

LADY AUDLEY'S SECRET



PART I

Context;
Narrative and Concealment;
Madness

DISAGREEABLE SENSATIONS

She may boast...of having temporarily succeeded in making the literature of the Kitchen the favourite reading of the Drawing room.

(W. F. Rae, 'Sensation Novelists', 1865)

Excitement, and excitement alone, seems to be the great end at which they aim...And as excitement, even when harmless in kind, cannot be continually produced without becoming morbid in degree, works of this class manifest themselves as belonging...to the morbid phenomena of literature.

(Henry L. Mansel, 'Sensation Novels', 1862)





GOTHIC & UNCANNY TROPES

“A very dim and shadowy lady, vague of outline, and faint of coloring, with eyes, hair, complexion and dress all melting into such pale and uncertain shades that, in the obscure light of the foggy November morning a superstitious stranger might have mistaken the bride for the ghost of some other bride, dead and buried in the vault below the church.”
(vol.I, ch.XV)

FRAGMENTS AND CIRCUMSTANTIAL EVIDENCE



[VALMORE GAZING AT LADY AUDLEY'S PICTURE.]

- “‘And now listen, Phoebe. What I want you to do is very simple.’ It was so simple that it was told in five minutes, and then Lady Audley retired into her bed-room.” (vol. I, ch.VII)



[LADY AUDLEY RECEIVES A TELEGRAPHIC MESSAGE.]

- “If any one could at that moment have told the young barrister that so simple a thing as his cousin's brief letter would one day come to be a link in that terrible chain of evidence afterward to be slowly forged in the only criminal case in which he was ever to be concerned, perhaps Mr. Robert Audley would have lifted his eyebrows a little higher than usual.” (vol. I, ch.VII)

“A fierce and crimson sunset. The mullioned windows and twinkling lattices are all ablaze with the red glory; the fading light flickers upon the leaves of the limes in the long avenue, and changes the still fish-pond into a sheet of burnished copper; even into those dim recesses of brier and brushwood, amidst which the old well is hidden, the crimson brightness penetrates in fitful flashes till the dank weeds and the rusty iron wheel and broken woodwork seem as if they were flecked with blood.”
(Vol.I, ch.II)

“The old well must have been half choked up with the leaves that drifted about it, and whirled in eddy circles into its black, broken mouth.” (vol. I, Ch. XIV)



PRE-RAPHELITE PORTRAITS

“Lucy was better loved and more admired than the baronet's daughter. That very childishness had a charm which few could resist. The innocence and candor of an infant beamed in Lady Audley's fair face, and shone out of her large and liquid blue eyes. The rosy lips, the delicate nose, the profusion of fair ringlets, all contributed to preserve to her beauty the character of extreme youth and freshness.”
(vol. I, ch.VII)



MADNESS: ANOTHER SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION

“Mental illness...remained imprecise in its meaning and was often confused with madness; a phenomenon interpreted as the infringement of the natural and moral laws.”

(Hachaichi, 90)

“Robert never relaxed his scrutiny of that pale face,”
“She shall look at me [...] I will make her meet my eyes, and I will read her as I have read her before. She shall know how useless her artifices are with me”

(vol. II, ch.VII)

“An unnatural luster gleamed in her great blue eyes. She spoke with an unnatural rapidity. She had altogether the appearance and manner of a person who has yielded to the dominant influence of some overpowering excitement. Phoebe Marks stared at her late mistress in mute bewilderment. She began to fear that my lady was going mad.” (Vol.III, ch.I)





“there is no evidence of madness in anything that she has done. She ran away from her home, because her home was not a pleasant one, and she left in the hope of finding a better. There is no madness in that. She committed the crime of bigamy, because by that crime she obtained fortune and position. There is no madness there. When she found herself in a desperate position, she did not grow desperate. She employed intelligent means, and she carried out a conspiracy which required coolness and deliberation in its execution. There is no madness in that.”

