive role as consumers of the product. Her blatant borrowing from both Flaubert and Feuillet's publications, if we assume that the titles she used, *The Doctor's Wife* and the reworking of *Dalila* as *Circe*, were not merely naïve and clumsy nomenclatures, suggest her contribution to the furtherance of literature as social commentary and discussion of human nature. If critics or editors tried to curtail her endeavours in one form, like the 'Hydra headed monster' she likened to the young author in *Told by the Poet*, Braddon came back with an even more exaggerated or blatant contribution to the debate. If they dismissed her sensation novels, she entered the fray with a social novel, or a controversial reworking of a popular French plot.

This meant she provoked the personal dislike of critics such as Margaret Oliphant, whose harsh commentaries on Braddon's works are often cited by critics such as Lyn Pykett and Carnell[44] as proof of the disapprobation in society of sensation fiction and the damaging effects it was perceived to have upon the female reader. Disapprobation was certainly one attitude in the reception of 'strong' stuff produced by sensation novelists; but a handful of critics on *Blackwood's Magazine* or conservative, moral commentators on *The Christian Remembrancer* did not speak for the majority of the reading public. The fictional character of her young poet, and we can assume that like Sigismund he speaks on her behalf, was more concerned with dedicating himself to his art and providing publishers and the reading public with something of the feelings that he experiences and his ideals for literary composition, developed from his love of Shakespeare and his reading of Bulwer and

Balzac. 'I had sounded the furthest depths of my soul . . .' he states in *Told by the Poet* in reference to the production of his great work 'Cleopatra'. 'I thought of Pygmalion,' she wrote, reiterating his thoughts out loud, 'as I walked to & fro in the summer stillness. Was there not some touch of madness in the intensity of my delight in the work of my own hands?'[45]

As much as the proof of the pathology of female readers has been sought via *The Doctor's Wife*, or the damaging influence of dangerous, bigamous young women in literature was sought by contemporary critics in *Lady Audley's Secret* or *Aurora Floyd*, Braddon's unpublished manuscripts in the BFC can provide us with evidence of how she perceived the production of commercially and artistically satisfying compositions. The status of artist that she sought for herself, as evidenced by her correspondence with Bulwer over ten years, can be seen articulated in this unpublished work. It is as much a part of the legitimate negotiation of her craft as the published opinions of Sigismund.

Solveig C. Robinson in 'Editing *Belgravia*: M. E. Braddon's Defense of "Light Literature"'[46] brings Braddon's editorship of that magazine under scrutiny and the years between 1866 and 1876 when she pioneered a form of criticism that 'was friendly to such low-status popular literary forms as sensation fiction' and helped to 'to reshape the critical discourse surroundings those forms'.[47] Anxiety over critical reception and her status as an artist was tackled head on in the pages of this publication, with the participation of Sala, Escott, Kenningale Cook, William Stigand, Francis Jacox, among her contributors. Their studies and series of essays are 'structured so as to be comfortable leisure reading even while they impart useful information about the works and reputations of the authors involved'.[48] Between them they challenged, questioned, and replied to the criticism of Margaret Oliphant in *Blackwood's Magazine* and the accusations of plagiarism levelled at Braddon in the *Pall Mall Gazette* over the publication of *Circe*. '(I)n an essay entitled "The Value of Fiction," Walter Besant argued that novels are intended to provide a healthy escape from introspection, boredom, and overwork, and that as such they

offer readers a refreshment of mind and spirit that "no sermons ever preached" were likely to do. (*Belgravia* 16 [Feb. 1872]: 48-49)'[49] With the help of Sala and Besant, Braddon was able to establish a counter-cultural defence of sensation and popular fiction and argue with and satirize the assumptions of conservative critics.

> The key to *Belgravia's* critical position under Braddon was the belief that readers' tastes could be educated or uplifted, so that in pleasing them, authors wouldn't necessarily be guilty of pandering. Through the criticism published in *Belgravia*, Braddon drove home the point that *popular* taste didn't necessarily have to mean *bad* taste. [50]

The socially satirical content of the early manuscripts in the BFC has to be considered alongside the published works of fiction and Braddon's eventual emergence as an editor of authoritative and resoundingly radical opinions. The extent of her work in the late 1850s through to the mid-1860s offers as much satire and social commentary as it does sensation – an interweaving of styles and genre that she was developing as early as her first published novels, or proposed novels. If Braddon could determinedly reinvent herself for publicity and profit as a stage heroine in nautical melodramas or a woman with a past in a satirical romance she could grasp the revolutionary twists and turns in contemporary literature and absorb the different effects of genre and form in translation and adaptation from France, for example. As Lyn Pykett asserts in her introduction to *The Doctor's Wife*: 'Ironically, Flaubert's novel, regarded by many as a triumph of artistry and a landmark in novelistic realism, is in many ways more sensational than the queen of the English sensation novel's reworking of it.'[51] This bears out Braddon's view of the lightness of the material she spent time defending as an editor against the detractors of popular fiction, and reiterates Sala's assertion that great literature is not always characterized by its 'sanity, wholesomeness, and cleanliness'.[52]

Braddon created her combination style of approaches to fiction, as Flint points out, with *The Lady's Mile* as a social novel that incorporates melodrama. So, from *The Trail of the Serpent*, through the experiments in fiction in the BFC, to the novels of character and society in the mid-1860s, Braddon's typical approach to fiction

seemed to be this combination of plots and the working through of events and feelings via methods gleaned from Collins and Reynolds, but also Dickens and Flaubert. The Dickensian, or Flaubertian, influence is as important as the influence of Collins and Reynolds, and yet Braddon is typically depicted as borrowing and deriving works from the latter two novelists and not offering any significant contribution to the development of styles and genre pioneered by the former.

In *The Kingdom of Boredom* in the BFC she used the available blend of characters that populate a large country estate to represent her satirical take on fashionable society, in what could have become another combination plot. The villagers, servants and estate workers are shown enjoying the party at Astrandel Park for their master's coming of age. They are an array of rustic types familiar from the Victorian stage, but they are outlandish and incongruous when contrasted with the restraint and coldness of the highborn characters. We can appreciate their quaintness, but we are also encouraged to see their vulgarity, crudeness, and vitality. As the hot day progresses the idyllic setting becomes more of a Bacchanalian rite, with the villagers reeling around in a stupor, slurring their words and getting into fights. The gentlemen of the press, employed to cover the event for the society pages, cannot tell what day it is or read any of their own copy as they slip into a state of inebriation.

> Yes! They had been happy, & drunk & disorderly, & enjoyed themselves in their own good English way on the lower lawn; & in the steward's room, & even in the cave of the hermit, alone with his beer; while Boredom on the upper lawn, wished the time away, & began to be weary of the Sun, after its wont.[53]

The 'good English way' Braddon described of the lower classes to enjoy any public event sees them staggering homeward drunk and belligerent, whilst the aristocracy, inhabiting their upper tier, tire very quickly of the festivities. Braddon employed a slip-shod Sam Wellerish slang to describe the speech of the lower classes and offered a portrait of the Astrandel family via the conversations of their servants, the gentleman's gentlemen, who wait upon the Astrandel brothers. Their insight

provides the background to the story and the events that unfold which then veer more towards the sensational.

The mother of the Astrandel twins is the source of the discontent in the family. She is the Dowager lady of the 'Kingdom' and has schooled the 'heir' of the Astrandels in all the nuances of Boredom's desired fashionable manners. Her lacklustre method of raising her twin sons, with a mixture of indifference and disdain, is the source of the travails that will beset their future with the overtones of sensation, arising from the family's secret and a pursuit for revenge. Their servants initially provide the commentary on the family's troubles. The aristocracy is portrayed as a series of specimens for appraisal and scrutiny by its employees. It is only when the blind son, Philip Astrandel, iterates his feelings that the tone of the story alters. Braddon employs a melodramatic 'epic' oration on his part to signify the switch from social satire to sensation. The family doctor supplies the further substantiation for this switch when he reveals the family secret to Philip, as he is about to leave the estate forever.

The atmosphere of the satire in this short fragment has a strange and subtle tone to it. The allegorical beginning, depicting the figures that inhabit the Kingdom, has an otherworldly quality to it. It is a cold awakening of flat champagne, hangovers and burnt-out gas lamps, 'London in September', in which the inhabitants stagger about aimlessly – shackled like convicts in a penal colony. This series of images, paraded for the reader to scrutinise, haunts the whole piece. The same haunting effect occurs in *Told by the Poet*. When the poet, Cyril, contemplates his solitary exercises in composition and looks to Shakespeare for inspiration, his world takes on a visionary quality. He 'sees' Cleopatra making her progress in a stately barge down the Nile, a waking dream. The inspiration seems to come in a ridiculously easy way to him; but taken within the context of the whole story it is a product of years of struggle and experimentation. The poet's breakthrough with 'Cleopatra' is similar to Braddon's with *Lady Audley' Secret*; success was impending when she wrote the opening for *Told by the Poet*. The sudden critical recognition elicits mixed feelings from Cyril as

he negotiates the interest of the public, including ungrammatical fan letters, signed 'Voilet'.[54]

Both *The Kingdom of Boredom* and *Told by the Poet* represent an exercise in dual forms of narrative – or a choice of narratives, beginning with one style and switching to another. In the former, Braddon commenced with an allegorical style of satire and moved on to an epic, melodramatic, sensational style – more familiar from her career at this stage. The latter opened with a visionary, contemplative style, perhaps a depiction of the artist that Braddon wished to be: caught up in a world of composing aspirational, 'poetic' literature supported by her reading of Balzac and Shakespeare. Then, with the intrusion of public acclaim, fan mail and critical reception, the story turns into a satirical exploration of the position of the artist and his/her integrity in the face of fashion and its (un)civilizing effects. Pamela K. Gilbert investigates this form of dual narratives and 'Generic Opposition' in an examination of *Lady Audley's Secret*. In the first instance is Lady Audley (in her various guises) and her persuasive narrative of melodramatic journeying to social success, punctuated by acts compelled by her ruthless 'madness'. The novel, according to Gilbert, switches to the story of Robert Audley, the 'ideal' narrative of 'Civilisation' manifested as a detective trail. Gilbert offers a verdict on this: ' . . . the artist's job (specifically, the popular novelist's) is to expose the transgression latent in the narratives of the ideal.'[55]

In Braddon's article in the *Idler* magazine in 1893,[56] she recollected, from the secure position of fame and wealth in her later career, her first adventures in fiction. Her reminiscences included the experience in childhood of writing simple stories – inspired by nursery rhymes and fairytales. Her pride in sitting at her desk as a child with the accessories of the writer around her, feeling grown-up and businesslike about fiction is engaging. Her inspirations were the lurid tales of Reynolds and Byron's *Bride of Abydos*. The exotic and poetic were consistently appealing to her and she yearned for the powers to express her ideas in Byronic tones. It was her mother, Fanny, herself adept at newspaper and magazine writing, who inspired

Braddon with her choice of material – firstly in the Romantic and Gothic strain and then with the suggestion to write a 'domestic story'. This early tale, from childhood, was *The Old Armchair*; a partial copy is found in the BFC, in very neat script on quarto sheets. Braddon kept this work safely for the rest of her life, a reminder of the innocence of childhood days and the inspiration that she found with her mother. It is a touching tale of an old couple on hard times; they lose all their goods to a 'rude broker', but beg him to let them keep their old chair. The evil broker mockingly rends the chair cover and out bursts – a pile of banknotes – they are saved. 'Nothing more simple – or more natural,' as Braddon stated.[57]

It was with this unambiguous, low-key tale that she considered her writing career had truly begun. She practised throughout her childhood and adolescence with such simple constructions and mastered the handling of plots that later enabled her to weave many strands together for the serial and three-volume forms. Her mother's suggestions were taken on at an early age, but she proclaimed in 1893 her consistent policy of resistance to the suggestions of others for the formation of her plots.

> Now, it is a curious fact, which may or may not be common to other story-spinners, that I have never been able to take kindly to a plot – or the suggestion of a plot – offered me by anybody else. The moment a friend tells me that he or she is desirous of imparting a series of facts – strictly true – as if truth in fiction mattered one jot! – which in his or her opinion would make the ground plan of an admirable, startling, and altogether original three-volume novel, I know in advance that my imagination will never grapple with those startling circumstances – that my thoughts will begin to wander before my friend has got half through the remarkable chain of events, and that if the obliging purveyor of romantic incidents were to examine me at the end of the story, I should be spun ignominiously. For the most part, such subjects as have been proposed to me by friends have been hopelessly unfit for the circulating library; or, where not immoral, have been utterly dull; but it is, I believe, a fixed idea in the novel-reader's mind that any combination of events out of the beaten way of life will make an admirable subject for the novelist's art. [58]

She accused well-meaning friends of suggesting 'immoral' or 'utterly dull' plots for three-volume novels, 'hopelessly unfit' for the circulating library. As 'Queen' of the

circulating libraries she was in a good position to judge. She had a disagreement of this kind with George Sala, early in her career. He wanted her to collaborate with him on a serial based upon Goethe's *Faust* and Hugo's *Les Misérables*. Eager to compel her to repeat the success they had enjoyed with *Aurora Floyd* he tried to encourage Maxwell to persuade her to take this project on – but she resisted.[59] Still, this particular combination plot was one that she would cover in one way or another during the rest of her career. She and Sala agreed in earnest on the value of 'light literature', but not always on what would be commercially successful.

It was guaranteed, however, that Braddon would resist the suggestions of friends or colleagues for novels. After her experience with Gilby she was never liable to encourage intervention from anyone whilst she wrote. Gilby had chosen Garibaldi and the Sicilian campaign as the subject for Braddon's epic poem written in Spenserian stanza whilst he was her patron at the end of the 1850s. She loathed every minute of the experience and was not shy of declaring this later in life. The notion of such intervention is at odds with twentieth-century ideas of independent artistic integrity, but the dynamic between a young actress and her male patron in the mid-nineteenth century was specifically weighted in favour of the man. Gilby was doing her a service and saw it as his duty to free her from the stage, by first compelling her to drop her stage name (which she gave up reluctantly) and second by educating her so that she could pursue a legitimate career as a poet and become his wife. His letters outline the attitude he adopted with her and offer a sense of her response to him. After she had returned two of his letters he replied angrily:

> I have just been to church, and I hope I am not angry, but I wish I could show you how you often try to make me so. Here are my 2 letters back by the dead letter office that (I thought) you said you had received – *Business habits these!* (. . .) Then I rather gather from your letter that you have *not* seen the K. Gardens, or the Nat History at the Museum – Ah! what is the use of writing! What a task shall I have if I try to guide your studies. You know best whether you will be guided or not, but it is the only thing that gives me misgivings and pain.[60]

Braddon's pursuit for authorial identity came about in the face of such personal pressures and such strained responses from Gilby whilst he organised her career and tried to get her to comply with his idea of how she should write and acquit herself. He was angry at her unwillingness to return from London to Yorkshire. In Yorkshire, at Beverly, he felt he could control her and tried to fashion her into a provincial, North Country lady poet – his discovery. Such a Svengali figure was totally unnecessary for her. Braddon had shown independence and self-reliance from an early age and her later musings on and defence of the development of her career, in the BFC and in published articles, are emphatic on the topic of her trajectory as a writer. She claimed her life as her own and the 'history of the books I have written and the books I have read'. Her experience under the patronage of Gilby offered her another perspective on life that she would utilise to great effect in her writing. Being subjected to his often clamorous and embittered attentions she gained insight into a form of male desire. This difficult, strained relationship, followed so quickly by the passionate, intense commencement of her union with Maxwell, gave her ample material for a variety of her plots.

Thus, she was a complex and earnest young novelist in the first decade of her career and lost none of that drive, sometimes leading to illness and near breakdown at times in her career. She consulted various expert opinions in her correspondence, professional relationships and in her reading. The fusion and development of forms and genres, apparent from the BFC, was a product of her career on stage, her reading influences and the pressures of commercial composition. She had, in 1860, entered the fray of Victorian commercial writing and there was no going back if she wanted to fulfil her aims of independence and domestic security, which included the wish to support her new family with Maxwell and her mother, Fanny Braddon. Complicating her position was her unmarried status with Maxwell and her function in the household as stepmother to his five children and the negotiation of time around her working life, pregnancy and domestic management. An accompanying anxiety was the 'secret' of her previous career on stage, which she kept consistently hidden throughout her life. The BFC material indicates the time and space she took

to experiment and arrange her ideas in her early and late career. In it she pondered the act of composition and writing itself, whilst negotiating the pressures and constraints of the commercial, artistic and domestic life of the author. She looked for freedom and release and the chance for articulating the feelings generated by her complicated position. Influential upon her in her young life thus far were the ideals and desires of others, especially men that both curtailed and inspired her ambitions.

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[1] Wolff, *Sensational* 4.

[2] Jennifer Carnell, *The Literary Lives of M. E. Braddon,* Hastings: Sensation Press, 2000.

[3] Wolff 45.

[4] Carnell, *Literary Lives* 287–375.

[5] Mary Braddon website: www.chriswillis.freeserve.co.uk.

[6] *Lady Audley's Secret* adapted and produced by Donald Hounam, Granada Television, 2000.

[7]Thomas Boyle, *Black Swine in the Sewers of Hampstead,* London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1990.

[8] Patrick Brantlinger, 'What is Sensational about the Sensation Novel?', *Nineteenth Century Fiction,* 1982, 37(1): 1–28.

[9] Elaine Showalter, 'Desperate Remedies: Sensation Novels of the 1860s', *The Victorian Newsletter,* 1976, 49 (Spring): 1–5.

[10] Lynn M. Voskuil, 'Acts of Madness: "Lady Audley" and the meanings of Victorian Femininity', *Feminist Studies,* 2001, 27(3) (Fall): 611–30.

[11] Susan David Bernstein, 'Dirty Reading: sensation fiction, women and primitivism', *Criticism,* 1994, 36(2) (Spring): 213–29.

[12] Chris Willis, 'Mary Elizabeth Braddon and the literary marketplace: a study in commercial authorship', www.chriswillis.freeserve.co.uk/meb2.html, Birkbeck College, 1998.

[13]Christopher Heywood, 'Somerset Maugham's debt to *Madame Bovary* and Miss Braddon's *The Doctor's Wife*', *Etudes Anglaises*, 1966, 19: 64–69; 'Miss Braddon's *The Doctor's Wife*', *Revue de Litterature Comparee*, 1964, 38: 255–61; '*The Return of the Native* and Miss Braddon's *The Doctor's Wife*: a probable source', *Nineteenth Century Fiction*, 1963, 18: 91–94; 'Flaubert, Miss Braddon, and George Moore', *Comparative Literature*, 1960, 12: 151–58; '*Lady Audley's Secret:* a T.S. Eliot source?', *Review of English Studies*, 1976, 27: 182–88; 'A source for *Middlemarch:* Miss Braddon's *The Doctor's Wife* and *Madame Bovary*', *Revue de Litterature Comparee*, 1970, 44: 184–94.

[14]Katharine Mattacks, 'Introduction', in M.E. Braddon, *The Christmas Hirelings,* Hastings: Sensation Press, 2001, 3.

[15] Braddon, *'M.E.M' Beginning,* BFC (MS), Appendix 11, 8.

[16] Wolff 223.

[17] Carnell 115.

[18] Contained in the Theatre Collections, Templeman Library, Kent University, Canterbury.

[19] For cast lists, see, Tom Taylor, *Still Waters Run Deep*, London: Lacy's Acting Edition, 1867.

[20] Carnell 14-15.

[21] Deborah Wynne, *The Sensation Novel and the Victorian Family Magazine*, London: Palgrave, 2001, 125.

[22] Wolff 169.

[23] Ibid 178.

[24] Braddon to Bulwer, May 1863. Robert Lee Wolff, 'Devoted disciple: the letters of Mary Elizabeth Braddon to Sir Edward Bulwer Lytton, 1862–1873', *Harvard Library Bulletin*, 1974, 12: 14.

[25] Ibid 30, n. 75.

[26] Ibid 10.

[27] Ibid 135.

[28] Wynne 114-15.

[29] M.E. Braddon, *The Doctor's Wife*, Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998, 11.

[30] Ibid 47.

[31] Ibid 30-31.

[32] M.E. Braddon, *The Lady's Mile*, London: Ward, Locke & Tyler, 1866, 1–2.

[33] Ibid 5-6.

[34] Ibid 6.

[35] Eve. M. Lynch, 'Spectral politics: M.E. Braddon and the spirit of social reform', in *Beyond Sensation: M.E. Braddon in Context*, New York: State University of New York Press, 1999, 236.

[36] Kate Flint, *The Woman Reader, 1837–1914*, Oxford: OUP, 1993, 286.

[37] Michael Wheeler, *English Fiction of the Victorian Period 1830–1890*, London: Longman, 1985, 90.

[38] Braddon, *The Kingdom of Boredom*, BFC (MS), Appendix 6.

[39] Braddon, *Told by the Poet*, BFC (MS), Appendix 4.

[40] Wolff, *Sensational* 112-13.

[41] M.E. Braddon, 'My First Novel: *The Trail of the Serpent*', *The Idler*, 1893, III: 19–30; see also Appendix 10.

[42] Braddon, *Told by the Poet*, BFC (MS), Appendix 4, 10-11.

[43] Flint 288.

[44] For example, see: Carnell, 169–70, 176–77; Wolff, *Sensational* 200–07; Lyn Pykett, *The Sensation Novel from The Woman in White to The Moonstone*, Plymouth: Northcote House, 1994, 40–41.

[45] Braddon, *Told by the Poet*, BFC (MS), Appendix 4, 13.

[46] Solveig C. Robinson, 'Editing *Belgravia*: M.E. Braddon's defense of "Light literature"', *Victorian Periodicals Review* 1995, 28(2): 109–22.

[47] Robinson 109.

[48] Ibid 119.

[49] Ibid 113.

[50] Ibid 111.

[51] Lyn Pykett, 'Introduction', in Braddon, *The Doctor's Wife*, xvi.

[52] George Sala, 'Cant of modern criticism', *Belgravia*, 4 November 1867: 54.

[53] Braddon, *The Kingdom of Boredom*, BFC (MS), Appendix 6, 9-10.

[54] Braddon, *Told by the Poet*, BFC (MS), Appendix 4, 14.

[55] Pamela K. Gilbert, 'Madness and civilisation: generic opposition in Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret*', *Essays in Literature*, 1996, 23(2): 229.

[56] Braddon, 'My First Novel' 19–33, Appendix 10.

[57] Ibid Appendix 10, 13.

[58] Ibid Appendix 10, 12-13.

[59] Wolff, *Sensational* 116.

[60] Gilby to Braddon, 11 March 1860, Wolff Collection, in Carnell, 111-112.

Chapter 2:

Sexual Politics: *The Doctor's Wife* and *Dead Love Has Chains*

Braddon's experiences with men were, from the commencement of her acting career, unusually relaxed, socialized and more sexualized than was common for women of her class at the time. This is not to say that she deserves the stigma and disapprobation levelled at her by her contemporary critics, nor was she, as in the modern, liberal appraisals of late-twentieth and early twenty-first century critics, a pioneering proto-feminist; anti-marriage and convention. She was, simply, in a minority of professional women at the time and inevitably both benefited and suffered from the social mobility that her life as an actress had offered her. Braddon knew, at least by association, 'that disorderly half of society which becomes every day a greater object of interest to the orderly half'. This comment comes from Henry James's, now often quoted, review of Braddon and her novels in 1865:

> [Miss Braddon] deals familiarly with gamblers, and betting-men, and flashy reprobates of every description. She knows much that ladies are not accustomed to know, but that they are apparently very glad to learn. The names of drinks, the technicalities of the faro-table, the lingo of the turf, the talk natural to a crowd of fast men at supper, when there are no ladies present but Miss Braddon, the way one gentleman knocks another down. These things are the incidents of vice; and vice has its romance. Of this romance Miss Braddon has taken advantage, and the secret of her success is, simply, that she has done it with a woman's *finesse* and a strict regard to morality. If one of her heroines elopes with a handsome stable-boy, she saves the proprieties by marrying him. This may be indecent, if you like, but it is not immoral.[1]

She knew about life, then, and that sort of 'life' as lived by those 'in' society, who moved with 'fast' crowds. Her father had been such, accumulating debts that he

could not meet. Henry Braddon came from a good family, established in Cornwall with the estate of Skisdon at St. Kew. His life was punctuated by various attempts at careers as a solicitor and magazine writer. His mother tried to set him up with a partnership in a firm of solicitors, but within a year the firm had returned her money to her. When Braddon was four years old her mother uncovered a series of letters that proved Henry had been having an affair. Bravely, as Carnell accounts, Fanny decided not to overlook her husband's adultery and they separated.[2] He continued to have intermittent contact with his youngest child and it is the outline of this kind of insecurity associated with her father that had a big impact upon Braddon in her career choices, motivations and decisions in life and in her writing. She inherited something of his reckless, independent nature, but tempered with immense loyalty to her mother and insistence upon a secure family life.

However, her situation with Maxwell, a man not unlike her father, emphasizes the fact that she lived for her passions and would risk a great deal to fulfil them. John Maxwell first met Braddon when he worked on the *Welcome Guest* after she had been recommended as a contributor by mutual acquaintances through the playwright Andrew Halliday.[3] Maxwell's track record in publishing was reasonably successful but subject to the uncertainties of the industry and he had behind him a number of failed journals. Braddon's collaboration with him, from 1861 onwards, marked the change in his fortunes. She was his 'find' and he had a strong personal and professional influence over her; but her identity as a novelist, whilst certainly affected by him, was freed rather than compromised. They shared a 'vision' formulated by him, to bring quality periodicals 'within reach of the lower classes', an exciting commercial and artistic prospect.[4] Her developing personal relationship with him, from 1860 onwards, also marked the decline of her association with John Gilby, her patron from Yorkshire. The jealousy and complexity that signified the transition of her relationship from one man to another was a lesson to her in the ordeals that accompany intimacy of all kinds. It also showed her the sensitivity and passion of the Victorian male, something she was to draw on throughout her career.

For a short period in her early writing career some critics characterized her as male – because her novels had been published as the works of M. E. Braddon. This non-gendered title appealed to her and she wrote to Edmund Yates in 1863, regretting that her publisher, Tinsley, had revealed her true gender – albeit unintentionally as there had never been any conspiracy to assert other than a female identity for her.

> Do you see what the [*Saturday Review*] says about *Aurora Floyd* and my philosophy in the matter of beer, brandy, cigars, and tobacco? It is Mr. Tinsley's fault for advertising me as 'Mary Elizabeth.' I used to be called *Mr.* Braddon, and provincial cities were wont to regret that my experience of women had been so bitter as to make me an implacable foe of the fair sex.[5]

This secrecy around her identity, for only a short period but for very telling reasons, gave her a vicarious insight into the freedom and opportunity available to the male writer. When it became apparent that she was a woman she was criticised for possessing a 'philosophy' that made use of cigar smoking and brandy, but as a 'man' had been characterized as an enemy of the female sex, learning that particular philosophy from, they presumed, hours spent in the 'divorce courts'. This amused and interested her. Her fiction, it seems, could have been written by a man; independently interpreted as such by some critics, despite her public persona that was emerging and had never been deliberately hidden.

Due to inadvertently ambiguous labelling and geographic disparity her work had been freely understood as 'sounding' masculine, thanks to her chosen mode of writing sensation fiction and mediating lower-class penny fiction and scandalous divorce cases into serial form. This can reinforce Braddon's position as a feminist literary model, as discussed by numerous critics,[6] and also cloud some of that argument. Into the equation comes her authenticity in writing and sounding the male point of view. Pykett, Showalter, Miller Casey, Hughes, Schroeder and others consistently describe and define Braddon's voice as iterating 'female rebellion', enacting 'women's suppressed emotions and covert anger' and appealing to a counter culture of female knowledge, shared frustrations and accessing of

contraband literature as a manifestation of rebelliousness.[7] All of this, now the received notion and familiar critical view of her work, is undoubtedly substantial and solidly justified by the evidence of her sensation and social novels in the early phase of her writing career. However, some account needs to be given of the balance of the genders in her work.

Henry James considered that Braddon's experience of the male world offered reinforcement of male experience in her narratives. It was not just the 'maleness' of the experiences that caused him to turn his attention towards her. It was the twilit world of the gentleman at play and leisure that he detected in her work. The times when women vacated the parlour or dining room, or the men retired to the smoking room, were accounted for as well as the more dissolute landscape of the gambling house, racecourse, tavern or private club. Into this region polite women could not stray without jeopardizing their reputations, but actresses or prostitutes could.

There is no evidence to suggest that Braddon was sexually active and took lovers before she began her relationship with Maxwell, but she would probably have encountered women in the acting profession who did. She did have relationships and friendships with men, notably with Gilby and that affair, whether sexual or not, was not a conventional courtship. Braddon went through phases of retreating from his attention and then returning to him, seemingly accepting of his eagerness to control her career. This led to a fraught and difficult experience for them both, the attraction and affection he felt for her was not reciprocated. She knew what it was like to be on the receiving end of a type of male attention that sought to control her because it perceived her as being in a needy and vulnerable situation. There is more than a touch of reforming zeal about Gilby's treatment of her; he clearly felt that she was in need of saving.

The drama and tension of her relationship and interactions with Gilby and the affect her relationship with Maxwell had upon him was one source of her understanding of male desire. Another was her time on stage and the inevitable close quarters she

shared with male actors. The 'proximity' issue, covered by Tracy C. Davis in her examination of the female acting profession,[8] was about both the encouragement and discouragement of attention from male members of the audience, the relationships formed with male colleagues within the shared backstage and domestic environment and the knowledge of the culture of leisure pursuits that took place in the neighbourhood of theatres, including the areas frequented by prostitutes. In *Circumambulatory*, her theatre story in the BFC, Braddon revealed her intimate knowledge of theatrical life, even recounting it from a male perspective.[9]

Braddon's numerous and sympathetic portrayals of theatre professionals in her novels represented those who knew the dangers inherent in the casual, leisurely side of life in the absence of socially approved manners and conventions. They are vigilant and protective of those who stray into their world. Jim Rodney, the young actor and playwright in *A Lost Eden*, diligently monitors the associations of Flora Sandford, the middle-class girl who is compelled to join the profession as a means of making her living after her family falls on hard times. He dutifully walks her home across London from the Phoenix Theatre after every evening's performance. They soon develop an understanding and become engaged, thus formalizing his role as protector of her virtue. In Braddon's familiar style of dual narratives Flora is safer and accounted more virtuous in her story, because of this caution and sympathy enacted by her suitor, than her sister Marion is in her narrative as a governess, the 'respectable' calling for a young educated middle-class woman. Marion is shown to be more vulnerable in the domestic environment and that of suburban London than her sister is on the 'mean' streets. Flora survives the trials of the family, never accosted on her nightly journey, whereas Marion is abducted and spirited off by the villainous Edward Vernham.

Young women as the objects of men's passionate desire are a recurring motif in Braddon's novels and stories. More often than not, however, critics concern themselves primarily with female desire. This is a natural and expected preoccupation when the critical reception of Braddon's works has been assimilated,

quite understandably, into feminist discourse. *The Doctor's Wife*, for example, is typically treated as an example of Braddon's exploration of female desire: she was giving voice to the experience of women as readers, wives and daughters, who are frustrated and unfulfilled. Pykett's introduction to this novel deals with Isabel's trajectory of learning and maturing in her feelings and desires. She becomes an independent-minded, wealthy, socially aware individual. This is a satisfactory end result for the feminist critic. Whilst all this is certainly a feature of the novel the counterbalance to it – that is the male aspect – has not been given as much critical weight. By definition, for Isabel to operate as she does in the midst of her romantic, illusory world constructed from her addictive appetite for fiction there must be another force in play. In Isabel's case it is Roland Landsell, the young upper-class poet, who feeds her appetites with his volume of verses *An Alien's Dreams*.

Isabel is ultimately the inheritor of all that belongs to her husband, George Gilbert, and Landsell the master of Mordred Priory, and is given a premonition of sorts in her habitual romantic reveries. When viewing the stately home Warncliffe Castle, on a daily tour, she fantasises about 'some romantic legerdemain' whereby 'she could 'turn out' to be the rightful heiress of such a castle as this'.[10] Everything does 'turn out' in her favour by the end of the novel. She has had to experience terrible pain and loss, but from an economic angle she has won, and achieved everything. Ann Heilmann comments on this spectacularly successful acquisitive achievement of Isabel, her 'passion symbolically feeds on the bodies of husband and lover': and in accordance with Pamela Gilbert's reading of the heroine's body in Braddon's novels Isabel's physicality 'as well as her transitional mode of existence between states of dreaming and waking . . . conjures up images of the Victorian vampire'.[11] For her to be a 'vampire' there must be something for her to feed off – and it is the male desire for her that eventually enables her appetite to be satisfied. With male and female desire feeding and supplying each other in the novel, a parasitic, symbiotic relationship starts to be revealed. The first volume features the fertile ground in which Isabel's aspirations and desires later feed, thrive, grow and eventually obliterate the other (male) growth and desire.

First of all there is George Gilbert's father, John Gilbert, the parish doctor and Braddon's portrayal of his social and economic subordination to his professional rival the fashionable Dr. Pawlkatt. The 'pretty pastoral' town in 'Midlandshire' is the setting for the elder widowed Dr. Gilbert to raise his son alone. John Gilbert is not spurred on to compete with Pawlkatt, 'Mr. Gilbert's mind was narrowed by the circle in which he lived'. His aspirations are for his son to succeed him, irrespective of young George's abilities: 'If John Gilbert's only child had possessed the capacity of a Newton or the aspirations of a Napoleon, the surgeon would nevertheless have shut him up in the surgery to compound aloes and conserve of roses . . .'[12]

After this there are George's desires, deadened from early childhood by his father's lack of ambition and his contentment with the narrow social view. George was 'commonplace' as a child and loved with a 'womanly' devotion by his father. From the outset Braddon charged the male characterization with an ambiguity and dissonance around the usual conventional social and domestic roles. As a counterpoint to this 'womanly' quality shown by the country doctor towards his son, who is, even after his medical training at St. Bart's, 'as innocent as a girl',[13] are Isabel and her strident stepmother. These two women are overwhelmed by the dominant male presences in the home, in the persons of Mr. Sleaford and his sons, but remain relatively indifferent to them. They do not attempt to impose any kind of 'feminine' order on the household in competition. Isabel, whilst escaping into her world of dreams and romance, is capable of acquitting herself with confidence in the hostile streets of London, by remaining aloof to the squalor and disorder. In fact, with her slovenly appearance she is completely at home in the lower-middle to working-class world of shopping for butter, shambolic suppers and threadbare clothes, despite being, in her imagination, Napoleon's mistress or Edith Dombey. George Gilbert, by contrast, makes a tentative trip into town terrified by the urban environment and its connotations of danger and immorality: 'He hailed a hansom, and felt as he stepped into it he was doing a dreadful thing . . . if by any evil chance it should become known that he had ridden in that disreputable vehicle'.[14] He has

learnt nothing worldly from his medical training, if anything the achievement of professional status has furthered softened him.

George's meeting with Isabel is set against the disorganised, 'masculine' household of the Sleaford family. Young Horace Sleaford is more typically male, having 'just arrived at that period of life when boys are most obnoxious', than his soon to be brother-in-law George. Horace is obsessed with sport and gambling, that twilit world that Braddon knew so much about, and on the threshold of manhood he is disdainful of and competitive with other men. He 'hated his mother's partial boarder' Sigismund Smith, envious of what he considers to be the attributes of manhood that Smith can enjoy:

> The young author was master of that proud position to attain which the boy struggled in vain. He was a man! He could smoke a cigar to the very stump, and not grow ashy pale, or stagger dizzily once during the operation; but how little he made of his advantages! He could stay out late of nights, and there was no one to reprove him. *He* could go into a popular tavern, and call for gin-and-bitters, and drink the mixture without so much as a wry face; and slap his money upon the pewter counter, and call the barmaid 'Mary!'; and there was no chance of *his* mother happening to be passing at that moment, and catching a glimpse of his familiar back-view through the half-open swinging door, and rushing in, red and angry, lead him off by the collar of his jacket, amid the laughter of heartless bystanders. No; Sigismund Smith was a MAN.[15]

This passage articulates the desires of the adolescent male, in his envy of what mature men are permitted and is also told from the perspective of the frequenter of the 'popular tavern'. It offers a useful interlude exhibiting Braddon's familiarity with the scenario, thought up as part of Horace's dream – comprising the ultimate expression of manhood, to be familiar with barmaids and drink in a public bar. That expressive touch, of what it is to be a *real* man: slapping the money with a resounding note onto the 'pewter counter' and calling the barmaid 'Mary!' - explains why it is small wonder that with such dramatic detail, however slight, Braddon's voice was sometimes thought to be that of a male author or at least that of a disreputable woman.

Horace's situation is also a poignant one in the neglectful household of a harassed mother and criminal father. He has warts on his hands, the 'stigmata of boyhood', sleeves so worn that they are 'shiny' at the elbows and a 'sulky fierceness of aspect' of the adolescent boy who fears that everyone despises him. So he challenges George and Sigismund, trying to score points off the men. He does not 'care for girls' and finds their interest in Isabel a sign of feebleness; especially when he discovers that George, as a 'Midlandshire man', is 'lamentably ignorant' of the odds against 'Mr. Tomlinson's brown colt, Vinegar Cruet, for the Conventford steeple-chase'.[16]

Horace Sleaford's desires and ambitions are soon overtaken in the narrative by George's desire, or seeming desire, for Isabel. Early in Volume 1 the novel runs as a catalogue of what men want at a variety of ages – from the genteel country doctor down to the warty adolescent urchin. Mr. Sleaford, absent for much of the time from the family home, has a 'policy' that informs life at all points: 'If you have boys, "cry havoc, and let loose the dogs of war;" shut your purse against the painter and carpenter, the plumber and glazier, the upholsterer and gardener; "let what is broken, so remain," – reparations are wasted labour, and wasted money . . . Mr. Sleaford had one daughter and four sons, and the sons were all boys'.[17] The boys are all allowed the run of the house and garden and with the tools that their father has bought for them they play destructive games, hacking at the furniture and building execution blocks, fortresses and boats out of the chairs and sofas; '. . . every where there was evidence of boys'. George navigates his way cautiously through this battleground of youthful masculinity, appalled at the living conditions that his friend Smith puts up with. He finds, as reward, Isabel in the garden dreaming over her books and poetry. In this dilapidated, rotting environment the 'idle, useless life' she leads is played out until that moment when George falls under her spell.

