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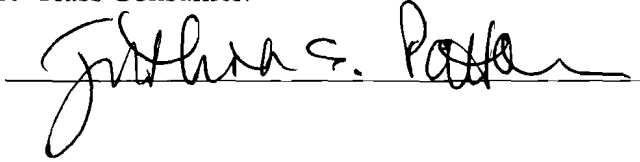
Abstract Approved: 

In her first two major novels, *Lady Audley's Secret* and *Aurora Floyd*, Victorian sensation novelist Mary Elizabeth Braddon demystifies the taste of the Victorian upper class for her primarily female middle-class readers. In so doing, she provides access to the upper-class lifestyle in such a way that her readers could emulate that taste in their own lives. Braddon examines fashion, interior decorating, leisure activities, reading material, the mystique of land ownership, and the value of appearing to be of established wealth rather than one of the *nouveau riche*. These two novels serve as guidebooks for the emerging middle-class, status-conscious Victorian consumer seeking to appropriate the upper-class ideal for her own.

Window Shopping: *Lady Audley's Secret* and *Aurora Floyd* as Guidebooks for the Mid-Victorian Middle-Class Consumer

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The influence of the written word on the development of middle-class femininity in Victorian England has been established by scholars examining a variety of genres. The results of that influence manifest themselves through myriad lenses – gender, economics, class – providing a complex portrait of this period in England's history. Profiling the profound subtleties of Victorian literature is a popular and active segment of scholarship, but I would argue that a purpose of some Victorian literature has been overlooked. The sensation fiction that exploded onto the literary scene mid-century is coming back into vogue for study, passing beneath the traditional lenses of criticism for analysis. While this genre is being mined for material to support hypotheses of women's oppression and class bias, it seems that the surface details and their significance are being overlooked. Sensation fiction, especially in the case of Mary Elizabeth Braddon, arguably the most popular author of that genre, certainly contains subversive references to women's imprisonment in the domestic sphere and addresses issues of sexuality and purpose. However, at the same time that these themes were being buried within the text, authors such as Braddon were overtly providing their primarily upper-middle-class female readership with guides on how to achieve the respectability of the upper class by emulating the look and feel of that lifestyle.

Details of costume and setting are not unusual in nineteenth-century realistic narrative, but the manner in which Braddon dissects the objects in her usually upper-class characters' homes seems designed to provide readers with a catalogue from which to construct their own homes. Braddon not only notes that a dialogue takes place in the

study, she describes the chairs, desk, and the origins of the wall hangings. When she comments on the colors of a female character's gown, she also details the fabric, cut, and at times the dressmaker. Usually published in serial format, Braddon's novels shared space in magazines with advice columns, recipes, and advertisements aimed at the "lady" of the house. This synergy was far from accidental. Letters and comments from Braddon show that she had a keen sense of cultural trends and what her reading public wanted out of her novels, and she successfully and consistently delivered. The burgeoning bourgeois wanted respectability, and emulating the upper classes was the way to achieve it. Through her novels Braddon entered into a conspiracy with her readers in which she supplemented a scintillating plot with detailed snapshots of upper-class life, complete with a source guide for acquiring that lifestyle, making the ambitions of the upper-middle-class woman more attainable.

THE EMERGENCE OF THE MIDDLE CLASS

Defining the middle class of Victorian England is essential to understanding Braddon's influence. Economically the quintessential bourgeois was a capitalist, "either the possessor of capital, or the receiver of an income derived from such a source, or a profit-making entrepreneur, or all of these things" (Hobsbawm, *The Age* 242). Income from the new urban-centered, industrial sources was the defining characteristic of the middle-class economy. The traditional land-based wealth was still reserved for the landed upper class and handed down from generation to generation, while the new businessman took advantage of the opportunities afforded by the Industrial Revolution. Politically the middle class tended towards liberalism in the second half of the nineteenth century. Although politics is a time-consuming endeavor, requiring more specialized

skills than that of business in general, many middle-class businessmen became involved in politics as the century progressed. Especially in the large cities in England, political interests were controlled by "the oligarchy of local businessmen" (Hobsbawm, *The Age* 243). Not necessarily members of the Liberal party, the bourgeoisie at this time believed in capitalism, free enterprise, science, and technology. They believed in progress, a "certain amount" of representative government, and a "certain amount" of civil rights as long as these rights recognized the rule of the law and kept the poor in their place (Hobsbawm, *The Age* 245). They believed in culture rather than religion and that their own lives proved the merits of their beliefs. Socially the generalizations prove more complicated.

The middle class included members from a variety of occupations, provided they were wealthy and established enough to assume respectability: businessmen, property-owners, members of liberal professions (i.e. lawyers, doctors), and the upper ranks of government administration (Hobsbawm 243). Within the middle class, however, lay a division between "upper-middle" and "lower-middle" social status. The upper ranks of the middle class were, of course, generally the wealthier members and the men were employed in the more respectable occupations, such as banking. On the lower end more stratification existed; businessmen drew a line between themselves and the shopkeepers who actually sold goods directly to consumers. For all its internal divisions, the bourgeoisie as a class possessed one major characteristic: "[...] it was a body of persons of power and influence, independent of the power and influence of traditional birth and status" (Hobsbawm, *The Age* 244). This was a class of "self-made" men, a new phenomenon in England. In *The Long Revolution*, an examination of changing culture

and society, Raymond Williams comments on the how this phenomenon became a compromise, appropriating aristocratic tradition to establish its validity. Williams recognizes that the middle class in England began as an independent unit, confident in its domination over the old traditions of the aristocracy, but around the middle of the nineteenth century "the English middle class lost its nerve" and "compromised with the class it had virtually defeated" (319). Unable to shake the cultural traditions of the established class, "the captain of industry provide[d] himself with a family title and status expressing prestige in older terms" (Williams, *The Long* 320). Rather than attempt to remake the world into a bourgeoisie ideal, the Victorian middle class accepted the values of the upper class in the drive for fortune and social stature.

The opportunity to achieve wealth and power was new territory for many Englishmen in the nineteenth century. The pre-industrial models of experience, tradition, wisdom, and morality were no longer adequate guides for navigating the new capitalist, entrepreneurial economy (Hobsbawm, *Industry* 87). Fortunes were made and lost in a single venture, adding a precariousness to the position of the middle-class family. The collapse of the finance house of Overend and Gurney in 1866, bankrupting many, became a symbol of the "fragility of the middle-class way of life and of entrepreneurial capitalism even at its most triumphant" (Beetham 60). For all the risks, however, there was plenty of money to be made. By the 1840s the annual surplus of funds available for investment had reached £60 million and the middle class was afloat with excess capital (Hobsbawm, *Industry* 112). Much of that money was wildly invested in railways and other endeavors, used to construct municipal buildings, or spent on opulent furnishings (Hobsbawm,

Industry 92). It is in the latter expenditure that we begin to see the middle-class Victorian woman's side of the coin.

A successful businessman was expected to possess a house removed from the smoke and toil of urbanity and a devoted, modest wife to make his house a home. Beginning in the 1840s and especially during the economic upswings of the 1860s and 1890s, the upper-middle class left their urban dwellings and escaped to the outskirts of the cities for many of the same reasons Americans do so today: cleaner air, quieter streets, and the status of land ownership (Hobsbawm, *Industry* 157). The "landed interest" had dominated British politics and social life for centuries; to belong to the upper class meant one owned an estate and a seat in Parliament (Hobsbawm, *Industry* 97). Prior to the Industrial Revolution, land was the foundation of society and landlords were symbols of wealth and power, a deep-seated cultural identity that defied the changing social order (Hobsbawm, *Industry* 195-96). Even with other traditions being overturned and discarded in the wake of the new economy, the prestige of being a landowner continued late into the nineteenth century, when the stereotype that "the Englishman is a . . . country squire at heart" gained popularity (Hobsbawm, *Industry* 170).

Land was not the only status symbol the middle classes sought to possess. The widest definition of the middle class was the employment of domestic servants (Hobsbawm, *Industry* 157). By 1861, the total number of male and female servants in England had reached over a million, and middle-class homes usually employed at least one servant (Altick 83). Not only did employment of domestics denote some degree of financial success, it also advertised that the women of the household were not required to

spend all – or, in the case of the quite wealthy, any – of their time tending to the drudgework of creating and maintaining that ideal "haven" of the home. It was a sign of achievement for the male head of the household to reduce the physical activity required by the female members of the family in maintaining the home (Rowbotham 15). Although most middle-class women were still part of the household workforce to varying degrees, they aspired to that aristocratic model of "the smoothly functioning household with its invisible cogs and wheels" (Donald 117). The role of the servant in the upper-middle-class home, then, was to perform her[1] job as unobtrusively as possible. While the upper-middle-class gentleman might see only that his clothes are clean and ready and his breakfast is laid before he leaves for work, and that upon his return supper is ready to serve and his children are bathed and ready for bed, the hours of his absence were a flurry of activity. In households where the gentleman ran his estate from home, housework was carefully controlled to maintain the illusion of tranquility. Not only were there strict rules about which rooms the servants were allowed to enter, but at what times so as to ensure the least disturbance to the master (Donald 117).

It is important for this study to note the role of the perfect servant in the upper-middle-class household because without this workforce the bourgeoisie would not have been free to indulge in the consumerism that defined their class. As Moira Donald notes,

> it was this 'invisible' workforce [...] – the polishers of the silver, the dusters of the pianos, mahogany dining-tables and tallboys, the washerwomen of the damask tablecloths and coarse linens, the blackeners of the hearths and the polishers of the brass doorknobs and fenders – who enabled the nineteenth-century middle classes

[1] By mid-century the majority of household servants were female (Donald 117).

> to inhabit their suburban mansions, to consume and expand their consumption *ad infinitum*. (113)

Being able to afford a servant meant the family had reached a significant level of status and consumption above the working classes, achieving that essential attribute of upper-class life: leisure time.

THE RISE OF A MIDDLE CLASS AMBITION

The England of the nineteenth century was a new world for its citizens. The Industrial Revolution swept through the nation, changing almost every aspect of life, from where people lived to how they earned a living to how they spent their time when they were not working. In the new industrial society, the clock ruled a worker's time rather than the seasons or the weather, and filling the non-working hours was a challenge. The concept of leisure time was familiar to the higher echelons of society, but it was something new to the masses who previously worked in agrarian occupations or small family-based businesses. Eager to identify with the upper class and distance themselves from their working-class roots, the emerging middle class embraced the leisure ideal. Leisure was to be a uniting factor between the middle class and the aristocracy (Beetham 30).

The word itself, "leisure," is a complicated one, accumulating many meanings and changing over the centuries. For the mid-Victorian middle classes, leisure was both an indication of status and a moral dilemma. Under the heading of leisure, the upper-middle class was able to participate in activities previously reserved solely for the enjoyment of the aristocratic class, such as shooting. In 1671 a legislative act had been passed disqualifying all except the landed classes from game hunting, and in 1692 another act

further pronounced that "inferior Tradesmen, Apprentices, and other dissolute Persons neglecting their Trades and Employments" must not "presume to hunt, hawk, fish or fowl" (qtd. in Cunningham 17). Thus the gentry – the landowning, uppermost members of the middle class – were allowed to hunt and shoot along with the aristocracy, emphasizing the solidarity of the two groups and providing the upper-middle class an additional barrier against the lower classes. The infiltration of the aristocracy's leisure world is also further evidence of the wide spread emulation of that lifestyle by the middle classes, although only the wealthiest were able to achieve it in any true form. Still, this gradual assumption of upper-class leisure pursuits benefited both sides; the middle class brought their wealth to the patronage of various activities and in return received the boost in status they craved (Cunningham 132). The moral dilemma of leisure arose from the tradition of thrift and frugality that was giving way to the opulence available to the newly moneyed class.

The old ways of living for the majority of England's residents were destroyed in the boom of the Industrial Revolution, leaving them free to discover new ones, and as the middle, business, class emerged they found a "firm pattern of life waiting for them" in the traditions of the aristocracy (Hobsbawm, *Industry* 82). The aristocracy had already adjusted their economic behavior to the business methods of the new middle class – feudalism was long ceased and reliance instead on a small army of servants and retainers to maintain their affairs was a common practice. Their social predominance was intact, and their political power in the rural areas complete, so they were little affected by the practices revolutionizing how the lower and middle classes went about their business. Aside from seeing their rents rise, the aristocracy continued on with life as they had

known it for generations, a life rooted in power and privilege. That consistency of lifestyle provided members of the new moneyed class with an ideal in their quest for respectability and identity apart from the working classes (Hobsbawm, *Industry* 80-81).

Assimilation into the aristocratic oligarchy was not achievable by all members of the middle class, however. Only those who were very rich and/or occupied in businesses that acquired respectability through tradition – which excluded retail trade and certain kinds of industry – could hope to be granted the status enjoyed by the bluebloods with ancient wealth (Hobsbawm, *Industry* 83; *The Age* 243). In spite – or perhaps because – of the elitism of the upper class, businessmen and their wives increasingly sought to emulate the upper class, eager to leave behind the coarser trappings and traditions of their pre-industrial ancestry. Rather than abide the slow, gradual increase in status through generations of good fortune and shrewd marriages, the new middle class, especially among its upper ranks, sought immediate rise in status by appropriating the upper-class lifestyle. Many of the newly wealthy came from non-Anglican stock and from regions lacking an established aristocratic order, such as the business world of Manchester. Without emotional ties to old traditions of their own, they were eager to acquire the accouterments of the elite and create new traditions to establish their own station in society, for from about 1830 on, the middle class recognized itself as a "class" rather than a "rank" and claimed rights and power of its own (Hobsbawm, *Industry* 83). Scholars of Victorian leisure argue that it was primarily through leisure activities that the middle class proceeded to build a community, using this symbol of status to confirm its own class identity apart from the working classes (Bailey 76). By appropriating the lifestyle

and leisure activities of the upper class and tailoring them to its own desires, the middle class could carve out its own culture.

The burgeoning middle class modeled its material ideals primarily after those of the upper class, admiring its standing in society – if not its traditional values – and seeking to imitate the lifestyle to raise its own status. The money coming in from factory ownership, banking, shipping, mercantile, and other non-wage-earning professions afforded this relatively new class both the means to purchase the products of the Industrial Revolution and a desire to advance their social status. Eager to climb the social ladder and escape the taint of the working class a few generations back, the middle classes eagerly accepted the promises of their modern culture, present in advertisements and the popular press, that one could purchase gentility. Not everyone could afford to mimic the upper class in style and possessions, but even with limited funds the lower-middle class was able to attain ornamental objects for the home. As the availability of objects imitating the upper-class lifestyle increased, deciding what surplus funds were spent on became an important part of the upper-middle-class woman's role in the household. Helping her identify which items would best separate her family from the lower-middle class was the realm of the printed page.

THE PEN IS MIGHTIER . . .

Just as technology improved the production of steel and textiles, so too did it improve the process of printing. The development of cheaper methods of printing, and the repeal of the Stamp Duty in 1836, resulted in a glut of magazines and books vying for the new society's pennies and shillings. Capitalists were quick to recognize the potential for great income, and publishing houses sought to corner the market on various genres:

broadsheets, newspapers, penny fiction, serials, etc. As more and more members of the "popular" class were able to afford reading material, fiction became a touchstone of discussion over the purpose of literature (Williams, *The Long* 167). Reflecting the influence of the Evangelical revival that swept England during the first half of the nineteenth century, fiction was expected to provide entertainment and pleasure for its readers, yet also to instruct and direct. Historians of nineteenth-century England generally agree that Evangelicalism was one of the most significant influences on the character of the Victorians. During the period from about 1800 when the Evangelicals began to gain a significant hold on both the Church and society, and continuing through around 1860 when their numbers began to decline, the Evangelical movement affected almost every area of English life. The piety, prudery, and obsession with proper behavior that we have come to associate with Victorians can be traced to this movement (Bradley 17-18). Although many of the aristocracy professed conversion, especially following the ascension of the devoutly Evangelical Queen Victoria in 1837, it was the middle class that were most affected by the "call to seriousness" (Bradley 51).

