

Week 10 - Lady Audley's Secret

Nithya, Luke, and RJ

Introducing Audley Court

“It lay down in a hollow, rich with fine old timber and luxuriant pastures; and you came upon it through an avenue of limes, bordered on either side by meadows, over the high hedges of which the cattle looked inquisitively at you as you passed, wondering, perhaps, what you wanted; for there was no thorough-fare, and unless you were going to the Court you had no business there at all.

At the end of this avenue there was an old arch and a clock tower, with a stupid, bewildering clock, which had only one hand—and which jumped straight from one hour to the next—and was therefore always in extremes. Through this arch you walked straight into the gardens of Audley Court.

A smooth lawn lay before you, dotted with groups of rhododendrons, which grew in more perfection here than anywhere else in the county. To the right there were the kitchen gardens, the fish-pond, and an orchard bordered by a dry moat, and a broken ruin of a wall, in some places thicker than it was high, and everywhere overgrown with trailing ivy, yellow stonecrop, and dark moss. To the left there was a broad graveled walk, down which, years ago, when the place had been a convent, the quiet nuns had walked hand in hand; a wall bordered with espaliers, and shadowed on one side by goodly oaks, which shut out the flat landscape, and circled in the house and gardens with a darkening shelter.”

- What do we make of this opening and the second-person narration?
- Do we notice symbolism in the imagery? Perhaps in the clock and its ‘extremes’?

Realism and the Sensation Novel

- **Lanie’s seminar paper:**

“In her use of description, Braddon undermined Barthes’ Reality Effect in favor of sensation. Yet, it is important to note that realism does not entirely disappear from this sensationalistic plane.” Does the realism of the novel lie in the setting? In the characters? In the necessity of detail to the plot, as Lukacs would argue?

- **Adriana’s summary of Peaks**

- How do we define a sensation novel? Is it, as Peak suggests, a genre that disrupts the middle-class perspective, a genre that combines romance and realism, or something else altogether?

“One of the sensation novel’s basic narratives concerns the downfall of a privilege that is masculinized in comparison to the humbler classes’ enforced femininity. . . .every genre’s boundaries are fluid, but the “family of meanings” behind the term “sensation novel,; as Victorian critics feared, indeed disrupted class hierarchies even in the process of reifying them.” - Peaks (850). Do we agree with this?

- Where do the theories of Bakhtin, Lukacs, and Jameson fit into Peak’s discussion?

Class and Gender

Attempts to ascend socially

- **Nithya’s seminar paper**

“A closer look at Lady Audley’s Secret however, paints a far more complex and often confusing picture, suggesting that the transgression of gender roles is not necessarily a function of class, but rather an endeavour of social ascension that is doomed to failure.” (1)

“Lady Audley is unmoored not only of her gender, but of all gender altogether because, for Robert, she has acted in such a profoundly unfeminine way that she must be transformed into an abstract, demonic figure.” (2)

“Robert curiously manifests some of the qualities Peaks assigns to the feminized servant: obedience, submissiveness and inferiority.” (3)

- Is this cautionary? lamentable?
- How can we compare Braddon’s treatment of class to Dickens’?

Misogyny

To call them the weaker sex is to utter a hideous mockery. They are the stronger sex, the noisier, the more persevering, the most self-assertive sex. They want freedom of opinion, variety of occupation, do they? Let them have it. Let them be lawyers, doctors, preachers, teachers, soldiers, legislators—anything they like—but let them be quiet—if they can. (177)

“How pleasant it was to be lectured by the woman he loved! How pleasant it was to humiliate himself and depreciate himself before her!” (372)

“He remembered the horrible things that have been done by women, since that day upon which Eve was created to be Adam’s companion and help-meet in the garden of Eden” (233)

- Is Braddon calling attention to Robert’s misogyny in order to disrupt societal norms or reify them?
- Is Braddon’s treatment and portrayal of women surprising, considering that she is a woman herself?

Agency in courtship, marriage

p. 13 “You must be entirely guided by your own feelings” (Mr. Dawson to Lucy)

p. 14 “‘I scarcely think there is a greater sin, Lucy,’ [Sir Michael] said solemnly, ‘than that of the woman who marries a man she does not love.’”

but then... p. 16 “‘But if you do not dislike me, and if you do not love any one else, I see no reason why we should not make a very happy couple. Is it a bargain, Lucy?’”

p. 298: “I learned that my ultimate fate in life depended upon my marriage, and I concluded that if I was indeed prettier than my schoolfellows, I ought to marry better than any of them.”

