THE CAMBRIDGE COMPANION TO SENSATION FICTION

EDITED BY

ANDREW MANGHAM

CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.

It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of education, learning, and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521157094

© Cambridge University Press 2013

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements, no reproduction of any part may take place without the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 2013

Printed in the United Kingdom by TJ International Ltd. Padstow Cornwall

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication data
The Cambridge companion to sensation fiction / edited by Andrew Mangham.
pages cm
ISBN 978-0-521-76074-4
1. English fiction – 19th century – History and criticism. 2. Sensationalism in literature. 3. Literature and society – Great Britain – History – 19th century.
I. Mangham, Andrew, 1979 – editor of compilation.
PR878.S44C36 2013
823'.809353–dc23
2013013364

ISBN 978-0-521-76074-4 Hardback
ISBN 978-0-521-15709-4 Paperback

Cambridge University Press has no responsibility for the persistence or accuracy of URLs for external or third-party internet websites referred to in this publication, and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is, or will remain, accurate or appropriate.

CONTENTS

List of illustrations page vii
Notes on contributors viii
Acknowledgement xi
Chronology xii
Note on references and abbreviations xvi

1 Introduction
ANDREW MANGHAM 1

2 Sensation fiction in the 1850s
ANNE-MARIE BELLER 7

3 Sensation fiction and the gothic
LAURENCE TALAIRACH-VIELMAS 21

4 Illustrating the sensation novel
MARY ELIZABETH LEIGHTON AND LISA SURRIDGE 34

5 Sensation fiction on stage
ANDREW MAUNDER 52

6 Queering the sensation novel
RICHARD NEMESVARI 70

7 The contemporary response to sensation fiction
JANICE M. ALLAN 85

8 Sensation, class and the rising professionals
MARIACONCETTA COSTANTINI 99

9 Sensation fiction, empire and the Indian mutiny — 113
SAVERIO TOMAIUOLO

10 Sensation fiction, gender and identity — 127
TARA MACDONALD

11 Sensation fiction, spiritualism and the supernatural — 141
TATIANA KONTOU

12 Science and sensation — 154
LILLIAN NAYDER

13 Sensation fiction and the publishing industry — 168
GRAHAM LAW

14 Sensation fiction and the medical context — 182
PAMELA K. GILBERT

15 Sensation fiction and the New Woman — 196
GRETA DEPLEDGE

16 The sensation legacy — 210
LYN PYKETT

Further reading — 224
Index — 226

ILLUSTRATIONS

4.1 [Thomas Hood], *Prinvilliers the Poisoner: or, The Live Coal and the Deadly Cup*, 'Four Illustrated Sensation Novels'. *Beeton's Christmas Annual* (1865). — *page* 35
4.2 Isa Blagden, *Santa, or A Woman's Tragedy*, *Once a Week* (23 August 1862). — 38
4.3 F. C. Burnand, *Mokeanna, Or The White Witness*, *Punch* (28 February 1863). — 39
4.4 Wilkie Collins, *The Woman in White*, *Harper's Weekly* (31 December 1859). — 40
4.5 Charles Dickens, *Great Expectations*, *Harper's Weekly* (22 June 1861). — 40
4.6 Wilkie Collins, *The Moonstone*, *Harper's Weekly* (25 January 1868). — 41
4.7 Wilkie Collins, *The Law and the Lady*, *The Graphic* (19 December 1874). — 42
4.8 [Thomas Hood], *Quintilia the Quadrigamist; or, The Heir and the Hounds*, 'Four Illustrated Sensation Novels'. *Beeton's Christmas Annual* (1865). — 45
4.9 Wilkie Collins, *Armadale*, *Cornhill* (December 1865). — 47
5.1 Playbill advertising *Lady Audley's Secret*, *The Colleen Bawn* and Wilkie Collins's *Black and White*. New Theatre Royal, Brighton (18 September 1869). Reproduced courtesy of Special Collections, Templeman Library, University of Kent, Canterbury. — 53
9.1 Sir John Tenniel, *Justice*, *Punch* (12 September 1857). — 124
9.2 Sir John Tenniel, *The British Lion's Vengeance on the Bengal Tiger*, *Punch* (22 August 1857). — 124

9

SAVERIO TOMAIUOLO

Sensation fiction, empire and the Indian mutiny

> Of all the great events of this century, as they are reflected in fiction, the Indian Mutiny has taken the firmest hold on popular imagination.[1]