Rebelling against the eighteenth-century's "vague" Christianity that relied on logic and legalism, the Evangelicals sought an emotional connection with God and strove to emulate Christ in all their dealings. Emphasis on appropriate behavior is a hallmark of the Evangelical movement, and the many conduct manuals of the first half of the nineteenth century reflect the ideals of its adherents. The frivolous, dissolute lifestyles of the aristocracy were under attack, while the bourgeois values of hard work, plain living, and moral propriety were exalted (Bradley 153). As Raymond Williams identifies in *The Long Revolution*, literature was an important tool in educating the middle classes on the

behaviors appropriate for their emerging professions and stations as well as expressing their anxieties over tenuous fortunes and social positions (64). Early in the nineteenth century, the High Church novel combined storytelling with morality lessons, cautioning its mainly female readers to live a pious, frugal, and chaste life with the ultimate reward of marriage to a handsome young clergyman. By the 1860s, as the Industrial Revolution's second boom led to a golden era of economic stability for the middle and upper classes, the children and grandchildren of the Evangelical movement reached adulthood. Piety began to give way to materialism, and the moral novel of the previous decades was usurped by the lurid plots of the wildly popular "sensation" novel.

The power of print to instruct did not die with the rise of the lurid tales of bigamy and murder found in the sensation novel. Instead, these novels instructed readers in new subjects pertaining to the world in which they now lived. Rather than discuss the trials and triumphs of a pious woman, sensation novels instructed readers on the trials and triumphs of becoming an upper-middle-class woman in mid-Victorian England. To be the woman at home was being redefined as a skilled task in a modern world that stressed literacy and print-based knowledge (Beetham 66). Literacy statistics for the nineteenth century are unreliable at best, but Richard Altick notes in his classic *The English Common Reader* that the middle classes were becoming increasingly literate, as evidenced by the dramatic increase in the production of literature aimed at that class (82). Just as leisure time had become a signifier of femininity, so too did reading. Leisure was the "necessary condition" for the emergence of the novel, allowing for the free time to pursue reading for pleasure (Beetham 10). Reading quickly became identified as an activity engaged in within the privacy of the home, and because the middle-class woman

was the "hub" of the home, she too became identified with reading (Beetham 10). Women's magazines promoted this image, capitalizing on it to create a booming literary industry aimed at upper-middle-class women.

From its inception in the late eighteenth century, the magazine was the genre that addressed "the feminine," and entwined as it was with the novel both genres were heavily identified with "the fair sex" (Beetham 9). Periodicals scholar Margaret Beetham defines the Victorian woman's magazine as offering "not only to pattern the reader's gendered identity, but to address her desire" (Beetham 1). That desire was to establish herself and her household firmly in upper-middle-class respectability. Magazines answered by providing "explicitly bourgeois models of feminine behavior," both addressing and defining the "lady" of the house (Beetham 7). Specifically, magazines featured recipes, dress and embroidery patterns, poetry and prose, and "models of the self" to help create the ideal upper-middle-class woman (Beetham 1). Ignoring the inclusion of recipes for the moment, the majority of material that magazines provided for women's leisure reading was ornamental. The latest fashion plates and embroidery patterns allowed the upper-middle-class woman to present both herself and her home in the height of fashion. The poetry and prose found in the pages of the magazine provided her with what we today might call "light" reading: enough to engage her mind pleasantly, but nothing so complex as to lead her down the unladylike path of a scholar or "bluestocking." The "model of the self" the magazines presented was that of decorative object in her home, not an active part of the world at large, though as a consumer the upper-middle-class woman was an integral part of the new economy.

The fact that magazines were a purchasable product immediately placed many readers in the dual role of reader-consumer. As a commodity, the magazine was available only to those with the necessary levels of literacy, income, and leisure, placing status on the very act of owning a magazine. Already established as a consumer, the reader was then introduced to a variety of other commodities for sale in the pages of the magazine. Advertisers were more than happy to show these women how to attain their desires. Depicting women at leisure, interested in pleasure or beautification, advertisements directed at middle-class women focused on everything except work. As Katherine Montwieler asserts in her discussion of advertising and the middle-class Victorian woman, "working women do not sell products" (46). Even in domestic scenes, women were depicted at leisure, pampering themselves with the product advertised (Montwieler 45-46). Indeed, the middle-class woman's role had shifted to that of director of the family's consumption and that role excluded productive or paid work (Beetham 27). In his book analyzing the rise of leisure in Victorian England, Hugh Cunningham notes that the perfect lady was "part of the leisure class by compulsion," showcasing her husband's wealth through a forced inactivity (131). Even so, she rose to the occasion and appeared to embrace her part in the new economy. The feminine role of providing for the household was increasingly defined as shopping for goods rather than making them, an image perpetuated by magazines full of advice and tips on how the middle-class woman should spend her husband's money and her time (Beetham 8). As defined by the popular magazines, the acceptable "work" for the upper-middle-class woman included music, conversation, embroidery, and reading, in all of which the magazine attempted to provide some instruction (Beetham 30). The definition of work,

then, underwent a shift for the bourgeois woman. She was no longer to spend her time sewing the family's clothing or preparing the meals; her work consisted of providing ornamentation for the home both materially and emotionally. Magazines frequently published embroidery patterns and sheet music alongside the poetry and prose, but such frivolity is not all the periodical provided.

From the beginning, English women's magazines imparted wisdom and advice on all manner of topics, although the summation of the advice was always the adjuration to women to confine themselves to their domestic duties (Beetham 23). The first issue of *The Lady's Museum*, published in 1798, featured an article titled "On the Duties of Women in the Superior Class of Society," in which women were offered three roles: wife, mother and mistress, or "heads of families." The role of wives, claimed the article, was that of consumer, or "the disposal of that part of the husband's revenue which is consumed by the family"; that of mothers to be "responsible for the religion and moral conduct of their children"; and that of mistresses to control the "moral conduct of female domestics" (Beetham 27). Thus, from the dawn of the nineteenth century women were being told by the popular press that they were to concern themselves not with production but with consumption of goods and control of the domestic sphere.

FICTION AS INSTRUCTION MANUAL

Alongside the advice columns and embroidery patterns published in women's magazines ran large amounts of fiction. Beetham's qualitative analysis of one issue of the widely read mid-Victorian *Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine* reveals that of the forty pages printed, sixteen were of poetry and fiction, two were of fashion, and one was of music, indicating a proportionally significant amount of space given over to fiction

(68). Fiction has always been a troublesome genre, especially when connected with the female reader, as it increasingly was. Throughout the nineteenth century the debate raged over what was appropriate reading for females from school-age upward. Fiction was generally deemed inferior to biography, history, and science because it was not "true" and because it dealt with sexuality, however coded, in the form of the romance novel (Beetham 10). While some critics wished to exclude all fiction, deeming it escapism, others advocated reading the "classic" English authors, like William Makepeace Thackeray, Jane Austen, Walter Scott, and Robert Louis Stevenson (Flint 125). It is interesting to note that, in this decades-long debate, some authors and novels previously deemed inappropriate were moved to the acceptable reading list as time passed. Mrs. Henry Wood's *East Lynne* was a scandalous novel upon publication, but twenty years later, Edward G. Salmon, in "What Girls Read" (1886), advocated placing the novel "in every girl's hands as soon as she has arrived at an age when she may find that life has for her unsuspected dangers" (qtd. in Flint 155). No longer a pariah in fiction, *East Lynne* became a morality tale for girls.

In mid-Victorian England the debate over appropriate reading material centered on young women and girls, partially because this group of readers was growing quickly, but largely because the female sex was considered more impressionable and emotional than the male. There was a great anxiety among those who set themselves as the moral arbiters of society that girls would take what they had read and apply it to their own lives, turning themselves into heroines from a sensation novel. This anxiety suggests that women were obtaining more than entertainment from reading; they were using popular literature to learn how to behave in the increasingly materialistic world around them. The

post-Evangelical, materialistic climate allowed a new kind of fiction to enter the popular culture: the sensation novel.

The serial fiction that ran for months at a time in magazines usually focused on a youthful and beautiful heroine, her quest for a happy marriage, and the trials and tribulations on the road to realizing her dream (Beetham 73). Mary Elizabeth Braddon was a master of the style, constructing sensational plots and intriguing characters, and placing the action in the lavish homes of the very wealthy. Her primary female characters often married into the aristocracy, albeit the lower branches, allowing them to become part of that upper echelon of society her readers saw as the pinnacle of their own hopes and dreams. Braddon was remarkably savvy about delivering what her readers coveted through her novels, a quality that made her one of the best-selling authors of the nineteenth century. By providing detailed glimpses into the lives of the upper-class, Braddon enabled her primarily female, middle-class readers to copy the lifestyle they coveted.

CHAPTER 2

BRADDON REDISCOVERED

Scholarship and analysis of Braddon's writings, most notably *Lady Audley's Secret*, began appearing in academic journals as a topic of criticism only within the last twenty years, initially as either another entry into the female canon or in the narrower study of the sensation genre (Tromp et al. xv). Indeed, scholarly and teaching editions of Braddon's works have only appeared in the last fifteen years, beginning with the Oxford World's Classics edition of the now-canonical *Lady Audley's Secret* in 1987 and continuing through the Broadview edition of *Aurora Floyd* in 1998. As Braddon gradually enters the canon and the discussion of literature at large, the initial emphasis on the diversity of her work and importance to the literary history of the latter half of the Victorian era has given way to multiple analyses. Even those who question the legitimacy and significance of Braddon's work provide additional points for examination, signifying the value of her writing. As the editors of *Beyond Sensation: Mary Elizabeth Braddon in Context* – the first major collection of Braddon scholarship, published in 2000 – point out, the complaint that Braddon was too prolific (a criticism once leveled at Charles Dickens) reflects the twentieth-century bias that "less is more" and that "voluminous publication not only discourages the modern reader but probably gives rise to a mild contempt for the author of such excess" (Tromp et al. xvi). That this bias is against Braddon – but no longer against Dickens – generates questions of gender bias, the status of the female author in Victorian England, and issues of women as professionals. Other critics have, ironically, accused Braddon of being "conventional" and concerned with "maintaining Victorian codes of propriety" at the expense of any real inquiry or

censure of the roles imposed on women (Tromp et al. xvii). While it is true that Braddon prefers to resolve her plots with closing scenes of domestic bliss and a return to Victorian mores and norms, such criticism ignores the three hundred pages prior in which Braddon's female heroines (or, in the case of the famous Lady Audley, her villainess) exhibit decidedly transgressive attitudes and behaviors. An accusation of "conventionality" only serves to galvanize the increasing majority of critics who view Braddon's novels as subversive commentaries that "call into question notions of gendered identity and the domestic order" (Tromp et al. xvii). The paradox of conventionality and rebellion is one that Braddon struggles with, especially in her first two novels, and one which critics must acknowledge to gain a real understanding of her work.

Inquiries into Braddon's work are most often linked to feminist critiques of the "cult of domesticity" and women's roles in Victorian society. In the above-mentioned collection of essays, *Beyond Sensation*, only those examining Braddon's publication schedules and distribution were *not* concerned with how the author observed and exposed the undercurrent of female disquiet among her contemporaries. The recent interest in Braddon has produced "an active scholarship of literary and cultural critics and historians," whose interests offer a variety of lenses with which to examine Braddon, such as economics, sexuality, madness, art, identity, imperialism, canonicity, social policies, publication history, theater, and law – "explorations that attest to the complexity of her work and the importance it has in our study of the period" (Tromp et al. xvii). Utilizing the many critical approaches at their disposal, scholars have drawn upon the complexity of Braddon's works to underscore the theme of women's oppression,

however subtly it is represented. Although these approaches provide a deeper understanding of what scholars see as Braddon's attempt to make women's voices heard, I would argue that she has another goal in mind that is equally important to our understanding of the period.

The British class system was in a state of flux at mid-century as the middle classes continued to grow and become politically and socially vocal. As I have already examined, the newly leisured class sought to imitate and even appropriate the lifestyle of the upper class, further blurring the lines between them. The desire to achieve the taste of the elite stems from a tradition of classification by the dominant (upper) class that considers that taste to be the highest or "legitimate taste." In *Distinction*, his important work examining how taste is acquired and produced in and by society, Pierre Bourdieu argues that taste is "a classification system constituted by the conditionings associated with a condition situated in determinate position in the structure of different conditions [...] with this world of ranked and ranking objects which help to define it by enabling it to specify and so realize itself" (231). In other words, taste is a constructed, self-conscious system of classification, a product that Bourdieu concludes is a "quasi-miraculous correspondence [...] between the products offered by a field of production and the field of socially produced tastes" (231). He separates these "socially produced tastes" into three categories: legitimate or high-brow, which prefers high art and is associated with higher education levels and the dominant class; middle-brow, which brings together minor works of the major arts and the major works of the minor arts; and popular or low-brow, which admires "so-called 'light' music or classical music devalued by popularization" and is associated with lower levels of education and the "masses"

(Bourdieu 16). Middle-class taste in Victorian England was still developing at the time Braddon began her literary career, and her novels can be seen as an entrance into the discussion of that acquisition of taste.

Bourdieu recognizes the "competition for luxury goods, emblems of 'class'" as part of the "struggle to impose the dominant principle of domination" by "maximizing the distinctive profit of exclusive possessions" (232). Braddon uses her fiction to reveal not only the identity of those "exclusive possessions," but how they were used and, often, where they were acquired, for the benefit of her middle-class audience. In so doing, Braddon demystifies the "legitimate" taste as reflected by the dominant, upper class and provides entry points for her readers to appropriate that taste for themselves. After all, as Bourdieu points out, the upper-class taste demands that, for example, a night out at the theater become "an occasion for conspicuous spending" (270). The public display of taste and leisure is transformed into a symbol of status in which the participants carefully choose "the most expensive seats in the most expensive theaters," choosing the theater that is "marked with all the signs of 'quality' and guaranteeing no 'unpleasant surprises' or 'lapses of taste'" (Bourdieu 270). No avant-garde theater experiences for them: they prefer the "playwright who knows his job," "a past master" who presents comfortable "questions that everyone asks themselves" and stays away from controversial or provocative issues (Bourdieu 270). Braddon identifies the upper-class taste for the comfortable, the traditional, and the expensive as desirable for the emerging middle class, using her novels to further idealize that taste while providing the knowledge of how to acquire it in an era of shifting class stratification.

It would be a mistake to assume that the Victorian middle class exhibited solely conservative, traditional tendencies, however. Lyn Pykett – whose influential 1992 study of sensation novels, *The Improper Feminine: The Women's Sensation Novel and the New Woman Writing,* provoked a reexamination of Victorian popular fiction in the 1990s – argues that "the conservative/radical dilemma" expressed in these novels for mass consumption, the compromises Raymond Williams identified, is now the "big question" facing scholars of nineteenth-century cultural history. Pykett illustrates the paradox arising from contemporary approaches to Victorian popular authors by concluding that "Braddon is both a radical and a conservative, and . . . she is neither" (qtd. in Liggins and Duffy xvi). Elaine Showalter, one of the first feminist critics to analyze the Victorian sensation novel in terms of its potentially subversive content, argued as early as the 1970s that this genre was a vehicle for "feminine protest," although ultimately "the sensationalists could not bring themselves to undertake a radical inquiry into the role of women" (qtd. in Liggins and Duffy xvi). Examination of the subversive in female writing of the Victorian era quickly came into vogue, although critics such as Ann Cvetkovich complained that all popular texts, newly rediscovered gold mines of material that they are, were being indiscriminately celebrated as "a voice for female subjectivity" and latent radicalism (qtd. in Liggins and Duffy xvi). It is by acknowledging the radical *and* the conservative, argue these critics, including Emma Liggins and Daniel Duffy, editors of *Feminist Readings of Victorian Popular Texts*, that a clearer picture of Victorian popular culture emerges.

