SENSATION FICTION: Part 1

Publisher's Note

"Together with Wilkie Collins, Mary Elizabeth Braddon dominated the market for what came to be known as 'the novel of sensation' during the 1860s. Designed to unsettle, the genre caused moral alarm among critics. Not only did it revel in the dubious subject matter of murder, bigamy, illegitimacy and madness, it seemed to pathologise the very act of reading itself, since its narrative method – which foreshadows that of modern detective fiction – turned reader into addicts, titillating them with a series of withheld secrets and startling revelations."

Lucasta Miller,
The Guardian, 9 August 2003

"With Braddon, there are reasons why she has become a novelist that now gets taught in seminars..."

John Mullan, speaking on In Our Time, BBC Radio 4, 6 November 2003

A close friend imprisoned for homosexuality.
- A withered cripple with Svengali like powers.
- Assumed names. Secrecy.
- A crooked, womanizing lawyer who abandons his family.

These may seem like a list of probable ingredients for a 'novel of sensation'. In fact, they are elements of Mary Braddon's own life story. While her readers may have read her novels as a form of literary escapism, for Braddon they reflected a lived reality.

She was born in Southwark, London, on 4 October 1835, the daughter of Henry Braddon of Cornwall, and Fanny (née White) of Ireland. Mary was the youngest of four children, following her sister Margaret Eleanor (b. 1824) and her brothers, Edward Nicholas Coventry (b.1829) and Francis (b.1834). Her adulterous father – an unsuccessful solicitor and occasional writer – left them when she was only five. His bankruptcy forced the family into straightened circumstances, although they were supported by their extended family in Cornwall. Mary enjoyed many childhood holidays at Skiddon House, near Bodmin, and attended boarding school. Her brother, Edward, went to India in 1857 to work with their uncle William, a wealthy merchant.

By the age of sixteen Mary became an actress to bring in much needed money. From 1852 to 1860 she toured relentlessly – mainly in the provinces - adopting the enigmatic name of Mary Seyton (pronounced 'satan'). Her mother accompanied her as Mrs Seyton. They enjoyed a long spell in Brighton from 1857 to 1860, living in New Road, while acting in Repertory at the Theatre Royal. She started to write poetry and plays of her own and contributed articles to the Brighton Herald. Some of her verses had also appeared in the Beverley Recorder and these lead to the transformation of her career. They were seen by John Gilby, a wealthy Yorkshire squire whose withered legs forced him to move about on two sticks. He clearly fell for Mary and offered her a substantial fee to write an epic poem. At the same time she was commissioned by a printer in Beverley to write a serial novel in the style of G W M Reynolds and Dickens. This was her chance to give up acting and become an author, as she explains in My First Book (1897):

"I cannot picture to myself, in my after-knowledge of the bookselling trade, any enterprise more futile in its inception or more feeble in its execution; but to my youthful ambition the actual commission to write a novel with an advance payment of fifty shillings to show good faith on the part of my Yorkshire squire, seemed like the opening of that pen-and-ink paradise which I had sighed for ever since I could hold a pen. I had, previously to this date, found a Maecenas in Beverley, in the person of a learned gentleman who volunteered to foster my love of the Muses by buying the copyright of a volume of poems and publishing the same at his own expense - which he did, poor man, without stint, and by which noble patronage of Poet's Corner verse he must have lost money. He had, however, the privilege of dictating the subject of the principal poem, which was to sing – however feebly – of Garibaldi's Sicilian campaign."

Braddon did not enjoy writing on Garibaldi, but he did enjoy a glorious half-year living in a farmhouse in the Yorkshire countryside with her mother, surrounded by books and with the freedom to write. The serialized novel was called Three Times Dead (1860) and was poorly received. Garibaldi (1861) was privately printed and sank into obscurity. Withdrawing from the attentions of Gilby, Braddon and her mother relocated to London where the publisher, John Maxwell (1824-1895) became a far more welcome influence. Under his guidance, Three Times Dead was remodelled as The Trail of the Serpent (1861), which sold 1,000 copies in its first week and featured a killer orphan, an heiress and a mute detective.