She is sickly, not physiologically, but spiritually or emotionally – some sort of unearthly illness – best described as a form of 'dis-ease'[18] with the world. Sigismund

correctly diagnoses it as a dangerous preoccupation with the range of fiction she is reading – such as romances by 'Algernon Mountfort' - 'beautiful sweet-meats, with opium inside the sugar'. Seated with them is George, the doctor, who 'looked at Miss Sleaford's face with no more emotion than if she had been a statue amongst many statues in a gallery of sculpture'. [19] The doctor does not diagnose the illness because it is beyond his empirical methodology. He 'arrived at a vague conviction that she was what he called "pretty"' and has no hope of expressing in words any actual feelings for her. He cannot converse with her or articulate his emotions. He is overpoweringly emotionally impotent and, Heilmann speculates, perhaps he is also sexually impotent. He and Isabel, she conjectures via Braddon's 'subtle hints' in the text, both remain virgins throughout their marriage '- the only possible explanation for her apparent ignorance of Roland's erotic intentions'.[20] George marries Isabel because she is 'different' from any other woman he has met and promptly sets out to 'smoothe [*sic*]' the quirks and idiosyncrasies of her nature. He is hopeless at it. Likewise, Roland cannot manage or manipulate Isabel around to his way of thinking, no matter how many picnics or books he tempts her with. She absorbs all his idealism of art and poetry, she feeds off him as she does George, but the ultimate consummation of passion is, as Heilmann mentions, completely misunderstood and rejected by her.

Roland's desires for Isabel are, whilst not innocent, actually quite straightforward and comprehensive. He wants her to be his mistress. His narrative of desire takes shape from first meeting her and bewitched by her unorthodox beauty – she is for him a form of enchantress, a Morgan Le Fay-like figure – sets out to win her as his muse and lover. He struggles with his feelings and guilt and the injustice he would impose upon George who faithfully ministers to the needs of the estate tenants and in the process dies after contracting typhus. Roland leaves his castle to travel on the continent and forget Isabel in a continuous round of pleasure with dissolute company in the romantic landscape of the Alps. He cannot, no matter how hard he struggles with his feelings, shake off his passion for her, a passion he imagines is reciprocated

by her. But when the moment comes she withdraws from him and takes refuge in a sudden spiritual and religious zeal.

There is a great deal of complex dramatic emotion about their relationship but the impetus is very simple. He desires her in a basic and uncomplicated way, knows that they will have to reject all social convention to be together, but considers it worth the risk. His desires are remarkably conventional. A large proportion of Volume 1 of the novel is concerned with the various forms of male desire, and similarly, there is a preponderance of the plot dedicated to male desire (Roland's) in the opening of Volume 3: ' . . . above all he wanted to *see* her – only to see her; to look at the pale face and the dark eyes once more. Yes; though she were the basest and shallowest-hearted coquette in all creation'.[21]

As Pykett asserts in the introduction to the novel, the reader is invited to enter into the 'active process of judgment' of Isabel. The young woman's role models are hardly 'happy' including as they do Edith Dombey and various mistresses of Napoleon and the unfortunate 'miscast(ing)'[22] of Roland Landsell as Michael Cassio from *Othello*. Isabel is a foolish, uneducated woman, as Braddon and her critics who now deal with the text frequently assert. However, none of the critics have referenced Isabel's age as a factor in her behaviour. Braddon is at pains to notify the reader of it, even introducing the celebration of Isabel's birthday in Volume 1 - on a landmark date in July 1853 - she turns eighteen. This is only a few months into her married life. She is cast in the opposite fashion to the child-women in fiction, such as Braddon's Mary Marchmont and Dickens's Agnes Wickfield. Isabel is akin to Lady Audley or Dora Spenlow – the child-like spirit in the body of a mature and desirable woman.

As such, a chronologically and emotionally young woman, she is a tempting prospect for the men who wish to mould her. George's family servants, the Jeffsons, also undertake their judgment of Isabel. They have total sway over George's household and are relatives of George's mother: 'Mr. Jeffson and Matilda Jeffson

his wife did as they liked in the surgeon's house, and had done so ever since that day upon which they came to Midlandshire to take friendly service with their second cousin, pretty Mrs. John Gilbert'. They are superbly self-righteous to the extent that they consider the combination of their domestic attributes, such as baking and cleaning, with their own married relationship as a model example for others. They are scathing of Isabel, the bride at seventeen, and consider her unworthy of 'Master Jarge'. However, Braddon leaps to Isabel's defence over this with her extensive authorial interventions in criticism of Mr. Jeffson.

> I am compelled to admit that, in common with almost all those bright and noble qualities which can make a man admirable, Mr. William Jeffson possessed one failing. He was lazy. But then his laziness gave such a delicious easy-going tone to his whole character, and was so much a part of his good-nature and benevolence, that to wish him faultless would have been to wish him something less than he was. There are some people whose faults are better than other people's virtues. Mr. Jeffson was lazy. In the garden which it was his duty to cultivate, the snails crawled along their peaceful way, unhindered by cruel rake or hoe; but then, on the other hand, the toads grew fat in shadowy corners under the broad dock-leaves, and the empty shells of their slimy victims attested the uses of those ugly and venomous reptiles. The harmony of the universe asserted itself in that Midlandshire garden, unchecked by any presumptuous interference from Mr. Jeffson . . . ' . . . Mr. Gilbert had more fruit and vegetables than he could eat, or cared to give away; and surely that was enough for any body.' Officious visitors would sometimes suggest this or that alteration or improvement in the simple garden; but Mr. Jeffson would only smile at them with a bland, sleepy smile, as he lolled upon his spade, and remark, 'that he'd been used to gardens all his life, and knew what could be made out of 'em, and what couldn't.'[23]

The 'lolling' in the garden and his resistance to hard work singles Jeffson out as similar to Isabel herself. The 'harmony' of nature remaining unmolested by Jeffson was Braddon's satirical, bordering on the sarcastic, comment on the older man and yet because of the gender and status of the character his laziness goes unchecked. George is notoriously shy and unforthcoming and would not dare to deal with these faithful relatives in 'friendly service' in a harsh manner. Isabel receives all the attention for being unable to darn socks whilst the 'venomous' toads grow fat on their 'slimy victims'.

An extensive passage given in the Oxford edition of *The Doctor's Wife* (1998) that Braddon cut from earlier editions of the novel offers a further detailed portrait of Jeffson. She did include in the early editions his doting behaviour towards George, which bewilders his wife Matilda: ' . . . that tender, sympathetic devotion which William felt for his master's son was something beyond her comprehension. ' "My master's daft about the lad,"' she said, when she spoke of the two.' Braddon cut the passage describing Jeffson's 'poetic' soul that included the description of his 'manner . . . as gentle as that of the gentlest of womankind'.[24] He was, in this early text cut, compared unfavourably to another Dickensian role model, John Browdie. Coupled with their antics in the haystacks, which Braddon did leave in - 'What was the good of haymaking if George wasn't in the thick of the fun, clambering on the loaded wain, or standing, flushed and triumphant, high up against the sunlit sky on the growing summit of the new-made stack?'[25] - further description of Jeffson's womanly qualities might have been a step too far for readers.

The lines are distinctly blurred over the gender attributes already and perhaps with the doting behaviour of the servant, added to the feminising effect that both father and servant have on the country doctor as a boy, the sexual connotations began to get too overt. Braddon did go as far as including the 'pleasure' Jeffson receives in the 'bright magic of [George's] presence'. When, as a boy, George read Shakespeare aloud in the kitchen to Jeffson, the older man's enthusiastic response confused him, as it did Mrs. Jeffson. Braddon was establishing a relationship, told in hindsight as an authorial intervention in Volume 1, along the lines of that enjoyed by Pip and Joe Gargery in *Great Expectations* recently serialized in 1860. As well as the origins of the novel in *Madame Bovary*, Braddon incorporated something of the sympathetic, sentimental portrayal of the gentlemanly, charitable blacksmith Joe. However, unlike Pip, George Gilbert is not cruelly raised 'by hand', he is cosseted and protected. Jeffson, unlike Joe, is a 'lazy' man given over to sensuous engagement with the agreeable qualities of his outdoor life. Also, unlike Joe, he does not fully take on the parental role as exclusive carer of George when the doctor contracts typhus. That is

reserved for Isabel and Matilda Jeffson. Isabel finally sustains a form of wifely duty but is then ousted by Matilda and her husband in a territorial act of possessiveness, 'and she was fain to creep into a dark corner, where it had been her habit to sit since the Jeffsons had, in a manner, taken possession of her husband's sick-bed'.[26]

At this point in George's illness, the narrative is exclusively that of Isabel and Roland as they struggle with their mixed emotions whilst the husband lies on the brink of death. The servants are peripheral but nonetheless their disapprobation of Isabel's actions is prominent in the text, as the doctor's wife tries to navigate the difficulties of guilt and remorse over Roland and the return of her criminal father. The locals, who consider her the most despicable of adulteresses whilst her husband lies dying, of course misunderstand her nocturnal meetings with her reprobate father. Matilda erupts in anger at her: ' . . . you might have waited, Mrs. Gilbert; but you're a wicked woman and a wicked wife!'

However, honest, impotent George forgives her and admonishes his housekeeper for her harshness. He apologises to Isabel for the 'dull life' with him and appeals to her to think of the 'poor people – better rooms – ventilation – please God, by and by . . .' which is probably the formulation of Isabel's reformed, charitable actions at the close of the novel. He then dies in Jeffson's arms with his wife reduced to clasping his hand. Unlike Joe's ministrations to Pip during his illness, and the affirming reformation of character undergone by Dickens's hero with the influence of his 'true' father, the suffocating, softening protection experienced by George cannot prevent his death. In fact, his softness and 'womanly' powerlessness probably contribute to his weakened constitution. He dies like a heroine.

The Doctor's Wife was admired by, amongst others of Braddon's contemporaries, Dickens. It is acknowledged now as a significant work that mediates between Flaubert's novel as source material (possibly underscoring Hardy's *Return of the Native*) and the reading habits of young women of the period, both destructive and productive. It is one of the works that constituted Braddon's numerous pleas for

appropriate education, instruction and purpose for young women negotiating the difficult path from adolescence to useful adult life. Ultimately it reiterates economic power as a redemptive force as long as it is come by in an innocent, non-exploitative fashion. Isabel might be foolish at times but she is not cynical. She is also blameless in the face of male desire and, for much of her story, oblivious of her attractive qualities, almost an ethereal other which is, sadly for the men who fall 'victim' to her innocent charms, capable of causing destruction.

As an early novel that deals with the frailties of men and women and their desires and passions *The Doctor's Wife* offers insinuations about the blurred lines of gender roles and, in the face of contemporary restrictions, it requires the gathering of clues, as Heilmann notes, and the reading of 'subtle hints' about the characters' sex lives, or lack thereof. That the characters' sexuality or sexual performance, perhaps George and Jeffson in particular, might be in question as an important facet to the text is debatable. The same endeavour possible for this text has been shown for *Lady Audley's Secret* and the homoerotic connotations now aligned to the relationship of Robert Audley and George Talboys,[27] but this is by no means a universal reading. When Braddon decided upon a resounding exploration of male sexuality there is no ambiguity as to the possible reading of character and text. This exploration took place in her late novelette *Dead Love Has Chains.*

Dead Love Has Chains was published in 1907 and benefits, because of its place in Braddon's career at the early point of the twentieth century, from the more liberal possibilities of the time. It can be viewed as a work that exercises the opportunities open to a novelist in 1907 but its genesis can also be understood as gradual, being a work that was formulated over a considerable period of time, finally published in the Edwardian period. Wolff was able to chart some of its progress from Braddon's diaries. He dates its development to a completed draft in 1904 under the title 'Conrad'.[28]

The plan for *Dead Love Has Chains* appears in the BFC in one of the two notebooks found in the collection, Notebook 'B' **(34 - 36)**.[29] Where this plan sits in the timeframe of Braddon's other notes and drafts for novels and stories suggests that she formulated it possibly as far back as the early 1890s. Before Hurst & Blackett published *Dead Love Has Chains* in 1907, the Northern Newspaper Syndicate serialized it as *Alias Jane Brown* in 1906.[30] So even before the final publication date of 1907, with the symbolic foreboding title *Dead Love Has Chains*, this novelette had various phases when it was named for its leading male character (Conrad), then as a serial named for the layers of identity of the leading female character (Alias Jane Brown) and finally offered as a single publication whose title signified the situation of all the characters. Braddon chose to utilise this universal title, indicative of the experiences of men and women so as not to foreground one narrative over another. She preferred to draw attention to the predicaments that all the characters endure because of social propriety and the moral imperatives attached to the relationships of men and women and to resolve all of this in a combination plot.

To begin with, from what Braddon offered in her plan in Notebook B, we can discern her decision over the title and note that she had the situations in place for the opening of the story:

(34)

Dead Love Has Chains

Lady Mary, widow of rich commercial man, after a cold weather in India, returning to England.
Girl in cabin next her own, hysterical, moans in her sleep, seldom leaves cabin, traveling with a middle-aged maid, grim, puritanical.

Lady M. goes to her one night, tries to comfort her, the girl is almost mad. I must tell someone. I'll tell you. Y're a lady, you won't betray me. I must.

> She tells her story, went back to India, where she was born with her mother, a year before, adored her mother, didn't like her father, (…) – keeping her at arms length.
>
> Mother died. She grieved desperately, and in the midst of her grief came the lover.
> Tells her story to a culminating point, and then puts her arms around M's neck & whispers in her ear.
> You'll never tell, you won't tell, swear it, swear on the crucifix, snatches silver crucifix beside her berth, makes M. kiss it and swear –
> (…) by that sacred image never, never, never, to tell what she has heard. [31]

Braddon crossed out these notes, possibly as the partial sketch of the novel began to take shape or once an idea was incorporated into the text of the draft.

This outline begins to show the plot taking shape with the key indicators of character and situation. 'Lady Mary' is Lady Mary Harling in the published story, the mother of Conrad. These notes are the outline for the first two chapters of the story as it was published as *Dead Love Has Chains*. The economic style that Braddon used to indicate the major events of these chapters is, nonetheless, underscored by a certain melodramatic impetus when the 'girl', who is Irene Thelliston 'Alias Jane Brown', impels the older woman to swear on a crucifix for example. The elements are all there: an older aristocratic woman of means is on board ship when she is disturbed by a girl 'moaning' in her cabin, seemingly in some 'hysterical' fevered anguish, next door. It transpires that this girl, whose mother is dead and whose father has rejected her, had a lover whilst she was out in India. Her disgrace, arising from this affair, means that Lady Mary must swear never to tell she knows this secret, which Irene felt impelled to confide in someone. Irene, like Isabel Sleaford, is not quite eighteen.

At seventeen, out in the steamy, exotic environs of India an older man, who quoted lines from Byron's *Don Juan* in order to convince her of his romantic sincerity, seduced her. As this is a later Edwardian story Irene succumbs where Isabel resisted. At the time of her meeting with Lady Mary on their voyage Irene is pregnant – her lover having left her to marry another woman – and is on her way to Ireland in order

to give birth and have the child farmed out to someone else. The remaining vestiges of her family's honour now depend upon the secrecy and discretion of a distraught, pregnant seventeen-year-old.

Lady Mary cannot bring herself to empathise with the girl. She is a widowed woman who is caught up with her own preoccupations and ailments, a figure straight out of Braddon's early, unfinished story *The Kingdom of Boredom.*

> Lady Mary found herself wanting in words of consolation. To a woman of mature years, with whom chastity was a habit of mind, such a fall as this, the fall of a well-born, well-bred girl, was inconceivable. She could better understand the outcast of the streets, the village beauty, betrayed and abandoned, flung into a gulf as black as hell. She was not without pity; but she was without understanding. She wanted to speak words of healing and comfort, but the words would not come. She could only think of the disgracefulness, the shamefulness of the story. A girl, educated at a respectable English school, a girl whose heart was still bleeding from the loss of a good mother, a girl in the freshness of youth, to whom the faintest touch of impurity should be horrible, for such a one to fling herself into the arms of her first lover, consumed by the fire of lawless love! It was unthinkable.[32]

Lady Mary's objections are both moral and class-conscious; how could a girl who had been educated in a 'respectable English school' have allowed herself to fall? Irene's age is not lost on her, however, and she blames all parties – the lover, the family who were not vigilant and Irene herself. The whole situation leaves her 'dumb and unsympathetic'. Her own preoccupations, those of religion and society, eclipse any feelings of care she might have for the fallen woman but she shows the correct propriety and goes through the motions, sincerely enough, of swearing secrecy on the crucifix. Lady Mary's world is caught up by her own situation and the life of her son Conrad.

Irene is a study in the passions of impetuous youth and the risks of sexual curiosity prompted by her reading of Byron's passages of Juan and Haidée and *Jane Eyre.* The latter she owns as a piece of 'contraband' since it was banned at her 'respectable' school. Lady Mary allows her to borrow a copy of *The Scarlet Letter*

from the shelves in her cabin, which proves an ineffectual restorative for Irene as she cries herself to sleep with it. Her desires have taken shape around the heroes offered by Byron and Bronte, the fatal cocktail of Juan and Rochester; and she still suffers for her desire for her lover and attributes a kind of glamour to *Jane Eyre*: ' . . . I was Jane Eyre – and not Jane Brown. Her troubles were my troubles. I don't think she had so bad a time after all.' She still longs to have the status of Bronte's airy, delicate heroine, beloved of and 'worshipped by that stern strong man'. Irene's story is prefigured by Bronte's narrative, when drastically and dramatically the 'stern' hero, her lover, is reunited with her years later.

With the narrative structure for the opening chapters laid out, Braddon progressed, in her plan, to the outline of Conrad's narrative, moving along swiftly and economically.

(35)

M's only son has been ten years in a private asylum,
Daisy Mentith – 27
She was not an impure woman –
compared with the great sinners, she was passionless, pure as a child – but she loved me with a love that had been growing in the constant intimacy of our lives, for the last nine years – she had given me her promise – our first kiss had made us one forever. – All our

plans
{It was a mind new born. The life of the mind was new, science,
were
poetry, facts, fancies, art, music – worlds to explore - & the made &
man still in the flower of his youth – strong as a lion.} fixed
finally
at that fatal ball – we were to leave England for ever next morning. She was to walk out of her house quietly at nine o'clock, & I was to be in a side street

{He remembered her. Her face comes back to me. Her beauty shines like a star}.
waiting for her –as her father had waited for her mother thirty years before.
{Conrad goes back to Cranford after 7 to 8 years. He will be 27 in Aug.}

> M. urges her to give him up, to break with him before it is too late – she reminds M of her words. If he is a good man he will forgive – M tells her the story of C's first love – the risk of a shock to his feelings –
> Will that induce you –
> No I mean to marry him. I mean to make him happy.
>
> Does yr. stepmother know.
> No – no one knows but my father. That's why we hate each other. [33]

Daisy Mentith, changed to Meredith in the published version, is Lady Mary's young spinster companion. She stays with her patron whilst the beloved son Conrad is recovering from his mental breakdown in a private asylum. This portion of Braddon's plan continued the narrative at a point where, in the final version, Conrad has left the asylum and re-entered society only to meet the rejuvenated Irene and fall in love with her. Lady Mary, who knows Irene's dreadful secret, cannot condone the marriage but is bound by her oath and tries to compel Irene to give Conrad up and not disclose her impure past.

In the plan Braddon also included here the reminiscence of an elopement and a description of a love affair that binds the two parties together. This could refer to the situation between Irene and her lover – with whom she absconds before she is due to marry Conrad. The narrative used complex melodramatic methods and the plot is highly charged and sensational to an extent with secrecy and disgrace forming its driving force. However, this is not the complete picture as Braddon was concerned with further issues in this work, aiming for psychological realism and the treatment of intimacy and male/female relationships in a subtle fashion. This story was a 'new departure' according to Wolff and a successful one at that:

> Written when she was sixty-nine years old, it belongs with her very best novels: *The Lady's Mile, The Lovels of Arden, Joshua Haggard's Daughter, Ishmael,* and *The Fatal Three.* Altogether different from any of these and marking a new departure in its bold and delicate exploration of human psychology and in its economy of style, it won her no new critical

> attention then or since. It examined once more the theme of under-sexed male, a subject that [Braddon] turned about in her mind again and again as if seeking explanations for a phenomenon she saw all about her.[34]

Amongst her best work in his view it did not, however, win her any critical acclaim and has largely been overlooked until its recent re-issuing by Jennifer Carnell at Sensation Press. This new edition has made the text accessible but it has not been critically re-appraised. It forms part of Braddon's later stylistic and narrative concerns with male sexuality as the subject matter for fiction, a topic she had introduced earlier in *Like and Unlike* (1887) and would return to in *Our Adversary* (1909).

In *Dead Love Has Chains* with the character of Conrad she considered the psychological dimension of sexuality in men and the 'under-sexed male' 'emasculated' by suffocating mother-love. Later on in *Our Adversary* she 'explicitly made her chief male character unable to satisfy a woman sexually'.[35] Firstly, in *Dead Love Has Chains*, she explored in her portrayal of Conrad the state of mind of the male who is unable to perceive of women as equal sexual beings – he thinks of their passions as a taint on their characters. Women need to be on a pedestal of purity as far as he is concerned. Braddon outlines the origins of this in his upbringing. Lady Mary's moral outlook is registered early on with her shock at Irene's transgression. We then learn, in Chapter 3, of her obsession with well-born social class status. She is the daughter of a Duke who married 'low' to an extremely wealthy shipbuilder who left her widowed at age thirty with young Conrad. She was guarded 'from the evil to come' by her husband's will. The terms encouraged her to consider her son as her 'plaything' and 'idol' and dissuaded her from the charms of an 'impecunious guardsman or . . . foreign adventurer' in later life. The posthumous legalistic conditions laid on her assumed that she must elevate her maternal status and that she would naturally be vulnerable to mercenary male seductive charms as a woman alone. This environment partly contributes to the shattering of the son's mind so that by the age of twenty-one Conrad's mental faculties are gone: 'The machine was broken. The main spring of intelligence had snapped. The man

remained a magnificent man – a picture or statue of splendid manhood; but the mind was cancelled'.[36]

The cause of Conrad's breakdown is part of that 'phenomenon' that Wolff cites as influential on Braddon's appraisals of society at this point in her career. Conrad has been cosseted and brought up as a precocious highborn child for whom the privileges of superior status in society are a God-given birthright. Lady Mary has encouraged this perception: 'He was his mother's idol. She lived only to worship him, and to maintain the dignity, the reserve, the aloofness from all unworthy people and paltry things, incumbent upon Conrad's mother'. His 'coming-of-age' party takes on a resemblance to an Elizabethan fair – 'Coming of age in ye olden time' in 'reminiscence of Frith's picture'.[37] It also echoes the celebrations on the lawns of the Astrandel estate in *The Kingdom of Boredom*.[38] The *droit de seigneur* for Conrad will constitute Lady Mary guiding him towards the correct bride when she feels he is ready for marriage after seeing the world and representing his people in Parliament. Then 'fortified by blue blood' he can continue the family line.

All this planning and scheduling for him comes to nothing when he meets and falls in love with the daughter of an innkeeper; Stella Meadows, 'whose father kept the "Otter's Head," a favourite resort for boating men'. For her Conrad turns 'socialist' – reading Marx and pronouncing upon workers' rights at public events. He throws himself vehemently into this love affair and his distracted manner offends his mother: she reproaches him for his lack of concern for her and her animals. She senses she is losing him and finds out he is in love 'seven years before the date her sagacious mind had allotted for his marriage'. Conrad, meanwhile, requests Stella's hand and agrees with her father on the best course of 'finishing' for her to turn her into a lady so that he will not be embarrassed by her lack of breeding. She is his 'lovely statue' and he looks for the right 'artistic treatment that would embellish without altering his goddess'.[39]

Conrad is Pygmalion to Stella's Galatea. He does not want a real woman. Fuelled by his mother's principles of breeding and her idolatry of him he too looks for an 'ideal' in an extreme manner. Obsessive and feverish in any pursuit, he attempts to formulate an unreal construction of womanhood – it must be pure and nymph-like, a statue or dressed in white as the girls in the finishing school are and playing tennis on a lawn amidst a perpetual summer. Stella's natural qualities from her 'cockney' upbringing make her less than angelic but are the features indicative of her moods and character, 'accents of Stella's that touch the boundary line of vulgarity, when she was angry or excited'. Very soon, Conrad 'was told what kind of woman he had loved'. On his return to the Otter's Head after visiting the school he has found for her Conrad is told of Stella's flight with a married man to America where she will be rich. This incident prompts a couple of responses from Conrad. He is disgusted and distracted by this abandonment but this is accompanied by his shock at hearing of his rival:

> And then Conrad learnt that he had a rival, and such a rival! A prize-fighter, the champion middle-weight, famous in the sporting world, an olive-skinned gladiator, whose close-cropped hair of raven blackness, a blue chin, a broken nose, and a drunken wife. He had come to Abingdon for a holiday, while he was out of training, and he had stayed at the "Otter's Head," the centre of an admiring company, an attraction to the jovial bar, a profitable guest.
>
> Conrad had seen him sculling in the sunshine, the muscular arms bare to the shoulder, the supple form shining like pale bronze.
>
> This was the man she loved, the master she obeyed, the brute-force that had subjugated her trivial nature, while the young undergraduate's passion had only flattered her vanity.[40]

The prizefighter is a tall, dark, brutish, handsome man. Conrad is jealous but equally has not failed to notice the man's overbearing presence on the river in the sunshine and in the bar. Loud, obnoxious, masculine, the man sickens him – but also fascinates. Stella, by contrast, has lost all her appeal. Her beautiful 'dimpled' face and 'exquisite lips' once the possessions of a 'goddess' are now the 'hackneyed charms of a low-bred wanton'.[41]

Conrad's ensuing breakdown, when he has turned to 'stone', takes up most of the next decade for mother, son and Lady Mary's companion Daisy. The consequences of this first doomed affair cause Lady Mary to be more morally judgmental of 'low' breeding than before. She is more calculatingly class-conscious and feels vindicated in her moral judgment of the lower orders. They have, in her mind, invaded her protective sanctuary and poisoned the mind of her beloved son: 'A wanton's perfidy had killed the happy boy whose path lay in the sunshine, for whom she had anticipated a life of fame and gladness. All God's good gifts, nature's lavish bounty, were turned to dust and ashes'.[42]

After Lady Mary has returned from Ceylon and her shipboard meeting with Irene, Conrad begins to recover. She visits him and discovers that his reading matter is indicative of the rebirth of his mind: 'She looked at the books. Darwin, Wallace, Tyndall, Clodd, and several new books on electricity'.[43] As indicated in Braddon's plan, Conrad's mind is renewed, galvanised by art and science. The doctors warn his mother that although a complete cure has happened and his mind is back to what it was he must be guarded against further disappointment in love. Their diagnosis is a quiet life and 'Marriage will be his safest harbour. With a wife he loves he will escape the dangers of imagination and temperament'.[44]

Thus it is now the responsibility of an as yet unknown 'perfect' woman to provide the 'cure' for Conrad. The 'mental upset' that was his attraction to and disappointment with Stella was 'an accident' according to the medical men consulted by Lady Mary. These doctors are officials of their profession, they are guaranteed as the best medical authorities to understand Conrad's condition – Braddon was conscientious on this fact of the story. She was adopting the terminology of the profession and depicted Conrad's condition in mechanical terms with his doctors describing the 'energy' of his mind to his mother. The therapeutic effect of Conrad's affection for animals, another aspect of Lady Mary's 'breeding' programme, is the key to his recovery in the end.

There remains, however, something disturbingly delicate about Conrad despite the upbeat optimism of his doctors. Lady Mary asks: ' . . . would it be necessary to tell the secret of those sad years [of his breakdown] to the girl he might want to marry or to her people?' The doctor thinks that she might be able to 'ignore' that history 'without compunction'. So whoever takes on Conrad for a husband will have all the responsibility of his mental health, dependent upon social and moral purity and breeding, and will not be privy to the facts of his past. Whilst in the asylum at Roehampton Conrad has befriended one of the house doctors. Braddon offers a 'subtle hint' again: 'the house doctor who had become [Conrad's] particular friend . . . ' and who 'wanted' a holiday to Devon with Conrad and Lady Mary, 'as the young man's companion rather than his medical advisor'.[45]

Conrad Harling is happiest when surrounded by his books on art and science, his favourite pets and in the company of his chosen male friends or looking on as bronzed athletic men compete in the sunshine. His softened, creative outlook on life, his suffocating relationship with his mother and disappointment with attractive women whom he tries to mould into his ideal all indicate in Braddon's working out of the plot Conrad's tendency toward the homoerotic and homosexual.

> He remembered the figure of the pugilist, loafing in the Inn garden, or drinking in the bar, or rowing, or playing cricket; a cheap Alcides, with a certain picturesque beauty of strength and graceful movement; and he remembered that never for one instant had he thought of this man as a possible rival.[46]

It is not just the 'graceful' quality of a man's movements or his classical, conditioned form that has drawn Conrad's eye. It is the vulgarity and brutality of the rival that preoccupies the young man's thoughts. He notices men who are stronger than him and men who are confident and somewhat dangerous. In many respects he shares the fascination that both Stella and Irene possess for these Byronic, brooding, dangerous men; the masochistic tendency towards fascination with controlling, passionate, potentially violent men is also within in his own nature.

Irene is the woman (as the ideal that he discovers and intends to marry) who has to take on Conrad's rehabilitation. In the plan in Notebook B, Braddon shaped the confrontation that Lady Mary has with Irene, herself rehabilitated into society after the death of her baby. Alike with Conrad the secret of her past disgrace does not need to be mentioned – it is literally buried. Conrad's experience of the asylum, in a neat echo and reversal of Lady Audley's incarceration, is also buried. He is restored, unlike the female villain, and finds society accepting of his newfound qualities. Braddon's text in the published version closely reflects the tone and vocabulary of the plan notes:

> Everything interested him. It was a mind new born.
> The life of the mind was new. Science, literature, art, music, facts, fancies, superstitions, follies, all things were new. At eight-and-twenty years of age he was still in the flower of his youth, strong as a lion . . . [47]

The key factors of disgrace, revival of fortunes and social discourse are included in her plan with the addition of some melodramatic embellishments when the women confront one another for the heart and mind of the precious Conrad. The young man is idolized by the mother and, in turn, expects and anticipates the same from the women he bestows his affections upon. If anything, after his breakdown, his feelings are more exaggerated on this aspect. He is also slightly vindictive, taking pleasure in seeing the vulgar depths to which Stella has stooped. He even keeps her picture and shows it to his mother: ' . . . Stella Meadows in an evening frock, with a liberal display of arms and shoulders. A girl who has no opportunities of wearing evening dress likes to be photographed in it'.[48] He meets Irene who 'is almost too exquisite to be mortal' and he is back on track for either complete happiness or total devastation once again, on 'the threshold of a passionate drama'.

Lady Mary's worst fears are confirmed. What she most abhors is 'bad style' epitomized in her mind by the behaviour of the girl 'Jane Brown' aboard the steamer from India, 'with the hideous phrase; "Don't give me away," in the midst of tragedy.

She had never forgotten her shudder of disgust even in a moment of pity'.[49] Irene is beautiful when, after the long interval, Lady Mary beholds her back in society.

> The girl's calm outlook, and steady accents, took her breath away. That she could stand before her there, smiling, unabashed, with the air of a young Princess accustomed to adulation, disgusted the woman who had been kind to her in her day of shame . . . "What an actress," thought Lady Mary.[50]

Despite the restraint that the characters have to possess to acquit themselves in society, their inner consciousness that Braddon exposes is vociferous and often visceral in the articulations of their passions and desires. Lady Mary's 'disgust' at Irene's reappearance is not outwardly articulated and the two women do not speak but Irene's lip trembles and the older woman has to make her 'escape' and confine herself to a darkened room where the words ' "He must not marry her"' repeat themselves in her brain 'like the strokes of a hammer'. The necessity for such restraint is the very thing that causes Conrad such anxiety and fragility of mind.

The 'phenomenon' of social propriety and restraint leading to such stress and instability was, Wolff contends, familiar to Braddon and necessary for her to explore in her fiction. Further, she explored the restraint laid upon the expression of sexuality. The sanctioned form of expression known to Conrad is not what he desires despite his vehemence in relationships with women. His real feelings surrounding masculinity and desire are totally counter to the pursuit for female perfection that he must engage in. Irene behaves impeccably, thwarting Lady Mary's plans and encouraging Conrad in all the right ways, she acts her part consummately well. The actress in society is familiar in Braddon's work. To this role she adds the 'actor' Conrad for whom the role is too much and causes a schism in his understanding of who he is and what he wants.

However, Irene's façade totally fails once her old love returns and reminds her of the 'chains' that bind them together. Her 'merciless' and mercenary approach to marrying Conrad defeats Lady Mary as long as she can maintain the exterior

propriety. Whilst she is Conrad's beloved her pride of 'womanhood' is sustained. She is victorious over Lady Mary and her father – the two judges who had been so disgusted by her. Her competitive pride is more acquisitive and stronger than Conrad's fragile mental stability. On a 'tropical' day at the races in Sandown, however, they meet Irene's former lover:

> He had . . . that peculiar air of suppressed agitation . . . with eyes brightened as with fever, and a certain over-alertness of movement and manner . . .
> The man had a loud voice, resonant, not unmelodious, and they could hear every word as they approached . . .
> He was a large man, tall and broad-shouldered, handsome, commanding of aspect, a man who looked as if he had once been a soldier, well set up still, but a little out of training. Idleness and high living had set their mark upon the magnificent figure, and the face was one upon which high thinking had never been expressed. It was perfect from the sculptor's point of view, but the beauty was purely physical, the type suggestive of the arena and not of the forum.[51]

The 'man' (un-named at this point) is a 'physical' handsome type more like a gladiator than a thinker or a politician. He is a man who acts and sounds out his emotions and base thoughts and has attracted Irene to him and earned himself, on first meeting, Conrad's disgust. The disgust is tempered with fascination once again. He dismisses this 'magnificent being' as not of the right breed; the 'man' persuades Daisy to go and admire his horse in the paddock, the 'brute'.

Whether they are disgusted or fascinated by such men the polite restrained society people cannot be indifferent to them. After this incident Irene's manner with Conrad is more and more of an act. Something essential has been stirred in her again at the sight of the old lover, Middlemore, we eventually learn his name. He writes to her and stirs up all the memories of her youth 'before the knowledge of evil'.[52] This latter phrase is of course reiterated by Braddon as the title of her autobiographical memoir of her childhood. She had an uncertain childhood and adolescence before she encountered the realities of earning her living on stage and with her pen, and before her meeting with the 'masterful' John Maxwell. In some respects Irene's risk-

taking and attraction to dominant, 'masculine' types mirrors that of Braddon's own sensibilities – influenced by readings of Byron and Charlotte Bronte.

In her plan Braddon introduced the telling denouement of Irene's letter to Conrad, the final nail in the coffin of his trust and attraction for women. In Notebook B Braddon offered this:

> **(36)**
>
> *Irene's letter* There is only one man in the world I have the right to marry & he has claimed me. I go to him with a broken heart. I know that all my life must be unhappy – but I have no choice.
>
> After the shock he roams out into the Park, wanders about all night, finds himself at Farm in Bayswater, holding onto the railings of K. Garden.
> I am going mad again – seven more years – I have served for [Leah] & I am to serve for Rachel & not get her. He laughed wildly.
> No I won't go mad! No man need go mad unless he likes. It's the will power that's wanting. I must get out of this infernal world – this world of false lovely women. This time it shall not be Roehampton. I'll try Africa. [53]

'Irene's letter' in the published version prompts this nervous reaction. In the plan Conrad disappears to the park and tries to control his response and wins, thanks to the resolve he has learnt from the doctors. The published version dramatically elaborated upon the economical offerings of the plan. All the way through Braddon embellished and enhanced the detail of the passions and desires of the characters. Her outline plans comprise plotting and development of action but her mature style, praised by Wolff, offered much more than the novels of incident did from her earlier career. She still retained the economy of style learnt from the theatre, reminiscent of the style of composition for playbills, and used this method in her notebooks. Episodes and events are listed – which she then took forward to the draft of her final text. She was a rapid composer, by all appearances and accounts, and the methods in her notebooks bear this out.

The climax of the story begins with the receipt of Middlemore's letter by Irene. This artefact from her old lover, the father of her dead child, thrills and stirs her once again. The restraint she has to show with Conrad dissolves in the rush of memories at being 'the central point of a strong man's thoughts'. This now disgusts her as she remembers the 'degradation' of the past. Irene's internal thoughts are characterized by this visceral, masochistic response. In the past, when she was a teenager, Middlemore had taught her how to deceive her protectors so that they could be together. The old ways and old thrills flood back in on her but now his words are like drops of 'molten lead' on the page. When she encounters him in the park there is a consummation of sorts – sadomasochistic in nature. His 'violent' and 'exacting' passion for her leaves her spent and exhausted and she can only struggle home and collapse, exhausted, on her bed: 'She flung herself upon the bed, beaten, beaten! She felt as if the beating had been not only moral but physical. Heart and limbs were aching. She wanted to lie upon the ground, face downwards, and never get up'.[54]

Braddon carefully managed the heat, anguish, fascination, disgust and desire felt simultaneously by her characters. Such a mixture of feelings encountered by each character could have resulted in a messy or confusingly overblown account of their experiences. However, Braddon deftly handled what, to all intents and purposes, could be an overly melodramatic story but emerged as having the best of melodrama fused with a subtle and affecting account of human psychology and desire. Conrad's adventure from sanity, privilege and confidence to his breakdown and subsequent rehabilitation is a convincing iteration of a young man's story in which he cannot and will not honestly articulate his feelings of sexual attraction. Irene's story is a harrowing, often pathetic, account of a woman whose family neglect her and who finds herself in a passionate, full relationship with an unsuitable man. Pregnant as a teenager she is not allowed to articulate the full expression of love for her child, or grief at its death.

The published version offers a more elaborate phase of action than that suggested in the plan after Irene abandons Conrad. He pursues her and finally watches, unseen, at the railway station as Middlemore triumphantly sweeps her off her feet and into the carriage. She is pale and grief-stricken, a 'victim' dressed in funereal black and Conrad's inner questioning 'By what spell had this man held her?' signals his confusion and naivety about relationships. The epilogue provides some resolution to the characters' lives. Conrad has recovered by touring Africa instead of needing further incarceration. Daisy looks more and more likely to be his chosen spouse, a sort of convenient compromise in his mother's eyes; the woman who could mean more to him than the 'adopted sister, the useful friend, the good "Pal" 'might make a good wife. She would offer no pressure, no unwonted distractions for him and be a suitable wife for a 'public man'. The private man, however, is never 'joyous.' Irene and her husband are known for their social prominence in Yorkshire and Middlemore is preferred above her as she ages with her 'cold and unattractive manners'.

Conrad, the young man who resembles the 'Belvedere Apollo' in 'outlook' and 'poise', was to have been the title character of the story. In the development of this text Braddon unearthed a more complex blend of character and plot that required a title to cover the total experiences of 'dead love' from the past or 'love' (desire) subdued and denied. All the characters are 'chained' and restrained to their desires and loves. The deathly quality of Irene's demeanour as she departs with the man who has claimed her as his 'true' wife and then her 'cold' existence with him denotes the chilling privations that marriage for passion and desire might result in for women. Her husband is more preoccupied with his racehorses and hunting in Yorkshire than with the wife that he sadistically and irresistibly compelled to run away with him. There is no mention of further children for them. The dead child haunts Irene. Her baby was the one slight hope for the future that she was never permitted to take delight in. Conrad departs for the 'dark' continent, an appropriate location for him, to act out his final nervous breakdown. There he experiences risks and illnesses that nevertheless allow his return in 'vigorous health' ready for the

'humdrum' life of the country gentleman. Whilst he is away the women who love him, Daisy and Lady Mary, must endure their own period of anxiety 'in the land of conventionalities'.

