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*From Sensation To Society: Representations Of Marriage In
The Fiction Of Mary Elizabeth Braddon, 1862-1866 (review)*

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tal to ideas and practices of Victorian ideal femininity. I would add that the forms and objects of women's gift exchange—as various and complicated as love itself—were also crucial to ideas and practices of women's community. “What remains to the social,” she asks, “when relations of domination, oppression, status, discipline, and governmentality are set aside? . . . what theory of the social can be derived from relationships like those between women of the same class and nation—never free from power differentials, but never exhaustively defined by them” (pp. 259-60). Here, though Marcus recognizes the inequalities inherent to women's relationships, she wants to set aside “status” and “domination.” However, her own provocative discussion of punishment and style has already shown how crucial such terms are to women's intimate relationships. The gifts that women gave women, more than the “altruistic economy of reciprocity” Marcus identifies, also established alternative forms of rank and power and took their meaning from larger systems of giving (p. 86). Her book thus suggests how further attention to exchanges between women could promote new directions of study. Additional gift theories, such as Annette B. Weiner's work on the status afforded by objects withheld from circulation, might usefully extend Marcus's scholarship.

However, to speculate on these topics is to show the necessity of this ground-breaking book. It is also to take up the call for further inquiry in Marcus's powerful response to Virginia Woolf's famous discovery that “Chloe liked Olivia”: “whether they are lovers, friends, or coworkers, Chloe and Olivia are overworked, and we need more than two proper names and a verb to do justice to the variety and complexity of women's social alliances” (p. 258). *Between Women* goes a long way toward doing them that justice. It is significant scholarship and a very pleasurable read.

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FROM SENSATION TO SOCIETY: REPRESENTATIONS OF
MARRIAGE IN THE FICTION OF MARY ELIZABETH BRADDON,
1862-1866, by Natalie Schroeder and Ronald A. Schroeder. Newark:
University of Delaware Press, 2006. 290 pp. \$52.50 cloth.

Marriage, no doubt about it, was a vexed question for Mary Elizabeth Braddon; it eluded her in life since the father of her children had a legal wife in a lunatic asylum, while it served as the mainspring of her best-selling plots. In *From Sensation to Society*, Natalie Schroeder and Ronald A. Schroeder have compiled an exhaustive survey of Braddon's “reservations about contemporary marriage” in six early novels, arguing that she therein “undertook a rigorous and unflinching examination of the state of mar-

riage and matrimonial relations in her culture" (p. 10). What she found was far from pretty. Her original sensation novels showed "the Victorian ideology of marriage" under quite literal assault from the criminal activity of apparent angels in the house (p. 11). In *Lady Audley's Secret* (1862), "Braddon practically represents marriage itself as a species of domesticated crime," both for the bigamous heroine and for the patriarchal accusers who rob her of her very identity, turning her into the ultimate *femme couverte* (pp. 48-49). With *Aurora Floyd* (1863), on the other hand, Braddon managed, after three volumes of sensational mayhem, to reconstruct her bigamist's second marriage according to "an alternate model of companionate happiness" based on mutual love, relative equality, and a modification of traditional gender roles (p. 86). The Schroeders see Braddon, for all her controversial extremes of fictional plotting, as a moderate when it comes to marriage, "advocat[ing] reform but not revolution" (p. 107).

Braddon's next several novels, while continuing her project of "fashioning an unpleasant profile of contemporary marriage" (p. 34), function in the Schroeders' scheme as "a bridge" between sensationalism and the devastating anatomy of the marriage market in her first society novel, *The Lady's Mile* (1866) (p. 115). During this interim period, the Schroeders find compelling images of the home as a prison and duty as bondage in *John Marchmont's Legacy* (1863), along with probing analysis of the danger posed by the sheer monotony and boredom of conventional middle-class marriage in *The Doctor's Wife* (1864). The central relationship in *Eleanor's Victory* (1863) "seems almost like a laboratory for what can go wrong in matrimony" (p. 140).

By 1866, already a veteran author of at least eight triple-deckers, besides anonymous penny and halfpenny dreadfuls, Braddon was prepared to cut loose from the sensational trappings that had brought her so much profit and notoriety. *The Lady's Mile* moves definitively from external incident to interior psychology, focusing on three varieties of marriage—purely mercenary, purely companionable, and a satisfying mix of love, companionship, and "mutual bondage" (p. 256). Braddon's advice, the Schroeders conclude, was that, absent institutional reform, "love is the best chance women have to improve their odds in the most important lottery of their lives" (p. 264). "Unfortunately," as they put it, "Braddon is mysterious about how this love comes into being" (p. 260). Nor, alas, was she particularly original in recommending love as the basis of happiness in marriage.

From Sensation to Society is something of a high-calorie treat for Braddon enthusiasts, filled with lengthy and toothsome quotations from favorite texts. For all the fascinating welter of detail, however, the Schroeders find it difficult, as they implicitly acknowledge, to draw any larger conclusions, either about the novels themselves or about the Victorian social context. If they can recover "no coherent agenda to ameliorate the conditions of marital

inequality and dissatisfaction” in *The Doctor’s Wife*, perhaps it is because that is too much to ask of a popular novel, or series of popular novels (p. 184). Although they attempt to provide a source for Braddon’s “authority” in her enormous readership, the fact remains that these novels were written in haste, with the wolf or the printer at the door, as Braddon herself readily admitted (p. 9). Painting with a broad brush, keeping abreast of a fast market, Braddon, like other popular novelists, knew how to push the hottest buttons of her particular culture. She wrote with panache, insouciance, and wit, which the Schroeders, in their moral seriousness, tend to ignore. What has endured from her work is not argument or any program for reform, but indelible images and situations and character types—most of all, to Braddon’s later chagrin, the iconic scene of the fair-haired child-wife pushing her extraneous husband down an abandoned well. There is something unanswerable about Lady Audley and her kin, something that still ignites even the most resistant twenty-first-century imagination.

Winifred Hughes

IN SCIENCE’S SHADOW: LITERARY CONSTRUCTIONS OF LATE VICTORIAN WOMEN, by Patricia Murphy. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2006. 256 pp. \$39.95 cloth.

Patricia Murphy’s *In Science’s Shadow* gives a lucid account of misogynistic attitudes that underlay representations of women and science in the late Victorian period. The book has many virtues, including its clarity and coherence. Something of a recovery project, it examines lesser-known works by novelists Thomas Hardy and Wilkie Collins and calls attention to the poet Constance Naden, botanist and memoirist Marianne North, and the novelist Charles Reade, figures who are fascinating if less well known. Unfortunately, the book’s clarity is also a weakness; while its argument is never fuzzy, it can be reductive, resting on the familiar binaries of masculine and feminine, or public and private, as if those categories were unproblematic in nineteenth-century ideology and practice. Victorian studies has been complicating them for some time now, but that scholarship has not found its way into this work. *In Science’s Shadow* makes a real contribution to the history of science, women’s studies, and Victorian studies, but, ironically, it would be a more satisfying book if it were a bit messier.

The book’s most successful chapter focuses on Marianne North, botanist, painter, and author of the memoir *Recollections of a Happy Life*. Murphy delineates North’s textual strategy of “gender nullification” to create a persona who is neither masculine nor feminine (p. 146). Examining her art—which sounds stunning—the spatial politics of her home, and