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Forging a New Path: Fraud and White-Collar Crime in Mary Elizabeth Braddon's

1870s Fiction

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Whether deservedly or not, the present age has been stigmatised as the age of counterfeits and adulterations; an age of outward show, of gloss, and of inward rottenness. (Duthie, 'Gold and Glitter' 461)

This statement, made in the February 1870 issue of *Belgravia*, a monthly periodical conducted by Mary Elizabeth Braddon, set the tone for the change of criminal activities depicted within her fiction in the ensuing decade. The 1870s saw Braddon attempting to break free from her reputation as 'the author of *Lady Audley's Secret*' – that is, as a writer of bigamy, incarceration, and murder – despite still publishing using this signature to attract her loyal readership. She expanded her literary criminal repertoire to focus on 'counterfeits and adulterations': financial frauds that drew on the emerging popular appetite for reading about such crimes. As Heather Worthington notes, 'by the mid-century, fear of fraud had apparently overtaken fear of murder or robbery' (98). As crime became more sophisticated, so did Braddon's engagement with people's fears as her 1870s criminal narratives expanded to include counterfeit money ('Mr. and Mrs. de Fontenoy' [1870]), identity fraud and embezzlement (*Taken at the Flood* [1874]), forged wills ('Dr Carrick' [1878]), and postnuptial fraud (*The Cloven Foot* [1879]). In the 1870s Braddon not only continued focusing on her protagonists' fraudulent double lives, but also her new northern publishing syndicate (as discussed below), expanded the circulation of her narratives of fraud, securing her a wider reputation as an author striving for respectability, while simultaneously playing on her 'sensational' fame.

To examine fraud and white-collar crime, the specific context and terminology needs to be understood. The ‘fight against fraud’ began in Britain in the 1850s as a direct result of ‘the railway boom and the aftermath of the collapse of the railway share market and the 1840s commercial crisis’ (Wilson 146). ‘Fraud’ is a generic term for a type of offence, of which the actions usually comprise ‘the dishonest non-violent obtaining of some economic advantage or causing some economic loss’ (Kirk and Woodcock 1). Typical types of fraud include forged signatures, counterfeit money, and food adulteration. Fraud aims to fulfil personal greed either through quick gratification or an activity over a prolonged period of time. Notably, it has the dual effect of personal gain or self-advancement for the perpetrator and loss or prevention of gain for the victim. Usually non-violent, fraud has a different *modus operandi* from crimes, such as robbery, arson, or murder; fraud is distant, tactical, and passive. Fraud can be committed by people of any class or gender; however, the ‘criminal classes’ were socially and fictionally constructed over the nineteenth century as coming from the lower echelons of society. The emergence of white-collar crime changed this perspective.

‘White-collar’ crime is a specific type of fraud, but one that was not considered a separate crime in the nineteenth century. White-collar crime was only defined in 1939 by Edwin Sutherland as an offence that is ‘committed by a person of respectability and high social status in the course of his occupation’ (9). This definition can be applied to white-collar workers of the nineteenth century, such as company directors, bankers, lawyers, businessmen, and politicians, and by extension their office workers. White-collar crime by such professionals demonstrated that instead of the respectable middle classes simply needing the law’s protection from the supposed criminal lower class, they also needed shielding from those among their own class who were using criminal means to rise up the social ranks. Generally, ‘fraud’ was the term ‘used to articulate “alleged misconduct in business” during the nineteenth century’ (Wilson 152), as it covers dealings by both professionals as well as the people they are doing

business with, be they other professionals or clients. Throughout this essay, ‘fraud’ will be used as a generic term for economic crimes within the narrative, while ‘white-collar crime’ specifically relates to business-related economic crimes committed by supposedly respectable professionals in the course of their work. Overall, fraud and white-collar crime cross economic, geographic, social, and gender boundaries within Victorian Britain and so are adaptable crimes for a sensation author such as Braddon to utilise.

The rise of fraud and white-collar crime in the mid-nineteenth century coincided with one of the most significant pieces of legislation to be enacted in that period. 1870 saw the passing of the first Married Women’s Property Act, as one result of ongoing agitation for women’s rights. While the Act gave married women more financial freedom, it also increased the potential for women, as well as men, to be victims of fraud, and of white-collar crime specifically. Not only as a woman directly affected by the Act (Braddon married her publisher and long-time romantic partner, John Maxwell, in 1874 on the death of his first wife), but as a writer who was most famous for her active female protagonists, this naturally had an impact upon Braddon’s work. If women were now more responsible for their own financial freedom, then they, too, were at much greater risk from financial fraud. I argue, therefore, that the passing of this Act changed the course of Braddon’s fiction; Braddon began writing sensation fiction in which women were not only the victims, but also the perpetrators, of financial fraud.