This novelette is formed as a social tragedy of sorts. The promise of youth and beauty dwindles into convention and unhappiness because the characters cannot honestly articulate their feelings. Stella and Irene, from opposite ends of the social scale, both succumb to a passion for the strong, protective male who treats them sadistically. Conrad, bewildered by feelings of disgust and attraction, shares their confusion. His struggle is that of the characters Braddon drew on from Victorian/Edwardian society who 'act' out their existence. His demeanour is that of the upper class Oxbridge man with the suffocating mother and a heavy burden of expectations for career and 'breeding'. His actual self is a closeted homosexual unable to acknowledge or articulate his feelings of desire and attraction for the dark, domineering men he sees sweeping women off their feet.

Two successive relationships fall prey to this brand of masculinity. Once he turns mad and once he fluctuates between sanity and distraction because of it. He can neither emulate nor express his desire for such blunt, brutish men. Eve M. Lynch describes in the recent book *Beyond Sensation: Mary Elizabeth Braddon in Context* how: 'Braddon agitated to experiment with fiction that considered more pressing social issues, particularly in the problems she saw arising out of Victorian reform policies that ignored the private domestic trials of women and the poor'.[55] To the plight of women and the poor can be added Braddon's concern for men also. Men for whom the pain and struggle with identity and articulation of feelings and frustrations was just as crucial as it was for women and their endurance of restricted habits.

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[1] Henry James, 'Aurora Floyd', *Nation*, 9 November, 1865, quoted in Wolff, *Sensational* 153–54.

[2] Carnell, *Literary Lives* 5.

[3] Ibid 115-116

[4] Ibid 116.

[5] Braddon to Yates, 1863, from *Edmund Yates: His Recollections and Experiences*, 2 vols, London: Bentley, 1884, 63–64, quoted in Wolff, *Sensational* 442, n 3.

[6] See Natalie Schroeder, 'Feminine sensationalism, eroticism, and self-assertion: M.E. Braddon and Ouida', *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, 1988, 7(1): 87–103 for a summary of the key feminist critical debate around Braddon's sensation fiction from the 1970s and 1980s.

[7] See Pykett, 'Introduction' to Braddon, *The Doctor's Wife* vii–xxviii.

[8] Tracy C. Davis, *Actresses as Working Women: Their social identity in Victorian culture*, London & New York: Routledge, 1991, in particular Chapter 3: 'The social dynamic and "respectability"', 69–101.

[9] Braddon, *Circumambulatory; or the adventures of three gentlemen and a lady in search of a British public*, BFC (MS), Appendix 8, 18.

[10] Braddon, *The Doctor's Wife* 125.

[11] Ann Heilmann, 'Emma Bovary's sisters: infectious desire and female reading appetites in Mary Braddon and George Moore', *Victorian Review*, 2003, 29(1): 33.

[12] Braddon, *The Doctor's Wife* 5.

[13] Ibid 6.

[14] Ibid 8-9.

[15] Ibid 18.

[16] Ibid 20.

[17] Ibid 21.

[18] Heilmann 33.

[19] Braddon, *The Doctor's Wife* 24.

[20] Heilmann 36.

[21] Braddon, *The Doctor's Wife* 299.

[22] Ibid. Pykett 'Introduction' xvi.

[23] Ibid 55.

[24] Ibid 56-7.

[25] Ibid.

[26] Ibid 366.

[27] Connotations of Robert's attraction for George outlined by Ann Cvetkovich, *Mixed Feelings: Feminism, mass culture and Victorian sensationalism*, New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers UP, 1992, 57–58.

[28] Wolff, *Sensational* 392.

[29] Braddon, Notebook B, BFC (MS), Appendix 11, 87-9.

[30] M.E. Braddon, *Dead Love Has Chains*, Hastings: Sensation Press, 2001, Notes on the Text.

[31] Braddon, Notebook B, BFC (MS), Appendix 11, 87.

[32] Braddon, *Dead Love* 14.

[33] Braddon, Notebook B, BFC (MS), Appendix 11, 88.

[34] Wolff 392–93.

[35] Ibid 372.

[36] Braddon, *Dead Love* 17.

[37] Ibid 18.

[38] Braddon, *The Kingdom of Boredom*, BFC (MS), Appendix 6, 5.

[39] Braddon, *Dead Love* 25.

[40] Ibid 27.

[41] Ibid 28.

[42] Ibid 31.

[43] Ibid 33.

[44] Ibid 35.

[45] Ibid 35-6.

[46] Ibid 38.

[47] Ibid 42.

[48] Ibid 43.

[49] Ibid 48.

[50] Ibid 51.

[51] Ibid 72.

[52] Ibid 76.

[53] Braddon, Notebook B, BFC (MS), Appendix 11, 89.

[54] Braddon, *Dead Love* 91.

[55] Lynch, *Beyond Sensation* 235.

Chapter 3:
Mary Braddon at Work: *Sons of Fire* and *A Lost Eden.*

Sons of Fire (1895) Braddon's last three-volume novel opens with the title 'A Striking Likeness' for Chapter 1. The concept of doubling and dual narratives was on Braddon's mind during the composition of this late work. This structure is familiar from many of her works: the idea of two characters linked somehow by coincidence, relationships or a secret past. The two men who share a 'likeness' are Allan Carew and Geoffrey Wornock. Carew inherits a modest estate from his uncle near Matcham, 'a small but prosperous hamlet, lying in a hollow of the hills between Salisbury and Andover'[1] a part of the country that Braddon knew well. This novel is an interesting piece of work that at different points both challenges and adheres to Braddon's typical style of composition.

A framework of duality and the recognition of incidents drawn from secrecy and coincidence form the basis of the plot. However, she departed from this to examine the consequences of impetuous love affairs and the descent into madness of Geoffrey Wornock as part of a narrative of psychology. Wolff in *Sensational Victorian* deals very briefly with this, her last, and what he considers her 'feeblest' three-volume novel. He traced its composition to an early start date of 1891 during Maxwell's final illness that led to his death. It was composed simultaneously with *All Along the River* (1893), a two-volume novel, and *Thou Art the Man* (1894). Wolff, in his sketchy treatment of these works, looks upon them as amongst the 'poorest' of Braddon's fiction.[2]

From the primary source manuscripts that he analysed Wolff ascertained that *Sons of Fire* was inspired by E.T.A. Hoffmann's tale of the 'Doppelganger' and was the only work of Braddon's in which she 'deceives the reader: a striking resemblance between two men proves to be only a coincidence, and the story peters out'.[3] The

poor quality of this novel is of course relative. It depends upon what critic and reader might anticipate. As Carnell points out, this and other novels might not work as mysteries in which there is a puzzle to solve, 'but are saved by interesting characters'. Similarly, in a response to a disappointed fan who wrote to complain about *Sons of Fire*, Braddon understood the mismatch of expectations on the part of the reader and what she had set out to do:

> . . . as the dram. pers. are then all on the scene of action, and the experienced novel readers ought to be able to foresee the drift and end of the story. I am sorry – for your purpose – the story is rather a psychological romance – than a complicated mystery: but still there is a grand question for your readers to solve – Which man will the heroine marry in the last chapter?[4]

By this point in her career and in her vast experience of the novel-reading habits of the age, she considered it important to appeal to the 'experienced' palate of her readers by not being too predictable. This led to disappointment on the part of some readers because she did not consistently adhere to a generic formula, and lately to Wolff remarking upon the weakness of the structure. These opinions testify to the fact that readers and critics held preconceived notions about Braddon's style that they found and still find difficult to shake off. On sitting down with a Braddon three-volume novel readers expected certain things; critics largely sustained these expectations. The preponderance of critical treatment devoted to her sensation fiction has meant that the spectrum of debate around her work has barely shifted since the nineteenth century, still preoccupied as it is with the worth and quality of repetitions of generic formulae and the subtexts contained in *Lady Audley's Secret*. Pamela K. Gilbert is one of a still small number of critics seeking to rehabilitate Braddon's reputation as a novelist of subtle 'interrogation' of the various distinctive modes of working in both the sensational and 'realist' traditions of the nineteenth century. Gilbert has identified Braddon's technique of 'mark(ing)' the 'distinction' between these modes within the text itself.[5]

The draft notes dedicated to *Sons of Fire* in the BFC echo, in Braddon's activity of composing, the aspirations that she articulated in her early career in correspondence to Bulwer Lytton. It is now widely recognized that she aspired to something more worthy and artistic. In her pronouncements to her mentor she expressed the wish to write novels of character and 'poetry'. Opinion is greatly divided as to whether she achieved this. She was still defending this aspiration in correspondence to disappointed fans at the turn of the century. *Sons of Fire* represents her attempt to deal with 'psychological romance'. In Notebook A in the BFC (the 'Black Book') she experimented with the title for the novel, in explicit recognition of Hoffmann's tale, using *Doubles* along with the eventual choice *Sons of Fire*. Across approximately eleven pages **(21-32)** of this Notebook Braddon constructed the plan for this 'deceitful' story.[6]

The main elements in the published version provide ample speculation for possible sensation and mystery avenues and these are shaped in the Black Book. Carew and Wornock become rivals for the hand of Suzette, the heroine, who must eventually choose which man will be her husband. For a period of time, when she is barely out of school, Suzette is engaged to the besotted Allan Carew. She is drawn to his doppelganger Geoffrey Wornock whose 'genius' on the violin bewitches the impressionable young girl. Wornock has been in the army in India, he is wealthier and more a man of the world than his 'double'. Suzette breaks off her engagement to Carew because she feels she cannot love him but in a surprising show of independence she does not affiance herself to Wornock, despite his protestations of love. Instead, she goes away with her father and contemplates her dilemma.

Carew and Wornock also decide on a surprising plan of action. Along with Cecil Patrington, an explorer, they depart for Africa, the same device Braddon employed for Conrad in *Dead Love Has Chains* - to journey across the interior of the continent and visit Lake Tanganyika. This is a major episode in the novel and an intriguing departure for novelist and characters. After Patrington is 'claimed' by Africa and dies of a fever Wornock deserts Carew and returns to England to claim Suzette as

his bride. She reluctantly succumbs to his demands as he has begun to show the first signs of a mental breakdown. Africa has had the opposite effect on him than it had on Conrad, and Suzette is afraid of him. However, her feelings for Carew on hearing about his adventures in Africa have been rekindled. News comes to the families of the two men that Carew is making his way home and Suzette and Allan's widowed mother are excited and relieved. Wornock realises that Allan is the more beloved and he resorts to desperate measures to protect his interests. He disappears and later Carew is discovered in the woods close to home, badly beaten and near death. Suzette, Wornock's mother and Carew's mother all take turns in nursing him back to health. He remains unconscious, unable to reveal who assaulted him.

On the day set for the wedding, Wornock suddenly reappears, expecting Suzette to attend church for the ceremony. He is distracted and aggressive and all realise that he has lost his mind. Doctors are called and he is carried off to a private asylum and, just before his incarceration, he admits to his crime against Carew: that he waylaid his double in the woods near his home and savagely attacked him leaving him for dead. Allan Carew steadily gains strength with never a word of condemnation for Wornock. He has turned out to be the noble, gentlemanly figure, heroic and patient. Suzette and he are eventually married, quietly and modestly when she is of an age to be independently joined to him rather than obliged out of propriety and remorse. They are destined to have a comfortable future at the close of the novel. Wornock dies a few years into his illness, quickly followed by his mother.

The mainstays of sensation are contained in this plot: the doubling of characters, the mysterious attempted murder, the madness and the secrecy. Intermittently Braddon strived to create episodes in the writing of this work that took the reader into another time or place. She experimented with this in the reportage provided by Allan's father. After his father's death Allan discovers a journal written as a confessional for the son to understand why it was his father never loved his mother in the full spiritual, romantic way that he wished he could,

> All that constitutes the poetry, the romance of love, the fond enthusiasm of the lover, vanished out of my life before I was three and twenty. All that came afterwards was plain prose.[7]

The prosaic nature of his relationship with Allan's mother, Lady Emily, was as a result of the loss of George Carew's one true passion. Esperanza, a lovely young woman, a psychic, won his heart when he was a student. Thanks to the machinations of his controlling mother and her companion they were parted on the day of their secretly planned wedding. Esperanza disappeared from his life and married another man in Europe. George eventually consented to the arranged marriage of convenience with Lady Emily. Esperanza, Allan has recently discovered, was none other than Mrs. Wornock, mother of Geoffrey. She had tracked down George Carew after many years and peered in at his window to take one final look at her lost love, observed by Allan. The 'pale wan face' looking in from the darkness unseen by her old lover startled the son. Out of duty and honour she had conceded to the demands of George's mother when she was little more than a girl. Her fondness for Allan was a result of her early passion for his father. She bitterly regrets her son's actions. Geoffrey, like his mother, is a creature of passion and art but one who has no sense of honour or duty, with an unstable mind. Allan Carew develops a friendship with Mrs. Wornock fascinated at first by this reclusive woman. She in turn tries to atone for her son's horrible crime and for his stealing of Suzette by caring for Allan after the attack and ensuring that Geoffrey is put away in the asylum.

The result of George Carew's past love affair is, we might suppose, the birth of Geoffrey, conveniently concealed by Esperanza's departure for the continent and marriage to another man who was sympathetic enough to take on an illegitimate child. As Wolff notes, Braddon might be guilty of deceit here. This could be the ultimate example of the red herring and the depiction of a truly coincidental, fatal encounter between doppelgangers. However, Braddon did not name her novel for this device. The two men, mirror images of one another, might be the 'sons' of the same fiery spirit but George Carew does not really epitomize this 'fire'. Instead 'Sons of Fire' is derived from the name given to English explorers in Africa:

> [Africa] called them Sons of Fire.
> Geoffrey, with his tireless energy, his rapid decision, his angry impatience of delay, seemed to his followers the very highest exemplar of the fiery race that can persevere and conquer difficulties which the native of the soil recoils from as insurmountable.
> Sons of Fire! Were they not worthy of the name, these white men, when far out in midstream, while the boatmen bent and cowered over their paddles, these Englishmen looked in the face of the lightning and sat calm and unmoved while day darkened to the pitchy blackness of a starless midnight, and the thunder reverberated from hill to hill, with roar upon roar and peal upon peal, like the booming of batteries, and anon crashed and rattled with a sharper, nearer sound. Blinding lightning, torrential rain, war of thunder and tempestuous waters, were all as nothing to these sons of fire . . . Through every vicissitude the ready wit and calm courage of the Englishmen rose superior to accident, discomfort, or danger; and to the native temper these wanderers from a far country, an island which they had heard of as a speck in a narrow sea, seemed men of iron with souls of fire.[8]

This breathless, melodramatic description of endurance in the face of dangerous nature is a descriptive blend of the foolhardiness and patriotism endured in the exploratory efforts of Englishmen. Braddon distilled a form of colonial politics into these African chapters derived from the fame of Burton, Livingston and Stanley. These politics combine a generosity and liberalism towards the 'natives' of the countries explored, an insistence on the civilizing effect upon them of art, music and European culture, and humility in the face of exposure to the might of nature on African soil.

These chapters, like George Carew's memoir, take the reader out of the confining environs of Home Counties society and into unknown territories where the men have to discover their resilience in the face of the vast tracts of land to be navigated and the tempestuous waters of the African lakes. Cecil Patrington, the modest, heroic man who has a great love of Dickens, is claimed by the land he loves. Allan and Geoffrey discover their true selves in this interlude of romantic, idealized adventures. Allan discovers patience and restraint, which eventually wins Suzette back. Geoffrey goes mad.

In the plan for this novel in Notebook A Braddon began **(21)** with the outline of characters and their roles. She emphasized the role that Mrs. Wornock was to play, beginning with her interest in Allan, but not representing her as the love of George Carew's life. Instead Braddon intended the séance as the place for Esperanza's meeting with Mr. Wornock, whom we never meet, without any mention of Allan's father. The plan stressed Allan's awareness of his similarity to Geoffrey and his growing irritation with it as he shows in the novel. This informs the development of his character in the opening chapters.

Allan Carew enters society at Matcham and is constantly met with astonishment at his similarity to Geoffrey. He feels like a 'peripatetic photograph'. In Braddon's early outline Carew's resentment towards the as yet unknown Geoffrey Wornock develops into animosity. At an early point in the plan **(22)** Braddon sketched out a proposed trajectory for the plot and action that she later crossed out presumably to reject it as it contains incidents that run counter to the developments she eventually employed. In this alternative version Allan's animosity runs into aggression, he is the villain. Geoffrey is the wronged hero. This initiative represents the possible route the novel could have taken but one that Braddon rejected. An examination of it will enable further critical appraisal of the existing plot in comparing the differences.

(22)

They are engaged. G – returns & Rosamund {Helena/Nova} falls in love with him. She struggles against the fascination – he behaves honourably – both are miserable.
A. has hated him in advance – he sees that he has lost Rosamund – yet holds on – will not renounce her.

Yachting adventure on the Mediterranean – Allan lets
go the boom –
G is knocked on the head & swept overboard.
A believes him killed – returns to England –
impersonates G.

G off his head for a long time – recovers, goes back & finds A. in his place – while A's house is

(23)

Mrs. Warnock's (*sic)* accepts the imposter

shut up ^ Rosamund/Suzette suspects, & finally discovers the trick.
Taxes him with the cheat –
What did I say to you in such an hour, at such a spot - & what was yr. answer –
You cannot tell me no, because you are not G.W. [9]

This is a radically different version of events. First, Allan and Suzette are engaged – here she is called Rosamund, Helena or Nova – until the next page. Geoffrey, as in the final version, does win her from Allan. However, instead of entering into the despicable behaviour of trying to seduce Suzette whilst Allan is away caring for his dying father, the 'Sons of Fire' end up on a yacht in the Mediterranean together. Geoffrey is hit by the boom and believed dead, thus allowing Allan to exploit the doppelganger plot and fool even Geoffrey's mother. Only Rosamund/Suzette discerns the difference between the two men, one she loves the other she despises.

The deceitful nature of the central character, in this case Allan, might have addressed the sensation formula in a more satisfactory fashion for Braddon's readership and perhaps have seemed stronger for Wolff in turn. That Braddon might have successfully configured the doppelganger element into her plotting – showing it serving a specific purpose, as opposed to the one she chose, which is disquieting but non-sensational – might have resulted in a more generous reception of the novel. This certainly reads in note form as an exciting and engaging plot. It would require a very different perception of the characters with bolder and more distinct deliberate acts of deceit and doubling. In some ways the course Braddon opted for, tantalizing the reader with the doppelganger plot that remains unexplored, is similar to the Phoebe/Lady Audley situation. This dynamic echoes that in Collins's *The Woman in White* but does not carry through a full imitation of the Anne/Laura doubling plot.

In the discarded version of the *Sons of Fire* plot that casts Allan as the villain and Geoffrey the wronged hero Suzette shows some potential for female sleuthing. She manages to penetrate Allan's identity as he masquerades as his look-alike and confronts him with her evidence. In this version she is discernible, from albeit the sparse clues Braddon offered, as a more dynamic female character than the one she was eventually to be – a convent-educated girl who is seduced away from her rightful, heroic fiancé by the strains of Geoffrey's mesmerizing violin. After outlining the basis of the plot and the cast of characters, the *dramatis personae* that she referred to in the letter to her disappointed fan, Braddon pursued the plot of George Beresford Carew, Allan's father, and Esperanza, Geoffrey's mother.

> **(24)**
> George Beresford, when an under-grad attended a séance in a street near Russell Squ. The givers of the performance are imposters, except a girl who acts as medium. G.B. & the friend who is with him see that this girl is honest – hysterical perhaps, mediumistic, (…)
> She is pretty and interesting.
> There is a row, she is frightened – a man in the audience threatens to bring in the police, Beresford takes the girl away with him, puts her in the charge of an old servant, carries her off to Scotland meaning to marry her.
>
> They are followed to Edinbro' by his mother, who arrives to break off the match – sends the girl to school.
>
> Beresford marries an Earl's daughter.
>
> The girl makes the acquaintance of Warnock an elderly man, who finally…[10]

This version is familiar from the published novel. The chapters dealing with George Carew's past life, as the lover of Esperanza, are a strange configuration of memoir and confessional. Why the father should feel he had to justify not loving the mother of his son is set up as a mystery; George ran a huge risk in leaving the account of his lost love locked in his desk and entrusted to his son. The presumption he makes, that Allan will have a loyalty to him and not his mother, is an interesting one -

particularly after his confession of his 'useless' life during which he 'wronged' Lady Emily with the loveless state of their marriage.

Allan's beliefs about manhood and paternalism enable his father to place the secret with him, in certain knowledge that it will be safe. As the guiding light of his son's life he has armed himself against indiscretion in his family. The secrets continue. In this respect the novel adopts sensational motifs, but does not fully render them as such. The reading of the memoir, established as a fateful act on the part of Allan, does nothing other than embed his greater respect for his parents and Mrs. Wornock. It is part of his growing maturity that he realises people must be released and absolved from the mistakes and impetuous decisions of their past. It is in this way that Allan Carew consolidates his role as hero, controls the ramifications of others' misdemeanours, and quenches the 'fire' of indiscretions, secrets and sensation. Geoffrey Wornock, and his attempted murder of Allan followed by a descent into madness, is a last gasp of sensation perhaps – appearing in Braddon's final three-volume novel. Just as he is 'put away' at the end of the tale so Braddon had to set aside the familiar old form of popular writing.

An interesting cameo role appears in the interlude of George Carew's past life told in his journal. Braddon depicted the eccentric, artistic novelist Mrs. Ravenshaw, who with her husband attends the séance in Russell Square where George meets Esperanza, 'Mrs. Ravenshaw, as became an imaginative writer, was of [an] idealistic temperament, receptive, confiding; but her husband was a man of business, and wanted to see value for his money'.[11] This is an amusing and affectionate portrayal of characters that Braddon could have based upon herself and Maxwell – the lady novelist and her partner - although this characterization of a money-minded, pragmatic man was unlike Maxwell.

The séance itself is a fraudulent one operated by the Kaltardens a German couple who use Esperanza's 'child-like' innocence and beautiful singing voice to con the gullible public. However, many of the people in attendance at the séance are there

for the entertainment and curiosity value of it. George is a sceptic and then he encounters Esperanza.

> The *séance* proceeded after the vulgar routine of such mysteries in England and in America. We sat in the frowzy darkness, and heard each other's breathing as we listened to the mysterious rappings, now here, now there, now high, now low, as of some sportive dressmaker rapping her thimbled finger on table, or shutter, or ceiling, or wall. We heard strange messages thumped out, or throbbed out by excitable mahogany, which became more and more vehement, as if the beating of our hearts, the swift current of blood in all our arteries were being gradually absorbed by that vitalised wood . . .
>
> The whole business wearied me. I was moved to melancholy rather than to laughter as I realised the depth of human credulity which was indicated by the hushed expectancy of the dozen or so of people sitting round a table in the dark in a shabby Bloomsbury lodging-house . . .
>
> I sat in the darkness, weary and disgusted, utterly incurious, desiring nothing but the close of the manifestations and escape into the open air, when suddenly, in a faint wan light, which came I know not whence, I saw a face on the opposite side of the circle of faces, a face which assuredly had not been among the audience before the lamp was darkened at the beginning of the *séance*. [12]

What was sparsely accounted for in the plan is embellished in the novel. The scene is dramatic and arresting. The ghostly figure of Esperanza – whom George half considers might be a genuine manifestation – rises above the table and begins to sing. Throughout her career as a 'mediumistic' practitioner Esperanza believes that she is the genuine article. She considers something spiritual, angelic maybe, enters her when she sings. George is transfixed: 'Nothing so beautiful could be false, dishonest, ignoble. No; whatever the rest of the *séance* might be, this at least was no vulgar cheat.' She is the vulnerable, ethereal woman - such as the figure encountered by Walter at the opening of *The Woman in White*.

Suddenly Esperanza screams, faints and comes crashing down, striking her head against the table. She has been hooked onto an iron bar with a harness that can be winched up to the ceiling as she sings, thus fooling the spectators with a crude mechanical device. She believes in the real spirituality of what she does: 'What

strap? The spirits were holding me up . . .' but her employers abscond, leaving her in the sympathetic charge of George and Mrs. Ravenshaw. As a mysterious, melancholy, sensitive woman she also intrigues Allan when he meets her years later. There is, for a short period, the possibility that Allan might be in love with Mrs. Wornock, until Suzette enters upon the scene.

The plan further suggests that George attempts to elope with Esperanza, to Edinburgh. Braddon changed this to a planned clandestine marriage at the church near Great Ormond Street where Esperanza lodges with George's old nurse, Martha. Sadly they cannot trust Martha whose loyalty to George's mother disregards his feelings and the need for secrecy. The marriage is thwarted, bringing about the tragic separation that haunts the two for the rest of their lives. A question remains unanswered. Is George Carew the father of Geoffrey Wornock, thus rendering the doppelganger motif more than just coincidence? Braddon does not fully resolve this and Wolff believes the story deceives in its endeavours and finally lets the reader down. However, as with *Dead Love Has Chains,* and others of Braddon's later novels and stories, the hints and possible conclusions to mysteries surrounding characters' true selves are contained in the text.

The plan reiterates Braddon's decision to retain the doppelganger motif, 'A. sees likeness of himself – refined, idealized' **(28).** Later on, Braddon incorporated a more explicit insertion of the doppelganger with the voice of death calling from outside Allan's tent in the African night, a ruse Geoffrey decides to employ in order to plot his murder:

> **(29)**
> {Seated by campfire someone tells story of voice calling outside tent – calling a man by name – he goes out & finds no one there – prophetic of death.
> Later Geoffrey plans that Allan
> shall be called -
> He goes out – there is no
> one" etc . . . }[13]

Braddon saw Geoffrey and Allan as doppelgangers throughout the planning of the novel; their encounter as a coincidence, their families' shared history as fate and sensational incident. She did not subsequently use this example of Geoffrey's murderous intentions and the doppelganger motif. It was not until the very end of the novel that she fully revealed this side of his insanity.

However, in the detail that the novel offers there are some insinuations about the nature of the relationship between George Carew and Esperanza. Whilst they are careful about how they conduct their relationship, chaperoned by Martha, there is a hint that they have become intimate. They share evenings in the back parlour, with Martha in close proximity, according to the memoir, and Esperanza playing Handel and Mendelssohn. George finds these experiences passionate and intense, 'paradise' full of 'beatific sensations' that are mostly ascribed to her playing. Later on he accompanies her on regular walks around the quiet London square, where he kisses her in the shadow of St. George's Church, 'love's first kiss,' he claims.

It must be remembered that this is the subjective reminiscence of a man in his own words and intended for the son who idolises him. He would be unlikely to offer the confession that he had fathered a child out of wedlock and effectively abandoned mother and child. Esperanza, throughout her life, is powerfully and obsessively loyal to her first love. At one point during his courtship of her George noticed how 'wan and out of health' Esperanza looked. She has been trying to secure a place as a governess but cannot convince any household to take her on. 'I must look very stupid,' she speculates, or perhaps very pregnant. It is feasible for such a character as Esperanza at the age she is and with her slightly distracted demeanour to be naïve enough not to know that she is pregnant. Martha, one might assume, would recognize the symptoms, but she grows less inclined to patronize the girl, and perhaps her growing aversion to her and eventual betrayal of her master has its origins in the fact that she knows what has been going on.

This after all is George's narrative and justification to his son and he would necessarily depict himself as the wronged party. The truth of this memoir is never guaranteed. Readers were accustomed to the disclosure of family secrets happening via letters and hidden journals, finally revealed after death or ruin, or held up as the artefact destined to reveal the ultimate truth. Braddon used such devices on some occasions. She retreated from full disclosure in *Sons of Fire*, however. We settle down with Allan for the narrative contained in his dead father's journal, anticipating the disclosure, ready for the knowledge that, yes, Allan's father was a cad, but we are left not knowing. Pamela K. Gilbert, in her examination of Braddon's *Joshua Haggard's Daughter*, considers how 'Braddon uses revisions of and references to popular literature both to position her "realist" novel[s] and to critique attitudes toward popular literature and reading itself. Braddon uses references to popular literature to cue reader expectations – expectations that will be overturned one by one, as "reality" is not the stuff of novels'.[14] And, as Braddon herself wrote in *The Idler* article: 'as if truth in fiction mattered one jot!'

There is no firm or definite conclusion as to Geoffrey's parentage, therefore, just insinuation and clues – the 'stuff' of real behaviour when issues of illegitimacy arise. That the men, whilst in Africa, are the 'Sons of Fire' and that this was Braddon's firm decision for her title does tend to dispel the absolute conclusion that George is *not* Geoffrey's father. The likeness of the two men, their shared allegorical parentage at least, and Braddon's insistence on the element of mystery – which of the two will Suzette choose in the final chapter? – suggests some fraternal link. Further to this, in the Notebook plan, Braddon inserts the possible time of year for Geoffrey's birth, **(25)** 'Geof born at (. . .) . . . mid-winter' in the midst of developing George's relationship with Esperanza.

The range of possible encounters that the 'sons' have after this is quite extensive in the plan.

(26)

> Geoffrey comes back – falls in love with Suzette. She still true to Allan,
> G. deeply fascinated, willful, sensitive, with curious womanish traits –
> Leaves the Army to be near S.
> Has two or three love scenes with her – finally sickens of his disappointment – buys a yacht, asks Allan to go with him.[15]

The idea for the yachting trip remained a favourite with Braddon for most of her planned schemes for this novel. Geoffrey instigates the occasion to get them together on board but Braddon veered between his and Allan's villainy. Right up until the end of the plan and probably the draft for the novel, Braddon had not yet decided which man was to be her villain. Firstly, Allan is the bad 'son' and allows Geoffrey to be knocked on the head by the boom and sees his opportunity for deception. Braddon followed this up with **(26)** an accident befalling Allan on board,

> Accident to Allan on yacht. He is laid up with fever abroad – off his head –
> G. leaves him in a maison de sante, nameless, say Corsica, goes back with the news of his death
> . . .
>
> Allan in Corsica – without money – clothes – escapes from Maison de S. helped by young girl –[16]

Then, in this scenario, Geoffrey is guilty of abandoning Allan to his fate, incarceration in a foreign '*maison de santé*' of course reminiscent of Lady Audley. This device might have been too obviously sensational, reverberating with her most famous 'victim' of insanity and diagnosis of deviant behaviour. As a 'nameless' innocent, Allan would have been typical in the mould of sensation characters. If Braddon was self-consciously renouncing and denying this form in her later career then she needed to change this device as well as do something about the introduction of a 'young girl' who aids Allan and might complicate the romantic plot. These

insertions might jeopardize the potential 'psychological romance'. So, fluctuating between first Geoffrey and then Allan as victim, she proceeded with another configuration of the 'lost at sea' plot:

> **(27)**
>
> Geof. & Allan both on yacht, G. has sunstroke & is strange and flighty – the sensible friend & A. discuss the situation & agree that he must be put under restraint – They get a doctor to come on board & see him. A happens to be ill with head ache & touch of fever – G. gets wind of the intention & contrives that the doctor shall see A - & A is taken on shore to a Maison de Sante – G goes home, & makes love to Suzette.
>
> When doctor comes on board to see patient – twilight, the stars shining in clear evening sky, they can see the hills above San Remo in the far distance – [17]

This is a balance in the plotting with both 'sons' attempting to waylay one another. Geoffrey emerges as the slippery one managing to turn the tables. Allan is incarcerated and Geoffrey, presumably pretending to be Allan, 'goes home, & makes love to Suzette'. Plus, the 'sensible friend' is included here and becomes Patrington the explorer.

The usefulness of seeing such workings in the plans is the understanding it gives of Braddon's experimentation towards refining her novels. It is interesting to see the various plots played out in these notebooks. First Allan is villain, then Geoffrey, and then they try to outwit each other. The buoyancy and economy of devices and the spinning of yarns shows Braddon's continuing energy for invention in her compositions. It is important to note the fluidity and flexibility of the potential in her plots in these forms. For much of the compositional outline the roles of villain and hero are interchangeable. The good 'son' might be Geoffrey for much of the plan, with his 'willful (*sic*), sensitive' nature and 'curious womanish traits'. The son who is inclined towards sensitivity and insanity might become the triumphant hero and Allan, far from learning the patience and gentlemanliness of the true hero, might be allowed to let his resentment and animosity to his 'brother' get the better of him.

The material in the Notebooks shows the ease and simplicity with which Braddon constructed her plots and also her thoroughness and the grasp she had of multiple strands of composition. As already noted, she created stories simultaneously and the plan for *Sons of Fire* occurs amidst the plans for other works, including *The Venetians* (1892) and *Thou Art the Man* (1894). This offers an indication of the duration of her ideas for her novels and how working through them in note form constituted a lengthy and involved process of corrections and research. For *Thou Art the Man*, she included copious notes on epilepsy and related conditions **(11-19)**[18] in Notebook A, just before the plan for *Sons of Fire* commences. These notes for research into the condition Brandon Mountford suffers from were gleaned from *Trousseau's Clinical Medicine* (Armand Trousseau's lectures on epilepsy appeared in printed form in 1877) and Braddon might have translated them herself.

Braddon also set down the first slight indications of ideas and plots amongst her outlines for completed works. Amidst the plan for *Sons of Fire*, just as she is getting into her stride and beginning to work on the plot for the African expedition, she included the idea for 'What Mr. Fiddler [did] with his fortune' about a man who suffers from 'stock exchange spine'.[19] Similarly, ideas flowed and merged between the compositions. Already the idea of a life 'Before the Knowledge of Evil' has been seen to reverberate in her prose, with that phrase alighted upon in *Dead Love Has Chains* reappearing as the title for her childhood memoir. One of the possible alternative titles for *The Venetians*, along with *This Wicked World*, appears in the Notebook A as *All in Honour.*[20] This was the eventual title for Chapter 22 of *Sons of Fire*, in which Geoffrey returns from Africa to claim Suzette as his bride. He enters from the open window, saying her name in 'a spectral voice; the voice of a ghost calling to her' and angrily seizes her, 'Why did you send me away? No, I won't ask. It was all in honour, all in honour.'

There are also two incidents in the plan that did not emerge in the finished novel and these demonstrate Braddon's disinclination towards incorporating sensational

incident in this late work. One is the confrontation she outlined to take place between Mrs. Wornock and her son:

(30)

Mrs. W surprises Geoffrey with pistol –
I am hopelessly, utterly miserable –
You must go away – travel - &c…
What, & leave him with her –
It must come to that, G – she will marry him –
She shall not marry him – I will not stop at a crime[21]

There are confrontations between mother and son, but none in which Geoffrey (or his mother as this could be read either way) are armed with a pistol. As the characters are finally drawn it would be out of keeping for them to brandish weapons at one another. Braddon removed such potential sensational incidents. This psychological narrative favours contemplation and argument, rather than action scenes with characters displaying outright aggression to one another. In her continuation of the plan **(32)** with the processing of ideas for the African narrative, the next incident was a fight scene between Allan and Geoffrey and, again, she thought better of this:

(32)

Grinning imbecility, craft, sulleness [*sic*]- the lying lips, the greedy hand –
G. decides to go westward – they are diversed [*sic*] from the right (…) – difficulties – Allan down with fever – G. seized with inexorable impatience – divides his men & leaves Allan in the wilderness. Allan & Geoffrey quarrel – one wild with fever – they fight – the niggers looking – Allan delirious – G. leaves him.[22]

The eventual confrontation between the two men, which leaves Allan hanging onto life, is done covertly and secretly. Geoffrey anticipates Allan's return and waylays him in the woods but does not admit to this until he is sent away to the private asylum.

The conclusion of their African adventure and the return to England is fraught with suspicion and mystery, finally resolved with Geoffrey's confession. There are no descriptions of melodramatic confrontation, with the exception of the scene featuring Suzette and Geoffrey when he resolves to claim her back. Geoffrey's madness is a hidden factor, progressive and gradually acquired whilst he is abroad. Its eventual manifestation is the crime against Allan for which he had ample opportunity in the African wilderness but never resorted to until the return to England. Until then he is accepted, albeit displaying eccentricity and erratic behaviour. It is Suzette who suspects, subjected as she is to his sadistic moods towards her in melodramatic scenes, but in fear of him she agrees to their marriage. His malady is secret until he admits to it himself. Clues as to his potential deviant behaviour are scattered throughout the novel; from his plaintive violin playing, a form of musical mesmerism, to his flight to the Hartz Mountains once he has declared his love for Suzette. He is the Gothic wolf in sheep's clothing that disrupts the domestic idyll. Suzette is the virgin that falls for his charms and finally saves herself thanks to common sense and the intervention of pragmatic friends and doctors.

Braddon resorted to neatly tying up the loose ends of the novel rapidly and conclusively with Allan's remark to his mother, 'Let the past remain a blank, mother. No good can come by trying to remember.' This ending dismisses the possibility of his father's sins emerging and of further anguish for Mrs. Wornock who is the mystical woman who gave birth to the dangerous son Geoffrey. The scene is purged of sensation and threat especially once mother and son are buried beside one another in the humble country churchyard that witnesses the happy union of Suzette and Allan. He has finally achieved the state he desired throughout the novel and won the birthright of the 'Sons of Fire' – Jacob to Geoffrey's Esau.

In Braddon's late novels, many outlined in the BFC Notebooks, narratives of past and present are recurring themes. *Thou Art the Man* incorporates a murder mystery

plot from ten years before the novel opens. *Sons of Fire* includes the past reminiscences of George Carew's infatuation with the mesmerizing Esperanza, a foreign 'other'. Sibyl Penrith in *Thou Art the Man* must ascertain the identity of the true murderer aided by the lively heroine Coralie Urquhart and clear the name of the man she chastely loves, taking on the role of female sleuth, as Heidi H. Johnson asserts in *Beyond Sensation*. Johnson accounts for the roles of both the older and the younger woman as they unravel the truth, borrowing motifs from Greek Tragedy: *Electra* and *Oedipus Rex*. Daughters and wives discovering the guilt or secrets of their male relatives and loved ones occur frequently in Braddon's fiction. Occasionally, these mysteries are rendered as the province of male characters such as Allan in *Sons of Fire*. He, unlike his female sleuth counterparts, prefers to let the past lie undisturbed to achieve a biblical state of placid forgiveness. Perhaps this is one of the disappointments of that novel, voiced in Wolff's criticism and that of contemporary readers. The dedication of the plot to a male character led to a pragmatic and controlled subjugation of past secrets.

