

# PUBLISHED VERSION

Madeleine Seys

The scenery and dresses of her dreams: reading and reflecting (on) the Victorian heroine in M.E. Braddon's *the Doctor's Wife*

Changing the Victorian subject, 2014 / Tonkin, M., Treagus, M., Seys, M., Crozier De Rosa, S. (ed./s), Ch.9, pp.177-199

© 2014 The Contributors This work is licenced under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial- NoDerivatives 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0) License. To view a copy of this licence, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0> or send a letter to Creative Commons, 444 Castro Street, Suite 900, Mountain View, California, 94041, USA. This licence allows for the copying, distribution, display and performance of this work for non-commercial purposes providing the work is clearly attributed to the copyright holders. Address all inquiries to the Director at the above address.

## PERMISSIONS

<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>



**Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International** (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0)

This is a human-readable summary of (and not a substitute for) the [license](#).

[Disclaimer](#)

### You are free to:

**Share** — copy and redistribute the material in any medium or format

The licensor cannot revoke these freedoms as long as you follow the license terms.

### Under the following terms:



**Attribution** — You must give **appropriate credit**, provide a link to the license, and **indicate if changes were made**. You may do so in any reasonable manner, but not in any way that suggests the licensor endorses you or your use.



**NonCommercial** — You may not use the material for **commercial purposes**.



**NoDerivatives** — If you **remix, transform, or build upon** the material, you may not distribute the modified material.

**No additional restrictions** — You may not apply legal terms or **technological measures** that legally restrict others from doing anything the license permits.

<http://hdl.handle.net/2440/84715>

# 9

## The scenery and dresses of her dreams: reading and reflecting (on) the Victorian heroine in M.E. Braddon's *The Doctor's Wife*

*Madeleine Seys*

In Mary Elizabeth Braddon's 1864 novel, *The Doctor's Wife*, heroine Isabel gazes into the looking glass 'to see if she really were pretty; or if her face, as she saw it in her day-dreams, was only an invention of her own, like the scenery and the dresses of those foolish dreams' (155). Throughout *The Doctor's Wife*, Braddon explores the mirror's dual capacity to fashion fantasy and register reality. In the mirror, Braddon fashions a new symbolic relationship between reading and dressing and, thereby, metafictionally negotiates Isabel's dual position as reader and heroine, subject and object in the novel. Dressing, reading and dreaming in front of the looking glass, Isabel self-consciously acts out the construction and representation of the heroine in the Victorian novel. At the same time, Braddon negotiates shifts in conceptions of feminine and literary subjectivity in *The Doctor's Wife* and fashions a form of highly self-conscious and culturally receptive authorship and readership in the genred literary climate of the mid-nineteenth century.

*The Doctor's Wife* traces the life and reading of Isabel Gilbert (née Sleaford) from naïve adolescence to wisdom and maturity. Like many female members

## *Changing the Victorian Subject*

of 'the poorer middle classes', Isabel has received a 'half-and-half education' (Braddon 27). The narrator advises us that she

knew a little Italian, enough French to serve for the reading of novels that she might have better left unread, and just so much modern history as enabled her to pick out all the sugarplums in the historians' pages ... She played the piano a little, and sang a little, and painted wishy-washy-looking flowers on Bristol-board. (27)

After the cessation of her formal education at the age of sixteen, the narrator continues, Isabel 'set to work to educate herself by means of the nearest circulating library ... and read her favourite novels over and over again' (27-8). Despite her voracity, Isabel is neither a critical nor discerning reader. The narrator states that she

was not a woman of the world. She had read novels while other people perused the Sunday papers ... She believed in a phantasmal world created out of the pages of poets and romancers. (253)

She dreams of inhabiting this world and being 'really, truly sentimentally beloved, like the heroine of a novel' (247). Isabel's position as a literary subject in the novel is defined both by her status as a reader and as a heroine.

Isabel's 'small delicate features', pale face, dark eyes and purple-black hair 'invested her with a kind of weird and melancholy beauty ... which could only be fully comprehended by a poet', the narrator states (167, 25). Her suitor, George Gilbert, thinks she is 'fitted to be the heroine of a romance' (30). Sigismund Smith, within the novel an author of popular fiction, uses Isabel as his muse: 'I do her for all my dark heroines', he says (30). Roland Lansdell, a poet of Byronic character, is also attracted to Isabel's beauty, innocence and impressionability. He thinks of her as a 'beautiful piece of animated wax-work, with a little machinery inside' onto which he can impose his fantasies of seduction (151). In the course of the novel, however, Isabel resists seduction and transcends these models of dangerous and corruptible femininity. Through a process of reading, reflecting and self-fashioning, Isabel transforms herself into a model of feminine respectability.

This chapter explores the significance of the mirror as a tool for reflection, both literal and figurative, in M.E. Braddon's *The Doctor's Wife*. It examines Braddon's use of the mirror as both a physical tool and self-conscious

## *Changing the Victorian Subject*

metaphor for Isabel's transformation as reader and heroine. Standing in front of her looking glass, novel in hand and reflection before her, Isabel muses on her subjectivity. She gradually refashions her appearance and identity in light of contemporary ideas about gender, genre and reading. At the same time, Braddon uses the mirror to refashion her own literary subjectivity. In *The Doctor's Wife*, she self-consciously and playfully employs elements of sensationalism and realism whilst also critiquing the legitimacy of these generic distinctions (P. Gilbert, *Disease* 9). In this way, Braddon addressed her public authorial persona as 'The Sensation Novelist' and defended herself on the charge that she was a 'slave' to popularity and sensationalism (P. Gilbert, *Disease* 92; Rae 197). This chapter explores the various ways in which the narrative of *The Doctor's Wife* brings together and reflects on the self-consciousness of heroine, reader and author in the mirror and uses them to fashion a series of conscious, comprehensible and culturally relevant literary subjectivities. In *The Doctor's Wife*, the mirror is a site for changing literary, feminine and authorial subjectivities and subjects. This chapter draws on this and uses the mirror to shape a reading practice which itself changes the critical subject and repositions Braddon's novel within debates about women as heroines, readers and authors in the mid-Victorian period.

