Victorian Literature and Culture (2007), **35**, 471–488. Printed in the United States of America.
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THE LITERARY PORTRAIT AS CENTERFOLD: FETISHISM IN MARY ELIZABETH BRADDON'S *LADY AUDLEY'S SECRET*

By Lynette Felber

FROM "MY LAST DUCHESS" to *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, portraits are ubiquitous in Victorian literature – lurking behind velvet curtains or stowed in locked attics, their canvases turned to the wall. The literary portrait, a variation on the copious nineteenth-century description typical of the Victorian novel, provides a verbal representation of physical appearance that most conspicuously functions to establish character. Literary portraits work vicariously, asking readers to conceptualize imaginatively what the characters actually see, requiring that they visualize a painting – see it in their mind's eye. Verbal and visual, private and portable, the literary portrait is a memento of an exciting reading experience. To better understand the appeal of literary portraits in the Victorian era, we might explore the effects of verbal description and the psychosexual impulses motivating the production of literary portraits. Victorian literary portraits commonly fetishize female subjects for a purportedly male gaze; even post-Freud, psychoanalysts view fetishism as a primarily masculine proclivity (Metz 89). Novels such as Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret* (1862), to name only one among many, present a fetishistic portrait that seems to be a classic illustration of Mulvey's observation that "[i]n a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female" (11). Film theory offers literary critics ways to theorize specularization – the behavior of "looking" – that precinematic viewers could not yet articulate.[1]

A popular, best-selling novel of the Victorian era and a major exemplar of the naughty sensation genre, *Lady Audley's Secret* introduces the portrait of its female protagonist as the fetishized object of the male gaze. It may seem surprising to find this Pre-Raphaelite centerfold embedded in a sensation novel, a product of Victorian popular culture. However, while sensation fiction was not considered high art during the 1860s, both the sensation novel and Pre-Raphaelitism, Lyn Pykett points out, focus on "detailed representation of the female body" (*Improper* 35). It is significant that the portrait of Lady Audley described early in the novel is not a facial but rather a three-quarter or full-length portrait, exhibiting the woman's body to the viewer. Sensation fiction exposed the contemporary moral underworld for middle-class readers and offered vicarious pleasures by depicting acts forbidden by their moral

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1060150307051583 Published online by Cambridge University Press

code. Novels such as Braddon's exploit moral ambiguity and disclose the more complex reality beneath the Victorian bifurcation of women as angels or demons. Paradoxically, sensation fiction titillates and moralizes at the same time; it is a genre characterized by "ideological contradictoriness" (Heller 361), provoking seemingly inconsistent reactions. Thus, a sensation novel like *Lady Audley's Secret* – with its mix of lurid details and conventional moral resolutions – offered Victorian readers an opportunity to experience fantasies of bigamous sex, voyeuristic indulgence in luxurious commodities, and the thrill of violent crimes from the safety of their armchairs, seemingly without an overt challenge to their complaisant morality.

As a subgenre of the Victorian novel, sensation fiction exaggerates and renders more visible features of the larger genre. A hybrid of various strains within nineteenth-century fiction, the sensation genre reflects the influence of stage melodrama and prefigures crime and detective fiction. The most obvious predecessor of sensation fiction is the gothic Brontë novel, specifically *Jane Eyre*, with its focus on artworks and its bigamous subject matter.[2] Braddon's literary portrait recalls the mysterious painting featured in such gothic novels. As in the typical gothic painting, this portrait contains clues about hidden identity. Indeed, it reveals the secret of Lucy's assumed identity to her first husband at the same time it also exposes a more abstract image of the way women's identities were formulated by Victorian society.

The combination of provocative content and conventional moralizing in Braddon's sensation fiction has led to mixed claims about her feminism. Braddon may be less obviously feminist than predecessors such as the Brontës in that she provides no female role model in this novel. However, while Braddon's fetishized portrait solicits the male gaze, it may have different implications as it functions as a mirror for female gazers – or feminist readers. Recent feminist approaches to Braddon associate the novelist with a resistant though conflicted feminism. In their introduction to the collection *Beyond Sensation*, editors Marlene Tromp, Pamela Gilbert, and Aeron Haynie argue that "although many of Braddon's novels may seem to capitulate to normative Victorian standards of morality . . . [they ultimately provide] a subversive variety of revision that . . . call[s] into question notions of gendered identity" (xvii). Current feminist interpretations, contextualized in cultural and historicist approaches, thus qualify and expand upon Elaine Showalter's 1977 assertion that sensation writers "could not bring themselves to undertake a radical inquiry into the role of women" (180). While Showalter argues that sensation novels expose Victorian women's discontent (153–81), she finds that they fall short of an anger which is "confronted, understood, and acted upon" (180). It is true that in this sense Braddon's feminism does not meet our more modern expectations: it articulates criticism but neglects to outline specific solutions to the limitation of women's roles.

Evaluation of Braddon's ideology has provided a major focus of criticism as her previously noncanonical work has begun to receive substantial scholarly consideration and attempts to identify how her ideology evolved from the early, foundational studies. More recent analyses, mine included, find the exposure of such anger to comprise a rigorous, feminist exploration.[3] Politically, Braddon supported suffragettes and the vote for women, though she disapproved of militant feminists (Carnell 282). Her feminism is not that of an activist, however, but an ideology based on inside knowledge – a lived, experienced reaction to hard social and economic realities. And Lucy, her protagonist, does indeed "act upon" her anger and exploit one "advantage" women possessed in Victorian society: Lucy

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deliberately profits from the male sexual desire she elicits. Braddon's portrait similarly exploits – and exposes – Victorian fetishism. The multiple substitutions represented by the verbal description of an imaginary portrait, painted by a presumed but unnamed Pre-Raphaelite artist, viewed by characters in the novel, and ultimately "observed" by Victorian and successive generations of readers, provide a striking exemplar of the complex layering – and the enigma – at the heart of women's societal construction. Braddon's presentation of the portrait comprises a multivalent critique: it protests the power and authority of the male gaze; it anatomizes fetishistic desire; and it raises questions about the construction of women and their sexuality in Victorian society. While titillating, and perhaps even satisfying, male gazers, Braddon's portrait also functions to screen a more profound feminist statement about Victorian patriarchy's relation to women and heterosexuality.