- Is marriage as a way to ascend socially always doomed to failure?
- How much agency do women have in who they marry? Alicia seems to have to marry Harry Towers, Phoebe is forced to marry Luke.
- Is Braddon pointing out the constraints that women in Victorian England have to work with, and the limited options open to them, or is she simply attempting to codify what being a good woman entails? Is the novel subversive in any way?
- **Yumi’s close reading**

“This reading of the passage seems to fit in thematically with other passages in the novel that describe how Lady Audley’s, or even women’s, beauty, femininity, and affection mask some sinister reality.”

Physical Appearance and Beauty

p. 224 “Her face expressed the mingled bewilderment and curiosity of a puzzled child, rather than the serious surprise of a woman.”

p. 171 “Her beautiful features, naturally statuesque in their noble outlines, seemed transformed into into marble by their rigidity of her

expression. The face in which he looked was the face of a woman whom death only could turn from her purpose.”

p. 234: The pale face of Clara Talboys—that grave and earnest face, so different in its character to my lady’s fragile beauty—arose before him.

p. 65 “No one but a pre-Raphaelite would have painted, hair by hair, those feathery masses of ringlets, with every glimmer of gold, and every shadow of pale brown. No one but a pre-Raphaelite would have so exaggerated every attribute of that delicate face as to give a lurid brightness to the blonde complexion, and a strange, sinister light to the deep blue eyes. No one but a pre-Raphaelite could have given to that pretty pouting mouth the hard and almost wicked look it had in the portrait.

It was so like, and yet so unlike. It was as if you had burned strange-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 mediaeval monstrosities until his brain had grown bewildered, for my lady, in his portrait of her, had something of the aspect of a beautiful fiend.

Her crimson dress, exaggerated like all the rest in this strange picture, hung about her in folds that looked like flames, her fair head peeping out of the lurid mass of color as if out of a raging furnace. Indeed the crimson dress, the sunshine on the face, the red gold gleaming in the yellow hair, the ripe scarlet of the pouting lips, the glowing colors of each accessory of the minutely painted background, all combined to render the first effect of the painting by no means an agreeable one.”

- How does Clara’s description contrast with Lady Audley’s, and there is a significance to her classical, almost masculine beauty?
- Importance of eyes (the word is mentioned 153 times!) – how does this relate to the general theme of surveillance?
- How do these descriptions relate to Robert’s anxieties about women?
- Why is Lucy constantly described as childlike?

Homosocial desire

“Robert looked at her with a tender compassion in his face; she was so like the friend whom he had loved and lost, that it was impossible for him to think of her as a stranger; impossible to remember that they had met that morning for the first time.”

“It’s comfortable, but it seems so deuced lonely to-night. If poor George were sitting opposite to me, or—or even George’s sister—she’s very like him—existence might be a little more endurable. But when a fellow’s lived by himself for eight or ten years he begins to be bad company.”

- What do we make of Robert mediating his desire for George through Clara, who is gendered so differently from Lady Audley?

Break? (2:45/3:00)__

Class

Heteroglossia: Dialects

“But they say traveling makes people genteel, Luke. I’ve been on the Continent with my lady, through all manner of curious places; and you know, when I was a child, Squire Horton’s daughters taught me to speak a little French, and I found it so nice to be able to talk to the people abroad.” “Genteel!” cried Luke Marks, with a hoarse laugh; “who wants you to be genteel, I wonder? Not me, for one; when you’re my wife you won’t have overmuch time for gentility, my girl. French, too! Dang me, Phoebe, I suppose when we’ve saved money enough between us to buy a bit of a farm, you’ll be parleyvooring to the cows?” (28) + How do make sense of Phoebe’s light accent and Luke’s heavy dialect? + How is this passage commenting on international awareness/sensitivity to culture?

Madness/Physicians

- **Anna’s close reading**

“personal and family issues are inextricable from questions of capital, so intertwined that Sir Michael brings them up almost immediately as his wife raises the question” “The passage is just one of many similar ones in a novel which materializes a larger set of anxieties around domestic peace and privacy” + While Reade focuses on mental health to construct a critique of a specific institution, this quote suggests that Braddon’s focus on madness comes down to disrupting the idea that the domestic fundamentally related to capital. How does this relate to our discussion of class, and thinking of madness as a manifestation of the need to ascend? + Accusation as a weapon + What is the relationship between madness and evil, especially in the context of social ascension?

Narrative Voice

Who has not felt, in the first madness of sorrow, an unreasoning rage against the mute propriety of chairs and tables... the unbending obstinacy of the outward apparatus of existence? (175) + Who is speaking here and what do we make of this narrative voice? + Who gets narrated monologues? Peaks argues that part of the sensation novel's project is to disrupt a middle-class perspective by allowing the reader to identify with lower-class characters. Does Braddon create a sense of interiority with Phoebe and Luke, or even with characters who are not Robert?