During the 1860s, the British literary field was dominated by the genres of realism and sensationalism (Brantlinger 15). These were socially-, morally- and politically-, as well as artistically-driven categories (Phegley 27). Contemporary critics such as H.L. Mansel, W. Fraser Rae and Margaret Oliphant criticised sensation fiction as a 'wildly popular and artistically dubious upstart genre' and 'a crisis in ... literary realism' (Phegley 113; Brantlinger 27). According to Rae, realism is premised on the understanding that 'a novel is a picture of life, and as such ought to be faithful' (203). Sensation novels, alternatively, were defined as 'fancy portraits of repulsive virtue and attractive vice' (Mansel 499). The forthright narratives and morals of realism were 'punctuated with question marks' in sensation fiction (Brantlinger 2). A deficiency of verisimilitude yet penchant for describing frivolous details was identified as the genre's main artistic fault and the point on which it differed, most markedly, from realism (Rae 189). However, the sensationalism/realism dichotomy is not a simple one. As a genre, sensation fiction is defined by its instability: generic, narrative and thematic. Patrick Brantlinger furnishes us with the most succinct definition of the genre

## *Changing the Victorian Subject*

when he states that it is governed by the idea that ‘innocent appearances cloak evil intentions; reality functions as a mystery until the sudden revelation of guilt’ (14). Whilst this was unsettling, it was the genre’s themes, characterisation and setting which Victorian readers and critics considered particularly problematic.

Sensation fiction broaches subjects that many Victorians thought inappropriate: it depicts murder, adultery, bigamy, insanity, fraud and impersonation (Brantlinger 5-6). Its heroines are women of ambiguous and unstable identities and secret histories who transgress accepted models of gender, class and morality (Brantlinger 5-6). Most shocking, however, is that they commit their crimes, ‘not in the worst rookeries of Seven Dials’ but in the ‘sweet ... calm’ of the middle-class Victorian home (Braddon, *Lady* 54). It was not just within the world of the novel that sensation fiction and the sensation heroine were considered to threaten the sanctity of the home, however. Sensation fiction was also perceived to threaten the Victorian cult of the domestic in appealing to a large and enthusiastic female readership.

According to contemporary critics and reviewers, sensation fiction was primarily consumed by women readers (Phegley 113). In *The Doctor’s Wife*, Braddon addresses contemporary concerns about this readership through the observations of an inhabitant of Graybridge (the fictional setting of the novel). This critic states that ‘a young person who spent so much of her time in the perusal of works of fiction could scarcely be a model wife’ (117). Female readers were depicted as uncritical and easily corrupted by the genre’s transgressive and immoral narratives (Phegley 111-13). By appealing to female readers’ latent ‘dislike of their roles as daughters, wives and mothers’ and their repressed ‘fantasies of protest and escape,’ sensation fiction was considered to threaten the sanctity of the Victorian home (Showalter 130). It was also perceived to appeal to women’s sexual passions and ‘eagerness ... [for] physical sensation’ (Oliphant 259).

In 1867, Margaret Oliphant wrote that the heroines of sensation novels are

women driven wild with love for the man who leads them on to desperation  
... women who marry their grooms in fits of sensual passion;<sup>1</sup> women who

---

1 This is an obvious reference to M.E. Braddon’s 1863 novel, *Aurora Floyd*, in which the passionate and impulsive Aurora elopes with a groom employed by her father.

## *Changing the Victorian Subject*

pray their lovers to carry them off from husbands and worlds they hate; women, at the very least of it, who give and receive burning kisses and frantic embraces, and live in a voluptuous dream. (259)

This model of femininity, she states, 'is held up to us as the story of the feminine soul ... [and] state of mind' (Oliphant 259). In *The Doctor's Wife*, M.E. Braddon questions this model of dreaming, corruptible, dangerous and uncritical female readership. In the course of the novel, heroine and reader Isabel Gilbert awakes from her 'voluptuous dream' of being a heroine and transforms herself into an active and mature reader (Oliphant 259). Braddon uses this redemptive narrative to defend sensation fiction and its female readership and to refashion her own authorial subjectivity.

Mary Elizabeth Braddon was known as the 'queen of the sensation novel' (Phegley 23) and was amongst the most prolific and popular authors of the nineteenth century (Tromp, Gilbert and Haynie xv). She was also one of the most frequently and vehemently criticised. Her novels *Lady Audley's Secret* (1862) and *Aurora Floyd* (1863) are considered definitively 'sensational' in their depiction of women who subvert the Victorian ideal of angelic and passive femininity (Showalter 130-5; Brantlinger 1; Pykett, 'Improper' 84). Of *Lady Audley*, the eponymous heroine of Braddon's first sensation novel, Rae states that

[w]henver she is meditating the commission of something inexpressibly horrible, she is described as being unusually charming. Her manner and her appearance are always in contrast with her conduct. All this is very exciting, but also very unnatural. (186)

Rae considered *Lady Audley's* crimes to be both moral and narrative (186). Her 'horrible' actions breach ideas about innocent and passive femininity. Simultaneously, the fact that she maintains her 'charming' looks whilst perpetrating such transgressions upsets the established realist equation of signifier and signified (Rae 186). Sensation fiction, therefore, engenders instability on both thematic and narrative levels. Amongst the most common criticisms of sensation fiction was that it violated the carefully constructed boundaries between high art and popular culture and combined elements of both (Phegley 113). Because of this, it is unclear where exactly 'the boundaries of sensation fiction begin and end' (Knight 325) and critics continue to grapple to define and identify the genre. A review of the existing critical literature on Braddon's *The Doctor's Wife* makes evident this struggle.

## *Changing the Victorian Subject*

*The Doctor's Wife* was published in 1864, during Braddon's most 'sensational' period.<sup>2</sup> However, as the novel's narrator states, it 'is *not* a sensation novel' (358, emphasis in original). Because of this tension, *The Doctor's Wife* has proved a point of contention for critics from Rae in 1865 into the twenty-first century. Analysis of this novel defines it as either self-consciously sensational or unsuccessfully realist. Writing in the *North British Review* in 1865, Rae stated that *The Doctor's Wife* was Braddon's attempt to write a realist novel but that she remained a 'slave ... to the style which she created. "Sensation" [was] her Frankenstein' (197). This argument still has credence for critics in the twenty-first century (Pykett, 'Introduction' xx; Sparks 208). Golden argues that in this novel Braddon attempted (unsuccessfully, it is implied) to censor her sensationalism in pursuit of critical, rather than popular, acclamation (30). Sparks accords and states that the novel is a 'confused compendium of three types of popular Victorian literature, sensationalism, sentimentalism, and realism' (198). Pamela K. Gilbert attributes Braddon with greater control over the style of her text, suggesting that *The Doctor's Wife* signalled a decisive break with sensationalism (*Disease* 106). Braddon, she states, deliberately establishes *The Doctor's Wife* 'in the high-culture genre of realism by positioning ... [it] through internal textual cues, against sensation fiction' (*Disease* 9).<sup>3</sup>

*The Doctor's Wife*, as these divergent readings attest, cannot be easily accommodated within Victorian models of genre. Rather than constructing her text within the strictures of realism or sensationalism, Braddon critiques the legitimacy of these generic distinctions (P. Gilbert, *Disease* 9). As Jennifer Phegley argues, in this novel Braddon 'hoped to show that she could write

---

2 *Lady Audley's Secret*, Braddon's most famous sensation novel, was serialised from 1861 to 1862 and the equally sensational *Aurora Floyd*, *John Marchmont's Legacy* and *Eleanor's Victory* were published between 1862 and 1863.

