Miranda

Revue pluridisciplinaire du monde anglophone /
Multidisciplinary peer-reviewed journal on the English-
speaking world

7 | 2012

Ceramics / Submorphemics

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Electronic version

URL: <https://journals.openedition.org/miranda/4600>

DOI: 10.4000/miranda.4600

ISSN: 2108-6559

Publisher

Université Toulouse - Jean Jaurès

Electronic reference

Laurence Talairach-Vielmas, "Saverio Tomaiuolo, In Lady Audley's Shadow: Mary Elizabeth Braddon and Victorian Literary Genres", *Miranda* [Online], 7 | 2012, Online since 09 December 2012, connection on 21 September 2021. URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/miranda/4600> ; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/miranda.4600>

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Saverio Tomaiuolo, *In Lady Audley's Shadow: Mary Elizabeth Braddon and Victorian Literary Genres* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 222 p, ISBN 978-0-7486-4115-4

- 1 Saverio Tomaiuolo's *In Lady Audley's Shadow: Mary Elizabeth Braddon and Victorian Literary Genres* is a fairly recent study of the literary career of one of the most renowned Victorian writers of sensation novels. The book opens with the story of Edward Bulwer Lytton's wife, Rosina Wheeler, who was wrongly incarcerated in a lunatic asylum in 1858. This sensational case inspired many a sensation novel of the 1860s, typifying the way in which the sensation novel borrowed from real life, subversively confusing the boundary between fiction and reality. As Tomaiuolo shows, indeed, the connections between Rosina Wheeler's fate and Braddon's *Lady Audley's*, just like the role that insanity and asylums play in Braddon's fiction, seem to have been strongly inspired by the writer's own life, be it her friendship with Bulwer Lytton, to whom *Lady Audley's Secret* was dedicated, or her relationship with John Maxwell whose own legal wife was "mad". However, the book does not aim at dealing solely with sensation fiction. Rather, *In Lady Audley's Shadow* examines how Braddon engaged with other literary genres, from the gothic to detective fiction and even realism. To do so, the analysis is divided into three parts, each respectively dealing with a literary "genre" (or "mode").
- 2 Part I starts with Braddon's updating of the Gothic mode. In *Lady Audley's Secret* (1862) country houses revamp Ann Radcliffe's medieval castles, bourgeois mansions becoming sites of transgression and being, just like in Gothic novels, particularly related to the female body. In the following chapter, on *John Marchmont's Legacy* (1864), Tomaiuolo

shows how Gothic topoi enable Braddon to “scan the inner recesses of the characters’ personality” (47) and express emotional or legal dispossession. Chapter 3, on “Good Lady Duncaye” (1896)—Braddon’s vampire story—resituates Braddon’s short story within a tradition of vampire stories, from Polidori’s *Vampyre* (1819) to Le Fanu’s *Carmilla* (1872) and James Rymner’s *Varney the Vampire* (1847). References to new scientific and technological innovations give a modern touch to vampire stories and motifs. Spenser’s essay, “The Social Organism”, informs the argument, as Tomaiuolo compares the circulation of blood with that of commodities in market economy and explains the meaning of Braddon’s vampire in a *fin-de-siècle* context (marked by fears of invasion, contagion, degeneracy or anti-semitism). As Tomaiuolo contends, scenes of transfusion or the use of chloroform are so many examples of the ways in which Braddon “de-Gothicise[s] her story” (71). Thus, as Part I highlights, Victorian secrets sharply differ from Gothic mysteries—some of which often remain “inexplicable” (32)—, but the chapters do not always make it clear which conventions of the Gothic genre—or “mode”—Braddon seems to depart from exactly. Moreover, although Braddon’s references to contemporary medical experiments may, indeed, have revisited Gothic stereotypes, Tomaiuolo fails to mention that such revisions of the Gothic were found in Stoker’s and other *fin-de-siècle* fiction as well, and therefore makes Braddon appear perhaps more original than she actually was.

- 3 In Part II, Tomaiuolo looks at the impact of evolutionary theory on literature, more especially on detective fiction, drawing on Lawrence Frank’s study of Victorian detective fiction (*Victorian Detective Fiction and the Nature of Evidence: The Scientific Investigations of Poe, Dickens, and Doyle* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003)). In some of Braddon’s novels, the detective becomes “a sort of criminal geologist” (81), as a character argues in *Eleanor’s Victory*. The chapter offers another analysis of *Lady Audley’s Secret*: seen through an evolutionary lens, Braddon’s eponymous heroine is this time re-defined as a “female species” who “struggles to survive in a patriarchal world” (87). Tomaiuolo then moves onto *Henry Dunbar* (1864), while Chapter 5, on *Eleanor’s Victory* (1863) and *The Trail of the Serpent* (1861), highlights how the two novels exemplify Braddon’s departure from sensational narratives and her gradual move towards detective fiction. Tomaiuolo reinscribes Braddon’s heroines within a history of female detectives as in Catherine Crowe’s *Susan Hopley* (1841), Wilkie Collins’s “The Story of Anne Rodway” (1856) and W.S. Hayward’s *The Revelations of a Lady Detective* (1861), and traces Braddon’s allusions to Darwin, even if we may sometimes wonder whether long quotes from *Origin of Species* are necessary to the argument. As Braddon investigates the hereditary nature of evil, Tomaiuolo suggests, her disabled detectives appear as a “successful ‘variation’ on the species of the traditional Victorian detective” (112). Chapter 6, on *Rough Justice* (1898) and *His Darling Sin* (1899), looks at two novels which feature an identical detective (John Flaunce) and play upon visual evidence. For Tomaiuolo, these narratives are much more modern detective narratives since they may be related to the birth of criminal anthropology, the impact of the translation into English of Cesare Lombroso’s *L’Uomo criminale* and the dissemination of his definition of the criminal in England in the 1890s.
- 4 In Part III, which deals with realism, Tomaiuolo examines *Lady Audley’s Secret* again, this time in order to define British realism (in contrast to French realism) and its “morally-oriented approach” (138). To do so, he lays stress on Braddon’s use of letters, scraps of paper, newspaper articles, as well as the Pre-Raphaelite portrait of the heroine, and shows how the motifs interspersed in the narrative function as means of enhancing the

effect of reality. Chapter 8, which examines *The Doctor's Wife* (1864), recalls the connections between the novel and Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* (1857) and points out how the novel sets apart sensationalism and realism, sensation fiction enabling writers to offer a new "realistic" look on reality. However, the term "photographic" in the title may disappoint readers expecting developments on the relationship between photography and realism, since Tomaiuolo only uses the term metaphorically. Lastly, Chapter 9, on *Phantom Fortune* (1883), looks at the image of the female consumer, using Marx's *Capital* as a backdrop to the analysis of Braddon's depiction of Lady Audley and Lesbia as avid consumers of goods.

- 5 Tomaiuolo's book is a thoroughly researched study of Braddon's works and a genuine effort to contextualize Braddon's fiction. We may regret that some of the references in the book do not appear in the bibliography (which is not always in alphabetical order) and that the study may sometimes lack originality for Braddon scholars. However, the book does offer a significant overview of Braddon's works and should prove a good guidebook to students interested in the patroness of the sensation novel as well as a significant addition to studies of popular Victorian fiction more generally.

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Keywords: sensation novel, detective fiction

Mots-clés: roman à sensation, roman policier

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