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AnnMarie Marlow April 13, 2021

The Mass Production of Illicit Femininity: Narratives of Celebrity Formation in *Lady Audley's Secret* and *Armadale*

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Abstract

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By AnnMarie Marlow

This honors thesis examines the sensational heroines of the quintessential Victorian sensation novels, *Lady Audley's Secret* and *Armadale,* in order to expose the latent narratives of modern celebrity culture which commodified deviant manifestations of middle-class femininity. Through the historical contextualization of the sensation genre within a period of rapid industrialization, the sensational heroine emerges as the product of a Victorian mass audience. By engaging with contemporary critics who overwhelmingly viewed the sensation novel as the harbinger of a declining society, this thesis examines the duality of the sensational heroine/villainess as the embodiment of the modernizing effects of technology which exposed the private, domestic sphere to be consumed by the masses.

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Introduction:

In an 1858 edition of Charles Dickens' *Household Words,* Wilkie Collins published "A Shockingly Rude Article," in the guise of a "charming woman," in which he addressed conventional renderings of the female sex by Victorian novelists:

> Upon my word, when I see what angels the dear nice good men make of their heroines, and when I think of myself, and of the whole circle of my female friends, besides—I almost feel sick—I do, indeed … Let all rising young gentlemen who are racking their brains in search of originality take the timely hint which I have given them in these pages. Let us have a new fictitious literature, in which not only the bores shall be women, but the villains too.[1] (440)

By identifying the trope of idealized femininity as inaccurate and mundane, the author calls for a new class of heroines, one which reflects the times, and more importantly, reflects the Victorian woman. One year before *The Woman in White* would inaugurate the sensation novel, Collins seems to anticipate a shift in Victorian culture. The British public's appetite for crime news and the remarkable success of the Great Exhibition in 1851 revealed to writers as well as businessmen that the greatest way to earn an audience was through the spectacle of exposure. In August of 1858, Wilkie Collins saw the fictional heroine as a figure whose exposure would be made all the more thrilling by the cultural obligation to preserve the sanctity of middle-class femininity which shielded women from the prying eyes of the public like a mourning veil. The spectacle did not arise from characters such as Dickens' Miss Havisham, who is unsexed upon the first mention of her name; rather, the spectacle was in the process of unveiling, requiring the

[1] "A Shockingly Rude Article" was published anonymously in *Household Words;* however, Collins identified the article as his own when he published it in *My Miscellanies.* (1863)

heroine to initially appear as the manifestation of Victorian ideology—beautiful, innocent, and passive—so that, as the *Times* articulated in 1862, "gradually [one] discover[s] a mask" ("Lady Audley's Secret" 4).[2]

In his book, *Literature, Technology, and Modernity: 1860-2000,* Nicholas Daly writes, "technological modernization makes the world more rather than less mysterious" (76). The sensation novel of the 1860s mechanized the Victorian heroine, rendering her a villainess. Four years after the "Shockingly Rude Article" was published, Mary Elizabeth Braddon responded to Wilkie Collins's "timely" proposition with the creation of a heroine who scandalized and transfixed the British public. Serialized in John Maxwell's *Sixpenny Magazine* in 1862, *Lady Audley's Secret* presents a story of female criminality, suffused with the shocks and vibrations of modern life despite being largely contained within the private domestic sphere.

For Victorian readers, the most frightening aspect of the sensation novel was its familiarity. As Virginia Morris explains in *Double Jeopardy,* sensation novels were "partly new novels of manners and partly tales of terror" (89). Lucy Audley, Braddon's heroine, was designed to reflect the fashions and politics of middle-class femininity which cast the Victorian woman as an "angel in the house" and a foil to the masculine realm of imperialism and industry. Even in the wake of her transgressions, Lucy maintains the aspect of the saint, with her "disordered hair in a pale haze of yellow gold about her thoughtful face" (Braddon 142). By distilling domestic ideology into a single, concentrated image of idealized femininity, Braddon

[2] When Miss Havisham's name first appears in *Great Expectations* (1861), Mrs. Joe Gargery states, "and she is a she I suppose ...Unless you call Miss Havisham a he" (41). The unsexed character of Miss Havisham fulfills Victorian conceptions of immorality as inherently opposed to femininity as well as societal prejudice against aging women and spinsters. Hortense of *Bleak House* also represents an alternative or antecedent to the sensational villainess as Dickens used her character to challenge notions of femininity as inherently moral while tempering the transgression by making her French. Hortense was also based on the infamous Maria Manning whose case will be discussed in part one of this thesis.

"take[s] normality itself to such an extreme as to make it appear barking mad" (Allen 404). The sensation novel revolutionized Victorian standards of femininity by subsuming the "angel in the house" within the democratizing process of mass production.

Designed to stimulate the appetite of the masses, the sensation novel simulated displays of excess and spectacles of commodified beauty through the villainess. Lucy Audley manufactures her own image through thoughtful arrangements of commercial goods so that she can continuously shift her identity to reflect the desires and ideals of her spectators. In his infamous 1863 review of the sensation novel, literary critic Henry Mansel wrote, "a commercial atmosphere floats around works of this class, redolent of the manufactory and the shop" (33). The 1860s was a period of dizzying development in England as imperial expansion generated a prosperous and leisurely middle class which fueled rapid developments in retail and print. The first department store of Britain opened in 1863, followed by a series of "purpose-built modern department stores" (Lysack 7). Shopping became a sensorial experience as stores created extravagant displays of goods which shoppers could not only gaze at but touch. As Krista Lysack explains in her book *Come Buy, Come Buy: Shopping and the Culture of Consumption in Victorian Women's Writing,* the "new proximity to commodities in the department store also created new identifications with commodity objects" (7). The rise of modern consumerism transformed the Victorian public into a mass culture of compulsive consumption and over-identification.

Mass readership was well established by the 1860s; however, mid-Victorian innovations in print technology produced a reading public which Wilkie Collins coined "a monster audience" (*My Miscellanies* 262). Following the repeal of the stamp tax in 1855 and the abolition of the paper duty in 1861, British culture experienced an efflorescence of print which pervaded the

lives of the lower classes as well as the middle, women as well as men. Many London newspapers were printed daily, becoming a facet of everyday life for many Victorian families. After the price of the *Daily Telegraph* was lowered from two pence to one penny in 1855, the paper saw an "enormous increase in circulation" and exceeded 140,000 copies per day by 1862 (King 2). The 1860s saw the emergence of commercial newspapers such as *The Penny Illustrated Paper* (1861), *The Illustrated Police News* (1864), and *The Pall Mall Gazette* (1865) which included "women's pages, gossip columns, sports coverage, parliamentary sketches, political commentary, extensive use of illustrations, sensational exposés and 'occasional notes' columns" (King 5). Penny papers targeted the working class and the lower-middle classes by dedicating the bulk of each issue to police court reports. Subsequently, penny papers were "viewed by respectable commentators as fairly lurid journals which satisfied their readers' tastes for crime and violence;" however, the established papers such as the *Times* featured regular columns dedicated to court reports "which hardly differed at all" from those dominating the cheaper publications (Crone 3).

The revoking of the stamp and paper duties prompted a corresponding profusion of periodicals and books. The "paperback revolution" of the 1860s saw the emergence of single-volume "yellow-backs" which typically cost one to two shillings.[3] Railway stalls offering refreshments to hurried passengers were soon accompanied by stalls selling cheap "railway novels" or lending out volumes of the standard triple-decker novels.[4] While paperbacks and circulating libraries modernized the individually bound novel, the dominant format for

[3] See Taunton, "Print Culture."

[4] The industrialization of circulating libraries was led by Mudie's and W. H. Smith & Son; the latter were the first to lend books directly from railway stalls. Circulating libraries also delivered novels directly to subscribers' homes, creating a bridge between the public and private spheres. (Taunton, "Print Culture")

disseminating new fiction throughout the 1860s was the periodical. By the mid-nineteenth century there were more than one thousand periodical journals "devoted solely to literary subjects" (Phegley 105). Within periodicals or literary magazines, new fiction was serialized alongside advertisements and essays on a range of subjects from science to politics. Serialization offered an ideal format for novels of detection. The cyclical and fragmented system transformed the experience of reading by introducing the element of suspense.[5] Serial-plotting induced writers to design their chapters so that the end of each installment left readers on the edge of their seats, hungry for more. The corporality of anticipation also precipitated an active form of reception in which readers were left to conjecture and speculate as they awaited the next issue.

The steam railway allowed newspapers, periodicals, and library parcels to be transported from the manufacturers to the doors of Victorian homes on a daily basis, nullifying the physical and ideological distance between the domestic and public spheres. While the 1860s experienced a sudden profusion of choices when it came to reading material, the contents of newspapers and novels were determined by market forces which often rendered the boundaries separating reality from fiction indistinguishable. Thus, the restless anxiety generated by the cyclical system of periodical publishing was exacerbated by the intrusion of the sensational within the everyday lives of British readers. In Wilkie Collins's sensational saga, *Armadale,* the invasion of the British imagination by print is made manifest through the duplicitous heroine, Lydia Gwilt.

Serialized in *The Cornhill Magazine* from 1864 to 1866, *Armadale* represents an internalization of print-culture as a pervasive, external force occupying the homes and minds of the Victorian middle class. The novel's two male protagonists are haunted by the figure of Lydia

[5] See Palmer, "Are the Victorians Still with Us?"

Gwilt, whose looming presence takes the form of a newspaper article or a dream as often as it does the physical body of the woman herself. The disembodied or abstract nature of Gwilt's character throughout the novel personifies the power of mass print to create public figures whose influence can be seen and felt despite distance; thus, *Armadale's* narrative of female criminality exemplifies the processes of exclusion and emulation which comprise modern celebrity culture.

In her study of the scandalous celebrity of Lord Byron, Clara Tuite defines celebrity culture as the "social" order of "print-capitalism," derived from the "understanding of publication as a social event, and of print culture and literature as social institutions" (5, 7). Tuite argues that through "a communal culture of productive reception," the publicized individual becomes a commodified identity, "alienated [from the] self" (8). Lydia Gwilt's celebrity forms through the speculation and identification of her audience, who project their own fears and desires onto her image. *Armadale's* embodiment of celebrity formation also represents an internalization of contemporary debates surrounding female readers and their identification with the deviant heroines.

By writing from the position of a woman, Collins's "Shockingly Rude Article" reveals the impetus for Victorian authors to write for the female reader.[6] Domestic ideology promoted the feminization of novel-reading through creating a class of women consigned to lives of leisure and by designating the home as the "feminine sphere of idea" as opposed to the "masculine sphere of 'fact'" (Kao 118); however, debates surrounding what and how women should be

[6] Census data collected between 1851 and 1900 reveals a dramatic increase in female literacy from 54.8 percent to 96.8. The 1832 Reform Bill began the work of expanding education access to the working classes, but it was not until the 1870 Forster Act was passed that the government took responsibility for educating the masses. This thesis will focus on the middle-class woman as she was the primary target of sensation authors, and her role as a consumer greatly shaped the presentation of the villainess. (Taunton "Print Culture")