After 1840, publishers established a market for literature, turning reading into a consumer-oriented activity. Women became increasingly identified with popular culture

texts in the nineteenth century, whereas men were associated with the "high-culture novel" (Liggins and Duffy xix). The typical readers, reviewers of popular fiction assumed, were "young, sexually ignorant middle-class" women, prone to identification with the supposedly transgressive characters and appropriating the lives of fictional heroines for their own (Liggins and Duffy xx-xxi). Acts of appropriation and acquisition were not unfamiliar to the middle class, of course. In her essay examining the work of Ellen (Mrs. Henry) Wood, Deborah Wynne identifies the "philistine imagination" that emerged in the pages of Wood's novels, "offering spectacular accounts of clothes, trinkets, and furniture, catering to the fantasies of readers who dreamed of participating in the burgeoning consumer culture of mid-Victorian Britain" (90). The same statement can be applied to Braddon's works; she, too, presented readers with her view of the "spectacular" homes of upper-class Britons, fueling the fantasies of those who aspired to imitate that lifestyle by exposing the "exclusive possessions" Bourdieu identifies as "emblems of class" (232). Braddon's efforts to provide access to the tastes of the upper class are at once conservative and radical: she presents the traditional view that the upper-class taste is to be admired, yet she demonstrates that in the age of mass production the middle-class woman can obtain that taste for her own refinement and her family's social advancement. This study concerns itself with how that knowledge and appropriation of taste is manifest in Braddon's first two major works: *Lady Audley's Secret* and *Aurora Floyd.*

MARY ELIZABETH BRADDON: COMMERCIAL AUTHOR

Mary Elizabeth Braddon was one of Victorian England's most prolific authors, writing over eighty novels and a large number of articles and short stories, and editing

Belgravia magazine for a decade. By the late 1880s her publishers could boast that she had "43 novels always in print"; at the turn of the century the *World* called her "the Queen of the circulating libraries" and the *Daily Telegraph* dubbed her "the queen of living English novelists" (qtd. in Willis). England was not her sole realm of influence, however. In the late 1880s *The Academy* commented that "you would travel far before you reached the zone where the name of Braddon failed of its recognition" (qtd. in Willis). She was the most serialized author in late-nineteenth-century Australia, boasting the publication of twenty novels in major Australian periodicals between 1872 and 1895. By contrast, her closest rival was Wilkie Collins, who had only nine novels appear in those periodicals during that same time period (Johnson-Woods 113). Braddon's popularity extended to the island of Japan where transplanted Australian Henry Black translated at least one of her novels (*Flower and Weed*) into Japanese in 1885, as well as Charles Dickens's *Oliver Twist*. Both novels were seen as early warnings about the evils of child labor and the exploitation of young women in Japan's then-unregulated textile factories, implying that Braddon was relevant no matter where she was read (McArthur).

Her phenomenal success around the world is largely attributed to Braddon's sensitivity to the commercial demands of the market and her awareness of what her reading public desired. In a December 1864 letter to her mentor, novelist Edward Bulwer-Lytton, Braddon irreverently described her latest novel, *Sir Jasper's Tenant*, as "all the old sort of thing – mystery – and murder & so on – written with a view to the popular market" (qtd. in Willis). Her desire to sell large quantities of her work was constantly at war with her desire to create something great, as she revealed in another letter to Bulwer-Lytton: "[I am] always divided between a noble desire to attain

something like excellence – and a very ignoble wish to earn plenty of money" (qtd. in Willis).

Braddon's desire for "plenty of money" sprang from the need to support her mother who had been left penniless by her father, an unfaithful husband who was professionally unsuccessful. In what remains the definitive biography of Mary Elizabeth Braddon, *Sensational Victorian*, Robert Lee Wolff explores the events that shaped the life of the best-selling author. Born in October of 1835, Braddon was the youngest child of Henry and Fanny Braddon. Fanny was Irish, the daughter of Patrick White from County Limerick. When she wed Henry, she was to have a settlement of three hundred pounds per year, but only a fraction of that money ever materialized. Henry, a solicitor, possessed "good abilities, good connections, and a popular manner," according to Braddon, and might have done quite well for his family (qtd. in Wolff 23-24). Braddon did not explain precisely how her "Papa" was a failure professionally, simply saying he was "his own enemy" (Wolff 22). On the failure of the marriage, however, she had no doubt. After her mother's death Braddon discovered "those sordid letters which tell the humiliating story of a husband's infidelity" preserved among her mother's papers (Wolff 25).

Following the demise of her parents' marriage when she was five years old, Braddon remained with her mother, with whom she led a "modest, respectable life" (Skilton ix). Recognizing the qualities of an entertainer, Fanny held "musical ambitions" for her daughter – a decidedly immodest aspiration that certainly deserves further examination in another forum – but it was on the theatrical stage that Braddon first attempted to earn her living (Skilton ix). In 1857, under the stage-name "Mary Seyton,"

the 22-year-old Braddon began performing onstage in Yorkshire. Without a husband and father to provide for the family, Braddon took on the mantle of provider herself (Skilton ix). Live performance was not her strong suit, however, and her stage career was to be short-lived. Braddon had begun writing in 1856, but continued acting until 1860 when she quit to pursue a full-time career as an author and published her first novel, *Three Times Dead* (Skilton ix).

Braddon modeled her first novel after two of the most successful authors of the day, saying in a later interview that she aimed to "combine, as far as [her] powers allowed, the human interest and genial humour of Dickens with the plot-weaving of G.W.M. Reynolds" (qtd. in Wolff 81). It is significant that Braddon chose to imitate the styles of two male authors, if simply as a commentary on the role of female authors at this point. Women writers such as novelist Charlotte M. Yonge and conduct-manual matron Sarah Stickney Ellis were employed in producing domestic and didactic texts, carefully maintaining their separate sphere of influence. The sensation novel is what allowed the female author to explore the themes of violence, murder, and crime with something of the freedom allowed her male counterparts.

Despite her attempt to capture the popular styles of the inimitable Dickens and the melodramatic Reynolds, *Three Times Dead* did not sell well initially. Braddon then had the good fortune to meet London publisher John Maxwell, who was later to become her lover and eventually her husband. Maxwell was an "inveterate founder of magazines," launching at least eight titles from 1858-1866, although only *Belgravia*, edited by Braddon for its first decade, enjoyed long-term success under his ownership (Sutherland 423). His magazines catered to the middle class, and primarily to women, publishing a

miscellany of articles and relying heavily on serialized fiction to fill in their often scantily illustrated pages (Sutherland 423, 549). Under Maxwell's guidance Braddon revised *Three Times Dead*, cutting it by 10,000 words to fit the format of the currently popular two-shilling railway novel. "Railway fiction" had appeared to meet the demands of a new market: the railway traveler. Beginning in the 1840s, various publishing firms issued cheap reprints of previously serialized or "triple-decker" novels in single editions, and by the 1860s bookstalls were a staple of the British railway system, especially in London (Sutherland 519). Catering to the newly mobile middle class, the railway outlet allowed authors greater exposure to the reading public than they received through the circulating library, leading to an increase in profit as well. Indeed, Braddon's mentor, Edward Bulwer-Lytton, was tremendously popular with the traveling public by the mid-1850s, receiving "an unprecedented 20,000 from Routledge [publishers of the 'Railway Library'] for the lease of all his thirty-five copyrights" (Sutherland 519). Maxwell's advice that Braddon relaunch her literary career in this market proved sound: republished as *The Trail of the Serpent*, her novel sold 1,000 copies within a week of publication (Willis). With that lesson under her belt, Braddon moved on to *Lady Audley's Secret*, the book that was to launch her into fame and fortune.

Lady Audley's Secret was published first as a serial in Maxwell's *Robin Goodfellow*, a weekly sixpenny magazine, beginning in July 1861 (Skilton x). *Robin Goodfellow* was Maxwell's attempt to recoup and revitalize his failed weekly, *The Welcome Guest*, which was published 1858-61 and ran Maxwell a loss of about £2,000 (Sutherland 423). At a cost of sixpence, *Robin Goodfellow* aimed firmly at a growing segment of the middle-class audience who could afford a modest weekly expenditure (of

both money and time) on reading material. Unfortunately, *Robin Goodfellow* fared worse than its predecessor: the magazine folded at the end of September 1861, and Braddon assumed that was the end of the fair-haired but villainous and controversial Lady Audley and her secret (Skilton x). She began work on a new serial, this time thumbing her nose at tradition with a dark-haired, rebellious but ultimately redeemable protagonist. *Aurora Floyd* was published in another Maxwell sixpenny magazine, *Temple Bar*, from January 1862-January 1863 (Sutherland 33). Shortly after Aurora's story began appearing, a new magazine expressed interest in continuing the story of Lady Audley, and in 1862, Braddon found herself responsible for producing installments of two serials simultaneously (Skilton x). Such proliferation would become a hallmark of Braddon's career. Rare was the time when she was not writing at least one novel, and she often had two or more novels both in production and in serialization contemporaneously. Examining Braddon's publication in provincial newspapers during the period 1873 to 1901, Jennifer Carnell and Graham Law uncover a complex schedule of production and publication that is more than adequate to result in the twenty-five novels Braddon wrote during this period, in addition to short stories, articles, and other miscellany (128-29). Writing again to Bulwer-Lytton, a rather harried Braddon commented that she had written the third and a portion of the second volumes of "Lady A." in less than two weeks (qtd. in Willis). Despite the interrupted and hurried writing of *Lady Audley's Secret*, it was a decided improvement over Braddon's first novel in both style and popularity. After its serial run, *Lady Audley's Secret* was published as a three-volume novel; it ran to nine editions in the first three months (Willis).

At the same time the one-two punch of *Lady Audley's Secret* and *Aurora Floyd* was winning Braddon popularity and wealth, she was attempting to live a quiet life. She desired to make "ignoble amounts of money" to ensure her own and her mother's middle-class standard of living, joining the thousands of other members of the English middle class who were clinging to the appearance of respectability (Skilton ix). Although the mid-Victorian upper-middle class enjoyed stability of fortune and position, the largest segment of the middle class still experienced the anxieties of reversals of fortune and of acquiring the "proper social behavior" befitting their new social status (Wynne 95). Insecurities about genteel appearances and attempts to put distance between themselves and the working class made this segment of society ripe for satire in the pages of *Punch*, for example, but authors such as Mrs. Henry Wood and Braddon recognized these insecurities and attempted to alleviate them by revealing the inner workings of high society for the benefit of their readers. Acquiring the knowledge to present the appearance of gentility was increasingly important to the middle classes. And it was a matter of appearances for Braddon, as well as her readers, in 1861: not only was she supporting her mother, she was also living with her publisher, John Maxwell.

Maxwell's wife was alive, but confined to a madhouse, so he and Braddon could not marry. Braddon lived with him as his wife, but they attempted to keep their relationship quiet until the birth of their first child in March of 1862 shattered all pretence. Hoping to prevent public attack, Maxwell quietly published reports of his "marriage" to Braddon in 1864, but the ruse was quickly discovered (Tromp et al. xxi). Their unmarried status inspired moral outrage in her contemporaries, most notably reviewer (and prolific novelist) Margaret Oliphant, who suggested upon reviewing *Lady*

Audley's Secret that Braddon has "brought in a reign of bigamy . . . and it is an invention that could only have been possible to an Englishwoman knowing the attraction of impropriety, and yet loving the shelter of the law" (qtd. in Tromp et al. xxi). Despite the criticism leveled at their dis-union, Braddon and Maxwell continued to live together, producing six children in addition to the five Maxwell had with his first wife. They were finally married in 1874, shortly after the death of Maxwell's first wife (Skilton x).

Although her biographer Robert Wolff writes that Braddon's life was "as sensational in its way and for its time as any novel she ever wrote," it is her fiction that served to open the hallowed doors of the great manor houses to her mass readership and provide them with examples to emulate and, at times, to condemn (qtd. in Tromp et al. xxi). With her entrée into popular culture via the genre-defining *Lady Audley's Secret* and *Aurora Floyd,* Braddon had hit upon a style and subject matter that appealed to readers, exhibiting the consumer savviness that was to provide her with a long and successful career.

BRADDON AND THE SENSATION NOVEL

When writing *Lady Audley's Secret*, Braddon stopped trying to imitate Dickens and cut the long descriptive passages and humorous tangents that had bogged down her first novel. She told her story of a murderous bigamist intent on climbing the social ladder in a fast-moving narrative, written in clear prose, and audiences responded in droves. In an early and crucial display of the cultural awareness that would allow her literary career to span more than fifty years, Braddon had discovered the combination of plot and style that appealed to the new mass readership who frequented the lending libraries. The sensation novel was a speck on the horizon when Braddon began her

literary career. With its roots in Dickens and the "disruptive immediacy of his style," the sensation genre exploded onto the scene in the early 1860s and dominated that decade (Sutherland 563). Attempts at defining the genre expose why Braddon's work provides so much material for discussion. The sensation novel is "preoccupied with materialism, spectacle, and the rise of the working class," according to Katherine Montwieler (48); it "focuses on the present, on the grand bourgeoisie and the aristocracy," and relies on plot rather than character, according to Pamela K. Gilbert (184); Winifred Hughes argues, "What distinguishes the true sensation genre, as it appeared in its prime during the 1860s, is the violent yoking of romance and realism, traditionally the two contradictory modes of literary perception" (qtd. in Tromp et al. xix). It is precisely that "violent yoking" and the accompanying focus on materialism and the changing class stratification that proved so controversial in the 1860s.

Contemporary critics were alarmed at the sudden rise in what seemed to them a "frightening new manifestation of female aggression and cultural decay" in this new genre that was primarily produced and consumed by women (Tromp et al. xviii). Sensation, by definition, is a response to some stimulus, and critics condemned the sensation novel's attempt to cause a physical sensation in its readers with portrayals of violence, murder, bigamy, and other thrill-inducing events. Concerns were raised over the "deteriorating effect on the mind" that these novels could have on their mostly female audience (Montwieler 48). One reviewer suggested that "the injury that these ill-toned, ill-wrought productions work on dispositions the least qualified to resist baneful influence [girls and young women] is incalculable" (qtd. in Tromp 94). The ill-equipped (female) reader, critics feared, would be unable to distinguish between reality and fiction

and might then attain an unrealistic view of life. Another anxiety that permeated reactions to sensation fiction was its cross-class appeal. In perhaps the most oft-quoted censure of Braddon, W. Fraser Rae lamented that, despite the "low type of female characters" depicted in her novels, she might still "boast, without fear of contradiction, of having temporarily succeeded in making the literature of the kitchen the favourite reading of the Drawing [sic] room" (qtd. in Tromp et al. xvi). Sensation novels in general, and Braddon in particular, were accused of bringing lower-class literature into the hands of the respectable bourgeoisie and upper class. Critics worried that this fiction would "corrupt mass tastes," which would in turn "corrupt the upper classes who shared the 'appetite' for sensation with their social 'inferiors'" (Tromp et al. xix). Henry Mansel argued in disgust that "a commercial atmosphere floats around works of this class, redolent of the manufactory and the shop," adding the "lower-class" materialistic nature of sensation fiction to its list of offenses (qtd. in Tromp et al. xix). Class stratification was shifting in mid-Victorian England, and as cultural power began to shift from the upper class to the emerging middle class, still attempting to create a culture of their own, the fear of corruption through the influence of a class they sought to leave behind threatened the respectability the bourgeoisie craved. Braddon's early novels exemplify this fear as her heroines jump class lines – especially in the case of Lady Audley – and commercialism permeates the narrative. The anxieties of the dominant classes (the aristocracy and upper-middle class) surrounding fiction were exactly what Braddon sought to provide her readers: a thrilling story aimed at women, filled with instructions for at least appearing to belong to a class level above their own.

With her less-than-stellar ancestry, her previous working experience, and her own struggles to achieve marital bliss, Braddon surely identified with her readers as they struggled to understand their roles as Victorian women. Through her writing she could address the problems underlying society's expectations of women while also giving those women access to the knowledge they needed to gain upper-middle-class respectability and imitate the upper-class lifestyle. Within the confines of their domestic sphere, Braddon could take her readers window shopping through the world of the aristocrats, providing them with achievable fantasies.