Sensationalising mutiny/mutinying sensation

In a letter to Angela Burdett-Coutts dated 4 October 1857, Charles Dickens suggested the measures he would take to end the insurrection commonly known as the Indian mutiny, begun on 10 May: 'I wish I were the Commander in Chief in India. The first thing I would do to strike that Oriental race with amazement ... should be to proclaim to them in their language ... that I should do my utmost to exterminate the Race upon whom the stain of late cruelties rested.'[2] Dickens's words have an uncanny resemblance to Kurtz's 'beautiful piece of writing' in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899), which gave Marlow 'the notion of an exotic Immensity ruled by an august Benevolence'.[3] Kurtz's concluding remark ('Exterminate all the brutes!') recalls Dickens's aim to 'to exterminate the Race upon whom the stain of late cruelties rested'. The repeated use of the term 'race' – instead of, say, 'people' or 'Indians' – is also indicative of the cultural and ideological background of Dickens's letter, since the studies in the field of 'racial science' (which mixed anthropological research and phrenological measurements) functioned at the time as a fundamentally imperialistic practice to justify British economic, political and cultural domination through an antithesis between the Saxons and the so-called 'dark races' of mankind, as Robert Knox defined them in *The Races of Men* (1850).[4] Dickens's aggressive verbal reaction gives voice to a widespread counter-attack against the rebellion of the sepoys of the Bengal Presidency army, which originated in Meerut and then spread through central India. Along with the storming of Seringapatam (1799), the violent suppression of the Jamaican ex-slaves by Governor Eyre (1865) and General Charles Gordon's martyrdom in the Sudan (1884), the Indian Mutiny (1857–8) was reputed as one of the most tragic events in Victorian colonial and imperial history, as well as a cultural trauma that affected the public opinion and the literary world in unprecedented ways.

Represented in melodramatic terms in contemporary newspapers and in more than seventy novels, it featured a sequence of recognisable gothic and sensational tropes such as 'exotic' settings, male violence, rape and brutality. According to some historians, one of the reasons for the outbreak was that Indian soldiers were increasingly upset by the attempts to convert Hindus and Muslims to Christianity. For others, the sepoys were also afraid of losing their power as landed gentry and opposed to land-revenue payments following the annexation of Oudh. Another cause, which was the more easily 'justifiable' in popular accounts (but also the least reliable), was based on the controversy over the new Pattern 1853 Enfield Rifle, whose paper cartridges, which had to be bitten to be opened, were said to have been greased with pork and beef fat, two animals considered by Hindus and Muslims as unclean. As Benjamin Disraeli declared before the House of Commons on 27 July 1857, 'the decline and fall of empires are not affairs of greased cartridges', and the Indian war was in truth 'the result of two generations of social disruption and official insensitivity'.[5] The insurrection ended in 1858, when a peace treaty was signed on 8 June, three months after the recapture of Lucknow.

The sepoy rebellion was an important watershed in Victorian culture and in British colonial politics, leading to the dissolution of the East India Company and to a general reform of the colonial army. For the first time, an 'Oriental race' (as Dickens put it) dared to fight against its rulers and, even worse, dared to commit 'cruelties' against the two emblems of Victorian domesticity, women and children. The enormous media coverage given to the revolt was generally focused on a rigid juxtaposition between British innocent victims (and heroic soldiers) and violent Indian sepoys. Reports centred in particular on the massacres that took place during the sieges of Delhi and Cawnpore (the English term for Kanpur), its Bibigarh well becoming the emblem of Indian brutality, and a symbol of colonial martyrdom. The story goes as follows: on 15 July 1857, Nana Sahib, who commanded the siege of the town of Cawnpore, ordered the sepoys to kill all those who were confined in Bibigarh (the home of the local magistrate's clerk). Because of their refusal to carry out his orders, Nana Sahib employed two Muslim butchers, two Hindu peasants and one of his personal bodyguards to slaughter the 120 sieged people (mainly women and children) with knives and hatchets. At the end of the massacre, the house walls were covered with blood, and the floor littered with fragments of human limbs. According to contemporary accounts, the dead, and even those who were wounded, were thrown into a nearby well.

The journalistic dispatches from India, usually based upon hearsay, as well as the political debates reported by newspapers and periodicals such as *The Times*, the *Westminster Review*, *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* and the *Quarterly Review*, influenced public opinion by turning the mutiny into a 'sensational' narration of colonial atrocities. Among the many examples, it is useful to refer to a typical piece of Victorian journalism from an anonymous article published in *The Times* on 25 August 1857. It describes in detail the sepoys' brutal actions in the streets of Delhi: 'They took 48 females, most of them girls of [*sic*] from 10 to 14 . . . violated them and kept them for the base purposes of the heads of the insurrection for a whole week . . . Then they commenced the work of torturing them to death, cutting off their breasts, fingers, and noses, and leaving them to die.'[6] By focusing on the use of violence against British women and children, in a way, these accounts prepared the public for (and implicitly justified) the brutal retaliations of the so-called British 'Armies of Retribution', which consisted, among other things, in exploding rebellious sepoys from cannons' mouths. Charles Ball, R. Montgomery Martin and Colin Campbell's books are probably the most famous 'historical narrations' of the Indian war, featuring violence upon children as well as torture and rape of defenceless English women. As the nature of these 'narrations' suggests, the mutiny was not simply a historical event of great relevance that generated a plethora of usually unreliable tales (rapes by Indian people on British women, for instance, were never proven). It was, above all, a sensational story centred on questions of colonial power and on the defence of Victorian institutions, such as the family and the nation, against any form of violent otherness, in which the image of rape turned into a recurring trope connecting gender issues to colonial concerns. The 'fictional' quality of the sepoy rebellion entails a reflection on the journalistic and historical (or rather parahistorical) documents, with an eye also to the rhetorical strategies employed by the various writers in their reconstructions of the events taking place in 1857. The use of traditional gothic and sensational tropes, the presence of (prevalently) male villains of foreign origin, the depiction of physical pain and the reiteration of terms such as 'horror' prove that historical facts were given a narrative structure to justify a return to familial and colonial order in the publicly acceptable form of military reaction.