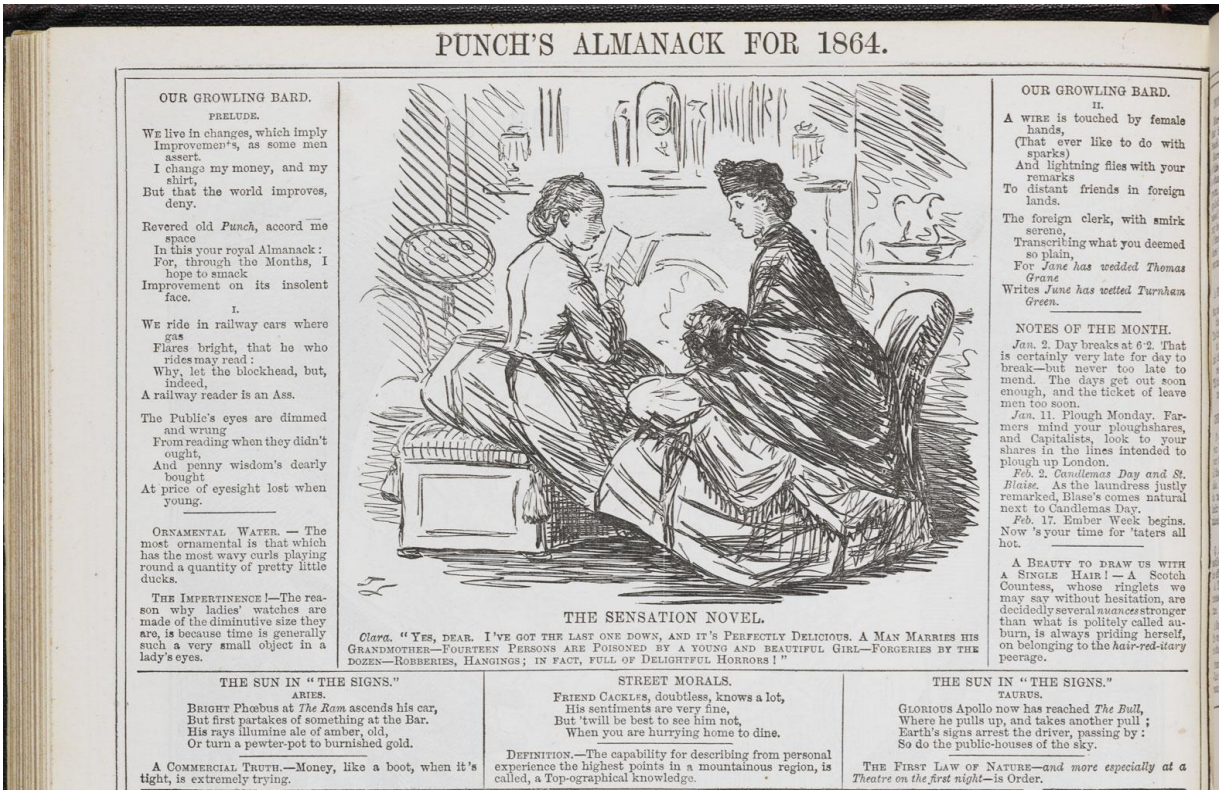
allowed to read are "as old as the novel itself" (Allen 409). In Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Woman,* the writer promoted the understanding of female readers as uncritical in order to emphasize the need for women's education: "their senses are inflamed, and their understanding neglected, consequently they become prey of their senses delicately termed sensibility and are blown about by every momentary gust of feeling" (109). Seventy years later, critics of the sensation novel echoed Wollstonecraft's portrayal of the female reader as too delicate for the ghastly plots and too naive for the alluring depictions of female criminality.

By investing their heroines with the lavish beauty of window displays and the mystery of modern technology, sensation novelists invited female readers to venerate and identify with the villainesses. Subsequently, contemporary critics maligned the genre as a direct threat to the sanctity of middle-class femininity:

> There is a praise and sympathy for unreasoning blind idolatry very likely to find a response in young readers, whether of the vain or romantic type; and the better it is done —the more sweetness and feeling is thrown into it—the more dangerous if it gets a hold, and keeps its ground. (*Christian Remembrancer, 1864, 112)*

Underscoring the *Christian Remembrancer's* warning against the allure of the sensational heroine is the notion of escape. In the era of mechanical reproduction and mass consumption, the sensation novel's commodification of transgressive femininity wielded the potential to transform Victorian culture through stimulating the imagination of the female consumer. In her book *The Fallen Angel: Chastity, Class and Women's Reading 1835-1880,* Sally Mitchell writes, "escape reading gives us a clue about what is being escaped from; it may reflect a reverse image of the tone of the times" (92). Braddon's literary magazine, *Belgravia,* promoted sensational literature as a medium through which female readers could fulfill their fantasies without challenging

convention;[7] however, Braddon portrays Lucy Audley as a female reader who does not escape reality through simply reading popular novels but through transforming herself into a sensational villainess by means of emulation. Thus, the sensational villainess serves as the principal and proxy of Victorian anxieties surrounding the sensation novel's threat to the sanctity of middle-class femininity.



PUNCH'S ALMANACK FOR 1864.

OUR GROWLING BARD.

PRELUDE.

We live in changes, which imply
Improvements, as some men assert.
I change my money, and my shirt,
But that the world improves, deny.

Revered old *Punch*, accord me space
In this your royal Almanack:
For, through the Months, I hope to smack
Improvement on its insolent face.

I.

We ride in railway cars where gas
Flares bright, that he who rides may read:
Why, let the blockhead, but, indeed,
A railway reader is an Ass.

The Public's eyes are dimmed and wrung
From reading when they didn't ought,
And penny wisdom's dearly bought
At price of eyesight lost when young.

Ornamental Water. — The most ornamental is that which has the most wavy curls playing round a quantity of pretty little ducks.

The Impertinence!—The reason why ladies' watches are made of the diminutive size they are, is because time is generally such a very small object in a lady's eyes.

THE SENSATION NOVEL.

Clara. "Yes, dear. I've got the last one down, and it's Perfectly Delicious. A Man Marries his Grandmother—Fourteen Persons are Poisoned by a young and beautiful Girl—Forgeries by the dozen—Robberies, Hangings; in fact, full of Delightful Horrors!"

OUR GROWLING BARD.

II.

A wire is touched by female hands,
(That ever like to do with sparks)
And lightning flies with your remarks
To distant friends in foreign lands.

The foreign clerk, with smirk serene,
Transcribing what you deemed so plain,
For *Jane has wedded Thomas Grane*
Writes *Jane has wetted Turnham Green.*

NOTES OF THE MONTH.

Jan. 2. Day breaks at 6·2. That is certainly very late for day to break—but never too late to mend. The days get out soon enough, and the ticket of leave men too soon.

Jan. 11. Plough Monday. Farmers mind your ploughshares, and Capitalists, look to your shares in the lines intended to plough up London.

Feb. 2. *Candlemas Day and St. Blaise.* As the laundress justly remarked, Blase's comes natural next to Candlemas Day.

Feb. 17. Ember Week begins. Now 's your time for 'taters all hot.

A Beauty to draw us with a Single Hair!—A Scotch Countess, whose ringlets we may say without hesitation, are decidedly several *nuances* stronger than what is politely called auburn, is always priding herself, on belonging to the *hair-red-itary* peerage.

THE SUN IN "THE SIGNS."

ARIES.

Bright Phœbus at *The Ram* ascends his car,
But first partakes of something at the Bar.
His rays illumine ale of amber, old,
Or turn a pewter-pot to burnished gold.

A Commercial Truth.—Money, like a boot, when it's tight, is extremely trying.

STREET MORALS.

Friend Cackles, doubtless, knows a lot,
His sentiments are very fine,
But 'twill be best to see him not,
When you are hurrying home to dine.

Definition.—The capability for describing from personal experience the highest points in a mountainous region, is called, a Top-ographical knowledge.

THE SUN IN "THE SIGNS."

TAURUS.

Glorious Apollo now has reached *The Bull*,
Where he pulls up, and takes another pull;
Earth's signs arrest the driver, passing by:
So do the public-houses of the sky.

The First Law of Nature—*and more especially at a Theatre on the first night*—is Order.

Source: "Sensation Novel" by *Punch's Almanack* 1864, *British Library. Punch*, a prominent weekly magazine with a satirical slant, poked fun at the sensation genre's grotesque subject matter and the "respectable" young women who consumed the salacious stories.

[7] M. E. Braddon founded *Belgravia* in 1866, serving as the editor and primary contributor. *Belgravia* was published monthly and sold at one shilling.

This thesis will be divided into two parts: "The Print Double" and "Spectacles of Consumption." Through analyzing the sensational villainess as a product—and consumer—of print culture and commodity culture, I will expose the latent narrative of modern celebrity culture in which the alienated image of the celebrity itself figures as an item of exchange and consumption. I will examine M. E. Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret* and Wilkie Collins's *Armadale* as these two novels are widely considered to be quintessential examples of the sensation genre, and their heroines embody the anxieties articulated by contemporary critics toward the sensation novel's representation of middle-class femininity.[8] After a renaissance of scholarly interest in popular literature occurred in the 1970s, many scholars have turned to the sensation novel as a crucial source for understanding British culture during an especially prolific decade. Because of the interdisciplinarity of the subject, I will engage with scholars across multiple fields, including cultural historians, literary scholars, and women's studies scholars.

In "The Print Double," I will engage with culture historians such as Clara Tuite and Brian Cowan to provide a foundational understanding of nineteenth-century celebrity as a product of mass circulation press and the Victorian reader's active engagement with print. I will examine the self-reflexive narratives within *Lady Audley's Secret* and *Armadale* which personify and sensationalize the increasing proximity between the constructed reality of news journalism and the lives of the British middle class. In analyzing print culture, I will also discuss the sensational heroines' mastery of print, and their manipulation of modern technology to deceive and disorient the male protagonists. Along with the sensation novels themselves, I will draw on newspaper

[8] Because of her sex and social standing—Braddon lived out of wedlock with publisher John Maxwell from 1861 until 1874 when Maxwell's wife died, allowing him to marry Braddon—Braddon was not as respected by contemporary critics as Wilkie Collins. (See Oliphant, "Sensation Novels, 1862" as well as "Novels, 1867")

articles and critical essays from the 1860s in order to establish the contemporary response to the genre and what the responses reveal about Victorian mores. Finally, I will discuss the contemporary cases of Maria Manning (1849) and Madeleine Smith (1857), and how these real-life sensations influenced the heroines of *Lady Audley's Secret* and *Armadale.*

The "Spectacles of Consumption" section will examine the emergence of a modern commodity culture in England, and the sensational heroine's embodiment of compulsive, emulative consumption. The scholarship of Krista Lysack and Thomas Richards will be central to my examination of nineteenth-century consumerism and advertising. Building on "The Print Double," I will examine the commodification of the sensational villainess into a standardized image of femininity through mechanisms of exploitation that simulated the transformation of public figures into merchandise which is produced for the pleasure and veneration of the middle-class consumer. Finally, I will discuss the female reader and her role in shaping the sensational heroines and the anxieties voiced by contemporary critics.

In the conclusion of my thesis, I will discuss Braddon's attempt to reinforce normative femininity and patriarchal sovereignty through pathologizing her heroine's criminality and dooming her to live the remainder of her life in a sanitarium. I will also discuss the rise of Sarah Bernhardt's celebrity in the decades after the "sensational sixties," and the commodification of her scandalous individuality by the press as the manifestation of the sensational villainess. The celebrity is, of course, an enduring phenomenon of modern society, and in many aspects, the forces which produced the celebrities of the fin-de-siecle and the early twentieth century were perpetuations of the mechanisms illustrated and embodied by the sensational villainess: technological innovation, capitalism, and the timeless thrill of scandal. Technology continues to reduce the distance between private domesticity and the teeming streets of modernity by

simulating proximity and creating what Lauren Berlant deems the “intimate public sphere” (“The Intimate Public Sphere”). The proximity of the public masses to the private home was also facilitated by the ease of imitation which increased with innovations in photography and the advent of cinema, providing consumers with detailed templates. When the templates were of murderesses, actresses, and flappers, mass culture proved an odious adversary to those who disapproved of modernization.

The Print Double

> He instantly suspected who she was, on the strength of what he had been told of her—for she's a famous woman in her way … he saw her in the passage and identified her in an instant … Miss Gwilt is a public character … [a] notorious woman. (Collins 461)

In 1860s England, a middle-class woman was rarely deemed "a public character" without also being considered "notorious." The fame which attaches itself to Lydia Gwilt in Wilkie Collins's *Armadale* can be viewed as both the cause and effect of Victorian sensationalism which subsequently fueled an emerging celebrity culture dominated by transgressive female figures. The collision of public and private which the villainess represented provoked shock and fascination within a culture which was submersed in the domestic ideology of the Victorian middle-class. The transformation of the middle-class woman from an idealized heroine contained within the private, domestic sphere into the villainess of the modern era whose mastery of technology allows her to deceive and subjugate the men around her emerged in response to the development of a mass reading public which shaped the progression of British culture. This section will focus on the self-reflexive narratives of *Armadale* and *Lady Audley's Secret* which illustrate the formation of celebrity as a process of doubling generated by mass circulating print and the "productive reception" of Victorian readers (Tuite 8).