CHAPTER 3

LIFESTYLES OF THE RICH AND FAMOUS

In her first two major novels, Braddon's advice to her readers runs the gamut of topics from interior decorating to fashion to household schedules to leisure activities. Some issues, such as the less glamorous topics of training servants and rearing children, receive minimal treatment, while the newly accessible furnishings and fabrics receive more careful description. Advice manuals and columns in ladies' magazines provided the practical knowledge of how to run a household; Braddon's novels provide the knowledge of ornamentation. Braddon's characters are carefully chosen for a combination of aspiration and accessibility; they belong to families whose lives, homes, and habits readers can examine for clues to increase their own middle-class respectability without being so far up the social ladder as to be unattainable. The families are either extremely wealthy upper-middle class, or from the lower, but still wealthy, ranks of the aristocracy, achievable goals for that growing segment of the middle class with social ambitions. Tradition and history are built into each family estate and pedigrees are constructed as necessary to provide justification for using these characters as models for middle-class readers. At the same time, Braddon warns her readers against aiming too high on the social ladder: Helen Maldon/Lucy Graham schemes her way from poor sea captain's daughter to wife of baronet Sir Michael Audley, yet ultimately fails and is punished for her audacious attempt to leap over class boundaries. Aurora Floyd, meanwhile, is the unconventional upper-middle-class daughter of a respectable banker; her supposed transgressions are cleared and she is rewarded with a happy marriage to squire John Mellish. Both women share that middle-class desire for a title, but Braddon

makes it clear that Helen/Lucy's ambition to climb from the lower-middle class to the titled landowning class is unreasonable while Aurora's smaller leap from upper-middle-class society into the country gentry is entirely possible. Braddon recognizes the desire to raise one's social rank, but implicitly advises her readers to set achievable goals in their quest for upward mobility.

At the same time Braddon seeks to advise her readers, her own tastes are not always those of the upper class nor is her life one which the respectable middle class should emulate. Whereas Braddon seems to believe her novels can assist middle-class women in achieving the look of respectability, revealing the inner sanctums of the upper class, her own lifestyle prevents her from claiming any real authority to advise her readers. Instead, Braddon relies on the narrators of these two novels to describe and recommend the ideals of "legitimate" taste and expose the garishness of those who only pretend to ascribe to that ideal. Both narrators admire the comfortableness of established wealth over stiff, outlandish displays of new money, discussing the paraphernalia of upper-class life in tones of respectability, conservatism, and nationalistic bias. The narrator of *Lady Audley's Secret* is obviously disdainful of the interloper, lower-middle-class Lucy Audley, and her attempts to exploit her new social status are often met with disapproval. *Aurora Floyd*'s narrator has fewer complaints about her upper-middle-class heroine, finding more to admire than to rebuke, and therefore maintains a more benevolent tone throughout the novel. Throughout both narratives examples exist of Braddon's obvious choice for her narrators to espouse an aesthetic to which she herself does not adhere, allowing scholars and critics a chance to see behind the narrative to the authorial construction supporting Braddon's desire to advise her readers in respectability.

ESTABLISHING THE MODELS

The Audleys of Audley Court are not a celebrated family; they do not move in the highest circles of society or politics. However, the Audleys are moneyed and titled: Sir Michael Audley is a baronet and although he appears to be retired from any rigorous activity regarding his estate, evidenced by its neglected grounds, he is still part of the hereditary aristocracy. His title has descended through ancient lines, traceable to the late fifteenth century as evidenced by an Audley knight buried in the village church. Both Audley Court and the village of Audley are situated in a hollow, "rich with fine old timber and luxuriant pastures," and have a long history which the narrator traces through several monarchies (*Lady Audley* 1). The village, we are told by nephew and heir Robert Audley, is probably named for an ancestor of his. He recalls "hearing a story of some ancestor who was called Audley of Audley in the reign of Edward the Fourth," dating the village back to at least the late fifteenth century[2] (258). The tradition of titles and lands passed down through generations was still admired in Victorian England, even by the *nouveau riche*, and Braddon taps into that cultural ideal to increase the Audleys' cultural capital. The manor house, once a convent, has undergone many renovations and additions through the centuries, the record of which Braddon uses to further establish the tradition of the estate:

> Time, who, adding a room one year, and knocking down a room another year, toppling over now a chimney coeval with the Plantagenets, and setting up one in the style of the Tudors; shaking down a bit of Saxon wall there, and allowing a Norman arch to stand here; throwing in a row of high narrow windows in the

[2] Edward IV of England ruled 1461-83.

> reign of Queen Anne, and joining on a dining-room after the fashion of the time of Hanoverian George I. to a refectory that had been standing since the Conquest, had contrived, in some eleven centuries, to run up such a mansion as was not elsewhere to be met with throughout the county of Essex. (*Lady Audley* 2-3)

The initial description of Audley Court comes in the form of an excerpt from a guidebook, signaling Braddon's intentions for the both objects in the novel and the narrator. The reader is an outsider, standing in awe of this stately old home, hearing of its grand history and being told to note its distinctive characteristics. By setting up the audience as observer, the narrator is able to form a teacher-student relationship with the reader in order to instruct them in the ways and means of imitating the peaceful stateliness of this ancient manor in the middle-class home. A former convent, dating back eleven centuries, outlasting dynasties and political turmoil, Audley Court is now a "glorious old place" where its residents and guests experience peace and tranquility (*Lady Audley* 2). The narrator naturalizes the estate, admiring how time has built and rebuilt the house until it is part of the organic landscape, a part of the mystique of English landownership. It is in this ancient manor, steeped in the various traditions of England, that Braddon presents the lives of the wealthy, well-established lower rank of nobility in *Lady Audley's Secret.*

The Floyds of Braddon's next novel are not members of the aristocracy, but they are so near the top of the upper-middle-class stratum that a title is almost unnecessary. Almost. Archibald Floyd, the patriarch, is head of Floyd, Floyd & Floyd, a Scottish banking house relocated to London (*Aurora Floyd* 43). Once again Braddon has carefully chosen her pedigrees. The beautiful, unconventional Aurora is the daughter of a

merchant: an immensely wealthy merchant, to be sure, even a land-owning merchant, but Archibald is still a man who worked for his wealth. The taint of business is minimal, however, because banking is one of the few wholly respectable occupations in mid-Victorian England (Hobsbawm, *Industry* 82). Besides providing Archibald with one of the most admirable professional pedigrees possible, Braddon has him in retirement from most actual business by the time the novel's primary action begins, thus further removing him from the stigma of professional occupation and allowing him to play the part of country squire without the actual title. The Floyds' Scottish ancestry could be troublesome, but is quickly defused by briefly recounting a nephew's words on the subject of changing his name from McFloyd to Floyd: "We've nae need to tell these sootherran bodies that we're Scotche" (*Aurora Floyd* 46). Aside from this and one or two other mentions of Scottish blood in the first chapter, the novel contains no other references to this ancestry. Braddon has brought up the issue of socially less-than-desirable pedigree, perhaps as an acknowledgement of her own even lower-ranking maternal Irish heritage, and informed her readers that such obstacles can be overcome in the quest to achieve upper-middle-class Englishness.

The desire for a title, that final bridge between the wealthy upper-middle class and the aristocracy, was most often fulfilled through the marriage of a daughter to a titled husband. Usually more concerned with joining estates and bank accounts than with love, these marriages allowed an upper-middle-class family to claim a titled line while the aristocratic family received an infusion of wealth and, not to be discounted, new blood. In her book *Nobody's Angels*, Elizabeth Langland examines instances of inter-class marriage, or more accurately the disappearances of such instances, in nineteenth-

century novels. She focuses on marriages between upper class and working class, concluding that the strict boundaries of class that arose during the Victorian era inhibited portrayals of inter-class marriages in novels as a way of discouraging them. Certainly real life examples existed of a nobleman marrying a servant, but such men risked loss of caste which would also be visited upon any children from the match (Langland 30). Likewise, guidebooks and advice manuals from the mid-nineteenth century addressed the phenomenon of inter-class marriage, cautioning against marriage too far below one's caste. Braddon echoes this opinion, counseling her readers to set their sights on achievable goals of social advancement. Sir Michael Audley takes a wife from the lower-middle class, a level too far below his own, and thus the marriage is doomed. Lucy's murderous tendencies and alleged insanity are visible reinforcement that she does not belong in the upper class. Marriage slightly above one's social level will be more successful than attempting to climb too high too fast, advises Braddon. Such is the method by which the Floyds gain entrée into the titled class: heiress Aurora marries strapping young squire John Mellish and joins together the holdings of Felden Woods and Mellish Park, while cousin Lucy Floyd marries baronet Talbot Bulstrode and brings more Scottish blood to Bulstrode Castle. Again Braddon chooses members of the lower ranks of the nobility for this family's first step into the hallowed class that is the aristocracy. The marriage of a wealthy middle-class daughter to a squire or a baronet is certainly more of an achievable fantasy than setting one's cap for an earl or a duke. That goal, Braddon implies, will have to wait for the next generation of daughters.

CHILDREN AND HOUSEHOLD MANAGEMENT

Children in Braddon's first two novels are scarce, indicating Braddon's choice to emphasize the objects of upper-class life rather than any practical advice on childrearing. In her novels children visit the great manor houses at Christmas, but only one is given any real plot consideration. Young Georgey Talboys is the son of Helen Talboys (a.k.a. Lucy Graham, later Lady Audley) and her first husband, George. Georgey, the evidence of his mother's dark secret, resides in a shabby seaside cottage with broken toys and a drunken grandfather (*Lady Audley* 40). He is a cheerful and precocious boy, but shy around strangers. Although his mother has hidden him away to pursue her new life, his presence cannot be ignored.

On the trail of his friend George's murderer, Robert Talboys initially overlooks Georgey as a potential wealth of information until his sense of duty reminds him that he is the forgotten Georgey's guardian. Upon arriving at the cottage to consider Georgey's future, Robert finally places some importance on the boy's chatter and divines a few more links in his trail of evidence leading to Helen/Lucy as the murderer. Robert exercises his rights as guardian and takes little Georgey away from his shabby dwelling and inebriated grandfather, promising to set him up in a school. The procurement of a good school in Southampton is soon achieved, but Robert finds himself left with the care of young Georgey for the few hours until it is time to deliver him to Mr. Marchmont's academy for young gentlemen (*Lady Audley* 177). Devoid of any knowledge of childcare, Robert leaves him with an idle waiter at their stopping house, choosing to go out and stroll the Southampton streets in a purposeful attempt to avoid Georgey's company (*Lady Audley* 179). Georgey is finally packed off to school at eight o'clock,

accompanied by a "cheque for the young gentleman's outfit" (*Lady Audley* 180). Little Georgey, having imparted his knowledge and advanced the plot, is therefore conveniently disposed of until the end of the novel, when he appears in the picture of domestic bliss that ties up the story.

In addition to his presence as a complication in Helen/Lucy's ambition for wealth and status, Braddon uses Georgey to highlight the stereotype that childrearing is a feminine domain. After imperiously asserting his rights as guardian and removing Georgey from his grandfather's care, the unmarried Robert is left bewildered as to actually caring for the boy. His solution is to pack the child off to boarding school for others to raise. It is not until the end of the book, when Robert is married to Clara and father of his own child, that Georgey re-enters the domestic scene as a contented, well-cared for boy. Georgey's father is a part of this scene, but Braddon is clear that the addition of Clara as mother-figure is the occasion that allows Georgey to rejoin his family (*Lady Audley* 445). Thus, Braddon reinforces the role of the woman as caregiver in Victorian society while the man is portrayed as incompetent in the ways of childrearing, although relatively few pages are given over to this point as compared to the ink expended on the matter of proper dress.

Managing the household is likewise pushed into the background. Audley Court is a well-ordered household, though neither Alicia, the daughter of Sir Michael Audley, nor Lucy, Sir Michael's second wife, is depicted as performing any managerial duties such as that contemporaneous authority of household management, *Beeton's Book of Household Management*, suggests are appropriate for the mistress of the home. Among the traits and habits of a good mistress, according to this encyclopedia of household wisdom, are:

rising early, practicing economy and frugality, careful choice of friends, abstaining from gossip, cultivation of a good temper, careful choice of dress, charity and benevolence, purchasing all provisions and stores for the house, keeping the household accounts, hiring and management of domestic help, and attention to the children's welfare, with time set aside for "recreation" and reading (1-9). While Lucy shows no interest in managing anything other than her own life and her husband's affections, Alicia resents her loss of status when Lucy is installed as mistress of Audley Court. The housekeeper at Audley Court has overseen most of the practical duties of the mistress for years, but from the "hours in which she entered her teens," Alicia was symbolically entrusted with the keys to the manor (*Lady Audley* 4). She lost them repeatedly and caused "all manner of trouble about them," but sincerely believed that the entire time they were in her possession she had been "keeping house" (*Lady Audley* 4). Following her father's marriage to Lucy, Alicia suddenly finds any request presented to the housekeeper not sufficient in that it comes from her lips; now all commands must be approved by Lucy. As a consequence, Alicia spends her time outdoors and openly dislikes her stepmother (*Lady Audley* 4-5). Alicia does not attempt to regain control of the household, nor does she seem all that upset at the loss of any actual responsibilities; she is simply angered that her figurehead role as mistress has been usurped. The implication is again that the *appearance* of feminine power is enough for the upper-class woman to claim that power in society.

Aurora Floyd also exhibits no desire to participate in the practical side of running a household. After her marriage to John Mellish and installment as the mistress of Mellish Park, she comments to her husband on the blessing of retaining her companion,

Mrs. Powell, "to take all trouble of administration off Aurora's hands" (*Aurora Floyd* 188). Indeed, Aurora much prefers to be involved with managing the stables rather than the manor and freely admits her ignorance of domestic duties. "Heaven help your friends," she says to her husband, "if they ever had to eat a dinner of my ordering" (*Aurora Floyd* 188).

No, Braddon does not undertake to show her readers how to manage a household. The capable servants, trained by some unknown mistress, carry out their duties without troubling either Lucy Audley or Aurora Mellish. Not that either of these heroines is presented as an example of a domestic goddess, but Braddon simply chooses not to weigh them down with the drudgery of common household demands. For the sake of her plots, these women are privileged to be excused from such mundane chores and instead spend their time in genteel leisure activities – in the case of the ladylike Lucy Audley – or tending to the more manly pursuits of the stables – in the case of the unconventional Aurora Mellish. The popularity of publications like *Beeton's Book of Household Management* is evidence that women were receiving practical knowledge elsewhere, leaving Braddon free to explore the more glamorous side of achieving the appearance of the upper-middle class and give her readers a picture of a life in which they can burn their *Beeton* and truly live a life of leisure.

CLOTHES MAKE THE (WO)MAN

Fashion, the art of using oneself to proclaim status, is something Braddon embraced in her novels. The women and the men in her upper-middle-class and aristocratic households dress as befits their status, donning new costumes for each portion of the day. The abundance of clothing that Braddon pauses to note indicates that she is

fully aware of the importance of costume to denote both wealth and status in mid-Victorian England, as it had done for centuries. The sumptuary laws of feudal England provided a tradition of identifying a person's social status and occupation by his/her dress. Although by the mid-nineteenth century sumptuary laws had long been overturned, the idea of fashion as status symbol continued. Magazines such as the *Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine* (hereafter *EDM*) recognized that their desired middle-class readership was more interested in fashion than in tips on household management. The *EDM* was initially launched by Samuel Orchard Beeton in 1852, as a compromise between the exclusive ladies' magazines and the women's domestic journals for the middle classes (Beetham 59). It met with quick success, boasting a circulation of 50,000 by 1857 (Beetham 59). Recognizing that its middle-class patrons desired less information on domestic management and more on the art of appearing respectable, the *EDM* was reimagined and relaunched in 1860; those sections of practical advice for the home had been scaled down and the fashion column expanded, often including Isabella Beeton's first-hand accounts of the latest in Paris fashion (Beetham 75). So popular was this new emphasis on fashion that the *EDM* regularly published a "Supplement" containing fashion plates, dress patterns, and needlework design patterns; household tips, fiction, and the other mainstays of magazines were excluded from this one-shilling supplement (Beetham 75). Braddon, with her eye ever focused on what the readers deemed worth reading, obviously could not ignore this intense interest in the latest from the *modistes*.

