The Parade of Identity: M. E. Braddon, The Travelling Circus Performer and the (Re)Construction of Self

Janine Hatter, University of Hull, UK

HЯ
The Humanities Review
Volume 11, Issue 1
Spring 2013 PP 26-38.
St. John's University

Janine Hatter is a PhD student at the University of Hull, UK whose research interests center on the nineteenth-century writer Mary Elizabeth Braddon. Her doctoral thesis moves away from Braddon's popular sensation fiction to focus on her life and career, as well as her theatrical, supernatural, detective, domestic and children's short fiction.

Introduction

According to modern social psychology, the construction of identity occurs on three distinct levels: individual, relational and collective (Vignoles, Schwartz and Luyckx 2011: 3). Previously, psychologists argued that the three levels were self contained concepts and processes: individual identity is based on self-definition and self-agency and thus varies for each person; relational identity is based on interpersonal space within the family or the roles that one plays within a larger system; and collective identity is based on relationships within a group or social categories to which one belongs (pp.3-4). *The Handbook of Identity Theory and Research* (2011) challenges this prevalent theory though by contending that the 'multiple aspects of identity... intersect and interact with each other' (p.4); the concept of identity construction is mutable and, thus, the three levels influence each other. In this article, I apply this interconnected identity theory to the travelling circus troupe, M. E. Braddon's depiction of circus performers in her short story 'One Fatal Moment' (1889) and to Braddon's own multiple actress, author, editor, wife and mother identities. This interpretation reveals that travel and identity theory are inextricably linked for the touring circus performer, the actor and the writer. Furthermore, because the circus troupe crosses the country beginning their act on the streets (continuing it within the circus ring), the performance deconstructs the boundary between reality and façade, not only with reference to the performer's own identity construction, but, as an extension, to the audience and the reader's as well.

The Circus, Travel and Identity Theory

According to *The Circus: Its Origin and Growth Prior to 1835* (1898), the circus has its roots as far back as the Roman amphitheatres (Greenwood 1898: 2-4), while Thomas Frost notes that the modern circus was created by Philip Astley in the late eighteenth century (Frost 1875: 16). The circus began as a lower-class form of entertainment with its lewd and risqué costumes and performances, but despite this association, during the mid-nineteenth century the circus industry grew rapidly and became popular with all classes. 'Lord' George Sanger produced two Royal Command Performances for Queen Victoria, while circus acts extended into the repertoire of theatres and music halls, demonstrating the wide range of audience members who enjoyed the circus for its entertainment value. Moreover, as Brenda Assael in *The Circus and Victorian Society* (2005) notes, the Victorian circus was enhanced by the developing rail network, which enabled performers to journey to remote areas of the country with larger amounts of equipment and eventually allowed exotic animals to be incorporated into the performance (Asseal 2005: 27). This meant their popularity and influence extended geographically, as well as socially, as the century progressed because touring across a country or even around the world was essential in generating a large audience and establishing the company's (inter) national reputation (Clarke 1936: 17-18). The circus' appeal can thus be attributed to the troupe's ability to travel to their audience, rather than the audience travelling to the circus, because it made accessing the performance more convenient, as well as linking the rural and industrial areas of the country together, creating a unified circus experience.

Nevertheless, smaller circus troupes often still travelled locally from town to town on foot, horse or carriage – these performers were known as 'strolling players' (Assael 2005: 3) – and to advertise their arrival in a town, a troupe would give a parade: an extravagant tour consisting of exhibiting the best and most colourful of the company's vehicles, costumes and performers (Clarke 1936: 20). The circus parade was an indication of the troupe's social status, and 'Lord' George Sanger's circus procession, as described below, demonstrates the expense and finery that some companies went to in order to attract an audience. The Victoria and Albert Museum describes Sanger's parade carriage and accompanying paraphernalia by noting that:

> When Sanger's Circus arrived in town in the late 19th century, it did so in style. [His] carriage which weighs ten tons, was drawn by four cream horses in 'royal state harness' as part of a grand procession. All the carved woodwork on the carriage was gilded. Mrs Sanger sometimes dressed as Britannia and rode on top holding a Union Jack shield, a gold trident, and

