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MARY BRADDON'S "GOOD LADY DUCAYNE" IN CONTEXT(S):

VICTORIAN MEDICINE, LITERARY GOTHICISM, AND 21ST CENTURY FEMINIST PEDAGOGY

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I. Reconsidering Feminist Pedagogy in the 21st Century

I was designing my first upper-level course on nineteenth-century literature in the weeks before the fourth semester of my first tenure-track job. I had been waiting my whole graduate career to get to teach this class. I had chosen my books and piled up my research, and I was happily anticipating the stimulating discussions my students and I were going to have about Victorian science, nationalism, race, gender, medicine, insanity, and detection. Then my phone rang. A senior colleague (male, which might be beside the point), was calling on behalf of an advisee (also male, again perhaps irrelevant), who was considering registering for my course; having gotten wind of some of my book selections, the student (and, I suspect, the colleague) wanted to know whether I was “teaching any men.” Surprised and immediately defensive, I tried to explain to my colleague that if one is teaching nineteenth-century prose fiction, one can hardly avoid women (writers or characters) without making a real effort to do so, and that my syllabus included many “great” Romantic and Victorian texts regardless of who wrote them. Bizarrely, I found myself defending the relative conservativeness of my book choices, almost assuming the “not-a-feminist-but” posture so many of my women students manifest: *See? Look at all the “great” works on my syllabus!* I wanted to argue that *Frankenstein*, *Jane Eyre*, and *Wuthering Heights* hardly count as “women’s texts,” as if the phrase necessarily refers to non-canonical, “lesser” works newly recovered by the feminist-politicized canon-busting project of the last couple of decades. The opposite of a “woman’s text” isn’t a “man’s text,” that is: the opposite of a “woman’s text” is ... what, a *good* text? A *canonical* text? A *necessary* text?

Despite my defensive reaction, I did not (and do not) interpret my colleague’s call as initiating the sort of open warfare in which feminist scholars before me had to engage. He certainly didn’t think I should *only* be teaching Scott, Dickens, Trollope, and Thackeray. He wasn’t asking me to make any changes to my booklist. But this

minor conflict, and my reaction to it, suggests that the present moment is an interesting and surprisingly urgent one for academic feminism. Acknowledging a lull in feminist theory, perceived by practitioners and students alike, the October 2006 *PMLA* forum offered several reconsiderations of feminism, its evolution, its continued necessity in the academy and beyond, the various backlash(es) it has wrought, and the possible new directions it may take, both in theory and in practice. Though varied in their approaches, the articles in this forum articulate the very questions that I tackled in response to my colleague as I reflected on our exchange. Am I a “feminist” scholar and teacher? If I answer in the negative, is it because I have, as Susan Gubar identifies, so incorporated feminist arguments in my non-gendered work that feminism has ceased to be a separate venture (1712)? Is that posture liberating and progressive, or is it anti-affirmative-action, reactionary, and conservative; is it mainstreaming feminism, or destroying it? What are the theoretical and pedagogical implications, in either case? Can a non-feminist feminist have it both ways?

My relative youth in the profession, as revealed in my opening tale, does more than suggest my inexperience with upper-level course design and dealing with students and colleagues on issues like this: it also indicates my entering the academy as a member of a unique generation of scholars. Though I don't consider myself a radical feminist scholar, I do believe in reading, studying, and sharing the work of women writers with students, but even as I write that sentence I realize that it is terribly imprecise. I don't “believe in” equality between male and female writers any more than I “believe” that my husband and I deserve an equal right to vote, and I'm no more a radical feminist scholar than I am a radical breather of oxygen. Of course I am interested in women writers, because I am interested in writers; of course I am interested in gender because I am interested in history. Sharon Marcus, in the October *PMLA* forum, laments (and challenges) the notion that feminism is becoming irrelevant: “There is a pervasive sense that feminist criticism has no future and only the shred of a present, that no one is doing feminist work anymore” (1725). But I think that this sense belies the work that we *are* doing: my generation of scholars, it seems, joins the feminist project with a new task, not to *recover*, not necessarily to *theorize*, but to *normalize* women's writing. We take the necessary next step from the work which has already been done.