3 P. Gilbert goes on to say that *The Doctor's Wife* was a response not only to sensation fiction but also to Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* (1856) (*Disease* 9). Golden agrees, stating that in *The Doctor's Wife* Braddon was 'laundering the sensationalism' of Flaubert's novel (30). It seems undeniable that the plot of Braddon's novel is influenced by *Madame Bovary* (Flint 288). In fact, Braddon admitted to 'borrowing' from Flaubert's text (Wolff, *Sensational* 162). However, she places Isabel's story firmly within British social, generic and literary conventions. Braddon's reflections on and refashioning of these conventions are the focus of this chapter and, for this reason, it will not undertake an intertextual analysis of *The Doctor's Wife* and *Madame Bovary*.

## *Changing the Victorian Subject*

realistically even while playfully engaging with elements of sensation' (136). *The Doctor's Wife* is 'tempered with a certain self-consciousness' of its own generic position (P. Gilbert, *Disease* 106). Our reading of the novel, then, must be similarly playful and self-conscious; it must be alert to the ways in which Braddon manipulates genre through her depiction of Isabel reading, dressing and acting in front of the mirror. Writing on Braddon's later but similarly self-conscious novel *Vixen*, Albert Sears argues that in order to understand Braddon's 'simultaneous engagement and resistance to the sensation fiction marketplace, we need a reading practice ... that reads for generic expectation but also attends to the ways her narratives surpass generic boundaries' (51). Reading through the mirror, this chapter takes up this challenge; it draws on the work of P. Gilbert, Phegley and Sears and considers the way in which *The Doctor's Wife* sets up and then transcends prevailing generic structures.<sup>4</sup>

The ideas of reading and reflecting inform this chapter in all of their literal and metaphoric senses. The image of Isabel pontificating on the relative fantasy or reality of her appearance, dress and status as the heroine of the novel in front of her looking glass connects the actions of reading, dressing and reflecting in *The Doctor's Wife*. It also foregrounds Braddon's consciousness of the complex codes that surrounded these activities for women in the 1860s. Braddon uses the mirror as a surface on which to cognitively and visually reflect

---

4 Although best known for her sensation novels of the 1860s, Mary Elizabeth Braddon continued to publish until her death in 1915; much of her later work is yet to have sustained critical attention. Braddon's later novels are marked by their contemporaneity. Her narrative style and subject matter continually evolved, keeping pace with the multifarious literary, cultural, social and political changes of the late-Victorian and Edwardian periods. Many of her later novels mediate between popular genres, self-consciously and playfully examining their poetics and politics. Scholarship on *The Doctor's Wife* has begun to explore this generic instability and self-consciousness. Albert C. Sears's examination of *Vixen* and Pamela K. Gilbert's reading of *Joshua Haggard's Daughter* similarly explore these novels' generic instability. Such readings provide a model for examining Braddon's later work in light of generic expectation, whilst also attending to the ways in which these novels interrogate or transgress generic conventions (Sears 51). This also opens up the possibility of returning to her better-known novels, *Lady Audley's Secret*, *Aurora Floyd* and *Eleanor's Victory* and reconsidering their relationship to sensationalism and its antithesis, realism, rather than reinforcing these strict distinctions. A similar approach could be taken to other sensation novels and novelists. This also has implications for the wider study of Victorian genres and generic anomalies.



## *Changing the Victorian Subject*

on the 'restrictive nature and devious possibilities that underwrote accepted class behaviours and gender roles' during this period (Phegley 137). Thus we begin to see the mirror as a site for the changing literary subject within and without the sensation novel. The literal use of the mirror as a tool for reflection also prompts self-consciousness of other, more figurative, sorts in *The Doctor's Wife*. The image of Isabel reading in front of the mirror, then, becomes a metaphor for literary self-consciousness in the novel.

Braddon's positioning of *The Doctor's Wife* within contemporary debates about realism and sensationalism, reality and fantasy, and women's writing and reading is deliberately self-conscious. The novel uses the mirror to reflect on notions of genre and gender and interrogate the ways in which they are employed, in contemporary literature and associated critical commentary, to fashion feminine literary subjectivities. This emphasises the status of the narrative and its heroine as works of fiction and, therefore, identifies Braddon's *The Doctor's Wife* as a work of metafiction. Patricia Waugh defines metafiction as literature that self-consciously and systematically draws attention to 'its own status as an artefact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality' (2). Metafiction re-examines

the conventions of realism in order to discover — through its own self-reflection — a fictional form that is culturally relevant and comprehensible to contemporary readers. (18)

However, Waugh also argues that nineteenth-century literature is not metafictional (31-2). The characterisation of Isabel as reader-heroine refutes this claim. In her role as reader, Isabel reflects on the fictionality of the heroine as a literary construct. As heroine, she consciously aspires to this ideal of literary femininity before finally refashioning and transcending it. In her self-conscious portrayal of the act of reading in the novel, Braddon unites Isabel with her favourite heroines and with the actual readers of *The Doctor's Wife*. Braddon fashions a narrative, then, which is culturally receptive and relevant, and comprehensible to contemporary readers in the way that Waugh describes.

In employing the mirror as a space in which Isabel fashions, inhabits and ultimately transcends the 'phantasmal world created out of the pages of poets and romancers' (253), Braddon provides a unique metaphor for thinking about

## *Changing the Victorian Subject*

the intersection of reality, fantasy and ideality in representations of the heroine in Victorian fiction. When Isabel stands in front of the mirror she is reflecting not only on her literary and readerly subjectivity but also on her appearance. She peers into the looking glass to see if she is as pretty as the heroine of a romance or if her appearance is only an invention of her own, like the dresses of her foolish dreams (155). In the mirror, fantasy (and fiction) are acted out and realised by Isabel. She fashions a new wardrobe and identity for herself in the styles of the novels she reads (155). The imagery of Isabel's appearance and a range of possible symbolic meanings borrowed, by both heroine and readers, from other texts to interpret it, coalesce at the reflective surface of the mirror. This captures the dual function of mirror (and of reflection) to create, distort and refashion the signification of the visual and written codes of Victorian genres. It also provides the tool with which Isabel and Braddon refashion how they are read within these codes as the novel progresses. Together, these forms of reflection and refashioning typify Braddon's self-conscious approach to representation and narrative in *The Doctor's Wife*.