Female characters in Braddon notoriously do not let mysteries lie dormant. Johnson suggests: 'the daughter's "paternal monogamy," to borrow Lynda Zwinger's apt phrase for protracted attachment in sentimental novels, is further promoted by maternal absence'[23] leading to their determined curiosity and search for truth. The 'erotic subtexts' in relationships between fathers and daughters – particularly, according to Johnson, *Thou Art the Man* - denotes a daughter's desire to please a paternal figure, mimic him and gain his approval from this enactment.[24] Conscious of the relationships in Greek Tragedies, Braddon frequently provided reasons for young women in her novels to agonise over and negotiate their position within the family and domestic structures of Victorian Britain. The daughter, Naomi, in *Joshua Haggard's Daughter* (1876), is Electra in a Devonshire setting of the 1820s.[25]

The combination of paternal attachment and maternal absence occurs in Braddon's *A Lost Eden* (1904) and typically forms one of the driving forces of the plot, not just acting as an incidental feature of family tragedy. This novel opens in the 1850s with

the funeral of the Duke of Wellington, an occasion for national mourning and patriotic nostalgia, and the notion of loss of a paternal figure. The trajectory of the story then occurs simultaneously with the unfolding events of the Crimean War. The story involves the dual narrative of the lives of Marion and Flora Sandford, sisters who have to cope with the trials of life after their family falls on hard times. Mr. Sandford is an honest, hard-working man who has suffered from the financial irregularities of his firm and lost his job before the novel opens. He has had to take a more humble, lower paid position and move his family out to the semi-rural suburbs in Camberwell. Here their adventures start.

Edward Vernham, a young aristocrat and promising artist, follows Marion home on the day of the funeral from London out to her family's cottage. Vernham is infatuated with her from the start but does not declare his intentions honourably, believing that Marion is a working-class woman. He intends to make her his model and paint her as Mandeville's 'Lady of the Land'. Thanks to the 'old boys' network', Vernham knows the local vicar and so gains entry to the Sandfords' home and an introduction to Marion and her parents. Mr. Sandford immediately takes a dislike to him, but the mother is besotted, and allows Marion to sit for him in secret. Vernham uses this opportunity to 'make love' to Marion and try to seduce her. He recognizes that she is the daughter of a middle-class family, despite initial appearances to the contrary, and so he manoeuvres events very cautiously. He cannot entertain any real intentions of marrying her as he is betrothed to another more suitable aristocratic relative. Instead he decides in a calculating fashion to make Marion his mistress and take her away to the continent. She will be appropriate as his muse, model and lover but he intends to discard her when he has grown tired of her. Marion believes that he might propose as his sustained attention towards her, in spite of her humble status, puts her in mind of Jane Eyre and Rochester.

Mrs. Sandford decides to hold a tea party one day in the sweltering summer of 1853. The neighbours come and the talk is of the impending war in the Crimea. The mother hopes that this party will occasion a proposal from Vernham. A

thunderstorm brews, and in the clammy, threatening atmosphere before the storm Vernham declares his intentions to Marion. She is shocked and disgusted that the man she idolized intends to make her his mistress. All of her romantic notions about him are shattered, but the sensual draw he provides is not. The landscape of the fallen woman stretches before her and she rejects him. The ensuing 'storm' that breaks signifies both Marion's confusion and horror at the immorality of Vernham's intentions and the total breakdown of what remains of the Sandfords' domestic peace and security. Vernham has to stay the night because of the bad weather and he overhears Mr. and Mrs. Sandford arguing about him. Tragedy strikes. In the confrontation between husband and wife Mrs. Sandford falls, hits her head and dies. Mr. Sandford was the only one present, but he has a stroke and cannot speak. Suspicion falls on him for the murder of his wife, but as there is no proof and he is partially paralysed he is not arrested. He remains at home to be nursed by his daughters and faithful servant. Both daughters, Marion and Flora, must now find a means to keep their invalid father and themselves. Their bitter and painful experiences are all still very domestic; the mother killed accidentally in a row with the father over a daughter's seeming disgrace.

Marion goes into service as a governess caring for the daughters of Mr. Donaldson, a widower who has made his fortune in trade. Flora decides to become an actress. It is here, with this partly autobiographical narrative, that Braddon reflected her own experiences on the stage in the 1850s. Flora is a pert and intelligent young woman in her late teens. She finds happiness and community amongst the company at the Phoenix Theatre. There she meets a young actor, Jim Rodney, and they become engaged. Despite moving into even cheaper lodgings, the lives of the Sandford girls begin to take a turn for the better. Marion is beloved of her employer, Donaldson, and he proposes to her after the eventual death of their father. On the point of marriage to the man she truly loves, Vernham returns to claim her. He is disgusted that she should throw her life away on a man who is of humble origins and works in the commercial sector. Instead of trying to persuade her to marry him by honourable means he abducts her. He keeps her prisoner, in a house at Mortlake, to compel her

to marry him. She manages to persuade the daughter of the woman who has acted as her gaoler, believing that she is mad, to assist her escape. Eventually she makes it back to her astonished family and fiancé. Her reputation has to be resurrected, and finally Donaldson's faith in her integrity and purity is restored. He marries her and Flora marries Jim and leaves the stage. The young women finally recapture their 'Eden'.

This involved plot has much of sensation about it and displays a late conviction by Braddon in her use of melodramatic and Gothic motifs. The dual narrative of the sisters in this novel is comprised of two sources: Braddon's own autobiographical experiences as an actress for Flora Sandford, and Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa* (1747- 48) for Marion's narrative. In 1895, during the development of the plans in the Notebooks leading to this novel, Braddon was in Switzerland after Maxwell's death. She was called back to England because of concerns for her daughter Rosie's health. On the journey, as she rushed to be by her daughter's bedside, she read *Clarissa.*[26] The extensive plans in the BFC for this work are spread across both Notebooks, interspersed amongst those for other works of this late period in her career and commencing soon after the plans for *The Venetians* (1892) and *Sons of Fire* (1895). They begin in Notebook A **(48)**,[27] the 'Black book', and recommence in Notebook B **(1- 2)**.[28] Braddon combined her inspirations for this plotting and maintained various strands of her narrative intent in the Notebooks. As a 'hybrid' of her experiences and Richardson's epistolary novel, *A Lost Eden* works extremely well. She introduced and resolved elements of sensation and also those of an earlier era in fiction: the middle-class milieu and sentiment from the eighteenth century. Flora Sandford bears an autobiographical 'likeness' to Braddon in the 1850s and Marion's 'likeness' is for Richardson's virtuous heroine. The hindsight and experience that Braddon brought to bear on the adventures of these heroines included the lessons of the Victorian age in fiction and autobiography.

Flora Sandford 'survives' her professional life on stage. She is neither compromised nor molested in her independent existence as an actress. Sexual threats, predatory

males, her unchaperoned proximity to members of the profession never taint her endeavours to provide for her father and sister. Her sister fears for her but ironically it is she, Marion, in her 'respectable' pursuit for employment who is compromised. Marion's adventures are sometimes those of a heroine of the eighteenth century out of time and out of her depth in the Victorian age, a melodramatic maelstrom of conflicting passions and doubt until she learns to exert her independence. She is locked into the discourse of virtue and propriety overshadowed by the dominant paternal figure of Mr. Sandford and the rakish villain Vernham. In her plan Braddon inserted some important character notes about the father (Notebook A, **50**), ' . . . morose, miserable, a domestic tyrant – standing on his dignity – querulous – exacting – unhappy. A massive man – fine head – an angry blue-gray eye'.[29] She also ensured the powerful nature of the father was discerned by Vernham when he has designs on the daughter (Notebook A, **57**):

> Vernham expected to see a weakling, a shrunken threadbare man, like the shabbiest of the clerks in the Camberwell O[ffice]. when there rose before him a magnificent wreck, a massive figure considerably above six feet, a grand iron gray head, & eyes that scrutinised him severely with a something of anger and distrust.[30]

Marion is compelled to be 'faithful' to her father's expectations, especially when he is incapacitated with a stroke. She is loath to risk her fidelity and 'monogamy' towards him. He has been 'ultra-liberal' over her education in music, languages, the arts and sciences, 'but he would not consent to outlay on theatre tickets or frivolous pleasures'.[31] To an extent, Marion is the construction of her father and his values. Importantly, Braddon tried speculative versions of the title for this novel, using 'The Suburbans' as a working title throughout her notes and varying that with the addition of 'Middle-Class'. The opinions of the Sandford family, formulated by the father, ring true as middle-class values, particularly the restrictions he still wants to impose on his daughters even when his assets are stripped and he has to scale down their lifestyle. Their mother desires social mobility and aspiration in her attempts to marry her daughter off to Vernham. Their views are what Vernham disdainfully terms

'Russell Square morality'. Sandford's opinions remain uncompromising on such things as employment for his daughters:

> He had felt nothing but anger when Marion first mooted the idea of going out into the world as a daily governess. That his lovely daughter of whom he had been so proud, should have to go among strangers, unchaperoned, in the rough and tumble of life, to be ordered about by some vulgar woman, to suffer the attentions of vulgar men, to go to and fro in an omnibus unaccompanied. It was hateful, it was impossible! He had fallen very low, he had been steeped in miseries and humiliations, but this he would not suffer.[32]

This echoes Vernham's later revulsion at the idea of Richardson's Clarissa as a captive in the brothel. Mr. Sandford does have to submit to his daughters' independence ultimately and steadily his grip on his family ebbs away. Flora is in the vanguard of this change and exploits the chance her father's incapacitation affords her, plus the sense of injustice that her mother's mysterious death, possibly at his hands, proffers her. She remarks on the family events (Notebook B, **4**) 'Flo said life wouldn't be bad if people didn't make fusses.'[33] Braddon also permitted her autobiographically inspired character a series of low-key rebellions, offering opinions on life, love and social propriety, as she builds towards her final act of defiance by going on the stage, 'Flora raised her prettily pencilled eyebrows and gave a low whistle, one of the little tricks which often aroused the paternal wrath.'[34] She has, traditionally, inspired anger in her father, 'like the colour red to an enraged bull' and offers her mother her homespun philosophies, 'Why can't you snap your fingers at Fate, as I do?' As a teenage girl, just on the brink of womanhood, she is remarkably self-contained and assertive. As Carnell mentions, reinforcing the position of autobiography in this novel, 'If Braddon was indeed like her young heroine Flora at fifteen years old she was already reluctant to accept the passive role that society has allotted her . . . ' and Flora's views on self-determination and employability for young women are 'unusual' to say the least for 1852- 3. For Flora, the opportunity for work in the theatre 'lies between burying one's self alive or having a career'.[35]

By distinct and dramatic contrast Marion is cast in a vastly different role, self-consciously 'She saw herself as Clarissa Harlowe might have seen it, in the pious seclusion of her chamber, with her bible and her Kempis.'[36] From her position at the turn of the nineteenth century Braddon mediated the views of the mid-Victorian girl, Flora, into a self-determined modernity and those of her older sister steeped in the performative influence of eighteenth-century heroines. Braddon could have taken her cue from reading Richardson's preface to *Clarissa* as she travelled back to be by her daughter's bedside:

> The following history is given in a series of letters written principally in a double yet separate correspondence: between two young ladies of virtue and honour, bearing an inviolable friendship for each other and writing upon the most interesting subjects . . . [37]

Distinct histories of the sisters were dealt with in *A Lost Eden*, 'double yet separate'. Her possible titles for the novel in Notebook A were 'Two Girls', 'Suburbans' or 'In Those Days' **(48)**.[38] She speculated upon naming the novel for the dual histories of her female protagonists or for the class distinctions imposed upon them, or, with a sense of nostalgic reminiscence for her youth, something she did respond to in the title of her childhood memoir in 1914 just before her death, *Before the Knowledge of Evil*. She opted for the symbolic, biblical sounding title for the novel inspiring an appropriate religiosity into the text accompanied by her foundation of the work on *Clarissa*. A route into this naming of the novel might have arisen from a line she employed in Notebook B **(5)** 'Milton's devils are such gentleman',[39] after her outline for one of Vernham's diatribes inspired by Richardson's Lovelace.

The Richardson influence arises in a variety of ways. There is the simple fact of the names she considered for the characters first of all. The family name of Jim Rodney, the actor and fiancé of Flora, is first noted down as 'Richardson' and later changed at different points of the plan to Rodney. Mrs. Richardson/Rodney the matriarch of the theatrical family, who operates a sort of bed-and-breakfast facility for her army of acting offspring, is the one who first discovers Marion after her kidnapping

ordeal. In Notebook A the plan outlines the episode (Vernham is at this point known as Wentworth or 'W'):

> **(56)**
>
> {"*Suburbans*"}
> On the eve of her marriage W. carries her off – puts her in a cab & carries her to Barnes – to the lodging he has prepared for her, with the woman who is to take care of her. He has described her as his wife – not quite right in her mind, or resolutely denying that she is his wife.
>
> Painful scenes –
> she makes her escape & goes to her fiancé –
> afraid to go back to Chelsea –
> or to Mrs. Richardson..[40]

Here, and in the published version, Marion finally seeks sanctuary at the Rodney's house, the first friendly abode she comes to after escaping Vernham's clutches. The proposed family name of 'Richardson' would have seen Marion, after Braddon's carefully crafted melodramatic episode for her, floundering through foggy London streets only to faint in the arms of 'Mrs. Richardson'. This might have seemed too clumsy a motif for her. However, the influence of *Clarissa* is overt and specifically alluded to throughout the novel. As well as the incarceration of Marion, echoing Clarissa's ordeal, there is the deliberate placing of events within the trajectory of the narrative of *A Lost Eden*, against the background of the Crimean War. Angus Ross, in his introduction to the Penguin edition of *Clarissa*, notes this 'presence' of the author in imposing such arrangements: 'The chronology of the story is only one of the more obvious instances of Richardson's extreme care and meticulous arrangement . . . The precision of the dating . . . puts the carefully arranging author, full of artifice, at the centre of one feature of the novel, namely, its sampler-like quality, the presence in it of fixed and elaborate objects for contemplation'.[41] Braddon adopted a similar sort of 'precision' in placing her characters at the funeral

of the Duke of Wellington at the opening of the novel and then acknowledged the dimensions of the action's timescale, first described in the plan in Notebook A:

(52)

Story opens Feb.53 Crimean begins March 54
June 53

Sebastopol Oct 55
Peace 56 [42]

(103)

Vernham away –

Returns spring – Marion sits for picture – Father dead.

A summer of lovers –
Scene with M. studio – say – a June evening?
F. engaged to Jim Rodney –
Donaldson's offer – October –
December – abduction. [43]

She kept to a relatively strict rationale of chronology across three years of action with the events of war an echo in the background of the novel's action. She did not entirely adopt Richardson's epistolary form with the same tight composition of dating, but letters between the characters are an important device, particularly those in which Vernham explores his role of libertine and artist with such relish. Within the plans Braddon highlighted the use of letters, depicting how they move the action along.

Clarissa also fostered the motives for Braddon's characters' development and their moral justification for behaviour. Vernham exemplifies this and draws Marion into his web of allusion and symbolism derived from the eighteenth-century precedent. He pursues her with the relentlessness of Lovelace, his role model. He even has a confidant, his own Belford, in the form of his fellow artist O'Donnell. The pretext with which Vernham tries, and succeeds, to draw Marion out of the sanctuary of her

family home is that she must pose for him as an artist's model. He intends to paint her as Clarissa at the garden door among other subjects. He will accept no arguments on this score and so it is covertly arranged, with Flora in attendance as chaperone, despite Marion's reservations. Vernham 'had two characteristics which were against family life. He was romantic, and he was selfish'.[44] So he represents the opposition to decent Victorian middle-class values; he is an artist and a rake and intends to seduce Marion. He argues with O'Donnell over her: 'Well, in my case there is no peril. Miss Sandford's marble calm would keep Lovelace at a distance,' and his friend responds, 'Clarissa was of the same marble, yet Lovelace destroyed her.'[45]

David Skilton remarks upon the situation Richardson creates for Clarissa, ' . . . she is caught between conflicting demands which to her and her author are absolute upon her: the duty of obedience to her family and her need to preserve her own integrity by rejecting the abhorrent suitor'.[46] Marion is in similar circumstances, imposed by Braddon, contemplating her life from her confined garret bedroom in their little house in Camberwell with, on the one hand, the absolutes of morality laid down by her father and her upbringing and on the other, the new and licentious values of Vernham – learnt from eighteenth-century characters and Romantic celebrities. She enjoys the discourse they share on the relative merits of Byron and Shelley, but shrinks from the prospect of conducting herself as one of the women beloved of such poets had done:

> His words chilled her. She had compassionated the sorrows of genius, the errors, the sins; but she had never thought of genius as licence for sin.[47]

Marion is caught between two conflicting sets of values: middle-class Victorian propriety and the 'artistic' values of poetry, passion and 'sex'. Vernham adopts Lovelace's methods in attempting to persuade Marion to his point of view through the use of letters that both inform her of his impassioned feelings for her and then reiterate his cold disapprobation of her values. She is, he accuses, becoming too imitative of middle-class behaviour in her attempts to please first her father and then

Donaldson. He is a challenge to the 'monogamy' she feels she owes to her invalid parent.

Braddon condensed the epistolary form of *Clarissa* into a few key missives exchanged by her characters. Some notes are curt and dismissive, from Marion to Vernham when she is trying to extricate herself from his control; or reassuring, as when O'Donnell writes to Marion to allay her fears of the moral environment at the Phoenix Theatre where Flora wishes to work.[48] The key correspondence occurs between Vernham and O'Donnell and is integral to the trajectory of the novel and Braddon's mediation of Richardson's mid-eighteenth-century values. Marion, in a rebellious act that contradicts the preoccupation of Richardson's heroine, returns a letter from Vernham, unanswered. He writes to O'Donnell in exasperation over this. Notebook B opens with this outline:

(2)

Vernham writes to O'Donnell

Vernham exasperated by the return of his letter –
Was ever man in my position treated so
M. passes him in the street - eyes fixed. Heart beating
At last he stops her – lays his hand upon her arm in the autumn dusk – makes her talk to him
They pace up and down Cheyney Walk – he in a white heat of rage –
he asks her to marry him – on the impulse of a moment – she refuses. Tells O'Donnell – like Lovelace – he had not intended it

Think what it means – To forfeit £6,000 a year – to grub on – in direst poverty –
I was hers, mark, her husband, if she would have me, bound hand & foot by our (…) marriage law I would have applied for the Licence tomorrow morning –
we live in the same parish – common (…) have seen me (…) – I should have sacrificed social position, ease, luxury a world of flatterers, sycophants – but I should have had her, my angel, my (…), my all the world. And she would not – she would not! She has a devil of obstinacy. But I will be even with her yet. *He* shall not have her. [49]

The rejection of his letter and Marion's public refusal of his proposal leads to his melodramatic iteration of intent and feeling. His rendition of this in a letter to his confidant is as much about persuading himself and formulating his own justification of his actions as it is about gaining O'Donnell's approval. O'Donnell tries to dissuade him in an epistolary response, outlined in the plan:

> **(3)**
>
> O'D begins his letter
>
> I ask myself what has she to lose and the answer peals like a thunder clap
> Character! that is what this lovely girl has to lose –
> her capital, her revenue, her all in the world that makes life
>
> endurable to a high souled woman I have looked into her
> eyes, I have listened to her voice, eyes and voice grave and earnest,
> the spirit of truth dwelling and speaking in them.
>
> When you estimate her loss, and reckon it at a pin's fee, do you consider what other women are to a fallen beauty, to the creature whom they know their superior in every attribute mental as well as physical, save for that slip which gives them the right to scorn her. Do you know how implacable prosperous ugliness can be to unfortunate beauty. Be sure when Emma Hamilton had England's hero at her feet, her lover and her slave there were plenty of ugly women in England who hugged themselves because they were not as that publican.[50]

His friend tries to invoke the figure of Emma Hamilton as the 'unfortunate beauty' who had to endure society's disapproval to convince Vernham that he must not pursue Marion. The appropriateness of the factual woman, in contrast to the tragic fictional heroine, is lost on Vernham. His reaction is to contradict his friend and persist with Clarissa as his example[51] and Lovelace's predatory approach as his inspiration. He considers that Marion's resistance and shame at the prospect of being his mistress will be outweighed by the value of what the relationship will offer her,

the advantages of her 'self-education'. She will be introduced to a world of greatness and passion that is beyond price.

(4)

She shall give herself to me with a lovely self-surrender. She shall creep into my arms shy & fond as the girl-bride whom the priest has blest. There shall be no prating of sacrifice – no puritanical reluctance – no cold calculation of consequences.
She shall give herself to me – the divine, the ineffable gift – with all her adorable beauty, eyes shining, lips smiling, a gift as willing and almost as unconscious as the sweetness that the flower gives the bee.

You have compared me to that inexorable villain – worst of all that motiveless villain. For my selfishness there is every excuse for to marry my beloved girl means the (…) of my life. To play with his victim, to trifle with feelings so sacred, to (…) her blushes, her sweet confusions.
When he offered marriage – then to withdraw the plea, and leave her modesty no

(5)

alternative but delay. The master fiend Iago had a more valid excuse for his devilry. What could be the mind of that man who could imagine such a monster – so impossible and so real – a devil of flesh and blood. Made alive by that mastery of detail which is R. He invents a tragedy as inexorable as the fate of Hamlet or Lear – as cruel – and paints the scene with minute touches of a Cosway – every infinitesimal dot has its value, the plodding , the labourious, the inspired match! I picture him sitting down to his daily task – cold & pragmatic, his quills neatly cut, not a sheet of Bath Post askew on his green baize desk. And now his Lovelace, and now his Clarissa who describes in each minutest particular the scene of yesterday, every syllable, every glance, every gesture, every pulsation of all-impassioned heart, every flutter of alarmed chastity. The scrubby late printer to invent so perfect a figure of a fine gentleman as the herd sees fine gentlemen! Was it not a marvel of art? Yet how the commonness creeps out. There are things L does that no nephew of Lord M, no man with good blood in his veins, not the wickedest man Satan ever spawned , could have committed. To take his future wife to a den of infamy, to hand over that meek and spotless dove to the ministers of vice, trust his future wife to a Mrs Sinclair, look on while lost women fawn upon and caress her, his future wife!

(7)

> And the motive – the motive for this dallying with his own fierce passion – this long drawn out prelude to legitimate joy – the motive! The wretch cannot himself give a clear account of his reasons. To test her, he urges sometimes, to discover if in a vile world there lives one absolutely virtuous woman – and when the test comes – the core of the tragedy – it is a (…) – a deed of basest craft & hour unspeakable, and no "test". Because he hates shackles – and has always shirked marriage vows. Yet again and again he tells his confidant that she *is* to be his wife – his wife when he has needlessly degraded, needlessly distressed her. His hatred of shackles is made the excuse for prolonging the agony through volumes of detail. You see here the taint of the tradesman. The town is hanging upon his story as if it were a revelation of actual life. Women of rank are pleading for Clarissa. Let her be happy, oh, for God's sake, good Mr. Richardson, take pity upon that admirable creature, the goddess, the angel. And the Mr. R can spin out her tortures and the deeper he can sink her lover's baseness the more of those little volumes will be bought by eager readers in the town. [52]

This is the lengthiest example of the epistolary form in this novel and worth quoting in full from the Notebook. Braddon devoted a considerable amount of her plan to it. It resounds with Vernham's hypocrisy and snobbery and is crucial to his development and O'Donnell's rejections of his notions. It is full of frequent allusion to Shakespeare's tragedies and shapes Richardson as the commercial author in the act of writing his novel. The allusion and formation of character are drawn from this range of references, from life and theatre, and bombard us with what is found in drama that can be compared to the despicable ruse concocted by Richardson's villain. Vernham is confused in this letter, or more accurately, at odds with his admiration for Richardson's novel and his snobbery towards the 'scrubby, late printer' who has such a mastery of the art of writing: so much so that he had his audience in agonies of suspense. The power that the serial novelist can wield is a matter of jealousy for him. The hold over an audience, mostly female, is not something that Vernham can create in his art as a painter. He is a failed artist, where Richardson the 'tradesman' was successful. Vernham is compelled to seize Marion

and make her, literally, his 'captive' audience after this realization of the impotence of his own 'art'.

Vernham's justification for continuing his pursuit of the heroine loses him his ally and confidant and alienates him from the rest of the characters. As he drifts more into the past, and the fictional world of the eighteenth-century novel, he steadily removes himself from the modern Victorian world and discovers both the dramatic power of Richardson's novel and the abhorrent nature of Lovelace's actions. Vernham, like his 'prey' Marion, enters a moral quandary. He is at first drawn into the fictional past of Richardson's characters because of the apparent dramatic simplicity the novel offers: the contention between a life of art and passion and one of propriety in a loveless marriage. Then, almost as if he has used the performative effect of *Clarissa* as a script for his actions and has got far enough along with the plot, he discovers the 'deed of basest craft - & hour unspeakable'. The 'fine gentleman' lets him down and he realises what his allusions to Lovelace entail, and how he cannot enact the final denouement against the heroine and must modify it somehow. Lovelace has no motive, in his view, and rapes Clarissa in a scene that Vernham considers indicative of Richardson's lower-class 'taint'. The figure of the novelist emerges for him as one who 'can spin out her tortures' to sell more copies. He is both attracted and repelled by the model that the eighteenth century offers for him and must belittle Richardson's achievement.

In this structure Braddon was engaging with a series of interesting and complex allusions and locations in time and form. As Skilton mentions, 'Lovelace is to a great degree derived from the libertine character-type in Restoration comedy',[53] and appeared in Richardson's mid-century novel in conflict with the emergent middle-classes of the eighteenth century, a man out of his time both exploiting and resenting the conventions of the period. Clarissa's 'right of refusal' over the choice of husband her family seeks to impose[54] (Solmes) works for Lovelace, and is also the initiative that he defies as he 'contrives to build up a false world around her – a world inhabited by creatures of his own making, in which she is surprised to find herself

constantly in the wrong'.[55] He decides upon his predatory strategy, setting his traps, ' . . . dig, dig, dig, like a cunning miner . . . and spreading my snares like an artful fowler . . . to get this inimitable creature absolutely into my power'.[56]

Drawn out, like the experiences of Lovelace and Clarissa, Braddon structured her action in *A Lost Eden* over about three years reflecting the life and times of 'Two (Middle-Class, Suburban) Girls' 'In Those Days' of the mid-1850s. She developed a narrative that took into account the anachronistic behaviour of Lovelace (a Restoration libertine) active in the eighteenth century; who is then invoked by a similar libertine of the mid-nineteenth century, and all this from the perspective of age and time in the early Edwardian period at the beginning of the twentieth century. *A Lost Eden* is imbued with the strengths and opinions of a series of dramatic and novelistic ages and forms. Her plans demonstrated the dual narratives of the sisters and were transposed to the novel, which charts the gradual rise of the heroine, afflicted by the controlling danger of the anachronistic libertine. Ross, in the introduction to the 1985 Penguin edition of *Clarissa*, describes the 'theatrical' roots of Lovelace in more detail:

> Lovelace's fantasy of his own life is often taken from the theatre. He constantly associates himself with the *macho*, autocratic princes of Restoration heroic tragedy, seeming ironically to forget that they mostly perished by their attempts at dominance; but he also seeks to turn Clarissa's part in his sexual pursuit into a part in a Restoration comedy, a comedy in which her abduction, harassment and rape would be followed by his (at least expressed) repentance, a country-dance and marriage. Clarissa, however, turns the story into something else.[57]

Clarissa takes charge of her narrative beyond just the control she can exercise with letter writing and turns the novel into a tragedy as a consequence of her goodness and virtue when she wastes away, 'confident of a happy life in heaven'.[58] As Skilton describes, Richardson created an irreconcilable situation for his heroine in which some control was left to her, but it is only of the morbid and religious kind. 'Richardson cannot devise a solution within his culture to the problem of female

identity he has imaginatively posited'.[59] But, in *A Lost Eden*, this is precisely what Braddon set out to do for Marion and succeeded. Clarissa's decline can be contrasted with Marion's progress from naive 'daily governess' to a creature of nobility and passion, an 'Arabian bird'; from the young woman on the 'Chelsea omnibus' to a heroine of integrity and power.[60] She escapes Vernham's snares and entrapment in the house at Mortlake. Where Clarissa was subjected to the environs of licentiousness in Mrs. Sinclair's brothel and finally violated, Marion is caught in a masquerade marriage with the insinuation that she is a hysterical, reluctant bride in denial of her love for her 'husband' Vernham.[61] He tries to invoke notions of hysteria and insanity to persuade the housekeeper, Mrs. Lester, that incarceration is the right way to cure her. For a while the mistrust of the 'lunatic' and those with a mental 'malady' works in his favour for his 'taming process', but he has reckoned without the innovations in the portrayal of the heroine in the Victorian period. She dupes him in return; in Notebook A Braddon offered a first outline of this, showing the transformation of Marion into the dynamic heroine who decides to challenge her manipulator:

> **(60)**
>
> He thinks she loves him & will yield
> At last after love scenes, she pretends to assent - &
> throws him off his guard –
> & escapes in the dead of the night – letting herself down from her window by the ivy – old & strong as the trunk of a tree.
> She must be wise as a serpent – any lie is justified by her situation.
> When she consents he takes her in his arms –
> She lets him kiss her – carried away by his passion – by her own love for him. [62]

As he tries to compel her to read *The Tempest* and *Romeo and Juliet* and take Miranda and Juliet as her role models, ' . . . with what innocent self-abandonment, with what implicit faith'[63] they took Ferdinand and Romeo as their husbands, Marion is plotting her escape. Mrs. Lester's daughter finally comes to her aid. Both she and Marion have been influenced by their reading matter, and 'Like most girls'

Marion 'had taken her views of life from the books she read, but those views were limited'.[64] They are not as limited as Vernham's however. He has overlooked a significant development in fiction, that of the self-motivated and dynamic heroine. His invocations and allusions to eighteenth-century fiction take him only so far, but being anachronistic and out-dated he underestimates the will and wit of the modern girl and her ability to act upon her initiatives. 'She must be wise as a serpent'. Braddon, from her vantage point at the end of the century, recollected the extent of publications available to young women fifty years previously and alighted upon Charlotte Bronte as the instrument for Marion's salvation.

> English fiction had not then touched every note in the gamut of passion. The words 'sex' and 'temperament' were still unfamiliar in romantic literature. French novels, with few exceptions, strictly forbidden . . .
>
> The book that had moved Marion most in a modern romance was a book that told of a man who tried to win his love by a fraud; of a woman who, alone and friendless, loving with adoring love, had yet been strong enough to resist her lover's pleading, . . . - to die rather that to yield.
>
> Jane Eyre, the plain little governess, the bright elf in whom mind and feeling stood in place of beauty, was her favourite heroine . . .
>
> And now she compared Rochester with Edward Vernham.[65]

After Vernham takes Marion prisoner he begins to regret the excess to which his emulation of Lovelace has compelled him and the injury done to the woman he now wishes to marry rather than cynically exploit and abandon. He listens to the sounds of her incarceration: the footfalls of the hired nurse who watches over his 'mad' wife and Marion's sobs. He weeps, 'I feel like a murderer . . . Thank God, I am not as bad as Lovelace. This is not Mrs. Sinclair's . . . There are not vile women here, no impure hands polluting my vestal with their loathly touch.'[66] What he has failed to realise is that, as Marion acknowledged earlier in the novel, he has ceased to be like Lovelace and is rapidly emulating Rochester.

What Marion has learnt is that the 'Rochesters' of this world enjoy a period of time when their values and imperatives, such as keeping troublesome wives locked up, are in the ascendancy but they will experience a downfall. Their brutish approach must be tempered – through ordeals, loss, and pain – and then they learn what love is thanks to the persistence and fidelity of a wise, modest heroine. Marion knows she will prevail in teaching him a lesson, and we also know she will because of her invocation of *Jane Eyre* and the way in which the other women, Mrs. Lester, her daughter and the nurse use the template of fiction in their interpretation of the situation. Miss Lester is enraptured with the 'purely romantic' view of Marion's imprisonment, her youthful female mind 'steeped in Currer Bell's novels':

> She thought Vernham the image of Rochester, the colossal hero, the Agamemnon of the circulating library, the king of the novelist's men. He was more generally courteous than Jane Eyre's lover, but she suspected the slumbering volcano.[67]

What takes place here is a gradual intervention of Victorian fiction to overwhelm the accumulation of eighteenth-century sentiment and performativity that Vernham has up till now been inspired to act upon. He, regretful now of emulating Lovelace, is cast by the female characters as Rochester, with here a description of the character as the 'Agamemnon of the circulating library', - a very witty touch coming from the 'Queen of the Circulating Library'. The descent of Vernham has commenced. First, he was seen in the guise of the almighty but ultimately tragic crippled Rochester compared to the cruel and tragic king of Greek drama. Within a few pages Miss Lester has succeeded in finding him yet another role model. This time 'There was rather a suggestion of the all-conquering Steerforth, Em'ly's evil star'[68] about him.

Vernham's trajectory, downwards, begins with his use of Lovelace's methods but sees him gradually caught up by the power of characterization from Victorian novelists and their ideas of motive, power and retribution. Lovelace's fate is sealed by the conventions of his time. Clarissa's kinsman calls him out and he dies in the duel, with the words 'Let this expiate!' Because of the resonant power of

Romanticism and the notions of retribution instilled in Victorian culture, the forces of nature (fire and water) overwhelm Rochester and Steerforth, fatally in the latter's case. Vernham now has to be very careful. The wrongs he has committed against Marion unsettle him and the reader is privilege to the surrounding fictional templates of Bronte and Dickens that he has, inadvertently, begun to resemble. He tries to lose himself in reading, satire and art – Thackeray and Ruskin – but to no avail. Marion's sobs and his guilt still haunt him.

Simultaneously, she no longer matches the expectations of madness and lunacy. Miss Lester and the nurse discuss her case. 'They never do look mad,' the nurse asserts at Miss Lester's protest that Marion does not resemble the 'idea' of the insane woman she expected. She does not fit the Bertha Rochester profile. Charlotte Bronte's novel acts as a diagnostic tool in Marion's favour and Miss Lester agrees to help facilitate her escape. The risk she would run in allowing a mad woman to flee the house and roam the streets has impeded Miss Lester's nobler intentions to assist Marion up to this point, plus her romantic notions had blinded her to the woman's plight. Just as things are bleakest for Marion, the other girl recollects that her knowledge of insanity, drawn from the figure of Bertha Rochester, does not find its parallel in Marion's behaviour.

Vernham attempts one last effort at persuading Marion to be his wife by writing to her whilst she is his captive, believing that a letter will have the power and eloquence that his pleadings do not. However, the epistolary form has long since lost its potency for her, and for us. She prefers to have a face-to-face confrontation with him in the garden of the house. During this episode, when he thinks he has her within his grasp, about to consent, Marion is scanning the surroundings to see how best she can engineer her escape. In his frustration at her he threatens that he will call Donaldson out for a duel over her honour if she still persists in her intention to marry her middle-class hero. She feels trapped, hemmed in, inside a melodrama that has taken on a momentum of its own, sweeping her along with the action of kidnapping, dishonour, and the threat of a duel. She decides on action for herself.

Whilst her sister, Flora, confines her dramas to the stage Marion's lived experiences are those of the eighteenth-century heroine and then the victimized heroine of the stage melodrama ' . . . hemmed round with difficulty, threatened with vague dangers'.[69] Once she is inspired to 'act' for herself Marion is a formidable and worthy Victorian heroine of the stage or novel. She gauges the risk of 'dropping from a window' or 'scaling a wall' and, once she ascertains that she will not break an ankle in the fall, she plans her escape. Instead of having to go to such an extreme Miss Lester agrees to help her and ensure the front door is not bolted so that she can make her way out to the gate, which is not kept locked. In a scene that in some ways pays homage to Clarissa's attempt to escape through the garden door in order to prevent her enforced marriage to Solmes, the two Victorian women effect Marion's flight. Whereas poor tragic Clarissa is inveigled away by Lovelace 'acting' the role of an honourable man and then duping her with the 'noises off' of servants and pursuers so that he can spirit her away, Marion and Miss Lester are more self-determinedly in control as directors of their action.

Marion's night-time escape leads her into one more stage of trials before she is finally free from her tormentor. She negotiates London at night as she makes her way from Mortlake to Putney. This feat of daring echoes the title of the farce written by Jim Rodney, Flora's future husband, 'Go To Putney'. In Notebook A **(48)** Braddon recorded Jim's determination to have his play acknowledged:

> Jim's farce – Have you written nothing else – No & I won't till they have taken that. They shall take it. I mean to rub their noses in it before I have done.
>
> I have schemes – (. . .) – that's what the French call it – for dozens of plays – but they shall have nothing till they take 'Go to Putney'. [70]

Marion enacts this farcical title in making her way to Putney through the foggy night, but in the mode of a melodrama heroine. Braddon dealt with this episode in a witty fashion, despite the ordeal that she made Marion endure. The woman is

exerted almost to breaking point in order to extricate herself from these adventures. At one point she crosses the railway line near the River Thames fearful of being crushed under an on-coming train, 'the great black monster with the burning eye'.[71] The ordeals of Clarissa Harlowe and Bertha Rochester are not enough for her. Braddon must also hint in passing at the fate of Anna Karenina, or Carker from *Dombey and Son*.

Marion has enacted so much in order to finally attain the Victorian ideal of happy secure middle-class domesticity with the man she loves. Her mind turns to her fiancé throughout her journey, anticipating how he will come to her aid and defend her honour, but he is not permitted to intervene in this particular role. Everything is left up to Marion herself. Whether she likes it or not the role of heroine is hers and she has to fulfil it to the bitter end. She meets a policeman who suspects she might be a prostitute, why else would a woman be out alone in the foggy dawn? The 'real' story of why she is thus embattled is too preposterous for her to relate. She has to part with her last coin in order for him to escort her part of the way from Wandsworth to Battersea and convince him that she is neither a prostitute nor a madwoman. Her demeanour prevails, he senses her middle-class qualities and so is not provoked into detaining her. For some while Marion teeters on the brink where she is treading that fine line between respectability and disgrace. The way she conducts herself when starving, thirsty and exhausted means everything at this stage. She finally finds sanctuary in Mrs. Rodney's parlour. The contrast of the excesses of her adventure with the comfy domesticity of the theatrical lady's house is marked:

> . . . up the steps and into the passage, and then into Mrs. Rodney's parlour, where the brightly burning fire, and the breakfast table, with Britannia metal teapot and white-and-lavender cups and saucers, made a vision of homely comfort after the long night in darkness and cold.
>
> The vision of the comfortable room flashed before Marion's eyes like a landscape seen in the lightning, and in the next minute she was lying on the sofa – guided by the sagacious and dexterous Flower – in a dead faint. Jim came from his den and saw her there, surprised beyond power of utterance. He looked at this mother, and his mother looked at him, and the

> Flower looked from one to the other with precocious wisdom, and then Mrs. Rodney said slowly –
> "Poor girl! She must have gone through a strange escapade."[72]

The mundane is shot through with the melodramatic here. The cups and saucers, detailed down to the colour, the bright fire and the shiny teapot are all taken in and registered before Marion slumps down in a dead faint. The melodrama heroine has burst in on the cosy domestic scene. Where has she been, what has been her 'strange escapade'? The reader knows, is privileged to the information, but we know, as Marion does, that no one else will believe her. Her 'escapade' is so strange. How can she describe the events of being forced to imitate the ordeal of Clarissa Harlowe or Bertha Rochester? Braddon combined the extravagant, melodramatic ordeal with the worldliness of the moral evaluation ordinary society would give it. A young woman disappears on the eve of her wedding to a respectable, wealthy man – what can have happened other than the most suspect behaviour on her part? There is only a young policeman who might remember her stumbling along near the gates of Richmond Park and offering him a coin – to buy his silence possibly?