“I do not think any jury in England would accept the plea of insanity in such a case as this”.

“as a physiologist and as an honest man, I believe you could do no better service to society than by doing this; for physiology is a lie if the woman I saw ten minutes ago is a woman to be trusted at large. If she could have sprung at my throat and strangled me with her little hands, as I sat talking to her just now, she would have done it.”

(vol.III, ch.V)



“physicians and lawyers are the confessors of this prosaic nineteenth century”

“He looked like a man who could have carried, safely locked in his passionless breast, the secrets of a nation, and who would have suffered no inconvenience from the weight of such a burden.”

PART II

Madness and Identity;
Queer Crimes;
Gothic Topographies

LADY AUDLEY'S SECRET



LONDON: J. & R. MAXWELL

MADNESS AND IDENTITY

Monomania:

“moral insanity”, signified by “a *partial lesion* of the intelligence, or the will, or the passions”

[Quoting Pinel] “It is of little consequence *pathologically* speaking, whether true monomaniacs exist or not, it is otherwise when we examine the question in its relations to jurisprudence...that the doctrine merits a serious examination.”

- ‘On Monomania’ from the *Journal of Psychological Medicine and Mental Pathology* (1856).





"Lucy! tell me that this man is a madman!"

'suppose that a man commits a murder, and from the utter apparent absence of motive and other circumstances, the question arises as to his sanity. The opponents of the monomania theory examine him. After the most careful investigation, they can detect no present error of the *intellect*, nor any past evidence save the *crime itself*; he is therefore pronounced sane and *criminal*. Supporters of the theory of monomania recognise as an element in their calculations the possibility of a blind impulsive fury arising in an otherwise sane mind, without clear warning, and transitory in its nature, passing away with the completion of the act, leaving no trace. The absence of past or present intellectual disorder does not necessarily prove that he was sane at the time of the completion of the crime; and he is not pronounced criminal until after a careful inquiry into all his antecedents, his hereditary tendencies, and his general physiological condition.'

- 'On Monomania' from the *Journal of Psychological Medicine and Mental Pathology* (1856).

"Lady Audley's real secret is that she is *sane*," (Showalter, 167)



"Lucy! tell me that this man is a madman!"

“He looks at a common event with a vision that is diseased, and he distorts it into a gloomy horror engendered of his own monomania.”

(Vol. II, Ch. XII)

“He bought the *Times* newspaper, and looked instinctively at the second column, with a morbid interest in the advertisements of people missing—sons, brothers, and husbands who had left their homes, never to return or to be heard of more.

There was one advertisement of a young man found drowned somewhere on the Lambeth shore.

What if that should have been George's fate?”

(Vol. I, ch. XIII)

QUEERING CRIME, NATION, AND EMPIRE

Robert “inhabits the interstices of conflicting ideology, where his dandyish performances are contested by the ideal of an unselfconscious middle-class gentleman. His position illustrates the emergence of the newly defined gentleman who [...] pushed the dandy into a marginal “social space that Victorian discourse typically reserv[ed] for the feminine” (Heinrich, 104)

“In *Lady Audley’s Secret*, Robert Audley seemingly transfers his desire for George onto the latter’s sister Clara, ostensibly resolving homoerotic tension into heterosexual conformity. Nevertheless, the men’s friendship remains crucially strong. In fact, their attachment to each other is integral to the final success of their relationships with women – and George’s relationship with his own son – instead of being in aggressive competition with it. (Forman, 420)



Still from the 2000 TV adaptation

GOTHIC TOPOGRAPHIES

“Considering that landscape is, essentially, a cultural artifact, it is not surprising that it plays a central role in the overall meaning of Gothic works. Disordered landscapes in the Gothic represent the chaos of a culture in transition, or the violence of passions seething beneath the veneer of civilized society. Gothic landscapes are a lens by which cultures reflect back their darkness hidden from the light of consciousness.”