The Classification of the Modern Celebrity

Scholarship varies on the exact moment at which the modern celebrity was formed. Stella Tillyard argues that "celebrity appears to have been made in the eighteenth century and in particular in London, with its dozens of newspapers and print shops, its crowds and coffee-houses, theatres, exhibitions, spectacles, pleasure gardens and teeming pavements" although the

first known instance of the term 'celebrity' being used to categorize an individual occurred in 1849 (20, 21).[9] Whether manifested through the theatre, the press, or the cinema, scholarship unanimously points to the mass audience as the author of the modern celebrity. Unlike glory, which Brian Cowan explains as the "judgement of posterity, reserved for those who have achieved great things and have been remembered as such," celebrity—an inherently ephemeral phenomenon—cannot be controlled or designed by the famed individual (85). Subsequently, celebrity does not consist of or represent an individual's personality or actions; rather, as Clara Tuite explains in her exploration of the "scandalous celebrity" of Lord Byron, celebrity consists of a "mediated and uncontracted (or unnegotiated) chain of reference between names" (5). The audience forms the celebrity from existing stereotypes through a process of "exclusion and categorization" (Valdez 96). Through the sulking and old-fashioned detective figure Robert Audley, Braddon encapsulates the system of categorization and its effective nullification of Lucy Audley's individuality:

> The Eastern potentate who declared that women were at the bottom of all mischief, should have gone a little further and seen why it is so. It is because women are never lazy. They don't know what it is to be quiet. They are Semiramides, and Cleopatras, and Joans of Arc, Queen Elizabeths, and Catharines the Second, and they riot in battle, and murder, and clamor and desperation. (137)

The chain of allusions which Robert Audley employs in his attempt to categorize Lucy's deviance reinforces normative femininity by maintaining the authority of binaries: madonna-whore or angel-demon. By classifying Lady Audley as a derivative of Queen Elizabeth, Joan of

[9] See also Cowan, 83-85 for his engagement with Tillyard and the "original" modern celebrity.

Arc, Catherine the Second, and so on, he reproduces the villainess's image into one which aligns with his narrow conception of female agency.

As the amateur detective of the novel, Robert Audley embodies the archetypal reader of the sensation novel. Braddon exhibits an awareness of the parallel between her hero's obsessive scrutiny of the heroine and the speculative practice of novel-reading when Robert Audley articulates his own methods of detection: "I will make her meet my eyes and I will read her as I have read her before. She shall know how useless her artifices are with me" (142). Robert reads Lady Audley—her physical appearance, her demeanor, and her words—and uses his observations to produce a conclusive image of Lady Audley's person. The hero's process of investigation—obsessive surveillance which leads to a transformative conclusion—subsequently mirrors celebrity culture "as a culture of enhanced reception, which functions as an active mode of production and transformation" (Tuite 16). Through invoking the cast of female icons as one and the same, Robert Audley subsumes Lucy within a process of reproduction. The paradox of mass culture which Braddon implicates is the standardizing of nonconformist ideas and individuals through mass production and mass consumption. Thus, while a celebrity culture undoubtedly existed in the teeming cities of eighteenth-century England, the expansion and maturation of celebrity culture into a perpetuity of modern life occurred in the mid-to-late Victorian era through revolutionary technological innovations that generated a culture of imitation and emulation.

Stereotyping

The language which today is used to denote imitation and parody—stereotype and cliché—originated in the early nineteenth century as the technology which enabled the mass

production of print. The stereotype or cliché was a revolutionary innovation in which a plate of type-metal was imprinted with the print form, creating a metal stamp which could reproduce the same page indefinitely.[10] The ability to mass produce and replicate drastically altered British culture. The distance between the creator and the product grew larger, rendering any sense of the original obsolete. In his 1935 essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," Walter Benjamin writes, "that which withers in the age of mechanical reproduction is the aura of the work of art" (4). In the wake of industrialization, the authority of the artist over his own work by merit of labor and ingenuity was replaced by plurality.[11] Braddon evokes the hollow and disjointed consequence of mechanical reproduction through the portrait of Lady Audley:

> No one but a pre-Raphaelite could have given to that pretty pouting mouth the hard and almost wicked look it had in the portrait … It was so like and yet so unlike. It was as if you had burned strange-colored fires before my lady's face, and by their influence brought out new lines and new expressions never seen in it before. The perfection of feature, the brilliancy of coloring, were there; but I suppose the painter had copied quaint medieval monstrosities until his brain had grown bewildered for my lady in his portrait of her, had something of the aspect of the beautiful fiend. (47)

Braddon not only depicts the disconnection between the subject and the facsimile generated by mechanical reproduction or the compulsive "cop[ying]" of unrelated subjects, but she also illustrates the discord between the idealized "perfection of feature [and] brilliancy of coloring" and a flawed interior. The scene foreshadows Lady Audley's deviation from normative

[10] See King, "British Newspapers 1860-1900," for a detailed analysis of print innovations in the late nineteenth century. For a primary source on the impact of stereotyping on the reading public see also "Essay on Printing" (1809).

[11] For further discussion of Benjamin and the absence of "aura," see Kaufman 121-148.

femininity through implying a "radical instability between the idealizing male gaze and malevolent female agency" which externalizes itself throughout the novel—and throughout the sensation genre—through the heroine's superior proficiency of technology (Lee 138).[12] As Krista Lysack explains, the aestheticized copy of Lady Audley "is not endowed with a sense of the original or unique," resembling the homogenizing effect of Robert Audley's chain of allusions (Lysack 66). The mechanical reproduction of individuals as commodities for mass consumption renders them simultaneously elevated above the masses and hemmed in by standardization

The mass production of print transformed the reading public and the act of reading itself. Newspapers and journals were no longer exclusive to the upper class, nor were they predominantly read aloud among groups in coffee-houses and cafés.[13] Novels and newspapers were increasingly read privately within the home by all members of the family. The emergence of the Family Literary Magazine in the 1860s indicates the pervasiveness of the print expansion within the Victorian household as the magazines were shared among all members of the family, and journals such as *Belgravia* (1866-1899) and *Cornhill* (1859-1975) engaged in discussions surrounding women and girls' reading habits and parental—or more commonly *paternal*—supervision of their daughters' print consumption (Phegley).[14] Journalists and authors capitalized on the democratization of print through employing "melodramatic tableaux" as a "useful way to market 'factual' crime reports and ... make complex ideas more accessible to general readers" (Mangham 5). The intimacy and the ritualistic nature of reading generated by the periodical

[12] Superior to the male characters. The feminization of technology and modernity and the disorientation of male characters will be further explored in "Spectacles of Consumption" (19-20).
[13] For an insightful analysis of the evolution of reading from a "collective and public activity" to an "individual and private concern," see "Artistic Images" (144).
[14] I will examine Thackeray's *Cornhill* and Braddon's *Belgravia* in part two's discussion of the female consumer.

system of publishing eventually wore down the barriers between the lives of the readers and the world of print.

Reading Double:

In April of 1863, Henry Mansel wrote his acerbic essay "Sensation Novels" for the Tory *Quarterly Review*.[15] Mansel's review appears in nearly every scholarly work on the sensation genre, for he thoroughly draws out every element of the sensation novel which made the literary phenomenon so successful despite his regard for the genre's popularity as "evidence that the public appetite can occasionally descend from trash to garbage" (Mansel 36). Touching upon the sensation novel's use of affect and the invasion of the private, middle-class home, Mansel writes:

> Proximity is, indeed, one element of sensation. It is necessary to be near a mine to be blown up by its explosion; and a tale which aims at electrifying the nerves of the reader is never thoroughly effective unless the scene be laid in our own days and among the people we are in the habit of meeting … The man who shook our hand with a hearty English grasp half an hour ago—the woman whose beauty and grace were the charm of last night and whose gentle words sent us home better pleased with the world and with ourselves—how exciting to think that under these pleasing outsides may be concealed some demon in human shape, a Count Fosco or a Lady Audley! (38)

What Mansel describes in this passage and what Collins and Braddon self-reflexively illustrate within the plots of their novels is a form of doubling.[16] The sensation novel functioned as a

[15] It should be noted that although Mansel's article is regularly cited by scholars, the *Quarterly Journal,* which was founded in 1809 by John Murray II, was no longer a preeminent critical voice in the 1860s.
[16] Jessica R. Valdez introduced me to the concept of doubling within the sensation novel in her essay "'The End is No Longer Hidden'" in which she identifies the newspaper as "an important technology of the

warped mirror, reflecting the lives and surroundings of the reader; only the image was saturated with lust, bigamy, romance, and murder.

Central to the illusion of proximity within the sensation novel was the ubiquity of the newspaper. The incorporation of news excerpts and the characters' ritualistic reliance upon daily news briefings to guide their actions created a multi-layered and self-aware portrayal of the tenuous relationship between the Victorian reader and the print they consumed. In the second book of *Armadale* a clergyman named Mr. Brock arrives at the home of Mrs. Armadale with his newspaper, as he does with "monotonous regularity at her tea-table three times a week [to] [tell] her all she knew, or cared to know, of the great outer world which circled round the narrow and changeless limits of her daily life" (Collins 43). In this passage, Collins evokes the ritualistic reading habits which formed around newspaper-reading as the result of daily or weekly publications. The contrast evoked between the "monotonous regularity … of her daily life" and the continuous current of news from the "greater outer world" sets the tone for the novel's frequent use of juxtaposition between tedious domesticity—experienced largely by middle-class women such as Mrs. Armadale—and the dizzying rapidity and shocking crimes of urban life.

Through the constant presence of newspapers within the middle-class home, the urban public furtively encroached upon the domestic sphere. The sinister potential which this subtle invasion represented is depicted through one of Mr. Brock and Mrs. Armadale's habitual evening readings. When an astonished Mr. Brock exclaims that there is an advertisement addressed to Allan Armadale, Mrs. Armadale's only son, the woman turns "a dull white" and states, "another

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uncanny in *Armadale*, as it helps to structure the series of repetitions and doubles of the novel" (101). In Andrew Mangham's chapter "Hidden Shadows," he argues that Lydia is the double or doppelganger of Ozias Midwinter, "manifesting the most dangerous aspects of his own character" (202). My argument diverges from existing scholarship as I propose that the polarities of the villainess—public and private, beautiful and monstrous—result in a process of doubling.

family, and other friends … the person whose name appears in that advertisement is not my son" (44). Despite Mr. Brock's contention that "it really seemed impossible there could be two persons [by the same name]," Mrs. Armadale insists that "there *are* two" (44). Jessica Valdez argues that in this scene between Mr. Brock and Mrs. Armadale, "the newspaper ceases to invoke an imagined community" when it calls directly upon a member of Mrs. Armadale's household (94). The fragile boundary separating Mrs. Armadale's world from the melodramatic realm constructed by news journalists fissures through the figure of her son. As Valdez explains, "in this early scene, readers of *Armadale* see their own practices of reading doubled in Mr. Brock and Mrs. Armadale, but this doubleness is not a source of community but of dread" (94). The reader soon realizes that there *are* two Allan Armadales. The double of Mrs. Armadale's son has taken and maintains the name of Ozias Midwinter, and thus, the 'other' Allan Armadale only exists in print: in the newspaper, in the confessional letter dictated by Midwinter's father, and later, on the marriage certificate betrothing Midwinter to Lydia Gwilt. Much as with the doppelgänger of German folklore, the impending exposure of Allan Armadale's double propels him towards an odious destiny orchestrated by the villainess.[17]

In Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret,* the emergence of the print double also serves as a pivotal moment in the mystery's progression. George Talboys and Robert Audley are seated in a coffee house where Talboys believes he is to meet his wife Helen for the first time since his return from a long voyage. While waiting for Helen to appear, George "mechanically [takes] a greasy *Times* newspaper of the day before from a heap of journals on the table [and] stare[s] vacantly at the first page" (Braddon 25). Resembling the language Collins uses to convey the

[17] According to popular myth, meeting one's doppelgänger, German for "double goer," was a sign of impending death. See Britannica, "Doppelgänger."

habitual nature of Mr. Brock and Mrs. Armadale's print consumption, Braddon characterizes George's behavior as "mechanical" and "vacant" suggesting that the constancy of the current of information renders the British public a nation of automata. The continuity of print media as a ceaseless and subsequently meaningless flow of "new" information is disrupted by a breach between the two-dimensional field contained within the *Times* and George Talboys's own life. Just as Mr. Brock and Mrs. Armadale are startled by the newspaper's sudden intrusion into their lives, George Talboys turns a "sickly, chalky grayish white" when he sees "Helen Talboys, aged 22" included "among the list of deaths" (Braddon 25). Louise Lee explains the "reading-in-disbelief moment" as a "common trope in sensation fiction, signaling, in the news-driven world of the 1860s, an unprecedented permeability between fiction and reality" (138). As the observant reader quickly gathers, the obituary is a fabrication, designed by Helen Talboys so that she could take on a new identity, first as the governess Miss Lucy Graham and then as the aristocratic Lady Audley. The print double facilitates Lucy's advancement and deception by exploiting the power of print to invest lies with an aura of truth.

