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Evidence enough has been adduced to show that sensation novels must be recognised as a great fact in the literature of the day, and a fact whose significance is by no means of an agreeable kind. Regarding these works merely as an efflorescence, as an eruption indicative of the state of health of the body in which they appear, the existence of an impure or a silly crop of novels, and the fact that they are eagerly read, are by no means favourable symptoms of the conditions of the body of society. But it is easier to detect the disease than to suggest the remedy. (Henry Mansel 1863: 267)

There has arisen of late years a popular idea as to the division of novels into two classes, which is, I think, a mistaken idea. We hear of the sensational school of novels; and of the realistic, or life-like school. Now, according to my view of the matter, a novel is bound to be both sensational and realistic. And I think that if a novel fail in either particular it is, so far, a failure in Art …. Let an author so tell his tale as to touch your heart and draw your tears, and he has so far done his work well. Truth let there be; – truth of description, truth of character, human truth as to men and women. If there be such truth I do not know that a novel can be too sensational” (Anthony Trollope 1870: 124)

“We have become a novel reading people” observed Anthony Trollope in 1870, who certainly contributed his share to Victorian fiction: “Novels are in the hands of us all, from the Prime Minister, down to the last appointed scullery maid” (1870: 108). Indeed, the Victorian era was the great era of the novel: never had so many literate readers consumed so much fiction so affordably. John Sutherland estimates that 60,000 novels were published in the period (1988: 1), and of course novels were by no means the only literature, nor even the only fiction, that Victorians read. But novels were always considered somewhat suspect – by audiences ranging from evangelicals who distrusted all fiction to critics who particularly abominated the “light reading”
thought to be largely consumed by women, as Kate Flint points out. And one of the most distrusted—and most popular—forms was what came to be known as “sensation fiction.”

Sensation fiction emerged in Britain as a distinct genre around 1860, though the term had been in common use to describe exciting, eventful stories in the US a few years prior. The new genre was distinctively transgressive in that it was thought to appeal directly to the “nerves,” eliciting a physical sensation with its surprises, plot twists, and startling revelations. It was also distinctive in its popularity, often across a range of readerships, and in its commercial, as well as cultural, success. In Britain, there was particular concern about literature that crossed class boundaries, and sensation seemed not only to cross “down”—from mistresses to servants—but also “up,” as startling “penny-dreadful” plots seemed to be moving into the middle-class three-decker. Sensation fiction tended to be associated with women readers and often, though not always, women writers. It was thought to be written and read quickly rather than discerningly; a “mass-produced,” disposable consumer product. These novels typically featured ordinary upper- or middle-class families in domestic settings experiencing startling emotions and occurrences, and were up to date in their subject matter, often taking up themes recently of interest in the newspapers. Finally, the genre was distinguished by the tone of the period’s critical responses to it: unwillingly attentive, sometimes even grudgingly admiring, but also censorious of its “low” appeal to physical appetites for “sensations” whether erotic or pleasurably horrifying, its questionable morality, and inadequate or inappropriate style.

Although the term’s use waned in the 1870s and began to be superseded by other designations, writers associated with sensation continued to write through the turn of the century—and often continued to write the same sort of “sensational” plots. Just as often, works initially caught in the broad net of critics’ denunciations of sensation fiction were only tangentially related to the more central examples of William Wilkie Collins or Mary Elizabeth Braddon, who themselves wrote in a variety of genres. And as astute readers of earlier and later literature may have thought while reading the prior paragraph, most of the characteristics of sensation are not unique to the genre. Indeed, it was a combination of traits appearing in several bestselling novels in short succession and of anxieties on the part of influential review writers that constructed a category, popularized a name for it, and made it stick.