These 'historical narrations' anticipated in many ways the textual strategies and themes of sensation novels by Wilkie Collins and Mary Elizabeth Braddon, who, in turn, referred in direct or indirect ways to colonial issues and, most notably, to the Indian uprising. For Christopher Herbert, the traumatic impact on Victorian and post-Victorian consciousness of the 1857 rebellion 'can only be meaningfully studied by considering it not as a geopolitical event but as a literary and in effect a fictive one – as a story recounted over and over, in one stylistic inflection and literary register after another'.[7] The mutiny became a source of narrative inspiration for a great number of short stories and novels which explicitly or implicitly alluded to it. The first narration devoted to it was, significantly, Charles Dickens's and

Wilkie Collins's collaborative piece 'The Perils of Certain English Prisoners' (published in 1857, in the Christmas issue of *Household Words*), which discusses the mutiny question in an indirect way, by dealing with what happened in South America nearly one century before. The action takes place in a British mining colony during the reign of George II. Collins's article entitled 'A Sermon for Sepoys' (included in *Household Words* on 27 February 1858), written in the form of an Eastern parable, had a more religious or philosophical tone than Dickens's and Collins's text. Here Collins goes back to the example of Shah Jehan (1592–1616), whose fame is mainly related to the building of the Taj Mahal, to demonstrate that the past history of India offers models of pacification that should be imitated as a lesson to tame (as he says) the 'human tigers'.[8] In the list of mutiny-inspired fictions it is also necessary to include novels such as *The Wife and the Ward; or a Life's Error* (1859) by Edward Money, Sir George Trevelyan's half-historical and half-narrative treatment of the Bibigarh siege and massacre in *Cawnpore* (1865), in which the author comes to the point of admitting British racist attitudes against Indians, H. P. Malet's *Lost Links in the Indian Mutiny* (1867), James Grant's *First and Last Love* (1868), *Seeta* (1872) by Phillip Meadows Taylor, *The Afghan Knife* (1879) by Robert A. Sterndale, George Chesney's *The Dilemma* (1876), Jack Muddock's *The Great White Hand or the Tiger of Cawnpore* (1896) and Flora Annie Steele's *On the Face of the Waters* (1896), a more balanced narration of events. These texts are all examples of the ways in which the memory of the Indian insurrection outlived and often reinvented history. But there are also fictional texts which refer to the Indian insurrection and, more generally, to colonial and imperial issues in indirect or metaphorical ways, and whose message is not always politically and culturally orthodox, as the examples of Wilkie Collins's *Armadale* (1866) and *The Moonstone* (1868), or Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret* (1862) and *Aurora Floyd* (1863) demonstrate.

Although Collins's *The Moonstone* is set in the years 1848–9, during the second Anglo-Sikh War in India (its historical frame being represented by the events that surrounded the storming of Seringapatam), the inclusion of mysterious Indian characters represented a 'topical' allusion to the mutiny that readers could easily recognise. Nevertheless, the stealing of the 'cursed' Indian jewel becomes in Collins's novel an occasion to depict the unevenness of British colonial politics. In having the 'pure' upper-class Englishman John Herncastle as the true villain of the tale, Collins turns the Indians into victims of imperial violence. In line with his interest in cultural, sexual and racial outsiders, Collins gives prominence to the role played by the racial hybrid Ezra Jennings (whose father is English but who has been educated and reared in the colonies), who helps solve the mystery of the stolen diamond. However,

Collins's handling of the colonial question in *The Moonstone* is not exempt from ambiguities. The narration is in fact framed by the point of view of one of the novel's primary narrators, Gabriel, whose love for Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* – one of the cornerstones of the colonial frame of mind – sets the novel in a contradictory ideological position.