> wearing a Greek helmet. Nero, the circus lion, and a lamb sat together at her feet. After this came a string of camels, a herd of elephants, numerous other costumed characters, exotic animals either in cages, or led by their trainers, and of course, the band. ('Sanger's Circus Carriage' 2013: online)

John S. Clarke provides a similar description of Sanger's parade, supporting the argument that this element of the performance served to cement the circus's national reputation and confirmed its overall social position (Clarke 1936: 20-1). Although, general literary depictions by respected writers – such as Charles Dickens in both *The Old Curiosity Shop* (1841) and *Hard Times* (1854) – also promoted the circus as a valid and valued national entertainment and established the circus as an art form in its own right.

In conjunction with the wider travelling nature of the circus, its ability to entertain a broad variety of audiences is also related to the circus troupe's adaptability – more specifically, its skill at adapting its own identity construction. Each of the previously outline identity levels can be applied to a touring circus performer: the collective identity derives from the circus troupe; the relational identity refers to the interpersonal spaces not only between the members of the troupe (being a performer), but with a personal identification to the act being performed (being a specific character); and the individual identity results from a sense of self gained from personal experience. Not all these identities are perceptible simultaneously, though. This is specifically due to the nomadic relocation strategy of the touring circus troupe because it impacted upon the publicly perceived identity of each individual performer. This is demonstrated effectively during the circus parade when the company entered a new town for the first time. The audience would only perceive the collective and relational identities of the performers and so their individual identities would be hidden beneath the façade, protecting the performer in private and maintaining the illusion of the act. Thus, identity theory is intrinsically linked to travel theory for the touring circus performer because there is no sense of identity fixed to one geographical location; the performer can deconstruct and reconstruct each identity in every new town visited.

This has a positive outcome for the circus troupe because it means that by travelling across the country, where they encountered numerous different regional cultures, traditions and preferences, they could adapt their collective, relational and individual identities to suit the particular paying audience. The character being performed was constructed with consideration for the regional differences of the audience (the act had variations), but the overall performance of the circus ultimately created a unified collective identity in the audience, and the country as a whole, specifically because of the mobility of the circus troupe. This contrasts to theatre companies that remained rooted in one fixed location who attracted a smaller, local audience and so did not have to take into account regional variation, though they were required to continually change performances (there were, of course, touring theatrical companies which also strengthened this unified national identity, such as Henry Nye Chart's of which Mary Elizabeth Braddon was a member [Carnell 2000: 43]). Adaptability of identity, therefore, is one of the circus's greatest assets.

Nevertheless, this interconnection also problematizes the construction of identity because the circus performer can change character for each separate act or overall performance in every new town; the manufactured public collective and relational identities of the performer vary so often that the performer's original individual identity can be suppressed until it cannot be perceived by even the performer. Therefore, the lack of fixed geographical location for the circus entertainer means that personal experiences dislocate and fragment the individual identity, meaning the circus performer's sense of self derives from the one aspect that remains constant: the performance. Performance as a constant is a contradictory concept, though, because although the process of acting remains the same, performers change clothes, characters and stages, making their relational and individual identities fluid. The circus parade is, therefore, the primary display of the performer's deconstructed, and reconstructed, collective, relational and individual identities, and it is underpinned specifically by the circus troupe's touring strategy.

Furthermore, the parade also challenges the boundary between the audience and the circus troupe as two separate collective identities because the parade brings the performance into the street. The act is not contained in the circus ring, just like the performer's constructed relational identities are not restricted to the stage but are relevant to the construction of the individual identity and everyday life. The parade effectively transforms the street into a stage, destabilizing the boundaries between the performer, the character, the audience and the circus troupe as a collective, which ultimately fragments the performer's and the audience's individual and relational identities. Thus, rather than creating a unified national audience (despite the regional differences), as previously suggested, every individual audience member's own collective, relational and individual identities are deconstructed until the concept of identity becomes a fluid and ever changing factor of existence.