While the print double of Allan Armadale functions as a source of dread for himself and Midwinter, the female double serves the villainess by aiding her criminal ambitions. Lucy Audley conjures the double with the explicit intention of separating her own identity from Helen Talboys so that she can become Lady Audley, whereas the act of deception which produces two Allan Armadales was not planned or executed by either of the men; rather, the "wicked hand which smoothed the way" belonged to Lydia Gwilt, the novel's villainess (Collins 36). Allan Armadale and Ozias Midwinter are haunted by the looming presence of the double and by the woman who invoked it. After discovering her son's double within the advertisement, Mrs. Armadale asks Mr. Brock, "will you promise … not to let that newspaper fall in his way?" (44),

establishing the newspaper as a looming threat to the male body. The male characters of sensation novels are victimized by print and by the women who have mastered the technologies of modern industry. Louise Lee explains "the Luciferian pulling power of Lady Audley or *Armadale*'s Lydia Gwilt," as owing not only to their embodiment of the "formidable drawing room *femmes fatales* in the quasi-traditional mold," but more acutely through their portrayal of "gifted and resourceful manipulators of newfangled inventions" (134).[18] The "mechaniz[ation]" of female bodies within the sensation genre externalizes itself through their ability to outpace and outmaneuver their male counterparts (Daly, "Railway Novels," 468).

Lady Audley's conjuring of a print double through the forged obituary allows her to manipulate a medium legitimated by the guise of masculine authority. The "reading-in-disbelief moment" reveals to Robert Audley and George Talboys "a masculine public sphere that is feminizing at an exponential rate" (Lee 138). Robert Audley illustrates the sensational hero's frustration towards his own technological impotence:

> If this woman of whom I speak had never been guilty of any blacker sin than the publication of that lying announcement in the *Times* newspaper, I should still hold her as the most detestable and despicable of her sex—the most pitiless and calculating of human creatures. That cruel lie was a base and cowardly blow in the dark; it was the treacherous dagger thrust of an infamous assassin. (177)

Lady Audley violates the pretense of authenticity which Robert Audley and George Talboys assume from newspapers, revealing a larger insecurity shared among the men of sensation novels that women have harnessed the dizzying powers of technology while they remain unable to keep

[18] See also Martin 138-141, on the mobilization of the Victorian woman in *Lady Audley's Secret*.

up. Further, Lady Audley's manipulation of the newspaper to construct a new identity which closely resembles the "angel in the house" of domestic ideology not only threatens the validity (and virility) of news journalism, but also suggests the idealized vision of Victorian femininity may be nothing more than a one-dimensional construct which isolates the aesthetic image of femininity from the personality and actions of the woman herself.

The Facsimile of the Villainess:

In his book, *Modernism Is the Literature of Celebrity* Jonathan Goldman writes, "celebrity makes the self contingent; identity depends on an audience for its continued existence, turning the individual into a stereotype, condemned to perform itself until death" (1). Tuite largely supplements Goldman's definition in her own study of celebrity when she writes that "celebrity is more aptly identified with the paradigmatically alienated self" (8). When considering Lord Byron's rise to fame as a formative process for modern celebrity culture, the divorce of the individual from the image produced by the publicity machine becomes evident through Byron's failed attempt to "control his image … [by] commission[ing] portraits or demand[ing] that others be destroyed" (8). The mass distribution or reproduction of an individual's image subjects them to the "appropriations and transformations" of "productive reception" (Tuite 8). While Byron's celebrity developed as a product of print-capitalism and the exclusionary effects of mass consumption, the public invasion of Lord Byron's private affairs did not constitute a fundamental violation of British ideology. The modernization of celebrity culture in the 1860s rendered celebrity a predominantly feminine enterprise.[19] After decades of prolific

[19] In "The Spectacle of Advertising," I will discuss the profusion of the female form in commercial advertising as well as the feminization of consumerism which shaped celebrity culture.

cultural production which buttressed the separate-sphere ideology by portraying the middle-class woman as an angelic figure of unearthly beauty,[20] the public exposure of the middle-class woman produced the dissonant sensations of "attraction and repulsion" which Tuite identifies as "a key feature of scandalous celebrity" (3).

While the fictional characters of Lucy Audley and Lydia Gwilt were not themselves celebrities outside of their fictional realms, their characters and the novels' treatment of their villainy represent an internalization of a celebrity culture which was rapidly developing in the 1860s. Further, by interweaving allusions to contemporary, highly publicized cases of female criminality, Braddon and Collins incorporate their own fictional heroines within the national "dialogue," engaging the reader's intuitive reasoning and conferring upon the heroine the status of notability (Valdez 95). The allusions to contemporary cases were viewed by critics as yet another artifice sensation novelists used to exploit the public's fascination with crime and scandal. Mansel explained the technique in his critical essay:

> If a scandal of more than usual piquancy occurs in high life, or a crime of extraordinary horror figures among our *causes célébres*, the sensationist is immediately at hand to weave the incident to a thrilling tale, with names and circumstances slightly disguised, so as at once to exercise the ingenuity of the reader in guessing at the riddle and to gratify his love of scandal in discovering the answer. (39)

Mansel's deprecation of the sensation author's use of contemporary scandals as inspiration for their own plots resembles Walter Benjamin's despair of originality in the age of mechanical reproduction; however, Mansel also implies that the allusions to contemporary cases and

[20] For examples of cultural productions which established and reinforced the separate-sphere ideology, see Patmore and Ruskin 81-114.

notorious figures encouraged a form of reading which was active rather than passive, producing a form of innovation which was denotative of mass culture. The sensation novel prompted readers to engage in the process of "exclusion and categorization" by creating a standard image of female criminality (Valdez 96).

When *Lady Audley's Secret* was published in 1862, the British appetite for murderous women had been revealed through the sensationalized cases of Maria Manning (1821-1849) and Madeleine Smith (1835-1928). Maria Manning and her husband, Frederick Manning, were executed before a crowd of 30,000 for the murder of Patrick O'Connor, Maria's lover. O'Connor was invited to the Mannings' home for dinner; however, as the *Times* reported, "nothing had been prepared in the way of food" (14 November 1849). Instead, the wealthy soldier was shot in the head and beaten excessively with a crowbar. His corpse was then buried under the kitchen floorboards. Frederick Manning "claimed that the murder had been solely committed by his wife" before his execution, but the *Times* did not need persuading as they had already categorized Maria as the "Lady Macbeth on the Bermondsey Stage" (Mangham 8). According to Andrew Mangham, newspapers covering the Manning case "laid enormous emphasis on Mrs. Manning's dinner invitation and the fact that O'Connor had been buried beneath the kitchen floor" (8). However, Mangham does not argue that Maria Manning's alleged perversion of the domestic realm exposed the British public to female capacities beyond their comprehension; rather, the murder of Patrick O'Connor "confirmed growing suspicions that every home and every woman could harbor the potential for extreme violence" (9). While the prospect of latent evil lurking beneath domestic spaces and the women who ran them did not shock the reading public, the publicizing of the private quarters of the Mannings' home and of Maria Manning

herself within the *Times* and the *Standard* revealed a voyeuristic appetite among the reading public for the exposure of the middle-class woman.[21]

In *Lady Audley's Secret,* the villainess insists that she "is not like the women [she] [has] read of, who have lain night after night in the horrible darkness and stillness, planning out treacherous deeds, and arranging every circumstance of an appointed crime" (196); however, Robert Audley transposes the image of the notorious Maria Manning onto that of Lucy Audley, implying that the heroine is, in fact, just "like the women [she] [has] read of":

> What do we know of the mysteries that may hang about the houses we enter? If I were to go tomorrow into that commonplace, plebeian, eight-roomed house in which Maria Manning and her husband murdered their guest, I should have no awful prescience of that bygone horror. Foul deeds have been done under the most hospitable roofs; terrible crimes have been committed amid the fairest scenes, and have left no trace upon the spot where they were done. I do not believe in mandrake, or in bloodstains that no time can efface. I believe rather that we may walk unconsciously in an atmosphere of crime. And breathe none the less freely. I believe that we may look into the smiling face of a murderer, and admire its tranquil beauty. (Braddon 94)

Robert Audley's statement not only illustrates the lingering impression Maria Manning left upon the public imagination, but also the intimacy with which the British public came to know the Manning case. Robert suggests the need to peer beneath the coverings of domestic "tranquil[ity]" and expose the private interiors, just as the *Times* allowed him to see into the "eight-roomed house" of Maria Manning and look beneath her stained floorboards. The subversiveness of

[21] See Morris, especially chapter 2.

Braddon's allusion to Maria Manning was not the association of an executed murderess and adulteress with a beautiful, aristocratic woman—as the "concept of 'outward show' not correlating with 'inner realities' was already a ubiquitous Victorian idea" (Mangham 169)—rather, the blending of crime journalism and fiction provoked readers to question the boundaries separating reality from melodrama.

While laying the foundations for the sensational villainess, Maria Manning's case diverged from what would become the standard narrative of the Victorian murderess from the 1860s through the turn of the century. First, Manning was not English; she was born in Switzerland, and during her trial, the papers emphasized her foreign accent. Second, Manning was Catholic. The third difference can be considered a continuation of the first two: Manning was executed. In the decades which would follow the Manning murder, sensationalized cases of female criminality predominantly earned the overwhelming sympathy of the public and concluded in acquittal. Although the Manning case constituted an unprecedented exposure of private domesticity, the murderess did not fully align with the hegemonic standard of middle-class femininity.

Collins was not as explicit in identifying his contemporary inspirations; however, in *Armadale,* the influence of "real-life" murderesses is far more pervasive than in *Lady Audley's Secret*. The narrative structure of *Armadale,* which shifts from the externalized third-person to the intimate first-person through the private letters and diary entries of Lydia Gwilt, points to a contemporary reference. Nearly ten years after the Manning case, Madeleine Smith, a wealthy, unmarried twenty-one-year-old, was put on trial for the murder of a shipping clerk, Emile L'Angelier, who "to the general astonishment, turned out to have been not only her secret fiancé, but also her lover" (Hartman 52). In "one of the most sensational trials of the century," Miss

Smith's private letters were publicized, revealing evidence of her deliberate pursuit of a romantic relationship with L'Angelier, "captivat[ing] a Victorian public with an already keen appetite for crime and illicit sexual adventure in high places" (Hartman53-54). L'Angelier was discovered dead by poisoning soon after his final exchange with Madeleine, and the police discovered "large quantities of arsenic" had been recently purchased by Miss Smith (Hartman 54). Despite the extensive case against her and the shocking details revealed in her letters, Miss Smith was acquitted, and "the decision was greeted with loud cheers in the courtroom" (Hartman 54). The discord between public opinion and the evidence presented in the courtroom revealed a troubling dimension of mass culture. The scrutiny with which the public inspected Madeleine's appearance, lining up in crowds outside of the courthouse "in the hope of catching a glimpse of the prisoner" and devouring articles which extensively detailed her "elegant attire," was largely absent when it came to considering the evidence against her.[22] The public and the jury chose to accept the defense lawyer's portrayal of Madeleine as "the passive, innocent dupe of an adventurer" despite the "more than sufficient evidence" that Smith's actions were "self-conscious and calculated" (Mangham 23, Hartman 56). Madeleine's public image was separated from her person so that the public could revel in the spectacle of Miss Smith's exposure without damaging the status of Victorian womanhood.[23]

Sensation fiction was contemporaneously perceived as inferior to literary realism by critics both for and against the sensation novel. As Jennifer Phegley explains in her discussion of

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[22] *The Morning Chronicle* published a court report on July 2, 1857 in which two, rather repetitive passages provide extensive details as to the colors, fabrics, and styles of each article of clothing worn by Smith. The article exemplifies the melodramatic tropes employed by contemporary crime journalists to entertain their readers.

