Femininity and Masculinity Reflected in the Relationships of Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret*

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Tutkimuksen tarkoituksena oli selvittää, miten feminiinisyys ja maskuliinisuus ilmenevät ihmissuhteissa Mary Elizabeth Braddonin sensaationovellissa *Lady Audley’s Secret*. Tutkimuksen kohteena oli kolme ihmissuhdetta: päähenkilö Lucyn ja hänen miehensä veljenpojan Robertin suhde; Lucyn sekä hänen palvelijansa Phoeben suhde; sekä Robertin, hänen ystävänsä Georgen sekä Georgen siskon Claran välinen suhde. Tavoitteena oli tarkastella sitä, minkälaisia sukupuolirooleja henkilöt omaksuvat suhteissa ja miten he vastaavat yhteiskunnan odotuksiin koskien ideaalia feminiinisyyttä ja maskuliinisuutta, miten henkilöt suhtautuvat sukupuolirooleihinsa ja taistelevatko he niitä vastaan, ja miten henkilöt käyttävät hyväksi feminiinisyyttä ja maskuliinisuutta ihmissuhteissa. Lisäksi tarkasteltiin miten seksuaalisuus ilmenee kyseisissä ihmissuhteissa. Tärkein tutkimuksen pohjana käytetty teoria oli Judith Butlerin teoria sukupuoli-identiteetin muovautumisesta ja rakenteesta.

Braddonin *Lady Audley’s Secret* on oivallinen esimerkki viktoriaanisen ajan sensaatiokirjallisuudesta, jonka tarkoituksena oli järkyttää erityisesti nousevan keskiluokan lukijoita sellaisilla aiheilla kuten murhat, aviorikokset ja vaaralliset, häikäilemättömät naiset. Tutkielman aihe on valittu sillä perusteella, että se tarjoaa mielenkiintoisen näkökulman viktoriaanisen ajan naisten ja miesten asemaan muuttuvassa yhteiskunnassa. Tarkastelun kohteena olevat ihmissuhteet tarjosivat monipuolisen kuvan feminiinisyydestä ja maskuliinisuudesta, sillä niistä kävi ilmi se, minkälaisia sukupuolirooleja henkilöt omaksuvat erilaisissa suhteissa.

Braddonin novellissa esiintyy sekä sukupuoli-identiteetiltään perinteisiä henkilöitä, jotka vastaavat yhteiskunnan odotuksiin siitä, minkälaisia ihanteellisten naisten ja miesten pitäisi olla, että henkilöitä, jotka eivät ole onnistuneet rakentamaan sukupuoli-identiteettiään odotetulla tavalla, eivätkä näin ollen vastaa sitä feminiinisyyttä tai maskuliinisuutta, mitä heidän sukupuoleltaan odotetaan. Toiset henkilöt pakotetaan kasvuun kohti arvostettua sukupuoliroolia ja -identiteettiä, kun taas toisia rangaistaan heidän tekemistään ”vääristä” valinnoista. Myöskään seksuaalisuuden suhteen Braddonin henkilöhahmot eivät aina täytä viktoriaanisen ajan normeja, joiden mukaan hyväksyttävä parisuhde oli ainoastaan miehen ja naisen välinen avioliitto, joka oli ideaalin feminiinisyyden ja maskuliinisuuden täydellinen yhteytys. Parissakin Braddonin novellin ihmissuhteessa on havaittavissa homoeroottisia vivahteita, jotka kirjailijan oli kuitenkin naamioitava ystävyyssuhteiksi, sillä homoseksuaalisuus oli tabu jopa sensaatiokirjallisuudessa. Vaikkakin feminiinisyyden ja maskuliinisuuden välinen dynamiikka palautetaan teoksen lopussa viktoriaanisen ajan ihannetta vastaavaksi - naiset ja miehet omaksuvat lopulta heiltä odotetut sukupuoliroolit - Braddon onnistuu kuitenkin kyseenalaistamaan ajatuksen perinteisestä sukupuoli-identiteetistä, feminiinisyydestä ja maskuliinisuudesta sekä seksuaalisuudesta.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The 1860s may be called a sensation decade, since it represented a time of sensational advertising, crimes and scandals which shocked the Victorian audience.[1] The expanding newspaper press reported to the rapidly widening readership on brutal murders, bigamy and other treacherous acts (1 - 2). This was naturally reflected in the literature of the era, and the decades of the 1860s and the 1870s became known for a literary genre called sensation fiction. It flourished and gained a wide readership especially among women and the rising middle class.[2] Indeed, some of the novels of the sensation genre – such as Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret* (serialised in 1861 - 1862) and *Aurora Floyd* (serialised in 1862 - 1863), Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White* (1859) and Mrs Henry Wood's *East Lynne* (1861) – were among the best-selling books of the entire nineteenth century (Pykett, 5).

As Pykett states, sensation fiction was especially marked by thrilling and complicated plots, mystery and gradually revealed secrets, which were concealed right in the heart of the domestic sphere of the Victorian family, which, in turn, was regarded as the sublime core of Victorian society (4 - 5). Sensation stories were, to a great extent, considered modern: they dealt with issues that actually fairly often took place in Victorian society, such as bigamy (6). Towards the end of the century, reformers started clamouring for the improvement of women's rights, and Victorian society – especially the idea of domesticity, and the woman's role in it – was facing an alteration. Literature was one field where gender roles could be handled. Carnell claims that sensation fiction strongly "challenged the accepted

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[1] Pykett, Lyn. *The Sensation Novel from The Woman in White to The Moonstone*. Plymouth: Northcote House of Publishers Ltd, 1994, 1 - 2.

[2] Morris, Virginia B. "Mary Elizabeth Braddon: The Most Despicable of Her Sex". *Double Jeopardy*, The University Press of Kentucky 1990, 88 -104. Available from <http://helios.uta.fi:2109/servlet/LitRC?vrsn=3&OP=contains&locID=tampere&srchtp=athr&ca=1&c=10&ste=16&stab=512&tab=2&tbst=arp&ai=U13685274&n=10&docNum=H1420037073&ST=braddon&bConts=16047>. No pagination. [Accessed 9 May 2007]

order and questioned conventional morality, rather than accepting pre-ordained certainties".[3] This was done mainly through female characters who were no longer in passive and weak roles. The novels still included examples of the "traditional" woman – that is, submissive and angel-like beauties, which represented the ideal of Victorian femininity – but they also included at least one uncontrollable, unconventional, strong woman, who was often described as unwomanly, mad or dangerous (Pykett, 7). The dangerous, aggressive – and often criminal – women of sensation fiction were, however, often very charming and beautiful, which made the novels even more shocking to the audience.

Mary Elizabeth Braddon (1835 - 1915) is, without a doubt, one of the most important authors of sensation fiction. Braddon produced texts in other genres as well, but became best known for her sensation novels *Lady Audley's Secret* and *Aurora Floyd*.[4] Her extensive production consists of more than seventy novels, several short stories, essays and plays (92). Besides this, Braddon was the editor of journals such as *The Mistletoe Bough* and *Belgravia* (92). Indeed, before being published in book form, Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret* as well as *Aurora Floyd* also appeared in magazines, the former in the *Sixpenny Magazine* and the latter in *Temple Bar* (Carnell, 144 - 146).

This pro gradu thesis will deal with one of Braddon's best-known works, *Lady Audley's Secret*. I chose the novel for my primary material, since it offers plenty of possibilities for investigation within the field of Women's Studies. Most importantly, the novel offers an interesting perspective on the ideal femininity and masculinity in the Victorian era and on the status of men and women in a changing society. Another motive for concentrating on this particular novel is its underrated place in the history of English literature and in research. Although we can say that Braddon was a pioneer of her time by discussing

[3] Carnell, Jennifer. *The Literary Lives of M. E. Braddon*. Hastings: The Sensation Press, 2000, 154.
[4] Gilbert, Pamela K. *Disease, Desire, and the Body in Victorian Women's Popular Novels*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997, 92.

delicate issues such as the roles of men and women in society, literary critics have often ignored her in serious research.

The plot of *Lady Audley's Secret* concentrates around the main female character, Lucy Audley, and her dark secrets. Lucy is the daughter of a drunken half-pay naval officer. After she has been deserted by her husband, George Talboys, who travels to Australian goldfields to make a fortune, Lucy reinvents herself as governess Lucy Graham and leaves her son in the care of her father. A baronet called Sir Michael Audley falls in love with the beautiful governess and asks Lucy to marry him. As a result, Lucy becomes Lady Audley, and begins her new life at Audley Court with her husband and her husband's grown-up daughter, Alicia, who cannot stand her new mother-in-law. Lucy is determined to conceal the secret about her bigamy – officially, she is still married to George – but this becomes increasingly difficult when George returns to England. Lucy writes a made-up obituary in a newspaper in order to make George believe his wife is dead. A year goes by, and George believes his wife rests in her grave at Ventnor graveyard. When George's old friend, Robert Audley, who happens to be Sir Michael's nephew, takes him to a visit at Audley Court, the new identity of his "dead" wife is revealed to George. As a result, Lucy attempts to kill George – and believes she has succeeded – but George flees to America without uttering a word to anyone. Worrying about what has happened to George, Robert starts to investigate George's disappearance and gradually becomes aware of Lucy's dark secrets.

My task in this thesis will be to investigate femininity and masculinity and how these are reflected in the relationships of certain main characters in *Lady Audley's Secret*. I will analyse how the characters act in the relationships, and what kind of roles they take as men and women, and whether they correspond to the expectations society places on men and women – that is, whether they correspond to the ideal femininity or masculinity. I will also consider whether the characters are satisfied with the constrained ideas on femininity and

masculinity and act accordingly, or whether they question their conventional roles as men and women. I will also consider how the characters utilise femininity and masculinity when acting in the relationships. In addition, I will discuss how the sexuality of the characters is depicted in the relationships, and whether one may observe signs of homoeroticism in the novel. To support my study, I will analyse the concepts of femininity and masculinity in chapter 2, and examine what the concepts meant during the Victorian era. The aim is to clarify what kind of roles men and women were expected to adopt, and what kind of characteristics and behaviour was valued during the time. The most relevant theory that is used in the thesis is Judith Butler's idea on the formation and structure of gender identities. This will be useful when considering how the characters express femininity and masculinity in the relationships. In addition, I will discuss Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's ideas on homosocial bonds and their effect on the roles of both men and women, since that strongly relates to several characters in the novel.

The relationships which I am going to examine closer are those of Lucy Audley and her husband's nephew, Robert Audley; the relationship of Robert Audley, his friend George Talboys and George's sister, Clara Talboys; and the relationship of Lucy Audley and her maid, Phoebe Marks. The reason for choosing these particular relationships is that they cover feelings from hatred to love and friendship, at the same time as providing an interesting view on femininity and masculinity and on the sexuality of the different characters. The relationships effectively reveal different aspects of the same characters, such as is strongly the case with Lucy Audley, for instance.

When it comes to previous scholarship in the area, the research has focused on the examination of Lucy Audley and Robert Audley. The issues which seem to have gained most attention have been madness (in connection with femininity), and elements that are connected with detective stories (Robert Audley as a detective). Femininity – especially Lady

Audley's role as an unconventional woman – has also been under examination. In my study, I will, however, emphasise the importance of the different relationships in order to offer a more versatile insight into femininity and masculinity. The relationships also reveal much more effectively the different roles that men and women are supposed to assume in society, since any relationship is, in a way, a microcosm of society. More focus will also be given to the other characters – that is, to George, Clara and Phoebe. For instance, previous scholarship has underrated the relationship of Lucy and Phoebe, and especially the eroticism between them has gained little attention.

When it comes to Braddon and her extensive production in general, we can say that she was especially fascinated by women with concealed secrets, and often this secret in her novels was bigamy. Indeed, both *Lady Audley's Secret* and *Aurora Floyd* include bigamously married heroines, who desperately attempt to cover the secret of their past. Carnell argues that Braddon was undoubtedly the most famous author of bigamous marriages (162). Bigamy was a familiar phenomenon to the Victorian readership, since it was practically impossible to get a divorce in the Victorian age (161). Braddon also had personal experience on the matter. From 1862, Braddon cohabited with publisher John Maxwell, whom she did not marry until 1874. The reason for this "late" marriage was that John Maxwell was already married to a woman confined in a mental institution. The couple had six children, in addition to which Braddon also took care of Maxwell and his first wife's offspring. Although Braddon and Maxwell were unable to register their relationship until the death of Maxwell's first wife, they, however, registered their children as a married couple in order to give their children a legitimate status (172). Braddon and Maxwell's non-marital status was revealed to the public only after the death of Maxwell's first wife, and the couple attempted to escape from the erupting scandal by moving to another location for a year (182 - 183).

The uncrowned queen of sensation fiction was able to avoid a huge scandal after her bigamous relationship had been exposed, but she was not, however, able to escape from the criticism concerning her writing. The reaction to sensation fiction was nearly frantic, although the expanding newspaper press dealt with issues such as crime and sexuality much more explicitly than fiction ever did in the Victorian age (Carnell, 165). Real life crime and newspaper reports did, however, not affect Braddon as directly as many other sensation writers, since she did not turn an actual act of crime into a story in her novels as some sensation novelists did (165). The sensation author Charles Reade was most influenced by newspapers and real life crime, and even used to quote newspaper stories in his novels (166).

One of the most relevant aspects that infuriated critics was the fact that some of the authors producing "immoral" material were women (Carnell, 167). Despite the fact that men still dominated the literary scene when it came to sensation fiction – Wilkie Collins, for instance, was regarded as the pioneer of the genre – the female sensation novelists were the primary target of criticism (167). This is how the Reverend Paget criticised sensation fiction and particularly women producing it in a novel called *Lucretia; or, The Heroine of the Nineteenth Century* published in 1868:

> No *man* would have dared to write and publish such books as some of these are: no *man could* have written such delineations of female passion (…) No! They are women, who by their writings have been doing the work of the enemy of souls, glossing over vice, making profligacy attractive, dealing with licentious minuteness the workings of unbridled passions, encouraging vanity, extravagance, wilfulness, selfishness in their worst forms (…) Women have done this, - have thus abused their power and prostituted their gifts, - who might have been bright and shining lights in their generation. (quoted in Carnell, 167 - 168)

The criticism may be due to the fact that women were considered to have too innocent a mind and not enough life experience in order to write any notable texts (Carnell, 172). With their writing – presuming that women were supposed to write at all – women were basically expected to raise religious morality (168). Women who took advantage of their life

experience when writing a novel were considered a serious threat. Braddon, for instance, had gained life experience by working as an actress, supporting her family with her writing and by living in a “dubious" relationship with John Maxwell (173). This definitely gave her ingredients to deal with in her forthcoming novels.

According to Carnell, Braddon was the female writer who received the fiercest critique (167). It was seen that she was a dangerous influence and would offer a distorted model for the Victorian female audience with her bigamists, murderers and arsonists as main characters (169). Critics feared that reading about such matters would allure young and innocent ladies into profligacy and voluptuous behaviour. Braddon was not only criticised by the opposite sex; in fact, one of her most venomous critics was Margaret Oliphant (169). Oliphant argued that other female sensation novelists were merely Braddon’s imitators, and hence Braddon became the main target of her critique (170). This is how Oliphant criticised sensation fiction in her article “Novels” in *Blackwood’s*:

> It is a shame of women so to write; and it is a shame to the women who read and accept as a true representation of themselves and their ways the equivocal talk and fleshly inclination herein attributed to them. It may be done in carelessness. It may be done in that mere desire for something startling which the monotony of ordinary life is apt to produce; but it is debasing to everybody concerned. (quoted in Carnell, 169)

The sexuality of the heroines in Braddon’s novels was Oliphant’s primary concern (Carnell, 170). According to Carnell, however, Braddon’s central characters were not that sexually toned as, for example, the heroines of writers such as Rhoda Broughton or Florence Marryat (170). One of Braddon’s most famous heroines, Lady Audley, is, for instance, often analysed by the critics to have no interest in sexual intercourse with men (see for example Pykett, 57). Carnell concludes that this conservativeness derives from Braddon’s somewhat ambiguous social status as Maxwell’s companion, due to which Braddon had to be more conservative when portraying sexual passion (170). Braddon’s conservativeness is understandable when one considers the criticism she received: critics often implied that the

immorality depicted in the novels descended from Braddon's own "immoral" choices (170 - 171).

The critique, however, did not prevent Braddon from being popular among the readership. Her three-volume *Lady Audley's Secret*, for instance, went through eight editions in only three months (Carnell, 147). Braddon also became popular overseas, as her novels appeared in France, the United States and in colonies such as India (149). Despite the criticism she got, one should also acknowledge that it were not merely bad reviews Braddon got at home; especially the provincial press used to compliment her (183). Despite the fact that her sensation novels became popular almost overnight, Braddon still had the feeling that she ought to write something greater, "an intellectually worthy novel" (143). This becomes apparent from the following extract from a letter to the novelist Edward Bulwer Lytton in 1863:

> if I live to complete these two [novels] I shall have earned enough money to keep me & my mother for the rest of our lives, & I will *then* try & write for Fame, & do something more worthy to be laid upon your altar (quoted in Carnell, 143).

2. THE MID-VICTORIAN EXPERIENCE

The following chapter will focus on the ideas of femininity and masculinity during the Victorian period. The primary aim is to clarify what kind of roles men and women were expected to adopt, what kind of femininity and masculinity was valued, and how all this affected the lives of Victorian men and women. The issue will be examined from various different viewpoints such as education, marriage and family life, as well as sexuality and morality. In the background, there are the aspects and values that are inseparable from Victorian society, such as moral values and the importance of home. Queen Victoria's reign lasted for almost 64 years (1837 - 1901), and it may be somewhat difficult to generalise the attitudes, values and perceptions of the Victorian age not only due to its length, but also due to the changes that occurred during the period. Although several alterations which offered widened opportunities for women in society took place in the late Victorian period, I could argue that Victorian values did not experience such a rapid change. This becomes apparent when considering the expectations society placed on men and women.