Identity (Re)Construction in M. E. Braddon's 'One Fatal Moment' (1889)

The concept of a fluid collective, relational and individual identity is portrayed by the former actress, Mary Elizabeth Braddon, throughout her theatrical fiction. In her oeuvre Braddon depicts numerous actors and actresses, several of whom try to reconstruct their own collective and relational identities in order to conceal a secret related to their individual identity. Kate Mattacks supports this argument when she states that '[t]he fluid and enigmatic figure of the actress is paradoxically the one element that remains consistently visible throughout Braddon's writing career', and she cites Braddon's 1861 creation of Lady Audley as an example (Mattacks 2001: 70). Lady Audley is presented as a lower-class actress, who, abandoned by her husband, bigamously marries Sir Michael Audley and then attempts to kill her first husband when he returns. Mattacks develops her argument by noting that, like Lady Audley, many of Braddon's 'literary characters manipulate their image through their use of gesture, costume and speech to hide their private desires from view' (Mattacks 2008: 332). I would argue, though, that Braddon manipulates more than the character's 'image'; she presents the means by which a character's entire life can be transformed through the deconstruction of the person's collective, relational and individual identities. It is this deconstruction and subsequent reconstruction of a performer's multiple identities, specifically due to the nomadic existence of a circus troupe, which Braddon represents in her 1889 short story 'One Fatal Moment', originally published in the monthly periodical *The Mistletoe Bough*.

As Deborah Pye notes, '[b]y the 1880s Victorian society was beginning to distinguish the actress from the fallen woman, in part because fictional actresses infiltrated the circulating libraries' (Pye 2003: 73), and thus, near the end of her writing career, Braddon was able to expand her repertoire and depict female circus performers outside the ring. Braddon's portrayal contrasts significantly from the previously mentioned references to Dickens's *The Old Curiosity Shop* and *Hard Times*: Dickens's representation is sentimentalised and focuses on the audiences' reactions to the performance in the circus ring, while Braddon depicts the circus parade specifically and centres on the performers. This circus parade, however, is somewhat less exquisite and grand than 'Lord' George Sanger's.

'One Fatal Moment' details the life of a soldier, Colonel Forrester, and his interactions with a female circus performer, referred to by her character, Joan of Arc. The circus arrives in the town where Forrester and his regiment are stationed and they parade through the streets mainly on foot, with some women on horseback, signalling their lower-class status. As they enter the town the performers are described as: '"poor bedraggled wretches"', 'weary', 'dishevelled', 'pinched', 'worn' and 'ill-fed' and the omniscient narrator notes that this 'circus troupe was third-rate as to number and horseflesh' (Braddon 1889 [1895]: 169-70). Braddon's representation is gritty and realistic; she depicts the harsh realities of the touring lifestyle. When Cyril, one of the soldiers, considers interacting with the performers, he remarks: '"I never saw one of them outside the ring ... It must be capital fun to hear them talk"' (p.175). By labelling the circus performers as '"them"' Cyril disassociates the entertainers from himself; they belong to a different collective identity and as such are perceived as almost a separate species because they are lower class and not deemed respectable, much like Dickens's *Hard Times* where the circus folk are given an idiosyncratic style of speech quite unlike the standard English of the main characters. Dickens leaves the reader in no doubt that though these are vibrant likeable people they are definitely not middle class. Moreover, Cyril's desire to 'hear them talk' also suggests that he views the performers as less-than-civilised, or even primal; he assumes their manner of speaking will be dramatically different to his own, further emphasising his disassociation with them. Braddon uses Cyril as a tool to represent the biased view of the middle-class, in alignment with her intended readership, but then mocks this perspective in order to demonstrate the absurdity of it. This was typical of Braddon at this later point in her career, where she challenged disconnected collective identities, or the separate spheres, by revealing the stereotypes of society in order to champion lower-class workers.