This volume is geared toward making this rich body of literature and its scholarship accessible to undergraduate students of the literature, as well as offering scholars of the genre a provocative survey of the state of the field and providing a springboard and inspiration for future work. Offering detailed coverage of sensation and its authors, the book first aims to reconnect the genre to its literary precursors. Hence, the first section includes essays on earlier types of fiction. The silver fork novel of the early to mid-century was characterized more by an interest in high life and politics than is sensation, but its luxurious attention to commodities is taken up by the later genre, and isolated instances continued the focus on wealthy protagonists. The Newgate novel’s interest in crime and in the motives and psychology of criminals, as
Introduction

well as in social critique, continues in the sensation novel. Although the sensation novel was perhaps less openly critical of social issues than the Newgate or the realist novels of the late 1840s and 1850s, often that criticism can arguably be found incorporated less obviously but no less significantly in the very structures of sensation plots, rather than in open narrative exhortation that characterized some earlier fiction.

Victorian literary critic H. L. Mansel, in his famous 1863 denunciation of sensation novels, observed that:

[O]ur task would be incomplete without some notice of the cheap publications which supply sensation for the million in penny and halfpenny numbers. . . . These tales are to the full-grown sensation novel what the bud is to the flower . . . They are the original germ, the primitive monad, to which all the varieties of sensational literature may be referred, as to their source, by a law of generation at least as worthy of the attention of the scientific student as that by which Mr. Darwin's bear may be supposed to have developed into a whale. (1863: 505–6)

Recent scholars have taken up Mansel's challenge, which has brought with it a host of new questions. Penny dreadfuls are both precursors to and continuous with sensation: indeed, sensation is arguably the middle-class reader's version of the penny dreadful's exciting plots and shocking revelations. But beyond the accumulative model of simply adding penny fiction to the growing list of "literature one really should read," scholarly work on popular literature demands new approaches to scholarship. We must understand a different economy of reading, and see these fictional texts as part of an intertext that may include vastly different information in the same periodical volume, for example.

But it also demands that we examine our now traditional commitment to close reading. Reading "great" literature supposedly demands that we establish a text—an authoritative version, usually the last author-corrected version—that becomes the authoritative work. However, this approach has always been more problematic than it first appeared. In the case of Victorian fiction, the very profusion of textual data poses difficulties. Often we try to work from the author's intention, or from the first audience's experience, but this, too is fraught with peril. Is it the first serial version? The first three-volume version? This is usually the loose rule literary scholars have used, both because it is usually the version most widely circulated in a more persistent form and because, for that reason, it is the one with which we are most familiar. But should we use the bound novel? Broughton's Cometh Up as a Flower (1867) was originally one-third shorter in periodical form than the bound novel, and the ending was changed significantly as she padded her word count to please the publisher. The ending of her other 1867 novel, Not Wisely But Too Well, changed so radically in response to the outraged comments of manuscript reader Geraldine Jewsbury that the protagonist, shot dead by her lover in the original, not only is never shot, but survives her lover for some years, becoming a sister of mercy who practices nursing in slums. These are not minor differences: which, then, is "the" text? Of course the readership
was often quite different in these diverse contexts – differences which were classed, but also gendered (Ouida’s first readers for *Under Two Flags* in serial form were men). And what of all the readers who came to the text in a condensed, rewritten, or plagiarized version? Or through theatrical adaptations? Which is their established text? Studying popular fiction, because of its focus on immediacy and the site of consumption, has highlighted a broader problem in studying Victorian literature that few scholars have carefully considered in reading Eliot or Tennyson, though they probably should: readings that hinge on particular words in a particular context are likely to be called into question once situated in the broader context of the non-linear, mutating, increasingly rhizomatic structure of Victorian literary, publishing, and consumer culture.