I will concentrate on portraying the mid-Victorian period (approximately 1848 - 1870), since the novel I am analysing was first published at the beginning of 1860s. This is also a time when the very core of Victorian values flourished in society. Most of the earlier research has concentrated on the analysis of femininity and the status of the Victorian woman. The male aspect often becomes apparent only as a comparison to the female one. However, I will attempt to clarify the male perspective as well, since masculinity is an essential part of the analysis of *Lady Audley's Secret* offered in the later chapters. I have found Tosh's book[5] on masculinity and domesticity especially useful in this respect.

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[5] Tosh, John. *A Man's Place: Masculinity and the Middle-Class Home in Victorian England*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999.

The mid-Victorian period was characterised as the period of "prosperity, optimism and stability".[6] Industrialisation and the developments in science brought on prosperity, although certainly not everyone was able to enjoy the accomplishments of the era. Gorham states that in the mid-Victorian period, there was also "a consensus about moral, social and political values"[7], denoting that the values of the rising middle class strongly dominated the thinking.

The rise of the Victorian middle class was strongly connected with the growth of the towns, as well as with the growth of the economy.[8] The members of the middle class represented people not belonging to the aristocracy or the working class (1). They worked regularly, but not in manual labour (Tosh, 13). The occupations of the middle class reflected the developments that had taken place in Victorian society: the members of the middle class occupied positions as entrepreneurs, businessmen, teachers, doctors, lawyers, merchants, clerks, managers and civil servants, to name a few (Loftus, 1). However, one should note that the new rising class was extensive and hence also heterogeneous. This denoted that some members of the middle class became as prosperous as the aristocracy, while those belonging to the "lower end" of the middle class could earn as little as the working class (1). Regardless of this, one could argue that the middle class as a whole strongly valued similar matters, and struggled in order to gain a respected life style. Most importantly, the middle class appreciated the values of domesticity, family life and ideal femininity (Gorham, 153).

One must acknowledge, though, that what has been described as essentially mid-Victorian is more true when it comes to men than women (Gorham, 153). During the mid-Victorian period, women were firmly dependent on their fathers, brothers or husbands, and

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[6]" The Victorian Age: Review". The Norton Anthology of English Literature. Available from <http://www2.wwnorton.com/college/english/nael/victorian/review/summary.htm>. [Accessed 15 February 2007]

[7] Gorham, Deborah. *The Victorian Girl and the Feminine Ideal*. London: Croom Helm Ltd, 1982, 153.

[8] Loftus, Donna. "The Rise of the Victorian Middle Class". 2001, 1. Available from <http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/victorians/middle_classes_01.shtml>. [Accessed 15 February 2007]

thus their position in society as well as their wealth depended on the position of the male members of their family (153). When the reign of Queen Victoria began in 1837, women had few legal rights to protect themselves in society: married women had basically no property rights or rights to control their own earnings; getting a divorce was utterly impossible; women had no right to the custody of their children; they had no right to vote; and they were completely excluded from all higher education, including universities.[9] First-wave feminism of the late nineteenth century took these grievances as its primary concern.

2.1. Women of Silence, Men of Action – The Ideal Manhood and Womanhood

Tosh states that the understanding of gender was strongly polarised in the Victorian middle class culture (46). He argues that "both character and sexuality were seen in more sharply gendered terms than ever before or since" (46). The Victorians regarded women as not only being inferior to men, but fundamentally different as well. Due to this, men and women were destined to specific and separate tasks, which, in turn, required different attributes (46). The two most relevant, distinctive attributes were femininity and masculinity. Preserving the right kind of femininity or masculinity was central to every aspect of life. These attributes represented the very core of manhood and womanhood, and were thus valued as the most essential characteristics in men and women.

According to Gorham, the characteristics of the ideal woman during the Victorian period can be summed up to a single term; she was expected be feminine (5). Being feminine, in turn, implied being innocent, pure, gentle, emotional and submissive (4 - 5). The feminine woman was totally satisfied with being dependent on the male members of her family (4). This is why it was also desired that the women possessed "childlike innocence and

[9] Bellamy, Joan. "Barriers of Silence; Women in Victorian Fiction". Ed. Eric M. Sigsworth. *In Search of Victorian Values: Aspects of Nineteenth-Century Thought and Society*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988, 131 - 147, 131.

infantine simplicity".[10] Simplicity and childishness would prevent the women from struggling for independence. Strong-mindedness was also a characteristic one should avoid, because instead of enhancing femininity, it would lead the girl to "presumptuous", "self-willed" and "arrogant" behaviour (Gorham, 104).

Another ideal during the mid-Victorian period was the idea of the perfect lady: this ideal was cherished especially among the upper middle class, but it was also admired by many working class women.[11] The perfect lady had a very limited role in society: she did not work, but instead was able to act only in the restricted sphere of the home (ix). Once again, the perfect feminine lady was completely dependent on the male members of her household (ix). The dependence was economic, legal, social, as well as ideological, and it was believed to be a natural part of femininity.[12] Dependency also becomes apparent when considering how women were defined through their relationships to men; most importantly, they were wives, mothers, daughters or sisters. Indeed, the most important aim of the perfect lady was to be a mother and a wife (Vicinus, ix).

Gorham claims that the idea of femininity as the ideal was a modern idea, and a significant reason for the subordination of women in the modern times (5). In pre-modern times, the subjection of women was based on either force or biblical interpretation (5). Since the end of the 18th century, however, regarding feminine qualities as "natural" has been, according to Gorham, the major cause for considering women as inferior to men (5). Indeed, feminine has often been regarded as the "Other", as something second-rated. This denotes that one perceives masculinity as a norm, while femininity is considered to be deviant, peculiar and perhaps even dangerous. The feminine qualities – such as emotional and intuitive versus

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[10] Cominos, Peter T. "Innocent Femina Sensualis in Unconscious Conflict". Ed. Martha Vicinus. *Suffer and Be Still: Women in the Victorian Age*. London: Methuen, 1972, 155 - 172, 161.
[11] Vicinus, Martha. "Introduction: The Perfect Victorian Lady". Ed. Martha Vicinus. *Suffer and Be Still: Women in the Victorian Age*. London: Methuen, 1972, vii - xv; ix, xii.
[12] Nead, Lynda. *Myths of Sexuality: Representations of Women in Victorian Britain*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd, 1988; 14, 29.

rational and logical – are often seen as weaker qualities. Thus, if one considers feminine qualities as weaker at the same time as seeing them as natural and inevitable characteristics in women, one can also easily justify the subordination of women. During the Victorian period, women's inferiority was indeed justified by biology and natural laws: according to Victorian thinking, "male and female sex roles had been decided in the lowest forms of life and neither political nor technological change could alter the temperaments which had developed from these differing functions".[13] According to the Scottish biologist Patrick Geddes, who studied sex-differentiation and social evolution at the end of the 19th century, women's passivity and patience was the result of their biological need to store energy (147). Due to physiological facts, women were also more intuitive, open-minded and sympathetic (147). Thus Geddes presents women's inferior position as a medical fact, which cannot be altered.

According to Rowbotham, the stereotypes concerning masculinity remained relatively stable during Queen Victoria's reign.[14] Although the Victorians cherished the idea of innate sexual difference, masculinity was considered something that fully developed in the course of time (Tosh, 103). Manliness was what made boys become men, the key requirements being "energy", "will", "straightforwardness" and "courage" (111). The key attribute of masculinity and manliness was independence, which denoted autonomy of both action and opinion (111). Total roughness was, however, not admired; while the ideal for women was the perfect lady, men were expected to aspire to the status of a gentleman, who treated women in a respectful and gentle manner (Rowbotham, 48). Geddes, in turn, saw males as more intelligent and courageous than women, and as being able to "expend energy in sustained bursts of physical or cerebral activity", as opposed to women who due to medical facts, were more apt to store energy (Conway, 146).

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[13] Conway, Jill. "Stereotypes of Femininity in a Theory of Sexual Evolution". Ed. Martha Vicinus. *Suffer and Be Still: Women in the Victorian Age*. London: Methuen, 1972, 140 - 154, 144.
[14] Rowbotham, Judith. *Good Girls Make Good Wives: Guidance for Girls in Victorian Fiction*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd, 1989, 48.

One may conclude that men were supposed to praise the active and powerful characteristics; the ideal masculine man was energetic, determined, courageous, independent and strong. These are in strong contrast to the ideal characteristics of a feminine woman, who was tender, simple, passive and irresolute. The Victorians saw the two sexes as being complementary, fulfilling each other's needs, and hence the characteristics were total opposites. This is how Ruskin[15] saw the concept of the two sexes as being complementary in his essay "Of Queen's Gardens" published in 1865:

> We are foolish, and without excuse foolish, in speaking of the "superiority" of one sex to the other, as if they could be compared in similar things. Each has what the other has not: each completes the other, and is completed by the other: they are in nothing alike, and the happiness and perfection of both depends on each asking and receiving from the other what the other only can give.
>
> Now their separate characters are briefly these. The man's power is active, progressive, defensive. He is eminently the doer, the creator, the discoverer and defender. His intellect is for speculation and invention; his energy for adventure, for war, and for conquest, wherever war is just, wherever conquest necessary. But the woman's power is not for rule, not for battle,--and her intellect is not for invention or creation, but for sweet ordering, arrangement, and decision.[16]

Although men and women were considered fundamentally different from each other, and thus were expected to possess distinctive characteristics, there were some shared attributes necessary for both sexes, such as "self-discipline", "order", "regularity" and "self-control" (Gorham, 112). In spite of this, the idea of confusing femininity and masculinity was an appalling thought to the Victorians. This becomes especially relevant when considering *Lady Audley's Secret* in the later chapters. Many Victorians shared Leach's ideas on femininity and masculinity even at the end of the 19th century (Leach writing in *Girls Own Paper* in 1884):

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[15] John Ruskin (1819 - 1900) was a British art critic, author, poet and artist, who was also known for his social, political and literary criticism. His essays were extremely influential in the Victorian period, and his ideas strongly affected Victorian thinking. During his lifetime, Ruskin wrote over 250 works concerning various fields of study. Ruskin is also known for his problems with sexuality. In 1848, Ruskin married Effie Gray. The marriage was, however, unhappy, and was annulled six years later on the grounds of Ruskin's impotence. Gray claimed that her husband had found her body repugnant, due to which their sexual life was a disaster.

[16] Ruskin, John. "Of Queen's Gardens" in *Sesame and Lilies*. Available from <http://www.gutenberg.org/dirs/etext98/sesli10.txt>. No pagination. [Accessed 2 May 2007]

> Let each fill their separate sphere of usefulness, and there need be no detraction of worth on either part; but interfere, or tread one on the other's ground, and we have the result in a feminine man, or a masculine woman; either, or both, of which is an aversion to both sexes. (quoted in Gorham, 120)

2.2. From Childhood to Adulthood – Victorian Education

In the early and mid-Victorian period, the most important precondition for girls' education was preserving femininity. It was acknowledged that girls needed some education, but mainly in order to become useful and entertaining companions to men, as well as good mothers to their children (Gorham, 102). Many Victorians believed that the only reason for teaching girls anything about "masculine" subjects – that is, mathematics, history and geography, for example – was that they would become better listeners in male company (103). Regardless of this, Victorian commentators on girls' education considered it most relevant for girls to learn about music, poetry, art and needlework, since these talents could be used as "the means of home enjoyment" (104). Considering their future roles in the domestic sphere, it was also relevant for a girl to learn about domestic duties and how to a run a household (Rowbotham, 124). Naturally this depended on a girl's social status: girls from the aristocratic families did not have to bother themselves with learning domestic duties.

Although it became more and more acceptable for girls to study the same subjects as boys towards the end of the 19th century, the girls' education still had to follow a more feminine structure (Rowbotham, 100). This feminine way of learning implied that a girl "should never be interested in learning for its own sake"; learning and achievement were regarded as masculine needs, and thus pursuing these would cause a girl to lose her femininity (Gorham, 105).

The preparation for an adult life began as early as in childhood and adolescence (Gorham, 101). In addition to teaching girls for their future roles as wives and mothers, they

were taught to accept their inferior position compared to males (Gorham, 101). Girls were given advice on the limits of their sex, and encouraged to appreciate their dependence on males as a natural part of their life (102).

Education sent boys and girls to follow different paths both mentally and physically. Home was considered the best place to teach girls, since it was feared that the school atmosphere would harden a girl unnecessarily and encourage masculine qualities in her (Rowbotham, 129). At home, the mother or a governess as her teacher, the girl could be protected from damaging outside influences (129). Few boys, however, were taught at home after the age of six or seven (Tosh, 104). The education of boys was considered to be most effective when outside feminine influence; at school the boys could identify with their male role models, as well as experience friendship and competition among their peers (Rowbotham, 129; Tosh, 105). It was necessary to teach boys for "manly independence" (Tosh, 4). The father of the family was also expected to fill his part in making his sons internalise what masculine status was all about and what masculine attributes were essential (114). All this aimed at preparing the son for the competitive public sphere (118).

Unless aiming at the university, most middle class boys finished their formal education in their mid-teens, after which training for a business or a profession began (Tosh, 105). Up to the 1860s, women – especially from the middle class – had few opportunities in the field of employment (Rowbotham, 223). This naturally affected girls' education itself; if women had no working prospects, their education was undervalued as well. Towards the end of the century, working opportunities widened as a result of economic need and female ambition (Rowbotham, 264). Being a governess was the most favoured option, but other possibilities opened up in the course of time, such as nursing, typewriting, journalism, being a clerk and philanthropy. Despite the fact that paid employment became more acceptable for women, it was by no means desirable (249). The utmost fear was that female employment

would eventually cause the destruction of morality and the domestic life (Nead, 31), which will be handled in the following.

2.3. Home Sweet Home – The Cult of Domesticity in Victorian Society

The so-called "cult of domesticity" is very relevant when considering Victorian values and the status of men and women in society. It developed as a result of the separation of home and the workplace during the 18th and the early 19th century (Nead, 32). Home was considered a sanctuary for basically all the classes of society; it offered a shelter and a resting place compared to the hectic workplace.[17] More than anything, it represented "seclusion", "intimacy" and "high morality" (Tosh, 30). Society was considered to be formed of small units – that is, homes – and each unit represented a microcosm of society; due to this, a well-cared home was a precondition for social well-being and order (Nead, 33).

The division between the private life of home and the public side of professional life had a remarkable impact on the perception of gender roles in the Victorian age, as gender identities began to construct around the idea of separate spheres. The public sphere of commerce, professional life and politics was regarded as the "male sphere", while the private sphere of home was dedicated to women (Gorham, 4). Women's ultimate duty was to fulfil the role of wife and mother, and this was naturally best accomplished under the shelter of one's own home. Again, one may consider John Ruskin's perception of the two sexes as "complementary opposites" that would fulfil their own separate duties and thus complete each other's work.[18] This fits perfectly to the idea of separate spheres. Ruskin goes further to present his ideas on the function of men and women in society:

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[17] Briggs, Asa. "Victorian Values". Ed. Eric M. Sigsworth. *In Search of Victorian Values: Aspects of Nineteenth-Century Thought and Society*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988, 10 - 27, 22.
[18] See page 14.

> By her office, and place, she is protected from all danger and temptation. The man, in his rough work in open world, must encounter all peril and trial;--to him, therefore, must be the failure, the offence, the inevitable error: often he must be wounded, or subdued; often misled; and ALWAYS hardened. But he guards the woman from all this; within his house, as ruled by her, unless she herself has sought it, need enter no danger, no temptation, no cause of error, or offence. (Ruskin, no pagination)

Women's duty was to take care of home by creating an environment where the male members of the family could relax after a harsh day in the competitive public sphere (Gorham, 4). Home was a place where the husband could take off his "public mask", and share his anxieties with his devoted wife (Tosh, 54). Naturally, comforting men also denoted taking care of household duties (Rowbotham, 23). Whether these were done by servants or the wife and daughters of the family depended on the wealth and status of the family. In any case, the Victorian ideal, the Angel in the House, would be able to create a cosy environment wherever she was (Gorham, 7). This is how Ruskin saw it:

> And whenever a true wife comes, this home is always round her. The stars only may be over her head; the glowworm in the night-cold grass may be the only fire at her foot; but home is yet wherever she is; and for a noble woman it stretches far round her, better than ceiled with cedar, or painted with vermilion, shedding its quiet light far, for those who else were homeless. (Ruskin, no pagination)

The ideal woman acted as "the cement which held the home together" (Rowbotham, 18). Holding family together was considered a huge emotional task; this task was regarded as appropriate for women, since they were the professionals of emotion (19, 52). Hence it was a woman's duty to become as professional in her domestic sphere as men did on their own playground, in the public sphere (21). In order to succeed in this, self-sacrifice was the key (19). Women were expected to neglect their own ambitions and desires to the benefit of the family and the household (19).

The English philosopher, John Stuart Mill, who clamoured for the rights of Victorian women, had a very different view on the cult of domesticity. He refers to the

woman's position at home as "domestic slavery", suggesting that the system forces women into "bondservants within marriage", where they have fewer rights than most slaves.[19] Mill was, however, extremely radical with his views on gender roles, and one may conclude that most Victorians saw home as a sacred place where its female inhabitants had the pleasure of entertaining their family.

Though historians have emphasised the Victorian home as a feminine domain, Tosh surprisingly argues that the domestic sphere was relevant to masculinity as well (4). A man's duty was to establish a home, protect it, provide for the family living in it and control it (4). Keeping domestic order was hence relevant to maintaining a respectable masculine status (60 - 61). Tosh emphasises that although the wife was given the opportunity of managing the household, she did it under her husband's control (63). Thus she was still a subject to her husband even in her own domain. Tosh also claims that the domestic setting revealed a man's level of income as well as his moral character most reliably (24). A wealthy husband could utilise his wife as a proof of his income and status, assuming that the husband's income allowed the wife to live in leisure at home (24).