And this leads me back to the classroom. In obvious ways, teaching women writers is the logical culmination of canon expansion. Feminist scholars have worked tirelessly for decades now, recovering women writers, publishing their texts, authoring biographical and critical scholarship, and theorizing the politics of their own work. If these efforts are not to be undone by time and apathy, or the sense that feminism is “over,” we must anchor these women writers in academic thought so that they are not again easily forgotten. But teaching women writers, amidst its other challenges, invites assumptions about pedagogy. And this observation represents the site of my earlier conflict. My conversation with the student, via my colleague, highlights the basic questions undergirding all attempts to teach literature: with what goals are we to approach literature in the classroom, to what ends do we pair or link texts, on what criteria do we privilege certain texts over others? The facts that my colleague asked the question and that a student asked him the question indeed suggest that the feminist work is not “over,” in the academy, at least insofar as a double standard still requires a defense of women-heavy syllabi anywhere outside the women's studies program while no such defense is demanded of courses with mostly male authors (like nearly every survey course in existence). Besides this, however, is the assumption that women-heavy syllabi demand courses that are theoretically or methodologically slanted toward gender studies. Why would one teach texts by and about women (content) if one was not teaching gender (pedagogy)? The implicit accusation in my colleague's question (and his student's apprehension), I think, was that I would turn my lectern into a feminist soapbox, my English Literature class into a Women's Studies seminar.

This kind of suspicion frustrates our attempts to introduce women's texts into the classroom. It implies the radical proselytising that the Academic Bill of Rights people already fear; worse (for feminist scholars), it suggests that women writers can only be taught one way, that these texts are only worth mining for gender issues. In fact, in this class, I presented a sequence of novels that featured elements of the Gothic and elements of the domestic, so we could examine the often surprising moments of overlap between two nineteenth-century movements in prose fiction and the surprising parallels in various novels' uses of science, of race/Othering, of medicine, of

detection. We read Radcliffe's *The Italian*; Austen's *Northanger Abbey* and *Emma*; Shelley's *Frankenstein*; the Brontës' *Wuthering Heights*, *Jane Eyre*, and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*; Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret*; Collins' *The Woman in White*; Stoker's *Dracula*; and Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*. I thought of my class as an investigation into two dominant strains of the nineteenth-century novel: it was guided by my interests in history and genre. But using Marcus's argument about the future of feminism, this approach is feminist: "Indeed, we *need* broadly conceived studies of knowledge, aesthetics, economics, and space that incorporate feminist insights and introduce them to readers who would never pick up a book with 'women' in the title but will gravitate to one about the 'big questions'—the novel, the market, the city" (1725). As a feminist, that is, I need to present "nineteenth-century literature" in such a way that incorporates the women who wrote the texts and the women who inhabit them, but I need to do so in a way that normalizes them, their existence, their issues. And this, without question of politics, augments the intellectual capital available to students at the university.

Professors remain responsible for generating and disseminating this intellectual capital, but it is worthwhile also to recognize that our students represent another, and yet more post-feminist demographic. They participate in the gender debate in very different ways. Most undergrads, the one who set my colleague calling notwithstanding, will read the texts they are told to read and trust that we are teaching them "important," "relevant," and meaningful texts. In my limited experience, few students care about the numbers of male and female authors represented, but they are tired of talking about gender. Even the women tend to think that feminism is outdated (or over), and they simply don't choose to think of themselves in gender-political ways. Even the ones inclined toward feminism have become the "postfeminists" that Susan Stanford Friedman identified in 1997, "who dislike what they dismiss as the older generation's obsession with victimology." And while I am certainly not willing to sound the death knell of academic feminism—Women's Studies programs, for instance, are theoretical entities quite separate from my nineteenth-century lit class—I believe that women writers are ready for us to respond to this changing demographic by presenting them in a more comprehensive light.

In short, it is my contention that whatever our goals *with* women's texts, we must start conceptualizing (and publicizing, and teaching) them as *texts* first and foremost, for the credit of the texts themselves and for the lasting worth of our attempts. While this may alarm theorists like Gubar, who see the possibility of the "wither[ing]" and "marginaliz[ation]" of feminist criticism as an "autonomous intellectual venture" inherent in this sort of mainstreaming, I posit that this mainstreaming is itself a desirable step in at least one strain of feminism, the successful fruition of decades of labor.