In Victorian literature, a heroine's subjectivity is developed through her dress; the fabrics and style of a woman's clothing attest to her wealth, class, morality and respectability as well as to current tastes and fashions (Kortsch 55; Reynolds and Humble 59). Dress also frames the woman's body within prevailing ideas about gender and sexuality (P. Gilbert, *Disease* 68). In her study of fashion and modernity, *Sex and Suits: The Evolution of Modern Dress*, Anne Hollander speaks to the power of dress in fashioning notions of femininity and female subjectivity. She argues that throughout the modern period, the 'form of the actual woman' was replaced by the fictional 'image of the Dressed Woman ... shaped ... according to shifts in the erotic imagination' (47).

The Victorian Dressed Woman and heroine of contemporary literature was, and continues to be, defined by a pair of antithetical and erotically charged images. She is either the virginal domestic angel of realism (Talairach-Vielmas 9), the 'ideal woman in feelings, faculties and [white muslin] flounces' (Eliot 301-2), or the sexual and sensational 'demon' in 'a ruby-velvet gown that *wouldn't* keep hooked' (Braddon, *Doctor's* 199, emphasis in original). She is bound to her narrative fate by the symbolic threads of her dress. There are two narrative alternatives available to her:

## *Changing the Victorian Subject*

[S]he will either get virtue's earthly reward, a rich husband, or be seduced and die ... The conscious heroine must work out a view of this absurdly simple pair of alternatives by which to transcend them. (Brownstein 81)

By reflecting on her appearance in the mirror, Isabel becomes a 'conscious heroine' (Brownstein 81). She 'stitches up' a new identity out of the stuff of Victorian literature and admires her fictional effect in the looking glass. In doing so, she works out a view of these genred alternatives of Victorian 'heroine-ship' and transcends her potential as a corruptible reader and seducible heroine.

When we first meet Isabel 'she [is] sitting in a basket-chair ... with a book on her lap ... She [is wearing] a muslin dress, a good deal tumbled and not too clean' (23). In the first part of the narrative, Isabel struggles to negotiate her individual subjectivity and agency with the literary codes which would cast her as a passive and fated heroine-reader. The book in her lap in this scene is a potent symbol of this struggle. She is discovered in the garden, not only by readers, but also by author Mr Sigismund Smith and his friend Dr Gilbert. Smith and Gilbert attempt to engage Isabel in conversation; however, she keeps one finger shut in the novel she is reading, indicative of her desire to plunge back into its fictional world as soon as possible (23-4). Isabel's struggle to tear herself away from her romance reading mirrors Braddon's struggle to distance herself, as an author, from such popular and sensational literary genres. As Braddon narrates these struggles in *The Doctor's Wife*, she knowingly enters contemporary debates surrounding female subjectivity and reading.

'Miss Sleaford's a very good little girl', states Sigismund Smith in the first volume of the novel, 'but she's got too much Wonder, and exaggerated Ideality' (66). Smith, we are told, is 'the author of about half a dozen highly-spiced fictions, which enjoyed an immense popularity' amongst the reading public (11). As well as being an author of sensation fiction within the narrative — although, as the narrator notes, 'that bitter term of reproach ... had not [yet] been invented' (11) — Smith also functions as the author-by-proxy of *The Doctor's Wife*. In casting Smith in this role, Braddon metafictionally dramatises the act of writing and the construction of femininity and female subjectivity in Victorian literature. She uses Smith as a mirror to her own authorship and, therefore, symbolically distances herself from the writing of the novel.

## *Changing the Victorian Subject*

As Braddon's fictional authorial *alter ego* (Pykett, 'Introduction' ix), Sigismund Smith orchestrates and chronicles the action of *The Doctor's Wife*. He introduces Isabel to Dr Gilbert and then to Roland Lansdell and chronicles their romances in his letters and, though indirectly, his fictional writing. Through his narrative commentary and description of his own literary efforts for the penny press, Smith establishes the normative way of reading Isabel as a sensational Braddonian heroine. Readers versed in Braddon's sensation fiction (namely *Lady Audley's Secret* and *Aurora Floyd*) see Isabel, slovenly in her limp white muslin gown, as an ill-fated *femme fatale*. 'Pretty and inexperienced' and with purple-black hair, red lips and a clinging gown, Isabel is easy prey to a profligate (Braddon, *Doctor's* 167). With a novel in her lap, she is simultaneously represented as the corrupted (or eminently corruptible) reader of such fiction; Isabel is thought to be prey to a profligate because she is 'dreadfully romantic' and 'reads too many novels' (30). The tension between reading Isabel as a corruptible reader and a corruptible heroine forms the basis of the metafictional reflection on and refashioning of feminine and literary subjectivity which Braddon undertakes in this novel.

Whilst Isabel has every appearance of a typical sensation heroine, Braddon suggests that her husband, Dr George Gilbert, belongs to the realm of the 'real' rather than the sensational, phantasmal or romantic. Dr Gilbert, the narrator notes, 'had those homely, healthy good looks which the novelist or poet in search of a hero would recoil from with actual horror' (6). When cast together, Isabel and George symbolise the genres of sensationalism and realism which Braddon plays with in this novel (Pykett, 'Introduction' xii). Smith introduces Isabel Sleaford and Dr Gilbert and, befitting his role as the 'author' of the novel, is the means of communication between them. Smith, therefore, symbolically traverses the space between reality (realism) and fantasy (sensationalism): he authors the letters that keep George informed of Isabel's life, and George falls in love with the 'heroine' of these epistles. Meanwhile, a mysterious misfortune befalls the Sleaford family and Isabel leaves her family and seeks work as a governess. She is reunited with George Gilbert whilst thus employed and accepts his proposal of marriage. Isabel is wooed by the 'pretty story' of his confession of love (Braddon 87) and by her desire to be 'really, truly sentimentally beloved, like the heroine of a novel' (247). Prior to this, she has lamented her role as governess, the marginal female figure who haunts the glamorous and beloved heroine in the

## *Changing the Victorian Subject*

novels she reads.<sup>5</sup> Furnished with her library, a wardrobe of new gowns and ‘a card-case with a new name on the cards contained in it’ (110) Isabel fashions a new subjectivity as the wifely heroine.