2.4. Marriage as a Mission

Marriage was regarded as an essential part of Victorian domesticity (Tosh, 27). Its function was, however, slightly different for men and women. During the early and the mid-Victorian period, marriage was regarded as the only possible and appropriate goal in a middle class girl's life (Gorham, 53). Becoming a wife and a mother was the sole purpose of a woman's life; other options were seen as unnatural or pitiful.[20] Marriage was more than often an

[19] Quoted in Millett, Kate. "The Debate over Women: Ruskin vs. Mill". Ed. Martha Vicinus. *Suffer and Be Still: Women in the Victorian Age*. London: Methuen, 1972, 121 - 139, 131.
[20] Foster, Shirley. *Victorian Women's Fiction: Marriage, Freedom and the Individual*. London: Croom Helm Ltd, 1985, 6.

economic necessity, as well.[21] This concerned especially middle class girls, who had few opportunities to earn a decent living by themselves – particularly if they wanted to maintain their status as ladies (120). The Victorians did appreciate the romantic side of marriage, as well (Gorham, 53). Thus they considered that it was sinful to marry for other reasons than love (Rowbotham, 46). Gorham, however, emphasises that in spite of the emotions, marriage was always an economic arrangement, too (53). This must have been the case especially with aristocracy and the wealthier middle class, whose aim was to ensure that sons and daughters married according to their social rank. A marriage certificate was also a "business agreement" between two families.

But how should, then, a Victorian girl find an appropriate husband? Again, this was an interesting procedure. Victorians found the idea of a "husband-hunting" girl utterly repulsive (Gorham, 53). It was seen that the right man would merely appear at the doorstep without any intervention from the girl's part (53). This is again one sector where the male is the dominant, active part, and the female is the submissive and passive counterpart waiting for the man to take action.

Not every woman was, however, able to live according to the Victorian expectations, and able to enter the joyful state of matrimony. This was largely due to the demographic imbalance between the two sexes[22], and due to the male emigration to the colonies (Foster, 7). According to the population statistics from 1851, of every 100 women over the age of twenty, 57 were married, 12 were widows and 30 were spinsters.[23] The women who had not succeeded in marrying were called "redundant" (57). The "redundant

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[21] Billington, Rosamund. "The Dominant Values of Victorian Feminism". Ed. Eric M. Sigsworth. *In Search of Victorian Values: Aspects of Nineteenth-Century Thought and Society*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988, 116 - 131, 120.

[22] By the mid-Victorian period, there were about half a million more women than men.

[23] Roberts, Helene E. "Marriage, Redundancy or Sin: The Painter's View of Women in the first Twenty-Five Years of Victoria's Reign". Ed. Martha Vicinus. *Suffer and Be Still: Women in the Victorian Age*. London: Methuen, 1972, 45 - 76, 57.

woman" was seen as an utter failure in the eyes of society, and was thus mere laughing stock (Vicinus, xii). If a middle class girl, for example, could not marry, she had basically two options: trying to support herself or becoming dependent in the household of a relative (Gorham, 27). More than often, this was also the destiny of widows and abandoned wives.

Due to their independent economic status, men were not as compelled to a find a spouse as women. Marriage was, however, strongly recommended, since only marriage could guarantee the full privileges of masculinity (Tosh, 108). These issues significant to a man's gender identity included establishing a household, controlling and protecting it, as well as exercising authority over dependants (108). Men often entered the blessed state of matrimony only in their late twenties, since marriage and establishing a household required a certain amount of property (109). Another common aspect that may have reduced the urgency to marry at a young age was male friendships. According to Tosh, in societies where women are seen as inferior to men, profound friendships between men are more likely to flourish (109). He states that one can easily recognise a homosexual overtone in Victorian male friendships, but it is difficult to discover whether the relationships really were homosexual in practise (110). Deep as these friendships between young males may have been, they could not replace the state of matrimony in achieving a full masculine status.

Getting a divorce had been practically impossible during the early Victorian period. Divorce was regarded as something which threatened self-control and respectability in marriage, and thus encouraged voluptuous feelings and behaviour (Nead, 55). The 1857 Matrimonial Causes Act brought some relief, since it transferred marital jurisdiction from canon to civil law, making divorce somewhat easier and cheaper to get (52). The new law was not, however, impartial; while a husband was able to appeal for a divorce by accusing his wife of adultery, the wife had to show her husband guilty of something more serious, such as cruelty, incest or bigamy (52). This inequality was justified by the argument that a woman's

adultery was more serious a crime; a woman could bring another man's offspring to her home as a result of adultery (53 - 54). Once more, one may notice that women were considered responsible for the domestic well-being, which their actions could either disturb or guarantee. One may also discover the double standards concerning morality and sexuality, which will be the topic of the next subchapter.

2.5. Animal versus Innocent – Victorian Ideas on Sexuality and Morality

The Victorian era was definitely not a golden age for sexuality. As Tosh states, we do not know much about the sexual lives of the Victorian couples, since they rarely referred to it explicitly (59). We do know, however, about the expectations, conditions and restrictions that concerned sexuality in the Victorian era. Basically, the core idea was that chaste behaviour and purity were considered the foundation on which to build a genteel family, which, in turn, was regarded as the ideal part of domesticity (Cominos, 156). The struggle for preserving purity had to begin in early childhood (158). Though young children were considered pure and innocent, it was believed that they had also "inherited a fallen nature", and thus needed guidance (158). The most important character in guiding children was their mother, who had the weighty responsibility of teaching her children purity and obedience (158).

Sexuality was not an impartial field during the mid-Victorian era, and double standards for men and women flourished. This denoted that most of society's expectations were placed on women. It was considered utterly impossible for a young girl to have any sexual thoughts or feelings; instead, she was expected to be completely ignorant of her own sexuality (Gorham, 54). This ignorance was thought to be the guard of her innocence; if a girl lost her ignorance, she became aware of her sexuality, and was hence in great danger of becoming voluptuous (54). According to Victorian theories, girls were already born with "a

remnant of the innocence of Paradise" (Cominos, 157). This innate, paradisiacal innocence was also a girl's safeguard against the "predatory male animal" (157).

Due to asexuality being the idealised norm in the Victorian era, the role of the wife and mother became somewhat contradictory (Gorham, 7). It is interesting how the Victorians were able to account for the reproductive role of a mother at the same time as claiming for non-sexual behaviour. According to Cominos, one explanation for this given by the Victorians was that males were tempted to exaggerate "the physical side of love" due to their physiology, while women merely longed for affection instead of sexuality (160). This is how Dr William Acton[24] saw women's relationship with sexuality:

> Love of home, children, and domestic duties, are the only passions they feel. As a general rule, a modest woman seldom desires any sexual gratification for herself. She submits to her husband, but only to please him; and, but for the desire of maternity, would far rather be relieved from his attention. (quoted in Cominos, 160)

Women were thus expected to know nothing and be ignorant of sexual desires and pleasures (Cominos, 160). As Vicinus points out, this unawareness was likely to avenge on many young girls; the reality of married life could turn out to be totally disastrous and even frightening for girls who were taught to be asexual and knew nothing about sexual intercourse (x).

Since unawareness was acceptable – even desired – during the mid-Victorian age, there were several false assumptions concerning sexuality and the functions of the human body. One of these myths concerned the fear of masturbation (Gorham, 55). It was believed that masturbation would damage both physical and mental health in both men and women (55). Impure thoughts leading to impure behaviour, such as masturbation, were thought to be the result of a failed education (55) – and again, it was the mother who was to be blamed. Menstruation was another great secret during the Victorian period. First, a menstruating woman was in many cases considered "unclean", and was also connected with peculiar

[24] William Acton (1813 - 1875) was a British medical doctor and a book writer. He was best known for his books on masturbation.

beliefs, according to which her menstruation was regarded as the cause of negative actions.[25] Second, female physiology gave justification for women's subordination in society. The mind and body of a woman were not considered to be fit for work during menstruation, and hence many thought it unnecessary for women to aspire to educational or professional improvements (42). It was stated that women's physiology acted as a handicap and as a result, women could never achieve similar accomplishments to men (42). Thus science and medicine were not only used as a means of justifying women's inferior position, but they were also utilised in attempting to prevent the situation from improving.

Morality is undoubtedly one of the key terms when considering Victorian femininity and masculinity. It was also strongly connected with the idea of sexuality. Striving for a pure moral nature was especially important in the case of Victorian girls (Gorham, 111). Due to their purity and innocence, women were expected to have a deeper moral tone in them than men. It was explained that men were unable to gain similar moral purity to women due to their participation in the competitive public sphere, which was likely to harden them (Rowbotham, 48). Ruskin, the supporter of very traditional gender roles, saw the wife as a moral guide to her husband; according to him, a woman should serve as the conscience of her male companion (Millett, 134). This also becomes apparent when considering brother-sister relationships during the Victorian age; especially the older sister had the weighty responsibility of acting as her brother's conscience and moral guide (Gorham, 45). The moral superiority derived from the innocence the girl maintained by staying in the private sphere of home (45). However, in order to complete the task successfully, the sister had to struggle to maintain her innocence and purity (45). The brother-sister relationship was, in any case, regarded as the ideal relationship between a male and a female, since it embodied all the affection and none of the sexuality there could be between a man and a woman (44).

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[25] Showalter, Elaine and English. "Victorian Women and Menstruation". Ed. Martha Vicinus. *Suffer and Be Still: Women in the Victorian Age*. London: Methuen, 1972, 38 - 44, 39.

Society certainly placed unequal expectations on female and male sexuality. Women were expected to be the moral guides in society, and to help the male members of their family to control their sexuality. Men's sexual energy was considered to be very strong, and thus the wife had to do her best in cooling down her husband's lust (Tosh, 46). Men were, however, not punished for having powerful sexual ardour and behaving accordingly. They were able to have extra-marital affairs, which society quietly condoned, although the Victorian moral standards may not have approved of them (Roberts, 73). It was not uncommon for young middle class men to have prostitutes as their first sexual partners while waiting for the right future wife to come along (Tosh, 108). Sexual activity was considered to enhance a man's masculine status, and it acted as a "rite de passage" to manhood (108).

For women, on the contrary, sexual activity outside marriage was absolutely impossible without it being connected to prostitution (Cominos, 157). The prostitute, or the "fallen woman", represented dangerous and illicit sex, while the feminine ideal stood for acceptable sexuality in marriage (Nead, 95). Female sexuality was, indeed, organised around the bipartition of virgin and whore (6). This categorisation did not offer much choice for female sexuality: acceptable sexuality within marriage guaranteed a respectable and safe position, while sexuality outside marriage gave one the label of a dangerous, unfeminine woman – that is, the label of a prostitute.

Real prostitution was a harsh fact in Victorian society. The conditions of female employment during the mid-Victorian era often left no choice for unwed mothers, for example, but to work on the streets selling themselves (Roberts, 63). The Victorian "underworld" of prostitution was a substantial one: police reports of 1850 reveal that in London alone, there were 8 000 known prostitutes, and more than 50 000 in England and Wales (63). Prostitutes were by no means a homogeneous group of women (Nead, 96). Nead makes a distinction between a prostitute and a fallen woman: prostitutes usually represented

the working class, while the term “fallen” referred to a woman who had been respectable, but for some reason had strayed from the path as a result of false promises of marriage, for example (95 - 96).

Prostitution is only one aspect where one may clearly see the Victorian double standards concerning sexuality. Society quietly condoned males’ “conquests” and the use of prostitutes, and this was even considered to enhance masculinity. Women, on the contrary, did not encounter forgiveness if they strayed from their feminine path of purity and innocence. As Cominos notes, women were the ones who bore the guilt of losing their innocence, since it was entirely a feminine responsibility to stay pure and innocent (165). The women who dared to break the sacred family circle – divorcees, prostitutes and adulterers, for instance – were regarded as a threat to the entire society (Vicinus, xiv). Thus again, women were handed with the burden of sustaining society as morally pure.

3. THE RELATIONSHIP OF LUCY AUDLEY AND ROBERT AUDLEY

In this chapter, I will concentrate on examining the two main characters of the novel, Lucy Audley and Robert Audley. My main goal is to analyse how the characters utilise femininity and masculinity in the relationship, how power and control are reflected in the relationship, how sexuality is depicted in it, how the characters develop in the course of time, and whether the characters question their conventional roles as men and women. I will begin by examining the appearance and characteristics of the two characters in general, and then move on to discuss their relationship in more detail in subchapters 3.2. and 3.3.. Subchapter 3.4. will deal with Judith Butler and her ideas on gender identities, and how this can be connected with the relationship of Lucy and Robert.

3.1. Appearance and Character Reflecting Femininity and Masculinity

It becomes apparent at the very beginning of *Lady Audley's Secret* that Lucy is the embodiment of femininity when it comes to her looks. Lucy's husband, Sir Michael, is completely enchanted by his young wife's exceptional beauty:

> He could no more resist the tender fascination of those soft and melting blue eyes; the graceful beauty of that slender throat and drooping head, with its wealth of showering flaxen curls; the low music of that gentle voice; the perfect harmony which pervaded every charm, and made all doubly charming in this woman; than he could resist his destiny.[26]

Femininity becomes especially emphasised when Lucy's hair is referred to: "They were the most wonderful curls in the world – soft and feathery, always floating away from her face, and making a pale halo round her head when the sunlight shone through them" (*LAS*, 9). The references to haloes clearly imply Lucy's feminine innocence. Her soft curls may be seen as

[26] Braddon, Mary Elizabeth. *Lady Audley's Secret*. Ware: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 1997, 7. *Lady Audley's Secret* will be shortened as *LAS* when referring to quotations.

angelic, denoting that Lucy is the Angel of the House. The feminine curls also have a strong sexual connotation emphasising Lucy's sexuality.

It is not merely Lucy's appearance that amazes everyone around her; Lucy's nature is also portrayed as extremely gentle, lovable and amiable. Her radiant nature offers comfort to everyone around her; thus she is like "a sunbeam" (*LAS*, 7), the ideal feminine Victorian girl spreading joy around her. Another attribute which is referred to more than often is Lucy's childishness and innocence:

> That very childishness had a charm which few could resist. The innocence and candour of an infant beamed in Lady Audley's fair face, and shone out of her large and liquid blue eyes. The rosy lips, the delicate nose, the profusion of fair ringlets, all contributed to preserve to her beauty the character of extreme youth and freshness. She owned to twenty years of age, but it was hard to believe her more than seventeen. Her fragile figure, which she loved to dress in heavy velvets and stiff rustling silks, till she looked like a child tricked out for a masquerade, was as girlish as if she had but just left the nursery. (*LAS*, 43)

Langland argues that "Lady Audley is defined by her idealised asexual beauty and her childishness".[27] Indeed, when considering her relationship with Sir Michael, Lucy appears to be occupying the role of a devoted daughter instead of the role of an adult wife. It seems as if she has masked herself in the disguise of an adult lady playing the role of the mistress of the house. Lucy's first husband, George Talboys, also regards Lucy as a child rather than an adult, sexual being who has given birth to his child: "I left my little girl asleep, with her baby in her arms" (*LAS*, 17).

Furthermore, it is not only Lucy's looks that give an impression of a childish figure – her behaviour is also described as that of a child: "Her face expressed the mingled bewilderment and curiosity of a puzzled child, rather than the serious surprise of a woman" (*LAS*, 209). Lucy's activities and amusements are depicted as childish too: she does not enjoy reading or studying of any kind, but instead, amuses herself by playing, painting, singing or

[27] Langland, Elizabeth. "Enclosure Acts: Framing Women's Bodies in Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret*". Eds. Marlene Tromp, Pamela K. Gilbert and Aeron Haynie. *Beyond Sensation: Mary Elizabeth Braddon in Context*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000, 3 - 16, 11.

walking occasionally in the gardens of Audley Court. As wife of a wealthy baronet, Lucy does not have to bother herself with household chores and may thus freely realise her childish wishes in indulgence and leisure. Lucy's childish behaviour seems to be idealised and accepted by everyone else except Sir Michael's daughter Alicia, who finds Lucy's childishness very irritating. One obvious reason for this irritation is Alicia's own attraction to her cousin, Robert, which makes her jealous as Robert pays a lot of attention to Lucy.

Thus one can conclude that the impression the reader – and Robert Audley – first receives of Lucy Audley is that she perfectly meets the Victorian standards of ideal femininity in her looks, nature, behaviour, role and activities: she represents feminine beauty; she seems gentle, fragile, sweet and innocent; she acts childishly and is not interested in developing her intellectual abilities, but instead amuses her household with talents regarded as suitable for ladies; and she appears to act as her husband's devoted companion. All in all, she appears to be a perfect Victorian lady.

While Lucy seems to represent ideal femininity, Robert Audley is certainly not the embodiment of ideal masculinity: "He was a handsome, lazy, care-for-nothing fellow, of about seven-and-twenty; the only son of a younger brother of Sir Michael Audley" (*LAS*, 27). Interestingly enough, though he is a member of an aristocratic family, Robert attempts to fulfil a middle class role as a barrister.[28] This, however, has not been successful, since "he had never either had a brief, or tried to get a brief, or even wished to have a brief in all those five years, during which his name had been painted upon one of the doors in Fig Tree Court" (*LAS*, 27). Besides his incapacity in the public sphere, Robert also seems to be incapable of fulfilling his masculine role in his free time. Both Nemesvari (518) and Pallo[29] draw attention to Robert's feminine characteristics and activities:

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[28] Nemesvari, Richard. "Robert Audley's Secret: Male Homosocial Desire in *Lady Audley's Secret*". *Studies in the Novel*, Vol. 27 Issue 4, 1995, 515 - 528, 520.
[29] Pallo, Vicki A. "From Do-Nothing to Detective: The Transformation of Robert Audley in *Lady Audley's Secret*". *Journal of Popular Culture*, June 39 (3), 2006, 466 - 478, 470.

> Sometimes, when the weather was very hot, and he had exhausted himself with the exertion of smoking his German pipe, and reading French novels, he would stroll into the Temple Gardens, and lying in some shady spot, pale and cool, with his shirt collar turned down and a blue silk handkerchief tied loosely about his neck, would tell grave benchers that he had knocked himself up with overwork. (*LAS*, 27)

Robert seems to lack all the energy, ambition, determination and independence so highly valued in a Victorian man. He is depicted as "the most vacillating and unenergetic of men" (*LAS*, 33), and also himself recognises his weaknesses calling himself a "lymphatic wretch"[30] (*LAS*, 182). Robert is indifferent to his manly duties in the public sphere and appears to be perfectly satisfied with being dependent on his uncle's legacy instead of pursuing his own ambitions as a barrister. Instead of enhancing his masculinity with manly hobbies such as fox hunting, he prefers to read French novels or turn sheets of music when his aunt-by-marriage is playing the piano. Thus it seems that at first, we find femininity in both Lucy and Robert. But how does their relationship develop?