After the performance (which is not depicted), the soldiers invite only the female performers of the company to dine with them (the mystery of the performance is maintained and so Braddon engages the reader's preconceptions of the circus while obscuring the identity of the collective). The story centres on the women's lives outside the circus, focusing on how touring the country impacts on their lives and reputations. Braddon emphasises the vulnerable position female performers were in; as a collective they were subject to the male gaze, like seamstresses and factory hands, but they could be singled out on request for the pleasure of particular members of the audience; their characters capture the imagination of audience members and so are prioritised over their individual identities. Middle- and upper-class women would not be subjected to this impropriety, but because the women are lower class, and especially because they are travelling circus performers, they are considered by the soldiers to be accessible and fair game; it is precisely their nomadic existence and short stay that appeals to the soldiers and allows the women to be taken advantage of.

Braddon establishes the collective identities of the circus troupe and the soldiers by depicting them both dressing for the 'disreputable' dinner as if it was an official banquet (p.172): the men 'dressed as carefully as if they had been going to dine with the Dean's handsome daughters' (p.174), while the performers dress with a pretext of decency – one woman 'wore blue satin, with a black lace scarf' (p.176) – however, their modesty is undermined by their free, coarse and easy-going nature: the woman's scarf does not hide her 'opulent bust and shoulders' (p.176). As Gail Marshall argues: 'on the Victorian stage at least, it was precisely the "statuesque" actress who was a highly charged icon of sexual desirability, whose own "erotic energy" was variously camouflaged, denied, even facilitated by her access to the theatrical rhetorical of statuary' (Marshall 1998: 4). Braddon's circus performers take this '"erotic energy"' one step further because they do not try to 'camouflage[...]' their 'sexual desirability' off-stage or on-stage. Braddon deliberately details the difference in the soldiers' and the performers' outfits to signify the disparity in their social standing; however, both collectives conceal their true individual identities. Most of the performers come dressed as their characters to the dinner, while the soldiers pretend the women are respectable ladies of society and thus begin to act a performance in life. The performance of the circus parade is transmitted beyond the street into the private sphere, blurring the boundaries between the performers' relational and individual identities, and simultaneously fragmenting the soldiers' own individual identities into truth and façade.

During the dinner, the tale focuses on Joan of Arc who was previously described as 'tall [and] splendidly built [with] black eyes [and a] defiant pride, [an] aggressive pride' (p.171). This suggests her individual identity is violent and unruly, like Madame Laure in *Middlemarch* (1871-2). When Ireland's Fenians are verbally attacked by Cyril, Joan becomes uncontrollably angry and stabs him – '[a] great gush of blood covered his shirt with crimson' and he dies (p.180) – confirming this depiction of her. This act of murder dehumanises Joan and further obscures her individual identity, as well as disassociating her from the heroine identity of her character. The violent imagery is also particularly detailed for Braddon's fiction and highlights the horror of the situation, as the omniscient narrator notes: '[i]n one instance the farce was changed to tragedy' (p.180). The narrator describes the scene using theatrical terms for everyday life, illustrating how the two supposedly separate collectives interconnect; violence is not contained within the circus, it travels around the country with the troupe, transcending the boundaries of the ring to infect real life. Furthermore, the actress's supposedly deceptive nature is undermined here; instead of repressing her intense emotions as Victorian etiquette required, she expresses her feelings openly, albeit violently. Joan is Irish and so was personally affronted by Cyril's derogatory comments, creating a sense of sympathy for her within the text, which confuses the slippage between crime and the social 'sin' of being an actress. Moreover, it suggests that performers can be more truthful than other women, and even if they do show duplicity of character, it is no more than anyone else; therefore, they should not be singled out, and their reputations slandered, by societal prejudices.