Fortunately for Marion the first house she comes to is that of the sympathetic Rodney family. The youngest, the 'Flower of the flock' with her 'precocious wisdom' has learnt enough from her career on stage to date that even she is not perturbed at the sight of Marion's entry. Whilst Jim departs to fetch Flora Mrs. Rodney ('Richardson' in the early plan notes) sits with Marion to ascertain what has happened. She displays her sympathy towards Marion's plight and her knowledge of the world, based upon years of experience in the theatre:

> ' . . . I can perfectly understand that a young lady, whose personal appearance would command an engagement in a London theatre, [let us never forget how beautiful Marion is] may have been overpersuaded (*sic*) into an alliance with a gentleman of large means, while her heart was otherwise engaged. "I called you *Clifford,* and you called me *Madam*!"' concluded Mrs. Rodney, with a strangled sob, reminiscent of long-vanished days when she had admired herself as Julia in *The Hunchback.* [73]

Marion tries to explain the events, but Mrs. Rodney resists her rationale, preferring instead to represent the heroine's ordeal in her own mind as one possessed of a 'modern' explanation involving a woman's reluctance at entering a passionless marriage and the prospect of elopement with her lover, yet still theatrical, having the qualities of the roles she excelled in during her career. Mrs. Rodney can sympathise because she knows what it is like to be in Marion's place, having played these very types on stage. Marion's attempts at explaining the real version of what happened to her are met with incredulity on the part of the retired actress. In her mind they are too preposterous, too outdated, 'powder-and-patch' adventures unlike the truthful representation of the 'modern melodrama'.

> Mrs. Rodney's brow contracted more painfully than before. She thought of children carried off by gipsies, of forcible elopements in the powder-and-patch century; but today, a young lady carried away from Cheyne Row, at eight o'clock in the evening! It was too incredible, too impossible even for modern melodrama, which aspired to represent things that might happen.[74]

This is a delicate position for Marion. She is trapped between conflicting narratives and genre, and the presumptions on the part of her 'audience' of what is feasible and credible in a modern narrative and what she tries, in vain, to represent of her narrative. What witnesses to the aftermath of her 'escapade' will believe and what is 'too impossible' for their experience of life and theatre to allow them to comprehend complicate Marion's situation with them and with her suitor, Donaldson. It is a 'romantic' story that she cannot prove. Donaldson wants evidence of locations, times, dates and names, but she cannot provide them in order to secure the veracity of her testimony. Where are the sleuths when she needs them? She had tried to punctuate her ordeal with reliable indicators of her identity: a trail of crumbs in the forest. She left her engraved watch with Miss Lester, a wedding present from Donaldson that had been etched with her married monogram 'M. D'. This has not worked. Marion is not yet able to 'prove' her identity as the wife of Donaldson.

Nothing but the influence of the 'madman' Vernham remains. The letter he dictated to her whilst she was his prisoner and sent to Flora provides proof of her guilt. The evidence incriminates her like the wrongly accused heroine in melodrama suspected of transgressing. Her fiancé does not know what to believe. In his pragmatic business oriented world where he is accustomed to dealing with 'fraud and imposture' the closest thing to a mysterious abduction case he can recollect is that of Elizabeth Canning and her 'fabrication' of her 'marvellous exploit',[75] another eighteenth-century incident. Donaldson is in a turmoil of doubt and suspicion and decides to believe the worst of Marion, again ascribing her experience to an eighteenth-century fictional narrative:

> He could not believe her story. It savoured too much of the last century; of the wilds of county Limerick or county Clare. It was like a chapter out of *Sir Charles Grandison.* There was nothing modern in it but the chloroform.[76]

Unfortunately for Marion, her fiancé alights on the wrong Richardson novel. If *Clarissa* had been his comparison he might have retained faith in the virtue of his fiancée. He agrees to marry her, 'I cannot let you go. You belong to me'. He needs to provide a mother for his daughters, Rosalind and Celia, and offer at least the façade of respectability, doing as much as he thinks is noble to salvage Marion's reputation. He 'had been cruel' however, and 'insulted' her by not believing in her story. They marry in a drab ceremony and he leaves her after they argue, with Marion trapped now in a 'monotonous' domestic round without a loving husband as 'a kind of state prisoner in a gilded cage'.

With all the resources of a respectable middle-class marriage at her disposal but none of the love, she devotes herself to being a dutiful mother to her stepdaughters; by loving them she can love their father. Donaldson has left strict orders that his daughters must not be subjected to bad influences, but in typical fashion, these girls also seek to defy their father. The next generation proceeds as the previous one had done. They want to meet a 'real actress', a proper one – not like Flora who is a 'young lady'. 'We want to see the other one', they reiterate and Rosalind 'should

love to be an actress like Mrs. Keeley, and act comic housemaids'. Celia interjects: 'Papa said she acted Jack Sheppard, and escaped out of Newgate, . . . Mustn't that have been lovely (?)'[77] Braddon laid on the irony of the situation as she rounded off the novel by introducing a network of references, real and fictional, to imply the full range of seemingly impossible stories. If only the other characters heeded their own fictive, mythic, actual and performative references then Marion's story might be believed.

The young women, again, in defiance of their father are seeking the thrills that the stage might offer as audience and performer. The flight from Newgate, enacted before an audience, offers all the excitement that melodrama can conjure but Marion's ordeal remains unacknowledged. She has embodied the spirit of the heroine of melodrama, yet is attributed none of the acclaim. Braddon successfully contrasted the lived and the performed ordeal, both in the fictive world of the novel, but one is acknowledged and one is not. Around her, other characters concoct their version of Marion's lived experience, refusing to allow that she had an ordeal in emulation of Clarissa Harlowe, Jack Sheppard, or Elizabeth Canning. Her adventures are too anachronistic for the 1850s; they are not 'modern' enough. Braddon, via Marion, referenced other real life criminal cases that were in her opinion also wild and 'incredible'.[78] Braddon long maintained the view that criticism levelled against her and other popular writers for the incredible, extreme nature of their plots was misplaced. Truth and real experiences could be stranger, crueller and more exaggerated than fiction in her eyes.

In a final twist, just as the novel reaches its close, in the dying seconds before the finale, Vernham writes to her – admitting defeat. His last letter that contains a full confession saves Marion's virtue. Donaldson and she are able to confront the Lesters at Mortlake and everything is wrapped up in Marion's favour. There could be no other conclusion, and the anachronism of a Clarissa for the 1850s hangs over the characters as an astounding adventure. They thought they knew their times so well,

but as Marion has realised even in 'these smooth days of an advanced civilisation desperate deeds had not become obsolete'.

Braddon's long and detailed emulation of *Clarissa* made for a remarkable work and an unexpected and intriguing direction for a late-century Edwardian novel. To draw so extensively from one of the longest and most unremitting explorations of manners, morality and sentimentality was a daunting and difficult prospect. What could a writer do with this monumental examination of eighteenth-century society, deception and virtue? Braddon's idea for transposing it to her lifetime meant that she could also incorporate autobiographical sentiments in the novel. The structure and resolution required a dual narrative, 'double' yet 'separate' of another young woman (Flora) subject to the same restrictions and privations but who prevails with the help and security proffered by a loyal and honourable suitor (Jim Rodney) and a promising career. Braddon might have still borne in mind the comments of Henry James from 1865 when as a young writer he reviewed *Aurora Floyd*. He had attributed to Collins's *The Woman in White* the status of a 'nineteenth-century version of "Clarissa Harlowe"' and had named Collins as Braddon's immediate (patriarchal) predecessor, as Richardson had been for Jane Austen. 'Jane Austen founded the novel of "domestic tranquillity," [Braddon] the novel of "domestic secrecy."'[79] Perhaps, Braddon was attempting to bypass the label of sensation author in her late career by acting in the capacity of Richardson's inheritor, rather than that of Collins.

However, this far down the line, in the Edwardian period of her career, she had evolved non-sensation explorations and adopted the influence of Zola and Balzac in the interim. She might have recollected the criticism levelled at her draft for *About the Childhood of Tommy and Harry* in 1862 from George Sala her fellow defender of 'light literature'. He had called it 'the same confounded old pigtail and squared toe business'. There was something in eighteenth-century fiction and melodrama that retained a hold on her. It was the return to *Clarissa*, read during a time of personal anxiety and difficulty, mourning the death of her husband and on the return

to England to be with her dangerously ill daughter that prompted this response to Richardson in her fiction.

A Lost Eden is an antidote to *Clarissa* and an effort at redressing the balance of injustice inflicted on the virtuous eighteenth-century heroine as a consequence of male control and domestic anxiety. Added to this note of sympathy and redress in the novel, in the vicinity of Cheyne Walk (from where Marion is abducted), lives Thomas Carlyle. When Flora is walking back late from the theatre, discussing her future with Jim by her side, Carlyle is there in his lodgings burning the midnight oil as the Victorian 'sage' in the background of the narrative.[80] As a presence in the novel and part of Braddon's formulation of times past, 'In Those Days' of 'A Lost Eden', Carlyle is cast as a learned, hard-working figure. It was to Carlyle that Dickens looked in the writing of *Hard Times*[81] and Braddon too felt the influence of Carlyle's critical histories, which she was re-reading at the end of the century.[82] At the zenith of the sensation novel, when Braddon had experienced her first big success in 1863, Carlyle's wife Jane had an accident that left her seriously ill. In his *Reminiscences* Carlyle recorded the experience:

> A hideous pain, of which she used to say that 'common honest pain, were it cutting off one's flesh or sawing of one's bones would be a luxury in comparison,' seemed to have begirdled her, at all moments and on every side. Her intellect was clear as starlight, and continued so; the clearest intellect among us all; but she dreaded that this too must give way. 'Dear,' said she to me, on two occasions with such a look and tone as I shall never forget, '*promise me that you will never put me in a madhouse,* however this go. Do you promise me now?' I solemnly did. 'Not if I do quite lose my wits?' 'Never, my darling; oh, compose thy poor terrified heart!'[83]

The anxiety of incarceration concerned Carlyle's wife and became known to readers later in the century with this touching portrayal. Braddon's use of Carlyle in *A Lost Eden* is subtle, underplayed. At one point, Matilda, the Sandford's maid recounts how she knows the troubles Mrs. Carlyle is having in hiring a reliable servant, she can only find 'sluts' who let her down.[84] Braddon's rendition of relocating the issues of female incarceration, anxiety and social propriety are dramatic and resonant with

the models provided by Richardson and Bronte. To the echoes of Clarissa Harlowe and Bertha Rochester, Braddon added the real, lived presence of Thomas Carlyle and the domestic travails of Jane Carlyle, subtly and understated.

Amidst the raging passions that are inspired by Lovelace and Rochester is the portrayal of the influential historian who would later in his *Reminiscences* recall the promise he made to never imprison his sickly wife in response to her earnest request. The domestic situation of the characters in *A Lost Eden* is touched by the competitive ethos of Carlyle and his predisposition toward the forceful energy of the Byronic hero and the absolute rule of Oliver Cromwell. It is no coincidence that the deserted house in which Vernham imprisons Marion at Mortlake is in amongst the winding lanes near to a crumbling manor once owned by Cromwell.[85] Braddon highlighted the ambivalence of Carlyle's Victorian politics. They were inappropriate on the domestic front, where the imposition of 'Might is right' led largely to destruction, pain and even death via dictatorial husbands and lovers. These allusions and references are almost lost amidst the clamour of the melodramatic experiences, but they are there nonetheless, a presence in the background to the cruelty inflicted upon Marion and Mrs. Sandford.

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[1] M.E. Braddon, *Sons of Fire*, London: Simpkin & Marshall, 1895, 1.

[2] Wolff, *Sensational* 353.

[3] Ibid 473–74, n 30.

[4] Braddon, Letter 13, December 1894, in Carnell 272.

[5] Pamela K. Gilbert, 'Braddon and Victorian realism: *Joshua Haggard's Daughter*', *Beyond Sensation: Mary Elizabeth Braddon in Context*, New York: State University of New York Press, 1999, 184.

[6] Braddon, Notebook A, BFC (MS), Appendix 11, 23-8.

[7] Braddon, *Sons of Fire* 157.

[8] Ibid 261-62.

[9] Braddon, Notebook A, BFC (MS), Appendix 11, 23-4.

[10] Ibid 24-5.

[11] Braddon, *Sons of Fire* 159.

[12] Ibid 161-62.

[13] Braddon, Notebook A, BFC (MS), Appendix 11, 27.

[14] Gilbert, 'Braddon and Victorian realism' 185.

[15] Braddon, Notebook A, BFC (MS), Appendix 11, 25-6.

[16] Ibid 26.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Ibid 19-22.

[19] Ibid 27.

[20] Ibid 29.

[21] Ibid 27.

[22] Ibid 29.

[23] Heidi H. Johnson, 'Electra-fying the female sleuth: detecting the father in *Eleanor's Victory* and *Thou Art the Man*,' in *Beyond Sensation: Mary Elizabeth Braddon in Context*, New York: State University of New York Press, 1999, 264–65.

[24] Ibid 266.

[25] Wolff, *Sensational* 273.

[26] Ibid 358.

[27] Braddon, Notebook A, BFC (MS), Appendix 11, 35.

[28] Braddon, Notebook B, BFC (MS), Appendix 11, 69.

[29] Braddon, Notebook A, BFC (MS), Appendix 11, 36.

[30] Ibid 40.

[31] M. E. Braddon, *A Lost Eden*, London: Hutchinson, 1904, 54.

[32] Ibid 55

[33] Braddon, Notebook B, BFC (MS), Appendix 11, 70.

[34] Braddon, *A Lost Eden* 62.

[35] Carnell, *Literary Lives* 22-3.

[36] Braddon, *A Lost Eden* 90.

[37] Samuel Richardson, 'Preface', in *Clarissa; or, the history of a young lady* (1st pub. 1747–48), London: Penguin Books, 1985 & 2004, 35.

[38] Braddon, Notebook A, BFC (MS), Appendix 11, 35.

[39] Braddon, Notebook B, BFC (MS), Appendix 11, 71.

[40] Braddon, Notebook A, BFC (MS), Appendix 11, 39.

[41] Angus Ross, 'Introduction', ibid 23-4.

[42] Braddon, Notebook A, BFC (MS), Appendix 11, 37

[43] Braddon, Notebook A, BFC (MS), Appendix 11, 59.

[44] Braddon, *A Lost Eden* 33.

[45] Ibid 48.

[46] David Skilton, *Defoe to the Victorians: Two centuries of the English novel*, London: Penguin Books, 1985, 23.

[47] Braddon, *A Lost Eden* 89.

[48] Ibid 157.

[49] Braddon, Notebook B, BFC (MS), Appendix 11, 69.

[50] Ibid 70.

[51] Braddon, *A Lost Eden* 48-49.

[52] Braddon, Notebook B, BFC (MS), Appendix 11, 71-3.

[53] Skilton 22.

[54] Ibid.

[55] Ibid 23.

[56] Richardson, Letter 152, 517.

[57] Angus Ross, 'Introduction', in Richardson 20.

[58] Skilton 22.

[59] Ibid 23.

[60] Braddon, *A Lost Eden* 402.

[61] Ibid 387.

[62] Braddon, Notebook A, BFC (MS), Appendix 11, 41.

[63] Braddon, *A Lost Eden* 404.

[64] Ibid 220-21.

[65] Ibid.

[66] Ibid 391.

[67] Ibid 404.

[68] Ibid 406.

[69] Ibid 415.

[70] Braddon, Notebook A, BFC (MS), Appendix 11, 36.

[71] Braddon, *A Lost Eden* 428.

[72] Ibid 434.

[73] Ibid 437.

[74] Ibid 437-38.

[75] Ibid 446.

Braddon, in *The Trail of the Serpent,* also referred to the Elizabeth Canning case. Chris Willis, in her editorial notes for the 2003 edition, offers the history of the case: 'Elizabeth Canning was an eighteen-year-old London servant who disappeared on January 1, 1753. She reappeared a month later, emaciated, dirty, and in rags, claiming that she has been abducted and forced into prostitution. She identified her abductor as Mary Squires, a seventy-five-year old gypsy. Squires denied the charges and produced an alibi, but was found guilty at the Old Bailey Sessions before the Lord Mayor, Sir Crisp Gascoyne. She was executed, and her alleged accomplice, Susannah Wells, was branded and imprisoned. But Gascoyne later obtained a Royal Pardon for Squires and had Canning prosecuted for

perjury. Although thirty people gave evidence of her good character, she was found guilty and sentenced to the penal colony in Australia for seven years. The case caused great controversy. According to the *Newgate Calendar*, "No affair that was ever determined in a judicial way did, perhaps, so much excite the curiosity of the public, as that in question. The newspapers and magazines were for a long time filled with little else than accounts of Canning and Squires." (Wilson, George Theodore, *The Newgate Calendar* [1816; reprinted London: Cardinal, 1991], p. 290.)': Chris Willis, 'Afterword', in M.E. Braddon, *The Trail of the Serpent*, New York: Random House, 2003, 457–58, n 5.

[76] Braddon, *A Lost Eden* 448.

[77] Ibid 460-61

[78] Ibid 446-47, the Elizabeth Canning case, and also the Rush attempted murders.

[79] Henry James, *The Nation*, 1865, cited in Wolff, *Sensational* 152–53.

[80] Braddon, *A Lost Eden* 208.

[81] Wheeler, *English Fiction* 81.

[82] Wolff cites Braddon's range of reading within the works of Carlyle, recorded in her diaries at various times, in *Sensational* 267, 375, 378.

[83] Thomas Carlyle, *Reminiscences*, London, 1881, 262–63, cited in John Sutherland, *Victorian Fiction: Writers, publishers, readers*, London: Macmillan, 1995, 82.

[84] Braddon, *A Lost Eden* 227-28.

[85] Ibid 360.

Chapter 4:

The presence of Dickens: the 'Introduction to *Little Dorrit*' and *Before the Knowledge of Evil*

Attention must be given to the debt owed by Braddon to Charles Dickens and the influence he exerted over her writing. In the frame of mind that gripped her at the end of the nineteenth century she was feeling nostalgic for the 'vanished Victorian days',[1] and looking to Charlotte Bronte and re-reading Thomas Carlyle, searching as far back as the eighteenth century for inspiration. Of course Collins is widely acknowledged by critics to be the 'literary father' of sorts to Braddon; this patriarchal hierarchy must take Bulwer Lytton into account also. Of all the male novelists that critics have described as having the greatest influence and 'claim' over inspiration for her fiction Dickens, surprisingly, has been amongst the least frequently cited. This is in spite of the fact that Braddon was quoted by the *London Society* magazine in 1888 as claiming that the most persistent entertainment and 'pleasure' she had derived 'all round' from any of her reading came from Dickens.

Of all the famous names of the age in her acquaintance, Dickens was one that Braddon did not meet and befriend, although she and Maxwell knew Collins and Sala well. She admired him from afar as a fan, only knowing him, as the mass market of readers did, from his fiction and reputation. The wide critical recognition of Collins's *The Woman in White* as the inspiration for *Lady Audley's Secret* has meant that Braddon's most famous novel has entered into scholarly debate as shorthand for the sensation craze triggered by Collins. The fear of incarceration, felt by Jane Carlyle in 1863, was prompted, John Sutherland has suggested, by the feverish frequency with which troublesome wives seemed to be 'put away' by their husbands[2] and the reflection of this in popular fiction. However, Braddon's first novel, published as *The Trail of the Serpent* but written with the title *Three Times Dead*, was requested by her Beverley printer when she was living in Yorkshire to be

comprised of 'the human interest and genial humour of Dickens with the plot-weaving of G.W.R [*sic*] Reynolds'.[3] Dickens featured first in her career, with Reynolds, before Collins.

Sarah Waters, in her introduction[4] to the recent reissue of *The Trail of the Serpent* describes this encouragement Braddon received from her first publisher to write 'in more or less blatant imitation of the popular, plot-based fictions of Dickens and G.W.M. Reynolds'. This paraphrasing of Braddon's own article about the genesis of the novel is slightly misleading. Braddon stated the 'human interest and genial humour' of Dickens were the important components she had to include in her composition, and not the plots. The mood of sentiment, emotion and character was the selling point to be gained from Dickensian inspiration.

Of all the aspects of his influence that Braddon did not attempt as derivation, imitation or in any other way were Dickens's plots. There is simply not the range included in her fiction. Her plotting is more confined and intimate, without the huge scope of social class and multiple strands. There is incident, certainly, as one of her trademarks, and the features of secrecy, mystery and detection are all there. Reynolds, Collins and Richardson are influences for plot but Dickens offered something else to her as reader and novelist. Waters acknowledges this as the 'tone' that reads as unfamiliar coming from a female author and she ascribes to it 'something almost Dickensian'[5], in order to attract the popular readership of the early twenty-first century. As many authors as possible are associated with Dickens when reissued by publishers today in the hope of exploiting the public's preconceptions of entertainment and readability in the context of Victorian fiction, however obscure. This distracts from the substantial importance of Dickens in Braddon's career.

The BFC contains Braddon's literary criticism on Dickens's *Little Dorrit* in which she outlined the qualities that she ascribed to Dickens as a mature reader of his works and novelist in her own right at the end of the nineteenth century. In this

writing we can discern the notions that she attached to his work and throughout her career there are indicators of the importance of his writing in the construction of her novels. The BFC also contains her autobiographical manuscript *Before the Knowledge of Evil* in which Braddon actively used the template of David Copperfield's childhood to assist in the reminiscent descriptions of her own early Victorian childhood.[6]

By the time she was using Dickens as a means of expressing her own feelings and reminiscences about the nineteenth century she was famous and established on a global scale. Her response to how she felt about Dickens as a writer and influence is derived from the passionate words of Juliet in Act 2 Scene 2 of *Romeo and Juliet*. In an interview of 1911 in the *Pall Mall* Magazine Dickens was one of those writers she described as the 'gods of my idolatry'.[7]Against the greats of European literature of the age Dickens took precedence. Juliet's lines read in full:

> Do not swear at all;
> Or, if thou wilt, swear by thy gracious self,
> Which is the god of my idolatry,
> And I'll believe thee.

It is interesting and touching to realise the former actress's carefully chosen quotation comes from the passionate teenage heroine, significantly believing in the power of the man she idolizes. Braddon aligned herself with the youthful intensity of Juliet in her devotion to the great men of literature. They are there for her as heroes from Shakespeare were there. The parts she played on stage included some based upon Dickens's characters or directly adapted from his work, such as Fanny Squeers in Andrew Halliday's adaptation of *Nicholas Nickleby* and Charity in an adaptation of *Martin Chuzzlewit*.[8] Braddon's admiration for Dickens can be recognized in the way it pervades her writing and in the dedication and frequency with which her characters use motifs from Dickens and endeavour to express feelings and states of mind by alluding to his works. One way in which she does this occurs in *Sons of*

Fire with the passion that Cecil Patrington feels for Dickens's works. Cecil lives for two things: exploration and hunting in Africa and the works of Charles Dickens.

> Allan [Carew] was a devoted worshipper of Scott, whom he held second only to Shakespeare; and as Cecil Patrington claimed exactly this position for Charles Dickens, the question afforded an inexhaustible subject for argument . . . [9]

Cecil's devotion to Dickens offers him a philosophy of life whilst he is in the wild terrain of Africa. He believes in the 'goodness and purity' of the local inhabitants, the porters and bearers, as though they were children and in 'matters theological' he has an honest Christian sensibility unchanged since he was a boy. In this he is alike to the most innocent of Dickens's characters, whilst at the same time a hunter and crack shot:

> Far away from new books and new opinions, knowing not the names of Spencer or Clifford, Schopenhauer, or Hartmann, this rough traveller's religion was the religion of Paul Dombey, of Hester [*sic*] Summerson and Agnes Whitfield [*sic*] and Little Nell, of all the gentlest creatures in the Pantheon of Charles Dickens.[10]

This is an affecting and amusing passage in that the roughest and sternest of the trio of explorers, who would never relinquish his Winchester rifle unless it were prised from his dead hand, has the sensibilities and feeling of Little Nell and Paul Dombey. This makes him the greatest of 'captains' for traversing the wilderness in the footsteps of Livingston and embodies some of the spirit of Carlyle's concept of a hero.[11] He philosophises upon and frequently quotes Dickens and would 'dose [Allan and Geoffrey] with Pickwick and Weller as he dosed them with quinine'.[12] He is their leader and guide and also their protector and teacher. From Cecil they learn the ways of the 'dark' continent taking inspiration from his form of colonization and exploration, which is distinctly respectful, gracious and gentlemanly, but lethal if the need arises. When he is taken from them by a sudden fever, claimed by the continent he loved, the other two men are bereft and hold hands by his grave. Allan has learnt the philosophy of trust, faith and dignity from

Cecil, 'We shall see and know our friends in heaven, and look back and know that we were children groping in the dark. Try to believe, Geoffrey. Belief is best'.[13] It is also Allan who finally employs the philosophy of non-disclosure of past secrets, crimes and infidelity, 'Let the past remain a blank…' He has translated this meaning from his experiences learnt from the wise and honest Cecil in Africa and negotiated it in reference to what he should do about his father's past secrets. In this way we never discern, truly or conclusively, whether or not he and Geoffrey are brothers. This disclosure is not the most important revelation for the novel.

Robert Mighall has recently argued for Dickens's renegotiation of the Urban Gothic in *A Geography of Victorian Fiction: Mapping history's nightmares*. In such novels as *Oliver Twist, Little Dorrit* and *Bleak House* in particular, Dickens 'imaginatively relocates the traditional Gothic mansion in the heart of the modern city'.[14] Importantly, he also addresses the relinquishing of the tainted legacy undertaken by significant figures in Dickens's novels. The 'haunted' past and the 'sins of the parents' traditionally positioned at the opening of Gothic novels are brought into a 'modern domestic context' by Dickens, 'he evokes this pattern and its supposed fatality only to deny it . . . ' Esther Summerson, for example, rejects the 'stern necessity' of the 'logic' of the secret of her birth and resurrects her familial and domestic role to marry Woodcourt and 'have children . . . free from any suggestion of ancestral guilt'. Esther's prayerful reasoning out of her situation is ultimately rewarded and clearly had a powerful impact upon Braddon, as she echoed the heroine's logic of 'Christian resolve and optimism'[15] in her characters of the African explorer and his disciple Allan Carew. Like Dickens, Braddon evoked the 'pattern' of the potential legacy in store for the 'Sons of Fire' only to dispel it through Allan's non-disclosure of his father's and Mrs. Wornock's shared past. Geoffrey, who does believe in the fatality of life and stands as a Gothic figure with an inherited 'taint', is ultimately cruel, aggressive, and manipulative, and then insane and pitiable. His harsh, suspicious qualities are not disclosed at the outset. They do not form the Gothic prologue to the novel warning us of a madman on the loose in rural Wiltshire. They only enter the novel at the final stage, when he has tried to kill Allan

and they require a clinical diagnosis. Braddon used the tradition of the sensation form that she helped to develop with this final disclosure, but damaging secrets are dispossessed of their force and the 'importance of forgetting', as Mighall calls it, is emphasized.

Cecil Patrington is also an interesting repetition of a character encountered in Braddon's earlier fiction, Roderick (Rorie) Vawdrey in *Vixen* (1879). Braddon called this novel 'a simple easy-going love-story with a frank high-spirited girlish heroine'. Wolff refers to it as a 'vehicle for vigorous radical social satire'.[16] It is a witty Tennysonian idyll of sorts with the outdoor, horse-loving girl Violet (Vixen) Tempest frequently described as 'Guinevere' in her ancient New Forest setting[17] and with her flaming red hair 'glistening in the sunshine' it appears as though she is 'posing herself for a pre-Raphaelite picture'[18] all the time. Rorie is Vixen's beloved childhood sweetheart and their series of difficulties are eventually conquered by true love's predestined, enchanted almost mythic qualities. They elude the doomed provenance of the lovers to which Braddon compared them – Lancelot and Guinevere – and create a happy haven in the New Forest full of ancient customs and dutiful serfs. Rorie, we discover, is the template for manhood that Braddon revisited in the heroic figure of Cecil years later. The two characters have much in common; their university careers are very similar, for example. Braddon described Rorie's time at university as a mixed experience with sporting glory replacing academic ability:

> He went to Oxford, and got himself ploughed for his Little Go, with a wonderful facility. For politics he cared not a jot, but he could drive tandem better than any other undergraduate of his year. He never spoke at the Union, but he pulled stroke in the 'Varsity boat. He was famous for his biceps, his good nature, and his good looks; but so far he had distinguished himself for nothing else.[19]

Cecil had a similar experience of Oxford by applying himself with the same sort of dedication to academic achievement, 'passed my Little Go with a flourish of trumpets; and my people hoped I had turned over a new leaf.' He then replaced that

initial triumph, his 'scramble' through the exam, with ambitions for travel and dropped out of University to become an explorer in emulation of Burton. Cecil's reading matter had expanded as far as the tales of African travels and of course Dickens and any hope of politics, law, intellectualism and so on are forestalled, and like Rorie, he replaced academic learning with sports and is accepted in that fashion. The depiction of these two men is interesting as Braddon firmly established them as rejecting notions of intellectualism, philosophy, politics and traditional learning through academic means. They both have an active, expansive, universal, Christian approach to the world and a Broad Church fairness and ideal of kinship and brotherhood with their fellow men. With this attitude, approximating to that found in the heroic characters in Dickens's novels, Rorie is proud of the fact that he admires the author of *The Pickwick Papers*, reinforcing Braddon's ideas of the power and worth in entertaining 'light' literature. In *Vixen* Braddon articulated these notions held by her hero amidst the debate she introduced into the novel around aestheticism, art and literature.

The idyllic surroundings inspired by Tennyson and the innocent love story that she professed to write disguise this underlying debate about value in the arts and compatibility in relationships. In Chapter 37 'Love and Aesthetics', Braddon crystallized the argument around these topics by depicting the problems that the sporting hero Rorie encounters in his conversations with his fiancée Lady Mabel Ashbourne. These are humorous exchanges with Braddon at her most satirical and dry. Mabel is a budding poetess with aspirations to be a second Browning and in the novel, along with the spinster intellectual Miss Skipwith and her search for a universal religion, is the mouthpiece for snobbery in the arts and disdain for popular and light literature. Mabel has created her hierarchy in the arts that she tries to compel others to follow. First comes the learning from the classics, then metaphysics and science, into which she dilutes Hegel, to come up with her poem the 'Tragedy of the Sceptic Soul' in what she considers is a style that emulates Browning. The exchange between Rorie and Mabel is worth noting in full for the way in which

Braddon covered the major points of the debate in the literary arts in an amusing way, especially when one considers the couple intend to marry:

> 'I frankly confess that some expressions in your – er – Tragedy - of – er Soulless Scept – Sceptic Soul – were Greek to me.'
> 'Poor dear Roderick, I should hardly take you as the highest example of the *Zeitgeist*; but I won't allow you to call yourself stupid. I'm glad you like the swing of the verse. Did it remind you of any contemporary poet?'
> 'Well, yes, I think it dimly suggested Browning.'
> 'I am glad of that. I would not for worlds be an imitator; but Browning is my idol among poets.'
> 'Some of his minor pieces are awfully jolly,' said the incorrigible Rorie. 'That little poem called *Youth and Art*, for instance. And *James Lee's Wife* is rather nice, if one could quite get at what it means. But I suppose that is too much to expect from any great poet?'
> 'There are deeper meanings beneath the surface – meanings which require study,' replied Mabel condescendingly. 'Those are the religion of poetry-'
> 'No doubt,' assented Rorie hastily; 'but frankly, my dear Mabel, if you want your book to be popular-'
> 'I don't want my book to be popular. Browning is not popular. If I had wanted to be popular, I should have worked on a lower level. I would even have stooped to write a novel.'
> 'Well, then, I will say if you want your poem to be understood by the average intellect, I really would sink the scientific terminology, and throw overboard a good deal of the metaphysics. Byron has not a scientific or technical phrase in all his poems.'
> 'My dear Roderick, you surely would not compare me to Byron, the poet of the Philistines. You might as well rank me with the author of *Lalla Rookh*, or advise me to write like Rogers or Campbell.'
> 'I beg your pardon, my dear Mabel, I'm afraid I must be an out and out Philistine, for to my mind Byron is the prince of poets. I would rather have written *The Giaour* than anything that ever has been published since it appeared.'
> 'My poor Roderick!' exclaimed Mabel, with a pitying sigh. 'You might as well say you would be proud of having written *The Pickwick Papers*.'
> 'And so I should!' cried Rorie heartily. 'I should think no end of myself if I had invented Winkle. Do you remember his ride from Rochester to Dingly Dell? – one of the finest things that was ever written.'
> And this incorrigible young man flung himself back in the low arm-chair, and laughed heartily at the mere recollection of that episode in the life of the famous Nathaniel. Mabel Ashbourne closed her manuscript volume with a sigh, and registered an oath that she would

> never read any more of her poetry to Roderick Vawdrey. It was quite useless. The poor young man meant well, but he was incorrigibly stupid – a man who admired Byron and Dickens, and believed Macaulay the first of historians.[20]

Their intellectual incompatibility means this relationship is doomed from the start as Rorie's taste for novels and poetry is 'quite useless'. This summary of the defence of good quality popular literature coming from the hero reflects the debate entered into by Braddon during her publishing career. 'Poor' 'dear' Rorie just does not understand what is wrong with popular poetry and novels that depict character, drama and romance so well. These low-level writings, according to Mabel's strict doctrine, epitomize the problem with artless literature for the masses and with a sigh she has to relinquish any hope of educating her fiancé. Her hierarchical lists of achievement in the literary arts place Byron at the bottom level of poetry for Philistines, below which comes the novel - with Dickens representing the lowest of the low. By showing her with such an inverted view of literature, discordant with the hero and the author, Braddon was offering a counterattack to the criticism levelled at her popular sensation literature and Dickens's serial novels. With 'popular' pronounced upon with such disgust by Mabel, Braddon summarized the problems inflicted upon novelists of the period and echoed the representation of the debate around artistic quality given in some of her other writings, such as *A Lost Eden*, *Circe*, *The Doctor's Wife* and in the BFC *Told by the Poet*.

Mabel is not a bad person and she is not harmful to other characters. She is a snob, and an unhappy snob at that. She is duped by her other suitor, Lord Mallow, who gets his secretary to read her poem and summarize his comments on it. This allows Mallow to court her with a feigned interest in her writing and thus encourages her to jilt Rorie, freeing him up to marry his true love Vixen. The tangled love affairs of the young landed gentry and aristocracy are dealt with in a witty and touching manner in the novel, with artistic snobbery and love of literature integral to the happy resolution of events. Tennyson provides the backdrop of lyrical romance to the action, Browning is the ideal of aspirational poetics and learning and Dickens is the voice of normal, common humanity. The high meets the low in Braddon's

authorial interjections in *Vixen*, using the voice of one of Dickens's most honest and gentlemanly of characters:

> Lady Southminster was stationed in the Teniers room, a small apartment at the beginning of the suite which ended in the picture-gallery or ball-room. She was what Joe Gargery called 'a fine figure of a woman,' in ruby velvet and diamonds, and received her guests with an indiscriminating cordiality, which went far to heal the gaping wounds of county politics.[21]

Sensitivity and fairness are championed here with the proper 'fine' woman Lady Southminster who would meet the approval of Joe Gargery, a barometer of common sense opinion for Braddon it seems. This quality, underpinned with the approval of a Dickensian role model, actually succeeds in healing social 'wounds'.

Vixen herself acknowledges her flaws, 'How idle I am!' she declares and decides that she has reached her final point of intellectual challenge when barely out of adolescence: 'I don't think my poor little mind would bear any more stretching . . .' She resolves that the extent of her reading in order to be compatible with Rorie will not be 'highly cultivated': 'I shall read Byron, and Tennyson, and Wordsworth, and Keats, and Bulwer, and Dickens, and Thackeray, and remain an ignoramus all the days of my life.'[22] The blunt resolution is both amusing and ironic. This list of poets and novelists for the 'ignoramus' precisely reflects Braddon's own reading and accounts for some of the principal figures of influence on her work and career. As Wolff acknowledges, Vixen's 'heart is clearly in the right place'. Whilst she and Rorie, on their own admission, are not the most intellectually sharp of characters, they actually have an invaluable wisdom; they do no harm with their values which they have learnt from the 'human interest and genial humour' of Dickens and the romance of Tennyson. They are not sheltered from the world but able to distinguish right from wrong for the common good. This they will bring to bear on the management of their considerable joint estates after their marriage for the good of their tenants. They are the best possible combination of passion, morality and modern *noblesse oblige*. They embody the truly 'popular' sentiment learnt from

important authors without the complex intellectual judgements imposed by Lady Mabel.

Wolff credits Braddon with, in contrast to the simplicity of learning of her hero and heroine, a 'radical' satire and 'criticism of the selfish rich [of the county] surrounding themselves with opulence while denouncing or ignoring the poor.' At the time of publication, he ascertains, this satire 'passed unnoticed'. *Vixen* is a hidden gem amongst Braddon's lesser-known novels.[23] It is an example of how she struck a note with Dickens's satirical edge, interests and humour, without concocting anything from his plots. Instead she employed a formulation of influences from Tennyson and the Pre-Raphaelites and her own experience of life amongst the county set in Wiltshire and Hampshire. This is a discriminating study of the notions of the 'popular' versus the 'high' literary and cultural forms, incorporating satirical radicalism.

Much of the satirical quality is thanks to her inspired rendering of the characters' tastes in literature and poetry and the embedded values of common sense and gentility derived from Dickens's novels portrayed in contrast to the vulgarity and snobbery of the 'county' families. Gillian Beer has remarked, in her review of the modern reprint of *Vixen*, that the novel is the 'most confident' of a batch of works reissued together in the early 1990s and including Rhoda Broughton's *Cometh Up As A Flower, Not Wisely But Too Well*, Collins's *Miss or Mrs?* and *The New Magdalen*. As a representative example of what still remains to be uncovered of the huge variety in popular fiction of the nineteenth century, Beer likened the opening of *Vixen* to the work of D.H. Lawrence and considered it 'witty and high-spirited' enough to 'change the dowdy image of Victorian bestsellers'.[24] It can also operate as a sample text to demonstrate Braddon's variety and range, with Vixen a very useful contrast to Lady Audley and Aurora Floyd. As a totally good character she is, surprisingly, not dull. As a woman who is helplessly romantic and beautiful she stumbles upon common sense criticism of those in power with an innate, innocent logic. As Wolff has noted, the 'radical' sympathetic politics that this novel so

meticulously inserts, almost unnoticed, are amongst its modest strengths, especially when Vixen encourages Lord Mallow, an MP for a rural Irish constituency, 'to admit that he himself only goes there each year "for the fishing." This enables her to crush him: "And then you go into the House of Commons and rave about Ireland . . . I think all this wild enthusiasm . . . is the silliest thing in the world when it comes from the lips of landowners who won't pay their beloved country the compliment of six month's residence out of twelve."'[25] Read as a Gothic/Medievalist pastiche inspired by Tennyson's idylls and *The Princess*, this novel does take on the satirical resonance Wolff attributes to it over the issues of the gentry's socio-political responsibilities and education for women.