The Victorian novel also had a vexed partnership with the stage. Taking many ideas from the theater and often writing with the stage in mind, fiction writers nonetheless suffered both monetary and artistic wounds when theatrical companies stole, staged, parodied, and revised their work for their own audiences and purposes. Any novel that had success was certain to appear on the stage – and if it was very successful, it was likely to morph into crowd-pleasing storylines and to include events or scenes designed to highlight the abilities of its actors rather than being true to the author’s vision. For example, a popular staging of *Under Two Flags* included several equestrian stunts not in the novel, taking advantage of the lead female’s abilities and happy possession of a talented equine performer (Jordan 2010). Melodrama takes up a larger mode of writing that is best known for its travel from stage to page in the period, as well as its reverberations across the larger cultural and political spectrum. Three chapters, on penny dreadfuls and serial fiction, melodrama, and the theater, take up these questions in various ways, as well as showcasing the latest work in these important areas.

The last three chapters in this section take up what might also properly be called modes of narration in fiction, rather than genres of fiction per se, as well as the large literary category of poetry. The Gothic, with its emphasis on the surprising, the supernatural, and the mysterious, is a direct influence, though sensation tends to avoid the supernatural as a primary plot element and domesticates the Gothic’s exotic settings. The spasmodic poem, with its emphasis on extreme, often pathological, mental states and dramatic situations, is an earlier craze that also parallels sensation fiction’s fascination with the extremes of human experience. And, perhaps most importantly, mid-Victorian realism, with its clinical descriptiveness and emphasis on psychology, is sensation’s twin and double, from which it is distinguished rather uncertainly by sensation’s (often) less probable and more complex plotlines and apparently more schematic moral tone. In short, sensation is not a neatly differentiated phenomenon, and to understand it requires the broader context of mid-century literature, as indeed, understanding Victorian literature generally demands, absolutely, an understanding of sensation.

Following this initial contextualization, at the heart of this volume is a varied palette of chapters devoted to individual authors and texts, including many that have
been long-term foci of research in the area and some that are just now again coming to light. In a period as rich with possibilities as this one, any selection would be partial; the section herein points to the range of approaches possible as well as bringing the reader up to date on the existing criticism on these texts and authors.

Two great names of the period that have intrigued scholars most over the past fifteen years or so of criticism on sensation are Mary Elizabeth Braddon and William Wilkie Collins, though they are slowly settling into their natural place in a wider pantheon of writers. Both prolific, successful authors, they emerged as serious contenders in the marketplace at roughly the same time (1860 and 1862, with *The Woman in White* and *Lady Audley's Secret* respectively). Braddon's top sensational "bigamy" novels penned at the same time, *Lady Audley's Secret* and *Aurora Floyd* (1863), each merit a chapter here. Braddon herself cited the division between sensational and "good" literature, attempting to write both. *The Doctor's Wife* (1864) was a significant adaptation of *Madame Bovary*; it was also Braddon's first attempt to achieve what she described as "something like excellence," (qtd. in Wolff 1979: 165). One chapter is devoted to that novel, and another addresses the somewhat later *Joshua Haggard's Daughter* (1876), another work focusing on psychological realism. Both Braddon and Collins have chapters devoted to their general authorship, and Collins has additional chapters on *The Woman in White* and *The Moonstone* (1868), each examined here at length.

Ouida and Mrs. Henry Wood also burst onto the literary scene in the 1860s, and both were immediately classified as sensational, although their work differed significantly from the fast-paced mysteries of Braddon and Collins. Ouida, influenced by the silver fork school, blended her early novels of decadent high life with exotic adventure, as was the case in the wildly successful *Under Two Flags* (1867), which has a chapter here after one devoted to the author. (Though her later work branched out into quite different areas, she was always more or less *sui generis* until much later imitators.) Mrs. Henry Wood is another major figure of the period to have a chapter of this volume devoted to her. Though she often wrote in sentimental contexts, she became a popular phenomenon with *East Lynne* (1861), which, though riven with sensational subplots, is primarily and finally focused on domestic melodrama.