3.2. Power Struggle of Femininity and Masculinity – Robert Audley's Transformation

The development of the relationship between Lucy and her nephew Robert is one of the main threads of the story. Above all, their relationship represents a power struggle, which I believe to have a dual meaning. First, there is a struggle of power and control between Lucy and Robert, which only one of them can win. Second, there is a battle between femininity and masculinity in both Lucy and Robert. Femininity and masculinity may be seen as competitive elements, which alternately control the thinking and behaviour of the two main characters. The developments in the relationship of Lucy and Robert both affect and are a cause of how the characters utilise femininity and masculinity.

[30] The term "lymphatic" referred to physical weakness, incapability and indolence during the Victorian period.

At first Lucy appears to be the more powerful character in her relationship with Robert. This is strongly based on her influence on Sir Michael. Lucy is, for instance, able to control when Robert and his friend George are able to see her. Robert finally succeeds in seeing Lucy before George, and is immediately fascinated by the looks of his aunt-by-marriage:

> 'She is the prettiest little creature you ever saw in your life, George,' he cried, when the carriage had driven off and he returned to his friend. 'Such blues eyes, such ringlets, such a ravishing smile, such a fairly-like bonnet – all of a tremble with heartsease and dewy spangles, shining out of a cloud of gauze. George Talboys, I feel like the hero of a French novel; I am falling in love with my aunt'. (*LAS*, 46)

Lucy is able to utilise her femininity in charming her nephew and thus possesses control over him similarly as she possesses control over her husband, Sir Michael. To Robert, Lucy is like one of the fatal and mysterious beauties in the French novels they both enjoy reading. The attraction Robert feels for his aunt gives Lucy an advantage, which she is able to utilise for a limited time.

So far, Lucy has been able to avoid being seen by her first husband, George Talboys. However, with the assistance of Robert's cousin, Alicia, the two men enter the lady's rooms hence penetrating her privacy. As the result, George discovers Lucy's real identity. In the rooms, the two friends find Lucy's portrait, which portrays Lady Audley as hard and almost wicked. This moment represents a turning point in the power struggle between Robert and Lucy. Langland notes that Lucy is under continual visibility, which offers her no protection from the outside world and society (9). In particular, it does not offer her protection from Robert. From this moment on, she starts to slide under the control and influence of Robert, and is not able to claim privacy anymore.

Robert's interest in his aunt seems more than peculiar when considering his growing obsession with the disappearance of George Talboys:

> In spite of Lady Audley's fascination, and in spite of Robert's very unqualified admiration of her, the barrister could not overcome a vague feeling of uneasiness on this quiet September evening.
>
> As he sat in the deep embrasure of a mullioned window, talking to my lady, his mind wandered away to shady Fig Tree Court, and he thought of poor George Talboys smoking his solitary cigar in the room with the dogs and the canaries. 'I wish I'd never felt any friendliness for the fellow,' he thought.
>
> […]
>
> Still my lady's pretty musical prattle ran on as merrily and continuously as the babble of some brook; and still Robert's thoughts wandered, in spite of himself, to George Talboys. (*LAS*, 70)

At this point, the reader must find it hard to believe that Robert's interest in Lucy would be romantic or sexual due to the fact that his mind is increasingly occupied with George Talboys. Instead, his interest in Lucy starts to be strongly connected with the disappearance of George.

In order to be able to investigate George's disappearance, Robert has to go through a serious transformation, which denotes discarding his irresolute and indifferent manner and starting to embrace his adult duties: "With Mr Robert Audley's lymphatic nature, determination was so much the exception, rather than the rule, that when he did for once in his life resolve upon any course of action, he had a certain dogged, iron-like obstinacy that pushed him on to the fulfilment of his purpose" (*LAS*, 72). In order to solve the mystery of his lost friend, Robert must take on an active and organised masculine role; he, for instance, starts gathering evidence which links Lucy to the disappearance of his friend, and travels to several different places including the homes of both Lucy's and George's fathers. He also takes responsibility of his lost friend's child and his future by sending him to a boarding school. Thus he starts to embrace characteristics considered ideal for the Victorian man, such as independence, determination, logic and ambition.

Adopting the new, more masculine role also involves rejecting femininity, as Gilbert suggests (95). In order to conquer Lady Audley's masculinity – which will be discussed later in more detail – Robert has to assume a more masculine role than his rival. In Robert, we have the perfect example of a "feminized male who lacks a social role", which

Pykett presents as being one of the gender stereotypes discussed in sensation fiction (10). As Robert is compelled to reject his feminine characteristics, he also starts to reject femininity in general, which can easily be seen in his thoughts concerning womanhood: "'I hate women', he thought savagely. 'They're bold, brazen, abominable creatures, invented for the annoyance and destruction of their superiors'" (*LAS*, 165). Thus Lady Audley appears to provoke a clear hatred of women in Robert – one could certainly regard this as misogyny. Misogyny not only implies hatred of women but also fear of them. Robert is obviously intimidated by women since he calls them "the stronger sex, the noisier, the more persevering, the most self-assertive sex" (*LAS*, 165) and makes an interesting reference to the Bible:

> I do not say that Robert Audley was a coward, but I will admit that a shiver of horror, something akin to fear, chilled him to the heart, as he remembered the horrible things that have been done by women, since that day upon which Eve was created to be Adam's companion and help-meet in the garden of Eden. What if this woman's hellish power of dissimulation should be stronger than the truth, and crush him? […] Robert Audley looked at the pale face of the woman standing by his side: that fair and beautiful face, illuminated by starry blue eyes, that had a strange and surely a dangerous light in them; and remembering a hundred stories of womanly perfidy, shuddered as he thought how unequal the struggle might be between himself and his uncle's wife. (*LAS*, 217)

Robert's fear of Lucy also becomes apparent when considering the images he sees in his dreams: he dreams of Lucy who has transformed into a mermaid who attempts to lure Sir Michael into destruction (*LAS*, 195). The closer he gets to the secret of Lucy, the more negative his images of womanhood develop. Robert certainly does not consider women the passive and innocent sex, but instead associates the opposite sex with tenacious, dangerous and dominant women: "They are Semiramides, and Cleopatras, and Joan of Arcs, Queen Elizabeths, and Catharine the Seconds, and they riot in battle, and murder, and clamour, and desperation" (*LAS*, 165). As Gilbert suggests, Robert regards women with masculine ambitions and masculine roles as evil, since he does not possess these qualities himself (96). Indeed, Robert's hatred and fear appears to rise from his own insecurities concerning his identity.

However, one does perceive Robert as the more powerful and dominant character in some scenes. This dominance often becomes evident when referring to physical bearing: "She [Lucy] held out her hand; he took it loosely in his own. It seemed such a feeble little hand that he might have crushed it in his strong grasp, had he chosen to be so pitiless" (*LAS*, 114). Lucy is also depicted as a helpless child in front of Robert: "She looked a childish, helpless, babyfied little creature; and Robert watched her with some touch of pity in his eyes […]" (*LAS*, 111). It is not only Robert who is afraid of Lucy, since Lucy is obviously intimidated by her rival at times. Lucy's fear of Robert is revealed when her face grows pale or her body trembles when she is facing Robert, "[…] but the same face, recognising Robert Audley, faded from its delicate brightness, and looked scared and wan in the lamplight" (*LAS*, 172).

Pallo emphasises that despite the fact that Robert has very strong suspicions of Lucy's guilt, he still occasionally wavers in his pursuits, and is willing to quit his investigations in order to protect his uncle from disgrace (474). One reason for his hesitation is, in my view, his fear of Lucy, which prevents him from assuming a full masculine status. Robert obviously feels relieved when George's father, Harcourt Talboys, urges Robert to give up his investigations:

> 'Thank God!' thought Robert Audley – 'thank God! it is over. My poor friend must rest in his unknown grave; and I shall not be the means of bringing disgrace upon those I love. It will come, perhaps, sooner or later, but it will not come through me. The crisis is past, and I am free.'
>
> He felt an unutterable relief in his thoughts. His generous nature revolted at the office into which he had found himself drawn – the office of spy, the collector of damning facts that led on to horrible deductions.
>
> He drew a long breath - a sigh of relief at his release. It was all over now. (*LAS,* 155)

Robert is still clearly reluctant to complete his masculine duties and feels liberated when he believes that his task has been done. Another moment when one may clearly see Robert's hesitation and his fear of conclusion is when he hints to Lucy that he is aware of her secrets

and that she may still avoid a punishment by running away from Sir Michael (*LAS*, 213). Lucy is not, however, willing to leave her status as Sir Michael's wife and decides to defy Robert; thus, Robert is compelled to confront Lucy and go through the final stage of his growth towards a masculine identity.

An important encounter between Lucy and Robert takes place in the lime walk of Audley Court. Robert confronts Lucy in order to make her confess her involvement in George's disappearance. At this point a clear alteration towards masculinity – an alteration to which he has been driven by Lucy – has taken place in Robert. He is now the active, self-assertive counterpart, whom Lucy must obey:

> 'I *must* speak to you, Lady Audley,' he said. 'If I am cruel, it is you who have made me cruel. You might have escaped this ordeal. You might have avoided me. I gave you fair warning. But you have chosen to defy me, and it is your own folly which is to blame if I no longer spare you. Come with me. I tell you again I must speak to you.'
>
> There was a cold determination in his tone which silenced my lady's objections. She followed him submissively […] (*LAS*, 210)

Lucy, however, chooses to defy Robert even after this menacing encounter, and instead of revealing the truth about her past to Sir Michael, she chooses to attempt to kill Robert in order to bury her secrets for good. This, however, does not succeed, and Lucy is forced to confront her rival once more, as Robert returns to Audley Court after escaping the fire at the Castle Inn where he is staying. This represents a turning point where Lucy recognises her defeat and is now completely submissive: "He assisted her to rise; and she obeyed him, very submissively. He took her arm in his strong hand and led her across the quadrangle and into the lamplit hall. She shivered more violently than he had ever seen any woman shiver before; but she made no attempt at resistance to his will" (*LAS*, 272).

Lucy is forced to reveal the truth about her real identity to Sir Michael as Robert listens to her story. She is now the weakest member of the triplet, which is also shown by her physical position: she kneels down in front of Sir Michael, thus showing her resignation. Sir

Michael and Robert are finally able to form the patriarchal family circle without the interference of Lucy Audley as she is stripped of her influence in the house. Robert is now the character with the ultimate power as he passes his judgement on Lucy, proclaiming "'I will bring upon you the punishment of your crime'" (*LAS*, 274). He is finally prepared to embrace his role as "the ultimate enforcer of social control", as Pallo puts it (475), when he places Lucy into an asylum. In the end, he becomes "her judge" and "her gaoler" (*LAS*, 303) and thus controls her destiny completely as Lucy has been disarmed of all her weapons. Robert is hence portrayed as one who protects not only the honour of his family, but also the safety of society by locking Lucy from the reach of other people. Interestingly, it is not Sir Michael who controls what will happen to Lucy, but instead he authorises Robert to make the decision concerning Lucy's destiny. This again emphasises Robert's victorious status and his masculine dominance over his rival.

In the denouement of the story, Robert has successfully gone through his process of masculinization, which has brought him the victory over his enemy. He has transformed into a respectable member of society, who practises his profession, hence succeeding in the masculine public sphere. In addition to this, he has become a husband and a father, completing the image of an ideal Victorian gentleman and embracing the full privileges of masculinity.[31] Above all, he appears to have discovered the essence of masculinity and its duties after his confrontation with Lucy Audley:

> 'Good heavens,' he thought; 'surely this must be God's judgement upon the purposeless, vacillating life I led up to the seventh day of last September. Surely this awful responsibility has been forced upon me in order that I may humble myself to an offended Providence, and confess that a man cannot choose his own life. He cannot say, "I will take existence lightly, and keep out of the way of the wretched, mistaken, energetic creatures, who fight so heartily in the great battle." He cannot say, "I will stop in the tents while the strife is fought, and laugh at the fools who are trampled down in the useless struggle." He cannot do this. He can only do, humbly and fearfully, that which the Maker who created him has appointed for him to do. If he has a battle to fight, let him fight it

[31] This will be discussed in more detail in chapter 5.3.

> faithfully; but woe betide him if he skulks when his name is called in the mighty muster-roll; woe betide him if he hides in the tents when the tocsin summons him to the scene of war!' (*LAS,* 292)

This passage sums up Robert's alteration and development as a character. It includes references to the army and the war, as Robert compares himself to a soldier who has to fulfil his duties at the front. Being a soldier may represent ultimate masculinity to Robert, since it requires extreme braveness and tenacity. Robert also defines his masculine duties as being something that God has appointed to him, and which thus cannot be avoided. Hence his newly-adopted masculinity not only corresponds to the expectations of society, but also to the expectations of Christianity.

3.3. Feminine versus Masculine – Lucy Audley and Gender Identity

There is one significant difference in the construction of gender identity between Lucy and Robert Audley. In the beginning, Robert does not meet the expectations and the standard of a perfect Victorian gentleman due to his lack of masculine qualities. Robert's task is to reject the feminine side of him and go through masculinization, which guarantees him the role of a hero. One cannot, however, see a similar alteration in Lucy. Instead of a clear alteration from one end to another, one could describe Lucy's identity as "fluid" as Nemesvari does (517). Nemesvari refers here to the different identities Lucy embraces or is forced to adopt: first she is Helen Maldon; then George's wife, Helen Talboys; after this, she reinvents herself as the governess Lucy Graham; then marries Sir Michael and becomes Lady Audley; and finally, Robert forces her to take the identity of Madame Taylor in the asylum (517). Besides this, I would like to emphasise that the fluidity of identity denotes that Lucy is capable of utilising her qualities – that is, both femininity and masculinity – according to her own needs in appropriate situations.

The first perception the reader receives of Lucy is that she is the perfect embodiment of Victorian femininity due to her exceptional beauty as well as her amiable and gentle nature. She has used this powerful tool to her benefit on several occasions. First, her beauty charmed her first husband, George Talboys, who to Lucy's disappointment ended up not being as wealthy as she had hoped for. After having been deserted, Lucy does not resign to her destiny as a poor daughter of a half-pay naval officer, but instead reinvents her self as Lucy Graham, and starts working as a governess to support her child. Her beauty and charm lead her as far as to the position of the wife of Sir Michael, who is completely bewildered by the sweetness of his young wife. He is utterly under Lucy's influence and dominance, which is guaranteed by Lucy's idealised femininity. Lucy is well aware of her feminine power. Through Sir Michael, she is able to utilise her feminine power also over Robert; she, for example, threatens Robert by declaring to him that she will tell Sir Michael that his nephew has gone mad: "A triumphant smile illumined Lucy Audley's countenance, a smile that plainly said, 'It's coming, – it is coming; I can twist him which way I like. I can put black before him, and if I say it's white, he will believe me '" (*LAS*, 223).

Thus it becomes very clear that sexuality is one of Lucy's most powerful weapons. However, Schroeder suggests that Lucy appears to have no sexual feelings for men.[32] This indeed seems to be the case if one considers the following passage where Lucy announces her loyalty to Sir Michael: "'[…] I became your wife, Sir Michael, with every resolution to be as good a wife as it was in my nature to be. The common temptations that assail and shipwreck some women had no terror for me. I would have been your true and pure wife to the end of time, though I had been surrounded by a legion of tempters '" (*LAS*, 281).

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[32] Schroeder, Natalie. "Feminine Sensationalism, Eroticism, and Self-Assertion: M. E. Braddon and Quida". *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, Vol. 7, No. 1, 1988, 87 - 103. Available from <http://helios.uta.fi:2109/servlet/LitRC?vrsn=3&OP=contains&locID=tampere&srchtp=athr&ca=1&c=9&ste=16&stab=512&tab=2&tbst=arp&ai=U13685274&n=10&docNum=H1420037072&ST=braddon&bConts=16047>. No pagination. [Accessed 9 May 2007]

Here Lucy clearly states that she would have been an honest wife to Sir Michael due to her non-sexual and non-romantic feelings for men. She does not meet the Victorian ideal of a sexually ignorant woman, since she obviously is conscious of her sexual power, but she manages to stay sexually pure by having no sexual feelings for the opposite sex. When it comes to her sexuality, Lucy is thus very different from Braddon's other famous female heroine, Aurora Floyd. Aurora acts according to her passions when marrying her first husband, James Conyers, at a young age with disastrous consequences. Aurora's second marriage with John Mellish also seems to develop into a relationship with deep and sincere feelings. Hence she obviously has romantic as well as erotic feelings towards the opposite sex.

For Lucy, marriage is obviously an economic arrangement. This was also the case with her marriage to George Talboys:

> 'Mr Talboys was a cornet in a dragoon regiment. He was the only son of a rich country gentleman. He fell in love with me, and married me three months after my seventeenth birthday. I think I loved him as much as it was in my power to love anybody; not more than I have loved you, Sir Michael; not so much; for when you married me you elevated me to a position that he could never have given me.' (*LAS*, 279)

The most important criterion for earning Lucy's affection is guaranteeing her high social status. She appears to be very rational when she considers her possibilities and understood at a young age, that her future would depend on a good marriage. Interestingly enough, as Morris claims, Lucy has no wish to be independent and she does not have any ambitions concerning a career (no pagination). However, I will later come to analyse how Lucy does strive for physical independence in her marriage as well. Naturally the marriage restricts Lucy's independence, but one should acknowledge that as a woman of the Victorian period, Lucy is almost incapable of controlling her life by any other means than marriage. Her femininity is her most important currency when fighting poverty:

> 'As I grew older I was told that I was pretty – beautiful – lovely – bewitching. I heard all these things at first indifferently; but by and by I listened to them greedily, and began to think that in spite of the secret of my life I might be more successful in the world's great lottery than my companions. I had learnt that which in some indefinite manner or other every schoolgirl learns sooner or later – I learned that my ultimate fate in life depended upon my marriage, and I concluded that if I was indeed prettier than my schoolfellows, I ought to marry better than any of them.' (*LAS,* 278)

Although it is evident that Lucy does not have sexual feelings for men, she is, in my view, very conscious of her feminine sexual power, and she is more than willing to use it to her benefit when needed. Due to her fear of poverty, her ultimate goal in life is to achieve a respected and wealthy status and to maintain it as such. Using sexuality as a means of controlling men is Lucy's way of controlling her own destiny. Her platonic feelings towards the men that admire her allow her to act rationally, without the burden of feelings. This also becomes apparent in her relationship with Robert: Robert is fascinated by his beautiful aunt, which makes him blind for a moment, but Lucy is not troubled with such thoughts.