In her quest to provide access to the upper-class world, Braddon often pauses to detail the costumes worn by her characters. She does not simply describe a dress as

"blue" or "green;" she makes a point to describe fabrics, embellishments, *and* how the gown suited the character who wore it. When Aurora wears a white gown and a "crown-shaped garland" of scarlet berries and green leaves to the ball in honor of her nineteenth birthday, the reader is informed that this choice of costume suits Aurora perfectly. She is "imperiously beautiful in white and scarlet, painfully dazzling to look upon, intoxicatingly brilliant to behold" (*Aurora Floyd* 77). The adjectives provide insight into Aurora's character: nice young ladies, such as Aurora's demure cousin Lucy Floyd, are not imperious or painful or intoxicating. Braddon's rebellious, free-thinking heroine, however, is not to be mistaken for one of those "timid," "pale and prim" potential wives whom Aurora's suitor Talbot Bulstrode so admires (*Aurora Floyd* 86). Her bold fashion choices continue, reflecting her own bold spirit: when Talbot proposes, having become "intoxicated" with Aurora despite his best efforts to dislike her, she again wears white silk, this time with a "thick circlet of dull gold upon her hair," conjuring up images of Cleopatra (*Aurora Floyd* 113). Aurora instinctively chooses ornaments that reinforce her regal, queen-like image, even though she is not of noble blood – yet because her character and bearing are so queenly, such ornamentation only serves to further enhance these qualities. Conversely, the narrator argues, such adornments would be rather gauche worn by Lucy Floyd. Her beauty is not a "candlelight beauty" like Aurora's; hers is a paler, more subtle beauty, and therefore Lucy should avoid bright colors and bold accessories that could overwhelm her features (*Aurora Floyd* 86). Braddon's inclusion of fashion advice is not always so subtly worked into her plot.

Following a period of depression after her first engagement ends in separation, Aurora accepts John Mellish's proposal. Her good spirits upon entering into this

commitment are evidenced by her renewed interest in riding about the countryside "wearing a hat that provoked considerable criticism - a hat which was no other than the now universal turban, or pork-pie, but which was new to the world in the autumn of fifty-eight" (*Aurora Floyd* 184). Indeed, according to C. Willett Cunnington's chronology of women's Victorian fashion, the bonnet was still the most popular choice of headgear in the late 1850s, but by the early 1860s, the hat had become the latest vogue for promenades and riding (200, 240). Aurora's bold, rather cutting-edge fashion choices reflect her own unconventional and bold character. Later, at her wedding to John Mellish, Aurora dons the traditional "virginal crown of orange buds and flowers" along with a Mechlin veil (*Aurora Floyd* 184). By noting that she wears a "Mechlin veil," Mechlin being a type of lace made in Brussels, Braddon gives the reader a tip on what is fashionable at an upper-class wedding. Bonnets were coming into vogue for wedding attire, and Aurora does argue to wear one, but is overruled by her female relatives who campaign for a traditional bridal costume (*Aurora Floyd* 184). At the same time, by allowing Aurora to wear the "virginal crown" of flowers, she gives the reader a signal that traditional marriage is not an easy fit for Aurora, for she is not a virgin. As we later discover, Aurora's marriage to John Mellish is not one with traditional domestic roles, but it suits her far better than that virginal crown. In the character of Aurora, Braddon makes a case for individuality in fashion, reminding her readers to choose that which suits their own personality while still obeying convention when necessary.

However, fashion is not always a true indicator of personality, warns Braddon; sometimes it is used to construct a false identity. In *Lady Audley's Secret*, the titular Lucy Audley uses her costume choices to present the face she wishes the world to know.

Although she is later revealed to be the villain of the novel, Braddon presents Lucy Audley as such a childish, timid, supremely feminine character that the reader is hard-pressed to reconcile the evil deeds of which she is accused with the frivolous, helpless image she has cultivated. The evolution of this image is evident when studying her attire throughout the novel.

While a governess for the local surgeon's children, Lucy wears simple clothing as befits her station and her purse. Phoebe, her lady's maid upon marrying Sir Michael, describes Lucy's clothing as "worn and patched, and darned, and turned and twisted, yet always looking nice on her somehow" (*Lady Audley* 27). During this time she is still establishing her identity as Lucy Graham, distancing herself from Helen Talboys, but she continues to wear a black ribbon around her neck, on which is secreted the wedding ring from her first marriage. Her beauty and cheerfulness soon catch the attention and admiration of the local squire, Sir Michael Audley. On the occasion of Sir Michael's proposal, Lucy is wearing a virginal white gown just as Aurora does when Talbot proposes, but the narrator specifies that Lucy's is a thin dress. This choice of costume paradoxically reflects both the fragility of the new life Lucy pursues and presents an eroticized image of Lucy – she is likely clad in minimal layers of undergarments. In addition, Lucy's most celebrated feature, her hair, streams about her shoulders and she clutches at the black ribbon hiding her wedding ring "as if it had been strangling her" (*Lady Audley* 11). Lucy is obviously in control of her destiny at this point; her beauty and tantalizing dishevelment are enough to overcome Sir Michael's vague uneasiness over her declaration that "[she does] not love anyone in the world" and he begs her to marry him even if she does not love him (*Lady Audley* 11). Braddon not only uses

Lucy's deceptively simple costume to remind the reader of the character's station as governess and her erotic control over Sir Michael, but also invokes Lucy's desperation at the choice she must make between a wealthy, though possibly bigamous marriage, and continuing to eke out a living as a governess. Her greed and ambition make the decision for her, and soon we see Lucy tricked out in sumptuous gowns, befitting her new role as Lady Audley: another opportunity for Braddon to direct her readers.

With Sir Michael's wealth at her disposal, Lucy quickly develops a preference for heavy velvets and rich, stiff silks on her slight frame, a juxtaposition that suggests the narrator's snobbery towards this lower-class interloper (*Lady Audley* 52). Recalling the admiration given Aurora Floyd's costume choices, bold though they were, Lucy's apparent disregard for what suits her bearing and frame is a reminder of her unfamiliarity with the fashion protocols of her new situation. She is desirous of obtaining the most opulent garments available, whether or not they suit her. When her nephew by marriage, Robert Audley, spends a winter in St. Petersburg, Lucy requests that he send her some sables. These valuable pelts are then made into a cloak, costing 60 guineas, and she is often described as wearing it, along with a favored blue bonnet, on her travels thereafter (*Lady Audley* 84, 106, 262). The reader is left to wonder whether Lucy prefers the sables for their beauty or the wealth they represent, for she often discusses the monetary value of things rather than their worth as beautiful objects. When she is preparing to be taken from Audley Court, following her confession to Sir Michael and Robert, Lucy dons an Indian shawl that cost 100 guineas, apparently intending to take at least one of her costly possessions with her upon her exile (*Lady Audley* 373). Lucy subscribes to that upper-class taste defined by Bourdieu which says the cost of an item, its symbolism as object of

luxury, exceeds its aesthetic value. Her choice of the Indian shawl over her favorite, stouter, but less expensive, sable cloak and blue bonnet seems indicative of this state of mind which the novel holds up for scrutiny and, possibly, ridicule. It is Lucy's alleged insanity, suggests the narrator, that causes her to choose the symbol of wealth over the much more practical furs. She has faith that her own readers, possessing a fine sense of the practical, will recognize the folly of Lucy's choice and ascribe it to her poor judgment. Appropriateness and the balance of luxury and utility are both of great concern to a middle class still learning how to spend their money, and Braddon uses her narrative to provide examples of both successful and unsuccessful attempts to strike that balance.

Lucy is often described as wearing blue or "delicate hues" to enhance her beauty as well as laces and ribbons and other embellishments to promote the image of a helpless child (*Lady Audley* 76). The first time Robert Audley meets Lucy, he not only remarks on her beautiful blue eyes, golden ringlets, and ravishing smile, but Braddon has him describe Lucy's bonnet in detail: "such a fairy-like bonnet – all of a tremble with heartsease and dewy spangles, shining out of a cloud of gauze" (*Lady Audley* 56). At this moment in the text, Braddon's voice as instructor, filtered through upper-class Robert, is most emphatic. Lucy has already been described from the male point of view and found to be beautiful, yet Braddon employs that same unlikely voice – a man who has yet to develop his keen eye for detail on the trail of a murderer – to retard the forward movement of the plot in order to emphasize the details of a character's bonnet for the reading public. The effect of this bonnet on her male observers is evidence of Lucy's female awareness of what is attractive to men, and one could speculate that more than a

few readers considered ordering a similar confection from the milliner's to enhance their own feminine charms. In a calculated show of ultra-femininity following her murderous trip to the Castle Inn, Lucy appears at the breakfast table in "a morning costume of delicate muslin, elaborate laces, and embroideries" (*Lady Audley* 328). Her careful choice of attire is meant to present herself as the picture of perfect gentility and harmless femininity, presiding over the breakfast table, utterly above suspicion, and equally to provide Braddon with the opportunity to impart further fashion advice.

Setting scenes with herself as the focal point is a skill of Lucy's. She usually manages to present herself as the center of a room, showcased in a manner to impress with her beauty and to undermine suspicions with her seeming frailty. When she summons Luke Marks to her presence to inform him of the money she means to use to set him up with a public house as a favor to Phoebe, Luke's intended wife, Lucy receives him in the drawing room, surrounded by wealth and splendor. She wears a dark violet velvet gown that contrasts with the amber damask cushions on the sofa where she reclines; her famous golden hair falls about her neck and glitters in the firelight. Any disciple of *Beeton's Book of Household Management* recognizes the *faux pas* in her choice of attire: blondes should not, advises that hallowed manual, wear hues of a dark color as they will overpower the complexion (5). Whether she is unfamiliar with or simply chooses to ignore this advice, Lucy negotiates the scene to impress Luke with her beauty and wealth, attempting to manipulate fashion and décor to show her at her regal best (*Lady Audley* 108). Unfortunately for Lucy, Luke knows her secret and her show of opulence only makes him demand more from her. In this instance the disregard of standard counsel on appearance proves a failure on Lucy's part, tangling her web of

deceit still further. She has the title of "Lady," but subtle clues such as this show the reader that she is not fully assimilated into the upper class.

Even Lucy's dishevelment has an air of theatrics and careful consideration of appearances. In a more successful attempt at propriety, while attending her sick husband in his chambers, Lucy is seen

> with her disordered hair in a pale haze of yellow gold about her thoughtful face, the flowing lines of her soft muslin dressing-gown falling in straight folds to her feet, and clasped at the waist by a narrow circlet of agate links, [which] might have served as a model for a medieval saint. (*Lady Audley* 216)

Here Lucy appears to the reader as saintly and holy, but in the midst of this reverential scene Braddon provides a quick lesson in fashion: despite the tension of the occasion, Lucy is perfectly attired, not in a simple dressing-gown, but in a "soft muslin dressing-gown falling in straight folds to her feet." Fabric and cut have been addressed, but Braddon insists on accessorizing with "a narrow circlet of agate links" to provide her readers with a complete description of a proper sickroom costume. In an age increasingly concerned with appearance, even invalids' chambers are not exempt from maintaining decorum in dress.

Lucy revels in the finery she can now afford, but just as she tries to present the image – with limited success – that she is "to the manner born," she soon begins to treat the costly garments carelessly, as though she had always been used to possessing them. Lucy's dressing room is described as strewn about with her gowns and she frequently bequeaths to Phoebe the dresses she no longer wants (*Lady Audley* 29, 69). This disregard for her belongings, which she obtained through deception, is an affectation of

how those from generations of wealth treat their belongings, as we shall see later. For the present, however, it is enough to observe that Lucy Audley focuses on the value of fashion both in monetary terms and in terms of manipulating her image to better utilize her newfound power, sometimes to her detriment. Lucy, then, serves as both model and warning to Braddon's audience. The author allows her readers to see both successful and unsuccessful attempts on Lucy's part to appropriate upper-class taste for her own. On the one hand she often chooses fabrics and colors based on their value as symbols of wealth rather than their suitability for her own figure and coloring, yet on the other hand she sometimes demonstrates a remarkable facility to appear the model of propriety and beauty. By allowing her readers to witness both, Braddon provides an illustration of the advice in manuals such as *Beeton's*.

Women are not the only fashion plates in Braddon's novels: the men's wardrobes are given some notice, if not as much as those of the fairer sex. When preparing to dine with Aurora and her father, with the intent to propose to Aurora, Talbot performs a toilet that includes fastening "a golden solitaire to his narrow cravat," using Monsieur Eugene Rimmel's scented wax (which promised to "smooth [his moustache] without making it greasy"), perfuming his boots (Hessians, of course), and submitting himself to the "unbending circular collar" that was the style of gentlemen of the day (*Aurora Floyd* 112). John Mellish wears his simple gray clothes with "the easy grace which is the peculiar property of the man who has been born a gentleman" (*Aurora Floyd* 332). Robert Audley favors a blue necktie and a blue silk handkerchief prior to his obsession with finding George Talboys' murderer (*Lady Audley* 32, 34). Admiration of a fashionably turned-out person is not reserved only for the ladies in Braddon's novels

either. The household at Mellish park admires John Mellish attired in "pink" and his top boots, ready for the hunt, more so than the famed statue of Apollo in the Vatican (*Aurora Floyd* 105). The off-hand mention of "pinks" – scarlet hunting jackets – in both novels indicates that Braddon is confident her readers are familiar with the proper attire for gentlemen during a hunt, the proper sport for the upper class. This off-handedness on Braddon's part suggests that she assumes her readers are gaining knowledge of the gentility from other sources as well. If they have not already learned enough about hunting to be familiar with "pinks," then she has provided another area the well-educated imitator of that lifestyle should explore. Naturally Braddon need not detail the working attire for her gentlemen as they certainly would not be so tasteless as to work for a living.

The servants in her characters' employ do not escape Braddon's notice, either. The favored lady's maids are presented with handsome gowns by their mistresses, making them the envy of their peers (*Aurora Floyd* 478, *Lady Audley* 25). These fine dresses do pose a problem, however. Although the sumptuary laws have long been repealed, that tradition of "proper" dress clings to the cultural memory and the image of a servant wearing silk disturbs the traditional order. Aurora's maid is never attired in one of her gifts, but in *Lady Audley's Secret* Phoebe dons a delicate grey silk dress and mantle, worn only half a dozen times by Lucy, for her wedding to Luke. The effect is such that several of the guests at the wedding remarked that Phoebe looked "quite the lady" (*Lady Audley* 110). Luke has no desire to see his new wife aspire to higher social levels, however, and criticizes her attire saying, "Why can't women dress according to their station? You won't have no silk gowns out of my pocket, I can tell you" (*Lady Audley* 112). Luke obviously adheres to the traditional order of things and sees no reason

for Phoebe, the wife of a pub owner, to wear expensive grey silk. Indeed, concern about the availability of ready-made clothing and the cheap production of silks, cottons, tweeds, and other materials "removing landmarks between the mistress and her maid, between the master and his man" appeared in many contemporary middle- and upper-class publications, including *Beeton's Book of Household Management* and its sister publication the *EDM* (*Beeton's* 962). For a class so concerned with staying safely above its social "inferiors," the blurring of class lines through dress became a hot topic. Lucy, so recently a member of that lower class, is apparently unaware that her discards may serve to stir up class issues; her focus is on what is "new" rather than what is appropriate. Luke, for all his apparent stupidity, is somehow innately knowledgeable on this question and forbids his wife to even appear to be questioning her class boundaries. Phoebe is thereafter described as wearing "drab," though trim and tidy, dresses for her work at the pub (*Lady Audley* 131, 300). Ignoring these tenets of good taste is Lucy's new lady's maid, "a very showy damsel" from London (*Lady Audley* 112). This gauche creature, who wears a black satin gown with rose-coloured ribbons in her cap and "other adornments which were unknown to the humble people who sat below the salt in the good old days when servants wore linsey-woolsey," is never taken into Lucy's confidence in the manner of Phoebe (*Lady Audley* 313). One supposes that Lucy recognizes in her another ambitious female, although one who is trying too hard to achieve that leap in social status by dressing above her station. The irony, of course, is that Lucy's own attempts to appear a member of the upper class often reveal her unfamiliarity with traditional behaviors that would mark her true membership in that society.