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THE PORTRAIT IS INTRODUCED EARLY in the novel and is amply displayed through both a lengthy ekphrastic description and a detailed account of its reception by two male observers. In a highly sexualized context, Robert Audley and George Talboys enter a "secret passage" to gain access to Lady Audley's boudoir, where her unfinished portrait is displayed on an easel. As Elizabeth Langland suggestively points out, "Lady Audley's private spaces are curiously vulnerable to penetration" (9). The novel's verbal representation of the decadent Pre-Raphaelite painting depicting "a beautiful fiend" hovers between description of feminine beauty and moral judgment:

> No one but a pre-Raphaelite would have painted, hair by hair, those feathery masses of ringlets with every glimmer of gold, and every shadow of pale brown. No one but a pre-Raphaelite would have so exaggerated every attribute of that delicate face as to give a lurid lightness to the blonde complexion, and a strange, sinister light to the deep blue eyes. No one but a pre-Raphaelite could have given to that pretty pouting mouth the hard and almost wicked look it had in the portrait.
>
> It was so like and yet so unlike; it was as if you had burned strange-coloured fires before my lady's face, and by their influence brought out new lines and new expressions never seen in it before. The perfection of feature, the brilliancy of colouring, were there; but I suppose the painter had copied quaint mediaeval monstrosities until his brain had grown bewildered, for my lady, in his portrait of her, had something of the aspect of a beautiful fiend.
>
> Her crimson dress, exaggerated like all the rest in this strange picture, hung about her in folds that looked like flames, her fair head peeping out of the lurid mass of colour, as if out of a raging furnace. Indeed, the crimson dress, the sunshine on the face, the red gold gleaming in the yellow hair, the ripe scarlet of the pouting lips, the glowing colours of each accessory of the minutely-painted background, all combined to render the first effect of the painting by no means an agreeable one. (70–71; vol. 1, ch. 8)

Pykett claims that "the narrator both satirises Pre-Raphaelitism and appropriates its sensuous and sensual gaze" (*Improper* 92). The insistence that "only a Pre-Raphaelite could have painted" this portrait draws upon the contemporary disapproval of the Brotherhood. According to Elizabeth Prettejohn, the suggestion that Pre-Raphaelite art was decadent arose in the 1860s, concurrent with an emphasis on a "new type of female figure"; some of the moral condemnation came from within the Pre-Raphaelite group itself, as William Holman Hunt, for example, criticized Dante Gabriel Rossetti's *Bocca Baciata* in a letter of 1860 for

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"gross sensuality" and "animal passion" (qtd. in Prettejohn 108).[4] There is, moreover, an implied discrepancy between the actual physical details and the subjective presentation of the portrait. The ekphrastic description depicts not only its subject but also the artist, presumably a male, one of the "brotherhood." Curiously, the description of the painting articulates an unexpected feminist critique as the narrator claims that it is the *artist's* representation that "exaggerat[es] every attribute"; it "give[s]" the subject her "lurid lightness" and "almost wicked look"; it destructively "burns" colors into the subject, and its "influence" brings out "new lines and new expressions." Thus, the narrator emphasizes that the portrait comprises a highly deleterious interpretation of its female subject.

The description of the portrait, despite its critical commentary on the Pre-Raphaelite artist and its obvious moralistic warning, hovers with fetishistic pleasure over its infernal subject. The passage frames a static moment of pleasure, arresting time and narrative movement as it lingers over the detailed, minute particularization of physical traits, "hair by hair."[5] Typical of the fetish itself, the partial, fragmented view represented by the catalogue of details (hair, mouth, eyes) dwells on the parts without integration into a whole. While purporting to represent a full view – or enough to show how her dress hangs around her body – the presentation is actually synecdochic, providing only selective glimpses of Lucy Audley. The fetish is a displacement that exposes an equivocal desire for an inherently elusive subject. It arouses at the same time it reassures the fetishist that he is safe from an actual woman and the threat posed by her genitalia. Metz explains, *pace* Freud, that "it is remarkable that the fetish always combines a double and contradictory function: on the side of metaphor, an inciting and encouraging one (it is a pocket phallus); and, on the side of metonymy, an apotropaic one, that is, the averting of danger (thus involuntarily attesting a belief in it), the warding off of bad luck or the ordinary, permanent anxiety which sleeps (or suddenly wakes up) inside each of us" (86). The literary portrait is an elusive representation that signifies both visual presence and absence. In the first place, the literary portrait is a *verbal* description. Moreover, it depicts a once-present now-absent posing subject. Further, because a fetish involves substitution, the fantasy of possession elicited by the fetishized portrait is revealed actually to be a sham. The ambiguous quality of presence and absence accounts, at least in part, for the appeal of the fetish: vicarious pleasures are safe yet evoke the exciting sensation of danger.

The gazers' reactions to the portrait in *Lady Audley's Secret* are as significant as the painting itself and may demonstrate how Victorian male readers might have reacted to these highly sensual visual micronarratives. Robert and George build up to viewing the unfinished portrait as the climax of the boudoir exhibition of artwork and of their voyeurism, surveying other paintings first and "leaving this unfinished portrait for a *bonne bouche*" (69; vol. 1, ch. 8). The pleasure each individual man receives is different – and completes the portrait differently – but the juxtaposition of the two reactions illustrates the dual effects of the fetish. Robert's pleasure typifies the "inciting" fetishistic effect, excitement, the raw pleasure of the gaze: "[he] arranged the easel very conveniently, and . . . had seated himself on a chair before it for the purpose of contemplating the painting at his leisure" (70; vol. 1, ch. 8). Characteristic of the hierarchized binary paradigm of male gazer/female object, a representation of "the nonreciprocity between look and eye, between being the subject and object of the gaze" (Jay 288), Robert's visual act is one of power and control. This hierarchical power over the portrait as subject incites his motivation as the detective solving the problem at the root of the novel's mystery, Lady Audley's secret. For Robert, the fetish betokens not only his potential

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mastery but also the presence of the absent: the attractive Lady Audley is summoned for his pleasure through visual representation.