Isabel believes, according to the narrator, that upon her marriage ‘[her] story had begun, and she was a heroine’ (90). The narrator states that ‘although Isabel amused herself by planning her wedding-dress ... she had no idea of a speedy marriage. Were there not three volumes of courtship to be gone through first?’ (99). However, Isabel’s life does not follow the structure of the three-volume romance novel and she is fashioned into the model Victorian wife without the narrative climax of the joyful wedding. This shift in narrative emphasis changes the subject of the romance from the wedding to its outcome. The wedding is a quiet affair and her gown is not of the light elegant stuff as she planned, but, rather, ‘a somber brown-silk’ chosen by George because of its homely usefulness (105). Through this change in dress, Isabel is fashioned as an object of Dr Gilbert’s fantasy of ideal domestic femininity; she is expected to be ‘handy with her needle, and clever in the management of a house and the government of a maid-of-all-work’ (36). As the narrator states, though, ‘Isabel could scarcely be that, since her favourite employment was to loll in a wicker-work garden-chair and read novels’ (36). Her life (and wardrobe) as the ‘doctor’s wife’ does not fit her literary fantasies of wifehood. In order to satisfy her yearning for romance, Isabel retires more regularly to her ‘garden-chair’ and ventures further into the world of popular romance where ‘reality and fantasy mingle’ (36; Wilson 228) and where the scenery and dresses of her dreams take on the vividness of reality.

Longing to be a heroine in the fashion of the novels she reads and dissatisfied with married life, Isabel falls in love with Roland Lansdell, a poet of works which are ‘a sort of mixture of Tennyson and Alfred de Musset’ (Braddon 130). Isabel and Roland meet in secret to exchange and discuss books of poetry. In her romance with Roland, Isabel appears to have fulfilled expectations of her as a corruptible reader. Her imminent seduction also indicates her fall as a sensation heroine. The role of printed literary stuff in their relationship echoes

---

5 There is much scholarship on the figure of the governess in the Victorian novel. Helena Michie describes this representation of the governess as ‘the heroine’s shadow-double, the figure in muted grey or brown who follows the gaily dressed heroine ... and is always one step behind her in her progress through the novel’ (46).

## *Changing the Victorian Subject*

that played by Smith's letters in Isabel's courtship with Dr Gilbert. There is, however, a subtle change in the metafictional tone of the novel and in Isabel's form of heroine-ship. Braddon casts Isabel as an active reader of, rather than passive object in, the written stuff; she is transformed from objectified heroine to active reader in her relationship with Roland. This shift is captured in the mirror. Standing in front of her looking glass, Isabel fashions a new literary and feminine subjectivity which eclipses both Gilbert's and Smith's notions of the 'heroine'. Isabel becomes a more conscious (and self-conscious) and discerning reader. She exchanges Dickens's *Dombey and Son* — she had wished to be Mrs. Dombey 'sublime in scornful indignation and ruby silk velvet' (357) — for *The Revolt of Islam* (402) and the works of Shakespeare. The narrator tells us that Isabel

took a dingy volume of the immortal William's from the dusty row of books ... and went up to her room and locked the door, and pleaded for Cassio, and wept and protested opposite the looking-glass. (155)

Throughout *The Doctor's Wife*, there is an ongoing symbolic connectedness between the form of self-consciousness evoked by the mirror and that (though fantastic) encouraged by reading, acting and dressing-up. Kate Flint argues that reading played an important role in the Victorian woman's construction and assertion of her sense of self (330). At the same time, reading provided the means for the Victorian women to abnegate the self, withdrawing into passivity (Flint 330). Helena Michie describes the same juxtaposition of passivity and self-consciousness in her discussion of the mirror; the reflection, Michie argues, 'is an image of the body (vanity/surface) and of an attempt to move beyond the body (reflection/contemplation)' (8). Dressing and dressing-up allow the Victorian woman to fashion herself in order to adhere to or transcend the archetypal images of femininity and heroine-ship; this is a literal manifestation of the process of moving beyond the body which Michie describes. In *The Doctor's Wife*, Braddon stages this process in detail: Isabel reads with her workbox, scissors, needles and looking glass at hand, recutting and reshaping her dresses, and her sense of self, as she reads. Christine Bayles Kortsch argues that the Victorian woman reader's workbox was equipped not only with scissors and a needle but with something more invisible and intangible — a knowledge of the significance of cloth and clothing (55).

## *Changing the Victorian Subject*

Isabel is acutely aware of the literary significances of the cloths and clothing she wears. She imagines her devotion to stereotypically Byronic hero Roland Lansdell in the symbolic ethereal terms of the passive white muslin-clad angel. In anticipation of a visit to the Lansdell estate, Isabel unpicks and refashions 'a soft transparent' gown of white muslin and lace with a 'white muslin mantle to match' (165). This gown is a significant departure from the homely brown silk that symbolises her role as the doctor's wife. Dressed in muslin, Isabel '[fancies] herself as a perpetual worshipper in white ... kneeling at the feet of her idol' (357).

While Sigismund Smith sees Isabel as one of his corruptible sensation heroines, Roland sees her as the virginal, passive feminine ideal of nineteenth-century realism. He imagines her as a silent and 'slender white-robed figure on the moonlit terrace' (214). During the Victorian period, white muslin at once symbolised virginity, innocence and passivity, and ghostliness and blankness (Hughes 70). This duality underpins the narrative of Wilkie Collins's 1860 novel *The Woman in White*, which Braddon metafictionally refashions in *The Doctor's Wife*. Collins's heroine, Laura Fairlie, is the image of the archetypal Victorian feminine ideal: fair, pretty, demure and modest (Reynolds and Humble 52). Her 'sexual nullity' is symbolised by the textural and chromatic nullity of her gowns (53). Laura Fairlie is the feminine ideal because garbed in white, 'her body functions as a blank canvas on to which the observer's desires and fantasies can be sketched' (53). In *The Doctor's Wife*, Isabel appropriates this objectification. Through refashioning her white muslin and lace gown (164) Isabel sketches her own fantasies and desires (to be a beloved heroine) onto the surface of her appearance. This is symbolic of Braddon's metafictional 'involvement in — and mediation of — reality through ... pre-existent texts' (Waugh 14) in this novel.

Evocatively garbed in white muslin, Isabel occupies a space between the real and the imaginary, the realist and the sensational for both characters in and readers of *The Doctor's Wife* (P. Gilbert, *Disease* 110). Vainly gazing at her image in the looking glass, Isabel traverses the fictional (fantastic) and the real, thereby playing out her own literary fantasies and those of the readers. Likewise, through this image Braddon plays out her metafictional manipulation of the norms of genre in this novel. Braddon employs such subtle yet critical metafictional and intertextual techniques in order 'to cue reader's expectations — expectations that

## *Changing the Victorian Subject*

will be overturned one by one, as “reality” is not the stuff of novels’ (P. Gilbert, ‘Braddon’ 185). In the mirror, Isabel refashions the ‘stuff’ of reality just as she refashions her plain stuff gowns. The actual function of women’s dress to hide and reshape their ‘natural’ forms and replace it with prevailing fictional verities of femininity (Hollander, *Sex* 47) is analogous with this, as Isabel performs.