Exploiting the Professions: *Taken at the Flood* and ‘Dr. Carrick’

In an anonymous article, the *Saturday Review* states that Braddon’s 1874 novel, *Taken at the Flood*, ‘is of course a story of crime and mystery’ that goes back to her ‘old hunting-grounds’ (‘Taken at the Flood’ 666, 665). This is a fair comment when considering the novel’s main focus is the Lady-Audley-type anti-heroine, Sylvia Carew. After dissolving an engagement to

Edmund Standon because his mother will disinherit him if he marries her, Sylvia marries Sir Aubrey Perriam in order to live a luxurious lifestyle. Describing Sylvia as a ‘mercenary heroine’ because she marries for financial security, rather than love, Emma Liggins links Braddon’s 1870s mercenary marriages to the ongoing agitation for better educational and working opportunities for women (74). However, Liggins misses the link to women’s changing legal position. Commenting upon the newly enacted Married Women’s Property Act, Sir Aubrey states, “I do not understand or approve the modern system of making a wife independent of her husband. Dependency is one of woman’s sweetest attributes...I should not like my wife...to possess an independent income during my lifetime” (*Taken at the Flood* 156). Sylvia’s restricted lifestyle – she is allowed no money of her own, is told to dress simply, and rarely leaves the confines of Perriam Place – leads her to commit identity fraud. Sylvia commits Aubrey to an insane asylum under the guise of being his brother, Mordred. Just like Lady Audley, Sylvia emulates the Angel of the House in order to increase her social standing through marriage. Ironically, it is precisely Sir Aubrey’s desire for Sylvia’s dependency that makes it necessary for her to commit identity fraud in order to have an autonomous existence. Braddon therefore uses Sylvia to comment upon different perceptions of the Married Women’s Property Act. Far from being detrimental to a happy union, as critics such as Sir Aubrey suggest, increasing female autonomy is, Braddon intimates, essential to a happy marriage, and stifling female independence means that even financially supported women remain in precarious circumstances.

Increased female autonomy in the home is a positive development for Braddon, which she contrasts to the problematic increase in male power within the banking industry. Fraudulent practices by bankers were widely enough known by the 1870s for Edmund’s second fiancée, Esther Rochdale, to fear that his working in a bank is related to his falling from his mother’s grace: “[h]orrible visions of possible calamity flashed across her mind. Edmund had been

forging, or embezzling, or something dreadful of that kind. People in banks so often end by forging. It seems almost a necessary consequence of a confidential position' (304). While Edmund had not been embezzling – his disgrace was caused by eloping with his first fiancée, Sylvia – the fact that such crimes are assumed echoes Sylvia's father's white-collar crimes enacted before the novel opens.

Sylvia's father, the schoolmaster, James Carew (alias Carford), like Edmund, used to work in a bank. In order to maintain himself and his wife in the manner to which they were accustomed, James had “falsified the accounts of the house” by both signing his employer's name on bills (forgery) and keeping back money that should have been deposited (theft) (86). White-collar crime was topical in the 1850s when this section of the narrative is set as this is when the first banking fraud cases were tried. Historian Sarah Wilson traces the growth of the banking industry and how it was matched by the first criminal fraud trials, such as those of Walter Watts for fraud against the Globe Assurance Office in 1850, of W. J. Robson against the Crystal Palace Company in 1856, and of the directors of the Royal British and City of Glasgow banks in 1858 and 1878-89 respectively (152). Such cases provided not only a backdrop of financial scandal, but heightened the public awareness of such possibilities taking place. The increasing public awareness of such crimes fostered a growing paranoia in the public imagination that, in turn, made them inherently exploitable by skilled sensation authors. This is particularly notable in the last example, as the fraud undertaken in 1858 was repeated twenty years later, demonstrating that high-level financial fraud had not been counteracted by the emerging contemporaneous system of policing, and so was still topical in the 1870s when Braddon was writing. Thus, while Charles Dickens in *Bleak House* (1852) compared an individual's financial struggle with the gigantic and inhuman legal system that no-one could manoeuvre, Braddon changes tactics later in the century to demonstrate how an individual can manipulate the banking system for personal gain.