(Healey and Yang, 5)



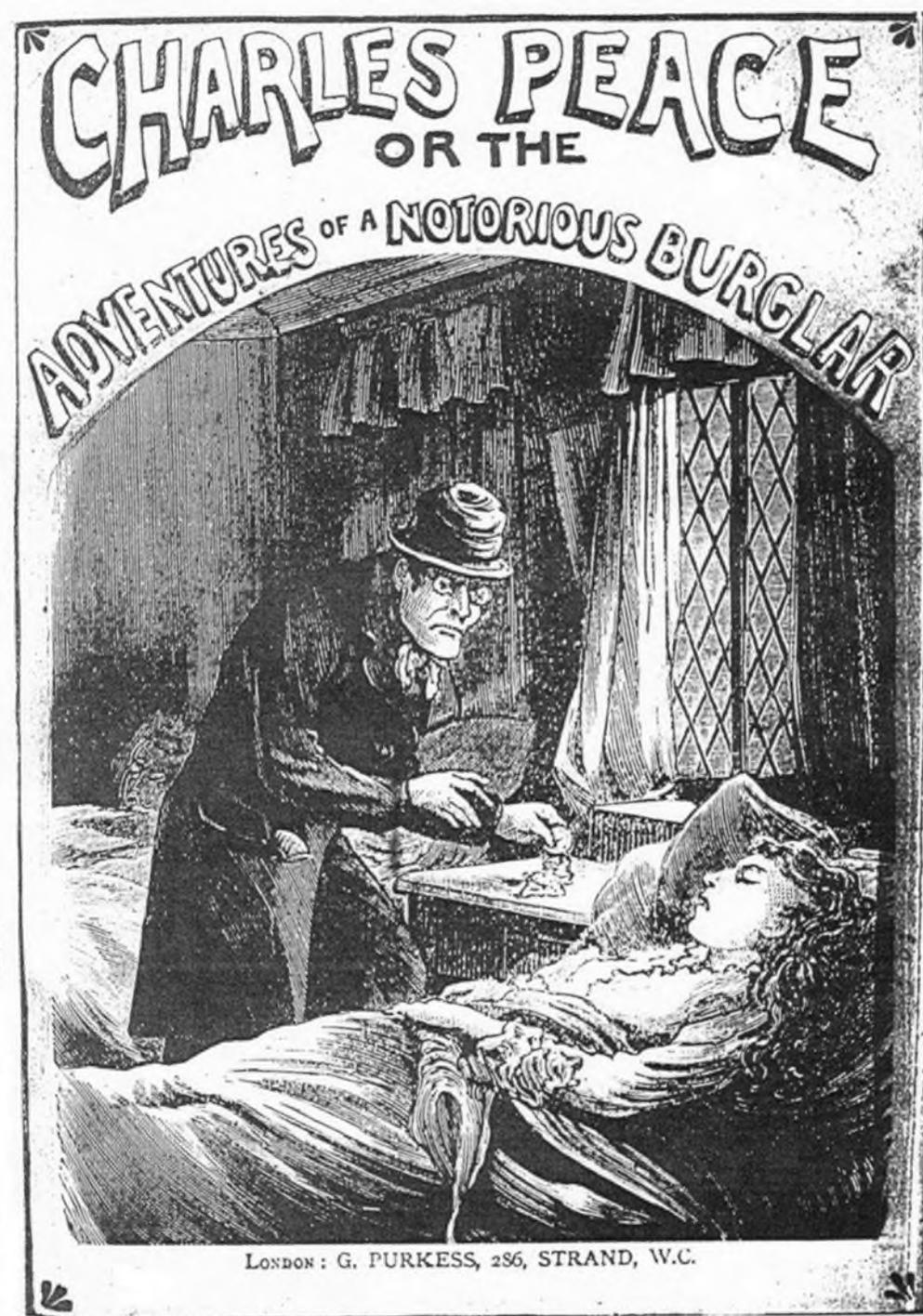
GOTHIC TOPOGRAPHIES

:“How astonished she’d be if some black-visored burglar, with a dark lantern, were to raise the floor some night as she sat before her looking-glass, having her hair dressed for a party!”