Braddon had now determined on a career as a novelist and penned further serialized efforts for the Halfpenny Journal: A Magazine for all who can read. These included The Black Band (1861) and Woman's Revenge (1862). Then came her real breakthrough – Lady Audley's Secret. A serialized version first appeared in Robin Goodfellow in September 1861 and continued in The Sixpenny Magazine. When it was published as a triple-decker in 1862, it was an instant sensation provoking condemnation as "one of the most noxious books of modern times" – which only served to encourage a broader audience. It features a beautiful, golden-haired 'angel of the house', Lady Audley, who is mixed up in a tale of murder, bigamy, madness and transgression of the class system. What is her secret? Did she push her first husband down a well? (No, he reappears, exposing her subsequent bigamy.) Is her attempted poisoning of her second husband caused by madness? (No, despite her being committed to an asylum.) The secret is that he is not mad, but scheming and manipulative, and it is this that shocked Victorian audiences. In addition to being a founding work of sensation fiction – ranking alongside Wilkie Collins's Woman in White (1860) - it also provides a powerful critique of patriarchal structures. One of the great strengths of the novel is that it is a page-turner, driving the reader forward compulsively, and it brings many of the elements of gothic fiction into the home.

Her second novel, Aurora Floyd, built upon this success, being published in 1863 following a popular serialization in Temple Bar. The novel portrays the dark undercurrents beneath an apparently normal marriage. It explores the way in which a dysfunctional relationship was maintained due to the pressures of Victorian Society and the fear of scandal. One reviewer writing in Fraser's Magazine noted that "a book without a murder, a divorce, a seduction, or a bigamy, is not apparently considered either worth writing or reading; and a mystery and a secret are the chief qualifications of the modern novel."

John Maxwell was responsible for the successful serial publication of both Lady Audley's Secret and Aurora Floyd and served as Mary Braddon's mentor and manager. By June 1861 they were also lovers and set up house together, causing some scandal. Maxwell had come to London from Ireland in 1842 and in 1848 he married Mary Crowley, with whom he had seven children. After the birth of their seventh, his wife suffered a mental breakdown and was committed to an asylum far away in Dublin. As such, Mary Braddon moved into an openly adulterous relationship with a married man and took responsibility for...
the five surviving step-children. Their own first child, Gerald, was born in March 1862, followed by Fanny Margaret in 1863, William Babington in 1866 and Winifred in 1868. She did not marry Maxwell until 1874, when his first wife passed away.

The years between 1862 and 1865 were also very productive in a literary sense. In addition to Aurora Floyd, Braddon completed The White Phantom (1862-3), The Factory Girl (1863), Captain of the Vulture (1863), Eleanor's Victory (1863), John Marchmont's Legacy (1863), Oscar Bertrand (1863-4), Henry Dunbar (1864), The Doctor's Wife (1864), and Only a Clod (1864). She was now truly "the Queen of the circulating libraries" with an appreciative audience including Queen Victoria and Henry James. The Doctor's Wife is perhaps the most distinguished of these and was an unacknowledged English adaptation of Flaubert's Madame Bovary. Once again it features a secret, adultery, death and an unhappy marriage – with a creative and intelligent woman alienated from her unappreciative husband. George Moore, George Eliot and Thomas Hardy may all have been influenced by this novel, which received generous reviews in the literary press. Only a Clod was also well-received. The Times proclaimed it "One of the most remarkable of the very remarkable books written by Miss Braddon; written, too, in better taste and with clearer purpose than any of its predecessors from the same pen, and calculated, we should think, on that account to deprecate censure of all kinds, whether from the critic or the moralist."

In 1866, Maxwell created the Belgravia magazine for her, which gave her an opportunity to branch out into many different genres including historical romance, love stories, detective fiction, and supernatural tales. In addition to her own works, it also featured writing by George Sala and Sheridan Le Fanu. Belgravia reached a peak circulation of 18,000 copies in 1868 and was bought out by Chatto & Windus in 1876, when she relinquished the editorship. It continued to 1899, featuring writing by Charles Reade, Wilkie Collins, Mark Twain, Thomas Hardy and Conan Doyle.

Braddon's literary outpourings continued. Between 1866 and 1876 she wrote a further 23 novels, including Sir Jasper's Tenant (1866), Charlotte's Inheritance (1868), Milly Darrell (1873), and Joshua Haggard's Daughter (1876). Between 1877 and 1897 she published a further 32 novels, including Vixen (1879), The Cloven Foot (1879), Mohawks (1886), and London Pride (1896). A further 16 novels appeared before her last publication in 1916, bringing her total output to close to ninety novels (several were unacknowledged), numerous short stories, essays and several plays.