James's white-collar crime is contrasted with his wife's desertion of him and their daughter, Sylvia, for her husband's employer at the bank, Mr. Mowbray. Mrs. Carford argues: "My crime served as a set-off against yours, James ... But for that you might have stood in the felon's dock" (86). Embezzlement and adultery are crimes 'set off' against each other, but hers is seen as morally more corrupt due to the nineteenth century's sexual double standard and her child-abandonment. While James speculated on the financial market and gambled to try and save his reputation and position, putting countless people's livelihoods at risk in the process, Mrs. Carford speculated on the marriage market and lost her position as a respectable wife and mother. This betrayal she lays at her husband's door: "Do you think I would have been reckless if you had told me the truth [of our financial ruin]?" (86). Through Mrs. Carford, as with Sylvia, Braddon advocates for woman's equality within marriage on emotional and financial grounds.

An evaluation of the penalties inflicted on the two Carford spouses is emphasised when James uses financial terminology to plead his dishonoured situation: "Mr. Mowbray could not *afford* to prosecute the husband of the woman he seduced" (86, emphasis added). 'Afford' here has several meanings: Mr. Mowbray cannot financially, morally, or reputationally afford to prosecute James as he has seduced James's wife, indicating that his moral crime cancels out James's financial one. James stresses the "*price* of [his] dishonour" by noting what his fraudulent activity cost him (87, emphasis added): "the house would spare me the disgrace of a prosecution on condition that I withdrew myself from the commercial world, and refrained from any future attempt to obtain credit or employment in the city of London" (87). He takes their daughter, Sylvia, and becomes a schoolmaster, continuing to earn money in a respectable, though lower-class, situation. James suffers no public punishment nor does he have to make any legal reparations.

Mrs. Carford, on the other hand, eventually leaves Mr. Mowbray and becomes a starving, homeless beggar, who returns to her husband to plead for forgiveness, food, and shelter (which he provides), but she still dies at the novel's end. Mrs. Carford's 'fallen-woman ending' invites a contrast to her husband's comparatively comfortable position as a schoolteacher. Despite barrister Luke Owen Pike asserting in 1876 that '[f]orgery is now considered an offence of the greatest magnitude' (541), Braddon's novel, published just two years before this statement, refutes this message, as James's punishment is significantly more lenient than his wife's. Her 'crime' of deviating from the Angel in the House was still considered the greater 'offence.' As Elizabeth Gaskell's own forger, Richard Bradshaw, in *Ruth* (1853) remarks, "many things are right for men which are not for girls" (117), meaning that dominant men are sheltered by both their gender and professional standing, while women who express sexually deviant behaviour have dramatic and tragic ends.

A similar situation in which a trusted professional abuses his position for his own financial advantage is found in Braddon's short story 'Dr. Carrick,' which was published in *All the Year Round* in 1878. As his medical practice fails to grow, Carrick gets desperate, and so when he finally gains one profitable patient, Eustace Tregonnell, he turns to fraud. Carrick mesmerises Eustace, getting him to forge a will that presumably leaves Carrick his fortune. Carrick's fraud is discovered by his own suspicious cousin and housekeeper, Hester Rushton, because Eustace is not usually 'very business-like in his habits' ('Dr. Carrick' 9). It is business etiquette specifically that raises the alarm as Eustace is usually 'so indifferent to money' (9). Being 'indifferent to money' is the prerogative of the wealthy, as it is precisely Carrick's financially insecure position that tempts him, like Sylvia, towards fraudulent activities. While he is not destitute, Carrick believes himself to be worth more than his current social standing. When Eustace signs his will, Hester uses the language of business to note an anomaly: 'It seemed to her as if Mr. Tregonnell, though to all appearance a *free agent*, had been acting under

the influence of the doctor' (9, emphasis added). In keeping with the general definition of fraud as a non-violent crime, Carrick does not use any violence when ensuring the fraudulent signing of the will – the mesmerism does not hurt Eustace; however, Carrick does then progress to attempted murder in order to fulfil the will's provisions by covering Eustace's face with a chloroform-laced pillowcase, but is foiled by Hester hiding in a cupboard. As the conclusion of the tale summarises: '[Carrick] had tried honesty; he had tried fraud and crime. Both had failed' (16). Eventually, Eustace marries Hester and Carrick is imprisoned. Braddon thereby combines the sensation fiction trope of mesmerism with the more topical, and less supernaturally inflected, theme of financial fraud. This is what makes Carrick such a dangerous villain: it is the supposedly sane, socially acceptable, trusted professional who deviates from society's rules that poses the most threat.