After this murderous act, Joan manages to evade police custody and is not seen for another seven years. Her ability to hide can be attributed to her unstable identity: her experience of deconstructing and reconstructing her many relational identities in each new town conceals her individual identity from the authorities; no-one knows who she is beneath the performance. As a performer she has several relational identities: she calls herself 'Ann Smith' when she joins the circus company (p.182), her stage name is 'Mademoiselle Lafontaine' (p.182), although she was called 'Joan of Arc' after her character by the soldiers. She is also referred to as 'the Maid of Orleans' (p.173), while her true individual identity is discovered to be 'Sibyl Botillier' (p.191). This splitting of her character into different identities, especially in relation to their associations – Ann Smith (plain, in order to hide herself from her family), Mademoiselle Lafontaine (French, therefore exotic for her performance), Joan of Arc and the Maid of Orleans (historical references to a fierce and challenging woman) and Sibyl Botillier (mystical and alluring as her 'true' self) – extends and liberates the possibilities of her identity, indicating that she has a fluid and enigmatic character, as Mattacks's quotation suggests of Lady Audley. It is this reinvention of her character that hides her individual identity from the police; Sibyl has so many versions and extensions of herself that her true identity is buried, or even completely erased. Once again, it is the touring strategy of the circus which allows Joan to move geographically from her past and, because her journey is not narrated, there is a gap in the narrative and in her identity that creates a blank space. This gap separates her past from her present, allowing her to rewrite her past and, consequently, her future. Viewed through this lens, her multiple identities are not independent of each other; Joan confirms that identities interact during their construction.

After seven years the story resumes with Forrester visiting Cyril's brother, only to discover he is going to marry Joan, who has concealed her murderous identity behind her individual self: Sybil Botillier. Sybil manages to evade police custody by returning to her original identity as the daughter of a wealthy middle-class Irish physician. Forrester confronts Sibyl about her upcoming marriage and she pleads that it was '"[o]ne moment, one single moment of wickedness: and I am to pay for it with the loss of a life-time of bliss! Is that fair, do you think?"' (p.197). This argument reflects Lady Audley's plea, indicating that either Braddon is still relying on her sensation fiction's fame in order to entertain her readership or that the respectability, morality and multiple selves of her heroines are a constant concern in her writing. Forrester is unmoving in his moral stance that she should tell her fiancé that she killed his brother because he believes that she is still 'a woman of strong character and icy temperament' (p.200); a person's inherent nature is unchangeable, no matter how frequently they recreate their individual, relational or collective identities by travelling to a new town.

On the day before her marriage Sibyl is taken to visit Cyril's grave and it is here that she reveals that she murdered her fiancé's brother. She then moves to Brittany to become a governess and nurses Forrester in his old age in order to atone for her sins. Notably, it is only when she ceases travelling that her past catches up with her and she is transformed into a repentant carer; she purges herself of her many created identities, leaving only her isolated and rejected true self. Sybil may have hidden behind her multiple constructed identities, achievable because of the nomadic existence of the circus performer's life, but this (re)construction of her identity eventually collapses under her own sense of guilt. By engaging in the late 1880s with the same themes as her earliest fiction – namely a person's individual, relational and collective identities – Braddon reveals that despite her now secure and respectable position in society, her history of being a performer still made her uneasy – an apprehension that was only settled in her later life.

M. E. Braddon's Self-(Re)Constructed Identities

Braddon's career as an actress began in 1852 at the age of seventeen

(Carnell 2000: 28), just as the travelling circus was developing as an art form in Britain. Her firsthand experience of the stage would prove vital in constructing her multiple identities before she wrote 'One Fatal Moment'. During her acting career, as Jennifer Carnell has documented, Braddon joined several theatrical companies – including Hull's Messers. Wolfenden and Melbourne's – and toured with them across the United Kingdom (p.28-41); thus, her theatrical career resonates with the travelling circus troupe and the (re)construction of identity that is inherent in this profession. Braddon undertook acting as a career in order to provide financial security for herself and her mother, Fanny, because her mother had left her father when his 'infidelities ... became impossible to pardon' (Maxwell 1937: 273). Braddon performed a multitude of roles in many different genres of play, the majority of which were comedies and farces, but she also acted in burlesques, pantomimes and various Shakespearean productions. Braddon also progressed from playing an extra in crowd scenes, to having small speaking parts, eventually rising to major supporting roles and finally becoming a leading lady (though this did not last long). Thus, she was well versed in the practicalities of how and why theatre companies travelled across country, as well as how to construct her relational identities when she entered a new town. Braddon's acting and travelling experience also reveals her comprehensive knowledge of the complex layers of the artificiality and the showmanship of the stage; the differences between theatrical and literary genres; and the importance of pleasing her audience; as well as providing her with the knowledge and skills to hide behind an assumed persona.