Just as her own star was ascending, her brother Edward was also doing very well for himself. He served as Commissioner of Excise at Oudh from 1862 to 1878, and, when he 'retired' to Tasmania in 1878 he was appointed Agent-General to London, 1888-93, and then Premier of Tasmania, 1894-99. He did not always appreciate the scandal attached to his sister's name. Her son, William Babington Maxwell, also began to establish himself as a novelist.

Braddon and Maxwell moved to Richmond in 1867 and lived there for the rest of their lives. As revealed in her notebooks and diaries, her life settled into a pattern of reading, writing, riding and walking – with family matters, literary parties and travel adding highlights. She continued to read and champion French fiction and to discuss novel writing with fellow writers such as Rhoda Broughton and Anna Jameson. When John Maxwell died in 1895, they were comfortably off and Braddon's reputation as a major novelist was secure. Oscar Wilde was one of their more flamboyant friends and appears as a character in The Rose of the Remembrance. They lived to see a silent movie adaptation of Aurora Floyd in 1913, taking the fiction to new audiences. She died at Lichfield House in Richmond on 4 February 1915 and was buried at the nearby cemetery. A bronze plaque, dedicated to "a writer of rare and refined scholarship, who gave profitable and pleasurable literature to countless readers" was added inside Richmond Parish Church.

Michael Sadleir made the following assessment of her career in the Dictionary of National Biography:"

"It is an injustice to regard Miss Braddon as a mere sensationalist. She was a clever, cultivated woman with wide sympathies and interests. Not only was her response to natural beauty always quick and keen (even in her earliest books she showed great power of description alike of landscape and weather-moods), but to the end she was intensely aware of the world and eager to be part of it. This hunger for actuality gives her best work a quality beyond that of mere sensationalism, and to her joyous acceptance of life in every form must be attributed her popularity, not only among the masses but also among her fellow-writers. That her books should have delighted readers so evident and so diverse as Bulwer, Reade, Thackeray, Sala, Labouchere and Robert Louis Stevenson proves them to be distinct with some quality beyond that of mere dramatic ingenuity".

This project makes available the complete collection of Braddon materials (many from the Robert Wolff collection) from the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas, Austin. It features:

- Seven substantial volumes of notes which Braddon used as a quarry for her writing. These include discussions of the philosophy of Plato, Kant and Nietzsche; extracts from writers that she admired from Horace and Shakespeare to Flaubert and Heine; plot summaries, book titles and some stories and plays; and notes on miscellaneous topics from African explorers and the colloquial Hindostani, to accounts of Florence and Venice. These volumes emphasize the importance of French fiction to her writing.

- 25 volumes of diaries covering the period from 1890 to 1914.

- Letters to and from friends and acquaintances, including J M Barrie, Herbert Beerbohm-Tree, Walter Besant, Rhoda Broughton, Hall Caine, William Powell Frith, Thomas Hardy, Henry Irving, Henry James, Arthur Wing Pinero, Charles Reade, Anne Ritchie and Charles Wyndham.

- Literary manuscripts including examples of novels, short stories and plays for the full range of her career.

- Sketchbooks, photographs and illustrations for Braddon's novels.

This microfilm project aims to make both her work and life more accessible, opening up new areas of research into Braddon and her fiction. Her portrayal of strong and assertive, if flawed, women has ensured that her life and work is now an increasingly popular area of study for all those examining nineteenth-century literature, culture and society.
Contents of Reels

REEL 1

Before the Knowledge of Evil (Manuscript novel)
Emile Zola and the Naturalistic School; or, Realism in French Literature (Essay)
Miscellaneous notes
The Wife (Manuscript extract from Play and other material relating to plays)
Letters
The Good Hermione, A story for the Jubilee Year by Aunt Belinda (Manuscript Story)
The Little Woman in Black (Story)
Joshua Haggards Daughter (page proof, insertions and large portions of original manuscripts)
At Daggers Drawn (Story)

REEL 2

A Life Interest (Play)
Fragment of a play
Maria Jones. Her Book (Story)
Mary (Typescript Novel with manuscript notes and insertions)
Sketchbook
The Missing Witness: An Original Drama (Printed Play with manuscript corrections)
People who write to the Times (Story)

REEL 3

Run to Earth (Story)
Autographs
The Ubiquitous Man (Story)
A Grey Day (Story)
Fragments
Tom Pearsons Last Party (Story)
Letters (together with transcripts)

REEL 4

7 Notebooks:

a) Miscellaneous notes on Flaubert, Don Quixote, Huxley, Mirabeau and other subjects. Much in French. Includes "A Drawing Room in Berlin." Part indexed at end of volume.