In Volume II of *The Doctor’s Wife* Isabel goes to the looking glass. The narrator says that she

rested her elbows on the mantelpiece and looked at herself, and pushed her hair about, and experimented with her mouth and eyes and tried to look like Edith Dombey [from Charles Dickens’s *Dombey and Son*] in the grand Carker scene, and acted the scene in a whisper. No, she wasn’t a bit like Edith Dombey, She was more like Juliet or Desdemona. (155)

In this strikingly metafictional and intertextual scene, Braddon illustrates the use of the mirror and dress to alter feminine and literary subjectivity and exhibits her awareness of the visual codes that surround these. The mirror functions as a link between the human, and literary, subject and their external representation (Hollander, *Seeing* 391). Anne Cranny-Francis suggests that the ‘real’ body is inscribed by prevailing discourses and material practices (2); the body is the ‘real material fact’ and representations thereof a ‘reflection’ of current ideas and fantasies (13). The looking glass literalises this process of ‘reflection’: it symbolises the idea that female identity is not only created but also distorted in the mirror (P. Gilbert, *Disease* 66). Through internalised literary fantasies of femininity, heroine-ship and genre (symbolised by the gazes of Sigismund Smith, Dr Gilbert and Roland Lansdell) Isabel’s subjectivity is distorted and refashioned.

Through her reading, self-fashioning and acting, Isabel oscillates between the ‘angel in the house’, the seduced fated heroine considering an Ophelia-like suicide (Braddon, *Doctor’s* 222), and the plain doctor’s wife darning coarse grey socks (189). She ultimately transcends these limiting narrative alternatives and refashions the stuff and dresses of her dreams. The mirror and the self-contemplation it facilitates are integral to this process. Braddon expresses this transformation from a fantastic dreamlike notion of femininity to a ‘realistic’ one through the symbolism of dress and cloth. The narrator states that:



## *Changing the Victorian Subject*

The sweet age of enchantment is over; the fairy companions of girlhood, who were loveliest even when most they deluded, spread their bright wings and flutter away; and the grave genius of common-sense — a dismal-looking person, who dresses in grey woollen stuff, warranted not to shrink under the ordeal of the wash-tub, and steadfastly abjures crinoline — stretches out her hand, and offers, with a friendly but uncompromising abruptness, to be ... [Isabel's] guide and monitoress. (277)

This scene has a dual function. It signals Isabel's journey through the mirror from the phantasmal world of romance and poetry to the narrative world of *The Doctor's Wife*. It is also the moment of reformation and redemption for Isabel and, therefore, for the novel from the realm of the sensational. Through this imagery Braddon raises questions about literature's capacity to hold a mirror up to social life. She addresses readers who, like Isabel, 'think that their lives are to be paraphrases of their favourite books' (30) and critics who charged her with being 'unnatural' and unrealistic (Rae 201). In this scene of sartorial and narrative transformation, Braddon interrogates this distinction between fact and fantasy, reality and fiction, and realism and sensationalism and their depictions of femininity through the distortion of the metafictional mirror. She questions the assumptions and the symbolic 'stuff' (written and 'clothy') which underpin realism and sensationalism as genres through viewing their self-reflections in a highly metafictional fashion.

The multiple acts of (genred) reading, acting, gazing and dressing are played out in this novel through the characters of Sigismund Smith and Roland Lansdell. Roland is the author of Byronically cynical poetry and 'delightful melodrama[s]' which hold the mirror up to nature so exactly 'to life' (85). Smith, on the other hand, 'is compelled to avail himself of the noses, eyes, ruby lips, and golden or raven tresses ... of every eligible young lady he meets, for the decking out of numerous heroines' (404). Through the voices (and gazes) of these two figures, Braddon draws attention to the impossibility of the mirror (in both its literal or literary manifestation) reproducing an image that is undistorted by engrained ways of reading and seeing (Michie 10). Whilst Roland assumes his literature to be a true depiction of 'real life', Smith makes no effort to disguise the fact he collects and refashions the features and details of the social world (and its female inhabitants) in writing sensation fiction for the penny press.

## *Changing the Victorian Subject*

Through literalising the gaze of the alternatives of Victorian genre, Braddon reflects on the role of the visual in objectifying the woman, as both heroine and author, in Victorian fiction. Through sewing and dressing, however, Isabel takes control of this. The fabrics and dresses of her dreams finally float away from her like cobwebs in a sudden wind (*Doctor's* 276). Through self-reflection and refashioning, Isabel transcends her subordinate position as an object of reading and the gaze by becoming an agent in her own representation and plot.

This transformation is made manifest when Roland proposes that she run away to France to be his mistress. He imagines Isabel as the feminine ideal: 'I went there, Izzie', he passionately declares, 'and set up your image in the empty rooms, and fancied you hovering here and there in your white dress, upon the broad marble terrace' (270). Roland again conjures the image of the passive and angelic heroine in white. This time, however, it connotes the ghostliness of fantasy and absence. In contrast, Isabel sees the image of another feminine archetype of Victorian literature at this suggestion — she is shocked that Roland would think of her as 'like those wicked women who run away from their husbands' (273). Conscience forbids her final refashioning into the ultimate beloved (and seduced) heroine: the Fallen Woman. 'If she had been Clotilde or the glittering Duchess', Isabel reflects, she would have been better suited to this role (276). However, her 'fairytale was finished now', the narrator states, 'with an abrupt and cruel climax; the prince had vanished; the dream was over' and she is left only with a 'vague sense of her own wrong-doing' (225, 275).

This realisation is indicative of a new consciousness, of world and self, which Isabel realises in the final chapters of *The Doctor's Wife*. In a vivid image of hindsight (couched in the language of the mirror) the narrator tells us that Isabel sees 'herself again as she had been; "engaged" to the man who lay dead upstairs [Dr Gilbert]; and weaving a poor little web of romance for herself even out of that prosaic situation' (374). When she gazes into this metaphoric looking glass, she recognises the fantasy of 'the scenery and the dresses of [her] foolish dreams' and realises that she has been 'the dupe of her own fancies, her own dreams' of heroine-ship (155, 271).