Conversely, the portrait bespeaks absence through presence to George Talboys: "he sat before it for about a quarter of an hour without uttering a word – only staring blankly at the painted canvas, with the candle-stick grasped in his strong right hand, and his left arm hanging loosely by his side" (71; vol. 1, ch. 8). While the onanistic erotic potential is signaled by the candle-stick George grasps, ironically, the portrait signifies absence, the only illusory presence of his absent, purportedly dead wife. Since her representation or presence in the unfinished portrait of Sir Michael's wife reveals that George has been betrayed, the painting conveys a threat of castration that renders George silent, visually blank and phallically impotent – or "hanging loosely." Interestingly, George nevertheless leaves behind ambiguous evidence of his onanistic interest: "a great man's glove on the carpet" which Lucy eventually has her maid remove, along with "withered flowers" and other "litter" (77, 79; vol. 1, ch. 9). Despite George's supposed impotence in the wake of the deception his wife has accomplished, the scene suggests spent sexuality through the litter left behind. Lucy responds with a feeling of violation when she hears of the viewing – complaining that the men had "the audacity to look at my picture" (77; vol. 1, ch. 9).

The gaze elicited from characters – or figuratively and vicariously from readers – is thus an instrument of erotic attention and potential power over the subject. As Jean Clair notes, "Vision is . . . a phalloid organ able to unfold and erect itself out of its cavity and point towards the visible. The gaze is the erection of the eye" (trans. and qtd. in Solomon-Godeau 229). Most banally, the fetishized Victorian portrait is a substitution for sex – genital activity is replaced by visual stimulation. In her meditation on the history of erotic photography in the nineteenth century, Abigail Solomon-Godeau remarks that "there is reason to think that erotic representation demonstrates a shift from a conception of the sexual as an activity to a new emphasis on specularity – the sexual constituted as a visual field rather than an activity as such" (233). It may thus be useful to consider the literary portrait in relation to the new medium of photography since the rise of the portrait as a device of characterization coincides with the advent of photographic representation in the early nineteenth century. The male characters' masturbatory reactions to the portrait in *Lady Audley's Secret* hint at the appeal of the literary portrait and its resemblance to other kinds of fetishistic representation.

Published in 1862, well after the discovery of photography, the novel may tell us something about the transition from the primarily verbal pornography of previous eras to the increasingly visual pornography facilitated by photography:

> [t]he historical period that produces the media explosion exemplified by the invention of photography itself is one in which the heightened fetishism of the woman's body, accompanied by fantasies of possession and imaginary knowledge, comes to be attached to the commodity. It is hardly necessary to underscore the fact that the conscription of images of women to and for the purveyal of commodities has been a cultural development of enormous significance and one in which photography has been a crucial agent. (Solomon-Godeau 237)

The construction of woman's image as erotic object originates in Victorian gender hierarchy and is informed by the aesthetic and economic standards of the status quo, reflecting and promoting the conflation of eroticism and material consumption. As Ann Cvetkovich characterizes sensation fiction, it "render[s] visible . . . what remains hidden or mysterious"

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and its "power arises from the satisfaction or thrill of seeing" (24). Further, although it is widely acknowledged that Victorian pornography was produced by and for men,[6] a woman with Braddon's background might well have been aware of the existence of visual pornography. Her contemporary Henry James commented, "She knows much that ladies are not accustomed to know . . . the talk natural to a crowd of fast men at supper, when there are no ladies present but Miss Braddon" (115–16). As a sensation writer, Braddon is a woman not only knowledgeable about the moral underworld, but also actively participating in – trafficking as a writer – the world of sexual matters forbidden to respectable women.

The ubiquitous literary portrait of the Victorian era may reflect a new middle ground between verbal pornography and the new visual emerging photographic genre.[7] Moreover, increasing levels of literacy meant that written pornography was accessible to a wider portion of the population. Annette Kuhn notes the ways class and literacy affected the production and circulation of different kinds of pornography: "When the term pornography first came into use, virtually the only medium in which representations could be reproduced in very large numbers was print. The printed word demands literacy, and not everyone was able to read. As a written medium, pornography was consequently limited as to the audience it could reach, and seems to have been something of a gentleman's pastime" (24).[8] Braddon cultivates the appeal of pornography and widens its distribution through her best seller at the same time she circumvents censorship with a verbal portrait. The verbal portrait, then, may be a transitional medium, paving the way for the ensuing visual media. A precursor to the modern magazine centerfold, the literary portrait may function as a site of scopophilic pleasure, the locus of erotic desire and power. Through its substitutions, Braddon's portrait functions as a typical visual and sexual fetish, which incites (or excites) but may or may not deliver specifically what it promises. There has been no penetration of the portrait's subject, of her physical person or her character. The reader is not surprised to hear that Lucy loves no one, that she has no interest in men or infidelity, because the text says little or nothing about *her* sexual desire, typical of male-oriented pornography.[9]

Since the novel's gazers are two men, and what stands behind the fetish is the phallus, it is not surprising to find it a screen for the homosocial. Freud claims that:

> [a]version from the real female genitals, which is never lacking in any fetishist, also remains as an indelible stigma of the repression that has taken place. One can now see what the fetish achieves and how it is enabled to persist. It remains a token of triumph over the threat of castration and a safeguard against it; it also saves the fetishist from being a homosexual by endowing women with the attribute which makes them acceptable as sexual objects. ("Fetishism" 200)

The fetish thus both forges and obscures the bond between the two men, which eventually will be mediated by Robert's purportedly heterosexual fascination with Clara Talboys, who possesses the same brown eyes Robert admires in her brother – another fetishized displacement, as her eyes substitute for George's. In one of the several Sedgwickian readings of the Robert-George-Clara triangle, Greg Howard claims that "Clara effectively triangulates what could be a disrupting site of homosexual love and allows Robert to assume his rightful place as a gentleman and a barrister" (40). And, as Richard Nemesvari notes, Robert's homophobia "finds . . . resolution . . . in the figure of George's sister" (523).[10] Such "resolution," however, is essentially spurious because the true nature of desire is denied. While the text insists that Lucy is the threat, the fears she elicits produce evasive displacements

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which nevertheless disclose masculine and/or patriarchal fears. As the fetish itself, the literary portrait accomplishes a displacement of sexuality from a threatening heterosexual connection to woman to an unthreatening substitution for that contact. Thus, while Braddon reveals the powerlessness of Victorian women subordinated by the male gaze, she also exposes the dissimulation of those Victorian men who create empty fantasies, unable to confront the real objects of their desires and the true nature of their fears.