Is mainstreaming women writers timely and necessary? Take the Mary Elizabeth Braddon story of my title, the text I use to cross-pollinate syllabi in the following section. Very little scholarship has been published about "Good Lady Ducayne"; though the story is available online and was recently published in Glennis Stevenson's *Nineteenth Century Short Stories by Women*, it has not been exhausted critically. If you search the MLA International Bibliography for "Braddon" and "Ducayne" together, you only get two articles—one from a collection of pedagogical essays I co-edited—and both of these deal with gender issues in the story, namely marriage and "redundancy" (Gruner; Goodlad). If you just seek "Braddon, M*" you find roughly 150 articles about Mary Elizabeth Braddon, nearly half of which deal with some aspect of gender: women readers; domesticity; marriage; femme fatales; maternal violence (Maugham); "the gendering of pain" (Rosenman); "female disadvantage" (Fisk); and "the enigma of femininity" (Peters). A search for "Wilkie Collins," Braddon's co-conspirator in the development of the sensation novel, meanwhile, reveals nearly three times as many entries, only about ten percent of which deal with gender issues, among articles on race, nationality, science, narrative form, detection, legality, and ecology. Is it because *The Woman in White* is somehow less concerned with gender than *Lady Audley's Secret*, or because we have a freedom in reading Collins that readers of Braddon do not yet enjoy? Obviously, I suspect the latter. With no disrespect intended to the feminist work being done, it is imperative to a feminist project that we begin to see women writers not as preoccupied with gender but as active and equal participants in the larger cultural and ideological realities they inhabited.

This may seem to state the obvious. But even if these inexact statistics about Braddon and Collins research could be explained away, other examples abound to prove that women writers are still most often seen as

women first, *writers* second. Margaret Cavendish's surpassingly odd and delightful 1666 quasi-utopian novel *The Blazing World*, for instance, finally excerpted in the Norton and the Longman anthologies, shows that some third-wave recovery work has paid off. But from a hundred available pages of text discussing contemporary scientific questions and theories, religious practice, and military engagement, the Norton and Longman editors both have selected the few pages about women's friendship that appear near the novel's end. The result of this decision is that *The Blazing World* to which most students (and scholars) will be exposed is a text preoccupied with the “happy creatoress's” relationships with her husband and her “noble female friends” both real and fictional; the observation that platonic same-sex love gives husbands “reason to be jealous”; and the utopian-lit cliché that women don't belong in positions of religious or governmental authority.

About one-third of *The Blazing World* scholarship deals principally with gender, and the rest illuminates the complex intellectual history to which the book responds and contributes. In this way, I believe, we must integrate gender into the larger historical paradigm, allowing modern students to see women writers participating more comprehensively in their ideological histories, not only existing in the margins but generating non-gendered intellectual capital. My personal interest in Braddon was first piqued by her use of medical technologies and paradigms (blood transfusion in “Ducayne”; heredity insanity in *Lady Audley's Secret*). Gender is obviously a factor in each text, but the inequalities of Victorian education and professional opportunity mustn't overshadow the other fascinating elements at play. In the following section, I present approaches to teaching Braddon's work within this broader historical view while simultaneously using Braddon to construct this broader view for our students.

II. Teaching Braddon's “Good Lady Ducayne” in Context and Conversation

Mary Elizabeth Braddon's novels and stories exemplify of some of the main issues surrounding women's texts and their place in the canon: aesthetic value, intellectual challenge, universality, and contemporary popularity. Her work, it may be argued, betrays occasional aesthetic imperfections; however, she produced a tremendous amount of published work, and it was enthusiastically received by female and middle-brow readers. Her texts would seldom be canonized in an academy still governed by New Critics. As critics have noted, her work and her life did indeed give insight into women's lives in the nineteenth century, so with the advent of academic feminism many of her works have re-appeared in print and have gotten critical attention by feminist scholars. At the same time, her work in sensation fiction marks the development of a subgenre, employs themes that have fascinated readers and writers for centuries, and reveals terrific anxieties in the cultural imagination then and now. Speculatively applying “Good Lady Ducayne” in a variety of syllabic contexts can demonstrate the underutilized value of texts otherwise somewhat precariously situated in an emerging, expanded canon.