[23] The prosecutor of the Smith case emphasized the letters in which Madeleine seems to reference having had sexual intercourse with L'Angelier as direct evidence of Madeleine's guilt. For Victorian audiences, female sexuality was synonymous with criminality. See Mangham 21-23.

Family Literary Magazines, "realism was elevated above sensationalism because it was believed to teach readers about real life" (111). The sensation novel was thought to pervert the reality of middle-class lives in order to shock readers. In an 1866 review of *Armadale*, the *Spectator* published the opinion that Collins's novel "overstep[s] the limits of decency" and "revolt[s] every human sentiment" by creating a heroine who is "fouler than the refuse of the streets, who has lived to the ripe age of thirty-five, and through the horrors of forgery, murder, theft, bigamy, gaol and attempted suicide, without any trace being left on her beauty." The *Spectator* review suggests a persisting desire for the outward show of moral legibility. M. E. Braddon's own literary journal *Belgravia* argued against the classification of sensation novels as contrary to reality by asserting that: "in all these novels the people walk and talk and act ... like dwellers in the actual, breathing world in which we live. If we read the newspapers, if we read the police reports ... we shall take no great harm by reading realistic novels of human passion, weakness, and error" (Sala 53). The sensation novel "literally [drew] from the headlines" which the public generally perceived as invested in truth and reality; however, the novels themselves challenge the legitimacy of newspapers as harbingers of fact by calling into question the role of the "amateur detective."

Mansel perceived the allusions to contemporary scandals within the sensation novel as a kind of artless fraud. The sensationist whose imagination has run dry need only "keep an eye on the criminal reports of the daily newspapers, marking the cases which are honored with the especial notice of a leading article, and become a nine-days' wonder in the mouths of quidnuncs and gossips" (47). Mansel's reference to the "nine-days' wonder" reveals a self-awareness among Victorian readers of the incendiary potential sensational language and serialization wielded through the public imagination. In January of 1868, the disappearance of Benjamin

Speke sparked an "almost universal panic among the public" as "the most respected daily and weekly newspapers were holding forth about his disappearance and presumed murder in spine-tingling detail" (Liddle 91). What evolved over the next month was a "waylaying and murder [which] occurred only in the imagination of newspaper writers and readers" and which "reach[ed] a peak of public interest in ten frantic days of press coverage" (Liddle 91). The *Times* publication of a letter written by Speke's brother-in-law on February 3, 1868 appealed to readers who wished to "give the clue which will solve this distressing mystery" (3 February 1868). The letter sparked a "flood of responses from both readers and professional journalists," and invested legitimacy in the position of the "Amateur Detective" whose theories were published in the *Times* (Liddle 93).[24] The sensational narratives of detection which had dominated the literary marketplace for more than five years allowed readers to exert a pleasurable effort [in] follow[ing] the generic cues of detective fiction, [and] weighing narrative clues and speculating on the mystery's solution" (Zieger, 61). The fast-paced mysteries in which the rapid accumulation of clues necessarily culminated in the satisfying sensations of revelation and closure induced impatience and dissatisfaction when it came to the unpredictable and at times stagnant progression of actual criminal cases.

By mid-February, newspapers were forced to retract their wild hypotheses of deadly cab rides and the "murders of defenseless gentlemen" when Speke was found alive in Cornwall (Dorington 7). In Dallas Liddle's essay, "Anatomy of a 'Nine Days' Wonder': Sensational Journalism in the Decade of the Sensation Novel," he argues that, while tempting, using the Speke case as evidence that the "quality press" had adopted the language and motives of the

[24] See also the 1868 *Times* article, "The Rev. B. Speke."

sensation novel in order to instigate excitement among the public and subsequently increase sales, "masks a crucial opposition of purposes" (Liddle 100). According to Liddle, "however outrageous its topics," the newspapers which engaged with the Speke case were "consistent in [their] mission … to assert and defend traditional authority, minimize mystery, and dictate decisive action to those in power" (Liddle 100-101). Liddle does not, however, acknowledge the journalists' simulation of sensational readership through their process of obsessive detection and subsequent "productive reception" (Tuite 8). The legitimation of "amateur detectives" and suppositious theories within the Victorian press constituted a pivotal development in the establishment of a modern celebrity culture. The murdered corpse of Benjamin Speke saturated the British imagination while the actual man "was alive and well" (Liddle 91). The mass audience of amateur detectives produced a print double whose specter occupied the houses of London for nine-days.

Collins and Braddon represent the authority of the public over celebrity formation through portraying mass culture as antithetical to the rationality and legitimacy of the judicial system. The male detective or barrister serves as a fundamental trope of the sensation plot, as the man of law provides a rational perspective on the villainess, typically immune to the allure the female figures hold over the general public. It is often through such male characters that Braddon and Collins self-referentially illustrate the power mass audience reception wields in creating a celebrity figure which is severed from the individual. The detective or barrister endeavors to remove the veil of feminine beauty and allure and subsequently solve the mystery; however, the detectives, particularly Robert Audley and Bashwood Jr, are cast by the authors as outcasts and generally derelict individuals; thus, the author discourages the reader from sympathizing with or even liking these voices of reason. The relationship between the reader and the detective mirrors

the contention between public affinities and legal mandates. Central to the conflict between the public consciousness and the "truths" upheld by the law is the pervasiveness of domestic ideology and the command stereotyped femininity held over British culture.

After Allan Armadale inquires after Lydia Gwilt's past and discovers her letter of reference was sent from an abortion clinic, he is overcome with "a man's merciful desire to protect from exposure and ruin the unhappy woman who had lost her place in his estimation" (Collins 305). Although he intends to "keep her miserable secret," news soon spreads among the public of Thorpe-Ambrose that Allan, a "comparative stranger," cast "undefined imputations" on Gwilt's reputation (Collins 312). Without knowing what exactly Allan discovered, the implication of scandal placed Gwilt in the position of a "martyr," "with an excellent effect on the public mind" (Collins 312). The barrister, Pedgift Sr, who has "had a large legal experience [with] the shady side of the sex" (Collins 314), writes to inform Armadale of Gwilt's sudden rise to fame:

> She is now considered to be quite a heroine. The *Thorpe-Ambrose Mercury* has got a leading article about her, comparing her to Joan of Arc. It is considered probable that she will be referred to in the sermon next Sunday. We reckon five strong-minded single ladies in this neighbourhood—and all five have called on her. (Collins 312-313)

Because the reader knows that Gwilt "*was no such pitiable victim,"* the saintly figure (re)produced through the newspaper and sermon is read as a false copy of the villainess (Collins 304). The allusion to Joan of Arc parodies the idealized vision of femininity as inherently moral and angelic. While Robert Audley's chain of references (which also included Joan of Arc) strips Lucy Audley of her individuality, his allusions are justified through the assertion that each of the

cultural icons “riot in battle, and murder, and clamor and desperation” (Braddon 137). The vision of Gwilt as the innocent martyr wholly separates her image and name from her conscious self.

After being visited by “the lady herself, in her capacity of martyr,” Pedgift Sr writes that he does not “altogether believe in Miss Gwilt” (Collins 312). Not only does the barrister not trust Gwilt, he judges her to be “an adventuress of the worst class; an undeniably worthless and dangerous woman” (Collins 319). The chasm between public opinion and that of the law widens when he declares:

> ‘She may have richly deserved to see the inside of a prison, Mr. Armadale; but, in the age we live in, that is one excellent reason for her never having been near any place of the kind. A prison, in the present tender state of feeling, for a charming woman like Miss Gwilt! My dear sir, if she had attempted to murder you or me, and if an inhuman judge had decided on sending her to prison, the first object of modern society would be to prevent her going into it; and, if that couldn’t be done, the next object would be to let her out again as soon as possible. Read your newspaper, Mr. Armadale, and you’ll find we live in piping times for the black sheep of the community—if they are only black enough’ (Collins 325).

In the new age of mass consumption, public opinion had the capacity to transform criminals into heroines and facts into lies. As a figure elevated above the masses while also being excluded from them, the public “protects” the villainess from a criminal’s fate, subsequently maintaining her mystery and the spectacle of her existence.

Pedgift’s diatribe against public opinion as predictably false when it comes to “devilish[ly] beaut[iful]” women is justified when the detective Bashwood Jr reveals Gwilt to be the “heroine of the famous criminal trial” (Collins 472). After her abusive husband was found

dead, Gwilt was "committed for trial, on the charge of murdering her husband by poison" (468). After the "prisoner was proved to have had no less than three excellent reasons for killing her husband," including "her own confession [of] contemplating an elopement with another man," the verdict was guilty (471). Gwilt "cheated the gallows" when the "public caught light like tinder" after the newspaper published the verdict, and the "prisoner was tried over again, before an amateur court of justice, in the columns of the newspapers" by "people who had no personal experience whatever on the subject" (Collins 471). In the end, the "verdict of the Law was reversed by general acclamation," and the public "found themselves with the pet object of their sympathy suddenly cast loose on their hands" (Collins 472). Once the sensation of the courtroom faded, public interest waned, and the "state of popular feeling" was that Gwilt should be "punished a little" (572). Just as the sensation novel was "written to meet an ephemeral demand, [and] aspiring only to an ephemeral existence" (Mansel 35), so too the celebrity of Mrs. Waldron (Gwilt) was produced to create a momentary thrill for the "scandal-mongering" public, only to dissipate the moment she exited the witness box and joined the masses (Collins 366).

Representations of femininity within nineteenth-century literature inherently confirm or reject binary stereotypes. The celebrity image is intrinsically a stereotype: a reproducible image. The audience takes in the circumstances of the individual's celebrity, whether it be scandal or victimization, and then reconfigures the individual to align with a stereotype which maintains a firm boundary between good and evil, man and woman, public and private. Through the sensation novel, M. E. Braddon and Wilkie Collins engage with the emergence of a celebrity culture in which the celebrity becomes detached from the individual through the mediation and "productive reception" of a mass audience (Tuite 8). The public separation of the individual from the popular, reproducible image was not merely a trope of the scandal-mongering public or the

pervasiveness of print; rather, this was a product of commercialized domesticity which commodified the female image for public consumption while maintaining separate-sphere tenets of private and passive femininity.

Spectacles of Consumption

> The proprietor of the Sanatorium received his visitors in the hall with Miss Gwilt on his arm. The hungry eyes of every woman in the company overlooked the doctor as if no such person had existed; and, fixing on the strange lady, devoured her from head to foot in an instant. (Collins 562-563)

Within the doomed walls of the Sanatorium, where Gwilt reaches her demise, the villainess appears as an advertisement for the institution by performing "in the character" of a nervous invalid suffering from "shattered nerves—domestic anxiety" (Collins 563). Collins articulates the fascination of the female audience as a hunger and their scrutiny of Gwilt as a kind of ravenous consumption. In April of 1863—a year before the publication of *Armadale* in *Cornhill*—Henry Mansel described the success of the sensation novel as denoting an "unspeakably disgusting" and "ravenous appetite for carrion" driven by a "vulture-like instinct which smells out the newest mass of social corruption, and hurries to devour the loathsome dainty before the scent has evaporated" (47). The corporeal and cyclic behaviors which sensation novels induced were perceived by authors and critics alike as operating within the body like the appetite for food. Readers were believed to consume sensation novels "to meet an ephemeral demand," so that "keepers of bookstalls, as well as of refreshment-rooms, find an advantage in offering their customers something hot, and strong, something that may catch the eye of the hurried passenger, and promise temporary excitement to relieve the dullness of a journey" (Mansel 35). Lacking in nourishment and provoking gluttony, critics maligned the public's "favourite food" as evidence of a declining society (Oliphant, "Novels," 373).