This assumed persona refers to Braddon's adoption of the stage name, Mary Seyton –pronounced 'Satan', therefore punning on virtue and vice – which she kept for the entire of her theatrical career. Despite the previously mentioned honourable motive for undertaking her profession, Braddon fragmented her individual identity by creating her own real life relational one in order to conceal the knowledge of her acting career from her extended family and the public, presumably due to the concern surrounding an actress's supposed questionable morals and lower social status. Braddon, therefore, understood the precarious relationship between company, character, performer and audience, and so instead of relying on the collective identity of the theatre company to protect her, she created her own separate relational identity, like Sybil. Thus, Braddon demonstrates how a performer's (re) construction of identity in fiction, along with how the boundaries between the act and the audience can be blurred, infiltrate, extend and reconfirm the construction of identity into the performer's and the audience's own lives.

Furthermore, having adopted the technique of deconstructing and reconstructing her individual and relational identities in her acting career when she performed on stage as Mary Seyton, Braddon continued to draw upon identity construction's mutability when she entered the literary marketplace. Although, unlike the travelling circus performer, Braddon was now fixed to one geographical location, London, so she had to adapt her identity construction strategy. She could no longer create a new identity in every new town; instead, she constructed a new relational identity for each new venture she undertook. Thus, to hide her individual identity as a female writer in a male dominated literary field, Mary Elizabeth Braddon chose to be known as M. E. Braddon; she adopted a gender neutral pen name to avoid the censure of the male literary critics. However, she also took the pseudonyms Lady Caroline Lascelles when she wrote for the penny dreadfuls, Babington White when she wrote for her own magazines, as well as the pen name Aunt Belinda for her children's literature. Braddon created multiple authorial relational identities in order to hide her individual identity from the public, as well as to disguise the fact that her fiction was flooding the literary market place. This meant that, like the travelling circus performer, her individual identity was hidden from public view, giving her the freedom to move about London without attracting attention. Notably, Braddon also continually refused several requests for portraits to be printed of her in order to maintain her anonymity in the public sphere (Braddon d. u. [2003]: Reel 5); adaptability of identity is one of Braddon's greatest assets also because it allows her to hide in plain sight.

This flooding of the literary market place occurred due to Braddon's multiple outlets for her fiction. As Linda Peterson notes, '[l]ong-running Victorian periodicals provided women authors with a regular outlet for their fiction, essays, and reviews and thus an opportunity to establish careers and build reputations' (Peterson 2009: 220). Braddon capitalised on this outlet by editing her own popular monthly periodicals – namely *Belgravia: A London Magazine and Belgravia Annual* from 1866 to 1876 and *The Mistletoe Bough* from 1878 to 1887 – which gave her enough security to establish herself, not only as an author, but as a professional 'woman of letters' with a socially legitimate identity and voice (Robinson 1995: 109), meaning her fiction and her influence transmitted across London. Nevertheless, this prominent editor position, while establishing and validating her author-editor relational identity, also made her more visible to her critics.

This problem of visibility has been noted by Jennifer Phegley and Solveig Robinson, albeit from opposing viewpoints. Robinson argues that Braddon's editorial position provided her 'with a "ladylike" platform for campaigning against contemporary critical practices that she disliked ... without necessarily (further) compromising her status as a *woman*' (p.109-11, emphasis added), while Phegley asserts that *Belgravia* was 'distinctly *unfeminine* in its predominant display of the name of its "conductor" on its cover, with the name of her married lover and publisher in a subordinate position' (Phegley 2004: 151, emphasis added). This dichotomy highlights Braddon's ambiguous position when accepting what had previously been a traditionally masculine profession because it further separates her 'bolder & busier' relational identity from her individual identity (Braddon in Wolff 1974: 136). Furthermore, it also illustrates the gendered and performative elements that were inherent to Braddon's position as an author-editor, confirming her previous acting career was vital in equipping her for this new relational identity. Thus, Braddon's representation of the nomadic travelling circus performer's ability to reconstruct identities in every town they visited in order to generate sales and public interest reflects Braddon's (re)construction of her own relational identities in each new literary venture for the same reasons.