The novel concludes in a frenzy of incident. Dr Gilbert falls victim to typhoid. Mr Sleaford returns to the narrative and, recognising Roland as the 'swell' (353) who gave evidence at his fraud trial, beats him to death. Roland

## *Changing the Victorian Subject*

bequeaths his fortune to Isabel and she lives on it modestly, donating large sums to charitable and benevolent causes in the town of Graybridge (353). With this, the narrator states, she 'passe[d] away from me into a higher region than that in which my story has lain' (402). This 'higher' region is both a moral and a cultural one. Morally, Isabel achieves the highest ideal of femininity as the 'angel in the house'. She is modest and demure and thinks only of the comfort and happiness of others. With this, she also graduates from the realm of sensationalism into the 'higher' literary form of realism. Sigismund Smith, too, leaves behind the genre of sensation fiction and sets to writing 'three volumes of the quiet and domestic school' (404). In his position as author-by-proxy of the novel, Smith's transition into the 'quiet and domestic school' of fiction holds a metafictional mirror up to Braddon's desire to change the fashion and subject of her authorship in writing *The Doctor's Wife*.

Whilst writing the novel, Braddon wrote to Edward Bulwer-Lytton of her intention of leaving behind sensationalism and 'going in a little for the subjective' in her writing (qtd in Wolff, 'Devoted' 19). She articulated her desire to change the subject of her fiction and, thereby, to alter the way in which she was perceived as an author by the Victorian reading public (qtd in Wolff, 'Devoted' 19). Her tools in doing so were the mirror and the yards of fabric with which Isabel fashions herself. In this novel, Braddon performs these changes by narrating Isabel reading, acting, dressing and self-fashioning in the mirror. The looking glass is a symbol of heightened self-consciousness and subjectivity for Isabel; it allows her to transcend the fantastic and erotic images of Victorian women as heroines and readers and move beyond them into autonomy.

In the closing chapters of *The Doctor's Wife*, the narrator describes Isabel as a woman (not a heroine, as she was previously referred to) governed by the higher feelings of sympathy and tenderness rather than the phantasm of fiction and dream (403). She refuses to be seduced by Roland Lansdell and retires to a life of respectability, domesticity and benevolence. That the corruptible female sensation reader resists actual seduction and, therefore, a moralising death, in the final chapters of the novel is highly significant. In this resolution, Braddon overturns the myth of the uncritical and corruptible female readers and fashions a positive image of women as heroines, authors and consumers of popular literature in the mid-Victorian period.

## *Changing the Victorian Subject*

In their influential work on nineteenth-century women's fiction, *The Madwoman in the Attic*, Gilbert and Gubar state that

[b]efore the woman writer can journey through the looking glass toward literary autonomy ... she must come to terms with the images on the surface of the glass, with, that is, those mythic masks males have fashioned over her human face both to lessen the dread of her inconstancy and — by identifying her with the 'eternal types' they have themselves invented — to possess her more thoroughly. (17)

In *The Doctor's Wife*, Braddon uses the mirror as a place of reflection, literal and figurative, in which to refashion the 'eternal types' of femininity which dominated mid-Victorian debates about popular literature. She refashions the seducible heroine of sensation fiction, transforming her into a sensible and grey-clad matron. Braddon also refashions her own subjectivity as an author. She refashions the image of 'The Sensation Novelist' which is held up by critics as a true reflection of her subjectivity (P. Gilbert, *Disease* 92). Instead, she celebrates the generic inconsistency of her metafictional novel and shows herself to be an intelligent and witty author, autonomous of the thrall of the 'style which she created': sensationalism (Rae 197). Using metafictional and intertextual techniques, Braddon makes this autonomy available to her readers.

Patricia Waugh argues that

[a]lthough the intrusive commentary of nineteenth-century fiction may at times be metalingual (referring to fictional codes themselves), it functions mainly to aid the readerly concretization of the world of the book by forming a bridge between the historical and the fictional worlds. It suggests that the one is merely a continuation of the other, and it is thus not metafictional. (31-2)

Through the narrative commentary of Sigismund Smith in *The Doctor's Wife*, Braddon holds a metafictional mirror up to the writing of the novel. She reflects its intricate influences, references, patterns and techniques for the readers and emphasises the narrative's status as a work of fiction. This breaks down the typically realist continuity between the world of fantasy and fiction and that of history and reality in a way that can fittingly be described, despite Waugh's statement, as metafictional. This is emphasised when Isabel's daydreams give way to reality and she comes to the realisation that "reality" is not the stuff

## *Changing the Victorian Subject*

of novels' (P. Gilbert, 'Braddon' 185). In this way, Braddon gives readers the tools with which to read critically and intelligently and, therefore, resist the fate of corruptible readers, harbingered by contemporary reviews, who 'think that their lives are to be paraphrases of their favourite books' (*Doctor's* 30). Braddon, therefore, invites her heroine and readers through the looking glass into a more self-conscious readerly subjectivity.

When Isabel puts aside her novels and fantasy of being a heroine and turns away from her looking glass toward the real world, she performs a significant symbolic action for women as authors, heroines and readers in the 1860s. She resists corruption and seduction and, by coming to terms with the eternal types of femininity reflected in the mirror, transcends them and achieves autonomy as a reader. Through a similar process of reading and reflection Braddon also refashions her authorial subjectivity as 'The Sensation Novelist' (P. Gilbert, *Disease* 92). In *The Doctor's Wife*, she incorporates elements of both realism and sensationalism whilst also critiquing the artistic and moral bases of these generic distinctions. She therefore demonstrates that she is neither a slave to sensationalism nor to her reputation as a sensation novelist.

Nevertheless, critics were quick to identify *The Doctor's Wife* as another Braddonian sensation novel in the fashion of *Lady Audley's Secret* and *Aurora Floyd*. Braddon's reputation as 'The Sensation Novelist' or 'queen of the sensation novel' functions as a mask, denying her versatility as an author and forestalling any reading of her novels as outside the conventions of the 'style which she created' (Rae 197; P. Gilbert, *Disease* 92; Phegley 23). In the final chapters of *The Doctor's Wife*, Braddon's narrator addresses these critics, stating that 'this is *not* a sensation novel. I write here what I know to be the truth' (358, emphasis in original). This claim to veracity and reality adds another layer of complexity and playfulness to Braddon's already self-conscious engagement with the literary codes surrounding reality, realism and sensationalism in this novel. By making this statement within the frame and mirror of the narrative, Braddon shows that all claims to reality are fictional and premised on particular, genred, ways of reading and reflecting. In *The Doctor's Wife*, Mary Elizabeth Braddon not only changes her subjectivity and that of her heroine and readers, then, she also changes the subject. She changes the literary subject by refashioning the sensation novel and its seducible and transgressive heroine. She also changes the

## *Changing the Victorian Subject*

authorial subject by actively addressing her reputation as a sensation novelist. Lastly, she changes the readerly subject by providing her audience with the tools with which to read attentively and critically.