“Good Lady Ducayne” is a darkly comic tale about Bella Rolleston, a poor girl seeking work to support herself and her mother. She is as unlikely a heroine as she is an employable woman: dull, unskilled, unimaginative. But she is young and healthy, in the bloom of youth, and she is soon situated with a very wealthy, impossibly old woman, the titular Ducayne, who takes her to Italy as a companion. In Italy, Bella fortuitously befriends an English girl and her doctor-brother just as her health begins to fail; finally, Doctor Stafford deduces that Ducayne's creepy Italian physician is anesthetizing and bleeding Bella at night without her knowledge, infusing Ducayne with her young, fresh blood, then treating Bella for the “mosquito bites” he leaves on her arms. Apparently, Ducayne has already lost two girls to the mysterious failure of their health, and only after is she confronted by Doctor Stafford does she agree to leave young women alone altogether. She gives Bella what is in effect hush money, Bella marries the good English doctor, and they all live happily ever after, except Ducayne, who one can only assume dies, despite vowing to find another, less homicidal method of extending her age .

Easily, one can imagine “Good Lady Ducayne” as contributing to a conversation about Victorian class and

gender struggles: the protagonist, unskilled and poor, abandoned by her father, simply needs a job to take care of herself and her mother; her bloodsucking employer, in true aristocratic fashion, thinks of her as a means to an end rather than as a person; as a low-wage worker, and a female one at that, she has internalized this poor self-concept enough to make the reader fear that she will give her life for lack of knowledge, power, and options; a man (and a professional one) is required to save her (and their marriage is narratively necessary lest she is to be “saved” only for even more desperate financial straits than she entered the text with, still frail, still unskilled and dull, and now out of a job). She leaves the text as ignorant as she began it, not even knowing the source of her own illness or how close she has come to dying. Obviously, the story is ripe for feminist analysis and class discussion of gender issues.

But the number of texts to which “Good Lady Ducayne” can be tied, and the number of potential analytical conversations which can then result, is impressive when we postpone regard of gender as a theme. The syllabus I propose [here](#), modified from the class I mentioned above, selects texts according to their interest in mystery, suspense, crime, or detection, and organizes them more or less chronologically from the Gothic to detection to sensation to horror. The progression is imperfect: we don't see nineteenth-century fiction moving seamlessly from one category to the next; furthermore, many texts that we don't see fitting into any of these categories at all are listed on the syllabus. But if one examines even these apparently ill-fitting texts closely, one sees dramatic similarities and differences that can give rise to surprising and provocative discussions of fiction, of history, and of power.

In some of these discussions, gender roles yet arise, but even they can get delightfully complex with gender-indiscriminate juxtapositions. Most of the titles listed feature a heroine in distress, usually a woman who lacks money, family or domestic power, often deliberately victimized, and in need of the protection of law, friends, or a protective male who is often an amateur or professional detective: Ellena Rosalba (*The Italian*); Catherine Moreland (*Northanger Abbey*); Elizabeth Lavenza Frankenstein (*Frankenstein*); Beatrice Cenci (“The Cenci”); Jane Eyre (*Jane Eyre*) ; Bella Rolleston (“Good Lady Ducayne”); Laura Fairlie (*The Woman in White*) ; and Tess Derbyfield (*Tess of the D'Urbervilles*), to name a few. Many of the male characters have authority and power, and, in the Gothic tradition, some will use this power to protect the distressed damsel while others will use it to manipulate or otherwise damage her: Cenci (“The Cenci”), Edward Fairfax Rochester (*Jane Eyre*), Heathcliff (*Wuthering Heights*), Count Fosco (*The Woman in White*), Alec D'Urberville (*Tess of the D'Urbervilles*). From a gendered framework, we are inclined to see the powerless woman replicated *ad nauseum*, to investigate only how individual women are oppressed, victimized, or subversive. It is fascinating to note, however, how the concept of “power” fluctuates to represent various social and historical features of Victorian ideology. Masculine power varies dramatically, from physical and economic power in some novels to the authority of professional knowledge in others, to work in yet others, to the privileging of Englishness over Otherness in others still; shifting narrative control and experimentation with point of view are also implicated in the distribution of masculine power. In the multifaceted aspect of power, gender paradigms are as often handily reversed as they are constructed. And finally, in many of the texts, the ultimate, climactic struggle can be seen as taking place between forms of power, not between men and women.