Along with the many literary pseudonyms that Braddon utilised to construct her relational identities, she also created a similar identity in her private life. After moving in with her partner and publisher, John Maxwell, in the early 1860s, Braddon became known as Mrs. Maxwell despite not marrying until 1874, almost fifteen years after they began living together (Wolff 1979: 253). This construction of a relational identity in her private life served to conceal her unconventional relationship, as well as protect her six illegitimate children from public critical censure. Despite the complexity of the construction of her multiple authorial identities, they did not interfere with her personal commitments, as Braddon explained in an interview with Mary Angela Dickens in 1897. Dickens reports that: 'Miss Braddon has never allowed her special work as a novelist to crowd out of her life her everyday work as a woman. She has responded ... to all the demands made upon a wife and a mother' (Dickens 1897 [2000]: 281), signalling that Braddon's matronly status had always been a main aspect of her individual identity construction, even if she did not reveal this to the public. Ultimately, as Beth Palmer notes, 'Braddon, [like] Wood, and Marryat ... had several jobs simultaneously, as well as the roles of mother and wife. In the multiplicity of their careers, they reveal the contingency and performativity of each aspect of their identity' (Palmer 2011: 13). Thus, Braddon demonstrates how her skills as an actress prepared her for the multiple relational identities of author, editor, wife and mother, and that, in conjunction with her literary pseudonyms hiding her individual identity from the public view, her self-constructed domestic identity of 'Mrs. Maxwell' distanced her professional identity from the private gaze.

Nevertheless, the fact that Braddon created various relational identities in her public and private life calls into question her need to do so. Were Braddon's multiple constructed identities caused by personal fragmentation, or did society force her to deconstruct her identity? I would argue that societal expectations forced Braddon to create these multiple identities in order to conceal the fact that she was a Victorian woman who was a successful wife, mother, actress, author and editor. Braddon, having 'internalize[d] the socially constructed identity categories that prevail[ed] in [her] local and cultural contexts' when a young and impressionable touring actress, learned to 'challenge, and potentially help to transform these social constructions' in her later life, through her writing (Luyckx, Schwartz and Vignoles 2011: 12). Thus, Braddon was able to use society's pressures to her advantage because, unlike Sybil, by the end of her life she had not purged herself of her many created identities. Instead she merged each of her identities into one, ultimately demonstrating that she was all of these things, and that this was possible specifically because of her training as a touring actress.

Conclusion

Having analysed how the interconnecting elements of identity construction can be applied to the travelling circus performer, a fictional character and a Victorian woman, this article has supported Vivan L. Vignoles, Seth J. Schwartz and Koen Luyckx's hypothesis that the elements interlink and influence each other. This merging of identity construction is underlined specifically by the nomadic, touring strategy of the circus/theatrical troupe because it allows a performer to recreate their relational identity in every new town they visit, compromising the individual identity of the performer because it conceals and fragments the sense of self that derives from personal experience. This is demonstrated effectively during the circus parade, which 'capture[s] the richness and complexity of identity' because it presents the collective and relational identities of the performer (p.8), while concealing the individual identity. The circus parade also extends the act of performance into the street, destabilising the boundaries between the performer and the audience, ultimately questioning the construction of the audience's own identity. This argument is expanded through the analysis of M. E. Braddon's 'One Fatal Moment', and her depiction of how the performer's own (re)creation of multiple identities confirms that the mutability of identity construction can be extended into the reader's own life, and is thus a fluid and enigmatic concept. Mary Elizabeth Braddon's life and career supports this argument because her own (re)creation of her identity as an actress, author, editor, wife and mother challenged society's expectations, while manipulating its traditions to her own advantage. This confirms that the self and its relation to society is predicated on the boundary between reality and façade.

