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Unlicensed Adaptation: Agency and Subversion in *Lady Audley's Secret*

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Midway through his 1839 novel, *Nicholas Nickleby*, Charles Dickens voices through his protagonist a now-famous tirade against the common practice of adapting popular novels for the stage.¹ Until the end of the nineteenth century, novelists could not prevent the unauthorized staging of versions of their novels – versions which regularly departed from the intentions, themes, and often even characters or plots of the original works. Dickens's rage against these violations of what we would see today as inalienable authorial rights is well documented. But what of those authors whose struggles against copyright are less well-known? Many of these authors wrote to make a subsistence living, and so the potential loss of royalties from adaptation rights had a much more pronounced effect on them than on Dickens, who by the time *Nicholas Nickleby* was mid-serial was comfortably ensconced in the middle class. Many of these authors, such as Mary Elizabeth Braddon, also wrote strong female characters and penned narratives which advocated female agency, only to have their novels adapted for the melodramatic stage by dramatists (usually male) who were interested only in the sensational elements of the novels and the ease with which they might be put on stage and bring in crowds. The changes these unlicensed adaptors made to the original texts strip the stories of much of their narrative power and the female characters of their agency, turning character and story alike into two-dimensional melodramatic stereotypes.

Kate Mattacks summarizes the 1842 Literary Copyright Act as the first to protect “dramatic and literary works from cases of domestic plagiarism” (10); the Act, however, failed to protect works from intercontinental or transatlantic plagiarism, or from unlicensed adaptation for the stage. In the early- and mid-nineteenth century dramatists found it more financially worthwhile to adapt a current novel or to translate a French play than to create an original piece – “quantity rather than quality was necessary to maintain any sort of income level” (Booth 143) – and because of the terms of the 1842 Act, these adaptations did not violate any legal authorial right. Dickens stated bluntly in an 1866 letter to Ellen Wood that “our English law (which has little tenderness for such an idle thing as Literature) does not, to the best of my belief, give you the power of preventing ANY stage adaptation of your book” (Storey 11.143). Over a decade later, popular novelists still struggled with the appropriation of their works for the stage. Florence Marryat and Ouida (Maria Louise Ramé) both publicly denounced such practices: Marryat recognized, in a letter published in the *Era*, that “in the slovenly state of our legislature the fruit of an author's brains are worse protected than the turnips in a farmer's field” (11). Ouida, similarly turning to the rhetoric of personal property, asked readers of *The Times* “how long [...] will the law protect our saucepans and our cabbages, and refuse to give us any

protection against theatrical thieving?” (10). In an attempt to appease the growing opposition of such outspoken authors, for whom the 1842 Act did not go nearly far enough to protect their rights, popular dramatists suggested that their stage adaptations could be used as free advertising, as additions to or interpretations of the popular novels, rather than as separate entities which might detract from the originals (P. Cox 166; Maunder, “Sensation” 56, 67). Far from glorifying these originals, however, many stage adaptations, especially of sensation novels, aimed at what Andrew Maunder describes as “public approval and a fast buck” (“Sensation” 52), removing all but the most exciting elements and “strip[ing]” the stories down “to the bare bones with a handful of strong characters, exciting confrontations and opportunities for grandstanding (all ingredients attractive to star actors)” (Maunder, “Sensation” 57-58).

<3>Adaptors worked primarily with the most popular novels – the stories of which were well-known and guaranteed to draw audiences – and Braddon’s works sat with those of Dickens and Walter Scott as the most frequently performed on the nineteenth-century stage. One of Braddon’s most popular novels, *Lady Audley’s Secret* (1862), appeared multiple times on the Victorian stage, in adaptations which were faithful to the original to widely varied extents. H. Philip Bolton, in his calendar of performances adapted from female-authored novels in the nineteenth century, lists 54 recorded adaptations of *Lady Audley’s Secret* alone – some of better quality than others, some which did not make it past opening night, and some which have not survived in any textual format (65-71). Ruth Lindemann suggests that Braddon, because of her own connections to the theatre, was less set against the practice of unlicensed adaptation of popular novels for the stage than were some of her contemporaries (279), though she did sue William Suter for breach of copyright in his 1863 adaptation of *Lady Audley’s Secret* (Mattacks 9, Powell 98).²