Marriage is the saving grace waylaying any risk of societal taint or inherited problems for the hero and heroine. Vixen's mother is a disturbing figure of a child-woman who tries to impose her values on her daughter, makes the daughter take on the maternal role, but wrecks her own life and health with a disastrous second marriage to the mercenary Captain Winstanley. He represents a further echo of sensation and the Gothic in his villainous attempt to control the heroine thanks to his thwarted lust for her. He tries to incarcerate Vixen on Jersey with the withered Miss Skipwith - who is engaged in her one-woman search for a universal faith and believes in the superior prowess of female intellectualism. Vixen cannot subordinate herself to this 'Princess'-like fortress and has to be 'rescued' by Rorie. The hero possesses a determination to be married, either to Mabel out of misplaced obedience to his family, but ultimately to his kindred spirit Vixen and ventures out to the prison isle to recapture his bride.

By contrast Cecil Patrington in *Sons of Fire* has not adopted this Nickleby or Copperfield-like heroic romanticism. He knows all that he needs to know of life and Braddon gave him a surprising Dickensian character to emulate, 'Perhaps he, too, had dreamed his dream, even as Mr Jaggers had.'[26] The 'dream' of Jaggers referred to is that articulated by Wemmick: 'I shouldn't wonder if *you* might be planning and contriving to have a pleasant home of your own, one of these days, when you're

tired of all this work.'[27] Jaggers navigates the Urban Gothic environs of secrecy and the lives of the outlandish criminal lowlife characters that come to his door; washing the taint of the proceedings from his hands in his obsessive fashion. He sighs and nods his head at Wemmick's comments and tells Pip ' . . . we won't talk about "poor dreams"; you know more about such things than I, having much fresher experience of that kind.' Jaggers is one of Pip's teachers on his road to true gentility assisted by Wemmick and Joe Gargery. His lawyer and guardian is the keeper of the secrets and from him Pip distinguishes the blight and damage that the revelation of such secrets might bring. In the legalistic lecture when he reiterates the story 'Put the case, Pip . . .', of the 'bedevilled' lives of those he has encountered, Jaggers advises him of the persistent need for secrecy over Estella's parentage. Cagey to the last, Jaggers nonetheless carries this out with a heroic tender-hearted resolve of the kind with which Braddon endows Cecil Patrington as he acts as instructor to Allan Carew in the wild environs of the 'dark' continent, as full of dangers of its own variety as the urban labyrinth of early Victorian London.

These character dynamics, inspired by Dickens, populate Braddon's fiction. The particularities of Jeffson's loyalty to George Gilbert in *The Doctor's Wife* owe a similar debt to *Great Expectations*, with Braddon's own features added to the structure that inspire confusion amongst the other characters, touched as they are by possible male sexual desire underpinning the servile devotion. In its dedication to the pathology of the female reader *The Doctor's Wife* provides ample Dickensian allusions within Isabel's reading matter and the ideology of female desire. As Lyn Pykett points out in her introduction to the novel Edith Dombey is hardly 'a happy role model' for the heroine. However, as Heilmann notes in 'Emma Bovary's sisters', Isabel stretches the constructs and tropes of literature to such extremes in her imagination 'she consistently resists the Flaubertian plot in both its moral and sensational configurations',[28] and in the process reinvents other narratives to suit her ideals and desires.

Prominent amongst these is that of Edith Dombey, but the narrative is Isabel's – with a Duke pulling his carriage to a halt in the Walworth Road to ask for her hand – the 'image' is that of Dickens's character, or, rather, that realized by his illustrator: ' . . . and she would be married to him, and wear ruby velvet and a diamond coronet ever after, like Edith Dombey in Mr Hablot Browne's grand picture.'[29] Again, 'being' the characters from Dickens's novels is not actually the most persistent feature of Isabel's daydreams, she often compares her situation unfavourably to them: 'It was not so that Florence Dombey's friends addressed her. It was not thus that little Paul would have spoken to his sister . . . Her father was not a Dombey . . . she had no good Captain Cuttle . . . no noble-hearted Walter.'[30] Being 'like' or 'unlike' the characters from a Dickens novel is a consistent method she has of framing her world, for example, that at 'nearly eighteen' she is older than Florence Dombey who 'was married and settled, and the story all over' by that age. She does, however, opt for the unworthy, attractive men, ' . . . it was Steerforth's proud image, and not simple-hearted David's gentle shadow, which lingered in the girl's mind when she shut the book.'[31] This agrees with her desire to have nursed Lord Byron at Missolonghi.

Probably the most extreme example of recasting, and reinvention of narrative trope, was included as an authorial intervention from Braddon when she considered that Isabel might have a destructive, masochistic, fatal urge:

> I think [Isabel] would have worshipped an aristocratic Bill Sykes [*sic*], and would have been content to die under his cruel hand, only in the ruined chamber of some Gothic castle, by moonlight, with the distant Alps shimmering whitely before her glazing eyes, instead of in poor Nancy's unromantic garret. And then the Count Guilliamme de Syques would be sorry, and put up a wooden cross on the mountain pathway, to the memory of - -----, ['fatality'], and he would be found some morning stretched at the foot of that mysterious memorial, with a long black mantle trailing over his king-like form, and an important blood-vessel broken.[32]

Here, Braddon restored Dickens's characters from the 'new terrain' of the labyrinthine Urban Gothic environment[33] as Mighall calls it, to the original Gothic

landscape of castles with ruined chambers on twisting mountain pathways, so that Isabel's possible fantasy of cruelty and murder is literally relocated, geographically and fictionally, as far away from the 'unromantic garret' of the dead prostitute as possible. Braddon also transported Isabel to the supernatural point, beyond death, in her fantasy when she could be reassured by *her* Bill Sikes's suicidal remorse at destroying her. In Mighall's critique on the renegotiation of the Gothic undertaken by Collins in his story 'Mad Monkton' he comments on the how: '(t)he supernatural and psychiatric are conjoined . . . transforming the supernatural into the pathological, Gothic into Realism, and a legend into a "case".'[34] Whilst Braddon (Mighall and other critics maintain) did a similar thing with her composition of *Lady Audley's Secret* by reconstituting murder and mystery into a domestic setting and exploding the myths of safety and security in the Victorian household environment, here, with Isabel, she did the opposite. Isabel's desires and urges for passion and her undeveloped sexual notions, led Braddon to concoct a 'legend' of Gothic supernatural proportions from the 'case' of Dickens's murdered London prostitute.

Braddon's allusions to the dynamic of relationships in Dickens's novels could then be extraordinarily involved and subtle, challenging the conventions and some of their reinventions. She also looked to mirroring and replicating them in a more traditional fashion. Braddon established the background to the 'case' that is pursued by her prototypical female sleuth character Eleanor in *Eleanor's Victory* by drawing in an associative framework with Dickens's *The Old Curiosity Shop* for her dynamic between father and daughter, as Carnell has argued:

> The relationship between Eleanor and her father is not unlike Little Nell and her grandfather in *The Old Curiosity Shop* with his uncontrollable gambling, fantasies of wealth and plans for Eleanor to be an heiress: he even calls her Nell. He is also one of the first unreliable fathers in Braddon's novels.[35]

This is an important landmark in Braddon's fiction with both the instigation of the female sleuthing role and the unreliable paternal figure arising in this novel and both went on to figure prominently in her work. It is appropriate that Dickens, one of her

idolized 'gods', helped her articulation of what was so important to her in autobiographical and fictional modes. One of these stories, with an autobiographical foundation, draws extensively on Dickens's model of recollection, reform and reconciliation found in *A Christmas Carol*. Braddon's *The Christmas Hirelings* (1894) deals with the introduction of a group of orphans into a country house at Christmas to create the real meaning of the festivities for the jaded gentility of the household. It is a story, as she described, 'about children, which should be interesting to childish readers, and yet not without interest for grown-up people'.[36]

In Notebook A in the BFC, Braddon drew up the plans for this story, using methods of scripting for the dialogue between the characters that she transferred to the finished published version. The ideas of redemption and the restoration of domestic family ties and affection are plotted in the Notebook in an economical fashion, mainly with the use of this experimental 'staged' dialogue.

> **(70)**
>
> Elderly man rich, misanthropic, something of a humourist [*sic*], discusses Xmas pleasures in circle of friends.
> Children are the only creatures who really enjoy Xmas, says Lady Viola, if one has no children of one's own one ought to hire some.
> Z. laughs, & says he'll think of it – sportive niece amused at the idea – urges him to carry it out – hire some children, nice ones, to make a noise in the gloomy corridors & great hall of the old mansion in Bucks. Suggests different children in neighbourhood – all rejected.
> Elderly bachelor friend chips in –
> I think I know of some children who wd. just do –
> Orphans –
> Yes, orphans – father dead –
> & the mother – not an intrusive person – I hope – who wd. trade upon our little jest afterwards [37]

This dialogue plan covered characterization, situation and background of the main adult roles. Within the space of a few pages Braddon planned the idea of the children entering the household for a country Christmas, transposed to Cornwall, the location

of her childhood visits to the old Braddon family estate at St. Kew near Skisdon. She indicated their slang speech and the development of the relationship between the old misanthrope and the children who are eventually revealed to be his estranged daughter's offspring, placed in his household by the bachelor friend Danby in order to reconstruct the domestic affection that has been lost.

(71)

The children are brought on Xmas Eve – by bachelor, behave charmingly – win old man's heart –
revelation – they are the fatherless children of the daughter he cast off for marrying his enemy's son –
They are so little – I had no idea they wd. be infants –
I am afraid I shall tread upon them –
Oh no you won't – because of their individuality.

The thin end of the wedge – children reticent – confess that they were told not to talk about their home – Sir J. reproaches (D)anby –
Oh, you wanted the thing to begin & end with Xmas –
you were afraid of the F.e W.

Children struck with luxury of food – frankly greedy –
T.D. proposes a toast after Xmas dinner. T smirk. M. breaks into slang –
And serve them jolly well right! [38]

Katherine Mattacks indicates the associations between this tale and the 'emotional regeneration' and redemption that take place in *Silas Marner* (1861) and *A Christmas Carol* (1843)[39] in her introduction to the story. Sir John Penlyon is the Scrooge figure in dire need of regeneration and this happens for him thanks to the innocent devotion of his granddaughter 'Moppet'. The illness that the little girl endures is the means of redemption for the old man and he is reunited with his estranged family, with Moppet, recovered from her illness, as his favourite companion and the 'little wonder' he has rediscovered. Braddon's experiments with dialogue in the Notebook plan were formulated as a script and appeared in the

finished published Prologue to the story in the same direct-speech scripting of characters in a play. The inhabitants of Penlyon Place discuss the meaning of Christmas and how to create the full sentiment of the season with the introduction of the children.

> **SIR JOHN:** My dear Danby, the notion is preposterous, - except in St. Giles's, where babies are let out to beggars by the day or week, there can be no such people.
> **DANBY:** There is every kind and grade of people; but one must know where to look for them. Do you give me permission to hire two or three – say three – cleanly, respectable children, to assist Miss Hawberk to get through a solitary Christmas in a lonely country house, with two old fogies like you and me?
> **SIR JOHN:** That depends. Where do you propose to find your children? Not in the immediate neighbourhood . . . I must beg you to leave me uncompromised by your foolishness.[40]

Sir John's reticence is soon dispelled when he meets Moppet, the youngest of the three and probably an autobiographical depiction of Braddon from her childhood. In the plan Braddon rapidly covered Sir John's reservations, 'I am afraid I shall tread upon them,' to the point of his redemption when he fears he shall lose Moppet.

> **(73)**
>
> Danby, you shdn't have done this – It was cruel very cruel - ?
> To let me love her – if I am to lose her –
> You won't lose her – We'll make a good fight for it anyhow. [41]

The plans of Chapters 3 and 4 were laid out with the 'idea' for the continuation of the plot in a few simple phrases, followed by sample dialogue of the children's 'slang' and the grandfather's gradual redemption by little Moppet who 'never had no father'.[42] He is forced to admit his actions towards his family, as she lies ill. The developments of this simple story that reflected the sentiments of *Silas Marner* and *A Christmas Carol* are dealt with economically in the plan that offered everything required within a few pages for the draft leading to publication. The intent and focus

of the story were outlined in the redemptive fables of Dickens and Eliot. Braddon simply had to outline the plot and characters for her Christmas audience; the expected ideals were already in place. She built her version upon autobiographical elements from her childhood when she had privileged holidays with the wealthy side of her family in Cornwall. Of course the sentimental impact of the sick child or diminutive heroine on her deathbed were not exclusively Dickens's creations – Braddon had suffered the death of one of her own children. The happy ending, for a seasonal publication, and the regeneration and rebuilding of domestic happiness owes it origins to Dickens's development of that market for popular publications.

Braddon's outline work in Notebook A demonstrates the efficiency with which she worked on this model as a vastly experienced writer of such works. She operated in an economical, bold fashion and created 'scene' and characters for her stories with broad brushstrokes and a confident framework of reference and associations. These acted as triggers for memory in the final composition and enabled her to handle many parallel plans simultaneously. With the precedent of Dickens's stories she could afford to use these triggers and short cuts in outline and anticipated the accepted relevance of such a tale.

The plans Dickens drew up for the serial numbers of his novels show his establishment of what became these accepted conventions and sentiments in Victorian literature. Braddon, at the turn of the nineteenth century, concerned herself with the representation of Dickens - the man and the novelist, seen in the introduction she wrote to 'a costly American edition of *Little Dorrit*' in the BFC. She acknowledged his dedication and prowess in developing such a rich seam of ideas and sentiments that, in effect, created a market for other novelists to pursue. In the way that she introduced the triggers for recognition of French novels, Shakespeare plays, associated sensation novels and real life crime, she also had her series of Dickensian elements: Jaggers, Sikes, Edith Dombey, Scrooge and others for her audience to recognise and interpret. The presence of these in her works fosters them as a genre in their own right, succeeding in reinforcing the import of the

novelist after his death and into the twentieth century. Dickens as a 'god of my idolatry' does not leave much room for interpretation or questioning the route that she hoped his influence would continue to have.

In his plan for the first number of *David Copperfield*, Dickens returned in 1849 to an eighteenth-century autobiographical style after *Dombey and Son*, and he organized the story as a 'piece of exposition' with 'rich possibilities latent in the Peggottys and Betsey Trotwood', 'with . . . possible themes for future development'.[43] John Butt and Kathleen Tillotson offer a transcript of the plan for the first number,[44] which shows the experimentation with names, the economical, bold imprints of chapter headings and *aide memoirs*. Dickens engaged in the focused planning of individual works whilst keeping in mind possible future plots. Braddon's Notebooks also show a range of simultaneous plans and economical draft endeavours. In Dickens's working plans he employed 'an economy of words' without 'casual embellishment' that led to the composition of his dramatic episodes, full of 'ominous' forecasts for the characters.[45] John Forster 'found the "'unity of drift or purpose . . . apparent always"', with the 'fortunes of the actors' forewarning the reader towards a strengthening of 'our . . . emotions'.[46] Braddon used a similar theatrical grounding and a system of foreboding elements for her characters' futures. She registered these with questions: 'Danby, you shdn't have done this – It was cruel, very cruel - ?' as well as the introduction of a 'big idea' as a 'what if?' to remind herself of the possible twists and turns and fluidity of the stories as she planned them.

Braddon's reinforcement of Dickens's capabilities and strengths as a novelist led her to a system of foregrounding his characters at certain points in her novels and punctuating her efforts with the sentiments and ideology found in his writing. To discover such frequent and admiring allusions in the work of one novelist towards another suggests that there is a determined process in operation to perpetuate the vocabulary of exchange and meaning across published works and years. An ideal opportunity arose for Braddon to develop this further with the invitation to write the introduction for a 'costly' American edition of *Little Dorrit*. This is her belated

tribute to her idol and an attempt at critiquing the novel with the chance of focusing on Dickens as the man, the artist and the Victorian figurehead.

She produced this typewritten manuscript for F.G. Kitton's 'autograph' series with her typical rapidity. She relished the task; it was ready in January 1903 six months before it was required. The publisher George D. Sproul, was responsible for the series due out in 1904. Kitton died in 1904 and the *Little Dorrit* edition was never published, Braddon's introduction was never printed and it is unrecorded by Wolff.[47] She carefully preserved it, like so many of her favoured projects, and it was uncovered with the Cobbett papers. She kept it together with some of her script fragments and autobiographical notes. It was in an envelope labelled in Braddon's handwriting 'Little Dorrit Introduction written for costly American edition', with the address 'Mrs. Maxwell Lichfield House Richmond'. Kitton intended to produce a series of by then popular classics with introductions written by other famous authors. The chance to write an introduction to Dickens made a profound impression upon her; she dispatched it to the publisher well before the due date, from where it was returned to her in the envelope addressed to Richmond, after which she kept it in her desk until she died.

It is not known whether Kitton or Braddon chose *Little Dorrit* for her contribution to the 'autograph' series. It is, on first impression, an unusual association; Braddon 'the Queen of the Circulating Library' and 'author of *Lady Audley's Secret*' writing the introduction for one of Dickens's late satirical novels. Of late, however, this no longer seems so incongruous. Braddon's range and initiatives in satirical writing, such as *The Lady's Mile* and *Vixen*, whilst remaining relatively unacknowledged for nearly one hundred years, now emerge in possession of the accomplishments attributed to the satirical forms of the period. Vixen Tempest might not be challenging the courts of Chancery, parliamentary candidates on the 'hustings', or the wrongs of the Circumlocution Office directly, but in her own modest way, alongside her fellow characters, she operates within her world and can draw out and 'crush' the hypocrisy of those who do wield power. Similarly the voice of

Sigismund Smith the sensation author is now credited with the power and intelligence it deserves.

The vigour with which Braddon approached the task of introducing Dickens's great work can be discerned by her tone in its execution. In assessing her novels of the time and their consistent acknowledgement of and allusion to Dickens, this project was clearly exactly the sort of commission she would welcome. The typed manuscript, running to thirteen pages, includes Braddon's handwritten amendments and editing. She pursued the story of the novel's creation with biographical references which she gleaned from Forster's 1874 biography.[48] In the extracts below, the underlined words and phrases represent those passages crossed out by Braddon and their replacements (in her handwriting in the original manuscript) appear in italics.

(1)

> . . . *when* those all-observant eyes of the eight-year-old Charles Dickens surveyed *scrutinised his father's obliging neighbours,* the Porter family, in their squalor and dirt, being sent by his captive father to borrow Captain Porter's knife and fork, as a preliminary to his first prison dinner, that dinner with a something gipsey like and pleasant to the child's eager fancy, which pleasantness in misery, with many other details of prison life, is familiar to the readers of David Copperfield. [49]

Childhood and loss of innocence resonate throughout this introduction, as she empathized with the young Dickens. She described with romantic elaboration what she thought he might have felt during the period of his father's imprisonment for debt and drew in the immediate reference to *David Copperfield*. The impression we get is that *David Copperfield* of all Dickens's novels was Braddon's passion. She was consistently full of praise for it and that extended to her use of it in her own childhood memoirs.

At this early twentieth-century point of her career she was nostalgic for the Victorian past of her life and Dickens embodied this in his work. His was the voice of the period that she looked to in order to examine what it had meant in the previous sixty years to be a Victorian. Her own autobiographical reminiscences were full of observations from childhood and the sensations and impressions of shared meals and trips out in London. The appropriateness of this kind of material begins to emerge as Braddon progressed with this introduction. Her frame of mind supplied a thoughtful and thought-provoking reflection on Dickens's late work. She too inclined towards reflections of childhood struggle and the parent/child dynamic in her work of the early twentieth century, which found a further outlet in her contemplations of Amy and William Dorrit after a consideration of the author's personal struggles.

Braddon considered the many forms of characterization in the novel along with the critical reception of Dickens's work in the *Edinburgh Review*. This Introduction was not a critically distanced, objective appraisal. It contained her personal perspective in her attempts to understand the author's creativity and greatness. But she was not always so awestruck with Dickens that she was unable to maintain a balanced view in her critique of some of the characters. She did not like Mrs. Clennam, neither the character's inclinations nor Dickens's use of her in the novel and the trajectory of her behaviour and treatment of Arthur. Braddon wrote:

(11)

> The old house, the grim woman, reappearing fitfully and at long intervals, seem hardly to belong to the story. The secret of Clennam's birth reduces tragedy to melodrama, and adds no interest to a character which is deeply interesting in itself, by reason of its moral beauty. Yet the house and the

(12)

> woman are depicted with all the force of the genius that sees the thing it describes; and the <u>maimed</u> *crippled* fanatic in her prison house of long years, making up her account with her

> Creator, might have been more effective as the supreme and single interest of a story, than as a shifting figure in so wide a panorama as "Little Dorrit." [50]

She praised here the 'moral beauty' of Arthur, a feature that for her raised the novel to great heights, but was unsure of Dickens's use of 'melodrama' as she read it. If the novel, as she saw it here, was a 'tragedy' then his use of the devices of mystery and ambiguity was potentially a risky, redundant exercise and reductive of its greatness. 'Melodrama' was negative criticism from Braddon in this context. When she wrote about the other villains in the novel she went on to describe Flintwinch's twin brother as a 'lurid patch of melodrama' in an otherwise unblemished plot. She succumbed to the late Victorian perception of the theatrical influence as a subordinate form; reductive and unworthy of a place in the novel, despite her frequent resorting to melodramatic modes of depiction in her work, early and late. What was appropriate for her, it seems, was unworthy of Dickens. She chose to edit general negative references in her critique, not wishing to accuse Dickens of 'roughnesses' or 'loose threads' in the composition. Instead she praised Dickens for his capacity to sustain multiple plot strands, 'not a single thread is left with a loose end, when every point is made good, every detail and every motive is carefully accounted for.'[51] She did not deviate into territory that questioned the quality of Dickens's writing and where she felt there was a negative, distracting comment she cut it from the manuscript.

William Dorrit she singled out for particular, strenuous praise. For her he was 'always real, always consistent, is of a higher order, and this, I think, is the strong thread of humanity that holds the book together'.[52] The tyrannical mother reduced tragedy to 'melodrama' but the tyrannical difficult father was the hub of the plot. Because of her own experiences, despite the later tone of forgiveness and generosity regarding her own father in *Before the Knowledge of Evil*, Braddon felt drawn to the brilliance of the characterization of the father as he descended into increased cruelty and neglect, the more his fortunes rose. She compared him to Balzac's greatest

creations and 'one of the allegorical figures in Spenser's Faery Queen', despite her earlier aversion to Spenser when writing *Garibaldi.*

The 'domestic affection' that Braddon sought to perpetuate in her own life in the face of alienation from family and society found its opposite in the 'domestic bankruptcy' she discovered Dickens had had to endure during the period of composition for *Little Dorrit*, ' . . . when the cruel question of temperament and incompatibility had arisen between husband and wife, and the "dearest Catherine" of so many tender letters, the object of so much loving solicitude in the cloudless early years, had become "impossible", as mate and companion for that fiery spirit . . . ' The 'domestic felicity', or 'affection', of the ideal Victorian family was 'bankrupt'.[53]

The full and unbiased story of the Dickens' failed marriage will never be revealed, what Braddon did was to speculate upon it, gathering the evidence she could uncover from his correspondence. She used it to inform her own perception of failed 'domestic affection'. The order of character that William Dorrit represented for her manifested the redundancy of attempts to rehabilitate the father figure who had dipped so far beneath the measure of ideal patriarch. She resorted to this type in her own novels. In *The Doctor's Wife* Braddon created the character of Mr. Sleaford, the father of the heroine Isabel, who is a wastrel, criminal parent and Wolff offers evidence that this novel was a favourite of Dickens, according to Kate Perugini.[54] What is also interesting here is Braddon's choice of language in describing the Dickens' married relationship. The 'temperament' of husband and wife meant they were no longer compatible. She resorted to the concept of human nature and attempts at defining how and why a marriage breaks down with a deterioration and 'bankruptcy' of the nurturing, supportive 'domestic affection' and 'felicity' of early years. The breakdown is defined in natural, economic and emotional language – the language of the social novelist adopting the ideas of the functions of the mind and considerations of social capital.

But her contribution to the debate around the difficulties in the Dickens' marriage, their 'domestic bankruptcy' and discord, Braddon chose to omit from the final draft. She exercised a sensitivity and discretion over this, perhaps because she knew the ramifications of the perpetuation of such a topic and felt that whatever distracted from Dickens's reputation, as an icon of Victorian brilliance, would detract from his achievement in *Little Dorrit*. She also chose to disassociate herself from these factors with this omission; probably aware of the connotations they carried from her own experiences and those of her parents. To distinguish Dickens and herself as less than capable of enacting the Victorian ideal of 'domestic affection' might have been an error of judgment that she subsequently discretely omitted from this manuscript. The passage she cut, mostly quoted from Forster's *Life*,[55] reads:

(2)

The time had come when husband and wife distressed each other, and when an amicable parting seemed the only remedy. The time had come when the happy husband and father of Devonshire Place, in whose confidential letters every domestic allusion breathes of domestic

(3)

felicity, could write to his friend as follows – "Poor Catherine and I are not made for each other, and there is no help for it. It is not only that she makes me uneasy and unhappy, but that I make her so too – and much more so. She is exactly what you know; in the way of being amiable and complying; but we are strangely ill-assorted for the bond there is between us. God knows she would have been a thousand times happier if she had married another kind of man, and that her avoidance of this destiny would have been at least equally good for us both. I am often cut to the heart by thinking what a pity it is, for her own sake, that I ever fell in her way; and if I were sick or disabled tomorrow, I know how sorry she would be, and how deeply grieved myself, to think how we had lost each other."

In the midst of chagrin and agitation Little Dorrit was conceived and written. and if there are knots and loose threads *roughnesses* here and there in the web, amidst its glory *splendour* of colour and variety of design, what artisan of the pen can wonder? [56]

She left in the reference, a minimal phrase of her own, on the composition of the novel, 'In the midst of chagrin and agitation Little Dorrit was conceived and written'. The 'child' - the novel - born out of troubles, she described as taking on a life that surrounded the author in a dramatic maelstrom, transforming the Victorian novelist into a heroic figure embattled by the act of composition:

(3)

> The work was carried on in his*Dickens's* usual strenuous manner. Periods of enthusiasm, periods of depression alternated, alike intense, times when "the story was breaking out all round" him, and when he rushed up and down the hills near Folkestone, as if impelled by the rush of his thoughts and fancies, when the new story was everywhere, heaving in the sea, flying with clouds, blowing in the wind. [57]

The Victorian hero-author is here a figure of great drama and dynamism striding across the Kent hills composing his novel in an elemental rush. She compared Dickens to the iconic figure of Scott 'the Wizard of the North' composing his work in a romantic setting, instead of describing either of them as the troubled husbands, fathers and professionals that they were. The delicate ground of marital discord and domestic strife was replaced with a consideration of Dickens's brilliance in his satire of government and officialdom in the Circumlocution Office, 'touched with irony as scathing as Swift's'. He was the mighty author of the Victorian age striding the hills and ready to bring down the might of his 'scathing' pen on official corruption, incompetence, social and domestic repression and snobbery. It transpired she could not be disloyal to that image.

The spirit of Dickens's work, in anticipation of her use of *David Copperfield* as a template for her own life in *Before the Knowledge of Evil*, inspired Braddon to compare *Little Dorrit* with the earlier novel. *David Copperfield* was for her the mark of his genius in which he scaled the heights of composition.

(4)

> It seems to have been agreed by the Author's chosen friends that the book was not equal to the stories of his middle period – that with "David Copperfield" he had climbed to a mountain top which he was never to reach again. Yet it is only when the Marshalsea story is measured against his very finest work – David's childhood – the story of little Emily's fall and redemption – that the book must take a lower place. [58]

The expression of David's childhood embodied the power of reminiscence and memory and suited her frame of mind in middle age at the turn of the century after widowhood and loss had impacted so strongly on her. The urge to articulate this in her writing built towards her final unpublished memoir. She used David's childhood to help her represent her own experiences and this, along with the moral ideology of the fallen woman scenario so admired from Emily's narrative, was a regular preoccupation in her fiction. In *The Venetians* (1892), *A Lost Eden* (1904) and *Dead Love Has Chains* (1907) amongst her published work she returned to this theme frequently.

Throughout the 1890s and beyond the turn of the century in the Notebooks in the BFC, she mapped out possible frameworks for these and other novels and stories, unpublished and published, which return consistently to the isolation of the themes of childhood, reminiscence, moral dilemmas and transgression, fall and redemption. She was in a contemplative frame of mind at the turn of the century when she wrote this introduction following her husband's death and the births of her grandchildren. She looked back on her past with Maxwell and the moral burden that surrounded unmarried relations, loss of innocence, marital separation and adultery. She was the nostalgic Victorian reader of Dickens returning to the fall and redemption of Little Emily, as well as a woman who perceived in his theme the resolution of a guilty burden that might say something about her own situation.

As a natural movement in this introduction, from her celebration of the themes in *David Copperfield*, Braddon elaborated upon the gravity and nobility of the lovers in *Little Dorrit*. Arthur and Amy made the most interesting pairing of lovers in

Dickens's fiction for her because of the depth and intensity of feeling, particularly on Amy's part.

(8)

> And if Dorrit the father is Dickens's master piece of selfishness Amy Dorrit is one of the loveliest emanations of that romantic mind. In her all is generous, all is noble. She has a simplicity without silliness, modesty with a noble courage, sweetness with strength. No foolish word ever passes those delicate lips. Her love for her first friend and benefactor is as pure as it is deep, a love springing so naturally from that first experience of sympathy and solicitude in *from* a man of refined and gentle nature. [59]

Braddon did not enter into such profound regions in her novels. She retreated from the idealization of heroines and preferred instead to make them more pragmatic and ambitious, and certainly flawed. If she did select an icon of womanhood it was often with the intention of undermining and usurping that type. Amy is very different from Braddon's heroines. Where there are doubts and crises over the moral fortitude of Braddon's female creations, Amy is enduring and loyal. Braddon's women have these attributes, but there are usually problems and conflicts over the articulation of these qualities. They experience misunderstandings over how they express their desires and, as in her classic sensation plots, the immodesty of the women and their determination to enact their plot causes friction and conflict. As Winifred Hughes, in her famous examination of women's sensation fiction and women in fiction *The Maniac in the Cellar*, comments: 'Whether heroine or villainess, it is always a woman who demands the spotlight in the typical sensation novel. This in turn leads to a conflict between the aesthetic requirements of the plot and the conventional social role assigned to women.'[60]

Amy Dorrit is no such troublesome woman and would never demand the spotlight or be in conflict with the form of the novel in Braddon's mind. If Braddon had written the story then the heroine would have dramatically iterated her feelings on a regular basis and probably absconded to Paris with an unsuitable man. As an 'emanation' of

Dickens's mind, Amy Dorrit, whilst admired by Braddon, disconcerted her somewhat. Amidst such a positive critique of Dickens's work she did admit her reservations about the diminutive quality of Amy's manners and enactment that includes the physicality of 'the childlike woman'.

(10)

> One detail which *that* the reader may perhaps regret is the heroine's diminutive figure, which, insisted upon too much in the earlier chapters, tho' perhaps almost forgotten later, brings little Dorrit too near being a "freak." What could Du Maurier, the adorer of the "divinely tall", think of a heroine who was mistaken by the casual observer for a little child, and who had to stand on tip-toe to knock at a street door? [61]

The subjectivity that Braddon revealed here demonstrates her discomfort with the physical description of a woman appearing as a vulnerable, incapable being 'who had to stand on tiptoe to knock at a street door'. Too close to being a 'freak', Amy Dorrit's physicality disturbed her whilst the character's moral capability was one of the outstanding features of the novel. Braddon felt the emotional interiority of characters and their personal attributes should in some way define their exterior appearance, not necessarily disposing them towards obvious characteristics but at least, if they were to carry the novel, they ought to have enough stature, energy and dynamism to do so. Her women benefit from the mobility that access to modern travel offered and the capacity for acquitting themselves in, quite often, hostile urban environments. What could Eleanor Vane, Coralie Urquhart, or Aurora Floyd accomplish if they could not knock on a door? This meant that often sensation women were typically seen as 'vigorous' creatures 'rushing into crime, and doing masculine deeds'.[62] Braddon, however, was amongst those authors that managed to temper the stereotypical female sensation heroine with modifications that sometimes led to more controversy but did result in her creation of, for example, those mobile, exciting sleuthing heroines. What would, she asked, Du Maurier make of such a woman as Amy?

She was uncomfortable with Dickens's preoccupation with 'miniature daintiness', because it might suggest a descent into the freakish or ridiculous or something more disturbing. She contrasted, wittily, the perception of heroines from the creator of Trilby with Dickens's child women. She did, however, consider that there was a role for the mature child as opposed to the physically child-like 'miniature' woman. This was more in the mould of the young Agnes Wickfield who is such a help and support for her troubled father. The way Braddon depicted herself in *Before the Knowledge of Evil*, as 'confidante' of her mother, bears this out. She remembered how she appreciated her mother's taste and economy and endured the torture of piano lessons in order to please Fanny. 'Little Mary' also tried to mend her torn linen in secret so as not to disappoint her mother when she spoilt her clothes.

In her early fiction, she reflected this child-adult theme in *John Marchmont's Legacy* (1863). 'Little Mary' Marchmont is her father's comfort and support whilst he suffers from consumption and tries to scratch a living on the stage. She is a neat, 'lady-like' girl who has had her childhood stolen.

> She had never been a child. That divine period of perfect innocence, - innocence of all sorrow and trouble, falsehood and wrong, - that bright holiday time of the soul, had never been hers. The ruthless hand of poverty had snatched away from her the gift which God had given her in her cradle; and at eight years old she was a woman, - a woman invested with all that is most beautiful amongst womanly attributes – love, tenderness, compassion, carefulness for others, unselfish devotion, uncomplaining patience, heroic endurance. She was a woman by reason of all these virtues; but she was no longer a child.[63]

Braddon wrote here about the 'womanly attributes' that are found in the child who has the knowledge of evil, the evil of poverty. She felt this loss of 'innocence' very keenly in the figure of Mary Marchmont in her early career and went on to explore this sense of loss throughout her writing with the culmination of it in her own memoirs, *Before the Knowledge of Evil.* Braddon, Mary Marchmont, Amy Dorrit, Agnes Wickfield, in fact and fiction, endured the loss of their childhood 'Eden'. They deserve, as she felt she did, love and domestic affection and she pursued this

for her characters and herself and discovered it in Dickens's novels. It did not always happen in the conventional sense. Her own life with Maxwell was proof of that. They had both strayed from convention but he was her gentleman and stood by her, as her mother did. She in turn stepped up to the challenge that the domestic situation presented to her and was a conscientious and considerate stepmother.

In her Introduction to *Little Dorrit* Braddon embarked upon an examination of the nobility and worthiness of characters that did not necessarily fit the bourgeois, conventional expectations of gentility. She defended Dickens's portrayal of his heroes. The 'moral beauty' of Arthur, although he is not 'quite – quite, don't you know?' for the 'privileged classes', made him the kind of protector and suitor that women most admire. 'For my own part I think any woman would rather have such a guardian as Jarndyce, such a friend as Arthur Clennam, such a lover as John Westlock, than have to rely on the love or the friendship of a typical gentleman of the most accomplished depictor [*sic*] of <u>good society</u> *the privileged classes.*'[64] She identified Dickens's exercise, and identified with him, in the creation of moral, true, gentlemen, as a counteraction to the 'surface' of bourgeois gentility. She noted the class-conscious 'highly superior' criticism levelled at Dickens on a regular basis. He was, his critics accused, 'incapable' of depicting a gentleman because of his background. Dickens, of course, completely understood what entailed gentility in the novel. He defined this in his portrait of William Dorrit who is a mockery of gentlemanliness maintaining a façade during his period in the Marshalsea, and contrasted this with the resolve and love demonstrated by his youngest daughter and Arthur.

Braddon represented her enthusiasm in this Introduction for what was one of Dickens's most modern satirical novels and championed his lack of adherence to what she remembered as the conventional Victorian bourgeois ideas of gentility. Simultaneously she was enthralled by his depiction of the departed Victorian age and the heights of 'moral beauty' he achieved with the faithful lovers Arthur and Amy. The slump into melodrama detracted for her from this superior achievement

and she identified with certain conventions; that, for example, theatrical devices did not belong in a novel that analyses the moral decay of society and the persecution of innocence in so sophisticated and triumphant a fashion. She was, in some ways, on the threshold of tackling the critical role of melodrama in Victorian fiction, but was ultimately too close in time and practice to see it as a worthwhile part of the poetic mechanism of the novel. Juliet John in Chapter 4 of *Dickens's Villains* evaluates his use of melodramatic poetics in *Little Dorrit*; those that Braddon identified in reference to Mrs. Clennam and Blandois. What Braddon saw as the weaknesses, John is able to calculate as a component of Dickens's late formula and an 'inversion of the melodramatic vision' leading to an effective 'dehumanized' landscape in which the novel's events can take place.

> The disturbing sense of danger which the opening description [of Marseilles] exudes is that of a hollow universe where violence, the dominant form of energy, usurps passion. The atmosphere is repressed, claustrophobic, a dramatization of the dialectical relationship which can exist between violence and repression.[65]

Instead, Braddon registered with the 'strong thread of humanity' in the novel through the character of William Dorrit and saw the dialectic as the persecution of Amy by her cruel father that increases with his wealth. As a true Victorian nostalgic reader, she concerned herself not with the idea of 'violence' or whether melodrama could have a purpose in this novel but the virtue and innocence of Amy and the nobility and dignity of Arthur in the face of repressive snobbery, cruelty and secrecy. She was, at times, on the brink of considering the 'dehumanizing' effect – of the Marshalsea on Dorrit's character for example – but consistently retreated from developing this. Her analysis of the novel was to consider some of the same components of the dialectic that John does, but not to question them in the same way. The ideas of repression and tension in the novel were certainly not foreign to Braddon but she did not question their construction or origins in the same way that critics do a century later. They are a system of absolutes, existing in the universe, to be combated by Arthur and Amy and finally triumphed over. That is the essential

drama for Braddon: how successful are novelist, hero and heroine in overcoming the tribulations that afflict them without resort to melodrama if possible?

She claimed for William Dorrit the 'humanity' in the novel; that is the 'real' and 'human' weak figure of the selfish father. Blandois and Flintwinch are 'somewhat theatrical' and 'not quite convincing'. The appeal for Braddon of what *Little Dorrit* offered is embodied in the tension of the father/daughter relationship. The constant, devoted attention of Amy, who epitomizes love, is set against the weakness of the father whose connivance makes for, as Michael Slater suggests in *Dickens and Women*, 'Perhaps the most harrowing scene in all Dickens's work . . . in which Mr Dorrit hints with clumsy artifice to his perfectly comprehending daughter that she should help to make his situation more comfortable by pretending to be responsive to the honest love felt for her by young John Chivery . . . '[66] This 'harrowing scene', in which the heroine is beset by her father's lack of scruples, is a melodramatic feature and a natural consequence of the Marshalsea prisoner's behaviour thus far. Dickens used this configuration subtly, contributing to, as John sees it, the dehumanizing impact and the usurpation of 'passion'. Where this type of effect worked for Braddon in the display of Dorrit's human weakness, she could not say the same for the portrayals of the other 'theatrical' villains.