In *The Woman in White*, for instance, Laura Fairlie is the obvious victim to her dastardly husband Sir Percival, who marries her for her money, financially and verbally abuses her, and then criminally tries to remove her from the picture altogether. But the bizarre cast of other (and Othered) characters demonstrates that the most pressing question, ultimately, is hardly whether Walter Hartwright can save Laura from Sir Percival; rather, it is whether the English working class drawing master *cum* amateur detective, with the help of a cunning female archivist, can stay one step ahead of a crafty, aristocratic Italian, well versed in chemistry and law, assisted by his extremely jealous wife. It is whether Laura's blue blood will ever triumph over Percival's carefully hidden illegitimacy, whether Marian's physical health will disallow her facilitating the recovery of Laura's mental health. It is whether identity inheres in the self or is constructed externally, and whether Victorian legal infrastructure has kept pace with the rising potentiality of what we now call identity theft. [1]The question becomes one that involves legal and medical knowledge; physical and mental health; financial resources; connections with friends, family, and agencies of international espionage; the perils of romantic love; the global authority of the English;

and, maybe most importantly, record-keeping, authority, and narrative control.

In “Good Lady Ducayne,” the complexity of power is evident in the quintet of main characters. While Bella (like Laura Fairlie and Ellena Rosalba) is obviously victimized by the sinister Italian, he, like she, is in the employ of Lady Ducayne, validating money as the arbiter of power. Clearly, Bella sees it this way from the beginning, as she audaciously seeks a salaried position instead of a simple domestic one. Ducayne does indeed have the power to buy and sell whatever is salable; but if the text demonstrates the abuses of capitalism, Bella at least begins the story with the resource of good health which grants her access into the sinister system of exchange. Ducayne herself is terrified at the notion of her impending death, a victim, as it were, to old age. The story can be seen, then, as valuing a sort of social authority that comes with youth and health, describing the decline of one's value over time. Parravicini's knowledge of experimental medical techniques, clashing with Dr. Stafford's forensic insight, demonstrates a Frankensteinian valuation of “modern” professional medicine over more mysterious, alchemical practices; it also, by both Bella's and Ducayne's professed ignorance over the processes by which the “crime” is committed, closes off access to this highly valued professionalized medical knowledge. Furthermore, Stafford's ultimate victory proves the strength and honor of Englishness over foreignness, including the expatriate Ducayne. Finally, no court of law will ever prosecute Ducayne or Parravicini, though they have clearly committed manslaughter at the very least, reifying a marriage plot over a criminal one (and perhaps suggesting difficulties of legal definitions that arise from advancing technologies).

Even without such elaborations on power, Lady Ducayne, by her (at least tacit) participation in the crime, upsets the Gothic gender paradigm and reveals that in numerous texts that feature a female victim, there are also female villains/murderesses, simultaneously victimized or otherwise: Marchesa Vivaldi, Beatrice Cenci, Lady Audley, Tess Derbyfield); male victims, simultaneously vilified or otherwise (Vivaldi, Alec D'Urberville, George Talboys in *Lady Audley's Secret*); powerful women, whether simultaneously underprivileged, victimized, villainized, or otherwise (Jane Eyre, Marian Halcombe in *The Woman in White*); or characters whose gender/power relationship is complex enough to produce very interesting conversations in light of those more easily categorizeable (Catherine Earnshaw from *Wuthering Heights*, Bertha Mason in *Jane Eyre*, Mina Murray Harker in *Dracula*, Helen Huntington Graham in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, and surprisingly and, as I will discuss presently, Emma Woodhouse). Rather than teaching “Ducayne” as an example of two simple types of woman—the wealthy femme fatale and the poor victim in need of masculine support—this list encourages us to see that within much stricter gender and social roles than our current society observes, women and men alike found strength and weakness from a variety of sources, within a variety of contexts, and with numerous and evolving influences: money, class, education, profession, religion, spirituality, physical and mental health, and emotional states like love and jealousy.