Moving a bit away from these heavyweights, we find other novelists categorized as sensational who also were significant figures on the literary scene of the time, to each of whom this volume devotes a chapter: the well-known Irish Gothic writer Sheridan LeFanu; his niece Rhoda Broughton, whose ironic domestic tales were shocking enough in their depiction of women's desires to be initially lumped in with sensation; the powerhouse social-problem novelist Charles Reade; the sensational/spiritualist Florence Marryat; and the clubby gentleman writer Edmund Yates. A few additional less well-known writers bring us to broader connections: Mary Cecil Hay and Charlotte Brame wrote for the provincial periodical market, and a comparative view of their careers clarifies much about the marketing of fiction in that context, as well as the transition from the mid- to late century. Amelia Edwards, best known for her Egyptological work, emerges here as a contributor to the mid-century sensational
scene. Dora Russell, the domestic sensation phenomenon, is discussed as the workhorse of Tillotson’s “Fiction Bureau.” And the final chapter in this section surveys the often ignored but numerous short stories of the time published side by side with parts of serialized novels and comprising an important aspect of their literary context.

The third section of the volume turns to significant themes in both the literature and its scholarship. With a return of interest in both women writers and popular fiction, sensation was a natural candidate for critical revival in the period of scholarly feminist recovery in the late 1970s through the turn of the century. This genre, dominated by women and viewed as transgressive, was quickly linked to the feminist concerns circulating broadly in the culture, as well as being seen as a precursor to the New Woman novels of the fin de siècle. Having recovered a body of work through the efforts of these scholars, scholarship refocused on the task of fleshing out and deepening our understanding of these works in a wider variety of contexts. The scholarship moved beyond the early critical binary in which these works were either seen simply as reinforcing or transgressing traditional gender roles, or were considered only in relation to the history of feminism.

Since then, feminism has continued to be of central interest to scholarship on this material. But now this work is inflected by the interests of gender studies, focusing on masculinity and queer theory in addition to the broader range of material and commodity culture reflected in this very commodified literature, its topicality and modernity, its emphasis on science and medical understandings of the body, its fascination with technology and temporality, and its peculiarly Victorian reflections on an emerging global order. As we have moved beyond initial rediscovery to a deeper scholarship on both this genre and its broader place in the literary marketplace, sensation has both lent itself to all possible existing interests in Victorian literature and opened doors which revise our most basic questions about how to read Victorian material. Early studies of the marketplace and readership by Richard Altick (1957) and Patrick Brantlinger (1998) opened questions of audience, economics, and circulation that often were elided in studies of canonical fiction. More recently, detailed studies of periodical publication by such scholars as Laurel Brake (1994), Graham Law (2000), and Andrew King (2004) have revised the most fundamental assumptions we have historically made about how literature was read. We now must think of these texts in dialogue with other verbal texts, with their audiences (often communicating with authors and publishers as serial parts were written), and with the visual information that was also an integral part of the literature – as true for Dickens as for these authors, but under-studied until questions about the “popular” led scholars to see the canonical (often, of course, also popular) with new eyes.

Scholarship on the genre often started with the question of why these texts had been considered sensational and how they came to be elided from canonical consideration, so the question of readership has long been central. Scholars began by looking at the criticism in Victorian periodicals that defined the genre and represents the early and sometimes only detailed documentation of readers’ experiences of the texts at the time of their publication. A chapter on critical responses, both initially and up to the
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present, clarifies this history. The next two chapters explore gender’s relationship to sensation and the queering of sensation respectively, thereby extending and bringing the reader’s understanding of this foundational critical discussion up to date. Race and class were early preoccupations of the scholarship as well, as the genre was thought to be consumed promiscuously across class boundaries and to appeal to low and uneducated tastes; the next chapter surveys both this critical material and representations of race and class in the literature. A fifth essay takes us into the broader context of empire and representation of the imperial other. A concern that has not been adequately explored in the past is the role of religion – a more central concern in all Victorian culture than has been understood over the last several decades – and our next chapter points the way for research in this area.