<4>The version of Braddon’s novel adapted by Colin Henry Hazlewood in 1863 is one of few available to modern readers and audiences. First performed at London’s Victoria Theatre on 25 May 1863 and revived in 1866 and 1877 at the Britannia and Olympia respectively (Aldrich 166), Hazlewood’s play exemplifies the violation of authorial intent at work in the act of adaptation for the nineteenth-century melodramatic stage.³ To cater to his original working-class audience, Hazlewood adhered strictly to established melodramatic conventions, especially in his rigid delineation of good and evil.⁴ In doing so, however, the adaptor necessarily removed many of what Zoë Aldrich terms the “subversive tendencies” of the novel (166). The changes Hazlewood makes – limiting Lady Audley to a single name and identity, removing the scenes of discovery and detection, simplifying the ending, and depicting Lady Audley as the sole villain of the piece – work together to erase the proto-feminist message which so many modern critics have read into Braddon’s writing. While I take into account in my reading of Hazlewood’s play the reminder of Linda Hutcheon and other adaptation theorists that an adaptation is not necessarily secondary to the original, the specific changes I address in the move from page to stage do detract from the power of Braddon’s novel.⁵ Hazlewood’s play has its merits, both as a play on its own standing and as a stage adaptation, but the act of adaptation removes the novel’s subversive element. The stage version of Lucy Audley – given a single name and defined as a villain – loses the agency and freedom Braddon’s original version allows to her.

<5>In Hazlewood's most overt change, his adaptation removes the multiplicity of names adopted by the title character and the extent to which she creates her own identity. In Hazlewood's play, the title character is referred to only as Lady Audley; in Braddon's novel, the heroine progresses through a series of names and separate identities. The novel opens with the governess Lucy Graham, the feminine ideal of genteel poverty. By the middle of the first chapter, her feminine perfection has captivated Sir Michael Audley, and she has become Lucy, Lady Audley, the quintessential angel of the house. In the second volume of the novel, however, Braddon reveals that Lucy Graham, the perfectly feminine governess, was a fabricated persona, physically pasted over the poverty-stricken Helen Talboys, née Maldon. Finally, the protean protagonist becomes Mme Taylor, a name – and an identity – inscribed onto her by her nephew Robert Audley. Hazlewood's stage adaptation entirely elides this central aspect of the novel – the multiplicity of identifiers, but also the self-invention allowed by the heroine's creation of the demure governess, Lucy Graham.

<6>Hazlewood not only removes these layers of Lucy's identity, he limits the possibility of her self-narrativization by instructing his audience on how to read the character before presenting her on stage. Prior to Lucy's first entrance, we hear Phoebe and Luke discussing her as a too-perfect example of femininity, well-versed in the womanly occupations of "French and the *pianny*," but one who "has played her cards well," a gambler who has achieved the heights of female ambition (7). While the reader of the novel is granted a similar first glimpse of Lucy – "everybody, high and low, united in declaring that Lucy Graham was the sweetest girl that ever lived" (12) – Braddon shows her heroine exemplifying these reports in person. Most significantly, Braddon titles the first chapter simply "Lucy," allowing the character to speak through the name, and identity, she has created for herself.

<7>Hazlewood appears to follow Braddon's original text in initially limiting Lucy's self-narration. In both the novel and Hazlewood's adaptation, the true story of Lucy's past is revealed by George Talboys, her first husband. The key difference, however, lies in the audience's knowledge in each instance. Readers of the novel would not have been able to connect the story of Helen Talboys as told by George with the figure of the angelic governess to whom they had been introduced in the previous chapter. The early placement of Helen's story in the novel, unconnected in any obvious way to the story of Lady Audley, anchors the various pieces of the narrative only insecurely in the mind of the reader. By the time Lucy reveals her own background, the reader must be reminded of those pieces of the story which have already been disclosed. In the novel, this more thorough explanation comes when Lucy is given an entire chapter (Vol. 3, Ch. 3: "My Lady tells the Truth") in which she is allowed – though forced by Robert – to narrate her own story. Leaving aside the consideration that many audience members of the stage adaptation would have read the novel, and would thus have been aware of Lucy's identity from the start, Hazlewood's audience has already been granted access to the knowledge that Lady Audley conceals a secret "face" (11). The dramatic irony added to the stage version limits the possibility of an audience's sympathy with Lady Audley, and situates her early on as a villainous character. The climactic act of self-narration included in Braddon's novel

all but disappears in Hazlewood's adaptation, in which she merely has one line of confession – "He knew too much, but now he is silenced" (31) – before descending into madness and death.

