Miss Braddon in Transition

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of classification of the problem play common to the five dramatists, and demonstrated how the plays were treated similarly and dissimilarly. Then, in passing, Simon could have filled in any further background information and in a manner which would not have exposed his inadequacies.

I must also protest against certain other irritating pretensions this work has. Dramatists, for example, are almost invariably given their full names every time they are cited. There are also frequent references to other literature which appear to be thrown in either because Simon has read something vaguely relevant or to bolster a not very fine point. Thus on pages 24-25 we are treated, for no real purpose, to a couple of paragraphs on "audience psychology" with references to Freud et al. On pages 81-82, after admitting that the influence of the Stanislavsky method "on English drama came late, if at all," Simon persists in writing about it. And, again, on pages 42-43, in writing about Ibsen, fifteen authors and eighteen book titles are mentioned leading to this piece of nonsense: "Ibsen's tragic idealism reflected his personal pessimistic view of life and his concern with the grand failure of the heroic personality in modern culture. Like Dostoyevsky's Raskolnikov, they wrestle [sic] with the great dare to be the Napoleonic hero. But like T. S. Eliot's J. Alfred Prufrock, they are forced to retreat, and become paralyzed by indecision and doubt."

There is no joy in castigating anyone's work: indeed I deplore the current trend in academic book-reviewing of finding fault at all costs. However, I very much regret to say that this book should not have appeared in print.

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J. P. Wearing

5. Miss Braddon in Transition


High time that a full dress study of Braddon appeared, and good that it is wrought by a capable hand. High time too that the subject is presented as more than just a Sensationalist, author of Lady Audley's Secret and Aurora Floyd (shades of young Henry James!). Like the lady's own oeuvres, Wolff's biographical-critical study is ample, but, unlike many Braddon novels, it breathes merit throughout. Supplementing the factual, but readable, chronology of her life, critiques of the works appear in proper sequence. Joshua Haggard's Daughter (1876) and Ishmael (1884) are praised as her best works.

Placing Braddon in the tradition of Sensationalism originated by Bulwer, and continuing through Wilkie Collins, Rhoda Broughton, and Ouida, as well as among others of her contemporaries, Wolff unfolds her movement toward greater social criticism during the development of her career as a novelist. Perhaps her own unconventional life furthered her tendencies along these lines. From Sensationalism on into chronicles of the bad effects of Edwardian wealth upon charac-
ter, Miss Braddon moved with comparative ease, although her predilection for melodramatics (she herself enjoyed an early career upon stage) never deserted her. Her tart satire of Victorian-Edwardian mores, her detective and occult novels, and her deft realism align her with other Transition figures.

Wolff's study brings up matters concerning such other writers as Hardy, Galsworthy, the Pre-Raphaelites, James, and (by implication) Rhoda Broughton - upon whom Wolff is fairly severe. It also portrays a fearless woman, well ahead of her times in personal conduct and attitudes toward hitherto suppressed matters as emotions and sexuality. Wolff has patiently assembled a superb collection of Braddoniana, a portion of which appeared several years ago in the Huntington Library Bulletin (the letters from M. E. B. to her mentor, Bulwer). The present work builds upon the Wolff collection and other primary resources. It also far surpasses the scant work of others concerning this author, such as Summers, Sadleir, and Nyberg. Sensational Victorian is a book well worth reading by all devotees of English fiction.

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