The destabilization of faith in the period has often been cited as a cause of Victorians’ growing fascination with other ways of establishing knowledge. Victorian realism and sensation have both been read extensively in the light of scientific and medical developments. From Gillian Beer’s *Darwin’s Plots* (2009) to Lawrence Rothfield’s *Vital Signs* (1992), scholars have understood the emergence of modern science and of the clinical gaze as crucial to the period’s worldview. Moreover, descriptive techniques of novelistic writing are closely aligned with techniques of positivistic research developed from the late eighteenth century onward. Two chapters address these themes, one on the intersection between sensational fiction and popular writings on science, and the other on representations of medicine in sensation fiction, using the example of drugs. Another essay addresses literary scholarship’s recent interest in disabled bodies, well represented in Victorian culture generally and especially in sensation fiction, with its focus on physical sensations and extreme states. But the scientific method was not only applied to understanding the mysteries of the body. Another mode of establishing truth that fascinated readers of Victorian fiction was the law. Two chapters here focus on this emerging field of interest for literary scholars, one on the impact of marriage and divorce laws so fundamental to sensation plots, and another on detection, the enduring and vital genre that emerged largely out of this literature’s focus on legal procedures, rational deduction, and mystery plots.

Sensation fiction was particularly marked by its topicality – it was generally set in the historical moment in which it was published, and was rife with references to the latest cultural crazes. Not only does sensation follow the silver fork novel in its tendency to catalog luxury objects, but its realistic narrative technique freights the text with specific brand-names and detailed descriptions of consumer objects. If its negotiations of class are deeply enmeshed in the late stages of industrial capitalism, it is also one of the premier literary venues for the depiction of commodity capitalism, explored in a chapter here. Of course, the novels were themselves objects of consumer desire and a sign of a well-developed leisure economy. Moreover, like other commodities, the novels relied on appeals to visual culture. Often heavily illustrated, and published in a period in which all literature was more interdependent with illustration than it was in earlier periods, the novels referenced developments in high art as well as relying on newer, cheaper lithographic techniques to enrich their meaning and
appeal to their audiences. Two chapters here explore sensation’s connection to illustration and to painting, respectively.

The volume closes with a series of chapters on the impact of sensation on later forms and movements in the late nineteenth century. The New Woman novel is the most obvious connection for two reasons: both genres tend to feature transgressive heroines and themes, and the early feminist scholarship on sensation, most notably by Lyn Pykett (1992), explicitly drew this comparison, shaping the critical work that followed. However, sensation’s lingering attachment to the supernatural provides a link between earlier Gothic spiritual quest novels such as Bulwer’s *Zanoni* (1842) and the *fin-de-siècle* religious and mystical novels of Marie Corelli, who is the principal example in the chapter on spiritual and metaphysical novels. Talia Schaffer (2000) has elsewhere established the connection between Ouida and *fin-de-siècle* aestheticism; here, she continues to explore those connections more broadly. Realism, of course, has long been critically acclaimed as the most significant contribution of the period to literature, and here we see sensation’s impact on the late century’s realist novels, especially Meredith, Hardy, and Gissing. The final chapter takes us to the present, examining the neo-Victorian revival that has lately influenced both popular culture and scholarship.