Desire for personal fulfilment and social advancement through any means necessary is not specifically gendered in Braddon's work, as the pressure to conform to society's norms is applied equally, if in different ways, to both sexes. 'Dr. Carrick' and *Taken at the Flood*, however, take the desire for self-advancement one step further than *Lady Audley's Secret* (1862). In these 1870s texts, Braddon examines what happens when it is our legal protectors or other professionals who have confidential knowledge about us, and who are therefore under a higher duty to protect us, who become the oppressors; the basis of Victorian society's marital, medical, and legal systems breaks down and it is up to the individual to restore order.

Fakery, Forgery, and the Lower Classes: *The Cloven Foot* and 'Mr. and Mrs. de Fontenoy'

Braddon's 1879 novel, *The Cloven Foot*, relies on her 1860s trope of bigamy as a sensational hook for her readership, but gives it an 1870s twist. As an anonymous review in *The Observer* noted, the novel is replete with 'love and crime and mutual deception' ('The Cloven Foot' 3),

including a double bigamy plot, several financial frauds, and characters with multiple identities. The male protagonist, John Treverton (alias married man Mr. Chicot), commits bigamy because of a complication in the will of his deceased cousin: he can only inherit his cousin's estate if he marries his cousin's ward, Laura Malcom. John marries Laura in order to enact a postnuptial agreement that signs over the estate to Laura, but his bigamy undermines its legitimacy. John's 'audacious fraud' inflicts wider harm upon the community (*The Cloven Foot* 217), because if John and Laura do not marry the estate is to be sold to establish a charitable hospital. This stipulation compounds John's fraudulent actions because it widens his financial crimes to affect a greater geographical, social, and economic area. Such fraudulent behaviour does not merely prey upon the wealthy and the intricacies and eccentricities of their wills, but also has implications that can affect all echelons of society.

In true 'sensational' style, however, the complications of the sensation plot are actually used to prevent John being criminalized. It transpires that John's first marriage to La Chicot is invalid (due to La Chicot herself already being married), and so he is innocent of bigamy and postnuptial fraud as his marriage to Laura is legal. While *The Observer* notes double bigamy may be 'rather stale' as a plotting device (3), it technically means that '[a]lthough guilty in intention, he had been innocent in fact' (*The Cloven Foot* 278), complicating John's position within the fraud narrative. Just as James Carew's banking firm did not press charges, thereby on some level condoning his actions, John's lawyer, Mr. Sampson, advises John not to give himself up to the police as '[h]is interests as well as his client's were at stake' (252). In each case the larger organizational systems work to protect the individual who originally threatened their authority and security. This is only true for James and John, however, because they show great criminal ingenuity and commit strategic ('higher-class'), rather than violent ('lower-class'), crimes. While James and John confirm that the middle classes themselves can be criminal – as opposed to the Newgate Novels' 1830s lower-class criminals, and Braddon's

1860s Lady Audley who fraudulently married her way up the social scale and violently protected her position against any threats – the companies eschew their prescribed morality and cover up James and John’s fraudulent behaviour. This may be in part because proving white-collar crime in court was difficult (Odden 142; Wagner 123), but it also meant that the companies avoided unnecessary scandal and so protected their own reputations.

Intertwined in *The Cloven Foot*’s double bigamy plot is a narrative regarding the murder of La Chicot, and the theft of her diamond necklace, by her friend, Desrolles. A financially hard up “swindler, and an adventurer” (194), Desrolles tries to sell the stolen necklace to a diamond merchant, only to be told it is a worthless fake – all ‘outward show.’ Through their violent nature, the murder and theft are specifically related to the lower-class characters, inviting a direct comparison with John’s legal fraud to emphasise how all classes of society equally are made up of, in Duthie’s term, ‘inward rottenness.’

As a fake object, *The Cloven Foot*’s diamond necklace links to the counterfeit money present in Braddon’s earlier short story ‘Mr. and Mrs. de Fontenoy,’ published in *Belgravia* in 1870. In this tale, the eponymous characters are coiners – people who forge counterfeit money. Not white-collar criminals because they are not from the professional classes, they are lower-class criminals who commit fraud. Mr. and Mrs. de Fontenoy have a particular pattern of victimization: they pretend to be aristocrats and rent out large and expensive houses in remote seaside towns in order to have enough space for their enterprise. Specifically, they target houses that have failed to let in off-peak periods, when their owners rush into ‘wild expenses in the way of advertising’ (‘Mr. and Mrs. de Fontenoy’ 449), and they rely on the owner being desperate regarding the lack of rent. The influence of personal advertisements on sensation fiction has been examined by Matthew Rubery, who argues that ‘unlike other sections of the newspaper, the advertising columns brought readers into potential contact with a variety of criminals’ (58): criminals advertising their fraudulent schemes, and also answering