b) Miscellaneous notes on African explorers (Livingstone and Burton), Schillers death, Kants philosophy, Kings and Queens, Shakespeare, and extracts from William James. Part indexed at end of volume.

c) Miscellaneous notes on colloquial Hindostani, the Bible, Shakespeare, Dryden, Wordsworth and diary entries for 1 Oct 1900 and 1 Sep 1905. Part indexed at end of volume.

d) Miscellaneous notes on Napoleon, his army, Waterloo and "Lydia Langrish: A Play."

e) Miscellaneous notes on cricket, essays ('The New Parvenu', 'The Great Lady', 'The Stylist'), stories and plays ('Two cads', 'He had been there before').

f) List of titles for books and plays and literary extracts from Scott, Keats, Browning, Dickens and other writers, including French, German and Classical authors.

g) Plot notes, records of Florence, Venice, and other parts of Italy, notes on Plato, notes on Jowett, jottings on classical legends and other matters. Part indexed at end of volume.

REEL 5

Letters from Barrie, Dicksee, Hardy, Reade, Ritchie and others
Autographs, Additional letters, Photographs, Drawings and Illustrations for her novels

**REEL 6**

M E Braddon diaries - 1890 -1893
(starting with the 'Army and Navy Pocket Diary & Almanac for 1890, No.1: featuring a week per opening with notes on the weather, appointments, health, progress with writing, brief accounts, what read, etc.)

**REEL 7**

M E Braddon diaries - 1894 -1896
(these diaries show the centrality of walking, reading and writing to her life and describe meetings with Rhoda Broughton, Anna Jameson and other public figures)

**REEL 8**

M E Braddon diaries - 1897 -1902

**REEL 9**

M E Braddon diaries - 1903 -1908

**REEL 10**

M E Braddon diaries - 1909 -1914

<back
Braddon Manuscripts in the Robert Lee Wolff Collection at the Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas at Austin

This list is a description of the Ransom Center's holdings of Braddon manuscript material represented in the Robert Lee Wolff Collection of Victorian Fiction. The Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center purchased the Wolff Collection in July, 1984. It is considered one of the most comprehensive collections of Victorian fiction in existence. Robert Lee Wolff spent over thirty years collecting books published between 1837 and 1901, and he estimated that he had obtained almost a quarter of the 42,000 titles published in England during the reign of Queen Victoria. In addition to printed works, the collection includes much manuscript material.

This list describes manuscripts in already-cataloged and uncataloged collections as well as the manuscript material that was added by the purchase of the Wolff Collection. A collection name designation to the left of each entry denotes the location of the material within the Ransom Center, and a description of the work is included on the right side of the page. This description will vary depending on whether the material has been cataloged or not, or if the collection as a whole is too large to be described item by item. In this case, a collection level description will be included, although it is possible to request more information about each collection.

Wendy Bowersock and Jennifer B Patterson, February 1992

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Symbols used to describe manuscripts in the collection:

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The symbols immediately above are used in combinations:

ALS means autograph letter signed;
Tccms means typed carbon copy manuscript, etc.

Brackets are used to indicate that the information between them is supplied from some source other than the manuscript itself.

BRADDON, MARY ELIZABETH under MAXWELL, MARY E. (BRADDON) (1837-1915)

Maxwell, MEB
Letters [Maxwell, Mary Elizabeth [Braddon]]
ANS "M.E. Braddon" to unidentified recipient
1899 September 15

Letters Maxwell, Mary [Elizabeth (Braddon)]
ALS to Frith, Miss
----- May 27 (Richmond)

Letters Maxwell, M.E.B.
ALS to Tristam, Mrs.
1904 January 16 [postmark]

Misc. Maxwell, M.E.B.
Signature on a small slip of paper
1899 September 15

Mackenzie, C
Misc. I Maxwell, M.E.B.
ALS to [Bateman, Sidney Francis]
n.d.

Misc. Maxwell, Mary
ALS to Compton, [Virginia (Bateman)]
----- July 12

Misc. Maxwell, Mary [Elizabeth (Braddon)]
2 ALS to Compton [Virginia (Bateman)]
n.d.
----- August 6
Smith, EB
Recip
Maxwell, Mary [Elizabeth (Braddon)]
ALS to [Smith, Ernest Bramah]
1894 March 11

Collins, W
Misc.
Maxwell, Mary [Elizabeth (Braddon)]
ALS to Bartley, Mrs.
n.d.