Despite the reach of existing scholarship on sensation represented here, much remains to be done. Scholars of periodical publication are now beginning the task of examining the circulation of texts across national borders, how they change in different contexts and how they influence the texts produced in those new contexts. By the time sensation entered the scene, as Graham Law (2000) has shown, there was an extensive network of provincial and international publication for metropolitan periodical fiction. Additionally, Mudie’s sent triple-deckers to the subscribers in British India and all over the world. Moreover, publishers routinely pirated foreign materials: Dickens bemoaned American pirated editions of his work, and British publishers routinely appropriated foreign materials as well. The fact that the very term “sensation novel” seems to have originated in the US context suggests an intriguing avenue for further research. French serials like *The Mysteries of Paris* not only spawned imitators like Douglas Jerrold’s *Mysteries of London*; they were taken up in hastily produced translations and resold on the streets of London (Léger-St-Jean 2010). Plays and fiction were adapted, translated, and outright plagiarized, in addition to influencing more respectful homages like Braddon’s aforementioned revision of *Madame Bovary*, *The Doctor’s Wife*. French realism had a significant impact on British sensation fiction, which borrowed its commitment to clinical description of “low” human behavior in the service of its scarcely more melodramatic plots. German Romanticism continued throughout the period to thread through scenes of horror or psychological abjection, and was a generally understood context for them: when Alicia considers that the rather demonic Pre-Raphaelite portrait of Lady Audley may reveal hitherto hidden capacities of the sitter, Robert shudders, “Don’t be German! . . . I’m not metaphysical; don’t unsettle me” (Braddon 2003: 108).
Moreover, the colonial and imperial context provides a rich (and under-studied) source of material as well as a convenient parking place for characters who need to be away from Britain: fortunes are made in the gold fields of Australia; diamonds are stolen from Indian temples and pursued by Hindu priests desperate to restore them; mysterious characters arrive in Britain from the Caribbean, having acquired murky histories and peculiar tastes. From the broader context of exoticism come the survivors of scalpings in the Wild West, opium-puffing Chinese, and smooth-talking Latin Americans with knife scars, beautiful daughters, and large investments in non-existent railroads. And of course, in many of these locations, writers in other languages were reading British fiction and writing their own challenges, responses, and appropriations. Generations of Indian writers have written their own novels which ironically cite, subvert, and sometimes pay homage to the modern novel form first introduced to the region by the Raj. British novels were first brought into India as a means of inculcating British values in the subordinated population, as Gauri Viswanathan (1989) explains; now, the fiction of former colonies forces a re-evaluation of the understanding of “Western” literature.

Finally, much scholarship remains to be done on medicine, science, the history of production, and sensation’s relationship to other arts. We have just begun to understand Victorian fiction’s relation to visuality, introduced in studies by scholars such as Kate Flint (1993), Jennifer Phegley (2004), and Sophia Andres (2005). The role of music has yet to be more fully explored, and the Victorian love of Wagner hints at the links between Romanticism in music and sensation in literature. We continue to delve into the relation of medicine, the social sciences (such as the link between anthropology and psychology investigated in Peter Logan’s *Victorian Fetishism: Intellectuals and Primitives* [2009]), and of political concerns outlined in such studies as Lauren Goodlad’s *Victorian Literature and the Victorian State: Character and Governance in a Liberal Society* (2003). This Companion will give the reader both the broad understanding of sensation and the specific information on the state of scholarship necessary to advance in the comprehension of the literature as well as the production of new scholarship; it is also to be hoped that it will increase the pleasure of those approaching this rich material for the first time, as well as those well initiated into its mysteries.

**Bibliography**


Part I
Before Sensation, 1830–1860
One of the progenitors of the sensation novel was the “silver fork” or “fashionable” novel. These novels, perhaps the first bestsellers, portray in detail the social lives of aristocratic exclusives during the Regency. They reigned from the mid-1820s to the mid-1840s and survived through the 1850s. As late as 1887, Marianne Stanhope’s 1827 novel *Almack’s* was reprinted in a three-volume edition, which the *Athenaeum* thought worthwhile in order to take the sense of a wider audience on this chronicle of *haut ton* in the reign of George IV (review of *Almack’s*, 1887: 253). In 1890 “H.R.H.” authored *Lothair’s Children*, a novel which Graves derided for its devotion to “the aristocracy & upholstery” (Graves 1890: 433).

These late Victorian comments echo the responses made by reviewers of silver fork novels sixty years earlier. Those reviewers saw fashionable novels as realistic, but dismissed them as trivial and often attacked them as immoral. The novels also provoked parodies, notably by Thomas Carlyle, Charles Dickens, and William Makepeace Thackeray. After 1850, however, silver fork novels were largely ignored. It was not until 1936 that Matthew Rosa published the first book on them, *The Silver-Fork School: Novels of Fashion Preceding Vanity Fair*. Rosa does a thorough job of describing silver fork novelists and summarizing their works, but, as his subtitle suggests, he sees fashionable novels as an interesting popular phenomenon with little intrinsic value. For him their primary importance lies in leading to the apogee of the genre, Thackeray’s 1848 masterpiece, *Vanity Fair*. Kathleen Tillotson’s *Novels of the Eighteen-Forties* similarly suggests that silver fork novels are important only as they increase our understanding of those authors, such as Thackeray, who reacted against them (1954: 5).