By placing Gwilt in the position of the consumed, the scene mirrors the reader's "ravenous" consumption of the sensation novel; however, the female visitors continue to watch

Gwilt and "[see] something in her face, utterly unintelligible," which causes them to surmise that "the Principal of the Sanatorium had been delicately concealing the truth, and that his first inmate was mad" (Collins 564). The interaction goes beyond the passive consumption of proffered information. The women engage in what Tuite coined "enhanced reception" (16), by actively transforming the figure Gwilt presents and subsequently creating a celebrity which is severed from Gwilt's individual self. Through the Sanatorium visitors, Collins evoked the various layers of commercial and consumption practices which were the products and producers of an emerging celebrity culture. *Armadale* and *Lady Audley's Secret* portray consumption as compulsive, imitative, transgressive, and inherently feminine, and as the sensational villainess embodies all three, her character represents an internalization of commodity culture and the principal role it played in celebrity formation.

Advertisements:

In 1851, the Great Exhibition transformed British culture into a society of display and excess, curated for the pleasure and entertainment of the middle classes.[25] Located in Hyde Park, the Great Exhibition or Crystal Palace Exhibition "occupied fourteen acres...and it contained, not an army of diplomats and attachés, but an assembly of manufactured articles, the largest display of commodities that had ever been brought together under one roof" (Richards 17). As Thomas

[25] The Great Exhibition was a flamboyant pageant of British imperialism and industry. Around 100,000 commodities were displayed over ten miles, including printing machines, a hydraulic press, and railway engines. British industry claimed half of the exhibit, but the other half included machines and artifacts from India, Canada, the United States, France, Chile, Switzerland, and Russia. The majority of the "customers" of the Great Exhibition were "solidly middle class" as it was middle-class consumers who were targeted by advertisers for the Exhibition (Richards 36). Richards explains the incentive behind cultivating a predominantly middle-class audience as owing to the "thrifty" nature of the mid-century middle classes whose consumer practices needed to be retrained in order to stimulate the consumer economy. The working classes were also encouraged to attend through the advent of "Shilling Days" so that they too could begin to view themselves as consumers. See also Picard, "The Great Exhibition."

Richards explains in his book *The Commodity Culture of Victorian England,* the Great Exhibition was the "first outburst of the phantasmagoria of commodity culture" (18). The Exhibition's conflation of theatre and museum, fact and fiction, engendered an understanding of the commodity as "inseparable from the knowledge of the self" (Richards 7). Henceforth, identity was not merely enhanced by commodities; rather, the commercial realm of the department store and, subsequently, the private home became a space of identity formation and transfiguration. The "commodity aesthetic" allowed consumers to actively produce their own image, not unlike an author inventing a fictional heroine (Lysack 48).[26]

The Exhibition's rendering of mechanically produced goods as "autonomous icons ordered into taxonomies, set on pedestals, and flooded with light," indelibly altered the realm of advertising (Richards 4). Spectacle and exhibition became inextricable from commodity culture, and thus, "mid-Victorian advertisers undertook the spectacularization of advertising" (Richards 6). The evolution of commercial advertising from the unrefined methods of London street corners to the provocative print ads and illustrated posters of the fin-de-siecle was slow and intermittent (Richards 6). The "sensational sixties" were a pivotal moment in the development of Victorian advertising due to the rapid expansion of print and the sensation novel's formulation of a class of women who embodied the mystery, beauty, and scandal of modern consumerism.

Lydia Gwilt's "story begins … in the market-place at Thorpe-Ambrose" where she was used as a "pretty little girl, with a beautiful complexion and wonderful hair" to sell washes and hair oils for a "travelling quack-doctor" and his wife (Collins 463). The "quack-doctor" "harangu[ed] the mob" by "showing them the child's hair" (Collins 463), demonstrating the mid-

[26] Lysack defines "commodity aesthetic" as "moments when the very boundaries between the self and the commodity world collapse" (48).

Victorian advertising methods which Richards describes as "primitive" (Richards 6). Upon being displayed to the "mob," the young Gwilt is directly purchased—as if she herself were the hair-oil—by a young Mrs. Armadale (née Blanchard) to serve as her "plaything" (Collins 463). The exploitation and dehumanization of Gwilt's childhood exemplifies an archaic model of celebrity formation as Gwilt's external beauty is divorced from her personhood through the spectacle of advertising, allowing outsiders to remodel her image to reflect and please her middle-class patrons (Richards 7).

Gwilt's celebrity, as a phenomenon produced by her audience and detached from the self, unfolds within the commercial sphere. When Gwilt is thirty-five, many years after her stint as the "living example of the excellence of [the quack-doctor's] washes and hair oils" (Collins 463), the commercial world has modernized through the emergence of shopping emporia, illustrated advertisements, and fashion periodicals. As a place of spectacle and display, the dress shop operates as a liminal space where identities shift:

> 'She's a devilish clever woman,' said Bashwood the younger; 'that's how it was. She gave us the slip at a milliner's shop. We made it all right with the milliner and speculated on the chance of her coming back to try on a gown she had ordered. The cleverest women lose the use of their wits in nine cases out of ten, where there's a new dress in the case—and even Miss Gwilt was rash enough to go back … one of the women from our office helped to try on her new gown and put her in the right position to be seen by one of our men behind the door. He instantly suspected who she was, on the strength of what he had been told of her.' (Collins 508)

As Gwilt is arranged and positioned by the milliner, she becomes the commodity displayed in the shop window and consumed by the public. The commercial sphere of the shop emerges within

this passage as a distinctly feminine realm which the male eye peers into, searching for answers. In *Lady Audley's Secret,* Robert Audley articulates an analogous vision of femininity as manufactured when he muses that men often "have no better experience of women than… a vague notion that she is a whirling teetotum in pink or blue gauze, or a graceful automaton for the display of milliner's manufacture" (Braddon 163). The generalization that even "the cleverest women lose the use of their wits … when there's a new dress in the case" (Collins 508), illustrates the cultural conception of women, not only as consumers, but as *compulsive* consumers. Collins presents this moment through the narrative of the detective rather than through Gwilt's diary because Gwilt—as a conscious individual with agency—is as inconsequential to her celebrity as the mannequin modelling a dress in the display window. Lydia Gwilt's celebrity emerges in the liminal space between the aesthetic display and the audience. Through the eyes of the detective in the shop, Gwilt ceases to be Lydia Gwilt; rather, she becomes the infamous Mrs. Waldron: the murderess.

While the conflation of femininity and consumerism was not a nineteenth-century development, the Victorian era saw the shop evolve into a space of uncontrollable female consumption. As department stores and "multi-floor emporia" quickly saw to the replacement of small milliners' shops, "London's West End...emerged during these decades as an urban consumer destination for middle-class women, becoming all the more accessible through the supporting infrastructure of women's tea shops, affordable mass transit, and public lavatories" (Lysack 6-7). However, the spectacle of consumerism was not contained within the public sphere. The consumer's appetite was often stimulated first within the home through print. Mass circulating print facilitated the development of a commercial culture which—like the sensation novel—was serialized and aesthetically stimulating. New methods of advertising within daily or

weekly publications created a sense that, like the news, fashion was constantly progressing, provoking consumer practices which were based upon the acquisition of commodities simply for acquisition's sake.[27]

The consumer revolution, like the print revolution, paradoxically facilitated the rise of the individual as central to mass culture. The expansion of the press and the emergence of the circulating library transformed reading from an elite or communal activity to a solitary pursuit. Print publications were read privately (as well as "bodily, hungrily, [and] horizontally") creating a sense of intimacy and a connection to print which was founded upon personal investment and individual desires (Allen 408). A similar progression toward greater intimacy between consumer and commodity occurred within the shop, as the "role of the shopkeeper or assistant as mediator between buyer and merchandise" diminished, providing "greater access to goods as these were more openly displayed or more available to the touch" (Lysack 49). The new value placed upon individual consumer desire and the physical sensations of consumption also informed advertising campaigns which adopted forms of direct-response advertising through second-person narratives and "the sensational trope of exclamation" (Richards 69). As critics viewed the overuse of affect within the sensation novel as "drugging thought and reason [by] stimulating the attention through the lower and more animal instincts," the use of sensational tropes within advertisements

[27] Victorian periodicals were often printed with advertisement pages attached to the outside covers of the magazine so that readers could remove the advertisements and be left with a "handsome volume on book stock" (431). Unfortunately, the disposability of periodical advertisements, which were printed on cheap paper, means there are few extant copies of Victorian magazines which are still bound with advertisement pages. For an analysis of Victorian advertising practices, see Lauterbach.

prompted analogous discussions of consumerism which were exacerbated by the advertiser's promotion of overtly feminine traits ("Our Female Sensation Novelists" 107).[28]

The sensation novelist's use of the "intimate second person" to speak directly to the reader often provides a clear understanding of the novel's intended audience (Allen 401). Following a lengthy description of Lady Audley's boudoir filled with "drinking-cups of gold and ivory, chiseled by Benvenuto Cellini; cabinets of buhl and porcelain, bearing the cipher of Austrian Marie-Antoinette" (195), Braddon interrupts the scene by inserting her own voice, in the tone of a confidant or advisor:

> I should be preaching a very stale sermon, and happening upon a very familiar moral, if I were to seize this opportunity of declaiming against art and beauty, because my lady was more wretched in this elegant apartment than many a half-starved seamstress in her dreary garret. (195)

For Victorian readers, Braddon's authorial intrusion was a provocative device, firstly, in the direct incorporation of the reader into the fictional plot, and second, in the articulation of her intrusion as a form of "preaching."[29] In taking on the role of the preacher, Braddon implies that her novel of bigamy, murder, and masquerade is not merely entertaining, but instructive. Within the context of Lucy's collection of beautiful commodities, Braddon's appeal to readers operates as a counter-advertisement; however, Braddon quickly retracts her demotion of consumerism by conceding that Lucy's "wretchedness was of an abnormal nature, and [Braddon] can see no

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[28] Discussions surrounding women's shopping as compulsive and alarming appeared in the popular press as well as scientific texts. Critics "pathologized" the novel practice of browsing, handling goods without the intent of purchasing, and shoplifting. Popular ballads and satirical cartoons portrayed the middle-class female shopper as manic and violent. See Lysack 46, for a discussion of the Victorian shoplifter.

[29] Henry Mansel begins his infamous review on the sensation novel with the statement, "I don't like preaching to the nerves instead of the judgement" (32). Mansel continues to refer to the novelist as a usurper of the "preacher's office" (32). See also Allen 409, for a discussion of "conscripted reading."

occasion for seizing upon the fact of her misery as an argument in favor of poverty and discomfort as opposed to opulence" (Braddon 195). Lucy Audley's position as an advertisement for feminine beauty and intrigue is therefore reinforced.

As a constructed and simulated display of mechanized femininity, Lady Audley demonstrates the potential of advertisements and mass production to create a standard female image which consumers are led to reproduce. The Great Exhibition's glorification of British imperialism proved to Victorian advertisers that the best way to market their goods was to "sell them the ideology of England" (Richards 5). Lucy Audley arranges her appearance to reflect—to the point of parody—standard images of domesticated femininity:

> Lucy Audley, with her disordered hair in a pale haze of yellow gold about her thoughtful face, the flowing lines of her soft muslin dressing-gown falling in straight folds to her feet and clasped at the waist by a narrow circlet of agate links might have served as a model for a medieval saint. (Braddon 142)

Returning to the stereotypes of the previous section, Braddon supersedes any semblance of Lucy Audley's individual self by transforming her into a literal embodiment of saintly, angelic womanhood. Through the careful arrangement of hair and fabric, Lucy's identity becomes subsumed within the ideology of the "angel in the house." Significantly, the eyes through which Lucy repeatedly appears as a manufactured vision of the ideal wife are consistently male. Through Robert Audley's perspective, Lucy emerges as a "medieval saint," and through the eyes of a young, honeymooning George Talboys, Lucy appears as a "Madonna in an Italian picture" (Braddon 172). The technological ineptitude exhibited by many of the male characters within the sensation genre is often matched by an equally determined conventionalism towards gender politics. Robert Audley's tirades against the opposite sex attribute the "annoyance and

destruction" of men to female ambition and modernization: "they want freedom of opinion, variety of occupation, do they? Let them have it...but let them be quiet—if they can" (Braddon 136-137). Thus, the commodification of femininity represented by Lucy Audley's manufactured visions of traditional ideology constitutes the disorientation and disempowerment of male figures within an increasingly feminine mass culture.