This chapter takes up these tools and, in doing so, reassesses the claims that nineteenth-century literature cannot be metafictional, that Braddon is a slave to sensationalism and that sensationalism and realism are mutually exclusive (Rae 197; Waugh 31-2). This self-conscious critical approach provides a way of thinking about the construction of narratives of Victorian gender and genre, not only in contemporary literature, but also in subsequent scholarship. Braddon's reputation as a sensationalist may have its roots in the 1860s, but it has been continually reinforced by subsequent critics. In reading for generic instability as well as generic expectation, we are holding a mirror up to our own critical practices, and continuing Braddon's process of reading and reflecting (on) gender and genre in representations of the Victorian heroine, novelist and reader.

### Works Cited

- Braddon, Mary Elizabeth. *Aurora Floyd*. 1863. Ed. P.D. Edwards. London: Oxford UP, 2008.
- . *Lady Audley's Secret*. 1862. Ed. David Skilton. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1987.
- . 'Letter to Edward Bulwer-Lytton.' 17 January 1864. Letter 7 qtd in Robert Lee Wolff. 'Devoted Discipline: The Letters of Mary Elizabeth Braddon and Sir Edward Bulwer-Lytton, 1862-1873.' *Harvard Library Bulletin* 22.1 (1974): 5-35.
- . *The Doctor's Wife*. 1864. Ed. Lyn Pykett. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008.
- Brantlinger, Patrick. 'What is "Sensational" About the "Sensation Novel?"' *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 37.1 (1982): 1-28. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org.proxy.library.adelaide.edu.au/stable/3044667>, accessed 4 July 2010.
- Brownstein, Rachel M. *Becoming a Heroine: Reading About Women in Novels*. New York: The Viking Press, 1982.
- Collins, William Wilkie. *The Woman in White*. 1860. Ed. Harvey Peter Sucksmith. London: Oxford UP, 1975.

## *Changing the Victorian Subject*

- Cranny-Francis, Anne. *The Body in the Text*. Melbourne: Melbourne UP, 1995.
- Eliot, George. 'Silly Novels by Lady Novelists.' 1856. *Essays of George Eliot*. Ed. Thomas Pinney. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963. 300-24.
- Flint, Kate. *The Woman Reader, 1837-1914*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993.
- Gilbert, Pamela K. 'Braddon and Victorian Realism: *Joshua Haggard's Daughter*.' *Beyond Sensation: Mary Elizabeth Braddon in Context*. Ed. Pamela K. Gilbert, Aeron Haynie and Marlene Tromp. New York: State University of New York Press, 2000. 183-95.
- . *Disease, Desire, and the Body in Victorian Women's Popular Women's Novels*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1997.
- Gilbert, Sandra M. and Susan Gubar. *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*. 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. New Haven and London: Yale UP, 2000.
- Golden, Catherine J. 'Censoring Her Sensationalism: Mary Elizabeth Braddon and *The Doctor's Wife*.' *Victorian Sensations: Essays on a Scandalous Genre*. Ed. Richard Fantina and Kimberly Harrison. Columbus: The Ohio State UP, 2006. 29-40.
- Hollander, Anne. *Seeing Through Clothes*. New York: The Viking Press, 1978.
- . *Sex and Suits: The Evolution of Modern Dress*. New York: Kodansha, 1995.
- Hughes, Clair. *Dressed in Fiction*. Oxford and New York: Berg, 2005.
- Knight, Mark. 'Figuring out the Fascination: Recent Trends in Criticism of Victorian Sensation and Crime Fiction.' *Victorian Literature and Culture* 37.1 (2009): 323-33. *Cambridge Journals Online*. <http://journals.cambridge.org>, accessed 12 August 2010.
- Kortsch, Christine Bayles. *Dress Culture in Late Victorian Women's Fiction: Literacy, Textiles and Activism*. Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2009.
- [Mansel, H.L.] 'Sensation Novels.' *The Quarterly Review* 113 (January and April 1863): 481-514.
- Michie, Helena. *The Flesh Made Word: Female Figures and Women's Bodies*. New York and London: Oxford UP, 1987.
- [Oliphant, Margaret.] 'Novels.' *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* CII.DCXXIII (September 1867): 257-80.

## *Changing the Victorian Subject*

- Phegley, Jennifer. *Educating the Proper Woman Reader: Victorian Family Literary Magazines and the Cultural Health of the Nation*. Columbus: The Ohio State UP, 2004.
- Pykett, Lyn. 'Introduction.' *The Doctor's Wife*. Mary Elizabeth Braddon. 1864. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008. vii-xxviii.
- . *The 'Improper' Feminine: The Women's Sensation Novel and New Woman Writing*. London: Routledge, 1992.
- [Rae, W. Fraser.] 'Sensation Novels: Miss Braddon.' *The North British Review* 43 (1865): 180-204. <http://books.google.com.au>, 10 November 2006, accessed 4 September 2010.
- Reynolds, Kimberley and Nicola Humble. *Victorian Heroines: Representations of Femininity in Nineteenth-Century Literature and Art*. Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993.
- Sears, Albert C. 'Mary Elizabeth Braddon and the "Combination Novel": The Subversions of Sensational Expectation in *Vixen*.' *Victorian Sensations: Essays on a Scandalous Genre*. Eds Richard Fantina and Kimberly Harrison. Columbus: The Ohio State UP, 2006. 41-52.
- Showalter, Elaine. *A Literature of Their Own: From Charlotte Brontë to Doris Lessing*. Revised and Expanded Edition. London: Virago Press, 2009.
- Sparks, Tabitha. 'Fiction Becomes Her: Representations of Female Character in Mary Braddon's *The Doctor's Wife*.' *Beyond Sensation: Mary Elizabeth Braddon in Context*. Ed. Pamela K. Gilbert, Aeron Haynie and Marlene Tromp. New York: State University of New York Press, 2000. 197-209.
- Talairach-Vielmas, Laurence. *Moulding the Female Body in Victorian Fairy Tales and Sensation Novels*. Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2007.
- Tromp, Marlene, Pamela K. Gilbert and Aeron Haynie. 'Introduction.' *Beyond Sensation: Mary Elizabeth Braddon in Context*. Ed. Pamela K. Gilbert, Aeron Haynie and Marlene Tromp. New York: State University of New York Press, 2000. xv-xxxviii.
- Waugh, Patricia. *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction*. 1984. London and New York: Routledge, 1988.
- Wilson, Elizabeth. *Adorned in Dreams: Fashion and Modernity*. London: Virago Press, 1985.



## *Changing the Victorian Subject*

Wolff, Robert Lee. 'Devoted Discipline: The Letters of Mary Elizabeth Braddon and Sir Edward Bulwer-Lytton, 1862-1873.' *Harvard Library Bulletin* 22. 1 (1974): 5-35.

———. *Sensational Victorian: The Life and Fiction of Mary Elizabeth Braddon*. New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1979.