The portrait fulfills the "atavistic" function of a fetish as, repeatedly and ritualistically, the text warns of Lady Audley and her "smile of fatal beauty" (217; vol. 2, ch. 7). The portrait unmistakably associates Lucy Audley with menace and deadly evil – she is the classic femme fatale. The completed portrait fulfills the warning latent in the earlier description:

> The picture was finished now, and hung in the post of honour opposite the window, amidst Claudes, Poussins, and Wouvermans, whose less brilliant hues were killed by the vivid colouring of the modern artist. The bright face looked out of that tangled glitter of golden hair, in which the Pre-Raphaelites delight, with a mocking smile, as Robert paused for a moment to glance at the well-remembered picture. (215; vol. 2, ch. 7)

Yet the "mocking" femme fatale is ultimately empty; she is a construction of the artist and the viewer/reader, a screen onto which traits are projected. The "secret" that Robert Audley and the text seek to discover, thus, is more of a catalyst, an impetus, than a destination. Lady Audley's real character traits remain obscure and are subordinated to emphasize the fiendish evil hinted at by her physiognomy and the decadent style of painting.

Lucy is not only generally but almost literally a femme fatale in her attempts at murdering both George and Robert, though they are both successful in thwarting her efforts. Yet her greatest threat is actually to none of the three individual male characters but to Audley Court itself and patriarchal succession to such estates.[11] Through a highly symbolic dream, Robert visually articulates his fear of this threat, imagining Lady Audley as a mermaid – that dangerous siren of female sexuality:

> [H]e saw Audley Court, rooted up from amidst the green pastures and the shady hedgerows of Essex, standing bare and unprotected upon that desolate northern shore, threatened by the rapid rising of a boisterous sea, whose waves seemed gathering upward to descend and crush the house he loved. As the hurrying waves rolled nearer and nearer to the stately mansion, the sleeper saw a pale, starry face looking out of the silvery foam, and knew that it was my lady, transformed into a mermaid, beckoning his uncle to destruction. (246; vol. 2, ch. 9)

While the estate is seemingly "unprotected" and vulnerable to waves of sexuality that threaten to "crush" the house, the tradition of male authority, of patriarchy, is much stronger than any threat posed by female seduction. As typical in the literary treatment of the femme fatale, the actual threat is of less consequence than the fear aroused. Robert's dream therefore concludes with the reassurance that, as the waves, "slowly, very slowly, receded," Audley Court is "safe and firmly rooted on the shore" (246; vol. 2, ch. 9). The true threat is located in Robert's psyche, in his unconscious, in his own sexual and economic fears. His fears, moreover, are not merely personal but culturally representative as the sensation novel reveals threats to patriarchal authority and social class hegemony. The class most fearful of and vulnerable

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to the incursion of unsavory upstarts and marginal elements is that comprising the novel's primary readership: the middle class.

The predominant detail fetishized in the portrait and in the previous and subsequent descriptions of Lady Audley is her blonde curly hair, an element of major significance for any economic and sexual analysis. Elisabeth Gitter argues that the Victorians were particularly ambivalent about blonde hair because of its association with gold or money: "In her more sinister incarnation, [the golden-haired woman] uses it for sexual entrapment and destruction," and that golden hair is most sinister when a woman uses it "for her own pleasure or profit" (946).[12] Lucy, in fact, not only entraps men with her blonde beauty but, in a kind of marital prostitution, she also exchanges her golden hair for the literal gold of material possessions, as implied in her calculated but frank response to Sir Michael Audley's proposal. Lucy Audley's sexual enticement and menacing threat are always foregrounded against a backdrop of fetishized objects, described in the verbal representation of the unfinished portrait as "each accessory of the minutely-painted background" (71; vol. 2, ch. 8), a juxtaposition that may function in different ways for male and female readers. It warns men of the economic depletion she exacts (also a sexual depletion), and it warns female readers not only of the moral cost of such material acquisition but also the possible loss of subjectivity. A woman who barters her beauty could become merely an object among objects.

The book lingers nevertheless over the sensual fetishized depictions to emphasize the special appeal of her sexuality when framed by the material possessions that she collects and that she herself represents. The specific goods that are represented – her suggestive sable furs and the cast-off clothing evocative of the female body (its warmth and scent) – as well as the invaginated "secret passage" to her boudoir comprise a collection of erotic fragments, typical of the fetish. Sexual features, in particular, are segregated from the whole woman's body. Thus, the fetishized portrait seems to encourage the (male) viewer to satisfaction at the same time the narrator criticizes (via the embedded critique of the artist) the process of social construction. The sexualization of the gaze also suggests an explanation for the curiously childlike and sexless nature of the protagonist: Braddon thus emphasizes that her sexuality is projected onto Lady Audley, as previously suggested by the ways George Talboys and Robert Audley react to her portrait early in the novel, a process or transfer accomplished by the fetish.

The most aestheticized and fetishized descriptions of Lucy present her in the form of a painting within her boudoir. Chiara Briganti describes Lady Audley's "luxurious apartments within Audley Court" as a "totally fetishized world" (201). In a descriptive passage in the chapter where she plots to burn Robert Audley and Luke Marks in their beds at Castle Inn, she is again depicted as the subject of a painting:

> If Mr. Holman Hunt could have peeped into the pretty boudoir, I think the picture would have been photographed upon his brain to be reproduced by-and-by upon a bishop's half-length for the glorification of the Pre-Raphaelite brotherhood. My lady in that half-recumbent attitude, with her elbow resting on one knee, and her perfect chin supported by her hand, the rich folds of drapery falling away in long undulating lines from the exquisite outline of her figure, and the luminous rose-coloured firelight enveloping her in a soft haze, only broken by the golden glitter of her yellow hair. Beautiful in herself, but made bewilderingly beautiful by the gorgeous surroundings which adorn the shrine of her loveliness. (294–95; vol. 2, ch. 13)

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This passage shows the degree to which photography has entered the cultural consciousness by the 1860s as a major form of visual representation: photography now provides an inscription on the brain, providing a metaphor for memory; the metaphor for this would have been "etched" in the century before photography. Photography is here presented, metaphorically, as an intermediate medium, an intermediary between the peeping, voyeuristic artist's own perception of a "real" subject and his eventual rendering in paint. The fetishized portrait thus invites entry into a private space, conflating – and purportedly satisfying – sexual and consumer desires. Haynie associates this visual voyeurism with a middle-class incursion into upper class estates, "Like Luke Marks, the reader can creep into Lady Audley's boudoir and fondle her clothes and jewels" (65). Luke himself, however, is one of those unsavory upstarts from the working class most feared by Lady Audley because he is closest to her own class background; it is thus fitting that he stumbles upon the secret information that can betray the legitimacy of her ascension to a higher class.