advertisements with deceitful replies as it allows them to ‘refashion themselves into legitimate members of society’ (62). Falling into the latter category, Mr. and Mrs. de Fontenoy’s arrival is a welcome relief to a deserted town, although as the epigraph to this essay asserts, the 1870s were ‘an age of outward show, of gloss, and of inward rottenness’ (449), and Braddon’s tale stresses Mr. and Mrs. de Fontenoy’s aristocratic ‘appearance,’ which hides their inner fraudulent selves. It is specifically their looks, manners, and attitudes that allow them to defraud the seaside town, St. Dunstons-by-the-sea: like La Chicot’s diamond necklace, they are ‘all outward show.’

Fraudulent coining has several detrimental effects on society: it reduces the value of real money; it increases inflation due to more money being circulated in the economy; and it causes losses to business owners as banks may not reimburse them for detected counterfeit coins. Thus, the de Fontenoy’s supposed aristocratic heritage potentially allows them to destroy the livelihoods of multiple shop owners – and by extension an entire seaside town – by buying goods, and belatedly paying for them with counterfeit money. The issue of fraudulent gold was topical in 1870, and concern enough to Braddon’s *Belgravia* readers for the periodical to include, immediately after ‘Mr. and Mrs. de Fontenoy,’ Duthie’s article ‘Gold and Glitter,’ which examines the goldsmith and jewellery trade. While not directly related to coining, the article discusses different standards of gold. Duthie argues that while Continental gold standards are lower (18 and 16 carat gold) than traditional British standards (22 and 18 carat), the introduction into Britain of 9-carat gold would not, as some feared, diminish the ‘strong, massive [and] durable’ quality of British gold (Duthie 464). The discussion is evocative of similar debates surrounding sensation fiction, with the middle-class reviewer William Fraser Rae’s outrage at the genre ‘making the literature of the Kitchen the favourite reading of the Drawing Room’ because it blurred strict social structures (204). In terms of gold, Duthie advocates for the inferior carat so that the lower classes can have jewellery that is ‘well worth

the money, and will answer every purpose of use and ornament' (465), but is strictly *not* the real thing: the social boundaries remain firm, with the higher classes having the best quality gold and the lower classes having gold for 'outward show.' This need by the lower classes to own gold, even if it is merely plated, reflects their desire to emulate the higher classes (hence La Chicot's fake diamond necklace), while also referencing the warning that 'all that glitters is not gold.' Mr. and Mrs. de Fontenoy need the glitter of the counterfeit gold and the aristocratic lifestyle to dazzle the seaside resort against detecting their fraudulent selves. Overall, the coining by these lower-class career criminals is on the same level as the embezzlement undertaken by James Carew; both exploit a perceived higher-class respectability, but ultimately have a devastating impact upon the local economies.

One key difference, however, is that while the middle-class fraudsters James and John are not legally punished for their actions, the de Fontenoy's are, and in this tale, unlike in the other three here discussed, the police are consulted. Mr. Migson, the owner of the house the de Fontenoy's are renting, contacts Scotland Yard via a retired detective when he sees a newspaper item detailing the death of Mr. de Fontenoy in Scotland. Mr. Migson's description of Mr. de Fontenoy matches that of 'Slippery Joseph, one of the most daring coiners that ever lived' (459). Having escaped early from the seaside town, Joseph/de Fontenoy, his wife and their coining crew are captured undertaking their next scam and are 'sentenced to penal servitude' (460). The lower classes in Braddon's narratives are brought to justice by the law, while her middle-class fraudsters are not, suggesting Braddon capitulates to her middle-class *Belgravia* readers' expectations.

The different types of fraud used in Braddon's 1870s fiction depend on the class of the fraudster. The lower-class forgers Mr. and Mrs. de Fontenoy use the ancient method of coining; they use the actual object, counterfeit money, because that is what they have access to. They do not have reputations upon which they can borrow or obtain credit, financial, or otherwise.