Braddon's own debt to theatricality and melodrama in her novels was a feature that she regarded as a weakness. In her letters to Bulwer Lytton during her early career she expressed her anxiety about this and chose to omit any references to her acting career in her autobiographical writing. It was perhaps one of the 'evils' that she chose not to include 'knowledge' of in her return to childhood innocence. This emphasizes her ambivalent relationship with many experiences in her life and the anxiety over 'domestic bankruptcy' that filtered through her writing from childhood 'nightmare terrors'.

This anxiety was sometimes exacerbated by the contemporary critical reaction to her novels, as Wolff and others have cited. In this Introduction Braddon mentioned

Dickens's detractors in 'Blackwood and the Edinburgh' in order to take the opportunity to answer them on his behalf, albeit years after the fact. She empathized with the difficulty he had to contend with in the face of what she called such 'malignant misrepresentation'. *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* was the vehicle for Mrs. Oliphant's anonymous attacks on sensation novels in the 1860s[67] in which she named 'Miss Braddon' as 'an Englishwoman knowing the attraction of impropriety, and yet loving the shelter of the law'. Years later Braddon accused the *Edinburgh* reviewer who attacked Dickens of being one of the 'Barnacle clan' of civil servants that he satirized in *Little Dorrit*. She took pleasure in her ability to defend him at last against the 'cudgels' of such reviews and was glad that *Little Dorrit* was soon to be reissued in American as a modern 'classic'.

As a mature, established author she did not need to defend her idol against criticism long past. There was still nonetheless enough of the anxious young actress turned writer in her make-up to take this opportunity for a counterattack against the mouthpiece of conservatism that had singled her out for personal criticism forty years earlier. The 'perfunctory criticism' in the *Edinburgh* 'asserts . . . "the catastrophe in 'Little Dorrit' is evidently borrowed from the recent fall of Houses in Tottenham Court Road, which happens to have appeared in the newspapers at a convenient moment".' [68] Braddon accepted that contemporary newspaper reports were a useful source but disagreed with the reviewer that this was a 'convenient' contrivance. She asserted that the house-quake was a complex device prefigured throughout the novel for even the most 'casual reader' to notice.

Braddon admired this adeptness of handling the 'moving panorama of life' and the strands of the plot, despite the mention from Forster that it was sometimes 'confused'.[69] Through her use of Dickens's characterizations as a template for childhood reminiscence, Braddon reached that point of consolidation and the drawing together of her own disparate strands of life shortly before she died. She would return to the themes of innocence lost and persecuted in her later works on many occasions. The resonance in *Little Dorrit* offered her the chance to gather

together the considerations of parent/child relationships, sibling selfishness and anxiety over 'domestic affection' and 'bankruptcy' brought about by bourgeois conventionality and replay it in her own writing. Dickens gave her the motifs and dynamics in *David Copperfield* and *Little Dorrit* with which to explore the concerns of her own life as time drew in. She had an opportunity to look back upon and reconcile her thoughts in relation to her various experiences but she never faltered in her continuing investigation of her own authorial identity. Dickens influenced her in this also. Her rate of composition in the last years of her life indicated this tireless examination. She found fresh routes into reflection.

Braddon's defence of Dickens's symbolic use of the house-quake might have triggered such a reflection, which she included in *Before the Knowledge of Evil* some years later. The 'collapse' of the house in *Little Dorrit* emphasizes the deterioration in bourgeois values and the destructive nature of secrecy and domestic repression - the bankrupt household literally caves in. The first house lived in by Braddon's parents collapsed in a 'house-quake' and destroyed all the newly acquired possessions and wedding gifts of the couple. She claimed it was a real event, recounted in her memoir *Before the Knowledge of Evil*. Was she prompted to reflect on her parents' marriage in this way after reviewing the 'house-quake' incident in *Little Dorrit*? Whatever the reality of the situation, she emphasized the symbolic nature of this in her life.

The only thing to survive this 'fall' was a partially complete edition of Byron's poems 'bound in white calf' and missing 'Lara' and 'The Corsair'.[70] This vestige from the ruin of her parents' early life meant that she read 'The Bride of Abydos' with her mother, and could imagine herself as Zuleika with her brother Edward in the role of Selim. She idolized her brother in the innocence of childhood, before she ever detected 'anything unbrotherlike' in Byron's depiction of his hero and heroine and before her experiences which led to her and Edward's estrangement. Thus she came full circle in her life and recollected the innocent catalysts that set her on the path of discovery and experience. Braddon's conclusion to her life, assisted by the

tools of fiction that Dickens offered her, saw the representation and final triumph of 'domestic affection' according to her own definition and values. As she recollected in her private notes 'M.E.M.':

> Whether the work I have done in literature is worth anything or nothing to the world at large it has been certainly worth a great deal to me for it has made at once the happiness & prosperity of my life, and it is to my mother's teaching & my mother's influence, my mother's admiration for stories wh. editors rejected & plays wh. managers declined, that I owe all I have ever done & almost all I have ever thought.[71]

The tools of contemplation and reflection provided by her unstinting admiration of and interest in Dickens's writing came into full effect in the unpublished autobiographical memoir *Before the Knowledge of Evil*. This work was probably composed in 1914, the year before she died. It is detailed, energetic and carried out with conviction. It provides a glimpse into Braddon's early Victorian childhood with an effective and affecting quality of snapshot memories and sensations, assisted by recollections and evaluations seen from the distance of adulthood and a world on the brink of war. It was probably typed on the same machine as that used for the composition of the *Little Dorrit* introduction.

It drew in her devotion to her mother and depicted Fanny Braddon as the embodiment of the taste, duty, sensibilities and humour in a woman afflicted by difficulties and the loss of 'domestic affection' in her marriage to Braddon's father. The marriage was never a 'love match' for Fanny.[72] Braddon's contemplation of her father's inadequacies and his relationship with her are worth noting in the context of her exploration of Victorian values through Dickens's work, and the method of substitution she employed in designating male novelists as patriarchal figures and mentors throughout her career.

If her father, Henry Braddon, was a disappointing figure who was neglectful and unsupportive of his wife and family then Braddon discovered, in the mentoring relationship with Bulwer Lytton, her friendship with Collins, and in the novels of

Dickens an extensive substitute paternal support network that was lacking in her childhood and adolescence. Criticism, friendship, inspiration, praise and understanding were all forthcoming in different proportions and in different forms from these male literary 'fathers'. Braddon needed this to address the worries and problems of childhood; an anxious period of time from her accounts in *Before the Knowledge of Evil*. Some of that time was spent in a Georgian townhouse in Soho:

> The sensations of those first years were so acute. The sense of vexation, recurring day after day in the long grey street where the sparrows were picking up their provender in the road . . .[73]

Small, intimate memories, vivid recollections of childish trinkets, caches of treasured objects, the envy that she felt at the privileges enjoyed by other children and her loneliness and lack of company form many of these anecdotal passages which are written as a continuous piece. There are no chapter breaks and she probably composed the work at the typewriter, without draft notes as guidance. The way in which the composition of her fiction appears in note form in the BFC distinguishes the compositional techniques employed for her published work. *Before the Knowledge of Evil* is not constructed in the same manner. There are a few handwritten amendments as there are on the manuscript of the *Little Dorrit* introduction. This autobiographical reminiscence was a departure for her in style and form and might not have been intended for publication.

It does however retain the self-conscious propriety and restraint of the lady novelist. She did not speak out of turn and was never completely condemnatory of family or associates. There is not one single mention of her acting career. This is partly because the memoir halts when she reached the age of about ten. But also the sense of propriety she still retained might have prevented her from pursuing the narrative further. She knew her brother and some family members had been outraged at her history and it might still have some detrimental memorial impact on her children and grandchildren. Her characters realise the importance of keeping family secrets, learning from the philosophy of Jaggers. Braddon curtailed the emotive impact of

reiterating the pain of the Dickens family at the failure of the famous man's marriage and perhaps she wanted to save her family from any strain down the years.

Life, in all its array of disappointments, triumphs, strangeness and novelty for the growing child, fills these pages – London street markets (she was the poor 'cockney' child after all), her first theatre visit, her 'coloured' nurse Mrs Allen, learning to read from a 'cruel' book and above all her unwavering passionate love for her mother. Fanny encouraged the adventurous spirit in Braddon:

> My mother had strong views about open air exercise – and a considerable portion of my life between two and four was spent in trudging by my nurse's side about the streets of London.[74]

London of those days, the 'hungry forties', figures highly and vividly in her memories. As a child of four to about eight years old she prided herself on her streetwise nature. She loved the colourful stalls of the vendors, the muffin sellers ringing their bells, the Punch and Judy booths on the heath and the occasional rare treat of cherries on a stick or white currants served on cabbage leaves. 'Shabby' and 'beguiling' London was never the same for her after her childhood and she was attracted and repelled by it, much as Dickens was when transforming it in his fiction into the monstrous, exciting 'character' of the city. Braddon recalled: 'I must have loved that old London in those days of awakening intelligence, the poor old London that had vanished as completely as the London of the Plantagenets'.[75] She felt a sense of kinship with other prominent Londoners and authors of the city's narratives, such as Reynolds and Dickens. Membership of the city populace in the difficult times of the 1840s and 1850s was a point of pride – a sense that if you had lived through those trials you had the right to claim the city and your place in the crowd.

The affinity with authors, Dickens in particular, places them within the context of family and friends of her youth. Into the equation of her mother, her nurse, visits from her sister Maggie and the joyous return of older brother Edward on holiday from prep school, came the learning and entertainment of those beloved writers:

Ainsworth, Mrs. S.C. Hall, Bulwer Lytton and tales from Shakespeare. On rare occasions came her father. He enters her memoir as a stranger, an intruder into the structure of security that Fanny had managed to construct for her lonely, youngest, late, child – perhaps little Mary was a mistake or a last attempt at reconciliation for the flagging relationship? Her father, having caused pain and distress to her mother with his persistent 'sordid' and 'humiliating' infidelity, and run up debts he could not cover, left Fanny and only arranged intermittent visits to see his daughters.

> After those early years in which I remember only my mother and nurse there appears in the book of memory another figure in the form of an agreeable gentleman in spotless linen, who took snuff out of a silver box, and who was associated with brown paper bags of winter fruit, which he would seem to have carried from Covent Garden, and with Sunday morning leisure in empty offices, and Sunday evening dress. This was Papa.[76]

Henry was a vague memory for his youngest daughter; he was that man who trimmed his 'superior' nails, always seemed well dressed and asked them: 'How's your mother?' This was a very vulgar turn of phrase in those days. He was particular about his boots and fond of commenting on his fine small foot and arched in-step. Whilst he was not a supportive and affectionate father he did provide her with the model and inspiration for some of her most amusing and interesting characterizations, and some of the deadly ones.

As a lazy young solicitor he inclines towards Robert Audley, including the imaginative side of that character that makes him susceptible to the fantastical and the Gothic in the world around him. Henry Braddon had 'chambers in Verulam Buildings in those early days, where he saw ghosts'.[77] As a smart, fashionable, fastidious man about town he is similar to Augustus Bannister in Braddon's unpublished story fragment *Told by the Poet*. He also provided the model for Isabel Sleaford's father in *The Doctor's Wife*. Braddon was possibly exorcising the memory of her father with that characterization in the early 1860s. Mr. Sleaford is a debtor, a criminal fraudster and eventually the murderer of Isabel's idolized poet, Roland Landsell. To cast the father in this spiral of criminal machinations that ruin

his family and cause neglect, suffering and trauma all round was possibly harsh, but an exercise she undertook in her writing that exposed some of her anxieties at that stage in her career. Mr. Sleaford favours boys, allowing his sons to run the house, and leaves his daughter totally bereft of paternal guidance in her dealings with men until he returns under an assumed name, on the run, and approaches her for cash to get him out of trouble. Henry Braddon, according to sources uncovered by Carnell, 'was especially proud of Edward [Braddon]' presumably due to his successful career in the colonial diplomatic corps.[78]

There is a conciliatory tone to Braddon's reminiscences about her father in *Before the Knowledge of Evil*: 'If Papa had not been Papa' and Henry Braddon 'was nobody's enemy but his own'. She recorded how her mother had adopted a similar attitude, presumably teaching that kind of manner to her daughter, and despite the hurt and humiliation endured over the separation did not bear any animosity towards him. When they encountered one another it was with cordiality and Fanny never indulged in vitriol against him before her children. The detail of the couple's anguish was kept hidden until after Fanny died. Braddon recovered letters that her mother had chosen not to destroy and these described the pain and humiliation of infidelity and the separation. Like some of her characters, Braddon inherited the responsibility of the artefacts that provided evidence of her parents' domestic bankruptcy.

As a point of pride for Braddon she remembered never causing too much trouble or anguish for her mother during those difficult years when they moved from one set of modest lodgings to another. Little Mary would amuse herself with consolatory efforts at playing games alone and trying not to let her nightmares disturb her mother. She was also content to be entertained by the cook general, Mrs. Hobbs, in the kitchen whilst her mother was out. It was from Sarah Hobbs and Mrs. Allen her nurse, as well as her mother, that Braddon learnt about the dimensions of story-telling and popular literature. As a composite of the third member of the Dickensian trio of child, mother, and nurse/cook from *David Copperfield*, Hobbs and Allen

served extremely well. Braddon's early schooling in popular literature was thanks to Hobbs, during happy hours spent below stairs:

> She was by no means equal to the immortal Peggotty, but she was a faithful creature . . . Sarah Hobbs was my resource, and I sat and watched her needlework in the kitchen just as David sat with Peggotty . . . She was more literary than Peggotty . . . she had a good many numbers of . . . magazines which published condensed editions of famous novels . . . whereby in this curtailed form I read 'The Last Days of Pompeii' and other famous fiction.[79]

Not the 'equal' of David's Peggotty, Hobbs had one essential resource that the fictional nursemaid did not have, she was more literate and in tune with the available fiction in abridged form. This was the ideal breeding ground for Braddon's imagination and she would remain in the kitchen setting, waiting for her mother to return after a night out. As with Isabel in *The Doctor's Wife*, Braddon's reminiscences enabled her to contrast her life with that of Dickens's characters and be thankful for the fact that it had not taken a turn for the worse with the imposition of cruelty generated by the Murdstones. She did not encounter the same stress and alienation that the distraught child David felt. She wrote, '[whilst I] waited for my mother's knock. There was no Mr Murdstone to see her [Fanny] home, thank God, never living man to come between her and me – memories she may have had . . . but of living man not a thought.'[80]

Braddon's familiarity with Dickens's characters and sentiments from a young age permeated her life and were clearly not lost on those around her. Mrs. Allen cunningly employed Dickens as a method of discipline for her young charge:

> It had been impressed upon me by Mrs. Allen that if I was naughty, the Beadle would come and take me away: and this being taken away conveyed an idea of penance . . .
>
> I had been taken to the dear old church at St.Kew and had so conducted myself that the Beadle was not even mentioned; but I had not derived any more benefit from the service than David Copperfield at Blunderstone.[81]

Oliver Twist and David Copperfield figure significantly in this reminiscence as templates for childhood and particularly the child's perceptions of the world and relationships with adults. Braddon credited Dickens with having an important impact upon the lives and the culture of social interaction of the Victorians. For example, the Christmas celebrations of her childhood were quiet and not necessarily the most festive occasion of the year. She had relatives whose Christmas 'of family affection' was more exciting than the one she remembered and similar to the 'Christmas which Charles Dickens was soon to bring into fashion with that little book which gave a new meaning to the twenty-fifth of December.'[82] Their modest celebrations, with only Braddon, her mother and Edward – home from school – were enough for her, and humble like the happy, gentle characters of Dickens's story:

> The pudding was an event, for Mamma always made it, and her feelings while it was being taken out of the copper and dished by the perhaps incompetent cook were like the feelings of Mrs. Crachit.[83]

The fact that poor Mrs. Crachit never has the benefit of a cook did not waylay Braddon's fondness for this associative framework with Dickens. If ever this memoir were to be published she intended for her readers to link the sensibilities of Dickens's brave, modest souls with those of her family. Fanny Braddon, her daughter was everlastingly grateful for the fact, did not descend into the misery and trauma that lay in store for David Copperfield's mother. Instead she was compared to the resilient Mrs. Crachit.

Braddon considered that she resembled David Copperfield in key ways. She possessed the sensibility of the novelist as she grew up and the enthusiasm to be liked, to entertain an audience and to please the adults around her. But she also considered herself more mature and resilient at a young age, able to weather the storms of life without allowing her innate gentility to compromise her or prejudice people's perceptions about her ability to cope with difficulties. She won this reputation after consciously battling for it. On her first visit to the theatre she was thought too squeamish and overwhelmed to cope with it.

> I remember my first theatre, the St.James's. I was taken there to see some performance of dogs and monkeys, with Mamma, my godfather, and Mrs. Allen. At the music of the band, and the beat of drums, and the lights and wonder of it all, my first theatre was too much for me, and I burst out crying . . .

This compelled her mother and nurse to hustle her out 'ignominiously'. After this outcome Braddon was determined to prove her resilience:

> . . . just because people jumped at conclusions and thought that burst of excited tears meant abject terror. I had to live a few years longer and go into dark rooms and sit in tossing boats before grown-up people knew I was not easily frightened.[84]

Braddon's encounters with the excitement and fearfulness of childhood experiences such as this and her conscious awareness of her resemblance to David Copperfield, in being raised by a single parent, made her use these experiences as part of the perceptions of childhood described in her memoir to encourage the idea that they had formulated her adult sensibilities.

Braddon constructed this memoir with clever devices of timeframe and memory again. She used the late 1830s through to the 1840s and halted at the point when the public would have just become aware of the significant autobiographical constructs in *David Copperfield* (1849) and *Jane Eyre* (1847). Born in 1835, she knocked two years off her age, claiming in *Before the Knowledge of Evil* to have been born in 1837, the 'year of Queen Victoria's accession'. She claimed to be twelve years of age when *David Copperfield* appeared. She would have read *Jane Eyre* from the age of twelve upward and not ten, as she wanted people to think. In doing this she was, in old age in 1914, still preoccupied with the era of her childhood and the novels that acted as milestones in the reading and cultural experience of the Victorian period. She deliberately structured her memoir to sound as though her childhood experiences resonated with these novels and therefore hoped to offer additional supportive enquiry into Dickens and Bronte's versions of Victorian childhood. She

wanted to allow for the comparison and the location of her childish experiences in recognition of Jane Eyre and David Copperfield. She even adjusted her age, making herself younger, to associate as nearly as possible with the framework fostered by Bronte and Dickens. Braddon wanted her lifespan to precisely fit the timeframe of the Victorian age and encourage her twentieth-century readers, if ever her memoirs were published, into recognizing the connections between her life and the lives of famous Victorian children in the novel.

To invent and modify her own experiences, it is of course impossible to actually verify the anecdotes related in *Before the Knowledge of Evil*, demonstrates the ever present fictive methods of expression, even when she thought in terms of her own life experiences. She continually framed her endeavours and sensibilities via literary and dramatic allusion. She attempted to show the origins of the Victorian novelist, in reference to herself and David Copperfield; and how the exchange happened between her and Dickens in her childhood. She likened herself to what was portrayed in the story of David's 'life'; and how that novel described the formation of the novelists of the era. That she represented her parents' experience of a fate similar to the domestic decay in *Little Dorrit* again shows how she wanted the association so expertly shaped by Dickens to inform her life.

Her resounding message to the reader is one of Dickens's veracity and almost forensic accuracy in depicting all of human life in the Victorian period, in town and country and at every phase. She wanted the twentieth-century reader to see that he had it all within his grasp and that this was his omnipotent quality as a novelist. If you want a picture of the age, she seemed to say, then look no further than Dickens and, by association, at her work also. She drew upon his template to describe her childhood and even lied about her age to define herself in the right framework. That was the truth for Braddon, the one she claimed for herself at any rate, and how she wanted to be remembered – the Victorian through and through, sharing the sensibilities of the favourite children of Dickens and Bronte.

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[1] Braddon, *Before the Knowledge of Evil*, BFC (MS) 1914, 89.

[2] 'It may have been harder for Jane to compose her heart with the examples of Lady Lytton and Mrs. Thackeray in her mind'. Sutherland, *Victorian Fiction,* London: Macmillan, 1995, 82.

[3] Braddon, 'My First Novel'.

[4] Sarah Waters, 'Introduction' in Braddon, *The Trail of the Serpent* 15-24.

[5] Ibid 17.

[6] For an outline of this material, see Gabrielle Malcolm, 'Vanished Victorian days: themes from the childhood of Mary Elizabeth Braddon, from her unpublished memoir: *Before the Knowledge of Evil*', in Martin Hewitt (ed), *Representing Victorian Lives*, Leeds Working Papers in Victorian Studies 1999, 2: 127–39.

[7] Clive Holland, 'Fifty Years of Novel Writing: Miss Braddon at Home', *Pall Mall Magazine*, November. 1911.

[8] Carnell, *Literary Lives* 314.

[9] Braddon, *Sons of Fire* 251.

[10] Ibid 249.

[11] Patrington seems to embody the range of attributes allocated by Carlyle to his notion of a political hero: 'the truest-hearted, justest, the Noblest Man,' in his published lectures *Heroes* first delivered in the early 1840s, cited by Walter E. Houghton, *The Victorian Frame of Mind*: *1830-1870*, New Haven & London: Yale UP, 1957, 328-29, n. 72.

[12] Braddon, *Sons of Fire* 276.

[13] Ibid 274.

[14] Robert Mighall, *A Geography of Victorian Fiction: Mapping histories nightmares*, Oxford & New York: Oxford UP, 1999, 70.

[15] Ibid 105-06.

[16] Wolff 278.

[17] Mary Braddon, *Vixen* (1st pub. London: Maxwell, 1879) Stroud: Sutton, 1993, 112.

[18] Ibid 420.

[19] Ibid 27.

[20] Ibid 383-84.

[21] Ibid 139.

[22] Ibid 107.

[23] Wolff 281.

[24] Gillian Beer, 'Sensational Women', *Times Literary Supplement*, pt 4745, 1994, 26.

[25] Wolff 279.

[26] Braddon, *Sons of Fire* 253.

[27] Charles Dickens, *Great Expectations,* Ware: Wordsworth Press, 1992, 353.

[28] Heilmann, 'Emma Bovary's Sisters' 38.

[29] Braddon, *The Doctor's Wife* 31.

[30] Ibid 29.

[31] Ibid 72

[32] Ibid 72-3.

[33] Mighall 104.

[34] Ibid 99.

[35] Carnell 265.

[36] Katherine Mattacks (ed) Introduction, in M.E. Braddon, *The Christmas Hirelings*, Hastings: Sensation Press, 2001, 1.

[37] Braddon, Notebook A, BFC (MS), Appendix 11, 45.

[38] Ibid 45-6.

[39] Mattacks 3.

[40] Ibid 14-15.

[41] Braddon, Notebook A, BFC (MS), Appendix 11, 46.

[42] Ibid.

[43] John Butt & Kathleen Tillotson, *Dickens at Work,* London: Methuen, 1957, 116.

[44] Ibid 116-17.

[45] Ibid 116-18.

[46] Ibid 114.

[47] Carnell 426.

[48] John Forster, *The Life of Charles Dickens*, (1st pub, 1874) London: Chapman and Hall & Frowde, 686-87.

[49] Braddon, 'Introduction to *Little Dorrit*', BFC (MS), Appendix 9, 2.

[50] Ibid 7.

[51] Ibid.

[52] Ibid 4.

[53] Ibid 3.

[54] Wolff 9.

[55] Forster 704.

[56] Braddon, 'Introduction', Appendix 9, 3.

[57] Ibid.

[58] Ibid 4.

[59] Ibid 6.

[60] Winifred Hughes, *The Maniac in the Cellar*, Princeton & New Jersey: Princeton UP, 1980, 45.

[61] Braddon, 'Introduction', Appendix 9, 7.

[62] Hughes 45.

[63] M.E. Braddon, *John Marchmont's Legacy* (1st pub. 1863), Sasaki & Page (eds), Oxford: Oxford UP, 1999, 18.

[64] Braddon, 'Introduction', Appendix 9, 6.

[65] Juliet John, *Dickens's Villains: Melodrama, character and popular culture*, Oxford: Oxford UP, 2001, 113.

[66] Michael Slater, *Dickens and Women*, London & Melbourne: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1983, 258.

[67] Wolff 200-07.

[68] Braddon, 'Introduction', Appendix 9, 8.

[69] Ibid 7.

[70] Braddon, *Before the Knowledge of Evil* 29.

[71] Braddon, *M.E.M. Beginning* Appendix 10, 9-10.

[72] Carnell 3.

[73] Braddon, *Before the Knowledge of Evil* 6.

[74] Ibid 11.

[75] Ibid 12.

[76] Ibid 23.

[77] Ibid 26-7.

[78] Carnell 8.

[79] Braddon, *Before the Knowledge of Evil* 129-30.

[80] Ibid 130.

[81] Ibid 83.

[82] Ibid 111.

[83] Ibid 112.

[84] Ibid 18.

Chapter 5:

The Theatre Enters the Novel: *A Lost Eden, A Strange World, Circumambulatory,* and *Robert Macaire 'Junior.'*

As Braddon sought to frame and structure her memoirs late in life with fictive and, it also might be said, performative associative elements with her most admired fellow writers, she also took the autobiographical and performance elements of her career on stage and carefully and judiciously included them in her writing. In this endeavour she made some crucial decisions as to how far and how detailed she went with the material. The evidence in the BFC offers further emphasis of this judicious editing of her own life in relation to her published works.

There are many comparisons made now by critics between the characters Braddon created in her fiction and the life on stage that she enjoyed immensely and personally never regretted. Lady Audley as the consummate 'actress' in the sensation novel is a widely chronicled feature of her work.[1] Robert Audley strips her bare, layer by layer, and to what end? She laughs at her nemesis and tells him she is mad. The ruthless actress, who so carefully stages her own performance, finds it all quite trivial and obvious. Simon Cooke, in his analysis of George Du Maurier's illustrations for *Eleanor's Victory*,[2] offers a fascinating study of the performative appearing in the structure and composition of the pictorial renderings of the novel's action. Braddon's admired fellow novelist - whom she acknowledged in her introduction to *Little Dorrit* as the adorer of the 'divinely tall' with *Trilby* - did great justice to her endeavours at a more 'high brow' style with the inclusion of his illustrations in the publication of *Eleanor's Victory* in *Once a Week.*

> Du Maurier visualizes details not specified in the text, draws out the narrative's outline and revelatory structure while capturing its swift movement, and, most important, pictorially completes Braddon's development of character and her sense of psychological complexity.[3]

Du Maurier, Cooke references, literally completed the picture that Braddon began in her text. It is not to say that Braddon's work was inadequate, quite the contrary. Her prose had within it such a rich vein of material for the illustrator to capture and build upon that Du Maurier's plates for the magazine 'are versatile exemplars' of the 'golden age' of British illustration.[4] Braddon, Carnell notes, was involved in the process of informing Du Maurier how the illustrations should signal the significant features of the text but, Cooke emphasizes, his was more of a *tour de force* than merely offering an account of the narrative in pictorial form. 'Du Maurier's approach is . . . a matter of *intensifying* the author's treatment of actuality: of appealing to the reader's visual memory by showing objects with pre-Raphaelite specificity . . . Du Maurier's graphic representations are a tangible underlining, a "making real" of the author's brief catalogues which fills in the blanks in her text.'[5] The fact that Du Maurier could find such material in the novel to elaborate upon is down to the essential melodramatic factors that Braddon utilized so well. The illustrations emphasise, elaborate, concentrate and focus the action of Eleanor's 'intricate story.'

One of the narrative bases of the novel is the background of the theatre with Richard Thornton's examination of what he does professionally as a musician, translator of French scripts and designer and scenic artist. Eleanor herself then has to enact the role she designates for her position as a vengeful Electra who investigates her father's suicide, determinedly defying the conventions of marriage and the role of the passive wife until she discovers the truth. The moments of physical 'response', exchange, construction and deduction of information are highlighted in the illustrations, for example, Eleanor on board ship encountering the old gentleman where her 'contrapuntal glance suggests her "yearning" desire to be ashore'.[6] There is no doubt that the pictures generated by Du Maurier in response to the novel's action are dependent upon accepted conventions and dramatic form derived from the theatre. He 'blocks' and 'directs' the action based upon Braddon's script. Her sensation novels and her novels of detection and deduction are, therefore, indebted to theatrical modes of character portrayal and action. Strength, beauty, dynamism,

decisive responses and exchanges can be categorized as theatrical and melodramatic signifiers in novelistic form.

So, heroines in sensation novels enact and perform their designated roles. As fictional constructs they can be translated and instated as melodramatic types, sometimes fluid and changeable, not necessarily resting on the one role. Within the novel they can shift from heroine to villain and back again, such as Aurora Floyd in her movement from dutiful daughter to loving wife and then as dominant, harsh mistress horsewhipping her servant. It is a transfixing and intriguing method of reinvention and reallocation of roles. Braddon's heroines can be cast and then recast in the space of a few chapters, fulfilling the metamorphic function of the actress from the Victorian stage, but within the same narrative and across the form of the novel. If a young woman, such as Eleanor Vane or Isabel Sleaford, is suspected of being an unfaithful wife, as occurs for both of them in their narratives, then that is the role they play, for a few chapters. Their actions, reactions, and the performative state Braddon places them in, reinforce the notions and interpretation of them that the other characters possess. They are, until exonerated, that 'kind' of woman with all the associations that come with the role. Lady Audley, as the most examined of any of Braddon's creations, infamously exploits the noted preconceptions that other characters impose upon her to her advantage at first and then, as her downfall is impending, reveals the true self from behind the mask - perhaps.

Braddon was afraid of this association with melodrama and theatricality in the novel. She designated 'melodramatic' as a negative criticism, as far on in her career as writing for Kitton's series of autograph novels at the turn of the nineteenth century. Dickens's villains in *Little Dorrit* still have for her something of the theatrical taint to them. Due to negative criticism early in her career she was reluctant to pursue the theatrical mode, not yet considering it solid or artistic enough for her newfound career as a novelist.

> The world is essentially a stage to Miss Braddon, and all the men and women, the wives, the lovers, the villains, the sea captains, the victims, the tragically jealous, the haters, the avengers, merely players. We could extract pages, fit as they stand, for the different actors in melodrama, vehemently, and outrageously natural.[7]

And yet she did pursue it, whatever her frame of mind might be when she did. There are numerous examples of script fragments in the BFC, in note form and on quarto and foolscap sheets, intended as drafts for finished plays. So, on the one hand, such difficulties with accepted modes of writing for critical acclaim and risking negative response perturbed her, causing her to write to Bulwer Lytton:

> I can write about villains & villainesses by the mile – with what my critics would call a 'fatal facility.' Then again I am impressed too much by externals and in thinking of my characters I can see their attitudes – the scenery & atmosphere about them – every detail of pictorial effect – and perhaps forget altogether the subjective side of the question. I doubt if I shall ever write an artistic novel – or a novel that will *satisfy* you – But I hope and believe I may write a much better novel than I have written yet – and succeed in *pleasing* you.[8]

But, on the other hand, she persisted with this despite the reservations she professed and the criticism she received. There was an underlying conviction in what she did with theatrical modes and melodrama in the novel, which she did not widely admit to. She professed the desire to write a 'better' novel that was not dependent on 'attitudes - . . . scenery & atmosphere', but her accomplished movement into more 'high brow' styles and novels of character for serial publication (*Eleanor's Victory* in *Once a Week* and *The Doctor's Wife* in *Temple Bar*) are actually examples of her most theatrical works with scenario, action, motive, movement and metamorphic (self-conscious in the case of Isabel) heroines derived from theatrical conventions.

In many respects, Braddon's rendition of heroines, situations and action in her novels was more theatrically efficient and effective than the adaptations of those novels for the stage. That the reviewer suggests the extraction of pages for the performance of the novels as scripts was meant to exaggeratedly emphasize the weakness of them as art and the deleterious impact they had on her readership, but

this operates contradictorily now as a compliment. Yes, they could read as scripts and, as their content proved so effective for Du Maurier's art, very good scripts at that. It is a pity that adaptations for the stage, such as Colin Henry Hazlewood's version of *Lady Audley's Secret*, do not read as well.

Hazlewood's 1863 adaptation is often cited because of its accessibility in the version edited by George Rowell for *Nineteenth Century Plays* (1972).[9] There were other adaptations in 1863 by G. Roberts and William Suter. Hazlewood's was an example of the hurried adaptation of a popular contemporary novel for the stage. In doing so Braddon's skilful characterization and plotting of the original were somewhat obscured. However, Joel H. Kaplan offers an analysis of a version performed by the Adelphi Screamers in 1989 as an attempt at recapturing late Victorian/early Edwardian theatrical and melodramatic processes and atmosphere.[10] Braddon created such a potential for a play in the novel that, Kaplan suggests, Hazlewood could seemingly go about adapting it with ease. Kaplan comments upon the ' . . . manner in which a popular work of fiction had been reshaped for the stage by a competent if routine theatre professional'.[11]

Using a combination of Braddon's plotting and the sort of information the novel offers, as Du Maurier was able to exploit for his illustrations, and Hugh Campbell's *Voice, Speech and Gesture: A practical handbook to the elocutionary art* (2nd edition, 1895), the Screamers were able to produce an effective version that did not struggle as much as one might fear. With straightforward playing and a mastery of gesture and speech, as recommended by nineteenth-century acting guides such as Campbell's, the affecting quality of the enactments of domestic anxiety by a late twentieth-century company reinstated something of the 'dramatic continuum' from Braddon's novels.

Braddon was able to provide the sensibilities required to perform and enact the roles adapted from her work to the stage. She knew, with her experience, how the atmosphere generated on stage first had to be formulated and imagined by the writer.

Her concerns with 'externals', that she shamefacedly admitted to Bulwer Lytton, were in fact essential and enduring characteristics. The emblematic qualities of her heroines created the conjunction of styles in the novel and the transfer of these qualities, in turn, back to the stage is still pertinent in understanding the performance tradition from only a century or so ago. If the expanse of popular melodrama scripts are difficult for performers to understand today, and challenging to interpret for early twenty-first century audiences, then we could do a great deal worse than refer to Braddon's fiction to aid contemporary performance of them. In Braddon's *The Black Band; or, the mysteries of midnight* (1861-62), written parallel with *Lady Audley's Secret*, she based the appearance, behaviour and attitude of her villain, Colonel Oscar Bertrand, on the qualities essential for the portrayal of villains in stage melodrama. Bertrand owes something of his heritage to the character of Guillaume Bertrand, the sidekick of Robert Macaire the popular villain of French satirical stage melodrama. Carnell notes:

> Colonel Bertrand makes his entrance like a melodrama villain, as he stands behind a pillar and mutters an aside; he even wears a red wig, an item which was often a signifier of the villain in mid-Victorian theatre.[12]

Concurrent with Braddon's frequent portrayal of heroines as actresses, creating the performativity inherent in her novels, she often portrayed actresses and theatre professionals in her novels. This required a different sort of focus, a switch from the abstraction of the performative response, to a pragmatic chronicling of types and choices as to the extent to which she could admit to her familiarity with the profession. Her time on stage was one of the big secrets in her life.

The passion and enthusiasm with which she dealt with the treatment of her theatre characters in her novels reveals her fondness and admiration for theatre people from her own life and the debt she owed to them for worldly wisdom, business acumen and the array of roles and reinvention possible for fictional characters. Theatre people are invariably sympathetic and generous, equipped to support and protect the innocents abroad in the city and behind the scenes. Richard Thornton is, effectively,

the real hero of *Eleanor's Victory*, especially as there is a tinge of tragic resolution about his enduring loyal devotion to Eleanor. She understands it as fraternal affection, when in reality it is passionate love that remains unrequited. Aurora Floyd's mother, Alicia, is more than a match for the Kentish gentry who deliberately reinvent her in their social discourse in order to justify the humility, and humour, that she brings into society during her brief sojourn as the wife of a wealthy banker. The Rodney clan, in *A Lost Eden*, are the loyal and disarming professionals who, down to the youngest, Molly (the 'Flower'), are unofficial guardians to the Sandford sisters. At the opening of the plan for *A Lost Eden* in the BFC (Notebook A), Braddon's thoughts immediately turned to the formulation of the theatrical subplot. It was uppermost in her mind from the outset and comprised of her autobiographical experiences and acquaintance with such acting dynasties.

(48)

Jim Richardson Rodney
Joe – Bill – Julia - Honoria Waterloo Terrace
Molly – the Flower of the flock

The Phoenix T. It was called the P. because it was always rising from the ashes that seemed hopeless.
It spent two thirds of every year in the ashy state – then blazed for a few months & anon faded into ruin. [13]

The frequency with which theatres burnt down in the nineteenth century plus the erratic box-office fortunes of minor London venues is dealt with wittily and as a strategic, knowing insert in her notes. She outlined the hierarchical structure of the family who populate the profession, according Mrs. Rodney the status of head of a theatrical dynasty. This modest, kind, harassed woman is given the accolade of having raised her 'flock' with the sense and talent to make their way in the world.

Without creating any furore Mrs. Rodney's elder son and daughter embark on tour, whilst the others in their modest 1850s household gear themselves up for the

professional working day, grabbing their meals on the hoof and departing for the journey to the theatre in time for curtain-up. There is a natural, unselfconscious quality to the scenes of working life in the theatrical Rodney family. Outsiders to the profession, such as Marion, O'Donnell and the villainous Vernham do not understand the ordinary life of the theatre. Marion, seeking reassurance over her sister's chosen profession, thinks she can rely upon the opinions of other, worldly, male figures as to the appropriateness of the conduct at the Phoenix Theatre. O'Donnell is guilty of adding to her fears about the dangers of the profession for a young woman, 'The theatre is like Sinbad's loadstone [*sic*] rock. It draws them; and it holds them.'[14]

But the reality is vastly different and surprising, even for Flora with her firsthand experience. Braddon went about demystifying the profession with the shock of reality, the mundane and normal, when Flora encounters the family at tea. She is met by the 'Babel of voices' and finds herself hustled into place at the table where, without formal introductions, the family go about their hurried repast before heading out to work. Flora's preconceptions about Mrs. Rodney as a long-suffering widow and 'domestic heroine' who will accept her as a daughter are rapidly destroyed. Mrs. Rodney enjoys reminiscing about her own career when she played Celia to Mrs. Kean's Rosalind at Newcastle and she allows her busy, active family to treat the shabby house as a staging post or hotel between appointments: 'They were not rude; or rather they did not mean to be rude.'[15] Jim is self-conscious about his family's lack of formal manners. He has seen how Flora was raised and expected to behave and his free-wheeling family embarrass him in the early stages of his engagement. He has to learn that there is more to gentility than superficial behaviour. The way in which his family welcome Flora and take Marion in when she is in need exemplify them as worthy members of society.