According to Lysack, British culture experienced an unprecedented inundation of femininity as "the new conditions of Victorian consumer culture linked the commercial interests of British imperialism to female appetite" (3). The new emphasis placed on female subjectivity was unsurprisingly met with anxiety by critics who warned against female consumer desire as ravenous and infectious. If left unchecked, women's commercial consumption could lead to hysteria and criminal behavior. The trepidation with which Robert Audley and George Talboys view Lady Audley's private quarters reflects contemporary concerns surrounding unregulated female consumption:

> She had left the house in a hurry on her unlooked-for journey to London, and the whole of her glittering toilette apparatus lay about on the marble dressing table. The atmosphere of the room was almost oppressive from the rich odours of perfumes in bottles whose gold stoppers had not been replaced. Bunch of hothouse flowers was withering upon a tiny writing table. Two or three handsome dresses lay in a heap upon the ground, and the open doors of a wardrobe revealed the treasures within. Jewelry, ivory-backed hairbrushes, and exquisite china were scattered here and there about the apartment. (Braddon 46)

Lady Audley's boudoir resembles the excess and arranged chaos of Victorian window displays.[30] As Lysack explains, "being surrounded by consumer goods was part of the pleasure of consuming" (49), but the overabundance of perfumes, flowers, dresses, and china, also comprises, for Robert Audley and George Talboys, a dangerous excess of femininity: "George Talboys saw his bearded face and tall, gaunt figure reflected in the glass, and wondered to see how out of place he seemed among all these womanly luxuries" (Braddon 46). The articulation of "oppressive...odours," "withering" flowers, and the overall disorder of the room imbues the material objects with the malevolence of the villainess so that the boundaries between individual identity and consumer goods dissolve. The exorbitant expression of femininity disturbs George and Robert because it renders them "out of place" (Braddon 46), but more importantly, it renders the men out of control.

By framing technology as a "peculiarly feminized culture" (Lee 134), sensation novels invested femininity with the velocity and unpredictability of industrial life. As Lynn M. Voskuil explains, "according to separate-sphere ideology...women are often perceived to be more gifted than men in the realms of authenticity" which rendered femininity "self-evidently counterpoised to the idea...of cultural construction" (612). The understanding of femininity as static and inherent empowered men with the ability to regulate and compartmentalize femininity. Robert and George's discomfort within Lucy's boudoir of commodified female expression represents the "Victorian uncertainties about how to maintain normative femininity when this category was being deformed through the commercial marketplace" (Lysack 46). As a forger and a bigamist, Lady Audley's external appearance is not merely a display of consumer desire; by exploiting the

[30] For a discussion of 1860s window displays, see Lysack, especially chapter 1.

new “breakdown of the boundaries between subject and object” (Lysack 11), Lady Audley thoughtfully and skillfully constructs an identity from material goods which allows her to pose as an aristocratic, “angel in the house.”

The exposure of Lucy’s idealized exterior as mere fabrication “explores and exploits fears that the respectable ideal, or proper feminine, may simply be a form of acting, just one role among other possible roles” (Pykett, 90). The identity of Lucy Audley, the wealthy wife and simpering aunt, consists entirely of material objects. Whether Robert Audley observes Lucy’s person or merely her boudoir of feminine excess, all he sees is a collection of objects, carefully arranged to mimic the qualities of angels and saints. As Lysack explains, “whether Lucy is present when others trespass into her rooms matters little, for, as we have seen, her objects stand in for her. Lady Audley is an object among objects” (71). By arranging and displaying the villainess as a shop owner would a piece of china or a luxurious dress, the author engages in the same successful methods of “bourgeois self-congratulation” employed by the Victorian advertiser (Richards 7).

Masquerade:

Through the Great Exhibition, consumerism became not only the axis of modern life, but the bourgeois theatre of self-invention and “self-congratulation” (Richards 7). The modeling of the commercial realm and advertisements on bourgeois tastes reinforced middle-class hegemony within British culture, but, as the sensational villainess illustrates, bourgeois consumerism also provided the means for outsiders to masquerade as members of the “respectable” class. In the previous section on celebrity and the print double, the notion of the sensation novel’s proximity to the reader’s own world initiated a sense of fascination and dread as the boundaries between

fiction and reality were blurred. The fluidity of class and identity which the sensation novel represented through the villainess derived from the genre's objective to shock and scandalize readers; however, because Lucy Audley and Lydia Gwilt so successfully impersonate feminine stereotypes and manufacture aesthetically pleasing forms of middle-class femininity, their masquerades also simulate a branch of consumer culture which would become increasingly symptomatic of celebrity culture: imitation.

Sharon Marcus writes in *The Drama of Celebrity,* "celebrities multiply themselves through paper and pixels, but also through people" (148). Whether copying someone's clothing, hairstyle or demeanor, people have been imitating celebrities for centuries; however, mechanical-reproductions, photography, and fashion periodicals provided the Victorian public with viable means for emulating the fashions of famous individuals. In *Armadale,* Mrs. Milroy, the sickly and jealous mother of Lydia Gwilt's pupil, attempts to refashion her own image to match the youthful beauty of Gwilt by drawing inspiration from fashion periodicals:

> Her head, from which the greater part of the hair had fallen off, would have been less shocking to see than the hideously youthful wig, by which she tried to hide the loss. No deterioration of her complexion, no wrinkling of her skin, could have been so dreadful to look at as the rouge that lay thick on her cheeks, and the white enamel plastered on her forehead...An illustrated book of the fashions, in which women were represented exhibiting their finery by means of the free use of their limbs, lay on the bed from which she had not moved for years. (Collins 273)

The grotesque imitation of Gwilt's beauty represented by Mrs. Milroy points to the degradation of original thought by the reproductions of modern industrialism which Walter Benjamin articulates. Because Mrs. Milroy's imitation of Gwilt is also motivated by "the contempt of one

woman for another," her actions reflect "the ambivalent circuit of attractions and repulsions that informs reading as a newly mobile activity of affective identification" (Tuite 3). The inherently transgressive nature of female celebrity during the Victorian period necessitated conflicting reactions of fascination and aversion.[31]

Lucy Audley's maid, Phoebe Marks, also fulfills the position of the imitative follower; however, unlike Mrs. Milroy, Phoebe naturally resembles the heroine, allowing her to see Lucy Audley as an enhanced version of herself. Lucy, too, perceives herself as merely an embellished model of her maid, and encourages Phoebe to copy her own appearance in a passage which remarkably resembles direct-response advertising:

> 'You *are* like me, and your features are very nice; it is only color 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.' (Braddon 39)

Presenting herself as a flattering reflection, Lucy Audley points out the flaws in Phoebe's appearance and then points to the commercial products which Phoebe should buy in order to remedy such flaws. In a 1862 essay entitled "Kleptomania," John Bucknill attributes the emergence of a "respectable" and female class of criminals—shoplifters—to the aggressive and deceptive tactics of contemporary advertisers: "we can find more pity for the poor woman who purloins a piece of lace . . . than for the smirking fellow who has caught her in his haberdashery

[31] Clara Tuite uses Newton's concept of "repulsive virtue" or the magnetic attraction of opposites to explain the duality of Byron's position as an exile and an icon.

trap by lying advertisements" (266).[32] By drawing out Phoebe's differences as imperfections rather than simply distinguishing characteristics, Lucy Audley frames imitation as superior to individuality.

Rather than becoming a mirrored image of Lucy Audley, Phoebe's attempts to reproduce the heroine's likeness only result in a superficial parody. When Lucy enters Phoebe's apartments, she sees that her maid "had done her best to atone for the lack of substantial furniture in her apartment by a superabundance of drapery" (Braddon 212). Resembling the protracted lists employed by Braddon to convey the show-room-like display and excess of Lucy Audley's boudoir, a panorama of Phoebe's apartments conversely reveals a sense of hollowness:

> Crisp curtains of cheap chintz hung from the tent-bedstead; festooned drapery of the same material shrouded the narrow window shutting out the light of day, and affording a pleasant harbor for tribes of flies and predatory bands of spiders. Even the looking-glass, a miserably cheap construction which *distorted every face* whose owner had the hardihood to look into it, stood upon a draperies altar of starched muslin and pink glazed calico, and was adorned with frills of lace and knitted work. (Braddon 212-213, emphasis my own)

The excess of fabrics operates as an imitative covering to disguise the chasm within. When Lucy sees the "festoons and furbelows," she has "reason...to smile, remembering the costly elegance of her own apartments"; thus, Lucy recognizes Phoebe's imitation of her own image (Braddon 213). The imitation of the villainess by her admirers exhibits a secondary form of "enhanced

[32] See Lysack 57 for further engagement with Bucknill's essay.

reception" which produces living doubles rather than print doubles. As an advertisement for beguiling middle-class femininity, the villainess exists as the original model and the imitation.

In her essay "Gender and Sensation," Emily Allen writes, "the greatest problem with sensation novels was that people read them" (408). Underscoring the many critical essays disparaging the genre as unoriginal, vulgar, and preposterous was the understanding that no amount of official censure could curb "the public craving for its favourite food" (Oliphant, "Novels," 373). In fact, Mansel acknowledges that the "praiseworthy attempts" to turn the public away from "silly or mischievous works… even acted as an advertisement of the rejected books" (Mansel 51). The issue plaguing the genre's critics was not, however, simply that *people* read sensation novels; within these critical essays, the victims of the sensational heroines are not their murdered husbands; rather, they are the young female readers who are duped into identifying with the beautiful and alluring villainess.

As advertisements for commercial products featured illustrations of the average consumer wearing or using the product, sensation novels were overrun with descriptions of women reading; however, even fictional portrayals of female readership conveyed implications of disease, addiction, and "illicit pleasure" (Allen 409). Alicia Audley, Lucy Audley's stepdaughter, appears throughout the novel either "follow[ing] the hounds" upon her horse or having "shut herself in her own apartment to read the third volume of a novel" (220). While Lucy Audley, too, rarely emerges without a book in hand, Alicia's reading habits more closely reflect anxieties surrounding female readership as harmful and degrading to a young woman's "delicate nervous system" which renders her vulnerable to "excessive stimulation" (Allen 408). When Robert Audley sees Alicia "with a book in her lap, and … very much absorbed in its pages," he notices her "bright brunette complexion had lost its glowing crimson, and the animation of the young

lady's manner was suppressed" (Braddon 147). Alicia's print consumption and the deterioration of her temperament are correlated through Robert Audley's gaze. Because sensation novels were understood as "an appeal to the nerves rather than to the heart" ("Our Sensation Novelists" 106), corporeal symptoms such as fatigue or, alternatively, nervousness were categorized as distinctly feminine disorders denotative of "infectious … reading habits" (Heilman 34).

Rather than simply observing the deleterious effects of novel-reading on his cousin, Robert Audley takes on the paternal role of regulation and chastisement. After inquiring as to the title, genre, and author of Alicia's novel, Robert Audley scolds her by explaining "with some gravity" that she "might have better manners than to read [the novel] while [her] first cousin is sitting opposite [her]" (Braddon 148). Contemporary discussions surrounding the issue of young women's reading habits often directed male members of the family to regulate and oversee their female relatives' print consumption. The *Christian Remembrancer's* 1864 invective against the sensation genre warns "husbands and fathers" to "look about them and scrutinize the parcel that arrives from Mudie's," which leads young women "to contrast the actual with the ideal" (112). Oliphant, too, identifies young women as particularly susceptible to the "noxious topics" of popular fiction when she writes: "over the objectionable portion of our library parcel… we will make up our minds to say nothing of it before the girls" ("Novels" 373). Of course, hyperbolic warnings against the potential dangers of novel-reading for young women are "as old as the novel itself," but anxieties reached a "hysterical peak in the 1860s" as Victorians struggled to contain and regulate normative femininity within a consumer culture seemingly sustained by female desire (Allen 409).