Lucy certainly embraces clear masculine attributes: she is determined, ambitious, energetic and courageous. Thus she is the total opposite of her nephew-by-marriage, Robert. She has a definite goal in life – striving for a better future – and to achieve this goal, she is prepared to use any means necessary, masculine as well as feminine. In order to realise her dream and to attain an upper class status, Lucy decides to perform the most unfeminine deed one could imagine in the Victorian period – that is, abandoning one's child. Lucy leaves her only son to the care of her drunken father and sends money to support them. The Victorians were certainly shocked by this "unwomanly" act, but one may also feel sympathy for Lucy especially on the basis of the following passage where Lucy's son declares he saw a crying woman – meaning Lucy – upon his bed: "'She came when I was not nearly so big as I am now – and she came up into my room, and sat upon the bed, and cried – and she left the watch under my pillow […]'" (*LAS*, 132). Thus one may observe that Lucy also

possesses feminine motherly feelings and feels a need to protect her child, but is forced to suppress these feelings in order to achieve her masculine goals.

Lucy's aggressiveness also relates to masculinity. Schroeder states that for women in sensation fiction, aggression is one means of exercising power (no pagination). Indeed, Lucy becomes more and more aggressive towards the end of the novel: she, for instance, attempts to murder George, and sets the Castle Inn on fire in order to get rid of Robert. After Lucy admitted having inherited madness from her mother, Dr Mosgrave comes to examine her. He also refers to Lucy's aggressiveness:

> 'The lady is not mad; but she has the hereditary taint in her blood. She has the cunning of madness, with the prudence of intelligence. I will tell you what she is, Mr Audley. She is dangerous!'
>
> […] 'If she could have sprung at my throat and strangled me with her little hands, as I sat talking to her just now, she would have done it.' (*LAS*, 301 -303)

Thus the doctor argues that aggressiveness is something predestined in Lucy's nature, making it a medical fact that cannot be altered. Most importantly, it seems to be Robert that makes this very unfeminine aggressiveness develop to its full measure in Lucy. She expresses her wish to get rid of Robert with strong words such as the following: "'If he stood before me now, and I could kill him,' she muttered in a strange inward whisper, 'I would do it – I would do it!'" (*LAS*, 243). Lucy also regards the battle between her and Robert as severe and aggressive, "'If the struggle between us is to be a duel to death, you shall not find me drop my weapon'" (*LAS*, 251). While Lucy's aggressiveness and cruelty is emphasised, so is Robert's non-aggressive nature; he is portrayed as a man "who would not hurt a worm" (*LAS*, 27). He certainly becomes more aggressive mentally when forced to fight Lucy, but he does not use physical force at any point. Thus one may see how the attribute of aggressiveness is reversed in Lucy and Robert: Lucy possesses masculine aggressiveness while Robert appears to have a much more tender nature.

One feature that clearly reveals the status of men and women in the novel is mobility. It shows the freedom allowed for men, as well as the restricted sphere dedicated to women. Langland states that Lucy is under almost continual surveillance, and must always report where she is going and how long she will be away (10). The men of the story, in turn, are often invisible to other people's eyes, and free to move without other people knowing about it. George, for instance, is able to flee to America without telling anyone about it. Robert, in turn, actively moves around when he attempts to discover the truth about his friend's disappearance. He is not responsible for telling anyone about his whereabouts.

By only emphasising the visibility of Lucy, Langland misses the fact that Lucy obviously struggles against her limited position also when it comes to mobility. She strives for masculine freedom of movement and independence on several occasions, and does not resign herself to her conventional role as a woman confined to the domestic sphere. The first time is when she leaves her son and her father and becomes a governess. As Sir Michael's wife, she, in turn, travels to London without Sir Michael's knowledge in order to destroy the evidence that confirms her real identity. Another occasion is when she walks to the Castle Inn in the middle of the night with Phoebe, hoping to get rid of Robert. Lucy, however, explains to Phoebe that she will go to the inn in order to pay Phoebe and Luke's debt. With the help of a careful plan, Lucy succeeds in sneaking out of the house without the servants or Sir Michael knowing anything about her disappearance. She acts with a calm and determined manner:

> 'Listen to me, Phoebe,' she said, 'I am going to the Castle Inn, tonight; whether it is early or late is of very little consequence to me; I have set my mind upon going, and I shall go.' […] 'I think that I can leave this house and return to it without being seen by any living creature, if you will do as I tell you.' (*LAS*, 247 - 248)

> Lady Audley's face was no longer pale. An unnatural crimson spot burned in the centre of each rounded cheek, and an unnatural lustre gleamed in her great blue eyes. She spoke with an unnatural clearness, and an unnatural rapidity. She had altogether the appearance and manner of a person who has yielded to the dominant influence of some overpowering excitement. (*LAS*, 248)

Hence one may conclude that Robert has what Lucy desires – liberty that only men could automatically gain in the Victorian age.

Lucy is more than often depicted as childish, helpless and frivolous; this is the illusion Sir Michael, in particular, has of his young wife. He is completely surprised as Lucy attempts to convince him that his nephew has gone mad. Sir Michael now for the first time regards his wife as an adult woman who has been affected by her "newly-adopted wisdom" (*LAS*, 229), which makes her determined and ambitious: "She had been transformed from a frivolous childish beauty into a woman, strong to argue her cause and plead her own defence" (*LAS*, 228). Thus it appears that momentarily, Lucy drops her feminine mask, and reveals her masculine side to her husband. This is certainly not the first time the reader is able to observe Lucy's transformation, but it is the first time Sir Michael is able to see it. Lucy's masculinity is, however, clearly perceived by Robert.

When confronting Lucy after the fire, Robert proclaims he no longer regards Lucy as a woman: "'Henceforth you must seem to me no longer a woman; a guilty woman with a heart which in its worst wickedness has yet some latent power to suffer and feel; I look upon you henceforth as the demoniac incarnation of some evil principle'" (*LAS*, 274). She is also depicted as "the most detestable and despicable of her sex" (*LAS*, 213), as well as "no longer innocent" (*LAS*, 234). One of the most powerful images is the one conveyed by the French doctor of the asylum Lucy is locked into: he calls Lucy a "beautiful devil" (*LAS*, 310), suggesting that Lucy's looks are feminine but her mind represents the total opposite of femininity – it is brutal and demoniac. Thus Lucy is stripped of all femininity and even humanity. She is severely punished – not only for her crimes, because actually she did not kill anyone – but for her masculinity. As Schroeder suggests, Lucy is emasculated in the end of the novel (no pagination); she is stripped of her power and does not have influence over men anymore, since her beauty and femininity do not benefit her in a closed asylum. The liberty of

mobility and independence Lucy had desired is also lost forever. All her weapons, both feminine and masculine, are stolen from her by Robert.

3.4. Acting, Performing and Assuming Gender Identities in the Relationship of Lucy and Robert

Two terms that appear several times in the novel are "acting" and a "mask". This becomes most evident in the relationship of Lucy and Robert. Robert calls Lucy an actress on several occasions, and also considers it his task to unmask Lucy:

> 'Good heavens! What an actress this woman is. What an arch trickster – what an all-accomplished deceiver. But she shall play her pretty comedy no longer under my uncle's roof.' (*LAS*, 203 - 204)
>
> […] how complete an actress my lady had been made by the awful necessity of her life. (told by the narrator; *LAS*, 236)
>
> 'She is altogether a different being to the wretched, helpless creature who dropped her mask for a moment […]'. (*LAS*, 116)
>
> […] that more wretched creature whom it had been his business to unmask […] (*LAS*, 286)

Pykett also states that Braddon portrays Lucy as an actress and a chameleon (54), which is a pertinent word if one considers Lucy's fluid identity and her ability to hide behind her feminine mask. What is it, then, that Lucy is acting – what is the role she is assuming? To analyse this, I will use Judith Butler's theory on the formation of gender identities.

Postmodern feminism is ground-breaking in the sense that it challenges the whole idea of gender divisions as well as men and women's status as fixed groups.[33] This denotes that all women – or men – do not automatically share a common identity. Thus postmodern thinking emphasises plurality instead of unity and refuses to consider women as a

[33] Beasley, Chris. *Gender & Sexuality: Critical Theories, Critical Thinkers*. London: Sage Publications Ltd, 2005, 100.

homogeneous category.[34] The stress, then, lies upon differences within as well as between individuals (1999, 81). Naturally, postmodern feminists also question the idea of male privilege over women (1999, 82).

One of the most famous postmodern feminists is Judith Butler with her ground-breaking work *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (first published in 1990). Butler's ideas on gender formation are rather extreme. She rejects the idea of there being any pre-existing elements to identity: instead, she regards the body as a complete cultural product (Beasley; 2005, 101). Thus, gender does not derive directly form the body, but is a social and cultural product (2005, 101). According to her views, it is the socially constructed gender that makes anatomical sex relevant in social practise, not the other way around (2005, 101). What is interesting in relation to *Lady Audley's Secret* is that Butler describes gender identity as being "performative", because there is nothing "real" in it, no "natural core" (2005, 102):

> Because there is neither an "essence" that gender expresses or externalizes nor an objective ideal to which gender aspires, and because gender is not a fact, the various acts of gender create the idea of gender, and without those acts, there would be no gender at all. Gender is, thus, a construction that regularly conceals its genesis; the tacit collective agreement to perform, produce, and sustain discrete and polar genders as cultural fictions is obscured by the credibility of those productions – and the punishments that attend not agreeing to believe in them; the construction "compels" our belief in its necessity and naturalness .[35]

Butler goes further to suggest that in a social context, acting gender is continuously repeated: "Gender ought not to be construed as a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts follow; rather, gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a stylized repetition of acts" (179). Everyone cannot, however, succeed in acting out their gender as expected. Butler argues that those who fail in repeating the required acts of gender are regularly punished in society (178).

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[34] Beasley, Chris. *What is feminism? An Introduction to Feminist Theory*. London: Sage Publications Ltd, 1999, 81.

[35] Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge, 1999, 178.

To prove her point concerning gender formation, Butler mentions drag performances as an example. She argues that drag performances – although being part of a misogynist culture – "reveal the imitative structure of gender itself" (175). Butler also suggests that there is, however, no origin behind this imitation, since there is nothing fixed or real to imitate (175).

Although I do not agree with Butler's most radical thoughts concerning gender formation – I do believe that gender and sexuality are not mere cultural products, but biology plays its part as well –, I think that she presents some interesting ideas which are relevant to my consideration of *Lady Audley's Secret*. First, there is the idea of gender being a performance, a repetition of acquired acts that can either succeed or fail. If one considers the relationship between Robert and Lucy, one may draw the conclusion that neither of them has a fixed, desired gender identity: Lucy does not resign herself to the feminine role she is supposed to embrace and is finally punished for her masculine behaviour, whereas Robert does not meet the expectations of the ideal masculine man. Both Robert and Lucy have failed in "doing their gender right", as Butler puts it; the difference is that Robert changes the course and is rewarded for his masculinization (a change to the "right" direction), whereas Lucy gets punished for acting inappropriately.

Earlier in this subchapter I presented a few passages that dealt with being an actress as well as with masking/unmasking. Voskuil also analyses the idea of Lucy as an actress and her performative masquerade stating that "the novel, however, shows Lucy Audley as a passionate agent, who exploits conventional understandings of role-playing for her own advantage".[36] According to Voskuil, Lucy skilfully performs different roles and emotions, such as her insanity or her role as an affectionate wife (624, 634). This may, in my view, be interestingly connected with Butler's idea on seeing gender as a performative action.

[36] Voskuil, Lynn M. "Acts of Madness: Lady Audley and the Meanings of Victorian Femininity". *Feminist Studies*, September 1, Vol. 27, Issue 3, 2001, 611 - 639, 625.

Lucy definitely performs her role as wife of an aristocratic gentleman and uses the mask of femininity to conceal her true identity and masculine ambitions. Her mask is so carefully constructed and her acted performance so perfect, that it is only Robert who succeeds in seeing behind it when she "drops her mask" momentarily – that is, fails to do her gender performance correctly.

Butler's point concerning the imitative structure of gender is also interesting. One does not have to go as far as to drag queens, who exaggerate gender stereotypes, to observe the imitative nature of gender. Children also use imitation when constructing their identity as they have their parents and older siblings as role models they may imitate. They learn which toys, games, clothes and manners of behaviour are appropriate or expected when it comes to their gender. Then children may be either rewarded or punished for their choices. This imitation may be seen in Robert and Lucy, as well. As Robert starts to investigate the disappearance of his friend and is forced to go through an alteration, he also starts to imitate the role of a barrister as well as the role of an idealised Victorian man with energy, independence and determination. At times he is very reluctant to assume this role but then again, continues to act according to a way he knows the man of his age and status is expected to act. Lucy, in turn, clearly imitates the role a perfect lady, which she was not raised to be. It was common for the Victorian middle class girls to desire and to imitate the role of a lady, which only a few of them could actually be due to socio-economic conditions. Lucy is aware of the expectations she must meet as a baronet's wife. Her beauty already corresponds to the ideal and she knows what kind of nature and behaviour is valued in a lady. Her imitation of ideal femininity must be perfect so that she can conceal her past, and it had been until Robert came to the picture.

4. THE RELATIONSHIP OF LUCY AUDLEY AND PHOEBE MARKS

In this chapter, I will concentrate on examining the relationship of Lucy Audley and her maid, Phoebe Marks. I will analyse how femininity and masculinity are reflected in their relationship, how the characters act as women representing different social status, what similarities and differences they have, how eroticism is depicted in their relationship, and how power and control is linked to their relationship. I decided to include the relationship of Lucy Audley and Phoebe Marks to my investigation because it offers a different perspective to Lucy Audley as a character, especially when it comes to her sexuality. The character of Phoebe Marks has also been undervalued in research, and femininity as well as masculinity in her has received hardly any attention.

Phoebe Marks is Lucy Audley's young lady's-maid. She had been working as a nursemaid in Mr Dawson's family, where Lucy also worked as a governess. After her marriage with Sir Michael, Lucy chose Phoebe to be her maid at Audley Court. Phoebe is portrayed as a girl who is sufficiently educated in order to be elevated to the trusted companion of her mistress: she has enough knowledge to have conversations or analyse the French novels with her mistress. This is how Phoebe's appearance is depicted:

> She was not, perhaps, positively a pretty girl; but her appearance was of that order which is commonly called interesting. Interesting, it may be, because in the pale face and light grey eyes, the small features and compressed lips, there was something which hinted at a power of repression and self-control not common in a woman of nineteen or twenty. She might have been pretty, I think, but for the one fault in her small oval face. This fault was an absence of colour. Not one tinge of crimson flushed the waxen whiteness of her cheeks; not one shadow of brown redeemed the pale insipidity of her eyebrows and eyelashes; not one glimmer of gold or auburn relieved the dull flaxen of her hair. Even her dress was spoiled by this same deficiency; the pale lavender muslin faded into a sickly grey, and the ribbon knotted round her throat melted into the same neutral hue.
>
> Her figure was slim and fragile, and in spite of her humble dress, she had something of the grace and carriage of a gentlewoman; but she was only a simple country girl, called Phoebe Marks, who had been nursemaid in Mr Dawson's family, and whom Lady Audley had chosen for her maid after her marriage with Sir Michael. (*LAS*, 21 - 22)

Thus one may conclude that Phoebe is not an ordinary maid, since she possesses a hint of gentility and grace so much admired by the working class. Phoebe clearly does admire the privileges of the wealthier classes, which becomes apparent as she expresses her wish to travel and learn French to her cousin Luke (*LAS*, 23). She does not embrace the same feminine beauty as her mistress, but still her resemblance – both physical and intellectual – to Lucy is emphasised on several occasions. Much of the resemblance clearly derives from the background of the two characters, since they both worked as servants before Lucy's marriage.

Lucy and Phoebe's physical resemblance becomes apparent when Phoebe is disguised as her mistress and sent to London due to Lucy's wish, as she attempts to conceal her secrets from the Audley family. Hence Lucy emphasises her similarities to Phoebe:

> 'you *are* like me, and your features are very nice; it is only colour that you want. My hair is pale yellow shot with gold, and yours is drab; my eyebrows and eyelashes are dark brown, and yours are almost – I scarcely like to say it, but they're almost white, my dear Phoebe; your complexion is sallow, and mine is pink and rosy. Why, with a bottle of hair dye, such as we see advertised in the papers, and a pot of rouge, you'd be as good-looking as I any day, Phoebe.' (*LAS*, 47)

Another moment when Phoebe clearly resembles her mistress is when she wears Lucy's dress on her wedding day: "[…] Phoebe, arrayed in a rustling silk of delicate grey, that had been worn about half a dozen times by her mistress, looked, as the few spectators of the ceremony remarked, quite the lady" (*LAS*, 89).

According to Voskuil, the fact that a servant can be turned into a lady emphasises the aspect of acting and performing certain roles (624). The same happened as Lucy herself turned from a governess into a mistress. This may, in turn, be linked to Butler's view on regarding gender as a performative act. Phoebe acts the part of her mistress successfully: she admires the gentility of her mistress and knows what is valued in a true lady after having witnessed the life of a prosperous gentlewoman. With her own hands, Phoebe has touched the sparkling jewels and rustling silks in Lucy's premises. She has become

acquainted with how to talk, walk and behave like a lady. Her make-up creates a concrete mask, which enables a required performance of identity. Indeed, make-up is a way of emphasising and acting femininity: this also becomes evident from Butler's example concerning drag queens, who perform femininity by exaggerating the exterior signs of femininity with the help of make-up, for example. According to Butler, imitating and performing gender has, however, no origin, since there are no pre-existing elements to identity. This may again be connected with the relationship of Lucy and Phoebe. Since Lucy herself is acting the part of a feminine lady in order to conceal her masculine side, one may conclude that Phoebe's imitation of femininity is something that has no origin; Phoebe is thus acting something which is not authentic in either her or in Lucy.