<8>Instead, between Lucy's revelation of her secret self to the audience and her very public (that is, onstage) attempted murder of her first husband, she is granted a suspicious moment of self-narrativization. Whereas in the novel Robert forces her to reveal her story to her second husband, in Hazlewood's version she freely, and with apparent pride at her accomplishments, reveals in brief outline the story of her life since George's departure from England:

I thought myself deserted, and determined to make reprisals on you; I changed my name; I entered the family of a gentleman as governess to his daughters; became the patient drudge for a miserable stipend, that I might carry my point – that point was to gain Sir Michael Audley's affections; I did so, I devoted all my energies, all my cunning, to that end! and now I have gained the summit of my ambition, do you think I will be cast down by you, George Talboys? no, I will conquer you or I will die! (15)

Because her privacy and secrets are not violated, as they are in the novel, by her nephew's investigative efforts, and because she is so much more specifically depicted as a villain in the stage version, this act of self-narration is not – as it might have been had Braddon included something like it – an act of agency, of emancipation, or of laying claim to her own personal story. Instead, this brief story fits the melodramatic convention of the villain revealing his or her plots, and the speech stands as an instance of villainous boastfulness. The act of self-narrativization, which Braddon characterizes in her novel as empowering, if dangerous, reveals to the audience that Lucy is in fact the villain of the piece (if there had been any doubt), and also foreshadows her eventual and inevitable defeat by the forces of virtue.

<9>In the original novel, Braddon further develops these elements of self-narration and self-creation through the innate theatricality of Lucy as a character. Throughout the novel, Braddon makes reference to masks, characters, and performance, focusing especially on Lucy's external presentation – she is constantly arranging her hair and her facial expression in mirrors. This external perfection, Lucy's "apparent epitomization of the Victorian ideal," allows her to infiltrate the respectable houses of the novel (Sparks 29). The mask image remains in the play, but in a greatly simplified form. Early in Act Two, for example, Lucy exclaims, "[Robert] must not see me with a cloud upon my brow! let me again resume the mask, which not only imposes on him, but on all the world" (20). On stage, however, this mask becomes a much less productive image: Lucy uses her mask as the external signifier of a new layer of identity. She merely hides one face with another, rather than creating and displaying a fully formed new character.

<10>Hazlewood's Lady Audley, though she was a much sought-after role by contemporary actresses keen to show their range, is herself an incompetent actress.⁶ The inability of her mask to hide her secrets comes across most clearly in a conversation with Robert in Act Two, when he catches her out accidentally, before he even thinks to interrogate her. She begins by trying

to play her usual frivolously feminine character, but cannot project a plausible image of innocence, as her novelistic counterpart does, because she only masks one identity with another. She has not created a new identity to be projected to the world, but rather has hidden her self and her past behind an external façade. Lucy falters: “I fancied I was looking remarkably well.” Robert responds by drawing attention to the theatricality of his aunt’s self-presentation: “You *appear* so, but you *are* not” (21; emphasis added). In keeping with Hazlewood’s simplification of Braddon’s story to fit the Manichean requirements of the melodramatic stage, the Robert of the stage version is as ineffective as a detective as Lucy is as an actress. He has no need to spend a third of the story investigating his aunt, as he does in the novel, because Lucy reveals herself to him before he has even begun to develop the suspicion that she might harbour a secret. He accuses her of resembling George’s wife without any apparent proof or way of knowing of this resemblance, though Hazlewood later reveals that there was a miniature of Helen amongst George’s possessions (22). If Hazlewood limits Lucy to the shaky façade of innocence, he similarly limits Robert to a series of barely-justifiable reactions: both are stripped of the agency which their novelistic counterparts possess.