(vol. I, ch VIII)

“even in these civilized days all kinds of unsuspected horrors are constantly committed”

(vol. I, ch VIII)



GOTHIC TOPOGRAPHIES



“Mr. Maldon had established his slovenly household gods in one of those dreary thoroughfares which speculative builders love to raise upon some miserable fragment of waste ground hanging to the skirts of a prosperous town. Brigsome's Terrace was, perhaps, one of the **most dismal blocks of building** that was ever composed of brick and mortar since the first mason plied his trowel and the first architect drew his plan. The builder who had speculated in the **ten dreary eight-roomed prison-houses had hung himself behind the parlor door of an adjacent tavern while the carcasses were yet unfinished.** The man who had bought the brick and **mortar skeletons** had gone through the bankruptcy court while the paper-hangers were still busy in Brigsome's Terrace, and had whitewashed his ceilings and himself simultaneously. Ill luck and insolvency clung to the wretched habitations. The bailiff and the broker's man were as well known as the butcher and the baker to the noisy children who played upon the **waste ground** in front of the parlor windows. Solvent tenants were disturbed at unhallowed hours by the noise of ghostly furniture vans creeping stealthily away in the moonless night. Insolvent tenants openly defied the collector of the water-rate from their ten-roomed strongholds, and existed for weeks without any visible means of procuring that necessary fluid.”

(Vol.II, ch.II)

“[u]niversally available escape-route: black sheep could be lost in it; ruined or misunderstood heroes could go out and return with fortunes; the weak of every kind could be transferred to it, to make a new life...characters whose destinies could not be worked out with the system as given were simply put on the boat, a simpler way of resolving the conflict between ethic and experience than any radical questioning of the ethic.”

(Williams qtd in McAleavey, 115-6)



Madhouses are large and only too numerous; yet surely it is strange they are not larger, when we think of how many helpless wretches must beat their brains against this hopeless persistency of the orderly outward world, as compared with the storm and tempest, the riot and confusion within—when we remember how many minds must tremble upon the narrow boundary between reason and unreason, mad to-day and sane to-morrow, mad yesterday and sane to-day.

(vol.II, ch.VI)

Monsieur Val opened the outer door of a stately suite of apartments [...] a dismal and cellar-like darkness; a saloon furnished with gloomy velvet draperies, and with a certain funereal splendor which is not peculiarly conducive to the elevation of the spirits; and a bed-chamber, containing a bed so wondrously made, as to appear to have no opening whatever in its coverings, unless the counterpane had been split asunder with a pen-knife.

My lady stared dismally round at the range of rooms, which looked dreary enough in the wan light of a single wax-candle. This solitary flame, pale and ghost-like in itself, was multiplied by paler phantoms of its ghostliness, which glimmered everywhere about the rooms; in the shadowy depths of the polished floors and wainscot, or the window-panes, in the looking-glasses, or in those great expanses of glimmering something which adorned the rooms, and which my lady mistook for costly mirrors, but which were in reality wretched mockeries of burnished tin.

(vol.III, ch.VI)