Most accessible to middle class readers, verbal portraits might provide a stimulus to Victorians' repressed desire for both physical titillation and for the fetishized luxurious goods associated with Lucy. In her study of photography and realism, Nancy Armstrong observes that "[f]iction could not have taken the pictorial turn to the extent or in the way it did, were its readership not already hungry for certain kinds of visual information" (8). Always placed among an abundance of costly but unnecessary goods, the verbal portrait, like a modern advertisement, tantalizes without satisfaction, and uses a sexual image to sell. What is offered for sale is not the goods described, however. The desire for the goods has already been instilled; this desire is harnessed to sell the medium, the book itself, just as the modern centerfold sells the magazine.[13]

By featuring the verbal representation of a painted portrait, Braddon may be alluding to a new kind of female Pre-Raphaelitism. An art historian, Prettejohn speculates that Pre-Raphaelite women artists may have wanted to promulgate "images of powerful women, in opposition to the prevailing taste of the earlier Victorian period for minikin and dainty heroines" (84).[14] A painting that illustrates this trend around the same period as *Lady Audley's Secret* is Joanna Mary Boyce's *Elgiva* (1855), a historical subject. This portrait of the Anglo-Saxon aristocrat who was branded and sent into exile in Ireland was praised by John Ruskin and Ford Madox Brown. Boyce's portrait exemplifies one of the Pre-Raphaelite "heroic female figures from English history who comment inevitably on the contemporary debate on the role of women" (Marsh and Nunn, eds. 112).[15] Prettejohn notes that

> [i]n the 1860s many artists, both male and female, began to make pictures of single female figures, largely divested of narrative context, and displaying enigmatic psychological complexity along with voluptuous or majestic facial features and figures. . . . [T]his kind of picture has ordinarily been presented as a male category, revelling in the sensuality of the new figure types or demonising women by presenting them as temptresses and *femmes fatales*. But the pictures of Boyce and other women in the 1850s suggest that the category can be read in more complex ways. (84)

Marginalized by writing as a sensationalist in the male-dominated marketplace of Victorian fiction, Braddon is in a similar position to the women who were part of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. (Significantly, Dickens, the most celebrated male Victorian novelist, launched moralistic attacks on both sensation fiction and Pre-Raphaelite art while at the same time reading novels by Braddon and Wilkie Collins with pleasure.)

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These forms of art are important not only for their subject matter, however, but also for the kind of "reading" or interpretation they may encourage. Although the portrait of Lady Audley described in the novel is presumably painted by a male Pre-Raphaelite, the *verbal* portrait is created by a woman writer. Lady Audley's portrait demonizes her as a femme fatale for male gazers, but the novel problematizes this depiction, like the "more complex" readings Prettejohn describes, as the narrator emphasizes that Lucy is constructed by the painter of her portrait and that her portrait is viewed differently by various gazers. If two male characters (Robert and George) react individually to Lady Audley's painting, the portrait would presumedly be perceived differently by male and female readers/gazers. Pykett argues that sensation fiction, Braddon's in particular, "often use[s] a woman-to-woman address" (*Improper* 32). Despite – and beyond – the voyeuristic appeal of the portrait for male gazers, then, it may "speak" differently to women. Victorian women readers might very well recognize the complex (particularly economic) motivations for Lucy's immoral and criminal acts. Certainly Lady Audley's character is perceived differently by the female gaze of women characters in the novel – her maid Phoebe knows her secrets and Alicia Audley jealously discovers that she is only a "wax-doll" – (56; vol. 1, ch. 7) though the male characters, most notably Robert Audley, can only fantasize about domination and control of her beauty.

The Pre-Raphaelite women artists were in a similarly knowledgeable position as they played multiple roles in relation to the Brotherhood: models, consorts, sisters, and wives – several were artists themselves. Most notably perhaps, the poet Christina Rossetti modeled for her brother. Her sonnet "In an Artist's Studio" presents a similar but more explicit critique than Braddon's as she exposes the predatory nature of the male artist whose gaze "feeds upon [the] face" of his model "by day and night" (l. 9). The painter (presumably her brother Dante Gabriel Rossetti) presents his subject variously as a "queen," a "nameless girl," a "saint, an angel" (ll. 5–7), but is oblivious to the real identity of the model, his eventual wife, Elizabeth Siddal (or Siddall), herself an artist and poet.[16] The distorting and reductive consequence of the fetishized male gaze to the actual woman "found . . . hidden just behind those screens" (l. 3) is clearly perceived and articulated by the poem's narrator: "every canvass means / The same one meaning, neither more nor less" (ll. 7–8) – and even more so by posthumous readers, knowing of Siddal's tragic death by self-administered laudanum at age thirty-three. Rossetti's depiction, however, differs from Braddon's as she refuses to display or fetishize her subject for the male gaze.

Descendants of the female Pre-Raphelites also implicitly criticized the male gaze as they cultivated alternatives to the fetishized image of women cultivated by the brotherhood. Evelyn de Morgan's *Portrait of Jane Morris* (c. 1904), for example, presents an unusual variant on the ubiquitous Pre-Raphaelite model, painting her after her russet tresses turned grey, pulled back into a sedate coif. Visual and ekphrastic verbal portraits suggest that women see differently because their gaze is informed by the process of identification (rooted in the sameness of shared sexual identity) and the first-hand knowledge of women's position within patriarchy. Braddon's examples of the female gaze create a prescient parallel to the situation of the Pre-Raphaelite sisterhood and their insight into women's position. Her portrait exhibits a fetististic representation for male titillation. As her protagonist Lucy, then, Braddon knowingly exploits male sexual desire with an economic motive. Yet her treatment also critiques social construction.

Women readers are also placed in the ambivalent cultural position inhabited by women Pre-Raphaelite artists: the ambiguity of the sensation genre allows them to choose to identify

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with Lucy or to condemn her, or to react differently at various points in the novel. Female readers are offered the role of "spectator," a role usually gendered male, at the same time they may identify with the female character's role of "submission" – ultimately a "contradictory process . . . which opens a space for oppositional readings and the subversion of dominant discourses" (Pykett, *Improper* 79–80). Moreover, as a genre of mass culture, sensation fiction is overdetermined. A novel like *Lady Audley's Secret* provides multiple sources of appeal. The exhibition of material goods and affluent lifestyle, the sexual display of Lucy, the revelation of domestic crimes, and the final moralizing containment of the female protagonist all may have affected its reception and effected its popularity. Contemporary readers very likely "consumed" the novel individually and variously, influenced by their social class, sex, and personal experience. Further, the ideology promoted by a text may not necessarily be equated with the effect it produces on readers. Cvetkovich points out that "mass culture can be subversive, but it can also be conservative. Or it can be both simultaneously, producing, in other words, multiple and unpredictable effects" (42).