Collins's multi-plot sensation *Armadale*, published when the echoes of the mutiny were still resonating, features the 'dark' Ozias Midwinter expiating the colonial crimes committed by his father Allan Wrentmore Armadale, who prospered in Barbados as a slave-owner during the 1820s. In a reformulation of Darwinian ideas on the inheritance of criminal attitudes, Collins destabilises and complicates the traditional paradigms of good and evil, empire and colony, by having Ozias as the cultural and racial outsider who lays claim to an English origin. Ozias's 'tawny, haggard cheeks; his bright brown eyes', as well as his 'rough black beard', make him a 'startling object to contemplate' for Mr Brock: 'The rector's *healthy Anglo-Saxon flesh* crept responsively at every casual movement of the usher's supple brown fingers, and every passing distortion of the usher's haggard yellow face.'[9] Finally, Mary Elizabeth Braddon's sensational blockbusters and 'pair of bigamy novels' (as she called them),[10] *Lady Audley's Secret* and *Aurora Floyd*, were both published at the dawn of the mutiny. Set during or soon after the uprising, these texts deploy the traditional rhetoric and iconography of the Indian insurrection in very different ways, and can be discussed in detail as case studies of the complex textual dialogue between colonial issues and sensation fictions.

Struggling with the tiger: *Lady Audley's Secret* and *Aurora Floyd*

At the beginning of the mutiny, when Braddon was entering the literary world and was still acting in provincial theatres under the stage-name of 'Mary Seyton', she had in fact already dealt with the Indian war. In poems such as 'Delhi' (*Beverley Recorder*, 26 September 1857), 'Captain Skene' (*Beverley Recorder*, 17 October 1857), 'The Old Year' (*Beverley Recorder*, 2 January 1858) and 'Havelock' (*Brighton Herald*, 2 January 1858), her views on the insurrection were in line with the need for retribution which was typical of that historical phase.[11] Moreover, *Lady Audley's Secret* and *Aurora Floyd* are not the only novels in which Braddon, in her long literary career, treated colonial and imperial issues. *Sons of Fire* (1895), for instance, is a late sensation fiction partially set in Africa during an expedition that involves its main characters (Africa is also mentioned in the detective novel *Rough Justice* (1898) as a place of racial degeneration). In one of her last novels, entitled *Dead Love Has Chains* (1907), the seventeen-year-old Irene is sent home from India in disgrace, being pregnant and unmarried. Like *Phantom Fortune*

(1883) before it, which centred on the crimes committed by the Governor of the Madras Presidency, Lord Maulevrier, India represents the site of moral corruption whose main agent is, however, of a British origin.

Set around 1857, *Lady Audley's Secret* is a narration of the 'traumas' experienced by the two antithetical characters of the text: by George Talboys, first after his reading of the news of his wife's death and then after his discovery of her adultery and bigamy; and by Helen Talboys, after she realises that her husband has abandoned her (and her baby) to seek his fortune abroad and, finally, after she is locked in an asylum. Through its complex characterisation of Lady Audley as a 'beautiful fiend',[12] whose story only partially motivates her unlawful and criminal actions, Braddon's novel puts into question the stereotypically antithetical roles of hero and villain, stainless husband and 'mutinous' wife. In *Lady Audley's Secret*, Braddon explicitly refers to gothic tropes and updates them on many occasions in order to prove that 'the mysteries which are at our own doors' (as Henry James said) are 'infinitely the more terrible' than those of Udolpho.[13] At the same time, she introduces new declinations of the gothic through her dislocation of the Indian rebellion in the domestic setting of Audley Court. Here the figure of the sepoy mutineer corresponds to the character of Lady Audley. Indeed, the most important events of the novel are set around the 'infamous' year of 1857: Lucy Graham (formerly Helen Talboys) marries Sir Michael Audley at midsummer, and her first husband George Talboys reads the false news of Helen Talboys's death in a number of *The Times* dated 30 August (the date of Helen's death on her tombstone is 24 August). Finally, Lady Audley is sent to the Belgian asylum of Villebrumeuse, where she will die, on 28 March 1859. Moreover, *Lady Audley's Secret* alludes to and filters historical events set in distant India in a metaphorical way, in order to discuss gender issues that are firmly located at home in Victorian Britain. For instance, in the course of a dialogue between Robert Audley and the ex-dragoon George Talboys one year after Helen Talboys's (supposed) death, Talboys compares his bitter sense of loss to the psychically shattered condition of British soldiers in India, suggesting an implicit connection between his individual tragedy and the national 'trauma' caused by the mutiny:

> 'when some of our fellows were wounded in India, they came home bringing bullets inside them. They did not talk of them, and they were stout and hearty, and looked as well, perhaps, as you and I; but every change in the weather . . . brought back the old agony of their wounds as sharp as ever they had felt it on the battle field. I've had my wound, Bob; I carry the bullet still, and I still carry it to my coffin.' (87)