This syllabus may also surprise readers by illuminating similarities in narrative structure. *Frankenstein* is famously epistolary and nested, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* is nearly identical; *The Woman in White* and *Dracula* are archival collections of testimony; and *Jane Eyre* is simple first person with that signature direct address (“Reader, an illustration”) that casts the novel as deliberate storytelling. This opens up, first, obvious questions of authority and bias. One is less likely to distrust Jane Eyre's account of the mysteries haunting Thornfield before considering how Collins's, Stoker's, Shelley's, and Anne Bronte's insistence on giving each principal character a voice illuminates the effects of bias, ignorance, and self-interest on the storytelling. Helen Huntingdon's diary, in *Tenant*, is a more direct, less flattering account of her youthful naiveté than Jane's, but even she is self-consciously edited by her devoted husband, and much more adoringly presented by virtue of his commentary, description, and careful ordering of narrative events. One is more likely to realize that the processes of information collecting and editing may add a layer of bias in more multivocal texts, but this awareness nicely transfers to single-narrator texts.

Then, too, we can examine the techniques that various texts employ to generate suspense. A tale based on suspense, whether we identify it as Gothic, sensational, detective, or horror, requires that someone holds the knowledge, someone else must acquire the knowledge, and whoever is in charge of disseminating knowledge to the reader must make decisions about how, when, and with whose sympathy, bias, or reflection (if anyone's). Though the narrative point of view in “Ducayne” is third person omniscient, Bella's ignorance can be seen as a

storytelling technique akin to Jane Eyre's first-person description of her younger self. Why would Bella not be curious about the decline of her health, the marks on her arm, and the weird ether dreams she keeps having? Well, why wouldn't Jane demand answers about mysterious midnight fires and stabbings before agreeing to marry Rochester? In one sense, from a character development standpoint, these are both tales of arguably willful ignorance, with characters resisting even self-preserving curiosity in their desire for the apparently good lives they have been offered. In both cases, this behavior seems inconsistent with the characters' stated attitudes. But our questioning the inconsistency reveals the mechanisms of the suspense-driven plot. In a narrative sense, such curiosity would disrupt the necessary sequence of information granted to the reader; such willful ignorance is a necessary narrative device (like, perhaps, the more obvious device of Robert Audley's reluctance to risk his family name in the pursuit of Lady Audley). Seen separately, we may approach these texts very differently (since we like Jane, since Jane makes her own excuses, and since Jane's speech seems elsewhere empowering, we tend to overlook her shocking lack of curiosity; since Bella is so dull and stupid we criticize hers); seen together, they expose some of the machinery of their respective narratives. [2]

Austen's decidedly non-sensational, arguably-canonical texts come into this conversation in some surprising ways. First, her explicit Gothic parody in *Northanger Abbey* belies the fact that she has in fact constructed Catherine Moreland as a typically Gothic heroine: like Ellena Rosalba, like Elizabeth Lavenza Frankenstein, like Jane Eyre, like Bella Rolleston, Catherine is a young woman in distress—without money, name, education, or savvy—whose fate rests in the hands of upper class, educated men. Her terror of the Abbey is misplaced, but her fear being expelled by the patriarch when he discovers her relative poverty is very real; her physical life is not endangered, but her comfort and happiness will be sacrificed by the whim of the powerful and severe Tilney patriarch according to the same values that cause the Marchesa Vivaldi to persecute Ellena Rosalba. The role of the Gothic novel in fueling Catherine's suspicions, replacing intellect and education, as it were, with frivolous, sensational novels is something that Austen herself makes much of. [3] These humorous observations when applied to “Good Lady Ducayne” contextualize Bella's apprehensiveness about the foreign, titillating stories that Ducayne seems to prefer, and in a class setting this juxtaposition opens a conversation about the effect of popular culture on young, uncultured minds. This conversation can obviously be gendered (dating back at least as far as Wollstonecraft), and is certainly historically significant to the nineteenth century, but it is not necessarily so for generations of students raised in a world of v-chips and parental warnings on television programs and video games.