A major difference that sets Braddon's portrait and this sensation novel apart from more realistic Victorian novels is the superficial characterization of her female characters: most notably, they provide few hints about the actual character of Lucy beyond her characterization as a femme fatale.[17] The portrait does not function primarily to describe Lucy physically; her angelic appearance has already been amply detailed through verbal description much earlier in the text, a passage devoid of criticism of the painter/gazer (6). Not surprisingly, Henry James described Lucy Audley as a "non-entity";[18] the narrator provides no omniscient knowledge of her thoughts (in contrast to the knowing depiction of Robert's). The narrator only speculates, unflatteringly, on her thought process and motives. Her character is not a complete void, however; Lucy herself provides some direct (mostly economic) explanations for her actions. Yet the inscrutability of her presentation makes a statement nevertheless about the obstructive strength of social construction. Lucy is an object lesson rather than the idealized heroine one might find in a novel by Charles Dickens or one of the more fully developed, realistic characters created by George Eliot or Elizabeth Gaskell.

Several mirrors in the novel also provide instructive "portraits" of Lucy: mirrors emulate the portrait, not only as they evoke the gaze, but also as they mirror what the portrait depicts. Their resemblance to the ubiquitous portrait suggests an alternative to the male gaze/female object. A major difference between the portrait and the mirrors in her boudoir is that the mirror facilitates self-gazing, an image that elides the unequal power balance of the male gaze and that replaces the fetish with narcissism. Phoebe describes Lucy's room as "all pictures and gilding, and great looking-glasses that stretch from the ceiling to the floor" (27; vol. 1, ch. 3). As Lucy gazes at herself in the mirror, the novel presents the protagonist's narcissism, a gaze and an identity that subvert the male construction. If, as Natalie Schroeder argues, "vanity is the source" of Lucy Audley's "unfeminine strength" (90), then through her self-gazing in the privacy of her boudoir, Lucy attempts to refuse the male gaze and to replace the image of herself imposed by gazer in the portrait. A painting by Pre-Raphaelite Emma Sandys, *Preparing for the Ball* (1867), portrays an opulently dressed woman in this same mirrored self-gazing. Although the painting postdates *Lady Audley's Secret*, it resembles Braddon's scenario in that the woman's gaze is self-engaged – her eyes are averted and refuse to meet the viewer's gaze (see *Preparing for the Ball*, Marsh and Nunn, eds. 96). In Braddon's novel, the mirror resembles the portrait, but it presents a potentially fluctuating

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image and the possibility of growth or change. In the mirror, Lucy could be a subject with some measure of control over her representation.

Because the narrator cannot penetrate Lucy's consciousness, the presentation of what Lucy sees in the mirror, however, is highly speculative:

> Perhaps in that retrospective reverie she recalled the early time in which she had first looked in the glass and discovered that she was beautiful: that fatal early time in which she had first begun to look upon her loveliness as a right divine, a boundless possession which was to be a set-off against all girlish short-comings, a counter-balance of every youthful sin. Did she remember the day in which that fairy dower of beauty had first taught her to be selfish and cruel, indifferent to the joys and sorrows of others, coldhearted and capricious, greedy of admiration, exacting and tyrannical, with that petty woman's tyranny which is the worst of despotisms? (296–97; vol. 2, ch. 13)

The passage first suggests that her beauty has been "fatal" to Lucy's morality – the cause of her corruption. Paradoxically, in sexualizing her "girlish" features the male gazers alleviate their own anxiety and create a temptation for her to trade on her "dower" of beauty. The passage thus comments on the corrupting power of the construction of women, described previously in relation to the portrait as the painter's "influence [that] brought out new lines and new expressions never seen in it before" (71; vol. 1, ch. 8). The narrative description of her "reverie" depicts her fall from girlishness, from the innocence of her "fairy dower of beauty." The mirrored reflection also provokes a realization about the power of the gaze: that she can exploit the sexualization of the male gaze, that there is a perverse power she can exert in revenge for what is taken from her.

Yet, at the same time, the passage goes on to counterpoint descriptions of extreme, unfair governments – tyranny, despotism, divine rights – with the smallness of feminine wiles, her "fairy dower" and her "petty" rule. Although it asserts that women's tyranny is "the worst," the actual depictions of its youthful ephemerality and pettiness undermine the passage's explicit assertion. Just prior to her departure from Audley Court, Lucy looks in her "cheval-glass" and reflects, according to the narrator, that "[t]he days were gone in which her enemies could have branded her with white-hot irons, and burned away the loveliness. . . . Whatever they did to her, they must leave her her beauty" (373; vol. 3, ch. 5). But the end of the novel reveals that Lucy has been misled because her beauty has no currency, no exchange value, when she is confined to a Brussels madhouse. A reflective representation similar to the portrait, the mirror communicates the projected nature of her image. Both the mirror and the gaze are media that might seem neutral, and they are ultimately empty, perhaps even more than the fetish or the displacements presented elsewhere in the novel. Yet the mirrors reinforce the effect demonstrated by the portrait: woman's significance is constructed in the process of reflection or being looked upon. The source of her power is located in the English society that both grants and limits women's power in exchange for the desire their beauty elicits.

Braddon's "feminist" presentation of Lucy – which critiques the Victorian construction of women through providing women readers with an exposé and a cautionary tale rather than a role model or a solution to gender oppression – is reinforced by her pervasive emphasis on mirroring and mirrors. Throughout the novel, Lucy is surrounded by images of mirrors and reflecting surfaces – most notably the chamber at the madhouse in Brussels, a

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nightmare parody of her fairy boudoir, decorated with polished surfaces which she "mistook for costly mirrors, but which were in reality wretched mockeries of burnished tin" (389; vol. 3, ch. 6). While the decor of the suite in the madhouse seems to reflect, with moralistic poetic justice, the failure of the newly-named Madame Taylor to be able to exploit her beauty in this final setting, it is important to remember that her quarters have been arranged by Robert. The image of the boudoir mirrors the social situation in which Lucy finds herself. Her punishment reflects, quite literally, Robert's agency and his construction of her: the madhouse accommodations he arranges for her are a dark image of the boudoir Sir Michael provided at Audley Court. The prevalence of mirrors therefore ultimately reflects the dominance of the male gaze under patriarchy – and the consequences of this gaze for the female subject. While a mirror provides Lucy an alternative to the gaze and construction of the static male-authored portrait, it is ultimately ephemeral and passive, ineffective in the current society to do more than reflect the larger status quo.