<11>In limiting Lady Audley to a single name, and thus to a single identity, Hazlewood adapts the character to fit perfectly the conventions of the melodramatic villain. Significantly, in Hazlewood’s adaptation the audience sees her commit her crimes – pushing George down the well and setting the inn on fire – crimes which are committed decorously off-stage in Braddon’s original novel, and left to the reader’s imagination. The scene of George’s apparent murder, at the end of Act One, leaves the audience with no doubt as to the villain of the piece. Just before George enters, when Lucy, alone onstage, begins to think that she may have gotten away with her schemes, the stage direction instructs the actress to “*throw off her levity of manner*” (14) and speak to the audience in her own character. This character, the ultimate interiority that I read below as the secret of the title, does not speak in the novel. Though the narrator occasionally reflects on Lucy’s obvious mental turmoil, the character never directly addresses the reader. This interiority is her secret, and hers alone, to the end of the novel – she dies never having explicitly revealed her greatest secret to the reader. In marked contrast, and in keeping with the conventional characterization of the villain, at the end of the first act of Hazlewood’s adaptation, Lady Audley explicitly states her schemes: “I live now for ambition and interest, to mould the world and its votaries to my own end” (14). This revelation of her intent removes any possibility of the audience sympathizing with the character. In the same speech, her glee at her own plans continues this distancing villainization: “Oh excellent scheme, oh cunning device, how well you have served me” (14). In the play, Lucy removes her own mask for the audience. Instead of having Robert and the other male figures of the novel penetrate her secrets and share them with the audience – creating the problematically invasive element of the detective portion of the novel – Hazlewood gives Lucy no chance of becoming worthy of the audience’s sympathy. Here, she reveals her own secrets, making her unquestionably a villain.

<12>In restricting Lucy to the role of the melodramatic villainess, Hazlewood removes the narrative power of the original character. She lacks the ability to recreate her identity, which the self-naming quality of the original novel’s character allows. On stage, Lady Audley no longer exercises control over her identity, which leads to the many mistakes she makes, the discovery

of her crimes, and her final defeat. In the play, where she creates a false identity that is more surface than substance, she is finally betrayed by her own body, by the failure of her own external characterization. In the novel, on the other hand, her discovery comes from circumstantial evidence, not the evidence of her own body, and follows a great deal of investigation by Robert, rather than lapses in her own performance.

<13>The play entirely removes the investigative role Robert plays in the novel. Hazlewood has no need to show Robert prying into Lucy's secrets, because the secret (or what Robert in the novel investigates as Lucy's secret) has already been revealed to the audience at the end of Act One, when Lady Audley pushes George Talboys into the well just left of centre stage. The staged version altogether removes the secondary secret of Lucy's inherited madness. In the novel, Braddon describes Robert's moments of discovery, the progressive removal of identities in his search for Lucy's final secret, using suspiciously violent images. Robert can only uncover the final item of evidence against Lucy, the sticker of her name, by physically stripping away one identity which has been pasted over another. Similarly, Braddon writes the early scene in which George and Robert enter Lucy's locked rooms – uninvited – as a symbolic rape. The removal of such a disturbingly invasive scene from Hazlewood's stage adaptation can be attributed to technical concerns – the possibility of censorship, or perhaps concerns over staging difficulties – but also to thematic ones. The connotations of the entry of the two men to the locked inner chamber of a woman they do not know certainly would problematize the otherwise uniformly good intentions of the sympathetic male figures in Hazlewood's play.

<14>Hazlewood also reduces the role George plays in driving Lucy to her extreme actions in the novel. Unlike Lucy, George becomes a much more sympathetic figure in the stage version. He is still an ex-soldier, but is also a colonial official, which in 1863, at the height of British imperialism, would have drawn immediate and immovable sympathy. Braddon's narrative directly accuses George of abandoning his wife: “[Lucy] looked upon this as a desertion, and [she] resented it bitterly” (347). He leaves without a note or a farewell, and his final words to his wife are words of anger. As Lucy recalls it, “[he] flew into a rage with her, [him]self, her father, the world, and everybody in it, and then ran out of the house, declaring that [he] would never enter it again” (24). On stage, George has been sent away to participate in the glorious expansion and enforcement of the British empire, rather than merely travelling to a New Zealand mining settlement for personal financial gain: “a relation procured me an appointment abroad – I left my wife in England and sailed to perform the duties of my office” (12). Braddon makes it very clear that George has left his wife to fend for herself, with an infant son and a useless father; her choices following George's departure are all necessary merely for survival. In Hazlewood's adaptation, however, Lucy is well aware of George's reasons for leaving, and knowingly ignores his letters – letters which, in the novel, are never sent. She acts out of boredom and ambition, as an expression of her villainy, rather than out of necessity, as an expression of her agency.