Narratively, *Northanger Abbey* allows students to juxtapose the intrusive Austenian narrator with the merely sarcastic Braddon one in “Ducayne,” the apparently inconsistent one in *Lady Audley's Secret*, and the controlling, autobiographical one of *Jane Eyre*. *Emma*, lest she be yet considered the odd novel out, affords a comparison of narrators in terms of their storytelling techniques and surprises students with a model of mystery storytelling in a novel not overtly a mystery. *Emma* may be the most meticulously plotted mystery of them all. With no detective to unearth clues, conduct interviews or experiments, or reveal to the audience information he alone possesses, Austen gives readers, and Emma herself, all the clues as they arise. Austen simply hides them behind Emma's particular blindnesses, delightfully and deliberately manipulating the reader with the technique of free indirect discourse.[4] “Good Lady Ducayne,” whose clues are likewise made visible but left uninterrogated in the narrator's detailing of Bella's uncurious mind, thus provides an interesting counterpart to *Emma*. Though the heroines could hardly be more different, the witty Emma sparkles at least in part because of the sparkling voice narrating her experience. Bella's dullness is constructed by a narrator more conspicuous in her contrast but who is nonetheless witty and deliberate. In this way, the example of *Emma* helps us divide the narrator from the protagonist and see the character development in each story as ironic.

There are dozens more ways to use “Good Lady Ducayne.” A second syllabus I present [here](#) for illustration only has a radically different organizational scheme, though some of the texts overlap. These texts, as you can see, traverse three hundred years; they could go back several hundred years more. Since many of the nineteenth-century texts I've already discussed also feature a speculative relationship between illness (mental or physical) and crime, it seems profitable to examine medical technologies, paradigms, and attitudes both professional and otherwise as they are at work in the various books. Lady Ducayne's crime comes most basically from a desire to prolong her health, and arguably the true criminal is the Italian doctor who not only knows the solution to the

mystery (in true gothic/detective/mystery fashion) but also holds the knowledge of the medical profession, which is never revealed to readers or other characters. [5] The only hope Bella has at surviving lies in the knowledge of another practicing doctor. In *Lady Audley's Secret*, the titular vixen's hereditary mental illness at least partially exonerates her for her crimes; similar to “Ducayne,” the story ends with some ambivalence over whether information about the crime outweighs information about the medical reality; in *The Woman in White*, the alleged insanity of the damsel-in-distress's doppelganger is essential to the criminal plot and again, the mysterious (foreign) doctor holds all the answers both to the crime and to the newly professionalized world of medicine. What a fascinating backdrop for the less obviously “sensational” *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, which ends with a mental breakdown of the tragic heroine, a murder, and an execution. What an opportunity to re-think Jane's blindness for Rochester's truly appalling way of treating his sick wife (whether he ever loved her or not). Viewed in this way, Braddon's story and the other classic and sensational texts contribute to intellectual threads on science, medicine, ethics, and fear that stretches back much further than the nineteenth century and forward into our own present time.

This particular syllabus focuses the medical theme through the notion of aging, particularly the fear of aging, and the lengths to which people will go (literally or imaginatively) to prolong life or prevent death. Paired with Mary Shelley's “The Mortal Immortal,” “Good Lady Ducayne” clearly shows a character's desire to extend her life beyond its “natural” parameters; her foray into medical science demonstrates a Promethean (Frankensteinian) overreaching that is both terrifying and taboo. This desire is obviously neither new in nor unique to the nineteenth century; students can learn about the strides in medicine between the time of Swift's, Shelley's, and then Braddon's text to connect the cultural anxieties of their moments of production to similar fears and hopes in the modern world. In very literal terms, “Good Lady Ducayne” is a story about blood transfusion, which was in practice throughout the nineteenth century but for many ideological, cultural, religious reasons still feared.[6] It is also about informed consent, which wasn't a legal issue until the mid-twentieth century; and it is about the menacing power of a medical institution to which the vast majority of people do not have access.[7]

This context also carves out a space for texts not overtly about science or medicine at all: *Dracula*, for instance, becomes not just a nineteenth-century retelling of an old vampire myth but a late-century expression of scientific nightmare of a piece with other texts, demonstrating the desire to live beyond one's “natural” lifespan, the extreme costs at which one might do so, and the perversity of attempting to control the “nature” which determines that lifespan. This idea sequence leads to issues of medical ethics that affect our world today: end-of-life issues, “playing God,” the “rightness” of supposedly “natural” things (and the “naturalness” of medically artificial things, like antibiotics). The notion of “blood,” most frequently used by literary scholars to signify racial or national identity (and subsequent hierarchies) might take the creative teacher in a number of new directions, crossing the ocean to include texts as surprising as “Desiree's Baby.”