Phoebe and Lucy also resemble each other when it comes to their nature:

> There were sympathies between her and this girl, who was like herself inwardly as well as outwardly – like herself, selfish, cold, and cruel, eager for her own advancement, and greedy of opulence and elegance, angry with the lot that had been cast her, and weary of dull dependence. My lady hated Alicia for her frank, passionate, generous, daring nature; she hated her stepdaughter, and clung to this pale-faced, pale-haired girl, whom she thought neither better nor worse than herself. (*LAS*, 237)

From this one may conclude that neither Lucy nor Phoebe corresponds to the feminine ideal: they are both depicted as selfish and cold – that is, as women with masculine ambitions. They are both unsatisfied with their position as women who are dependent on men, which becomes evident from the lines "[…] angry with the lot that had been cast her, and weary of dull dependence" (*LAS*, 237). It is obvious that Lucy cannot consider her maid as being any better or worse than herself, since they actually have a similar background when it comes to working as a servant. Due to her feminine beauty, Lucy managed to be elevated from the position of a servant to that of a lady, but Phoebe has not succeeded in this. Whereas marriage, albeit being restrictive, guarantees Lucy what she has dreamt of – that is, escaping

from the predestined poverty –, Phoebe does not receive the same advantage when she is forced to marry her cousin Luke.

Phoebe's marriage to Luke represents a turning-point in Lucy and Phoebe's relationship. Phoebe claims that she is forced to marry her brutal and aggressive cousin, because she does not have the courage to act otherwise. She openly discusses her motives concerning the marriage as she talks to Lucy: "'I daren't refuse to marry him. […] When he was a boy he was always violent and revengeful. I saw him once take up that very knife in a quarrel with his mother. I tell you, my lady, I must marry him'" (*LAS*, 87). Thus Phoebe's husband is far from the ideal gentleman due to his coarse and aggressive manners, as well as his habit of excessive drinking. Besides this, he obviously shows no respect for his wife and mocks the idea of Phoebe wanting to be genteel:

> 'Genteel!' cried Luke Marks, with a hoarse laugh; 'who wants you to be genteel, I wonder? Not me for one; when you're my wife you won't have much over-time for gentility, my girl. French, too! Dang me, Phoebe, I suppose when we've saved money enough between us to buy a bit of a farm, you'll be *parlyvooing* to the cows?' (*LAS*, 23)

Gilbert aptly points out that the marriages in *Lady Audley's Secret* reveal the real function of Victorian marriages, which were more than often "founded on the helplessness and fear of women, rather than on love" (98). The marriages of both Lucy and Phoebe strongly challenge the Victorian ideal, which was a marriage based on love and affection: Lucy's marriage is based on a need to avert poverty, whereas Phoebe's marriage is based on a concrete fear of violence. Gilbert adds that Phoebe and Lucy do evil in order to "seek passive comfort in the socially and financially secure role of wife"; thus Gilbert rejects the idea according to which the women do evil out of a desire for leadership (96). In my view, this appears too simplistic. Regardless of the fact that both Lucy and Phoebe seek financial security in marriage, it is not passive comfort they seek or attain: Phoebe knows she would be better off without her violent husband, whereas Lucy does not seek any romantic or sexual

comfort in her marriage with Sir Michael. Although Lucy is contented with the financial security of her marriage, she also struggles for independence instead of settling for passivity.

Lucy strongly objects to Phoebe's marriage. This appears to derive from various different reasons. First, Lucy questions Phoebe's feelings for Luke, and Phoebe does admit she could hardly love her future husband, but is forced to marry him due to the promise she made to Luke at a very young age. Lucy believes she will get Luke out of Phoebe's life by paying him:

> 'You silly girl, you shall do nothing of the kind!' answered Lucy. 'You think he'll murder you, do you? Do you think, then, if murder is in him, you would be any safer as his wife? If you thwarted him, or made him jealous; if he wanted to marry another woman, or to get hold of some poor, pitiful bit of money of yours, couldn't he murder you then? I tell you you shan't marry him, Phoebe. In the first place, I hate the man; and, in the next place, I can't afford to part with you. We'll give him a few pounds and send him about his business. (LAS, 87 - 88)

Phoebe, however, persuades Lucy to let her marry Luke, despite the fact that it becomes apparent that Lucy is not inclined to give up her maid: "'I shall be very sorry to lose you; but I have promised to stand your friend in all things'" (*LAS*, 88). Lucy promises that Phoebe and Luke may start keeping a public house after the wedding, clearly hoping that Luke will meet an early death due to his drinking habits.

As one may see, Lucy is the dominant party of the relationship before Phoebe and Luke's marriage; although Lucy is a liberal mistress, Phoebe is compelled to consult Lucy on the matters concerning her personal life, as well. Phoebe is also economically dependent on her mistress's assistance due to the fact that she cannot rely on her future husband when it comes to financial matters. Indeed, it appears that at first, Lucy takes the masculine role of a financial caretaker in her relationship with Phoebe, as she promises that Phoebe does not have to worry about her well-being as long as she stays with her mistress: "'Phoebe Marks,' said my lady, throwing herself into an easy-chair, and trifling with the wild flowers in her lap, 'you are a good industrious girl, and while I live and am prosperous you

shall never want a firm friend or a twenty-pound note'" (*LAS*, 64 - 65). The dominance Lucy has over her maid comes to an end, however, as Phoebe, whom Lucy has confided in, reveals to her mistress that Luke is also aware of Lucy's dark secrets. This turns the balance of power upside down in the relationship of Lucy and Phoebe. Phoebe first assumes she would be able to blackmail her mistress with the knowledge she possesses, but after being married to Luke, she comes to see that she is not the one with power and control – it is her husband.

One of the reasons Lucy does not want Phoebe to marry Luke is obviously the fear of blackmailing and of being exposed. Lucy does, however, object to the marriage even before she is aware of Luke knowing about her past. One major reason for this fierce resistance must be Lucy's unwillingness to see Phoebe in the constraints of marriage. Lucy obviously recognises similar masculine ambitions to hers in Phoebe, and does not want to see her maid being confined to a conventional feminine role of an unhappy wife with no independence. Instead of allowing her to pursue marriage, Lucy would rather see herself as Phoebe's caretaker. Despite the fact that Phoebe as a servant is not fully independent, her status as Lucy's lady's-maid is much more independent than her position as Luke's wife. Phoebe is clearly intimidated by her coarse and violent husband, and is under his control. Although she is at first more than willing to blackmail her mistress about Lucy's secret, she is now ashamed and regretful as Luke forces her to go and blackmail money from Lucy: "'Oh my lady, my lady,' cried Phoebe, piteously, 'don't be so cruel to me; you know, you know that it isn't I who want to impose upon you'" (*LAS*, 240). Phoebe is, however, defenceless under the control of Luke, and is forced to feminine submissiveness even when her husband is dying of his injuries after the fire: "The sick man's feeble hand pointed to the door, through which his wife departed very submissively" (*LAS*, 328).

Another significant reason for Lucy being unenthusiastic about Phoebe and Luke's marriage is, without a doubt, her jealousy of Phoebe. This becomes apparent not only

when Lucy states to Phoebe she cannot afford to part with her, but also when Lucy has set the Castle Inn on fire. Lucy's main goal was to get rid of her enemy, Robert, but she is obviously almost as pleased with the thought of imagining Luke dead. When Phoebe notices that the public house is on fire, she gets scared of the thought of what has happened to her husband, and expresses her fear concerning Lucy's participation in the event. Lucy is surprised by Phoebe's reaction and is appalled by the fact that Phoebe still seems to care about her husband's fate: "'I will tell you nothing except that you are a mad woman,' answered Lady Audley, in a cold, hard voice. 'Get up, fool, idiot, coward! Is your husband such a precious bargain that you should be grovelling there, lamenting and groaning for him? […] Get up and go; I don't want you'" (*LAS*, 259). These jealous feelings lead us to consider Lucy's feelings for Phoebe in more detail.

It is emphasised more than often that Lucy and Phoebe's relationship is especially close. Lucy regards Phoebe as her confidant, which becomes most apparent from the fact that she has shared the secret of her past with her lady's-maid. Phoebe appears to be Lucy's most favoured companion during the long days at Audley Court:

> […] rather than be alone she would admit Phoebe Marks into her confidence, and loll on one of the sofas in her luxurious dressing-room, discussing a new costume for some coming dinner party, or sit chattering to the girl, with her jewel box beside her, upon the satin cushions, and Sir Michael's presents spread out in her lap, while she counted and admired her treasures. (*LAS*, 43)

Lucy's non-sexual feelings towards men were already discussed in relation to her relationships with her two husbands and with Robert Audley. Indeed, Lucy's relationships with men appear to be nothing more than platonic; her relationship with Sir Michael, for example, parallels that of a caring father and his beloved daughter. As Lucy herself expresses it, she loves Sir Michael as much as she may possibly love a man who guarantees her a position she was not born into. Lucy is not willing to harm Sir Michael in any ways, although this surely derives from selfish reasons as well, as she is dependent on his prosperity. In spite

of this, one may clearly observe that Braddon has added some "feminine" compassion in Lucy's character as well, which becomes evident as she glances at her husband when leaving Audley Court without her husband's permission:

> His breathing was low and regular, his lips curved in a half smile – a smile of tender happiness which he often wore when he looked at his beautiful wife, the smile of an all-indulgent father, who looked admiringly at his favourite child.
>
> Some touch of womanly feeling, some sentiment of compassion softened Lady Audley's glance as it fell upon that noble reposing figure. (*LAS*, 245)

Lucy acts much more violently in her relationships with George and Robert than in her relationship with Sir Michael. In the case of Robert, Lucy merely uses her sexuality to delude Robert and does not have any sexual attraction to him in the first place. The case with George is slightly more complex, since there obviously was at least some sexual intercourse in the relationship, as a result of which their son was born. One does not know, however, whether the sexual intercourse was a token of sexual passion from Lucy's side, or whether it was merely a duty carried out by a Victorian wife. One does know, however, that the happiness in their relationship was directly proportional to the couple's financial status, whose deterioration led into the deterioration of the relationship. Thus one may draw the conclusion that Lucy's relationship with George was fairly platonic as well.

Is Lucy thus a cold, frigid woman unable to feel love and passion? Does she strip off her mask in anyone's company? There is one obvious scene in *Lady Audley's Secret* that does portray Phoebe not only as Lucy's confidant but also as the object of her sexual desires.

> 'Go on brushing my hair, Phoebe,' Lady Audley said, every time the girl was about to complete her task; 'I quite enjoy a chat with you.' […]
>
> The girl obeyed. Lady Audley smoothed her maid's neutral-tinted hair with her plump, white, and bejewelled hand as she reflected for a few moments.
>
> 'And now listen, Phoebe. What I want you to do is very simple.'
>
> It was so simple that it was told in five minutes, and then Lady Audley retired into her bedroom, and curled herself up cosily under the eider-down quilt. She was a chilly little creature, and loved to bury herself in soft wrappings of satin and fur.

‘Kiss me, Phoebe,’ she said, as the girl arranged the curtains. (*LAS*, 48)

According to Schroeder, the passage in question suggests both lesbianism and masturbation (no pagination). Indeed, physical contact is referred to here more than in any other scene in the novel. One may observe that Lucy thirsts for touch, comfort and warmth as she curls up in blankets and begs Phoebe to brush her hair. This appears to be one of the few times Lucy allows herself to be vulnerable and drops her mask in front of someone else. She allows herself to be feminine in front of another woman that resembles her when it comes to both appearance and character. One sees nothing similar in Lucy’s intercommunication with men, such as Sir Michael or George.

Another aspect that quite clearly implies sexuality in Lucy and Phoebe’s relationship is their habit of reading Lucy’s French novels, which due to their dubious romances and eroticism were considered highly dangerous reading for virtuous Victorian girls: “Phoebe knew enough of the French language to be able to dip into the yellow-paper-covered novels which my lady ordered from the Burlington Arcade, and to discourse with her mistress upon the questionable subjects of those romances” (*LAS*, 85). This activity is another “dirty” secret the two women possess – over which the men have no control. Reading French novels also refers to masturbation quite explicitly, since it represents a way of arousing oneself.

Thus I do agree with Schroeder that one may observe signs of homoeroticism in Lucy’s feelings towards her lady’s-maid. As evidence, one does not only have the homoerotic scenes that were referred to, but also Lucy’s behaviour later on in the novel. One relevant example is when she leaves the Castle Inn with Phoebe after setting the public house on fire: she literally attempts to liberate Phoebe from the subjection of Luke, hoping that Phoebe’s husband will perish in the accident. Thus she must hope that as a result, Phoebe will return to her old position as Lucy’s lady’s-maid and restore their old relationship. Lucy’s resentment to

Phoebe's marriage is another token of Lucy's controversial feelings, as is her anger as she realises that at some level, Phoebe does care about Luke's fate. The episode in which Phoebe realises that her former mistress has set the Castle Inn on fire and expresses her concern for Luke represents a turning-point in Lucy and Phoebe's relationship; Lucy realises she has lost the battle and cannot claim back her old position in Phoebe's life. Lucy also apprehends that Phoebe has settled for feminine submissiveness as Luke's wife, which is a disappointment for Lucy, who still attempts to struggle for her masculine independence and who did attempt to gain the position of Phoebe's economic caretaker.

Although it was characteristic of sensation fiction to deal with sensitive issues, such as bigamy or murders, homosexuality was one aspect that remained a taboo during the Victorian period, and could not be explicitly discussed (Nemesvari, 515). Braddon was also forced to act cautiously when it came to portraying sexuality, especially sexuality concerning homoeroticism. This may be one reason due to which – despite the clear hints to homoeroticism – one perceives Lucy and Phoebe's relationship as somewhat ambiguous; although Lucy's warm and affectionate feelings towards her confidant are explicit, she is again inclined to selfishness as Phoebe expresses her concern about Luke's use of alcohol: "She was too selfish, and too deeply absorbed in her own troubles, to take much interest in any danger which had befallen her sometime lady's-maid. […] why should she care for this low-born waiting-woman's perils and troubles?" (*LAS*, 241). The extract in question challenges Lucy's former ideas on her masculine willingness to support Phoebe both financially and emotionally, and it is also surprising in terms of considering Lucy's thoughts on perceiving Phoebe as her equal, as someone neither better nor worse than herself. These phrases seem, in my view, detached and out of place, considering that Lucy will soon attempt to liberate Phoebe by setting the Castle Inn on fire, and thus obviously cares about her former servant.

It becomes evident that Lucy's feelings for Phoebe are stronger and more profound than the servant's feelings for her mistress. At times Phoebe seems solicitous when it comes to Lucy's well-being; she, for instance, asks Robert whether Lucy is treated kindly in the asylum, and also seems regretful, showing feminine submissiveness, as Luke forces Phoebe to blackmail more money from her former mistress. However, Phoebe appears to be inclined to masculine determinism, ambition and selfishness, which often overcomes her more amiable feelings for Lucy. This becomes apparent from Luke's story, when he reveals to Robert how Phoebe acted after finding out Lucy's secrets:

> '[…] something had passed between 'em, not much, but enough to let her missus know that the servant what she looked down upon had found out that as would put her in that servant's power to the last day of her life. "And she is in my power, Luke, says Phoebe, and she'll do anythin' in the world for us if we keep her secret."' (*LAS*, 342)

Hence Phoebe aims for masculine financial autonomy, as well as for masculine control Lucy possesses over her, but instead ends up under the control of her husband. Neither does Phoebe's marital status guarantee her any financial security. Phoebe and Lucy's relationship is distracted by jealousy: although Lucy is a liberal mistress and allows her favourite servant exemptions and financial security, Phoebe cannot overcome the feeling that she shares a common background with Lucy, but has to settle for the position of a servant: "'What was she but a servant like me? Taking wages and working for them as hard, or harder than I did. You should have seen her shabby clothes, Luke – worn and patched, and darned, and turned and twisted, yet always looking nice upon her, somehow'" (*LAS*, 23 - 24).

Thus I could conclude that while Lucy embraces affectionate and even homoerotic feelings in her relationship with her lady's-maid, Phoebe's feelings for Lucy are more controversial, ranging from jealousy to platonic friendliness. Lucy's gender identity is especially interesting if one considers the links among sex, gender and desire. When analysing gendered identifications, Wilchins draws attention to the problem of linking

different identities together: "Each gendered identity must maintain a strict coherence among sex, gender identity, gender expression, and desire. Female is to woman as woman is to feminine as feminine is attracted to Male. Breaking any link causes a gender to fall right off the grid of cultural intelligibility."[37] Indeed, any divergences to the links of "female-feminine-attracted to male" or "male-masculine-attracted to female" are often seen as more difficult to grasp, since one often feels the need to categorise people according to their gender identity and sexual orientation into neat boxes in order to make the issues more comprehensible. Lucy poses a challenge to the conventional "female-feminine-attracted to male" link: although her appearance is feminine, her nature does not correspond to the ideal femininity, although she does attempt to hide behind the mask of her feminine looks. Lucy's relationship with Phoebe and her platonic feelings for men also demonstrate that Lucy's sexual orientation does not correspond to the link of "female-attracted to male". This again shows how the links are far from being inevitable: lesbians, for example, are not only females attracted to females, but can embrace either femininity or masculinity, since not all lesbians are butch in their gender presentation despite the common stereotype. Thus they break and challenge the "conventional" link several times. All in all, one may conclude that Braddon succeeds in questioning the narrow-minded idea of gender identities, sexuality, as well as the idea of ideal femininity and masculinity by challenging the links of "female-feminine-attracted to male" and "male-masculine-attracted to female" with her main characters.

[37] Wilchins, Riki. *Queer Theory, Gender Theory: An Instant Primer*. Los Angeles: Alyson Publications, 2004, 130.