By contrast, the middle-class fraudsters James and John use and abuse the banking system via their birthright, education, and connections. The contemporaneous technological banking system therefore enables this new type of white-collar crime where the fraudsters need to blend into the background in order to hide their activities rather than dazzle using false personas; James and John are dangerous *because* they look and act like everyone else, and also partially because of that they avoid prosecution by the criminal justice system. As with *The Cloven Foot*'s lawyer, Mr. Sampson, Mr. and Mrs. de Fontenoy have an 'ardent love of money-making' (24), which is the downfall of most fraudsters from any social strata. Nevertheless, in Braddon's 1870s fiction it is the lower-class career criminals who are locked up, or transported, for the good of society. Middle-class criminals who succumb to greed are morally, and socially, redeemed.

Dispersing Fraud: Braddon's Northern Publication Syndicate

As the sections above demonstrate, Braddon combined the historical background of high-profile fraud cases of the previous decades, with the ongoing agitation for women's rights and sensation writing conventions to create tales that spoke directly to her 1870s readership. Her clever use of these themes coincided with a change in her publication style. From 1873, Braddon began syndication with William Tillotson of Bolton in a deal that was 'original in the sense that it created the first syndicate of British provincial newspapers systematically covering most of the country for new work by an author with a reputation already established in the metropolitan book market' (Law 43). The newspapers Braddon published in at this point of her career were the *Bolton Weekly Journal and Guardian* (which published *Taken at the Flood*), *Manchester Weekly Times*, *Leigh Journal and Times*, *Sheffield Weekly Telegraph*, and *Newcastle Weekly Chronicle* (which published *The Cloven Foot*). Thus, over the 1870s

Braddon's novel publications became geographically widespread, pushing beyond London-based journals, such as her own edited periodical *Belgravia* that was sold in 1876 to Chatto and Windus. Braddon's short stories, however, continued to be published in London-based periodicals, such as *Belgravia*, *The Illustrated Newspaper*, *All the Year Round* and her 1879 newly formed Christmas annual *The Mistletoe Bough*, which maintained her influential standing in London literary circles and reviews.

The impact of this northern publishing syndicate on her literary reputation is significant. While such an alteration might initially suggest Braddon suffered a decline in popularity and author prestige in this period because the popular London periodicals were no longer publishing her fiction in the vast quantities she was producing it, there were in fact many benefits to this new mode of publication. Braddon's fiction was now being dispersed across the entire country, gaining her a wider readership – socially, economically, and geographically – that increased her literary impact (Carnell and Law 140). The positive connotations of this publishing manoeuvre are compounded by the fact that these newspapers were based in some of the major industrial cities of the north. This wider readership also had a significant impact on her criminal narratives in particular. While Braddon's fictions continued to be read alongside real life crimes that were reported in newspapers, the fact that her fraud and white-collar crime narratives were set outside London – for instance Devonshire in *The Cloven Foot*, Cornwall in 'Dr. Carrick,' Hedingham in *Taken at the Flood*, and Brighton in 'Mr and Mrs. De Fontenoy' – meant that they were consistently warning all strata of society against fraudulent activities, as they were not restricted to one area of Britain. Portraying fraud in fiction also emphasised the effects of such actions on both men and women; financial fraud was often perceived to be a 'victimless crime,' but the sensational and tragic results for both victims and perpetrators depicted in Braddon's novels showed a dimension news reports often lacked.

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While the *Saturday Review* asserted in 1864 that Braddon's early sensation novels 'are simply stories of exciting incident, without any sort of relation to the social system' ('The Perils of Sensation' 559), ultimately, through combining her brand of sensationalism with the changing context of criminal behaviour and the continuing agitation for women's rights, Braddon was able to 'forge a new path' in the 1870s that delved specifically into professional and criminal systems that threatened society at large. Through her innovative newspaper syndication, Braddon continued to establish herself as a reputable author, adapting and exploiting her changing publication strategies. The fact that Braddon turned her attention towards more sophisticated crime echoed the increasing complexity of her own literary productions. Braddon's already twist-laden sensation fiction narratives encompassed more modern modes of criminal enterprise in the 1870s, updating the sensation genre alongside it. Her 1870s criminal characters have greater emphasis within the narrative itself, instead of their crimes simply being the means of creating overwrought or emotional impacts in their victims. Coupled with the inclusion of less violent crimes, is greater emphasis on strategic crime and thus criminal ingenuity. The villains of these pieces are not the violent lower-class Newgate criminals or the ambitious, social-climbing Lady Audley; instead, they are formidable and complex middle-class characters straining to maintain their status through financial schemes. Such changes in fictional crimes and criminals were significant steps forward in modernising sensation writing into the crime writing of the twentieth century and beyond.

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