<15>In tracing the initial causes of Lady Audley's actions, Braddon's novel also implicates Helen's father (who does not appear in the play at all), hinting at the representative nature of the character's situation. George's description of his courtship of Helen Maldon has distinct

overtone of prostitution, and reflects elements of the contemporary debates over the Contagious Diseases Acts. George describes his father-in-law as “ready to sell [Helen] to the highest bidder,” and seems inordinately proud that he “happened just then to be the highest bidder” (23). Hazlewood’s adaptation glosses over this point – George does mention in his relation of the courtship story that he “had two thousand pounds when [he] first met [Helen]” (12), but says nothing about the father taking bids for his daughter.⁷ When George confronts Lucy, just before she apparently murders him, he instead accuses her of having “sold [her]self to a man old enough to be [her] grandsire” (15), focusing the audience’s attention on the ambition of her second marriage rather than on the wider issues at work in her first. What the novel presents as a choice, as Lucy bettering her position in life, here becomes another aspect of her villainy, even another of her crimes.

<16>In the novel, Braddon focuses her subversive message on Lucy’s outermost layer of performed identity, the ideal of wifely perfection. *Lady Audley’s Secret*, in keeping with the sensation genre, addresses the conventions of the society in which it was written. Here, Braddon represents the state in which women live, and the façades they must often uphold. Though Braddon was one of the most popular novelists of the mid-nineteenth century, this popularity fell off for most of the twentieth. Because of the sentiments evident behind her otherwise purely sensational novels, however, she has in the late-twentieth and twenty-first centuries been studied as a proto-feminist writer. “Much of the ongoing revival of interest” in Braddon’s works focuses on this “potentially subversive feminist content of her fiction” (Atkinson 133). In *Lucy*, particularly, Braddon “highlight[s] the plight of the Victorian woman whose only recourse to social improvement lay in marriage to a wealthy suitor” (J. Cox 9), and suggests the extremes to which this representative woman must go in order to survive in such a system.

<17>Katherine Montwieler suggests that we can read *Lady Audley’s Secret* not just as a commentary on the state of mid-Victorian gender roles, but also as a guide for change: “*Lady Audley’s Secret* functions the same way conduct books do, but toward a different end: You, too, can become Lady Audley. Let me show you how” (59). The potential subversion modern critics have read into the novel, then, lies not just in Lucy’s own actions and their immediate sensational effects, but in the possibility of mimicry, both within and outside the world of the novel. Braddon plays off of contemporary arguments against the sensation novel, the “anxiety [...] that women readers would in fact *become* the characters they read about” (MacDonald 132; original emphasis). Within the novel, the maid, Phoebe – described as a shadowy, colourless double for her mistress – becomes the first initiate into Lady Audley’s brand of escapism: “with a bottle of hair dye [...] and a pot of rouge, you’d be as good-looking as I any day,” Lucy assures her (60). Any woman reading the novel would have easy access to the cosmetics Lucy mentions; Braddon implies that these readers also have access to the freedom Lucy enjoys.

<18>The potential didactic properties of the novel aside, Lucy aims not at a proto-feminist crusade, but rather at her own personal advance. This training of potentially subversive wives and daughters may be part of Braddon’s purpose, but cannot be considered as part of Lucy’s. While the Victorian femme fatale figure generally acts in order to circumvent the system and

infiltrate the upper classes, Lucy does not have such an overtly political goal in creating multiple layers of identity and lying about her past and her origins. Rather, she merely wants to guarantee her individual identity, and to survive in the world. Her plots, masks, and performances all work towards guaranteeing her own individual social mobility and her access to and control of her own identity.