Natural Imagery

"No species of crime has ever been committed in the worst rookeries about Seven Dials that has not been also done in the face of that rustic calm which still, in spite of all, we look on with a tender, half-mournful yearning, and associate with—peace."

- How does this narrative non-sequitur serve as commentary on society? Is the narrator criticizing us for romanticizing what is superficially beautiful while ignoring its perilous nature?

Surveillance, Policing and Looking

- Especially Phoebe, Luke (both police and policed)
- Domestic policing → spying and blackmail by Phoebe and Luke
- Lady Audley herself:

"He thought of the beautiful blue eyes watching Sir Michael's slumbers; the soft, white hands tending on his waking moments; the low musical voice soothing his loneliness, cheering and consoling his declining years. What a pleasant picture it might have been, had he been able to look upon it ignorantly, seeing no more than others saw, looking no further than a stranger could look. But with the black cloud which he saw brooding over it, what an arch mockery, what a diabolical delusion it seemed."

Print Media

When Robert Audley had completed his brief record, which he drew up with great deliberation, and with frequent pauses for reflection, alterations and erasures, he sat for a long time contemplating the written page. + Robert's journal entitled "Journal of Facts Connected

With The Disappearance of George Talboys, Inclusive of Facts Which Have No Apparent Relation to That Circumstance.” What do we make of this title and his inclusion of “unnecessary” facts? + Robert’s other note-taking techniques include his pigeon-hole desk marked “Important.” + Anxieties about lower class literacy (see Peak) + Print media bridging distance between England and colonies (Australia, New York) → how is the emergence of print capitalism shifting the way in which Robert can gather information about George’s location? How do letters impact his investigation? + Unlike with Flaubert and Reade, where the reader is often confronted with information overload, it feels like every piece of information in this novel is necessary for plot progression and seems to serve a particular purpose. How does this change the way we think of gathering knowledge and managing information by characters like Robert Audley? + What would Lukacs say about the way most details inform plot? + **Call back to Yumi’s close reading** “In an odd way, Robert’s engagement with the annual seems to mirror the engagement annuals themselves seemed to promote in their readers: many annuals’ paratext made it clear that these texts were meant to be valued as physical, luxurious, aesthetic objects and as reminders of emotional relationships more than anything else.” + How do textual and physical interpretations of print media in this novel compare/contradict?

National Technologies and Imagined Communities

It was part of a telegraphic dispatch. The upper portion had been burnt away, but the more important part, the greater part of the message itself, remained. “—alboys came to — last night, and left by the mail for London, on his way to Liverpool, whence he was to sail for Sydney.”

- National technologies (telegraph, newspaper, clocks) seem to be more prominent in *Lady Audley’s Secret* than some of the earlier novels. What is the effect that this has on the text? Can we connect this to the sense of surveillance that runs through the book and the discussion we had with Trollope about newspapers being a kind of Panopticon?
- Does this have an impact on the sense of nationalism/community that runs through the novel, particularly when compared to *Bouvard and Pecuchet* which had little to no sense of country?

Digital Humanities (4:15pm)

Topic modeling

- Professor Buurma short presentation
- Theory and Practice

Rosenberg (“Stop, Words”)

- **RJ’s Criticism Summary**

“...we can recognize how the omission of stop words has led to processes that fundamentally changed the text and the experience of reading said text...”

- A brief history of the stop word lexicon
- What is/should be the role of the human in digitizing texts and indices?

Leary (“Googling the Victorians”)

- **Gabriella’s Criticism Summary**

- How could we update this? i.e., do people still search the same way they did in the mid-2000s?
- Perhaps discuss some of the drawbacks of applying a “Google-like” search feature to a Victorian text
- How might we consider conflicts of interest in proprietary indexing services?

Underwood

- **Yumi’s Criticism Summary**

“One of Underwood’s major claims is that full-text searches are not a neutral way of turning up new information: instead, they encode researchers’ already-existing assumptions and may repeat those assumptions in the apparently objective results of the search.”

- How can we minimize some of the biases caused by “boolean fishing” when searching digital headings?
- Similarities to the Ramsay paper
- What are some of the benefits of “topic modeling” and how do they avoid certain search issues? What are some of the drawbacks?

Proprietary Search Engines and Digitized Archives

- Technology companies do not need to disclose their search algorithms, and it is therefore impossible to know exactly what the search biases are.
- How can researchers guard against company conflicts-of-interest, particularly when considering advertisement?