Unsurprisingly, Braddon's periodical *Belgravia* promoted an alternative—and relatively radical—perspective on the debate surrounding female readership. In her study of Victorian

family literary magazines, Jennifer Phegley presents Braddon's *Belgravia* and Thackeray's *Cornhill* as contending journals despite their shared affinity for the sensation genre. While *Cornhill* promoted reading as a proper and valuable exercise for young women, the primary beneficiaries of female readership were not the women themselves, but their male relatives. As Phegley explains, "*Cornhill* offered a significant improvement in the rhetoric surrounding women readers by insisting on the link between the intellectual development of women and their roles within the family" (112). The periodical permitted the reading of sensational stories so long as the female readers "remained aware of their purely recreational purpose" as "low cultural texts" (Phegley 111). Maintaining the argument that sensationalism was "an intensified realism" (Phegley 117), *Belgravia* rejected the categorization of low and high cultural forms as well as *Cornhill's* portrayal of female readership as a subordinate act.

The woman reader of *Belgravia* read for her own entertainment and self-realization. Illustrations printed in *Belgravia* alongside serialized fiction often featured "images of women who experience pleasure and the fulfillment of fantasies through reading" (Phegley 121). In the June 1868 edition of *Belgravia,* a poem entitled "In the Firelight" was accompanied by an illustration of a young woman sitting alone by the fireside with an open book in her lap. Surrounding her are the spectral figures of knights and courtiers. The most prominent of the phantasmal characters is that of a young woman wearing a crown and a flowing white dress; the resemblance between the dreaming young woman and the otherworldly queen implies that the reader transposed her own image onto that of a fictional queen. *Belgravia's* rendering of the female reader was radical not only in its sanctioning of young women reading alone and unchaperoned, but more significantly in its empowerment of the female reader's identification with the potentially immoral heroine.

The sensation novel's use of affect to produce shock in readers has been extensively explored and explained by scholars such as Brantlinger and Daly; however, the role literary affect played in simulating identification and imitation in female readers towards fictional heroines has not been thoroughly examined. In her essay "Emma Bovary's Sisters: Infectious Desire and Female Reading Appetites in Mary Braddon and George Moore," Ann Heilman investigates the way in which "Victorian anxieties about literary infection and contamination were reflected and ironicized in later nineteenth- and early twentieth-century narratives about women's transgressive reading practices" (32); however, Heilman focuses on Isabel Gilbert, the romantic heroine of Braddon's 1864 novel, *The Doctor's Wife*. As a voracious and impassioned reader, Isabel serves as the quintessential female reader for many scholars of the genre. Braddon, too, saw her heroine as a medium through which she could engage with contemporary debates surrounding women readers: "novels are only dangerous to those poor foolish girls who read nothing else, and think that their lives are to be paraphrases of their favorite books" (*The Doctor's Wife* 27). Isabel demonstrates the "dangers of subject constitution through over-identification with narrative constructs" (Heilman 32), but her emulation of fictional heroines occurs largely within her imagination. Lady Audley's reading practices, like her shopping practices, are based upon active imitation and reproduction.

Lucy's skillful invocation of fictive selves allows her to obscure the boundaries between reality and fiction, creating the sense that she moves in and out of the pages of an open novel. Left to "[amuse] herself in her own frivolous fashion," Lady Audley "strolls" into the fateful lime walk, "book in hand" (Braddon 52). When Lady Audley re-emerges, she comes from "exactly the opposite direction, carrying her open book in her hand" (Braddon 53). The reader does not witness the heroine transform from Lucy Audley to Helen Talboys, from simpering

wife to murderess. The reader only sees the opening and closing of Lucy's book, with the understanding that a momentous change has transpired. When Lucy strikes again by setting fire to the hotel where Robert Audley sleeps, she emerges the next day and accounts for her "pale face" and "purple shadow under her eyes by declaring that she had sat up reading until a very late hour on the previous night" (Braddon 215) Once again, the moment of transformation is subsumed within the act of reading. Just as Lucy's identity is formed by her compulsive consumption of commodities, her behavior is informed and guided by a compulsive consumption of print.

Rather than novels, Lydia Gwilt turns to the newspaper to inform her actions and decide her fate. While Lucy Audley manufactures her identity through commodities, Gwilt's character transformations transpire within the newspaper and through the "enhanced reception" of the public (Tuite 16). As Valdez explains, "Lydia does not see herself as an individual agent but rather locked into larger structures of meaning instigated and signified by the news" (105); however, she does not passively consume the information. Because Gwilt's public identity—or print double—operates outside of her control, the villainess claims agency by also engaging in "the communal culture of productive reception" (Tuite 8). After hiring another man to kill Allan Armadale at sea, Gwilt gives orders that "the newspaper is to meet [her] at the breakfast table every morning till further notice" (513). When Gwilt asks, "will to-morrow's newspaper lift the veil?" (Collins 513), she conflates the suspense induced by the compulsive reader of serials or crime reports, and the frenetic anticipation of the defendant awaiting his sentencing. Gwilt's print double reveals the permeability of the line separating her own life from the constructed world of print, and by transmuting her own reality through the mechanizations of the press, Gwilt confers onto herself the rapidity and interchangeability of modernity.

Gwilt compulsively reads the newspaper with a single objective in mind: to see her fate. As the "amateur detectives" of the nine-days wonder revealed, sensationalism infected the British public with an impatience and restlessness which left them dissatisfied with the natural progression of time and the possibility of answers remaining hidden and mysteries unsolved. When Lydia Gwilt comes upon an old crime report among her private letters, she declares: "the end is hidden no longer. The cloud is off my mind, the blindness has gone from my eyes. I see it! I see it!" (Collins 392). The news article features a criminal case in which a woman—"a handsome woman...like [Gwilt]"—is "charged with fraudulently representing herself to be the missing widow of an officer in the merchant service, who was supposed to have been drowned" (Collins 392). Gwilt realizes her fate through that of the convicted woman: "I may personate the richly-provided widow of Allan Armadale of Thorpe-Ambrose" (Collins 393). Imitation and impersonation provide Gwilt with an escape from her life of abuse and manipulation. Seeing a reflection of her image, the case report acts upon Gwilt like an advertisement for an alternative feminine ideal.

The female reader's "blind idol[ization]" of fictional heroines was perceived by critics as "mere feminine fascination" which easily "triumph[ed]" over "the mutual duties, the reciprocal forbearance, [and] the inevitable trials of relation in real life" ("Our Sensation Novelists" 112). The *Christian Remembrancer* articulates the "duties" of the female experience as "mutual" and "reciprocal," implying equality and interchangeability between the lives of Victorian women and those of the men who fall "prostrate and helpless" before the allure of the fictional heroine (112). According to this perspective, the female reader uses sensational stories to fill a void which never existed in the first place. Lydia Gwilt, a young woman who had been abused as a child and then as a wife, embodied the reality which Victorian society "was reluctant to admit," which was

that Victorian women “were not adequately protected by the legal system” (Morris 89). The Matrimonial Causes Act of 1857, which “for the first time allowed abandoned or mistreated middle-class women to sue their philandering husbands for divorce,” transformed the private home into “a place that women could now, legally, leave” (Allen 404). Braddon and Collins contributed to the anxious discussions surrounding the position of women within Victorian society by creating fictional heroines who transformed themselves from disempowered and exploited wives into compelling and vigorous mercenaries through the emulation of transgressive female figures.

Conclusion:

Through Robert Audley's fetishizing of Lucy Audley's body as child-like, saintly, and medieval, Braddon demonstrates a masculine desire for the regression of Victorian women. Separate-sphere ideology attempted to enforce distance between the "ideal Victorian woman" and the "outside world of imperialist adventures [which were] too harsh for her to survive and to understand" (Kao 118). Domestic novels and cultural texts of the early-to-mid-nineteenth century, such as Coventry Patmore's long narrative poem *The Angel in the House*, promoted the sanctity of the middle-class home as a realm of traditional values, antithetical to the rapid transformations of the industrial, public sphere.[33] *Lady Audley's Secret* and *Armadale* invalidate any sense of separation between the two worlds by presenting heroines that embody both.

The conclusions of both *Armadale* and *Lady Audley's Secret* reinforce contemporary conservative views which vilified the Victorian woman's engagement with modernity by terminating the lives of both heroines within sanatoriums; however, the attempt to restore order by pathologizing the criminality of the heroines did not nullify the glamour of the villainess. Just before being taken away to an institution, Lucy Audley observes her reflection surrounded by the commodities of her boudoir and reveals the immutability of her beauty, which refutes the Victorian notion of femininity as the inverse of modernity:

> She ate her breakfast, and took her morning bath, and emerged, with perfumed hair and in the most exquisitely careless of morning toilets, from her luxurious dressing-room. She looked at herself in the cheval-glass before she left the room. A long night's rest had brought back the delicate rose-tints of her complexion, and the natural luster of her blue

[33] Patmore's poem was published in four installments over the span of seven years (1845-1862). The poem personifies Victorian standards of middle-class femininity as docile and inherently moral.

> eyes…my lady smiled triumphantly as she contemplated the reflection of her beauty. The days were gone in which her enemies could have branded her with white-hot irons, and burned away the loveliness which had done such mischief. Whatever they did to her they must leave her her beauty, she thought. At the worst, they were powerless to rob her of that. (Braddon 245)

In a scene where Braddon could have emphasized Lucy Audley's inadequacy and frailty in the face of patriarchal retribution, Lucy instead appears victorious. The agency which Lucy claims through industrial modernity is embodied in her mastery of feminine beauty so that, even when sent away to live a life of forced privacy, Lucy maintains the mechanisms of innovation.

The sensation novel promotes an understanding of modernity as synonymous with transformation. The mass circulation of print provided the means for Victorians to witness daily transformations in the form of news, and the industrialization of the market encouraged consumers to reconstruct their own identities to match new standards of beauty and femininity often exhibited by the commodified images of celebrity figures. In the wake of the "sensational sixties," Victorian England experienced the transformative possibilities of celebrity culture through the rising star of Sarah Bernhardt (1844-1923). The French actress, much like the sensational villainess, embodied the vibrations and vivacity of industrial modernity, and her image was appropriated by commercial advertisers who exploited her aura of eccentricity and sexuality to make their products fashionable. In her book *The Drama of Celebrity*, Sharon Marcus explains the saturation of British culture with Bernhardt's image as ironically indicative of the star's nonconformity:

> Wearing an item of clothing associated with Bernhardt enabled fans to approximate her essence by imitating her appearance. Paradoxically, the

> Bernhardt trait that admirers most wanted to emulate was her 'inimitable originality'; fashion was yet another arena in which replication only intensified the star's aura of uniqueness. (154)

Bernhardt's identity as a female celebrity represented a deviation from normative femininity, and yet, the publicity machine of the modern press standardized her image.

The phenomenon of mass-produced illicit femininity persisted through the sensational "new woman" of the fin-de-siècle and the flapper of the silent cinema. In his examination of the actress Clara Bow and the "invention of sex appeal," Nicholas Daly writes that at the center of the silent film and the "star system"—Hollywood's commercial enterprise—was "the body of the new American girl, a body that seem[ed] to act as shorthand for modernization itself" (*Literature, Technology, and Modernity* 94). From the 1860s onward, the progression of technology generated the thrilling sensations of intimacy between the consumer and the commodity, and as symbols of the intimate, private sphere, the female image was the ideal vehicle for communicating and initiating cultural change. Through the celebrity of dissident women such as Sarah Bernhardt and Clara Bow who rendered the scandalous figure of the actress a feminine ideal, critics such as Oliphant who claimed Braddon's "invention of the fair-haired demon of modern fiction … brought in the reign of bigamy as an interesting and fashionable crime," look less like alarmists and more like harbingers of a modern and persuasive class of women: the female celebrity ("Novels" 376).

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