It was almost fifty years later, in 1983, that the next significant work on these novels appeared: Alison Adburgham’s *Silver Fork Society: Fashionable Life and Literature from 1814–1849*. Like Rosa and Tillotson, Adburgham dismisses silver fork novels as
essentially trivial. While she provides much useful information, she is primarily interested in using the novels as a source of historical information, a task for which their verisimilitude makes them well suited.

Recently, however, fashionable novels have received renewed attention and a critical re-evaluation. In 2005, Harriet Devine Jump edited *Silverfork Novels, 1826–1841*. Jump’s collection includes six novels: *Granby* by Thomas Henry Lister (1826); *Romance and Reality* by Letitia Elizabeth Landon (1831); *Godolphin* by Edward Bulwer, later Bulwer-Lytton (1833); *The Victims of Society* by Marguerite, Countess of Blessington (1837); *Chevey: A Man of Honour* by Rosina Bulwer (1839); and *Cecil, or the Adventures of a Coxcomb* by Catherine Gore (1841). (In addition to authoritative texts, the collection provides a general introduction to the genre and an essay on each novel.) Silverfork novels were the subject of a special edition of *Women’s Writing* in 2009, edited by Tamara S. Wagner. These essays trace the novels’ reception by Victorian reviewers and elaborate on contemporary references such as Almack’s, the exclusive dance club run by Lady Patronesses. Most importantly they discuss the genre’s literary legacies, both individual novelists such as Charlotte Brontë, Dickens, Thackeray, and George Eliot, and later genres such as the Victorian domestic and sensation novels.

Besides Wagner, the most significant critics of silver fork fiction are Winifred Hughes, April Kendra, and Muireann O’Cinneide. These critics reject the notion that fashionable novels are inherently trivial or important only for providing historical information or leading to *Vanity Fair*. Rather, they examine the genre as important evidence in the transition from the Romantic to the Victorian novel. They interrogate the grounds for excluding fashionable novels from the literary canon, place them in the context of the shift from the novels of Jane Austen and Sir Walter Scott to those of Dickens, Thackeray, and Eliot, and examine their influence on subsequent fiction, especially the Victorian novel of domestic realism.

The descriptor “silver fork” was coined by William Hazlitt in his 1827 * Examiner* article, “The Dandy School.” In this attack on the genre, Hazlitt’s primary targets were Theodore Hook’s *Sayings and Doings* (1834) and Disraeli’s *Vivian Grey* (1826–7). Perhaps alluding to the Don Quixote proverb that “Every man is not born with a silver spoon in his mouth,” Hazlitt insists that the fashionable novelist is concerned only with “the admiration of the folly, caprice, insolence, and affectation of a certain class” and that “provided a few select persons eat fish with silver-forks, he considers it a circumstance of no consequence if a whole country starves” (*Works*, 11: 353, 355).

Hook’s *Sayings and Doings*, a three-volume collection of stories, was the first work of silver fork fiction. His tales of “the balls, the dinners, the hunts, the teas, the gossip, the electioneering, the opera, the theater, the clubs, the marriage settlements, the love marriages, the fashionable marriages, the gambling, and the dissipation” contained all the components of fashionable fiction and proved so popular that they were followed with two subsequent collections in 1825 and 1828 (Rosa 1964: 62). The first full-fledged fashionable novel was Robert Plumer Ward’s *Tremaine, or the Man of Refinement* (1825), an atypically moralistic tale which traces the search of a wealthy young man for an appropriate occupation.