Flora learns a great deal from their anecdotes and is astonished at the unromantic, pragmatic attitude they have towards their profession. The 'details of theatrical life in the provinces'[16] are revealed to her over the tea table until Joe and Honoria depart

for the theatre – Joe imitating a tipsy David Copperfield. The habit is to call everyone by a diminutive and regard the world within the theatrical frame of reference. Everything or everyone is either theatre or non-theatre.

> . . . (Julia) burst through the folding doors, banging them behind her.
> 'A drawing-room door isn't a vampire trap,' Bill shouted.[17]

A Lost Eden gives a wonderful insight into the working world of the theatre family; one is expected to feel alienated and envious when reading their mannerisms and their modes of speech. There is a 'knowing' quality that people then and now are not privileged to and the reader shares Flora's bewildered reaction. In the calm after the storm, when the family have left for work or to attend a performance as part of their social whirl, there enters the Rodney's own 'infant phenomenon' Molly, the 'Flower of the flock'. She is the hope of the family; her mother believes she will be a true star. A manager has even called her a 'lump of talent'. She is at the local parlour school, education and literacy being of vital importance to the profession, where she exhibits her talent for 'jography'. As a firm favourite of her mother, for professional reasons to instil in her a sense of the worth of her burgeoning talent, she is waited upon but makes herself quite agreeable with her precocity. The trajectory of her career is already marked out in her young mind; she wants to be like the Lester girls:

> The Lesters were two American sisters, who had taken the town by their precocious talent. Plays had been written for them – duologues of the patch-and-powder period; imbroglios developing refined flirtation and delicate love-making, in which the appearance of a full-grown lacquey [*sic*] to announce a carriage or deliver a letter suggested Gulliver in Lilliput, and hazarded the illusion.[18]

Molly also lists all the Shakespearean roles and popular stage heroines she wishes to play. Jim, for the sake of his family, has made the sacrifice to stay in London and helps to support them all by taking smaller roles and trying to carve out a career as a playwright. He has done this for the sake of his siblings' greater talent, Molly especially. There is a ruthless acumen and an unsentimental expediency about how the family has to pull together to enrich all of them. If that means the investment in

Molly's career, and not their own, then so be it. Molly possesses the self-assured confidence that will probably take her far.

> 'I'm a born actress, you know, Miss Sandford. Why, they said that of me when I was being mauled about as the child in *Pizarro*, held up over the torrent by Lionel Bowker, that horrid fat man who played the juvenile lead long after he could have done Falstaff without padding – and I was always afraid he'd drop me.'[19]

This realm of anecdote and knowingness, belonging to a child, represents the thorough knowledge that Braddon could include in her writing. Molly's 'mauling' – potentially a harrowing scene for a child viewing such action – is purged of its drama because of her professional concern over the competence of her co-star and her witty comment on the appropriateness of his casting. It is reminiscent of what Braddon's experiences might have been for her 'cliff-hanging' scenes as Rose Linden in the nautical melodrama *The Lost Ship.*

Flora, by contrast to Molly, is the middle-class girl in demand in the profession because of her natural manner and literacy, but for whom such pragmatism is as yet alien and strange. Her parlour-based amusements of songs and amateur theatricals, at which she excelled to the delight of her mother, certainly did not equip her for the realities of theatrical life. For her, the goal is not the enhancement of her career but to leave the stage as soon as Jim can settle and provide for them. Braddon's ability to show the multi-faceted approaches to the profession extends to the depiction of Alicia Floyd and John Marchmont, the 'walking man' or supernumerary, in small roles at a shilling a night. The company knows him as 'Barking Jeremiah' because of his consumptive cough.

> Mr Mostyn, being too polite to point out the man in question, indicated him with a twitch of his light eyebrows; and Edward Arundel, following that indication, singled out the banner holder from a group of soldiers in medieval dress, who had been standing wearily enough upon one side of the stage during a long strictly private and confidential dialogue between the princely hero of the tragedy and one of his accommodating satellites. The lad uttered a cry of surprise as he looked at the weak-legged banner holder.[20]

This shows the weary and strenuous choice of profession that a man utterly unsuited to the rigours of the theatre has been compelled to undertake to keep himself and his child. This passage also shows the disdainful and sarcastic response of the audience to the performance of a tragedy. Arundel and Mostyn have to endure the play selected as the highlight of the bill that night. They go to be amused at the shambling extras and clumsy performances, 'It's capital fun,' says Mostyn, ' . . . Did you ever see such an awkward set of fellows in all your life?" Arundel the hero, for whom that night at Drury Lane in1838 is a life-changing event, sighs and wishes ' . . . we hadn't come till half-price'.

In *A Strange World* (1875), Braddon considered the provincial 'Eborsham' (Yorkshire) touring circuit and Justina Elgood's dislike of the profession in which her heavyweight actor father Matthew raised her. She, by contrast to Molly Rodney, loathed the start she has received as the child in *Pizarro*. She found the whole experience degrading and 'shabby'. Braddon described the down turn of the provincial company, which has been made a 'commonwealth' because of poor takings. The modest receipts are whittled down each week as the leading members take their share, leaving the minor players to 'fall away'. The theatre manager at Eborsham laments, 'The provincial stage is in its decline, sir.' Again, Braddon exploited the prejudice of audiences, particularly young male audience members, when she portrayed James Penwyn and Maurice Clissold in *A Strange World*. They venture to the provincial theatre to patronize the Eborsham company. Penwyn wants them to believe that he is interested in the theatre as a 'Student of Humanity', inviting Matthew Elgood to supper after the show. It is a ploy to meet Justina, with whom he is captivated. Clissold thinks she has deliberately set out to trap his friend as a mercenary act:

> 'No, she only admired you innocently; opening those big blue eyes of hers to their widest in a gaze of rapture. Was it the locket, or the studs, or the moustaches, I wonder, that struck her most?'[21]

Their belief, especially that of Clissold, is that theatre people are out for what they can get. The women entertain and bewitch for financial and social betterment and the men and managers are on the look out for favours and patronage, 'No doubt [Elgood] has already speculated on the possibility of borrowing five pounds from you,' remarks Clissold.

In portraying with kindness the sensibilities and manners of theatre professionals, Braddon was also able to remark upon the prejudicial characteristics of society's reception and understanding of them. The young men of the world, in *A Lost Eden*, *John Marchmont's Legacy* and *A Strange World*, go to the theatre to be amused and mistrust and criticize the company with their 'superior' knowledge of what the dramatic arts should constitute. They also attempt to catch the eye of pretty young actresses. They respond to the characteristic features and stereotype of the 'stage door Johnny'. Whilst the companies Braddon portrayed are in some ways to blame for the preconceptions held about them, with their flawed problematic execution of material and their vanity, the young men in the audience participate in the exchange for their own ends, fitting the set of preconceptions we have about them.

> . . . Mr. Penwyn and Mr. Clissold placed themselves among the select few of the dress-circle, a cool and airy range of seats, whose sparsely scattered occupants listened with rapt attention to the gloomy prosings of 'The Stranger.' James Penwyn was not ravished by that Germanic drama. Even Mrs. Haller bored him. She dropped her h's, and expressed the emotions of grief and remorse by spasmodic chokings and catchings of her breath. But Mr. Penwyn lighted up a little when the Countess [Justina Elgood] appeared, for the Countess had the large melancholy blue eyes of the girl he had met in the meadow.[22]

This is similar to the experience of Herbert and Pip when they are obliged to go and watch Mr. Wopsle as Hamlet. With that episode in *Great Expectations* Dickens invoked the agony and entertaining bathos of bad performance and the dual experience of the audience going to be thus 'entertained' at a tragedy by bad acting and by their fellow playgoers' response to it. Like Mostyn in *John Marchmont's Legacy*, Pip and Herbert do not actively enter into the ribaldry and sarcasm but are

entertained nonetheless by the other audience members who do. When Wopsle decorously wipes his hands after handling Yorick's skull 'that innocent and indispensable action did not pass without the comment "Wai-ter!"'

Whilst not reaching for this extent of humour that Dickens engaged in – the hilarity of the scene in *Great Expectations* is told from the slightly baffled perspective of the 'innocent' playgoer Pip – Braddon managed to work in multiple perspectives of those who make and those who view theatre. The experience in the auditorium, where, in *A Strange World,* the sophisticated young men 'endured' the numerous acts of a 'bad' tragedy in order to catch a glimpse of the 'willow-waisted' melancholy Justina 'dressed in cheap finery', is contrasted with life backstage. Penwyn, and the other middle-class young men who attend performances, think they know what theatre (and tragedy in particular) ought to be, but he gets a shock when he is permitted into the inner sanctum of the green room, by an irresponsible 'official' who, because he works in a 'commonwealth', has allowed 'morals [to] become relaxed'. Braddon could condescend to her readership and introduced them, the majority of whom would never have ventured further than the dress circle, to the secret life backstage. Penwyn is our guide, wending his way into the alien world and showing us what he finds.

> The mystic world looked dark and dusty, and smelt of gas and dirt, to the unaccustomed senses of Mr. Penwyn.
>
> The voices on stage sounded loud and harsh now that they were so near his ear. There was hardly room for him to move between the side scenes and the wall – indeed, it was only by screwing himself against this whitewashed wall that he made his way in the direction which a scene-shifter had indicated as the way to the green-room.
>
> Mr.Penwyn's experience of life had never before led him behind the scenes. He had a vague idea that a green-room was a dazzling saloon, lighted by crystal chandeliers, lined with mirrors, furnished with divans of ruby velvet, an idealized copy of a club-house smoking-room. He found himself in a small dingy chamber, carpetless, curtainless, uncleanly, provided with narrow baize-covered benches and embellished with one cloudy looking-glass, on either side thereof an unscreened gas jet.

> Here over the wooden mantelshelf hung castes [*sic*] of pieces in preparation, 'Jack Sheppard,' 'Delicate Ground,' 'Courier of Lyons,' 'Box and Cox,' a wide range of dramatic art, and calls for next day's rehearsal. Here, in divers attitudes of weariness, lounged various members of the dramatic commonwealth; among them Mr. Elgood, in the frogged coat, crimson worsted pantaloons and Hessian boots of the Baron; and Justina, seated disconsolately, with her limp satin trailing over the narrow bench beside her, studying her part in the piece for tomorrow night.[23]

This snapshot is an important and revealing one from Braddon's work. It shows the array and process of work backstage and crystallizes the preconceptions of the uninitiated male observer and offers by contrast the reality of life in the profession. She outlined the 'mystic world' in this series of contrasts between the notions and understanding of the theatre held by Penwyn and the reality of backstage life. She assisted in the exploration and explosion of the myths.

Justina, in her identity as the Countess on stage, is attractive, statuesque and desirable to Penwyn. Her superficial identity is enough for him, but it is contrasted with the underlying reality of how she is disillusioned, awkward, uncomfortable, self-conscious and unaccomplished as a performer. Despite her 'pedigree' in the theatre as the daughter of Elgood, she is disconcerted by her role – on and off stage – and 'disconsolately' sits in her 'limp satin' trying to measure up for future performances. Justina is not the only reluctant actress in Braddon's fiction. Those young women who have access to the unromantic side of the profession could, she knew, quickly become disillusioned, confused and approach with trepidation the demands made upon them to combine the alluring with the respectable.

In her short story *Circumambulatory; or the adventures of three gentlemen and a lady in search of a British public* in the BFC,[24] Braddon sensitively explored the passion, heartache and romantic sensibilities of the young actress, Hypatia. Drawing on Dickens's satirical vocabulary, in his naming of the Circumlocution Office, in her title, she showed her aptitude for a story of character and situation first and foremost. The theatre profession is crucial to the formulation of characters but not the main

force in describing their narrative. They are a range of types, obviously found in theatre, but she went about dispelling some of the myths surrounding performers and reinforcing others, making them remarkably normal in the process. Principally involved in this exercise was her portrayal of Hypatia. The young actress, married to Volage the leader of their company, possesses all the romantic sensibilities of a young heroine who has to cope with the difficulties of life in a male-dominated environment. She attempts to negotiate the persona and status of a respectable middle-class wife, whilst engaging in the rigours of her profession and appearing on stage in short petticoats.

Whilst reconciled largely to her chosen route in life, Hypatia nonetheless has aspirations and attributes that transcend the role she has dedicated herself to. She desires the opportunity to fulfil her role as wife more suitably and refers to Tennyson's heroines as her templates and models. She might have the advantage that other women craved, of being in the profession and enabled to play the great parts in melodrama and romantic comedy, but she also wishes for a life of intimacy and reciprocation of feeling on the part of her husband. This is a delicate portrayal of character and addresses the conflicts in self-awareness, social and marital propriety and intellectual challenge for professional actresses. It could only really be arrived at from the personal experience Braddon encountered in her career on stage and through observation of her colleagues.

Hypatia is not desirous of abandoning her professional life. She is uncomfortable with the imposition of others' perceptions and with her need for stimulation, challenges and acknowledgement of her sensibilities – which would make her chosen career more fulfilling for her rather than merely satisfactory for her husband. It was he who named her for Kingsley's heroine with a 'high-sounding nickname'. This gives her a lot to live up to and immediately compels her to be all things: a wife, a housekeeper, a working woman and a 'Bohemian' who can tolerate the collective habits of mostly male society. She is an asset to the company in role and in her ability to 'correct a proof.'

Unlike Braddon's deviant heroines, who act their part to deceive or have it imposed in a social context, Hypatia is seeking a role of domestic convention. She has to combat the notions and preconceptions laid upon her by the public at large and by her male colleagues. As an actress readily approved of in a professional context she is still desperate to 'act' other roles and undergoes some of the same disappointments and thwarted ambitions of her counterparts in Braddon's fiction who are forced to assimilate various roles, much to their frustration. What Braddon sought to emphasize with Hypatia was the idea that she was no different from most women in her ambitions, in fact more 'middle-class' than most. As an actress she might have achieved the ambitions held by a Flora Sandford or an Isabel Sleaford, but as a woman she has more in common with Marion Sandford, or Jane Eyre and Tennyson's heroines, in her desire to be a good woman. She wants to love and be loved by a heroic man and, as she poignantly expresses, 'Is not Elaine's whole life shut up in those little words, 'I have gone mad, I love you, let me die?'[25]

Whereas Braddon's heroines dominate her fiction in their negotiation of roles assumed and imposed and in the consequences of their adherence to social pressures or their desire for independence, her heroes pursue more expected pathways. Occasionally she laid a trail of clues as to the more deviant behaviour of male characters, but they certainly thrive upon the social freedoms in their favour. Her male actors in *Circumambulatory* do not have the same issues and anxieties as their colleague Hypatia. The Zoophyte, the lethargic and philosophical 'jelly-fish', lends a sympathetic ear but wallows in self-pity over his own unrequited passions. He can sit and be inactive, knowing that there is no one he has to serve and admire apart from himself, 'I think the worst of all human sorrows is to have to put a cheerful face upon your sorrows.'[26]

This is the ultimate dismay and depressive situation for him, to have to act in life as he does on stage. In articulating this he can leave it at that, without the concerns over domesticity, self-preservation, modesty and the tension inherent in these for Hypatia.

The artefacts of her profession, her costumes, luggage, and properties, are her responsibility. The trials of touring take their toll on her as she fusses over her hatboxes at the railway station – she must succumb to the demands placed on her. Her face and her costumes are her fortune and she cannot risk wear and tear on either. If the Zoophyte or Volage appear on stage in Hessian boots and a tatty cape they will not be branded immoral, but Hypatia frets over appealing to the audience in short petticoats because she knows the fine line she treads.

Also in the BFC is Braddon's story *Some Passages in the Life of Robert Macaire Equ.*[*sic*] *Jnr* [27] in which she outlined the legacy of a famous theatrical character and the impositions upon a male actor/character living in the shadow of such a precedent. Born son of the leading character in the renowned melodrama *L'Auberge des Adrets* by Antier, Lacoste and Chapponier, Macaire Junior has to come to terms with the notoriety of his father and negotiate his own role in life from humble origins. Macaire Junior is the reluctant hero in his own story. First, he spins a yarn to reinvent his family background - 'It is a difficult task for the siege of historical research to separate the corn of truth from the chaff of fiction.'[28] Then he must find an identity and a livelihood, aided by his father's sidekick Bertrand. He decides he wants a living that does not complicate things further and which prevents his criminal legacy becoming an overriding factor. Set adrift in childhood in 'the neighbourhood of the New Cut, Lambeth', Macaire Junior attempts to resist his fictive inheritance and find his own role.

However, the momentum of the story runs out. Braddon persisted with the notion of this inherited role for the son of the famous father from satirical French melodrama, but the character soon runs into conflict with it. She could not sustain the intention, and Macaire Junior realises,

> Yes the old man was right there. I had a handsome face. I contemplated it by the light of a tallow candle in a small cracked looking glass that hung over the mantelpiece, that mirror was rather vague in its reflections & didn't quite seem to know which were my moustachios & which my eyebrows. But for all that it couldn't help reflecting a handsome face take me

> which way it would, upside down, crossways, or in a horizontal streak, as it was inclined to do. I recognized in myself a young man I had been in the habit of meeting in French prints, always represented as in a square cut coat, a white wig tied with blue ribbons & shining boots, making love to another white wig more blue ribbon and a hoop. I felt that I ought to have lived in those glorious days of square cut coats & shining boots, when nobody ever did anything but make love, drink champagne & get into debt. I felt in fact that I was an anachronism, that both my personal attractions & my principles belonged to the Regency & here was I thrown into an utilitarian century, utterly incapable of appreciating my peculiar genius. [29]

He is an 'anachronism' who cannot work out his role in life. Braddon represented, or tried to represent, the figure derived from his performative roots and contending with the immense legacy of the Macaire father from the stage, 'a compound of Fielding's "Blueskin" and Goldsmith's "Beau Tibbs"' according to Thackeray. Macaire Junior cannot fight his inherited characteristics, and when he does attempt to reinvent himself as a society figure or author he finds he is in a time 'utterly incapable of appreciating my peculiar genius'. He is a man out of his time and only fit for marriage to an heiress which constitutes appealing to the fallacy of romantic, theatrical characteristics from the Regency period in order to enrich himself.

He would, therefore, if Braddon had pursued this story been subject to the same performative demands laid upon her female characters. He, like they, would have to justify and reinforce his role as marriageable material once all the other avenues were closed to him. This is a useful experiment in fictive reinvention from the stage to the prose narrative early in her career. She relocated characters that were already familiar to the Victorian readership, as she went on to do with the template of *David Copperfield* for her autobiographical memoirs.

But she had problems from the outset in *Macaire Jnr.* with authenticity and the functioning of a narrative that has to disparage its origins via the main protagonist's first-person voice. She depicted the character of the son attempting a usurpation of the dramatic rendering of his father's adventures, followed by his self-conscious juvenile criminal activity and then his resolution for self-reform. In trying to reform

and make himself good he undermines the satirical and theatrical thrust of the very qualities that made Macaire such a successful character on stage and in French popular culture. So remarkably successful was Frédérick Lemaître's portrayal and effective invention of the Macaire role at the Ambigu-Comique in 1823 that the character persisted as a folk-hero figure for decades, appearing in a range of guises and personae in cartoons, on stage and in literature. The effective, performative, chameleon-like figure of the father really set Braddon at a disadvantage in her early story and she mistakenly went about an exercise of rehabilitation with the son.

Undoubtedly she learnt from this. The transposition and reallocation of role and tributes to significant figures from drama and literature reappear in her fiction time and time again. The frequent allusions to theatrical, mythological, historical and literary models are a characteristic feature of her writing. They are not present simply as comparisons or plot and story templates, although these are important functions. She used the psychological resonance present in them and the inventive, metamorphic, emblematic and iconic cultural properties they possessed. In this way she cultivated a conscious exchange in her novels across time and form and around the trajectory of other writers' careers and the modes that developed throughout the Victorian period. Marion Sandford, for example, evolves in the space of her narrative. She moves from being Clarissa Harlowe, wanting to emulate the moral loveliness of the 'best' woman in literature who dies, to the determined properties of loyalty and devotion learnt from Jane Eyre and finally achieves the mobility and energy of a melodrama heroine, potentially even Jack Sheppard, in her bid for freedom from her tormentor. The daughters of difficult fathers emerge from their inhibiting performative legacies in the role of a devoted Electra or Antigone, to the liberating role of detective in their own mystery. Her novels that use these modes work as *tour de force* examples of the power of fictive and performative representation and the emulation of existing templates.

[1] M.E. Braddon, *Lady Audley's Secret*, Jenny Bourne Taylor (ed), introduction by Taylor & Crofts, London: Penguin, 1998, xxxii.

[2] Simon Cooke, 'George Du Maurier's illustrations for M.E. Braddon's Serialization of *Eleanor's Victory* in *Once a Week*', *Victorian Periodicals Review*, 2002 35(1).

[3] Ibid 90.

[4] Ibid 89.

[5] Ibid 92.

[6] Ibid 97.

[7] 'Our female sensationalists', *The Christian Remembrancer*, 1863, 46: 236.

[8] Braddon to Bulwer Lytton, October 1865, Wolff, *Devoted Disciple* 34.

[9] George Rowell (ed), *Nineteenth Century Plays* (1st pub. 1953) (2nd ed) Oxford: Oxford UP, 1972.

[10] Joel H. Kaplan, 'Exhuming Lady Audley: period drama for the 1990s', paper delivered at 'Themes in Drama' International Conference, University of California, Riverside, February 1990 and subsequently published in James Redmond (ed) 'Melodrama', *Themes in Drama* 14, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1992.

[11] Kaplan 144.

[12] Jennifer Carnell (ed) Introduction, in M.E. Braddon, *The Black Band* (1st pub. 1861–62) Hastings: Sensation Press, 1998, xv–xvi.

[13] Braddon, Notebook A, BFC (MS), Appendix 11, 35.

[14] Braddon, *A Lost Eden* 146.

[15] Ibid 255.

[16] Ibid 257.

[17] Ibid 258.

[18] Ibid 262.

[19] Ibid 263.

[20] Braddon, *John Marchmont's Legacy* 10.

[21] M.E. Braddon, *A Strange World,* London: Maxwell, 1875, 33.

[22] Ibid 35-6.

[23] Ibid 37-8.

[24] Braddon, *Circumambulatory*, BFC (MS), Appendix 8.

[25] Ibid 24.

[26] Ibid 25.

[27] Braddon, *Robert Macaire Jnr.,* BFC (MS), Appendix 7.

[28] Ibid 6.

[29] Ibid 12.

Conclusion

Mary Braddon, from Sensation Novelist to Social Critic

...[T]hat miserable comedy of grins & smirks with which we act the great lie of everyday life.

So says the Zoophyte in his concluding statement in Braddon's early theatre story, *Circumambulatory*. This story, and the other manuscripts and notebooks in the BFC cover the period of Braddon's career as it spanned the mid to late Victorian age into the early twentieth century. One of the key features that has emerged from the evaluation of all this material was the realisation of her continuous, energetic invention. Wolff, for example, describes how she entered yet another phase, with a 'new departure' in her work when she was sixty-nine years old.[1] This kind of continuous development was a characteristic of her working life - as apparent at twenty-five when she constructed the authorial identity in *Lady Audley's Secret* and *Told by the Poet* - as it was when she was in her sixties - writing and planning *A Lost Eden* and *Dead Love Has Chains.*

This statement from the Zoophyte is a bitter reflection on 'the great lie of everyday life'. Braddon assumed different voices and identities in her everyday life. The strain of this performance is tangible in her work. She understood the difficulty of keeping up appearances. It was continuously revisited in her writing. Constant features of her work include bourgeois domestic affection and bankruptcy, the negotiation of role and identity, and the articulation of desire. She voiced the central concerns of the Victorian bourgeoisie. In many respects hers *is* their voice. Her own life informed a

huge part of her writing whether in the serial or three-volume form, plays, or novelettes and short stories.

Often she was outraged at the injustices of life, and frustrated at the lack of choice for women, and saddened at the neglect of vulnerable innocent children. Criticism of her work has portrayed her as a 'sensation' author, and more recently she has been seen as important to the detective novel. As yet, she means less to the development of the social novel of domestic anxiety, or the moral novel of innocence abused. She was as active within the social and moral generic strand as she was in the sensation genre. Taking a risk and removing her from any particular category, by attending to her unpublished work as much as her published sensation novels, she suddenly shifts within the focus allocated to her in the period. If as a critic you attend to the hidden and insinuated features and accept the significant precedent of her 'first' career on stage, then her contribution emerges into a different landscape. There is a gradual fragmentation of the category neatly allocated to her with *Lady Audley's Secret* and *Aurora Floyd* and these novels, plus her many others, begin to assume a different perspective. Whilst some of her early work can still be described as 'sensation' fiction, there need to be clauses written into this agreed view and the wider context of the completeness of her career evaluated.

Her authorship of sensation novels was a means to an end for articulating domestic anxiety. She was as dramatic and melodramatic in her exercise of this as she was sensational. In her unpublished work, such as *Revenge of the Dead*, she showed an ability, overtly, to use the Gothic as much as the sensational, without retreating into the 'lie of everyday life' but retaining the full supernatural (im)possibility manifesting the hidden thoughts and anxieties of her characters. The planned works written during her 'sensation' phase in the BFC show the development of her psychological, character-driven writing arising from her work with the Gothic and the melodramatic. She experimented with this from a much earlier date than was first supposed. The eventual manifestation of this ability in her mainstream published work was a result of careful development, which frequently ran alongside

her sensation novels and, before that, was evident during her acting career. That a young provincial actress in the 1850s could experiment with such work is a revelation which elucidates her approach to writing fiction.

Her use of melodrama also provides evidence of an early, sophisticated skill at the craft. She incorporated melodramatic resonance and modulations in ways that demonstrate her understanding of the form gained during her theatre career. If Peter Brooks could recognise the value of the melodramatic mode in Balzac and Henry James,[2] the same recognition is due to Braddon. Her borrowings and derivations from other authors and playwrights for her own novels and plays have had to bear the burden of accusations of plagiarism and a lack of artistry. Her anxiety at this was evident at the time, but now the full pattern and purpose of these reworkings can be investigated. They are a product of her theatre career and her debt, acknowledged in her lifetime, to the literary parents she so admired. She showed her belief in the durability of literary and dramatic forms when she turned existing plots, her own and others, into new works.

Braddon's autobiographical writings demonstrate her pursuit of new forms and her desire to consolidate her many identities towards the end of her life. She developed a narrative voice in these to offer the perspective of the outsider's sensibilities as a child. By resorting to tales from her childhood - anecdotal, actual or imagined - she was able increasingly to articulate the nostalgia of looking back at the previous age and express her concerns over innocence lost and exploited. She rehearsed and rehearsed her many voices in the writing available in the BFC. This was not to uncover the truth behind the 'great lie of everyday life' but to describe the 'lie' itself. Whether truth could be achieved was not at stake. It was the articulation of what the 'lie' and the 'act' were composed of that concerned her. If 'truth' in some form or other resulted from this then, in the fictive context, her characters frequently hid the consequences in order to break the cycle instituted by the 'lie' and prevent the perpetuation of domestic anxiety. From this Braddon emerges as a reforming author of meditative sensibilities, concentrating on the psychological damage of frequent,

generational revelation of family wrongs and inherited secrecy. She wanted peace for her characters, and by association, for herself and her class and gender. Her writing aimed to articulate the central concerns of every day life, using all the resources of literary allusion available to her. She used the forms of the Gothic, melodrama and social satire to express in heightened form the anxieties of respectable bourgeois Victorians.

Out of the preoccupation she had with *her* middle-class emerged a concern for the men and women in the arts, in trade and in the professions. That they should not be judged in a one-dimensional way by the accoutrements and reputations of a few of their members was one of her concerns. She had known the superficial and difficult nature of her father, the solicitor, and how it had affected her family and she undoubtedly recreated an impression of him in some of her most obnoxious, and intriguing, characters. She did not, however, take that with her to the end of her life. In her memoir, *Before the Knowledge of Evil*, she sought to redress some of the balance, or imbalance, of her previous portrayals of the difficult parent and the emerging suburbanites. She speculated upon how much easier and smoother her family's life, and her career, would have been, 'If Papa had not been Papa.'

She would not have had to exercise such determined self-invention, not subsequently a bad thing, if her father had provided for his family. She might, much earlier, have been a part of that new strand of society that she saw around her in the Edwardian period, and whose rise she had charted throughout the previous decades. These were the families of professional men, solicitors who rode to hounds and sent their sons to Oxford, their daughters presented at court. She, by then, understood that new class so well, the class so often accused of Philistinism. She, like they, enjoyed the pleasures of town and country society and upwardly mobile prospects, but acknowledged the concomitant pressures. It was out of these she had built her writing career. Their lives could contain all the melodramatic ambivalence of a stage drama and their children, compelled to parade and socialize, could encounter all the

anxiety contained in a Gothic novel. But they were vibrant and modern people. Yet, she meditated on their lot:

> Should I have been happy among the Philistines [If Papa had not been Papa] – for must not all rich men who have to live in a groove, and earn their champagne and turtle by toil at a knee hole desk, belong in somewhere to Philistia [?] Yet all solicitors are not Philistines: one at least I have known who was just as fond of books as I am, and to walk round whose library was a liberal education, and I have sat beside solicitors at dinner parties whose conversation was of the most interesting and made the longest dinner seem short. No, a solicitor need not be a Philistine.[3]

These people, 'Philistines', like her hero in *Vixen,* read and enjoyed Dickens, Byron and her novels. The capacity for variety and the power of reinvention and metamorphosis that this class seemed to possess was something that continually intrigued her. That the daughter of a provincial actress, or a man who had committed suicide over the outcome of a card game, could then become a gentlewoman expressed for her the fluidity and diversity of human experience and the properties for the drama of the novel. These she sought and expressed, constantly experimenting with and reinventing her work until the end of her life. She was a novelist of flair and originality and also derivation and allusion.

In *Beyond Sensation* a number of critics have begun the process of allowing her to re-emerge as an innovator with popular literary forms. Braddon's active participation in questioning the recommendations of some of her contemporary critics and their proscription, that women novelists should not be unrestrained and produce work unfit for impressionable young female minds, is a considerable achievement in her career. The protocols of writing and reading genres in fiction acted to dissuade critics from assessing Braddon 'beyond' the form of sensation writing until recently; but the application of different, diverse protocols of reading and criticism have commenced the re-evaluation of her contribution.

The BFC takes this process even further. Via endeavours, such as Carnell and Chris Willis writing on her detective fiction, new avenues open and further possibilities emerge. To Braddon, Henry James attributed a knowledge and perceptiveness of the workings of the criminal mind similar to Shakespeare's 'workings of conscience' from plays such as *Macbeth*.[4] If critics, as 'sleuths' in their own right, pursue the detecting style and protocols then more associative frameworks and revelations will emerge.

As I have noted, attitudes and vocabulary have changed over recent decades. Winifred Hughes described Braddon in *Maniac in the Cellar*, whilst attributing to her a prominent and pioneering role in sensation writing, as an author 'who continued to churn out anonymous serials,'[5] even after popular success with *Lady Audley's Secret*. But, the information from the BFC now sheds new light on her invention and compositional styles. Willis, Carnell, Heilmann, Johnson et al fortunately employ more positive vocabulary, and Braddon's expertise in writing 'probably the first British detective novel'[6] (*Trail of the Serpent*) for example, has entered our frame of reference. This is a substantiated scholarly claim that would have been unimaginable twenty years ago. It might be advisable, as Willis and others have done, for twenty-first century scholars to continue to look to such eminent forbears as Henry James for their avenue into understanding Braddon's contribution and legacy. She is still, however, regularly compared unfavourably to 'greater' novelists.[7]

The relationship with the material in the BFC that I have been able to develop over a period of five years has been an elaborate and complex one. To have touched upon the intimate creative life of such an energetic author does isolate certain features of her work for me, and impose certain conclusions that are sometimes difficult to articulate in the language of critical commentary. Braddon's personae and abilities have become something that, inevitably, promote a subjectivity and personal perspective in the manner in which I have treated them in offering a critical assessment of the BFC. The outstanding features of her work that most appeal

involved her commitment to her family; her mother and Maxwell, her children and her close friends and associates. She has a tone in some of her writing, and placed a value on certain items in the BFC, that involves the investigator of her life with her knowing, personal warmth towards figures such as Collins and Bulwer, Charles Wyndham and of course Dickens.

There is closeness and a relationship of sorts that builds up when handling personal artefacts that belonged to a woman of such intelligence and character. Her desire to communicate and articulate her heartfelt sentiments is a powerful and compelling feeling that emanates from her possessions and her manuscripts. Sometimes her script is tidy and well formed on the page, and at other times she clearly wrote with rapidity and energy, filling every portion of the available page. Her early manuscripts, dating from the time when she was still acting, have this latter quality. The image of her as a young actress, absorbed in composition, but aware of how precious the manuscript paper was to her on her meagre wage, comes across very powerfully in reading this material. Her personal belongings and mementoes generate a sense of intimacy with her and highlight her preoccupations with family and close attachments.

The letters that she saved, including one from Maxwell from 1894 written in a painstaking and scrawled hand and addressing her as 'Dear Dolly', exhibit this emphasis on the importance she placed upon relationships and the evidence of feeling and memory. He was in his final illness when he sent this message to her. Whilst the content of the letter is casual and business-like in tone the considerable effort he must have expended in order to write it clearly showed her his abiding feelings for her and was something she saved until her death. Likewise, the drawings from her children proved a revelation. It was intriguing to see the typical characteristics of children's drawings that depicted scenes of Victorian life. The fact that Braddon kept them, to have the memory of her children with her always, offers the insight into family life and the perspective on normality and everyday feeling that is frequently absent when considering, critically, the life of an author. Similarly

the child's shoe that was found amongst her possessions and the lock of hair kept in an envelope. The imagination is charged when investigating a person's life on such a level, and actually handling the evidence of that life, remarking upon the objects that they personally chose to keep with them and preserve. Their legacy is tangible and the investigator can enter into the territory that Braddon felt so important to depict in her novels and writings, the minutiae of life and domesticity. The picture that builds up contains the aspects of her life and times she so emphatically wanted to convey.

There is also a striking sense of her professionalism and the attraction she felt towards the glamour and vibrancy of Victorian fashions, pastimes and public life. Newspaper clippings reminded her of outings and events and the silk playbill contained amongst her treasured objects was preserved as a memento of her return to the stage for a benefit evening. She also kept a few sketches that she had made of Maxwell, seated and asleep or reading, perhaps from an early point in their relationship. These were executed with an adoring eye – depicting him from various angles, looking fine and gentlemanly with side-whiskers and a noble profile. Throughout the manuscripts there are a number of echoes and links that foster an understanding of the resolve she had about communicating certain things. Foremost amongst these regular and evocative themes is her devotion to her mother. In the pages of her autobiographical notes and manuscripts Fanny Braddon is a prominent feature. Braddon owed her mother a great debt for support and encouragement that she was always eager to acknowledge. There are also the common persistent themes surrounding theatrical life, and the evidence, in the 1895 letter from Charles Wyndham, of her abiding interest in theatre and desire to write for the stage throughout her career.

It is a strange exercise to engage in, and one that has no distinct end, in making such an appraisal. To feel so close to the reminiscences, tangibility and everyday experiences of a long-dead author has been a remarkable process of discovery. To trace the lines of continuity in one career, across a period of sixty years and more, and to assimilate those into a work of criticism has meant a certain amount of

editorial intervention was required and the reluctant exclusion of aspects that deserve further investigation. There are ample discoveries, appraisals and re-appraisals, still to be made. A crucial feature of this endeavour has been the awareness of anticipating what other scholars, historians, and critics will make of the collection in future.

This material is an example of the developing notions, modes and forms of a Victorian novelist from a career that spanned the crucial latter half of the nineteenth century. She lived through the crises, changes and innovations of the period, as a woman who shaped her life and career according to values that both embraced and rejected the standard conventions perceived of the time. Thanks to her experiences in confronting the demands of her career and the social conventions, as they evolved and changed, a picture of the complexity of Victorian lifestyles and values can be discerned. When, towards the end of her life, Braddon claimed the year of her birth as 1837, two years later than the actual date, she was self-consciously asserting her identity as a Victorian, born in the year of the young queen's accession. With hindsight from old age, clearly the importance of what it meant to have been a Victorian was something she wanted to highlight.

Braddon's position is an interesting one; she occupied an ambivalent and problematic place in society. Her parents separated when she was a child and so her earliest memories of family life and human relationships came from a perspective that was inherently troubled and did not meet the ideal of domestic security. She was a young middle-class woman who entered the theatrical profession, with all its associated dangers and uncertainties. Then, she began a writing career in earnest at which point she met Maxwell, fell in love and became pregnant with his child whilst he was still married to another woman. She fielded the embarrassment of being discovered as his mistress when his wife died: friends and acquaintances thought it was she who was referred to in the obituary announcement in the papers and even sent letters of condolence to her home.[8] She suffered the loss of her sister, her

mother, one of her children in infancy and Maxwell. Her brother, Edward, disapproved of her choices in life and was estranged from her for many years.

Braddon absorbed the ethics, politics, and events of the age – the age of Carlyle, Dickens, and Bulwer Lytton and of melodrama and bourgeois anxiety. She ventured to explore sensitive issues of the freedom of women in marriage and the incarceration of patients in madhouses. She was aware of the undercurrent in *Lady Audley's Secret,* and later in her career with *A Lost Eden,* in reference to Bulwer Lytton's scandalous and public marriage breakdown during which, in 1858, he had his wife Rosina abducted from a London street and put away in a private asylum. She lifted these events and used them in her fiction, commenting upon the misplaced power games and forceful treatment of women and children in her novels to explore the theme of domestic and bourgeois anxiety. This is the feature that constantly reoccurs in her writing: that of the malaise that afflicted the middle-classes and generated for her the matter and themes of her writing. To this commentary on society she added the resonance of Dickens's work, strategically editing out any reference to the troubles affecting his private life.

Through her references to Dickens's writing in her own work she reappraised his work and its values, and mediated the Victorian period for the modern writer. The BFC, with the insights into her personal life that it provides, gives us a particularly sharp focus onto the work and genius of one whose life was lived between domestic concerns and the transforming imagination of the writer – the 'wolf' of her fiction conceived 'between the wardrobe and the washstand'.

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[1] See Ch.2 n. 31.

[2] Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess*, New Haven & London: Yale UP, new preface edition, 1995.

[3] Braddon, *Before the Knowledge of Evil* 28

[4] Chris Willis, 'Afterword', *The Trail of the Serpent*, New York: Random House, 2003, 412.

[5] Hughes, *Maniac in the Cellar* 9.

[6] Chris Willis, 'Afterword' 409.

[7] Emma Liggins, 'Her mercenary spirit: women, money and marriage in Mary Elizabeth Braddon's 1870s fiction', *Women's Writing*, 2004 11(1): This article assesses Braddon's contribution to the various debates on women's issues in the 1870s and claims an active early feminist role for her, but ulimately draws a negative comparison between her and George Eliot, 'It would be unconvincing to argue that [Braddon's] novels achieve the depth of engagement with the woman question evidenced in *Daniel Deronda* . . .' 84.

[8] Carnell 181-82.

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