Times
Recip 3
Maxwell, M.E.B.
ALS to the Times, directed to the editor
[1877] November 27
Pages 101 and 102

Jerome, JK
Recip
Maxwell, M.E.B.
ALS to Jerome, Jerome K[lapka]
1892 September 17

Authors' Syndicate
Misc.
Maxwell, M.E.B.
ALS/inc to Harrison,
n.d.

Barrett, W
Recip/TA
Maxwell, M.E.B.
1896 March 26
1896 December 3
1899 February 25

Frith, WP
Letters
Frith, William Powell, 1819–1909
ALS to Maxwell, Mary Elizabeth (Braddon) [?]
1901 May 4

WOLFF 625f
Original contract between Tinsley and Braddon for Aurora Floyd

WOLFF 660m
Letter to Braddon, dated March 3, 1863, from Edward Tinsley, including an autograph draft reply from Braddon on p.3
WOLFF 672b  Original publisher's statement of account of Mohawks, dated 1886 December 19

WOLFF 698c  Letter to Braddon from Lucy Clifford, dated [1911] July 25

WOLFF 727  Typed address written by Braddon, dated 1864 June 7

WOLFF UNCAT  Diaries, 25 volumes

WOLFF UNCAT  Notebooks, 7 volumes

WOLFF UNCAT  Works:
untitled fragments
Fragments, 2 Amss
At daggers drawn
Emile Zola and the naturalistic school (Wolff 730)
The good Hermione
Joshua Haggard's daughter
A life interest
Maria Jones, her book
Mary 1 of 4, 2 of 4, 3 of 4, 4 of 4
Mary & notes
The missing witness (Wolff 723)
Oscar & Bertrand
People who write to the Times
Run to earth
Sketchbook
Tom Pearson's last party
The ubiquitous man
The white house (part I)

WOLFF UNCAT  Signatures

WOLFF UNCAT  Letters:
A-Z
Unidentified [Braddon?], Alice
MEB to Broughton
Letters (and Recip) Frith
Braddon, ME to Kent Chas.
MEB to Jefferson, Mrs.
MEB to Moncton, Lady
MEB to Sims
MEB to Strand Magazine
Whiting, Juliette
Photocopies of Braddon letters, etc.
Transcriptions

WOLFF UNCAT  Recip. (Letters to Braddon):
Unidentified
A-Z
Arnold, Edwin
Bancroft?, ME
Bancroft, Squire
Barrett, Wilson
Barrie, JM
?Basdin, (MEB’s aunt)
Gasden?
Bateman, Stringer
Beerbohm-Tree, Herbert
Beerbohm-Tree, Wm Sealons,
   Ed. Terry, MD Kavanagh,
   Leo Trevor, JB McCallum
Besant, W
Bourchier-Wrey, DE
Braddon family
Brough, Lionel
Broughton, Rhoda
Burnand, FC
Burnaham
Burns, KG
Caine, Hall, plus a letter
Cholmondeley, Mary
Clifford
Cowlard, S. (MEB’s aunt)
Dawson, Chas.
Delane, John Thadeus
Devon, CJ
Dicksee, Sir Francis
   Bertrand
Doneraile, Ed.
Doyle, AC
Gilby, J.
Gladstone
Hardy, Thos.
Harrison, Frederic
Harrison, RB
Hawkins, Anthony
Irving, Henry
James, Henry
Kendal, Madge
Lytton, Edith (and Lord
   L.)
Macleay, Alex. C.
   (Colonel)
Nevell
Oxenford, J[ohn?]?
Pinero, A. Wing
Reade, Chas.
Ritchie, Anne
Robins, Elizabeth
St. Helier
Sala, George A.
Sawyer, Wm.
Sieman, Owen
Treadwell, R.
Tree, M.
Whiteing, Richard
Wyndham, Chas.
Yater, Edmund
Young, Julian C.

WOLFF UNCAT

Misc:
Braddon, ME Signatures
Family letters (to Mrs. Fanny Braddon)
Longman, Wm to Waldorf
Leitch, WL to Wyndham, Mrs.
Li Ching-Fong to MEB
Mackay, Charles to
—Maxwell, John
Maxwell, Gerald
Maxwell, WB to various
ME Braddon's portfolio
Drawings by FH Townsend,
W. Parkenson,
H Fleuch
Drawings
Seicome-Smith, Rex
Notebook of notes on MEB
Letters to MEB
Photos
Photographs
RL Wolff correspondence,
Various
Folders, labels, etc.

WOLFF UNCAT

Vanity Fair Album with
misc. clippings, most
relating to MEB