India becomes a nightmarish place in the reference to the Bibigarh well of Cawnpore, displaced in Braddon's novel in the apparently peaceful country setting of Audley Court. Instead of old medieval castles, the novel relocates the conventions associated with the gothic tradition into a Victorian context haunted by colonial ghosts. This approach to domestic policy seems to be miles away from John Ruskin's depiction of the ideal Victorian house in 'Of Queen's Gardens' (1865) as 'the place of Peace; the shelter, not only from all injury, but from all terror, doubt, and division'.[14] In the following quotation, for instance, the old well in Audley Court is described by Braddon not in bucolic terms but rather in apocalyptic tones that recall the 'historical narrations' of the Cawnpore well:

> A fierce and crimson sunset. The mullioned windows and the twinkling lattices are all ablaze with the red glory . . . *even into those recesses of briar and brushwood, amidst which the old well is hidden*, the crimson brightness penetrates in fitful flashes, till the dank weeds *and the rusty iron wheel and broken woodwork seem as if they were freckled with blood.* (64, my italics)

This scene is a weird anticipation of Lady Audley's unsuccessful attempt to kill her first husband by pushing him into the old well, and replicates the image of the throwing of the British victims' bodies into the Cawnpore well. Braddon's decision to use the well as a criminal locus is an attempt to connect what was happening in India and in Britain in 1857, as well as a warning about the dangers deriving from violent assertions of independence coming from inside the margins of empire. Nevertheless, *Lady Audley's Secret* confirms and complicates these assumptions. Like Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897), it represents another example of what Stephen Arata defines as 'reverse colonization', according to which, in the invasive sexual, cultural and racial other, 'British culture sees its own imperial practice mirrored back in monstrous forms.'[15] Written soon after the Divorce and Matrimonial Causes Act was passed by Parliament (1858) as one of the first attempts to give Victorian women more legal rights, *Lady Audley's Secret* has been considered by feminist scholars like Elaine Showalter as one of the leading novels in the depiction of women's emancipation. However, in the light of the allusions to the Cawnpore well, the implications of *Lady Audley's Secret* seem, on the contrary, to call into question Braddon's 'status as a feminist writer'.[16] The impression is that, somehow, Braddon dramatised a problematic need of governance (both of assertive women and rebellious Indians) which came to the foreground at the dawn of the infamous year of the mutiny. At the same time, despite the presence of a dangerously 'mutinous' wife, the message between the lines of *Lady Audley's Secret* implies counter-interpretations of this text, because Lady Audley remains both a villain and a victim of

Talboys's decision to leave her to starve to death with her baby, and later (after his discovery of her change of identity and bigamous marriage) of his verbal menaces and physical violence. Indeed, the threat to denounce her crimes, along with the marks and 'bruises' (398) Talboys leaves upon the lady's wrist in their quarrel next to the well, will be the last spark leading to Lady Audley's reaction, which is not motivated by intermittent madness – as Braddon tried unconvincingly to explain, in an attempt to prevent negative criticism (which came all the same) – but by her desperation as a legally, politically, sexually and culturally powerless Victorian woman.

Although the Indian mutiny seemed, at least according to many accounts and reports, a rebellion guided by male leaders, some other commentators underlined the role played by the Rani of Jhansi (1828–58), queen of the Maratha-ruled princely state of Jhansi in North India, commonly known in Victorian Britain as 'the Jezebel of India'. After the outburst of the Indian rebellion of 1857, Rani Lakshmi Bai decided to strengthen the defence of Jhansi and assembled a volunteer army of rebels, which included women. When the British attacked Jhansi in March 1858, the Rani, with her faithful warriors, decided to fight back for about two weeks, dying during the battle for Gwalior. According to reports, she wore warrior's clothes and (being an expert horse rider) rode into battle to save Gwalior Fort, about 120 miles west of Lucknow. This woman became, for conflicting reasons, one of the emblems of the Indian war to the point that, in the opinion of Sir Hugh Rose (the British officer responsible for her defeat), the mutiny 'was produced by one man, and that man was a woman'.[17] This perception of India, and of the Indian insurrection, figured as an aggressively assertive woman, represents another facet of Western conceptions of the Orient. Indeed, Indian women were stereotyped both as passive creatures who were victims of 'uncivilised' rituals and traditions such as the *sati*, and as female fiends, witches and bazaar whores. Whereas on the one hand Philip Meadows Taylor's successful *Confessions of a Thug* (1839) paved the way for future representations of Indian superstitions and brutality through its male character Ameer Ali, it suffices to refer to the writings of Edward William Lane, who translated *The Thousand and One Nights* into English from 1838 to 1841, to have an idea of the way Oriental women were depicted in the British press. In *Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians* (1836), for instance, Lane represents Oriental women's unrestrained sexuality and trust in barbaric traditions through the use of morbid details, depicting a gothic scene that is on the verge of necrophilia: 'Some women step over the body of a decapitated man several times, without speaking, to become pregnant; and some, with the same desire, dip in the blood a piece of cotton wool, of which they afterwards make use in a manner I must decline mentioning.'[18] Sir Richard Francis Burton, another expert in Oriental and Indian

culture who translated *The Book of the Thousand Nights and A Night* (10 vols., 1885–8), and wrote *Sciende, or the Unhappy Valley* (1851), *Sindh, or the Races that Inhabit the Valley of the Hindus* (1851) and *Personal Narrative of a Pilgrimage to Al-Madinah and Meccah* (1855–6), reported that Indian men were prone to laziness and treachery, while Indian women were considered as 'naturally' dangerous.