5. THE RELATIONSHIP OF GEORGE TALBOYS, ROBERT AUDLEY AND CLARA TALBOYS

In this chapter, I will concentrate on three different characters, since I feel that Robert, George and his sister Clara as characters are so much involved with each other that dividing the relationships into three separate units would not serve the purpose, which is to clarify the dynamics between the characters, which are strongly affected by femininity and masculinity, and by the way the characters assume their roles as men and women. When it comes to George, I will concentrate on analysing how he ends up losing his masculinity. In the case of Clara, I will examine how she assumes her feminine role and how that again, emphasises other characters. I will also consider whether she struggles against her role or whether she submits to the expectations society places on her. Besides this, emphasis will be given to the bond between George and Robert: I will discuss how their friendship and its eroticism affect other characters in the novel.

5.1. George Talboys and the Loss of Masculinity

The past and future of the Audley family and George Talboys interestingly intertwine. Incidentally, Robert confronts his old-school fellow from Eton, as George returns to England after spending three and a half years in Australia, attempting to make a fortune in the Australian gold-diggings. After succeeding, George decides to return to England, eager to find his wife, Helen Talboys – who now is Lucy Audley – and his little son. George had decided on deserting his wife as they had spent all their savings after living a luxurious life: besides this, they could not rely on the assistance of George's father, Harcourt Talboys, since George's father had rejected his son after discovering that George had married a penniless girl with no respectable family background. When deserting his wife and son, George swore he

would not return to his family until he had earned enough money to support his family properly. However, soon after his arrival in England, George discovers a made-up obituary in the newspaper, announcing the death of his wife. George is utterly devastated by the "death" of his beloved wife, as a result of which his newly-found friend Robert starts taking care of his shocked friend.

George's character is somewhat controversial: one seems to be able to find both strength and weakness in him, both femininity and masculinity. His nature is depicted as likeable and humorous, and his appearance is portrayed as a mixture of feminine and masculine:

> He was a young man of about five-and twenty, with a dark face, bronzed by exposure to the sun; he had handsome brown eyes, with a feminine smile in them, that sparkled through his black lashes, and a bushy beard and moustache that covered the whole of the lower part of his face. He was tall, and powerfully built […] (*LAS*, 13)

George's masculinity comes out particularly in relation to his actions in Australia. He is portrayed as a man who, with determination and courage, struggled against wretchedness with all his powers – with only one goal in his mind. The young man's physical manliness is especially emphasised when referring to his work: '[…] the fortune which he had won by the force of his own strong arm in the goldfields of Australia' (*LAS*, 212). Hence George is depicted as the very embodiment of a masculine man. Surprisingly, one does not encounter any criticism concerning the way George deserted his wife and son, without contacting them at all during the period he was in Australia; even the lady whom George confides in in the ship merely admires George's braveness:

> 'But I toiled on through all; through disappointment and despair, rheumatism, fever, starvation, at the very gates of death, I toiled on steadily to this end; and in the end I conquered.'
>
> He was so brave in his energy and determination, in his proud triumph of success, that the pale governess could only look at him in wondering admiration. (*LAS*, 19)

Lucy also refers to her real husband's masculine perseverance and courage when she finally shares the secret concerning her past with Sir Michael and Robert: Lucy attempts to clarify why she had to fake her death, by stating that "'I knew enough of his sanguine temperament, his courage and determination […] to know that unless he saw the grave in which I was buried, […] he would never believe that I was lost to him'" (*LAS*, 282).

George's femininity, however, becomes apparent when he has to face the assumed death of his wife. He loses all his strength and the almost naïve confidence he embraced only a few hours back, and has to turn to the assistance of his newly-found friend. George's weakness is both physical and emotional, as he, for instance, faints when finding out about the "death" of his wife. To counterbalance George's femininity and to help his friend, Robert has to start embracing masculine perseverance: "The big dragoon was as helpless as a baby; and Robert Audley, the most vacillating and unenergetic of men, found himself called upon to act for another. He rose superior to himself and equal to the occasion" (*LAS*, 33). On the other hand, taking care of George also raises feminine tenderness, sympathy and consideration in Robert, who appears to be taking care of George like a mother nurses her child, or like an ideal wife should take care of the well-being of her husband. Robert invites George to his home, attempting to comfort his friend as well as he can: "The barrister received him with open arms; he gave him the room with the birds and flowers, and had a bed put up in his dressing-room for himself. Grief is so selfish that George did not know the sacrifices his friend made for his comfort" (*LAS*, 39). George's behaviour experiences an alteration from masculine perseverance to feminine submissiveness, as he allows Robert to decide on all the matters concerning his leisure time: "The quiet form which his grief had taken after its first brief violence left him as submissive as a child to the will of his friend […]" (*LAS*, 42).

The most significant moment that implies George's femininity is his confrontation with Lucy in the lime walk of Audley Court. George's original intention was to confront Lucy in order to tell her that he would force his wife to confess her real identity and her connection to George to Sir Michael. Lucy was, however, prepared to defy her first husband, and as George, who was leaning against the old well, grabbed Lucy' hand, Lucy drew the loose iron spindle from the wood, thus causing George to fall into the well. George, however, survives the fall, and after being in the care of Luke and his mother for a night, decides to flee to America. Once again, one sees George as being cared for by another man. In his letter to Lucy – which Lucy never actually receives – George announces that Lucy does not have to be afraid of being molested by her first husband, since he would never return to England again.

The scene in the lime walk represents Lucy's physical, emotional and intellectual victory over George: as a result, George surrenders, submits to his wife's will and escapes from her reach. This surrender represents complete resignation, which, in turn, indicates femininity, whereas Lucy's victory over George increases her masculine power. It appears that George is incapable of utilising the same masculinity he embraced in Australia due to the influence of Lucy; since the discovery of his wife's "death", George's character has become increasingly weaker and passive, and he has to turn to the assistance of others. The confrontation with Lucy in the lime walk symbolises the peak of resignation, and it seems that George is not capable of claiming back his masculinity any longer in the novel. Interestingly, we do not even see George in the novel most of the time, since he disappears right after his confrontation with Lucy and only comes back at the end of the novel; thus most of the time, George is invisible and silent to the reader, despite the fact that he is often discussed especially by Robert. This again emphasises George's femininity.

5.2. Homosocial Bonds in *Lady Audley's Secret*

The relationship of George Talboys and Robert Audley is one of the most interesting in *Lady Audley's Secret*. The two characters have not seen each other for years until they meet when George returns to England. In spite of this, Robert starts taking care of his old friend without any hesitation, and they spend about a year together before George's flight to America. Robert is totally devastated by his friend's disappearance and is not capable of continuing his life as he used to. One token of this is his masculinization, which was discussed in chapter 3.2.: in order to solve the mystery behind George's disappearance, Robert must reject his feminine attributes and start embracing masculine perseverance, logic and courage as well as finally assume his role a barrister, which he has not been willing to do earlier. Another sign of Robert's alteration is his growing obsession with George and his absence. Robert obviously misses his friend enormously, and is taken by surprise by these unfamiliar and unfaltering feelings:

> If anyone had ventured to tell Mr Robert Audley that he could possibly feel a strong attachment to any creature breathing, that cynical gentleman would have elevated his eyebrows in supreme contempt at the preposterous notion. (*LAS*, 67)
>
> 'To think,' he said meditatively, 'that it is possible to care so much for a fellow!' (*LAS*, 72)
>
> 'What could be his motive for leaving England in this manner, without a word to me, his most intimate friend […]?' […] 'It isn't kind of George Talboys to treat me like this.' (*LAS*, 75)

Robert is clearly disturbed by the lack of companionship and seems to have lost his appetite, for example, after losing George. All the pleasures that used to delight Robert have lost their meaning: he does not, for example, enjoy reading his French novels any longer (*LAS*, 166). He is, indeed, acting like a person suffering from heartache, as he is incapable of concentrating on any everyday-matters: "But he seemed to have lost all taste for

companionship, all sympathy with the pleasures and occupations of his class, since the disappearance of George Talboys" (*LAS*, 167).

In chapter 2.4. on marriage as a Victorian necessity, I mentioned male friendships as one possible hindrance when considering Victorian marriages: it was sometimes considered that women were not able to offer as profound intellectual and emotional companionship as other men could. It is not often easy to determine whether these male relations merely represented profound friendship, or whether homoeroticism was involved. The same applies to the relationship between Robert and George: is it pure, platonic friendship, or is one able to observe homoerotic tones in it?

Sedgwick defines "homosocial" bonds as "social bonds between persons of the same sex".[38] Thus homosocial does not denote the same as homosexual; while homosexuality could be defined as "men-loving-men", "homosocial" would rather refer to "men-promoting-the-interests-of-men" (3). Homosexual activities may either support or oppose to homosocial bonding (6). Sedgwick argues that homosocial bonds in society strongly affect the lives of women as well, as their status is "inscribed in the structure even of relationships that seem to exclude women – even in male and homosocial/homosexual relationships" (25). She also sees that power and control are strongly connected with idea of homosocial bonds, stating that "in any male-dominated society, there is a special relationship between male homosocial (*including* homosexual) desire and the structures for maintaining and transmitting patriarchal power" (25).

Nemesvari draws attention to the homosocial bonds in *Lady Audley's Secret*. He does not argue that Robert is a homosexual, but rather suggests that one may notice homosocial/homosexual overtones in Robert (519 - 520). Nemesvari notes that Robert attempts to suppress his homoerotic desires; thus, it is not only Lucy that attempts to conceal

[38] Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desires*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1985, 1.

a secret, since Robert also possesses one (527). Lucy's masculinity severely threatens the homosocial relationships in a male-dominated society, where women's role is to be passive objects without any control of their lives (518). If women are suppressed, men are able to define their roles more effectively. According to Sedgwick's view on homosocial bonds, women's status is always dependent on homosocial/homosexual bonds in patriarchal society. Lucy, however, is not contented with her predestined role in a patriarchal society, where men's relationships with other men determine her future. Nemesvari argues that it is Robert's task to re-establish the conventional homosocial bonds Lucy has disrupted (518). Thus he must nullify Lucy's masculine power. The task is not an easy one, since the men who are supposed to possess power in the novel – Robert, George and Sir Michael – have all failed in maintaining control. Sir Michael has lost his capability of controlling his wife due to Lucy's powerful influence on him. Robert and George, on the other hand, have failed in establishing a masculine status, which leaves the playground open to Lucy. Since George disappears, completely resigning under the dominance of Lucy, Robert is the only one capable of change, which enables him to conquer Lucy and nullify her power.

Although Nemesvari does not explicitly say that Robert is a homosexual, he does suggest that he has homoerotic desires. According to Sedgwick, the term "homosocial" *may* incorporate the term "homosexual", although it does not automatically do that. I would suggest that both terms are fairly adequate when discussing the relationship of Robert and George. I agree with Nemesvari that Robert is the character attempting to struggle for re-establishing the homosocial bonds, which Lucy threatens. Besides this, Robert's feelings for George appear to be clearly homoerotic. As a proof of this, one does not only have the passages presented on page 64, which reveal Robert's powerful feelings for George, as well as his own confusion concerning the depth of his emotions; another token of homoeroticism is Robert's attitude towards women. Sedgwick claims that male homosexual power does not

have an evident connection with misogyny (20). In this case, however, homosocial/homosexual bonds appear to raise misogyny in Robert.[39] Robert's earlier statements concerning his attraction for Lucy seem rather out of place when considering his more profound feelings for George. Alicia's unrequited love for Robert also makes one wonder about Robert's non-sexual attraction to women. Robert appears to be completely ignorant of Alicia's warm feelings for him, and only treats her with brotherly affection. Sir Michael also wonders why his nephew shows no romantic interest to his daughter:

> Sir Michael argued that because Alicia was a pretty girl and an amiable girl it was therefore extraordinary and unnatural in Robert Audley not to have duly fallen in love with her. […] He forgot that there are certain Jacks who go through life without meeting the Jill appointed for them by Nemesis, and die old bachelors perhaps, with poor Jill pining an old maid upon the other side of the party-wall. (*LAS*, 263)

The passage in question may be regarded as a fairly direct hint to homosexuality from Braddon's part: these "certain Jacks" may easily refer to men not sexually interested in the opposite sex. The "Jacks" Braddon draws attention to were thus compelled to spend their lives as official bachelors, since in Victorian society, homosexuality was far from being an acceptable choice. Hence the "extraordinary" and "unnatural" in Robert denote his homoerotic desires.

George's feelings for Robert cannot, however, be that easily interpreted as homoerotic as Robert's affection for his friend. Most importantly, George appears to be obsessed with the "death" of his wife: naïve as it sounds, he had honestly believed he could return to his old life as Helen's devoted husband and receive a warm welcome from his deserted wife. George is utterly devastated by the loss of his wife, and after a year has passed after his re-appearance in England, he still remembers the old agony caused by the loss of his wife: "I've had my wound, Bob; I carry the bullet still, and I shall carry it into my coffin" (*LAS*, 41). Robert and his affection for his old friend cannot liberate George from his misery,

[39] See also page 33.

which can be concluded from the fact that George disappears after his confrontation with Lucy, determined never to return to England. This becomes evident from the letter George wrote to Robert before leaving England – a letter Robert never received due to Luke's attempts to blackmail Lucy: "If your friendship could have done me any good, I would have appealed to it. If your counsel could have been of any help to me, I would have confided in you" (*LAS*, 335). This proves that Robert has, in a way, been conquered by Lucy, since his feelings for George were not enough to conquer the sorrow caused by Lucy. This again may increase Robert's misogynist feelings for women.

Since homosexuality was still a taboo even in sensation writing, Braddon had to come up with an idea of "normalising" the sexuality of one of her main characters. In order to do this, she had to find an appropriate companion for Robert. In the following subchapter, I will deal with George's sister, Clara Talboys, who will be the new target of Robert's affection.

5.3. Clara Talboys as the Epitome of Victorian Femininity

The first time Robert confronts George's sister is when he comes to see George and Clara's father, Harcourt Talboys, in order to make George's father aware of his suspicions concerning George's disappearance. Clara sits at the other end of the room with her needlework in her lap, without uttering a word during the conversation Robert has with Harcourt Talboys. Clara's father is very stern towards his daughter, and he demands her to remain quietly in her place. Clara obviously lives under her father's strict control and under complete suppression, where women are preferred to be invisible and silent. Clara is also unable to show any emotions in her father's presence, which makes Robert suspect that she is utterly indifferent to her brother's fate. The only time she reacts to Robert's story is when Robert implies that he

suspects that George has been murdered: this is when Clara hides her face in her clasped hands, never lifting her face again during Robert and Harcourt Talboys's conversation. After leaving the Talboys mansion, Robert, however, confronts Clara once more, as she sneaks out her father's house in order to let Robert know that she actually believes in what Robert had told her and her father only a few minutes earlier. This is when Robert's perception of Clara alters completely: he no longer sees Clara as cold or emotionless. Robert also starts regarding Clara as beautiful:

> Robert Audley stood looking at her with awe-stricken admiration. Her beauty was elevated into sublimity by the intensity of her suppressed passion. She was different to all other women that he had ever seen. His cousin was pretty, his uncle's wife was lovely, but Clara Talboys was beautiful. Niobe's face sublimated by sorrow, could scarcely have been more purely classical than hers. Even her dress, puritan in its grey simplicity, became her beauty better than a more beautiful dress would have become a less beautiful woman. (*LAS*, 159)

> 'If that girl, Clara Talboys, had been five minutes later, I should have left Dorsetshire, thinking her cold, hard, and unwomanly, and should have gone to my grave with that mistake part and parcel of my mind. I took her for a stately and heartless automaton; I know her now to be a noble and beautiful woman. What an incalculable difference this may make in my life!' (*LAS*, 162)

Thus Clara gains back her femininity when her affection for George is revealed: she starts to embrace feminine beauty, grace and nobleness, and is no longer masculine and hardened in Robert's eyes. Her earlier incapability to show emotions is explained by the suppression she has had to experience under her father's roof, and by the absence of the mother figure (LAS, 159): Clara has hence been unable to imitate her mother's femininity, which has caused her to be unable to perform full femininity, which during the Victorian period, included being the professional of emotions.

Claras's function in *Lady Audley's Secret* is very clear. Clara acts as a contrast to the character of Lucy Audley: she is the embodiment of femininity when it comes to appearance as well as her character and behaviour. Robert perceives her as "the most noble and beautiful of women" and as "always fresh and bright" (*LAS*, 346). As opposed to Lucy,

she does not act vehemently or aggressively, but instead, her speech is described as "impassioned" (*LAS*, 177) and her character as "apparently passionless" (*LAS*, 158). Clara has been an obedient daughter to her stern father, rejecting her own wishes – such as keeping in touch with her brother, for instance – and submitting to her predestined domestic role, which she has to fulfil on her own due to the absence of her mother. When considering Butler's views on imitating gender performances, one may note that despite the fact that Clara has spent her life without a female role model, which was considered extremely important in girls' education, she has adopted feminine characteristics and ideal manners of behaviour by herself. Thus Clara's femininity cannot be seen as a product of social upbringing, but instead as an innate quality. Seeing femininity and masculinity as innate characteristics in men and women was typical to Victorian thinking, but one may wonder whether Braddon agreed with this. On the one hand, one may consider that portraying Clara's femininity as an innate quality would suggest that Braddon regarded femininity and masculinity as predestined characteristics, but on the other hand, her representations of Robert and Lucy strongly show that she does not believe in perceiving femininity as an inevitable quality in women, or masculinity as inevitable in men.

One significant aspect that emphasises Clara's femininity is her high sense of morality. Due to their innocence and their role in the domestic sphere, women were expected to be morally superior to men and act as the moral guides of their husbands and brothers.[40] This is exactly how Clara acts in her relationship with Robert. Thus Robert comments on Clara's superiority and moral dominion:

> 'I accept the dominion of that pale girl, with the statuesque features and the calm brown eyes,' he thought. 'I recognise the power of a mind superior to my own, and I yield to it, and bow down to it. […] I'd better submit myself to the brown-eyed girl, and do what she tells me, patiently and faithfully. (*LAS*, 164)

[40] See chapter 2.5.