- Anon. 'On Monomania' *Journal of Psychological Medicine and Mental Pathology*, 9:4, (1856) 501-521.
- Badowska, Eva. "On the Track of Things: Sensation and Modernity in Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret*." *Victorian Literature and Culture*, vol. 37, no. 1, 2009, pp. 157–175., doi:10.1017/S106015030909010X.
- Bauer, Gero. *Houses, Secrets, and the Closet: Locating Masculinities from the Gothic Novel to Henry James*. Transcript Verlag, 2016.
- Boyd, Nolan. "Queercrip Temporality and the Representation of Disability in *Lady Audley's Secret*." *Journal of Literary & Cultural Disability Studies*, vol. 12 no. 4, 2018, p. 407-422.
- Forman, Ross G. "Queer sensation." *A Companion to Sensation Fiction*, edited by Pamela K. Gilbert, Cambridge, 2011: 414-29.
- Foucault, Michel. *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* [1961], trans. Richard Howard. Taylor & Francis, 2006.
- Grass, Sean. "Lady Audley's Portrait: Textuality, Gender, and Power." *The Commodification of Identity in Victorian Narrative: Autobiography, Sensation, and the Literary Marketplace*, Cambridge University Press, 2019, pp. 105–125.
- Hachaichi, Ihsen. "'There is sex in mind': scientific determinism and the woman question in *Lady Audley's Secret*." *Brno Studies in English*, vol.38, no.1 (2012): 87-102.
- Heinrichs, Rachel. "Critical Masculinities in *Lady Audley's Secret*." *Victorian Review*, vol. 33, no. 1, 2007, pp. 103–120. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/27793628.
- Jacob, Priyanka Anne. "The Pocket-book and the Pigeon-hole: *Lady Audley's Secret* and the Files of Victorian Fiction." *Victorian Studies* 61.3 (2019): 371-394.
- Kungl, Carla T. "The Secret of My Mother's Madness": Mary Elizabeth Braddon and Gothic Instability." *Demons of the Body and Mind: Essays on Disability in Gothic Literature* (2010): 170-180.
- Kushnier, Jennifer S. "Educating Boys To Be Queer: Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret*." *Victorian Literature and Culture*, vol. 30, no. 1, 2002, pp. 61–75., doi:10.1017/S1060150302301049.

- McAleavey, Maia. "Colonial return: Pendennis and Lady Audley's Secret." *The Bigamy Plot: Sensation and Convention in the Victorian Novel*. Vol. 100. Cambridge University Press, 2015.
- Leighton, Mary Elizabeth, and Lisa SurrIDGE. "Illustrating the Sensation Novel." *The Cambridge Companion to Sensation Fiction*, edited by Andrew Mangham, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2013, pp. 34–51.
- Luckhurst, Roger. "Gothic Colonies, 1850–1920." *The Gothic World*, edited by Glennis Byron and Dale Townshend. Routledge, 2014, pp.62-71.
- O'Malley, Patrick R. "Domestic Gothic: Unveiling Lady Audley's Secret." *Catholicism, Sexual Deviance, and Victorian Gothic Culture*, Cambridge University Press, 2006, pp. 103–129.
- Martin, Daniel. "Railway Fatigue and the Coming-of-Age Narrative in "Lady Audley's Secret"." *Victorian Review* 34.1 (2008): 131-153.
- Pedlar, Valerie. *'The Most Dreadful Visitation': Male Madness in Victorian Fiction*. Liverpool University Press, 2006.
- Schroeder, Natalie. "Feminine sensationalism, eroticism, and self-assertion: ME Braddon and Ouida." *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 7.1 (1988): 87-103.
- Sims, Rachel A. "Insanity and the Doppelgänger in Wilkie Collins' The Woman in White and Mary Elizabeth Braddon's Lady Audley's Secret." *Schizo: The Liberatory Potential of Madness*, edited by Irina Lyubchenko and Fiona Ann Papps, Brill, 2015. 135-144.
- Sparks, Tabitha. "To the Mad-House Born: The Ethics of Exteriority in Lady Audley's Secret." *New Perspectives on Mary Elizabeth Braddon*. Brill Rodopi, 2012. 17-35.
- Showalter, Elaine. "Desperate Remedies-sensation Novels of the 1860s." *Victorian Newsletter* 49 (1976): 1-5.
- Yang S.R., Healey K. (eds.) "Introduction: Haunted Landscapes and Fearful Spaces—Expanding Views on the Geography of the Gothic". *Gothic Landscapes*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2016.