These pictures of unchecked female sexuality did not simply have a documentary aim but also a more subtle cultural resonance, since they reinforced the patriarchal attempt at controlling and managing improper manifestations of femininity *inside* the geographic and cultural boundaries of Victorian Britain. The contextual references to Eastern culture, along with the example of the warrior queen of Jhansi, are important elements to introduce Braddon's second 'bigamy novel', *Aurora Floyd*, where the allusions to the Indian insurrection, and to the 'Orient' in general, are more pervasive than those included in its famous predecessor. The impression is that, as time passed, Braddon filtered and gave fictional form to her notions of the Orient using more articulate narrative strategies. In *Aurora Floyd* India is a historical, geographical and cultural entity which is constantly evoked and embodied in female shape by the eponymous character. Raised by her father Archibald Floyd, a rich Scottish banker, Aurora Floyd is a passionate young woman whose mother, an actress of unknown origin, died when she was still a child. The novel opens at the peak of the mutiny in late August 1857, with Aurora's return from a Protestant finishing school in France, where she secretly married her father's groom James Conyers. Because of her dark hair and eyes (contrasted to Lady Audley's blonde ringlets) and assertiveness, she attracts her two suitors, namely a proud Captain of her Majesty's 11 Hussars, Talbot Bulstrode (who finally decides to marry the tame and tender-hearted Lucy Floyd, Aurora's cousin), and John Mellish, who succeeds in winning Aurora's heart. Like the Rani of Jhansi, Aurora is a 'fast lady' fond of horses and horse riding, enjoying herself in a hobby often considered by Victorians as a sign of moral lassitude in women.

Along with her name, which suggests an Eastern nature (Aurora was the Roman goddess of dawn) and a potentially corrupting and corruptible nature (the girl's name was chosen by her vain and capricious mother Eliza Prodder), the novel repeatedly associates Aurora with famous Oriental women. In the following excerpt, for instance, Aurora's seductive Eastern beauty – compared in the novel to that of a 'rising sun' – overcomes Lucy Floyd's homely and domestic charms. In this respect, Aurora's traits are not too different from those of an 'Eastern empress' such as the Rani of Jhansi: 'The thick plaits of her black hair made a great diadem upon her low forehead, and crowned her *like an Eastern empress*, an empress with a doubtful nose, it is true, but an empress who reigned by right divine of *her eyes and hair*.'[19] On other

occasions, Aurora is compared to immoral and powerful Oriental queens such as Semiramide and Cleopatra by her suitors Mellish and Bulstrode, who wish to 'domesticate' her as if she were a rebellious (female) colonial subject. Nevertheless, their perception of Aurora's nature does not usually correspond to her behaviour. In this way, Braddon suggests a significant dichotomy between male gaze and female reality. Aurora is in fact neither a murderer nor a sexually promiscuous woman but, basically, a very impulsive and spoilt young girl.

The characterisation of Aurora as a (potentially) corrupting Oriental woman is reinforced in the novel in particular by Captain Bulstrode. His experience as an Indian officer often becomes the filter through which he reads and interprets Aurora's nature. In particular, he repeatedly compares Aurora to an intoxicating and alcoholic Indian beverage (called *bang* or *bhang*, a preparation from the leaves and flowers of cannabis that should be smoked), and expresses his fears of being poisoned by her beauty. A typical representative of the colonial officer, Bulstrode finally decides to marry the more yielding Lucy Floyd, epitomising the Victorian feelings of attraction to and repulsion for the Orient, perceived as a source of pleasure and corruption, of sensuality and death:

> A divinity! Imperiously beautiful in white and scarlet, painfully dazzling to look upon, intoxicatingly brilliant to behold. Captain Bulstrode had served in India, and had once tasted a horrible spirit called *bang*, which made the men who drank it half mad; and he could not help fancying that the beauty of this woman was like the strength of that alcoholic preparation; barbarous, intoxicating, dangerous and maddening. (77–8)

In the most sensationally theatrical scene of the novel, set near a stable yard, Aurora Floyd whips Steeve 'The Softy' Hargraves (a servant who was also the murderer of Conyers) after he had kicked her dog Bow-wow. While it is evident that Softy's physical violence towards Bow-wow represents a surrogate expression for his desire to exert violence on Aurora, her whipping epitomises a form of feminine revenge. In a reversal of gothic codes, it is the male villain who is now beaten by a woman. In the meantime Mellish, who is casually witnessing the scene, looks at this 'beautiful fury' with a voyeuristic mixture of horror and attraction:

> Aurora sprang upon him *like a beautiful tigress*, and catching the collar of his fustian jacket in her slight hands, rooted him to the spot upon which he stood. The grasp of those slender hands, convulsed by passion, was not to be easily shaken off ... She disengaged her right hand from his collar, and rained a shower of blows upon his clumsy shoulders with her slender whip ... John Mellish, entering the stable yard by chance at this very moment, *turned white with horror at beholding the beautiful fury*. (193–4, emphasis added)

The comparison of Aurora with a tiger is another indirect reference to her 'Orientalisation'. Indeed, tigers represented for Victorians the quintessential Indian animal and a symbol of India, and were perceived as another expression of what was violent, but also fascinating, in that faraway country. As far as the figurative representation of the Indian mutiny is concerned, many drawings and cartoons of the time convey the clash between British civilisation and Indian brutality by using a recognisable iconography. For instance, *Punch* censored its usually ironical attitudes and decided, on the contrary, to defend British vengeance against native Indian troops in a series of prints by Sir John Tenniel. In *Justice* (published on 12 September 1857), the personified figure of Britannia is about to hit with a sword mutinous Indians (fig. 9.1). The tone of the image is belligerent and the expression of Britannia, figured as a Minerva-like woman warrior, is extremely resolute and firm. Nevertheless, it is in particular in *The British Lion's Vengeance on the Bengal Tiger* (22 August 1857) that the Indian war is described in animal terms. In this cartoon, a lion that embodies England lunges against a tiger (India) that is trying to kill an undefended mother and her baby (fig. 9.2). As these prints demonstrate, the feeling of retribution and the use of violence in order to 'exterminate' the rebellious sepoys occur between and beneath the lines of the British press in figuratively emblematic translations. The fact that in the course of Braddon's novel Aurora is associated with (or compared with) tigers proves the novelist's complex negotiation with the Indian rebellion and with the use of colonial imagery to portray her heroine. Whereas Aurora's uncle Samuel Prodder wishes only 'to see this beautiful tigress in her calmer moods, if she ever had any calmer moods' (459), Bulstrode and Mellish describe Aurora's 'animal' nature in more subtle forms. In the attempt to inspect Steeve Hargraves's waistcoat (to find proofs of his involvement in Conyers's murder), Bulstrode evokes his battles in India and his struggles with tigers as proofs of his masculinity and of his ability to 'tame' Aurora's tiger-like instincts: 'I've been accustomed to deal with refractory Sepoys in India and I've had a struggle with a tiger before now' (544). Talbot identifies with the imperialist who perceives tiger hunting as a literal and symbolical manifestation of the Victorian desire to exert power and to rule over its colonies. According to this view, hunting required all the most 'virile' attributes of the imperial male such as courage, endurance, individualism, sportsmanship and even knowledge of natural history.

On the surface, the ending of *Aurora Floyd* appears a conciliatory one, featuring a domesticated heroine turned from 'tigress' into 'tame' Victorian wife and mother by John Mellish. Nevertheless, a distracted glance at the epilogue does not take into account or give justice to Braddon's recourse to irony, which perhaps resurfaces from the interstices of her seemingly

Fig. 9.1 Sir John Tenniel, *Justice*, *Punch* (12 September 1857).

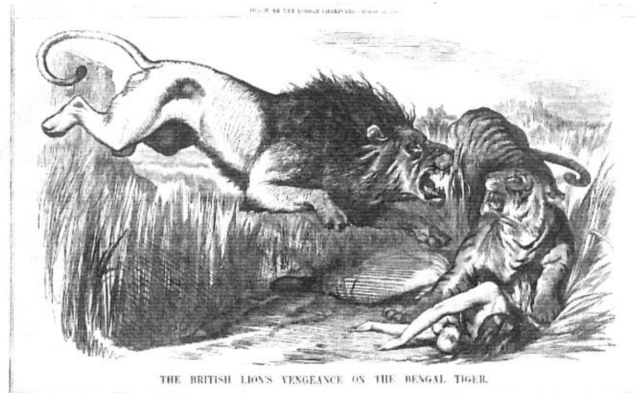

Fig. 9.2 Sir John Tenniel, *The British Lion's Vengeance on the Bengal Tiger*, *Punch* (22 August 1857).

institutional claims: 'So we leave Aurora, a little changed, a shade less defiantly bright, perhaps, but unspeakably beautiful and tender, bending over the cradle of her first-born' (549). The epilogue conveys a sense of creeping nostalgia for the fact that Aurora is now 'a little changed' and 'a shade less defiantly bright', as though Braddon wanted to suggest that the loss of independence (and of legal identity) in Victorian wives remained a sad price to pay.