Lady Audley's Secret depicts a gendered war for power in which Robert Audley ostensibly triumphs, and the threat of the femme fatale is doubly contained at the end as Madame Taylor is locked up in her room of reflecting surfaces. The portrait representing her role as Lady Audley is curtained in the deserted Audley Court (446; vol. 3, ch. 10), protecting future potential gazers. This aspect of the ending represents the conventional moralizing of Braddon's sensation novel. Some feminist critics assume the novel thus makes a "pessimistic statement about marriage and the fate of women who try to exercise their strength for their own ends" (Schroeder 91). As Tromp, Gilbert, and Haynie note, however, there is often a discrepancy between the "normative Victorian standards" asserted in the "closing moments" of Braddon's novels and "the resistance depicted throughout the novels as a whole" (xvii). Nemesvari argues that throughout most of the novel, Lucy named herself; her shifting identity "indicates a protean talent for escaping the constraints of a society which attempts to restrict women's social movement and definition" (517). However, the person locked up at the novel's end, Madame Taylor, is named by Robert and is totally his fabrication. He appropriates her strategy of naming herself through aliases and exploits his patriarchal legal authority to eliminate her subjectivity and her freedom.

At the same time, the end of the novel also reveals that, contrary to her master's instructions, the "grim old housekeeper" admits "inquisitive visitors" to Audley Court, and "people admire my lady's rooms, and ask many questions about the pretty, fair-haired woman, who died abroad" (446; vol. 3, ch. 10). Briganti views this epilogue as a restoration of the status quo: "Her place has been restored: as a pretty, fair-haired woman, she is the angel of Audley Court. On the one hand, this passage suggests the hollowness of the ideal of the Angel in the House: this ideal is so close to an easily assumed mask that in spite of all that has passed a criminal can still be taken for an Angel" (206–07). The highly ambiguous ending would also seem to romanticize Lady Audley and her mysterious death since its agents (particularly Robert Audley) are unnamed. On the other hand, the housekeeper's disobedience and the curiosity of the "inquisitive visitors" (probably mostly women) nevertheless suggest an undercurrent of social resistance and rebellion.[19] The final description of Audley Court thus concludes with a woman's act of rebellion, using the insurgent form of the sensation genre to hint at Victorian feminism, an underside of the mainstream society.

Patrick Brantlinger characterizes the novel's genre as parodic: "sensation novels seize upon and exaggerate the reductive properties that are already present in serious fiction" (27).

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If viewed as parody, however, the novel's ending does much more than simply exaggerate. While seeming to emulate the moralistic conclusions of Victorian novels (particularly those which punish or contain women protagonists), its ambiguity suggestively "writes beyond" complaisant morality.[20] Recent critics find that Braddon's ideology defies easy categorization: she is "both a radical and a conservative. . .a more complex and shifting entity than these labels would allow" (Pykett, "Afterword" 280). A further complication with the novel's ideology, and that of sensation fiction in general, is that we lack detailed evidence about how it was actually perceived by contemporary readers. Professional critics and competitors with a vested interest in the literary status quo (such as Charles Dickens [see Note 4]) condemned such fictions for the moral corruption it disclosed and the cheap thrills it provided. Ironically, while it was generally believed that sensation fiction was most "inflammatory to the behaviour and morals . . . of women and the working class," a medical journal in 1863 "came to the conclusion that young ladies would not be harmed" by reading sensation fiction (Carnell 211, 210).

Although the novel's ending is ambiguous, in Lady Audley's portrait and in her fate the novel provides a case study of the social construction of nineteenth-century English women. It is true that Braddon provides no positive role models, but her treatment is feminist in protesting the status quo and in providing an instructive exposé. Her treatment depicts a society where women are fetishized and constructed to the point that they are indistinguishable from commodities, valued primarily for their looks, or used as place fillers to mediate the homosocial relations between and among patriarchs. Masculine fetishists enjoy looking at Lucy, as Robert and George take pleasure in viewing her portrait, but this gaze obscures the perception of an actual subject and renders nugatory her subjectivity. That her maid Phoebe, with a little rouge and hair dye, could fill her place (and experiences a similar financial motivation for marriage) demonstrates the extremity – and peril – of Victorian social construction.

Furthermore, through the literary portrait, the male gaze itself is solicited only to be anatomized; it is revealed to be narcissistic, since what it fetishizes and eroticizes is its own construction. The woman who dies in a madhouse – successively identified as Helen Maldon, Helen Talboys, Lucy Graham, Lucy Audley, Lady Audley, or Madame Taylor – is comprised of multiple assumed and fabricated identities. The novel never reveals the self beneath the hair and clothing that characterize Lucy. The portrait functions in the same way as the erotic fetish which is always fragmentary and a substitution for something larger and more complete. The fetish may facilitate sexual desire and accomplish its end, but it is a substitution for possession of – much less connection with – the full subject that should be its true object. What remains at Audley Court is a portrait behind a curtain, a fetishistic substitution for the real thing: a fully developed protagonist, a depiction of a complex flesh-and-blood Victorian woman, that the novel never provides.

The femme fatale and Pre-Raphaelite vision of femininity authored by a woman writer are, however, portrayed as male representations of male-constructed threats. The self-satisfied complacency of the voyeuristic detective and Victorian patriarch, Robert Audley, is nevertheless exposed. Like the myopic (male) consumer seduced by the guilty titillations of sensationalism, Robert fails to see the solipsistic nature of his desire and the impalpable nature of his satisfactions. The curtained portrait is a figure for the novel's ideological statement. The excesses of the sensation novel present a statement writ large, but obscured by Victorian social myopia that hinders perception of other, more liberatory, constructions

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of gender. The feminist, futuristic potential of women's self-construction is nevertheless implied: if women's roles are constructed, they may also be constructed differently. For the discriminating Victorian (and contemporary) readers, a critique of fetishistic desire, of sexual hegemony, and empty consumerism is exhibited as prominently as Lady Audley's portrait before its final shrouding.