<19>Montwieler's reading of the novel as a kind of subversive conduct book also assumes a particular universality in Lucy's character and situation. Significantly, one of the apparent causes of Lucy's impropriety is her orphaned state, having been raised in a motherless household, a state which also describes Alicia Audley's childhood. "Lady Audley's contrived domestic virtues are much less convincing and more infuriating to Alicia Audley because she understands her artfulness, aware of the powerful effectiveness of such role-playing" (Hedgecock 122). She too has been brought up to perform her femininity, and she too does so to win a husband. Elaine Showalter argues that the subversive nature of Braddon's novel stems from this potential universality. Lucy's secret, in Showalter's reading, is not her crimes, nor her inheritance of insanity, but rather that she is "*sane*, and, moreover, representative" (137; original emphasis). Showalter argues that Lucy's power in the novel lies not in her villainy nor in her unfeminine ambition, but rather in the ease with which she presents herself in the character of the angelic feminine ideal. Lucy's subversion comes in her combined embrace of and challenge to the ideologies of the angel of the house, the conventional suppression of female desire and agency. Showalter argues that the "Secret" of the title is the universal nature of this talent for subversive mimicry.

<20>I would argue that Showalter's reading of Lucy's secret can be taken further: it is not her sanity which she contrives to hide, but rather the fact that she has been able consistently throughout the novel to create and recreate the layers of identity discussed above, including the identity of madness through which she escapes punishment for her crimes. Lady Audley's secret, then, is *her self*, her true identity – the point of personal identification which allows for her agency and her ability to act in her own interest. She hides this unconventional interiority, retaining it as her own creation, free from the attempted narrativization of either of her husbands, or of her father, or – finally – of Robert Audley. Hazlewood's removal of Lucy's layers of identity – and especially her own creation of these layers – which on first glance appears merely to be a simplifying choice, in actuality removes the titular secret.

<21>Less problematic but more overt is the difference in the ending of Hazlewood's adaptation. In the novel, as in the play, Lucy does die, though her death occurs in the Belgian asylum, and is only reported by letter. Given the obvious echo here of the previous letter which similarly reported Lucy's first (fake) death, Braddon leaves open the possibility that Lucy uses even death as yet another layer of identity, another pretence through which she endeavours to escape the expectations of her society. Braddon leaves similarly ambiguous the madness Lucy has feared, and hidden, throughout the novel. Rather than merely driving her heroine mad so that she can be relegated to a conveniently foreign space of confinement by her male relatives (one usual progression of a Victorian fallen woman plot), Braddon instead suggests throughout the final volume of the novel that Lucy has applied her madness as another mask. After Lucy has told her

story, and Robert has labelled her as a madwoman, Doctor Mosgrave suggests that Lucy is not, in fact, mad. He advises, rather, that she has deliberately tried to make Robert think of her as a madwoman, either to further some new scheme or, though the doctor does not explicitly make this connection, to preserve her own life: “she has the cunning of madness, with the prudence of intelligence. [...] She is dangerous!” (372). Hazlewood removes this aspect – and with it any reliable possibility of Lucy’s essential sanity – from his adaptation. In both versions Lucy confesses her madness, describing it as the inherited secret she has hidden throughout the story. In the novel, her mental state is left ambiguous, primarily by the doctor’s diagnosis, but also by the layered identities the reader has seen the character apply throughout the narrative. Hazlewood’s stage adaptation, however, ends with Lucy’s confession of her madness, after which she simply dies. “In Hazlewood’s adaptation, Lady Audley’s madness is explicitly presented in the final, public revelation of her guilt” (Aldrich 167), reversing the use of Lucy’s madness in the novel, in which Robert uses his aunt’s confessed madness as an excuse for her actions, a way to hide her guilt and to escape from a very public revelation of it. Onstage, Lady Audley’s confession of madness becomes both a confirmation of her guilt and the conventional end of her villainy.