The parable of Aurora Floyd recalls not only the ambivalent approaches to Victorian femininity of other sensationalists like Wilkie Collins and Ellen Wood, but also Braddon's personal story. For a writer like her, who will choose to live with her publisher John Maxwell when his wife was still alive (and incarcerated in an Irish asylum) and who will become the mother and stepmother of eleven children (some hers and some from Maxwell's previous marriage), the question of individual freedom was counterbalanced by a firm belief in traditional Victorian familial roles. Braddon's negotiation with colonial questions and with gender issues is another attempt to find a middle ground and an 'in-between space' to articulate 'hybrid' strategies of social renewal. To quote from Homi Bhabha, who writes in a different historical and cultural context from Braddon's but whose ideas find some support in *Lady Audley's Secret* and *Aurora Floyd*, 'these "in-between" spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood – singular or communal – that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself'.[20] In reshaping her notion of Victorian society and of the role of women in a complex alternation of tradition and innovation, Braddon (like Wilkie Collins and other sensationalists) was not depicting her 'struggle with the tiger' in faraway exotic countries but in peaceful British country houses, where the fiercest battles for the survival of the fittest were still taking place.

NOTES

1. Hilda Gregg, 'The Indian Mutiny in Fiction', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* 7 (1897), 218.
2. Charles Dickens, *The Letters of Charles Dickens*, ed. Madeline House, Graham Storey and Kathleen Tillotson, 12 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), vol. VIII, 459. Expressions like 'mutiny', 'rebellion', 'uprising' and 'insurrection' will be used interchangeably. Nevertheless, it must be acknowledged that each term alludes to a specific political agenda and cultural attitude. (It is significant that Victorian historians tended to prefer 'mutiny' or 'rebellion', whereas Indian scholars now use 'insurrection' or 'First War of Independence'.)
3. Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness and Other Tales*, ed. Cedric Watts (Oxford University Press, 1998), 208.

4. Robert Knox, *The Races of Men: A Fragment* (Philadelphia: Lea and Blanchard, 1850), 153.
5. *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates. Third Series 147. 20 July 1857–28 August 1857* (London: Thomas Curson Hansard *et al.*, 1857), 475.
6. Quoted in Jenny Sharpe, *Allegories of Empire: The Figure of Woman in the Colonial Text* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 66.
7. Christopher Herbert, *War of No Pity: Indian Mutiny and Victorian Trauma* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2008), 3.
8. Wilkie Collins, 'A Sermon for Sepoys', *Household Words* 414 (1858), 244–7 (244).
9. Wilkie Collins, *Armadale*, ed. Catherine Peters (Oxford University Press, 1999), 73, emphasis added.
10. Robert Lee Wolff, *Sensational Victorian: The Life and Fiction of Mary Elizabeth Braddon* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1979), 203.
11. See Jennifer Carnell, *The Literary Lives of Mary Elizabeth Braddon* (Hastings: The Sensation Press, 2000), 401–6. Braddon's novel *The Story of Barbara* (1880) is dedicated to Major W. S. R. Hodson, one of the most controversial figures of the Indian Mutiny.
12. Mary Elizabeth Braddon, *Lady Audley's Secret*, ed. Natalie M. Houston (Peterborough, ON: Broadview Press, 2003), 107. Further references to this edition will be given in the text.
13. Henry James, 'Miss Braddon', *The Nation* (3 November 1865), 593–5 (595).
14. John Ruskin, *Selected Writings*, ed. Dinah Birch (Oxford University Press, 2004), 158.
15. Stephen Arata, 'The Occidental Tourist: *Dracula* and the Anxiety of Reverse Colonization', *Victorian Studies* 33 (1990), 621–45 (623).
16. Lillian Nayder, 'Rebellious Sepoys and Bigamous Wives: The Indian Mutiny and Marriage Law Reform in *Lady Audley's Secret*', in *Beyond Sensation, Mary Elizabeth Braddon in Context*, ed. Marlene Tromp, Pamela K. Gilbert and Aeron Haynie (New York: State University of New York Press, 2000), 31–42 (32). See also Lillian Nayder, 'The Empire and Sensation', in *A Companion to Sensation Fiction*, ed. Pamela K. Gilbert (Oxford: Blackwell, 2011), 442–54.
17. Sir Hugh Rose, *The Times* (16 October 1885), quoted in Sharpe, *Allegories of Empire*, 75.
18. Edward William Lane, *Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians* (London: Charles Night, 1836), 257.
19. Mary Elizabeth Braddon, *Aurora Floyd*, ed. Richard Nemesvari and Lisa Surridge (Peterborough, ON: Broadview Press, 1998), 87, emphasis added. Further references to this edition will be given in the text.
20. Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), 2.