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NOTES

1. The binarism of Mulvey's assertion, presented in a classic essay first published in 1975, has been since problematized by film theorists, including herself. Ironically, both Freud's and Mulvey's gendered assertions are also challenged by pre-Freudian, precinematic Victorian novels with female artists, such as Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* or Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall,* which present active women characters who inscribe their own desire through their artworks.
2. Carnell provides evidence that as an adolescent, Braddon was strongly "affected" by reading *Jane Eyre* and that it "brought about a new phase of juvenilia" (90).
3. Earlier studies, however, also theorized connections between the sensation genre and its ideology. In 1980, for example, Hughes asserts that the sensation novel "provid[ed] a racy alternative vision, which struck at the roots of Victorian anxieties and otherwise unacknowledged concerns" (5). Two years later, while concerned primarily with the sensation novel as a "forbear of modern detective fiction" (3), Brantlinger nevertheless comments that sensation novels interrogate "virtue and domesticity . . . at least by implication" (5).
4. According to Nunn, Pre-Raphaelite women artists received even more blatantly moralistic criticism than their male counterparts: "Women's art was already the prime target of prejudiced criticism and trivialisation, and the earliest Pre-Raphaelite exhibits were dismissed by the *Times* as extravagances which disgraced the walls of the Academy and described by Charles Dickens to his readers as 'mean, odious, repulsive and revolting'" (60).
5. Brewer finds that Braddon not only identifies the painting as Pre-Raphaelite but herself utilizes Pre-Raphaelite "literary technique" (1). Montwieler goes further to find "the portrait's debt to the Pre-Raphaelites as a mark of Lucy's erotic power" (50).
6. See, for example, Marcus: "That pornography is almost entirely written by men and for men was demonstrated to me by a reading of one or two of the few works of pornographic fiction known definitely to be written by women. In these stories, there is no focus or concentration upon organs; much more attention is paid to the emotions, and there is a good deal of contemplation, conscious reverie, and self-observation" (281, note).
7. Archival research provides evidence that photography may have had an impact on visual pornography during this era. Heath reports that a "full-scale commerce of images rapidly developed" (110). In her history of erotic photography, Solomon-Godeau claims that "pornographic photographs were produced almost from the medium's inception" (222). Marcus describes the work of an English photographer Henry Hayler whose "operations" were interrupted in 1874 by a police raid which seized 130,248 obscene photographs and 5,000 stereoscopic slides (67, note). Pearsall argues that "When photography became a commercial proposition early in the reign [of Victoria], its potentialities were immediately seen by the traders in pornography, and obscene photographs were produced by the hundred thousand" (xii).
8. Kuhn states that "Porn did of course exist in visual media as well: but paintings and drawings also found a numerically small and socially exclusive market. Engravings and broadsheets, which did not

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call for literacy, were rather more widely circulated, but were still by no means a mass medium. Developments in techniques of mechanical reproduction of photographic images and consequently in the capacity to produce large quantities cheaply opened up limitless horizons for pornographers" (24–25).

9 Critics have noted that if Lucy has erotic impulses, they are oriented homosexually toward Phoebe, her maid, or perhaps narcissistically toward herself. See, for example, Schroeder 91–92.

10. Since my focus in on masculine fetishization of the female portrait, in this essay I have not pursued the Sedgwickian line of argument, which comprises nevertheless a major vein of criticism on the novel. Petch, for example, emphasizes the "fiduciary relationship with Robert" and Clara's role in a homosocial triangle (9). Or as Hart explains, "Clara appears as a *deus ex machina* to rescue endangered heterosexuality . . . Clara is nothing more than a patent copy of her brother" (8). In a Marxist interpretation of the triangle, Cvetkovich claims that Clara is "the medium of exchange that allows for the culmination of the relation between men" (59).

11. This point is also made by Petch, who points out that Robert is the "heir-presumptive" (10) and by Nemesvari, who explains that Robert prevents Lucy from producing a child by preemptively "exposing [her] crimes" (525).

12. The curliness may also be suggestive. Pearsall reports that pubic hair was among one of the "centers of interest" for pornographic writers, and cites many examples of Victorian verbal pornography which focus on the "sweet graceful curl." See especially "The Curl" (61).

13. Montwieler argues that "Lady Audley represents the woman of advertisements" (49) and that the novel provides an object lesson in social mobility through the model of Helen Maldon. And "[i]t is in Braddon's interest to invest energy in detailing commodities, since sensation novels themselves were as much commodities" as those items described in the novel (43).

14 Some Pre-Raphaelite women were more explicitly feminist. Prettejohn notes that women associated with the "Brotherhood" – not just the women who painted, but also those who were associated with the group as family members (sisters and daughters) and/or who served as models, – were also active political feminists in "the campaigns for women's legal rights, and the formation of Girton College in Cambridge" (79). And Nunn explains that "the first female Pre-Raphaelites were seen as part of the 'strong-minded' generation which formed the women's rights movement of the mid-century and made woman's role a talking-point in all classes" (59).

15. This portrait, according to Prettejohn, "reinterprets the subject" previously depicted as a "victim" by John Millais as a now "dignified and saintly heroine" (67–68).

16. Ironically, another woman who modeled for D. G. Rossetti, Ruth Herbert, played the role of Lucy in one of the many stage adaptations of *Lady Audley's Secret* in the 1860s (Carnell 196–97).

17. Braddon moved toward more realistic characterization later in her career: in 1913she acknowledged that "[r]eaders . . . like to see character evolve as events move" (qtd. in Carnell 224).

18. James also notes that while Lucy seems to lack "a heart, a soul, a reason" that her physical features, and the commodities which surround her, are "lavishly bestowed" (113).

19. As Pykett describes the ideological import of this scene "the curtain which hangs before the portrait is at once a shroud which hides the improper feminine from the society whose equilibrium it has threatened, and also a veil which tantalisingly conceals and maintains the improper feminine's alluring mystery. Thus, even after her death, Lady Audley remains as a disturbing presence" (*Improper* 93).

20. In her groundbreaking *Writing Beyond the Ending*, DuPlessis argues that strong women protagonists in Victorian novels nevertheless end their rebellion conventionally in marriage or death; it was not until the twentieth century that writers could envision other endings for transgressive women characters (see Chapter 1, "Endings and Contradictions," 1–19). While DuPlessis exposes a striking truth about the novel in literary history, her focus is on twentieth-century literature. More nuanced readings of nineteenth-century texts suggest an undercurrent of Victorian resistant feminism, reacting against patriarchy.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1060150307051583 Published online by Cambridge University Press

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