In *Aurora Floyd* the servants at Mellish Park are generally unremarkable, but two integral characters are defined by their dress. "The Softy," that ugly, hunchbacked, villainous man whom John Mellish has sent away for abusing Aurora's dog, is described as wearing a piece-meal wardrobe of cast-off clothing, always in need of washing and mending. This disregard for outward appearance naturally means "the Softy" is not fit to serve the Mellish household once Aurora is installed as mistress. He soon proves that his heart is as filthy as his clothes by kicking Aurora's dog and, after a whipping from Aurora, is sent away by John Mellish. Meanwhile, a handsome young man arrives at Mellish Park to take over running the stables from the aged stablemaster. James Conyers is compared to Apollo, Antinous, a "male Aphrodite," the model from which painters and sculptors draw their inspiration for male beauty (*Aurora Floyd* 246). Like Lucy Audley, Conyers learned early to trade on his beauty, and as a result he is extravagant, lazy, and selfish, as is reflected in his clothing. Conyers meets with his new employer, John Mellish, in a soiled and crumpled shirt, unshaven and bleary from drink, his elbows sticking through the frayed sleeves of his shooting-jacket (*Aurora Floyd* 332). A side-by-side comparison of the slovenly but handsome Conyers and the tidy but boyish John Mellish prompts the narrator to ask, "is it better to be clean, and well dressed, and gentlemanly, than to have a classical profile and thrice-worn shirt?" (*Aurora Floyd* 332). The question is less about physical beauty and more about caring about one's personal appearance, a signifier of class even today. As Katherine Montwieler notes in her article discussing Braddon and Victorian consumerism, "affect [...] can be learned; interiority is another issue" (49). The narrator argues that though John Mellish may lack the chiseled good looks James Conyers exploits, his upper-class breeding is apparent in his dress and

toilet, a statement that readers aspiring to assume a familiarity with the better classes would be wise to observe and put into practice in their own lives.

With emphasis on personal appearance consuming so much of what mid-Victorian women's magazines published, Braddon recognized that women were being targeted by advertisers shilling their latest beauty products that claimed to make women "Beautiful for Ever!" (qtd. in *Lady Audley* 452). Although Aurora appears to be above such concerns, Lucy Audley is perhaps the advertiser's dream. Her dressing room is oppressive with the fragrance of open perfume bottles and littered with the paraphernalia of making oneself beautiful: ivory-backed hairbrushes, jewelry, and a "heap of dresses" (*Lady Audley* 69). Entering the drawing-room where Robert is present, Lucy's "yellow curls [are] glistening with the perfumed waters in which she had bathed" (*Lady Audley* 116). Lucy utilizes everything available to her to make herself more attractive, whether it be the colors she chooses for her gown or the scent she chooses to exude. The ideal consumer, Lucy freely spends her husband's money, buying into Victorian advertisers' promises that "if you look like this, act like this, buy these things, you will become genteel" (Montwieler 48). Braddon carefully contrasts her two protagonists, Lucy Audley and Aurora Floyd, as consumers. Whereas the socially precarious Lucy purchases whatever is expensive and promises, however falsely, to increase the illusion that she is of a social level with her husband, spending a great deal of her time primping and pampering herself, the self-confident Aurora purchases those items which please her and has an innate sense of what flatters, without appearing to give an inordinate amount of thought to the process. Braddon argues, then, that while the appearance of gentility can be purchased and displayed on one's body, that purchasing ability must be

accompanied by knowledge of what is suitable for the individual, as well as a sense of self-confidence and elegance to balance what could become a crass display of wealth for the newly rich.

THE WELL-DRESSED HOME

Of course, one's body is not the only canvas available for displaying wealth and sophistication. The middle-class Victorian home needed to be furnished, and Braddon enthusiastically provides her readers with descriptions of her wealthy characters' manor houses, often including brand names – and occasionally the location of the shop which carries these items – to assist her readers even further in their quest for the perfect set of china or the right artists to hang on their walls.

Audley Court appears to be a moldering, crumbling old estate secreted among lush pastures and rich forests. A general air of serenity and old age inhabits the grounds, inspiring visitors to wish they could "have done with life" and spend their days at ease strolling about the estate (*Lady Audley* 2). Inside the manor, and especially in Lucy's apartments, all signs of neglect are banished and the rooms gleam with all the best things Sir Michael's money can buy. Phoebe, when rhapsodizing over her newly-privileged mistress's rooms, tells Luke,

> [...] it's a tumble-down looking place enough outside; but you should see my lady's rooms, - all pictures and gilding, and great looking-glasses that stretch from the ceiling to the floor. Painted ceilings, too, that cost hundreds of pounds, the housekeeper told me, and all done for her. (*Lady Audley* 37)

Phoebe is entranced by the gilding and flash of Lucy's chambers, much more so than the rest of the stately, ancient house in its tumble-down condition. Her awe, shared by Luke,

at the riches of her mistress's apartment is what one would expect from someone of the lower classes, a commentary from Braddon on the penchant to put too much value on gaudy displays of new wealth. Braddon again reveals snobbishness in her adherence to the cultural belief that the ancient and the established, the rooted and the traditional, are to be valued above the tawdry excess of new money. By putting the admiring words in the mouth of Phoebe, a servant, Braddon indicates that the furnishings appeal to a lower-class aesthetic. Indeed, when Robert Audley and George Talboys trespass into Lucy's boudoir to examine her portrait, they express no admiration over the expensive appointments or the luxurious chaos Lucy leaves in her wake. Their taste instead leads them to admire the "valuable paintings" decorating the walls of her antechamber, ignoring the painted ceilings that speak of such wealth to the servants (*Lady Audley* 69).

The extravagance of Lucy's chambers is dazzling to imagine; only among the wealthiest of the upper-middle class would painted ceilings be a possibility, but here a member of the nobility shows his love for his wife with this costly adornment of her rooms. And Lucy's rooms are certainly lavish! Her chambers consist of at least three rooms: her boudoir, her dressing room, and an antechamber. The boudoir is "fairy-like" and "luxious" [sic], containing a piano covered with sheets of music and "exquisitely-bound collections of scenas and fantasias which no master need have disdained to study" (*Lady Audley* 294). Lucy's musical tastes run in the vein of popular music, although the narrator quickly establishes their musical value. Her easel stands near a window bearing a water-color sketch of the Court and gardens; her gowns are strewn about the room adding splashes of color; and the looking glasses have been "cunningly placed at angles and opposite corners [... to multiply] my lady's image," an acknowledgement of Lucy's

role as ornament in this household (*Lady Audley* 294). Lucy sleeps on a "downy bed" under the "soft mountain of silken coverlet," wrapped in luxury even on her last night at Audley Court (*Lady Audley* 372). Ignoring for a moment the deceitful woman who dwells here, the narrator pauses the forward movement of the plot and provides a catalog listing of objects that fill this "luxious [sic] apartment":

> Drinking-cups of gold and ivory, chiseled by Benvenuto Cellini; cabinets of buhl and porcelain, bearing the cipher of Austrian Maria Antoinette, amid devices of rosebuds and true lover's knots, birds and butterflies, cupidons and shepherdesses, goddesses, courtiers, cottagers and milkmaids; statuettes of Parian marble and biscuit china; gilded baskets of hot-house flowers; fantastical caskets of India filagree work; fragile teacups of turquoise china, adorned by medallion miniatures of Louis the Great and Louis the Well-beloved, Louise de la Valliere, and Jeanne Marie du Barry; cabinet pictures and gilded mirrors, shimmering satin and diaphanous lace (*Lady Audley* 295).

The narrator does not simply inform the reader that Lucy drank from cups of gold and ivory; she notes the medieval Italian artist, Benvenuto Cellini, who created those cups. It is interesting to note that Cellini was not regarded as a particularly excellent sculptor during his lifetime; the mere fact that his work is "old" and therefore "good" was probably all Lucy needed to be convinced his pieces were proper for her consumption ("Cellini"). Additionally, the narrator not only provides the details that Lucy's expensive cabinets are buhl and porcelain; for the readers' benefit descriptions of what comprises the inlaid designs are supplied. A few pages later Braddon drops further hints as Lucy speaks of her "Marie Antoinette cabinet," "Pompadour china, Leroy's and Benson's

ormolu clocks" and "Gobelin tapestried chairs and ottomans" (*Lady Audley* 302). The emphasis on French furnishings, especially those produced during the reign of Louis XIV, suggests an adherence to Bourdieu's definition of the "legitimate" taste. As detailed by Bourdieu, the upper class taste is the art of conspicuous spending and acquiring the "exclusive possessions" that become "emblems of 'class'" (232). In this description of Lucy's chambers, Braddon specifies that the furnishings are expensive, old, and heavily identified with European aristocracy. An imitation, mass-produced piece may be what the typical middle-class purse can afford, but at least the middle-class shopper will know, in detail, which styles to emulate to acquire similar "emblems of class" in their own homes. Braddon confirms the perception of the aristocratic house as showcase of "name brands," the finest of everything, as she takes her readers window-shopping in a glorious mélange of French, Italian, and English craftsmanship. These brief passages, with their extraneous and rather specific description of objects, provide readers with a template to follow when decorating for appearances.

Lucy spends a great deal of time in her dressing room, as befits her vain character, but before preaching a sermon on the emptiness of an outwardly luxurious but inwardly sinful life, the narrator pauses to note the objects adorning this room. Again the reader is witness to Braddon in conflict, this time over revealing the "legitimate" taste of the upper class to her middle-class readers while also acknowledging the lingering Evangelical morality of the first half of the nineteenth century. Her compromise is to provide descriptions of both Lucy's consumption and her morally degenerate nature, but she chooses to give the decorating lesson first, so as not to confuse her readers into thinking copying the style automatically makes them sinful. Lucy's dressing room is decorated in

elaborate style, featuring a marble-topped dressing table, tiny writing table, vases of hot-house flowers, and a Persian rug (*Lady Audley* 68-69). The room is a sanctuary for Lady Audley, filled with frivolous items chosen not so much for their beauty, Braddon suggests, as for their cost. At the time of this description, it is the end of summer and the garden is still producing, yet Lucy's rooms feature "hot-house flowers" such as must be cultivated and cared for under special conditions. The ability to have hot-house flowers at any time is a signifier of wealth, but to prefer them in summer when the grounds of the estate must boast plenty of blooms is true extravagance. Braddon drops in this detail to reiterate just how wealthy the Audleys are, and arguably to reiterate Lucy's *nouveau riche* appropriation of that upper-class aesthetic that is desirous of the most expensive things available, equating cost with quality. While the middle-class reader may be in awe of the wealth exhibited in these rooms, Braddon seems to undermine Lucy's costly desires with the still present middle-class ideal of frugality. Once again, Lucy is to be both admired and criticized.

The entrance to Lucy's apartments is an octagonal ante-chamber, hung with about twenty of the best paintings the manor has to offer. Not content to simply state that these pictures are "worth a fortune," Braddon informs us that they are "Claudes and Poussins, Wouvermans and Cuyps" (*Lady Audley* 29). Each of the artists listed painted landscapes in the seventeenth century, favoring bucolic country scenes. Claude and Poussin were French artists who spent most of their careers in Rome studying Italian masters; Wouverman (sometimes spelled Wouwerman) and Cuyp were Dutch painters who studied and worked in the Netherlands (Web Gallery). Their presence at Audley Court is, first of all, a chance for Braddon to display her knowledge of the art world as well as

what type of art the aristocracy owned. Additionally, they are another visible symbol of the Audleys' aesthetic. All of these men are known for their serene depictions of the countryside and inclusion of Biblical or classical Roman figures, putting them firmly in the conventional, but expensive, tier of upper-class taste as defined by Bourdieu. Lucy is a willing disciple of this aesthetic, happily spending her husband's wealth to attain her ideal of the upper-class lifestyle. Indeed, as Lucy confides to Phoebe, the explosion of Louis XIV decorations in her apartments cost a thousand pounds (*Lady Audley* 106). Putting that figure in context for the contemporary reader, at roughly the same time Braddon was writing *Lady Audley's Secret* the majority of middle-class Englishmen reported incomes of £300 to £1000 on their income tax papers (Hobsbawm, *Industry* 156). Sir Michael's beloved young wife is ensconced among only the best furnishings and accouterments, with obviously no expense spared. However, Braddon posits the question for her readers whether the gaudy, flashy apartments truly denote good taste because they are furnished expensively, or whether the spectacular display is too indicative of the *nouveau riche* Lucy who married into wealth. The snob in Braddon warns against the bourgeois desire to acquire and display an overpowering collection of "emblems of class," admiring instead the elegance and refinement of old money, as we shall see in the descriptions of other areas of Audley Court.

The reader must not think that the other rooms in the rambling old mansion suffered at Lucy's expense. Although not lavished with as much descriptive detail by the narrator, the reader is directed to view various amenities of particular rooms almost as though they are on a tour, recalling the opening pages' introduction to Audley Court and firmly placing the reader in the role of window-shopper. A breakfast room, "one of the

modern additions to the Court," is described as "a simple, cheerful chamber, with brightly-papered walls and pretty maple furniture [...] while Miss Audley's picture [...] hung over the quaint Wedgwood ornaments on the chimney-piece" (*Lady Audley* 315). This particular room is a favorite of Alicia's and her belongings are scattered about the room – "drawing materials, unfinished scraps of work, tangled skeins of silk" (*Lady Audley* 315). The narrator's tone resembles that of a modern day magazine article, instructing readers how to redecorate a room with a carefree yet elegant flair. This is the upper-class house at its most accessible, its most achievable. Instead of spectacular displays of wealth giving rise to conflicting ideas about the upper-class aesthetic, the breakfast room reflects a simpler taste, easily duplicated on a middle-class budget.

The Court's library, Sir Michael's domain, is a "pleasant oak-panelled homely apartment" containing a "capacious easy-chair" drawn near the hearth, a black-oak bookcase filled with books in bindings of scarlet and gold whose titles are unimportant compared to their appearance, and decorated with "the Athenian helmet of a marble Pallas" and a bust of former Tory Prime Minister Sir Robert Peel (*Lady Audley* 280). A symbol of Pallas, goddess of wisdom and the arts, is certainly at home in a library, though the reader is left to wonder if the wisdom contained in the beautifully-bound books has ever been consumed by the Audleys. The selection of Peel as watchdog of Sir Michael's inner sanctum is significant in its reinforcement of Braddon's depiction of the gentry as conservative, but sympathetic to the middle classes. Peel was a founder of England's Conservative Party, yet before he left office he argued for the repeal of the Corn Laws and for free trade, which opened up more channels of profit for the enterprising businessman ("Peel"). In the selection of these two pieces, Braddon at once

provides examples of classic art and contemporary benevolent politics to adorn the middle-class library, itself a symbol of wisdom and temperance. This bastion of comfort and respectability – a favorite of Sir Michael's, where he "liked to sit reading or writing, or arranging the business of his estate with his steward" – is "homely" but nonetheless suits its inhabitant and serenely maintains a sense of established wealth with its richly-bound books and traditional *objets d'art* (*Lady Audley* 280).

Sir Michael's sick chamber is similarly subdued yet elegant. The presence of the massive furniture, "dark and sombre," is relieved by "scraps of gilding, and masses of glowing colour; the elegance of every detail, in which wealth is subservient to purity of taste" (*Lady Audley* 216). A comfortable retreat for the invalid? Yes, but still refined. To this description the narrator adds another tip for aspiring decorators: the well-appointed room is one in which "wealth is subservient to purity of taste." The urge to parade one's newly-acquired pounds in garish displays of painted ceilings and gilt must take a back seat to refinement and sophistication, is the advice. Comfort and usefulness must also be considered when arranging a room. Lucy carefully arranges magazines and newspapers on a "delicious" table beside Sir Michael's bed for his entertainment. As she prepares to leave him for the night, Lucy says, "If you can sleep, so much the better. If you wish to read, the books and papers are close to you" (*Lady Audley* 294). In this case the young wife arranges the room according to her husband's genuinely upper-class, refined taste, without the furbelows and fripperies of her overblown apartments, and the reader cannot escape the conclusion that the effect is much more pleasing, at least to the narrator.