Works Cited

Assael, Brenda, 2005. *The Circus and Victorian Society*. Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press.

Braddon, Mary Elizabeth, 1889 (1895). *'One Fatal Moment', in The Christmas Hirelings and Other Stories.* Leipzig: Tauchwitz, pp.163-209.

- - -. date unknown (2003). *Sensation Fiction: Part 1, Diaries, Notebooks and Literary Manuscripts of Mary Elizabeth Braddon (1835-1915)*, at Harry Ransom Humanities Research Centre, University of Texas, Austin, Marlborough: Adam Matthew, Microfilm Reels 1-10.

Carnell, Jennifer, 2000. *The Literary Lives of Mary Elizabeth Braddon: A Study of Her Life and Work*, Hastings: The Sensation Press.

Clarke, John S. 1936. *Circus Parade,* London: B. T. Batsford Ltd.

Dickens, Mary Angela, 1897 (2000). *'Miss Braddon at Home', in The Cold Embrace and Other Ghost Stories*, ed. Richard Dalby, Ashcroft. British Columbia: Ash-Tree, pp.280-3.

Frost, Thomas, 1875. *Circus Life and Circus Celebrities.* London: Tinsley Brothers.

Greenwood, Isaac, 1898. *The Circus: Its Origin and Growth Prior to 1835*. New York: The Dunlap Society.

Marshall, Gail, 1998. *Actresses on the Victorian Stage: Feminine Performance and the Galatea Myth*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Mattacks, Kate, 2001. 'After Lady Audley: M.E. Braddon, the Actress and the Act of Writing in Hostages to Fortune', *in Feminist Readings of Victorian Popular Texts: Divergent Femininities*, ed. by Emma Liggins and Daniel Duffy, Aldershot: Ashgate, pp.69-88.

- - -, 2008. 'Beyond These Voices: M. E. Braddon and the Ghost of Sensationalism', in Women's Writing, (15: 3), pp.320-32.

Maxwell, William Babington, 1937. *Time Gathered*, London: Hutchinson and Company.

Palmer, Beth, 2011. Women's Authorship and Editorship in Victorian Culture: Sensational Strategies, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Peterson, Linda, 2009. Becoming a Woman of Letters: Myths of Authorship and Facts of the Victorian Market, Woodstock: Princeton University Press.

Phegley, Jennifer, 2004. *'"Henceforward I Refuse to Bow the Knee to Their Narrow Rule": Mary Elizabeth Braddon's Belgravia Magazine, Women Readers, and Literary Valuation', in Nineteenth-Century Contexts,* (26: 2), pp.149-71.

Pye, Deborah, 2003. '"Irreproachable Women and Patient Workers": The Memoirs of Victorian Leading Ladies', Texas Studies in Literature and Language, (45: 1), pp.73-91.

Robinson, Solveig C. 1995. 'Editing Belgravia: M. E. Braddon's Defence of "Light Literature"', Victorian Periodicals Review, (28: 2), 109-22.

'Sanger's Circus Carriage', taken late 19th Century, Victoria and Albert Museum, London. Available: http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/v/victorian-circus/ [Last accessed: 12 January 13]

Vignoles, Vivan L. Schwartz, Seth J. and Luyckx, Koen, 2011. *Handbook of Identity Theory and Research, ed. Vignoles, Schwartz and Luyckx.* New York, NY: Springer Science and Business Media.

Wolff, Robert Lee, 1974. 'Devoted Discipline: The Letters of Mary Elizabeth Braddon to Sir Edward Bulwer-Lytton, 1862-1873', in *Harvard Library Bulletin*, (22: 1), pp.1-35, 129-61.

- - -. 1979. *Sensational Victorian: The Life and Fiction of Mary Elizabeth Braddon.* New York: Garland.