**VPFA 8th Annual Conference 2016: 'Victorian Popular Genres'**

***'My Own Child*' (1875-76): Florence Marryat and Sensation Fiction published in *London Society'***

An anonymous article published in the *Edinburgh Review* in 1864 asserted that '[t]wo or three years ago nobody would have known what was meant by a Sensation Novel; yet now the term has already passed through the stage of jocular use [...] and has been adopted as the regular commercial name for a particular product of industry for which there is just now a brisk demand'. These comments reflectanxieties about the sensation fiction which flooded the literary marketplace in the 1860s; the writer suggests that it is a mass-produced commodity and implies that it is an inferior literary form. The article also indicates the way in which the 'Sensation Novel' was a pejorative term before it became a recognised literary genre.

Florence Marryat demonstrates an acute awareness of the contemporary literary marketplace, for example in her preface to *Véronique* (1869) she challenges criticism of the sensation genre and defends her writing. However, by 1872, when Marryat took over editorship of *London Society,* the sensation novel was increasingly seen as formulaic and out of date. The three of Marryat's novels which were serialised in *London Society* under her editorship retain many of the defining preoccupations of earlier sensation fiction, but she responds to changing tastes in popular literature by subverting generic expectations. This paper examines the ways in which Marryat adapts the sensation genre in *'My Own Child*' which was serialised in *London Society* between 1875 and 1876. I argue that the sensation genre provided her with the malleable form that she needed in order to highlight problems with women's financial dependency upon men, and to suggest how women felt about gender roles and their lack of infant custody rights.

**Anne-Louise Russell**

**Anglia Ruskin University**

**email: Anne-Louise.Russell@pgr.anglia.ac.uk**