The Audley dining room is another showcase of elegance in use. The "old-fashioned oak-panelled" room contains a long table adorned with a "snowy damask" cloth and glittering with glass and silver (*Lady Audley* 360). In this description the narrator gives her audience clues that the Audleys are traditional – retaining the "old-fashioned" dining room – and prepared to entertain many at their long table. Hospitality, an ancient virtue of the aristocracy, is a "virtue to be cultivated" by the middle-class mistress, claims *Beeton's Book of Household Management*, and Braddon reinforces that in her depiction of this genteel family always at the ready to welcome friends and weary travelers (3).

Elsewhere in Audley Court is a sumptuous drawing room in which, once again, the Audley wealth is on display. The room is a showcase for the typical clutter associated with the mid-Victorian era, "rich in satin and ormolu, buhl and inlaid cabinets, bronzes, cameos, statuettes, and trinkets" (*Lady Audley* 28). That same room is the one in which Lucy later stages her seemingly benevolent scene of generosity toward Luke Marks, sitting on the amber damask sofa that so nicely contrasts with her dark violet gown (*Lady Audley* 108). The abundance of "trinkets" suggests Lucy's hand in decorating the drawing room, and she obviously feels it is a stage for her to play out her role as Lady Audley. Sir Michael and Alicia are rarely to be found in this room, indicating that it is probably Lucy's domain. Braddon has now given her readers two examples of Lucy's love of rich, heavily decorated objects to furnish her surroundings. As the newest member of this wealthy family, Lucy is the one who desires to put that wealth on prominent display, inspiring little admiration from anyone other than the servants. The decorating tips gleaned from Lucy's apartments must be balanced by the

comfort and usefulness seen in chambers belonging to Sir Michael and Alicia, whose taste reflects the refined elegance the narrator admires, despite the abundance of fashionable "things" Braddon litters throughout the novel for description.

Mellish Park also benefits from the arrival of a new mistress. John Mellish, enraptured with his bride, orders the western wing of the manor to be restored and remodeled for Aurora. Her chambers are oak-roofed and decorated in the vogue Gothic revival style, all "rose-colour and gold, like a medieval chapel" (*Aurora Floyd* 186). The active, outdoor-loving Aurora spends far less time in her chambers than Lady Audley spends in hers, preventing the narrator from providing much detail on the furnishings of the boudoir and dressing room. Instead, decorating advice is focused on other rooms in the house. John's study, where he and Aurora spend a great deal of time, receives more attention from the narrator. The room is described as

> a cheerful, airy apartment, with French windows opening upon the lawn; windows that were sheltered from the sun by a verandah overhung with jessamine and roses. It was altogether a pleasant room for the summer season, the floor being covered with an India matting instead of carpet, and many of the chairs being made of light basket-work. Over the chimney-piece hung a portrait of John's father, and opposite to this work of art there was the likeness of the deceased gentleman's favourite hunter, surmounted by a pair of brightly polished spurs [...]. In this chamber Mr. Mellish kept his whips, canes, foils, single-sticks, boxing-gloves, spurs, guns, pistols, powder and shot flasks, fishing-tackle, boots, and tops. (*Aurora Floyd* 224)

In this brief paragraph, the narrator succeeds in establishing a masculine room quite in contrast to Lady Audley's "fairy-like boudoir," providing a nice balance for her readers who have already been instructed in how to create ultra-feminine rooms. Here, the narrator promotes simplicity and practicality, the hallmarks of respectability. The room is made pleasant for summer with the logical substitution of light India matting instead of thick carpeting and wicker chairs instead of heavy wooden furniture, and the windows are shaded by climbing plants to keep out the hot summer sun. The room's adornments – a portrait of the late squire and another of his favorite horse – both continue the masculine theme and remind the reader of the Mellish family's status as established landowners. John's sportsman's paraphernalia is strewn about the room, signaling the usefulness of the room to its inhabitant while also reinforcing his status as a man of leisure and wealth.

Leisure and wealth are also in evidence at Felden Woods, the home of upper-middle-class Archibald Floyd. The picture gallery features portraits of "alternately sternly masculine and simperingly feminine faces of those ancestors whose painted representations the banker had bought in Wardour Street" (*Aurora Floyd* 276). Significantly, Wardour Street is a street in London traditionally known for antique dealers, although by the nineteenth-century its reputation was dubious and a purchase from that locale often denoted a fake (*Aurora Floyd* 276n). Many of Braddon's readers must have known this reputation, but here she presents a model home featuring portraits of manufactured ancestors – she later says "I fear [these portraits] had been painted to order" – with no embarrassment (*Aurora Floyd* 276). The narrator supposes this practice to be commonplace among merchants, imagining Wardour Street account books to read "'To one knight banneret, killed at Bosworth 25l. 5s.'" (*Aurora Floyd* 276). Presumably

Braddon is open to creative enhancement of the family's image through fake portraits, even going so far as to tell her readers where to find them and how much to expect they will cost. At the same time, she recognizes this violation of "legitimate" taste, and an air of disdain crops up in the narrator's tone, the vanguard of respectability, with regard to that same idea of using counterfeit knights to simulate ancient genealogy. The conflict between the admiration of established families to the point of snobbishness and the desire to increase one's own social cachet through imitation is one that Braddon cannot seem to resolve in either novel. It is up to the reader, then, to decide whether to purchase imitation ancestors in the quest to establish a family history.

Felden Woods's ancestral showcase opens into a half-billiard room, half-library. This hybrid room is a favorite of the Floyds', and "almost the pleasantest apartment in the house" (*Aurora Floyd* 135). Two large fireplaces warm the room, and a variety of chairs are placed about for comfort, evidence of the family's hospitality. Aurora sits in a "low easy-chair" near one fireplace while speaking to Talbot Bulstrode, who leans over a richly carved walnut *prie-dieu* chair (*Aurora Floyd* 135). The *prie-dieu* chair, traditionally used for private prayer, appears meant to inform visitors that the Floyds are a church-going family, for all their faults, and connects the family with the Evangelical respectability of the first half of the century. The importance of appearing religious is evident in the placement of this chair in the family's favorite room[3]. Braddon soon returns to the luxuries her readers are most interested in, however. Following Aurora's marriage and move to Mellish Park, her father experiences loneliness and melancholy

[3] However, one could argue that its placement is a jab by Braddon indicating the Floyds' ignorance of its proper use, suggesting that Braddon assumes her readers *would* know where and how to use this private tool of religion.

that cannot be assuaged by his many belongings, but the narrator can use this opportunity to list those belongings for the audience's benefit:

> He took no pleasure in the long drawing-room, or the billiard-room and library, or the pleasant galleries, in which there were all manner of easy corners, with abutting bay-windows, damask-cushioned oaken benches, china vases as high as tables [...]. Archibald Floyd could not sit beside both the fireplaces in his long drawing-room, and he felt strangely lonely looking from the easy-chair on one hearth-rug, through a vista of velvet-pile and satin-damask, walnut-wood, buhl, malachite, china, parian, crystal, and ormolu, at the solitary second hearth-rug and those empty easy-chairs. [...]. His five-and-forty by thirty feet velvet-pile might have been a patch of yellow sand in the Great Sahara for any pleasure he derived from its occupation. (*Aurora Floyd* 276)

Once again Braddon places the reader in the role of window-shopper. Rather than describing Felden Woods as "richly furnished" or "well-decorated" she presents a catalogue of materials found in the rooms, ending her list with the exact dimensions of a velvet-pile rug. Admittedly this detailed description is meant to paint a poignant picture of Archibald's loneliness in the midst of such luxury, but, setting aside emotional manipulation, Braddon almost gleefully lays bare the contents of the well-appointed home for her readers' consumption. She presents a mixed message that objects cannot provide happiness, but at the same time she describes those objects in detail. Perhaps her readers are not aspiring to happiness but, as Katherine Montwieler suggests, wanted to learn how to "live correctly and especially to demonstrate taste" (48). If the latter is the case, then Braddon provides the guidebook in both novels under discussion in this

analysis. She briefly addresses the fruitlessness of seeking contentment through materialism, then, that reminder dutifully issued, continues on with the shopping spree.

WHERE TO GET IT

All this advice on what to wear and how to decorate gives the aspiring upper-middle-class woman plenty to draw upon when preparing to purchase items for her own wardrobe or home, but Braddon does not leave her reader bereft when the time comes to find the recommended items. Throughout both novels Braddon mentions specific shops where the grand miscellany she presents for consumption may be purchased. Sometimes the references are vague enough to leave a modern audience wondering if Braddon was referring to real resources, such as when Lucy Audley allegedly sends her maid to retrieve a gown from Madame Frederick in London (*Lady Audley* 59). It may be enough in this instance for readers to note that Lucy's gowns are created by a London modiste rather than a provincial seamstress. More often, however, Braddon is quite specific about where to purchase items, occasionally including driving directions, as is the case when Aurora's aunt stops to purchase a watch in London. Coming from the West End, Aurora and her aunt drive to Dent's at Charing Cross (*Aurora Floyd* 70). Edward John Dent manufactured high-quality clocks and watches, selling them at three London shops, one of which was located at 33 Cockspur Street, Charing Cross (*Aurora Floyd* 70n). It seems Braddon was concerned that simply directing readers to "Dent's at Charing Cross" would lead them astray, so later in this scene she notes that Aurora, who waits in the carriage, is "between Cockspur Street and the statue of King Charles" (*Aurora Floyd* 71). The statue referred to sits at the junction of the Strand, Whitehall, and Cockspur Street, further narrowing the location of the clock

shop the Floyds patronize (*Aurora Floyd* 71n). Less exact but still providing guidance for the eager consumer are the resources for Robert Audley's cigars (the corner of Chancery Lane), Aurora's diamond bracelet from her father (Hunt & Roskell's), and, of course, the manufactured ancestors who hang at Felden Woods (Wardour Street) (*Lady Audley* 118, *Aurora Floyd* 79, 151). All of these shops are located in London, implying that Braddon's readership is familiar with the city already or at least has the means to travel to London on a shopping expedition and, armed with the information she provides, pinpoint the preferred mercantile establishments. Thanks to the railway boom in the 1840s, England had become increasingly mobile, allowing the middle-class family to live away from London proper but easily commute to the bustling metropolis as necessary. Braddon indicates her expectation that her audience is – or would like to be – of this "traveling class," able to spend a day or more away from their responsibilities and fulfill their role as consumer.

AT LEISURE

Braddon is concerned with the non-material aspects of the good life as well. Her characters, so unconcerned with managing household or estate business, spend their days in a variety of leisure activities, the hallmark of middle- and upper-class status. From watercolors to horseback riding, her characters indulge in a multitude of decorative and entertaining pursuits, reinforcing their status as members of the leisured classes. The newly-leisured Lucy Audley turns the pretty skills she used to teach to her female students as a governess into self-satisfying diversions. Readers are first introduced to her skill as a painter while she is still a governess in the surgeon's home. While discussing her marital prospects, Lucy is engaged in "dipping her camel's-hair brush into the wet

aquamarine upon the palette, and poising it carefully before putting in the delicate streak of purple which was to brighten the horizon in her pupil's sketch" (*Lady Audley* 8). Not yet Lady Audley, Lucy must turn her interest in decorative painting into a commodity, something she can teach the privileged children in her care. In this role she remains focused on improving and completing her pupil's sketch, even while discussing the possibility of a marriage that will change her life. After her marriage, Lucy's interest in painting becomes more extravagant. As she prepares to finish copying "a water-colour sketch of an impossibly beautiful Italian peasant, in an impossibly Turneresque atmosphere," Lucy marvels at the change in her fortunes (*Lady Audley* 117). Whereas serving in the surgeon's household she earned twenty-five pounds a year, just "six pounds five a quarter," she now enjoys such wealth that "these colours I am using cost a guinea each at Winsor and Newton's [a firm still in business today] – the carmine and ultramarine thirty shillings" (*Lady Audley* 117). At the time the novel is set, a guinea was equivalent to one pound, five pence. Therefore, the colors Lucy has at her disposal for her artistic enjoyment could easily equal the wages of half a year or possibly a full year as a governess. Just in case her audience has forgotten how wealthy the Audleys are, the narrator reminds them with an equation of wages to leisure materials.

Painting is a skill of Aurora Floyd's cousin Lucy as well, one of the many "lady-like arts" in which she is so accomplished (*Aurora Floyd* 100). Indeed, Braddon provides her two Lucys with an interest in many of the more demure, ladylike activities which primarily keep them indoors and exerting little energy. Lucy Floyd plays chess, sings, and plays the piano, all with the proficiency of one whose education concentrated on

perfecting these decorative skills (*Aurora Floyd* 100). Meanwhile, Lucy Audley whiles away a sunny morning

> now sitting down to the piano to trill out a ballad, or the first page of an Italian bravura, or running with rapid fingers through a brilliant waltz – now hovering about a stand of hothouse flowers, doing amateur gardening with a pair of fairy-like silver-mounted embroidery scissors – now strolling into her dressing-room to talk to Phoebe Marks, and have her curls re-arranged for the third or fourth time. (*Lady Audley* 77)

Throughout the forenoon she engages in not a single activity that might be deemed work or even useful; instead, she dabbles at playing the piano and trimming her plants, chatting with her maid and attending to her toilette. Similarly, Aurora spends rainy days indoors

> more restlessly than profitably by taking up books and tossing them down, pulling [her dog's] ears, staring out of the windows, drawing caricatures of the promenaders on the cliffs, and dragging out a wonderful little watch, with a bunch of dangling inexplicable golden absurdities, to see what o'clock it was. (*Aurora Floyd* 100)

Aurora's time is spent even less usefully than Lucy Audley's, and her activities are obviously time-fillers until the weather allows her to go outdoors and ride her beloved horses. Such luxury of time is commonplace for these privileged families, but the narrator seems to share that middle-class contempt for such extravagant wastes of time while recounting the several non-productive endeavors the characters engage in throughout the day. Although they may envy the characters' excessive leisure time, here

is a chance for Braddon's readers to feel superior, perhaps reading aloud to a sister or daughter or mother who sews while she listens to the tales of these favored creatures.

The same day Lucy Audley has been flitting about the house, her afternoon activity consists of taking a stroll with a book, allegedly taking advantage of the cool shade to peruse one of her French (the Victorian code for "immoral") novels. Robert and his guest, George Talboys, have gone off to spend the day fishing. Meanwhile Sir Michael takes off on his regular morning ramble and Alicia spends her time riding her favorite mare, Atalanta (*Lady Audley* 77-78). Fishing is a favorite pastime of Robert's, although he usually lets the fish do what they may while he naps. Another of his favored leisure activities, one he shares with Lucy, is reading French novels. He is so addicted to the Gallic press that he takes a half-dozen French novels, along with a case of cigars and three pounds of Turkish tobacco, with him to Audley Court for the hunting season (*Lady Audley* 113). Reading is a prominent leisure activity among both the Floyds and Audleys, consuming considerable time and providing Braddon with opportunities to both suggest and criticize reading material for her aspiring audience.