“Good Lady Ducayne” is just one example of the scores of newly “recovered” texts by women that deserve a more critical post-feminist look. For many reasons, as I hope I have explained here, our students (and these writers) deserve a gender-integrated, more comprehensive view of history.

Appendix: Syllabi

Syllabus One

Nineteenth Century Literature (mostly prose fiction)

Gothic / Crime / Detection / Sensation / Horror

***The Italian*, Anne Radcliffe (1797)**

***Northanger Abbey*, Jane Austen (1798; 1817)**

***Emma*, Jane Austen (1816)**

***Frankenstein*, Mary Shelley (1818)**

****The Cenci*, Percy Shelley (1819; 1820)**

****Manfred*, Lord Byron (1817)**

***Jane Eyre*, Charlotte Bronte (1847)**

***Wuthering Heights*, Emily Bronte (1847)**

***The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, Anne Bronte (1848)**

***The Woman in White*, Wilkie Collins (1860)**

***Lady Audley's Secret*, Mary Elizabeth Braddon (1862)**

***Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, Thomas Hardy (1891)**

"Good Lady Ducayne," Mary Elizabeth Braddon (1896)

***Dracula*, Bram Stoker (1897)**

***The Mystery of Edwin Drood* (1870)**

***The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* (misc stories—pub 1891-92)**

***Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886)**

This syllabus is also nicely supplemented with poetry and artwork of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood and Victorian Medievalism (Rossettis, Tennyson, Ruskin, etc).

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Syllabus Two

Science/Medicine/Magic, Age, and Immortality

The Blazing World, Margaret Cavendish (1668)

Gulliver's Travels, (especially Part 3), Jonathan Swift (1726)

Rasselas, (especially chapter 45), Samuel Johnson (1759)

"The Mortal Immortal," Mary Shelley (1833)

Frankenstein, Mary Shelley (1818)

"Tithonus," Alfred Lord Tennyson (1833)

"Ulysses," Alfred Lord Tennyson (1842)

She, H. Rider Haggard (1885)

The Picture of Dorian Gray, Oscar Wilde (1890)

"Good Lady Ducayne," Mary Elizabeth Braddon (1896)

Dracula, Bram Stoker (1897)

"The Road from Colonus," E. M. Forster (1911)

Back to Methuselah, George Bernard Shaw (1921)

"Fortitude," Kurt Vonnegut (1974)

Tuck Everlasting (1981)

Cocoon (film, 1985)

Lost Boys (film, 1987)

This syllabus could be wonderfully supplemented with texts that reveal non-magical, non-medical views on aging: Joyce's "The Dead," Jenny Joseph's "Warning", Ethan Canin's *Emperor of the Air*, various pop songs ("My generation," "My my, hey hey"), many other and diverse texts.

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Notes

- [1] See Ceraldi for a compelling discussion of nationalism as a central trope in *The Woman in White*. [[return to text](#)]
- [2] Scholars have made much of Jane's narrative outside this context, finding particularly interesting the way in which it is empowering and/or indicative of her (female) maturation. See especially Jordan, Kaplan, Peters, and Dale. [[return to text](#)]
- [3] Much work has tied *Northanger Abbey* to its Gothic contemporaries, most conspicuously the Signet paperback, which presents *Two Gothic Classics by Women: The Italian by Ann Radcliffe and Northanger Abbey by Jane Austen* (Rogers, D.) See also Rogers, H., Dussinger, Ty, and Roberts. [[return to text](#)]
- [4] For a more detailed reading of *Emma* as mystery, as well as connections to the “mysteries” of Austen's other novels, see Belton. [[return to text](#)]
- [5] See Stepan and Gilman for a discussion of the exclusionary nature of professionalized medical language. [[return to text](#)]
- [6] This obviously invites a tie to George Eliot's underappreciated story, “The Lifted Veil,” which, as it recounts a transfusion experiment, arguably illustrates how medicine and science may invade the private self or reveal the secrets of even the dead. [[return to text](#)]
- [7] See Weindling for a discussion of the international conversations about “informed consent” that arose from the Nuremburg Trials. This context of course raises other potential directions for Braddon's story: pairing it with something like David Feldshuh's play *Miss Evers Boys* would generate far different but equally productive conversations. [[return to text](#)]

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