<22>Hazlewood’s version does allow Lucy to have the last word: in the novel she is essentially silenced for the final chapters, following the revelation of her inherited madness, and the story ends instead with Robert’s marriage and domestic happiness. Hazlewood’s removal of the possibility that Lucy’s madness may only be yet another disguise or layer of identity, however, finally removes the subversive qualities of Braddon’s heroine. Her madness is also very differently presented on stage. Hazlewood does not include any suggestion of the condition being an inherited one and, as his version of the character dies almost immediately after becoming mad, it cannot be used as an escape from punishment or as a new protective layer of identity. Lucy’s immediate – and unambiguous – onstage death entirely erases the threat Lucy poses to patriarchal society in the novel. In Hazlewood’s version, Lady Audley dies to preserve her own appearance, to ensure silence about her crimes. While this enforced silence also underlies Robert’s decision in Braddon’s novel to imprison his aunt in the Belgian asylum under an assumed name, in the play it is Lucy’s own choice, not Robert’s. Her choice of death as a final escape is foreshadowed at the end of Act One, in an aside just before her attempted murder of George: “‘Death! death!’ Aye that is the word – that is the only way of escape” (16). In Hazlewood’s villainous construction of Lady Audley, she finally has no escape but death. Braddon, on the other hand, gives Lucy multiple escape possibilities, as she retreats through her layered identities, all the while protecting the innermost self to which even the reader does not have access. With her death in the stage adaptation, her identity as Lady Audley, the perfect wife of Sir Michael, becomes her only and enduring identity. In Hazlewood’s version, death rewrites Lucy as the feminine ideal; in the novel, Lucy’s reported death leaves her character open to continued interpretation.

<23>In the 1860s, as Braddon wrote her novel and Hazlewood his adaptation, the legal concept of coverture stated that husband and wife become one person. That is, upon marriage, the woman’s identity disappears – legally and ideologically – into that of her husband. The married woman ceases to exist as an identifiable self; at the same time, the unmarried or deserted

woman has few available means of supporting her material existence. By creating her own identity – and protecting it under multiple layers of deception – the Lucy Audley of Braddon’s novel can remove her innermost idea of her *self* from conventional patriarchal control and so can survive in a world that naturally limits her options. By removing this ability to self-narrate and to self-create, Hazlewood’s melodramatic stage adaptation also removes the possibility of female agency and the subversive proto-feminist undertones of Braddon’s original novel.

Endnotes

¹ “You take the uncompleted books of living authors, fresh from their hands, wet from the press, cut, hack, and carve them to the powers and capacities of your theatres, finish unfinished works, hastily and crudely vamp up ideas not yet worked out by their original projector, but which have doubtless cost him many thoughtful days and sleepless nights; by a comparison of incidents and dialogue, down to the very last word he many have written a fortnight before, do your utmost to anticipate his plot – all this without his permission, and against his will” (633-634). Nicholas’s target is a thinly-veiled satire of the dramatist William Moncrieff, whose adaptation of *Nicholas Nickleby* appeared at the Strand Theatre on 29 May 1839 – before Dickens had completed the novel.

² Prior to her career as a successful novelist, Braddon worked as an actress under the name Mary Seyton to support herself and her mother.

³ Jim Davis notes that Hazlewood’s *Lady Audley’s Secret* was the “most popular melodrama” at the Britannia over the next decade, being revived 71 times – “largely because so many leading actresses selected it for their benefits or for special engagements” (371-372).

⁴ The working-class audience in the second half of the nineteenth century was generically defined by such commentators as Examiner of Plays Edward F. Smyth Pigott as “more moral” than their West End counterparts: “collectively they have a horror of vice and a ferocious love of virtue” (332). As such, adaptations intended for East End or transpontine audiences placed more emphasis on the Manichean divisions of melodramatic morality than did those written for the West End stage. At the same time, in Blanchard Jerrold’s view working-class – especially East End – audiences preferred “highly spiced” dramas (qtd in Maunder, “*East Lynne*” 177). Hazlewood’s adaptation meets both requirements.

⁵ See, for example, Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation* (Routledge, 2006), and Margaret Jane Kidnie, *Shakespeare and the Problem of Adaptation* (Routledge, 2009).

⁶ Janice Norwood notes that Hazlewood’s original plays and his adaptations “typical[ly]” include “good parts for female performers” (171). See also Davis 371-372.

⁷ Again, Hazlewood may have made this choice with the potential of censorship in mind.

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