Clara begs Robert to continue his investigations concerning the disappearance of her brother, and thus attempts to guide Robert in a morally appropriate direction, which entails that George's murderer will be brought to justice. Clara's righteousness forces Robert to complete the task assigned to him, as "Clara Talboys, with an imperious gesture, beckoned him onwards to her brother's unknown grave" (*LAS*, 201). The second meeting between Clara and Robert also clearly indicates morality, as it takes place at Audley church (*LAS*, 204). Clara has come to visit her friends in Essex, and wants to try the old organ of the church, when Robert suddenly appears at the church. This confrontation has an obvious moral connotation, indicating Clara's higher Christian morality over Robert. Robert probably comes to seek harmony in the holy place – the reader gets the impression he does not do that often – and appropriately finds Clara, who becomes Robert's source of calmness and harmony.

I discussed mobility and struggling for physical independence in relation to Lucy in chapter 3.3. These issues are also relevant when considering the relationship of Clara, Robert and George. The restrictions concerning mobility are obvious when it comes to Clara. She is not able to travel to Australia in order to look for her brother, and recognises the limitations of her sex when it comes to mobility: "'If I were a man, I would go to Australia, and find him, and bring him back; if he was still to be found among the living,' she added in a lower voice'" (*LAS*, 349). It is only her later marriage to Robert that would enable her to travel abroad, which again reveals the lack of independence. The limited mobility and the incapability to act independently was already revealed after the first meeting between Clara and Robert, as Clara begged Robert to avenge the murder of her brother. Clara promises that she herself will find her brother's murderer if Robert refuses to complete his investigations: "'I will travel from one end of the world to the other to find the secret of his fate, if you refuse to find it for me. I am of age; my own mistress; rich, for I have money left me by one of my aunts; I shall be able to employ those who will help me in my search, and I will make it to

their interest to serve me well'" (*LAS*, 159). The reader does know, however, that it is impossible to perform this option in practise. Without the approval of her father, Clara's possibilities to move around independently – at the same time as maintaining her status as a lady – are very limited. It is also questionable to what extent she is in control of her property. Thus Robert is left with no other choice but to continue his investigations, since he cannot place a Victorian lady in the situation of having to compromise her status.

After her confrontation with Robert, Clara seems to discover the essence of her feminine power, which is to persuade men to act according to her own wishes. Thus she maintains her feminine status as a Victorian lady at the same time as enhancing the masculinity of the men she has contact with. When acting like this, she still corresponds to the ideal passivity expected from Victorian girls, since she only encourages other people to be active so as to satisfy her needs. One may see that Robert's process of masculinization is not only influenced by his rival, Lucy Audley, but also strongly by Clara, who "had found a voice" (*LAS*, 158), and forces Robert to start assuming his masculine role in order to fulfil Clara's wishes. One concrete example of Clara enhancing Robert's masculinity is when she encourages Robert to pursue his profession as a barrister in the public sphere:

> She recommended Mr Audley to read hard and think seriously of his profession, and begin life in real earnest. It was a hard, dry sort of existence perhaps which she recommended; a life of serious work and application, in which he should strive to be useful to his fellow-creatures, and win a reputation for himself. (*LAS*, 348)

Thus Robert has to reject his femininity not only to conquer Lucy, but also to please Clara and most importantly, in order to be a masculine contrast to Clara's femininity, so that they can be portrayed as an ideal Victorian couple in the denouement of the story.

Clara clearly reminds the reader of one particular heroine from Braddon's *Aurora Floyd* – that is, Lucy Floyd, who is Aurora's cousin. She also represents the feminine ideal, thus posing a strong contrast to the passionate, wild and adventurous Aurora, who often

upsets people with her non-feminine behaviour. Similarly in *Lady Audley's Secret*, Clara offers an ideally feminine contrast to Lucy Audley; the difference between these two relationships is, of course, that Aurora and her cousin Lucy are good friends, while Clara and Lucy never actually meet, and Clara – even when not knowing who Lucy is – wants vengeance on the assumed murderer of her brother. One of the main male characters of Aurora Floyd, Talbot Bulstrode, considers that he has found himself a perfect match in Lucy Floyd, as he appreciates the passive and innocent "Angel in the House" archetype, who accepts her traditional domestic role:

> Talbot Bulstrode's ideal woman was some gentle and feminine creature crowned with an aureole of pale auburn hair; some timid soul with downcast eyes, fringed with golden-tinted lashes; some shrinking being, as pale and prim as the mediæval saints in his pre-Raphaelite engravings, spotless as her own white robes, excelling in all womanly graces and accomplishments, but only exhibiting them in the narrow circle of a home.[41]

Talbot's first object of desire is actually Aurora, but due to Aurora's mysterious past, Talbot is not ready to marry her, and finally chooses Lucy over Aurora. Thus he contents himself with the girl who is a socially favoured choice, just as Clara is in *Lady Audley's Secret*. Both Lucy Floyd and Clara are safe choices, since they do not struggle against their predestined roles.

Robert starts to have affectionate and romantic feelings for his friend's sister fairly soon after their first encounter. He perceives Clara as being very different from other women he has known – that is, especially from Lucy and Alicia. Robert's feelings for Clara almost appear to heal his misogynist feelings for women, which were mostly caused by Lucy. He still considers other women a nuisance, but lets Clara into his secret fantasies: "His thoughts wandered away upon the blue clouds of hazy tobacco smoke, and carried him into a bright region of unrealities, in which there was neither death nor trouble, grief nor shame;

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[41] Braddon, Mary Elizabeth. *Aurora Floyd*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996, 40.

only himself and Clara Talboys in a world that was made all their own by the great omnipotence of their loves" (*LAS*, 317). However, despite the fact that Robert claims he is in love with his friend's sister on several occasions, the reader is left confused due to the continuous references to George when Robert analyses his feelings for Clara.

Clara and George's likeness is referred to disturbingly often. It is actually the first thing Robert notices in Clara when he enters the room the young lady sits in: "[…] but he could see that she was young, and that she was like George Talboys" (*LAS*, 149). Clara is also depicted as having "brown eyes like George's" (*LAS*, 156), as being "so like the friend whom he [Robert] had loved and lost" (*LAS*, 161) and as having "a feminine resemblance to poor George's hand" (*LAS*, 166). The most disturbing of all the passages concerning the likeness between the two siblings is the following statement uttered by Robert: "If poor George were sitting next to me, or – or even George's sister – she's very like him – existence might be a little more endurable" (*LAS*, 166). These references become more and more dubious as Robert's feelings for Clara appear to become stronger. The question is whether it is the George in Clara Robert falls in love with – thus proving Robert's romantic affection for his friend – or whether he falls in love with Clara as an individual person. On the basis of the extract on page 166, one may draw the conclusion that Clara is only the second best choice for Robert; thus she acts as George's replacement, as Gilbert suggests (101), and as George's even more feminine counterpart. Clara compensates for George's absence, as George is an impossible choice for Robert both physically as well as mentally: George is physically absent most of the time, but also otherwise an unacceptable choice for Robert due to the fact that homosexuality was an unthinkable choice during the Victorian period.

Another interesting aspect in the "triangle" of Clara, Robert and George is Clara and Robert's marriage at the end of the novel. Robert proposes to Clara when they discuss the possibility of travelling to Australia to look for George. Surprisingly, the author does not

mention Clara's consent at all, but instead, the reader only later discovers that the couple has got married. The scene of proposal ends with Robert's words, "'Shall we both go, dearest? Shall we go as man and wife? Shall we go together, my dear love, and bring our brother back between us?'" (*LAS*, 350). The reader is left wondering whether Clara accepts the offer of marriage only due to her gratitude, since Robert has promised to go to Australia to look for George. If so, we once more have an example of a Victorian marriage not based on romantic feelings, but instead on practical reasoning – similar to the marriages of both Lucy and Phoebe. Robert's motives for marrying are even more controversial. From the first pages of the novel, one gets the impression that Robert is not the "marrying type". This becomes apparent from his astonishment after hearing that George is married: "'The idea of you having a wife, George; what a preposterous joke'" (*LAS*, 30). It is noteworthy that even Robert's proposal of marriage ends with the words "bring our brother back between us", thus referring to George as his actual object of affection, who literally comes "between" the married couple.

Nemesvari presents Clara and Robert's relationship as something that eventually stabilises the patriarchal order and cements the homosocial bonds in society (524). In addition, he claims that "Clara provides Robert with the perfect object of transference and offers him the opportunity to turn his "illicit" homosocial desire for George in a socially acceptable direction" (524). Gilberts also suggests that Robert has to transfer his desires from unsuitable objects to more suitable ones (102). Nemesvari's and Gilbert's arguments seem justifiable, since it seems obvious that Clara does not pose a threat to male homosocial bonds as opposed to Lucy, whose masculinity threatens the patriarchal order and the power conventionally seen as a male privilege, which Robert, George and Sir Michael are, however, unable to claim. Clara's femininity and passivity allow the men to enhance their masculinity, and thus she does not only stabilise the homosocial bonds, as Nemesvari suggests, but also re-establishes the valued contrast between femininity and masculinity. In the end, Robert

discards his meerschaums and French novels, which symbolises his final denial of his feminine past assisted by Clara (*LAS*, 355). The fact that Robert discards the French novels also indicates that he starts to act out proper masculine sexuality in his marriage by rejecting masturbation, which the French novels quite clearly refer to. Lucy's destruction and the relationship of Clara and Robert also release George, to some extent, from the burden of his "embarrassingly" non-masculine past as the victim of Lucy's masculinity. In the denouement of the story, he is even given some hope of finding love; in the meantime, he is content with living with Clara and Robert: "George Talboys is very happy with his sister and his old friend. He is a young man yet, remember, and it is not quite impossible that he may by and by find someone who will be able to console him for the past" (*LAS,* 354 - 355).

Indeed, it seems that Robert gets the best of both worlds, as to his and Clara's pleasant surprise, George returns to England. George's femininity is once more emphasised by the fact that he acts as the restorer of domesticity, as "the two young men sat deep into the night by the hearth which had so long been lonely" (*LAS*, 352). The sorrow induced by women has finally been conquered by the love of Robert, which becomes evident from the following statement uttered by George:

> 'Jonathan was very kind to me, Bob,' he said; 'I had enough money to enable me to get on pretty well in my own quiet way, and I meant to have started on the Californian goldfields to get more when that was gone. I might have made plenty of friends had I pleased, but I carried the old bullet in my breast; and what sympathy could I have with men who knew nothing of my grief? I yearned for the strong grasp of your hand, Bob; the friendly touch of the hand which had guided me through the darkest passage of my life.' (*LAS*, 353)

The triangle of Clara, Robert and George offers a perfect example of a relationship where a woman acts merely as an object of exchange and "in which the true *partner* is a man" (Sedgwick, 26). Thus women as objects of exchange are used in order to cement the "homosocial bonds of men with men" (26). As I discussed in chapter 2.4., marriage was the only means of embracing full masculine privileges, and male friendships –

erotic or non-erotic – could not offer those. Thus it appears that Robert marries Clara in order to receive George as his true partner; hence he not only receives the full privileges of masculinity in order to complete his process of masculinization, but is also capable of enjoying his relationship with George in a socially acceptable manner. At the same time, Clara completes her ideal femininity with the role of the wife and the mother, thus stabilising the conventional domesticity so much valued by the Victorians.

6. CONCLUSION

Preserving the right kind of femininity and masculinity was essential in every aspect of life during the mid-Victorian period; women and men had their distinctive roles and assignments in society, and this order could not be guarded unless the traditional dynamics of femininity and masculinity were retained. Although society was in a process of alteration, the old norms and values did not undergo such a rapid change. In *Lady Audley's Secret*, one may see an interesting reflection of the gradually changing status of men and women in Victorian society. In her novel, Braddon introduces characters who due to their unconventionality shocked many Victorian readers; *Lady Audley's Secret* presents Robert and George as men who lack masculine characteristics and a social role in the male public sphere, and Lucy as well as Phoebe as women with strong masculine ambitions, struggling against their limited options and predestined future in patriarchal society. Clara, on the other hand, is depicted as a submissive and feminine woman, thus representing the traditional and idealised type of women.

The relationship of Lucy and Robert can be seen as a power struggle that only one of them can win. One may also observe a power struggle of femininity and masculinity that takes place in both characters. One common feature between the characters is that neither of them has a fixed gender identity, and they have both failed in doing their gender performance correctly: Robert lacks all the qualities required from an honoured gentleman, whereas Lucy's feminine appearance conceals her masculine ambitions, determinism and courageousness. Robert is forced to reject his femininity in order to conquer Lucy: as a result, his attitude towards women turns into clear misogyny, which is only cured by his friend's sister, Clara. Robert causes masculinity to become stronger in Lucy, whose battle against her poverty-stricken position as woman who cannot alter her destiny turns into aggression and violence. Lucy's feminine looks, masculine mind and fluid identity form a serious threat to

the patriarchal order, and due to this, her power and her capability of controlling men need to be nullified: Robert forces her to drop her mask, and as a consequence, Lucy loses all her feminine as well as masculine power when she is placed in the asylum. Robert is rewarded by his beneficial alteration, whereas Lucy is punished for her inappropriate choices.

Phoebe's function in *Lady Audley's Secret* is to emphasise that Lucy has a softer side in her, which Robert, for instance, has been incapable of perceiving. Phoebe is actually the one who in the first place, succeeds in dropping Lucy's mask momentarily. With Phoebe, Lucy is able to show her true emotions. The two women are, however, separated, since they form a threat to the patriarchal order with their masculine ambitions and shared secrets. They are similarly frustrated with their roles as women who are unable to control their lives as independent individuals, and Lucy, for instance, obviously encourages Phoebe to preserve her position as an unmarried woman more unaffected by patriarchal control. Lucy and Phoebe's power and control needs to be taken away from them in order to stabilise the traditional order of things. Robert is the one who strips off Lucy's power, and marriage is the force that nullifies Phoebe. Phoebe has to live under total suppression in her marriage, and this was exactly what her former mistress wanted to salvage her from. Phoebe is only liberated from the subjection when Luke dies, after which she is left with the burden of financial insecurity as a young widow.

Clara represents the "Angel in the House" archetype by being a Victorian lady who does not challenge or struggle against the restrictions of her sex. Her unselfish innocence forms a strong contrast to Lucy and her struggles for physical liberty. After Clara has been proposed to by Robert, the author silences her completely, emphasising the fact she has now fulfilled her mission by becoming a wife and a mother, who is not to be seen or heard outside the domestic sphere. By assuming and performing her feminine role successfully, Clara, on her part, helps Robert to gain back his masculinity, since she forces him to meet her feminine

needs, which Robert can only implement by protecting her, practising his profession in order to support her financially, and by establishing a household. Robert is thus driven towards masculinity by masculine aggression and violence (the means of Lucy), and through feminine power of persuasion (the means of Clara). Clara eventually stabilises the domestic order and the conventional dynamics of femininity and masculinity in society. Thus Robert and Clara form a perfect example of Ruskin's complementary opposites, who with their inner nature and actions complete each other in the relationship, hence fulfilling the tasks assigned to their sexes.

At the beginning of the novel, the reader perceives George as the embodiment of masculinity, as he has acted determinately and bravely in the Australian gold-diggings. George, however, loses his ability to act independently after hearing about his wife's "death", and as a result, he is forced to rely on the assistance of Robert, which again emphasises the femininity of the former and the masculinity of the latter. George's femininity is also emphasised by his absence in the novel: most of the time, the reader does not hear his thoughts or feelings directly, since his presence is only conveyed to us through Robert. By conquering her first husband, Lucy emasculates George, who is never able to claim back his masculinity, although he is saved, to some extent, by the death of Lucy and by the marriage of his sister and Robert in the end. George is not capable of establishing an adequate masculine status, since as opposed to Robert, he does not get married or establish his own household. The reader is also left with the impression that he does not practise any profession in England; hence he also fails in his actions in the public sphere. One could state that George is victimised by his wife for good.

When it comes to sexuality, it seems that the relationships with most sincere and profound feelings are those between two men (Robert and George) and two women (Lucy and Phoebe). Since the relationships occur outside marriages and are unacceptable due to their

homoeroticism, Braddon had to disguise them as profound, albeit platonic friendships. I believe Braddon did not use these relationships only to shock her readership – which was, of course, a significant aim of sensation fiction – but also in order to reveal the structure and foundation of many Victorian marriages that were not based on love, but instead on practical reasons, such as economic security, or fear of abuse and violence. Braddon shows how the function of marriages was often to guarantee a respected status in society for both men and women. With *Lady Audley's Secret*, Braddon also discusses other issues that deteriorated women's position in Victorian society. One of these issues is mobility and physical freedom. Lucy is an example of a character who strongly challenges the limitations of her sex, whereas Clara settles for her restricted life. Thus Braddon reveals how women's dependence on men touches upon various aspects of life – even the very simple ones, such as moving around outside the domestic surroundings.

Why, then, does Braddon end her story as she does, placing the women back in their passive position and the male characters in positions that corresponded to the Victorian ideal? One should acknowledge that the reversal of conventional gender roles was still an appalling thought to many during the mid-Victorian period. Apparently Braddon was not ready to introduce a total change when it came to the status of men and women, and was thus compelled to punish her main female character for her masculine behaviour, as well as show that a man is at his happiest when embracing an ideal masculine role. In spite of this, the reader cannot miss the irony concerning gender expectations, and as a result, Braddon does succeed in questioning the narrow-minded idea of gender roles, as well as the idea of ideal femininity and masculinity. In *Lady Audley's Secret*, one may observe a constant power struggle between the conventional and valued femininity/masculinity and the thinking which does not regard the links between "male-masculine-attracted to female" and "female-feminine-attracted to male" as the self-evident truth. Lucy is an excellent example of the

latter, but her destiny is to represent those whose actions do not correspond to the norms of society and who thus have to suffer. With her almost ridiculously naïve denouement of *Lady Audley's Secret*, Braddon actually shows that those who in Butler's terms succeed in performing their gender correctly by corresponding to femininity or masculinity expected from them are also successful individuals in the eyes of society. Those who fail in doing this, either intentionally or not, are punished by society, since they form a threat to the traditional understanding of gender, femininity and masculinity, which we still hold on to in order to understand ourselves better.

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