The French novels ordered by the carton-load from the Burlington Arcade for Lucy Audley and Robert serve as shorthand for frivolous lifestyles (*Lady Audley* 104). Braddon was well-read in French fiction, yet her narrator adopts the attitude that these novels were scandalous and daring, a deliberate acquiescence to the nationalism and conservatism Braddon associates with proper middle- and upper-class values. Having already established Lucy's frivolity and Robert's laziness, Braddon allows her hero to redeem himself by turning his attention to real life events instead. Deeply involved in the "real-life" mystery of George Talboys' disappearance, Robert loses all interest in his

"yellow-papered fictions," attempting to read Balzac but becoming so distracted by the mystery that he cannot concentrate on "the metaphysical diablerie of the *Peau de Chagrin*, and the hideous social horrors of *Cousin Bette*" (*Lady Audley* 156-57). Lumping Balzac with Dumas, the narrator displays an English, middle-class view of the French novel – in contradiction to Braddon's own sophisticated knowledge of French novels – apparently confident that the audience will agree with this assessment of these two titles. The narrator later directly criticizes that favorite genre through no other than Robert himself: "You have no sentimental nonsense, no silly infatuation, borrowed from Balzac, or Dumas *fils,* to fear from me," he tells Lucy (*Lady Audley* 139). By this time Lucy has already, in a moment of apprehension and foreshadowing, dwelt at length on the plot of a French novel in which a beautiful and much beloved woman, having committed a crime and kept the secret for many years, is found out and condemned (*Lady Audley* 105-06). Later in the crisis of discovery, her agony is presented as that of just such a heroine, suffering "agonies that would fill closely printed volumes, bulky with a thousand pages, in that one horrible night. She underwent volumes of anguish, and doubt, and perplexity" (*Lady Audley* 313). This moment of metafictionality in which the fictional Lucy identifies her life as that of a sensation novel would be revisited by Braddon in detail in *The Doctor's Wife*, a rewriting of *Madame Bovary* about a woman who chooses to live her life as though she were the heroine of a novel, but in *Lady Audley's Secret* Braddon offers just a brief addition to the debate over the effects of the novel on the female mind. The contemporary controversies surrounding fiction, especially those novels aimed at female readers, were obviously in Braddon's thoughts,

but as yet the only rebuttal she could provide was to have her villainess perform that fatal identification.

Robert furthers Lucy's association with a French heroine, telling her that incarceration in a madhouse will be no worse than choosing to enter a convent: "The solitude of your existence in this place will be no greater than that of a king's daughter, who, flying from the evil of the time, was glad to take shelter in a house as tranquil as this" (*Lady Audley* 391). Such a fiction sounds like the plot of one of those French novels they both used to enjoy, before they discovered that "real life" does not play out like a Dumas *fils*. The villainous Lucy of Braddon's English novel is therefore identified with immoral French fiction, while Robert atones for his poor taste in reading material by putting his mind to solving the mystery of his friend's disappearance. The biographical complication of Braddon's thorough knowledge of contemporary French novels is skirted by the presence of the narrator, who again adopts the voice of respectability in deriding the "sentimental nonsense" from across the Channel. Braddon, then, acknowledges that her tastes are not those the aspiring middle-class Victorian should adopt, avoiding presenting *herself* as a model for readers to emulate. For all her knowledge of what is "legitimate," Braddon is still an outsider in terms of class status.

Aurora's taste in reading material is also criticized. While other, proper young ladies like Lucy Floyd read the pious High-Church novels of Miss Yonge, Aurora pores over horse-racing guides and newspapers such as *Bell's Life in London* (*Aurora Floyd* 100). Braddon again weighs in on the debate over appropriate reading material for the fairer sex. Talbot laments the fact that Aurora's taste in reading material leans toward *Ruff's Guide to the Turf or Pocket Racing Companion* and the *Racing Calendar*, for it

makes her an unfit choice of wife for him (*Aurora Floyd* 95). Of course, ultimately, the secret of her past is what keeps them apart, but this outward sign of her defiance of lady-like virtues causes the righteous Talbot grief as he wrestles with his growing love for Aurora and his own familial pride. Pride wins out in the end and Aurora marries the happy-go-lucky John Mellish, who is pleased that his wife is interested in horse-racing.

Quality reading material is a concern for Alicia Audley as well, although she herself is the critic. On a rainy March morning, Alicia idles away her time "'yawning over a stupid novel'" whose pages she scarcely comprehends for lack of interest (*Lady Audley* 338). She "had flung aside the volumes half a dozen times" in her boredom, and eventually leaves them unfinished to stroll with her stepmother for whom she has no affection (*Lady Audley* 338). It is cutting commentary indeed for this leisured young woman to discard what was surely a three-volume novel to walk with someone she does not like. Here Braddon allows her audience to see an upper-class character treating her possessions as carelessly as the *nouveau riche* Lucy Audley is learning to treat her own possessions. Lucy discards her dresses after wearing them "about a half a dozen times," cavalierly giving them to her maid once she feels they are no longer cultural valuable as emblems of class (*Lady Audley* 110). Alicia likewise flings aside her emblems of class – recreational reading and the leisure time to do so – once she derives as much value as she can from them. Braddon therefore intimates that the upper class is privileged to enjoy a wide array of leisure options and is comfortable enough with its "idle" time to disregard any monetary considerations involved, and pursue whatever is most appealing at a given time.

WHAT TO READ

Braddon's assertion that the upper classes spend their leisure hours reading, however carelessly, allows her the freedom to make numerous literary allusions on her own, assuming that her upper-middle-class audience is well-read enough to appreciate her use of Literature[4]. Shakespeare is a favorite prop for Braddon's allegories, reflecting the Bard's status in popular culture as a source of excerpts, or "beauties," to be bandied about as a symbol of cultural education (Altick 43). In both novels the narrator peppers descriptions with references to Shakespeare's plays, revealing Braddon's confidence that the audience is familiar with them – at least the references if not the plays. These allusions can be read as tests for the reader, demonstrating his or her knowledge of "legitimate" taste. Braddon utilizes a multi-level system to test and acknowledge the cultural intelligence among her readers through the use of direct quotes, overtly signaled by the use of quotation marks, and through more oblique references embedded in the narrative. This system allows those readers with exposure to Shakespeare in decontextualized, excerpt format to recognize familiar quotations and feel a sense of superiority at the recognition. The allusions worked into the narrative allow those readers who possess greater familiarity with Shakespeare's plays to exhibit their more substantial consumption of what Bourdieu refers to as "high-brow," the high art associated with the dominant class (16). Additionally, these references to high art allow Braddon to establish herself, and the narrator, as well-read and well-educated, reinforcing her authority to advise her middle-class readers in the appropriation of upper-class taste.

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[4] In this case I use "Literature" in the manner Raymond Williams defines it, as a result of "a necessarily selective and self-defining area" in which "taste" and "sensibility" decide what validates the use of the capital "L" (*Marxism* 51).

The excerpts Braddon provides serve as tags to denote cultural capital, a shorthand for associating her characters with aristocratic ideals even in the midst of depression or suspicion. In *Lady Audley's Secret*, a stone pier stretches out into the "cruel loneliness of the sea, as if built for the especial accommodation of some modern Timon," the Greek misanthrope featured in Shakespeare's *Timon of Athens* (247). The pier in question is that on which George Talboys first met his future wife, Helen, and where he "had first yielded to that sweet delusion, that fatal infatuation which had exercised so dark an influence upon his after-life" (*Lady Audley* 247). Drawing on the tale of a man who gave generously but was disappointed when he sought the same benevolence in a time of poverty and came to hate all men for their duplicity, Braddon likens George's misplaced love of Helen/Lucy to the ungratefulness Timon experienced. The allusion to Shakespeare's tale of selfish mankind provides the astute reader with a rationale for George's second abandonment of Lucy, hieing himself off to distant Australia to forget about her in the gold fields.

Love is also the issue Braddon alludes to with a reference to *Much Ado About Nothing* as Sir Michael considers how cruelly Beatrice treated Benedick all while she was in love with him, and wonders if his daughter employs that same tactic in her treatment of Robert (*Lady Audley* 329). Readers familiar with the plot of this play might be misled into thinking Robert will eventually realize his cousin's true feelings and come to love her in return. Such is not the result, but the inclusion of this reference does allow Braddon to draw parallels between her work and the great playwright's, adding cultural cachet to her novel. Additionally, she uses the reference to trick her readers into assuming an incorrect ending to the novel, suggesting that Braddon wished to establish

herself as an original. In other words, readers may expect one ending based on their "proper" cultural knowledge of Shakespeare, but Braddon chooses to subvert that proper knowledge and provide a knew ending in another example of her conflict between upper-class tradition and middle-class innovation.

The Shakespearean references are thick in *Aurora Floyd*. Aurora's mother, Eliza, was an actress before her marriage, allowing that voice of respectability, the narrator, a chance to critique the English stage in the early pages of the novel. Archibald's sincere admiration for "British Drama" in the traditional sense is lauded by the narrator, who laments the degeneration of the theatre into presentations of French and German melodrama in another nationalistic pronouncement of middle-class prejudices (*Aurora Floyd* 51). Establishing the preference for true British drama early in the narrative, Braddon proceeds to apply excerpts from Shakespeare's *Othello* and *Macbeth* throughout the novel. The sinister air that hangs over Aurora's year abroad is often obliquely discussed in terms of Iago's plots against Othello and Desdemona. James Conyers blackmails Aurora, stating that he wants more than money, for "what does the chap in the play get for his trouble when the blackamoor smothers his wife? I should get nothing – but my revenge upon a tiger-cat, whose claws have left a mark upon me that I shall carry to my grave" (*Aurora Floyd* 269-70). The reference to the "blackamoor" who "smothers his wife" should be enough for readers with even the most casual acquaintance with Shakespeare to recognize, allowing them to nod sagely and feel as though they have made some deep connection with Literature. In an even greater test of the readers' knowledge of Shakespeare, Talbot urges the pale, distracted Aurora to let him fetch her a doctor, to which she replies, "do you remember what Macbeth said to *his* doctor?"

(*Aurora Floyd* 149). The reference here is to the line "Canst thou not minister to a mind diseas'd" (*Macbeth* V.iii.40): Aurora's malady is not of a physical nature, but of a guilt-ridden mind, a reference that rewards those who have read Shakespeare's play closely and can demonstrate their true standing as consumers of that "high-brow" taste. Aurora is later identified with another *Macbeth* reference, although one not nearly so sympathetic. As she pauses on the threshold, about to go into the night to pay off James Conyers, Aurora "look[s] like Hecate," the goddess of the underworld whom the hags invoke in *Macbeth* (*Aurora Floyd* 343). At this point in the novel, as the plot builds to the climax of Conyers's death, Aurora is lent a mysterious, sinister air by this analogy. Although Braddon does carry through her analogy to *Macbeth* throughout *Aurora Floyd*, it does not appear that the presence of these often decontextualized references is to provide scholarly insight into either side of the analogy. Instead the references serve to reinforce Shakespeare's status as "legitimate" and knowledge of his works, even in excerpted form, as cultural capital. Braddon is not opposed to showing off her familiarity with other writers, as has already been noted in Chapter 2. This is another indication that Braddon expects her audience to be familiar – in varying degrees – with the works she refers to, assuming a level of education and a taste in literature that matches her concept of the English middle and upper class.

Contemporary literary references are also in abundance as Braddon shows off her knowledge of some of England's premier writers as well as an acknowledgement of the authors that were considered mandatory reading for the middle and upper classes. Braddon particularly likes to allude to characters and plots from Charles Dickens' popular works in *Aurora Floyd*, including *Oliver Twist* (58, 474), *The Old Curiosity Shop*

(197), and *Dombey and Son* (251). Dickens was one of the best-selling authors of the century, a fixture in circulating libraries, and an author with whom Braddon could safely assume her readership was familiar (Altick 383-384). Tennyson and Byron also receive frequent mention as in Byron's "When We Two Parted" (*Aurora Floyd* 204), "The Bride of Abydos" (251), and his best-selling *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* (168) and "Lara" (252). Additionally, Tennyson's "The May Queen" (168), *Idylls of the King* (126, 147), "Mariana" (181), "Locksley Hall" (186), and "Lady Clara Vere de Vere" (320-21) are all either read by characters in Braddon's novel, or used to allude to character traits or plots. *Idylls of the King* has the distinction of being a bestseller in both its 1859 first edition and its subsequent reissue (with new material) in 1869 (Altick 387). Classics such as *Pilgrim's Progress* (*Aurora Floyd* 335) and *Paradise Lost* (256, 380, 403), *Tom Jones* and *Don Juan* (*Lady Audley* 156) also figure as parts of libraries or to provide insight into character motivations. The inclusion of *Pilgrim's Progress* and *Paradise Lost* is an acknowledgement of the lingering Evangelicalism practiced in those households which otherwise showed no signs of religious revival. The "English Sunday," as Richard Altick calls it, gave rise to a tradition of reading only serious works on the Sabbath, and, when faced with the choice of reading a book of sermons or one of the abovementioned works, many Victorian children opted for Bunyan or Milton (127). As a result, these two works acquired a tradition of respectability in addition to their status as old and English. Braddon includes them in the possessions of her genteel characters (with the notable exception that pretender to gentility, Lady Audley) to reiterate the validity of choosing to emulate their lifestyle. One could gather from this list that the members of the upper class who are to be admired have an almost strictly English taste in literature, another

example of the nationalistic bias witnessed throughout both novels. Again Braddon can assume a familiarity with these works among her audience, or at the very least provides a list of books with which her readers should become familiar.

Whether it be in providing a reading list or describing an elegant yet comfortable room, Braddon utilizes her first two major novels to guide her middle-class readers in their attempt to appropriate the upper-class ideal for their own. A conflict between the *nouveau riche* desire to display one's wealth while appearing as a member of established society is evident throughout both narratives, and at times Braddon leaves the issue unresolved. Throughout her account of the lives of the upper classes, she pauses to describe the surroundings or costumes in details that could easily be used to emulate the same affect in the reader's home. Braddon's audience are window shoppers looking in at the homes she has put on display for their benefit. In this way she makes the upper-class aesthetic accessible to the emerging middle class, the status-conscious Victorian consumer.

CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSION

In taking the time to examine the verisimilar details of Mary Elizabeth Braddon's first two major novels, I have attempted to add to the discussion of mid-Victorian society and literature with an eye towards the cultural development of middle-class society, a group that seems to be largely ignored in current scholarship. Although the habits of the British working classes have been eloquently analyzed in such works as Jonathan Rose's *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes*, and the (pre-Victorian) world of Jane Austen's genteel upper-class set has been examined *ad infinitum*, the aspirations of the emerging middle class and their reflection in literature have been neglected. When Victorian middle-class culture and society are addressed in scholarship, it is often with a patronizing tone, as if the increasing wealth of that class prevents it from being as complex as the poorer working class or its ephemeral, shifting boundaries negate it as an important area of study. The relative economic and political stability of the 1860s makes this decade ideal as a launch point for middle-class studies, allowing for greater confidence in examining literature as snapshots of a culture than during the uncertainties of the 1840s or 1880s.

My examination of *Lady Audley's Secret* and *Aurora Floyd* uncovers a body of knowledge designed to grant access to the upper-class lifestyle *and* to help the primarily middle-class readership develop the appropriate aesthetic to imitate that lifestyle. The wealth of support for this reading indicates that Braddon's depiction of the upper-class world was calculated to reveal that charmed life to her audience for their own emulation. Whether this is indicative of all mid-Victorian novels or even all sensation novels is

worth studying. Do Braddon's contemporaries share her desire to expose the "secrets" of the fashionable world for the purpose of appropriation by the middle classes? Additionally, what corners of aristocratic life does Braddon leave untouched? The implications of what is absent from her novels are possibly as important as what she includes.

As Victorian scholarship rediscovers popular fiction such as Braddon's, the role of that fiction in the development of middle-class culture should come into focus. Applying the critical apparatus at our disposal will allow scholars to undertake a deeper analysis of what appear to be superficial details and find a richer understanding of the Victorian middle class.

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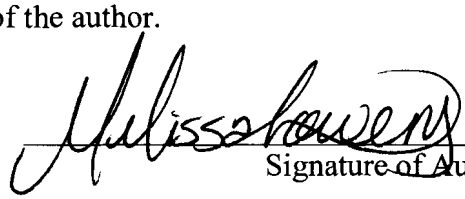

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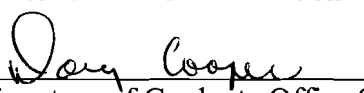

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