

# NINETEENTH-CENTURY GENDER STUDIES

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## “Gathering ‘stray and benighted curs’: Pet-keeping and Masculinity in *Lady Audley’s Secret*”

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<1>Scholars have long been intrigued by the character of Robert Audley in Mary Elizabeth Braddon’s *Lady Audley’s Secret*. His liminal position in relation to traditional representations of masculinity urges us to consider how we are to view his role in the novel. Taking up this question, Richard Nemesvari claims that Braddon uses the relationship between Robert and George Talboys to “explore the anxieties produced in Victorian men by the development of male homosocial bonds” and critique the ways Victorian society sought to deny and repress “taboo” desires (110). Lynda Hart argues that Braddon first “feminizes” Robert and then establishes his masculinity and reinforces his place as a man in society by allowing him to expose Lady Audley’s duplicity (6). Similarly, Simon Petch argues that Robert’s investigation into Lady Audley is also a quest for a professional future and the “establishment of his own identity as a professional man” (1).

<2>More recently, Rachel Heinrichs has argued against critics who view Robert’s development as a kind of transformation from effeminacy to masculinity as he conforms to societal norms. Using the work of James Adams in *Dandies and Desert Saints: Styles of Victorian Manhood*, Heinrichs examines Robert and the novel’s other male characters in light of mid-Victorian ideals of manliness, namely, the dandy and the gentleman, and claims that Braddon uses the narrative to present “an ambiguous attitude toward the ideal of essential selfhood...and [engage] with the confusion of a historical moment in which masculinity was radically decentered” (118). She argues that Robert undermines his own progress toward conformity and the establishment of a “new masculinity” (104). One feature of the “new masculinity” Heinrichs describes is a shift in human/animal relationships, and

though the representation of masculinity in *Lady Audley* is well-covered terrain, the contribution of Robert's dogs to this picture remains unexplored.

<3>Domesticated animals are ever present in the novel, and Robert's sympathy with these animals, especially his dogs, is revealed early in the narrative. When first introduced to him, the reader learns that Robert is a "man who would never get on in the world; but who would not hurt a worm. Indeed, his chambers were converted into a perfect dog-kennel, by his habit of bringing home stray and benighted curs, who were attracted by his looks in the street, and followed him with abject fondness" (Braddon 33). These "stray and benighted curs" are mentioned frequently in the text as they travel by train with Robert to and from Audley Court, walk with him through country lanes, and grace the floor under his easy chair. There are several possible, and plausible, reasons for the significant presence of dogs in *Lady Audley*. For instance, they may symbolize Robert's loyalty, sagacity, and instinct in discerning signs and events during his investigation. Or perhaps Braddon is employing the Gothic convention of using dogs to judge character and foreshadow danger. Alicia Audley's dog Caesar's obvious hostility toward Lady Audley seems especially ominous when contrasted with the tendency of strange dogs to trust and follow Robert (72).

<4>However, studies of the dramatic increase in pet-keeping in the wake of the nineteenth-century animal welfare movement have highlighted the intimate connection between that movement and Victorian views of masculinity. Given this connection, and the visibility of Robert's dogs throughout the text, it benefits us to question how Robert's relationship with his dogs might contribute to our understanding of gender performances in the novel. In this essay, I will argue that Robert's relationship with his dogs is consistent with the development of pet-keeping in the Victorian period and that viewing Robert's character in light of his humaneness toward animals offers an intermediate space between a binary approach to his feminization and/or his development into a more traditional form of masculinity. I propose that that Braddon uses Robert's dogs to reinforce his identity as wholly human with the emotional capacity to respond to others with empathy. Nevertheless, though Braddon poses Robert as an example of a new kind of masculinity based on affective capacity rather than inheritance, honor, and violence, the narrative reveals that new Victorian ideas of gender in fact continue to privilege masculinity, just in a different form. A textual thread of pet-keeping ethos and violent hunting metaphor woven through Robert's acts of humaneness exposes the parallels between his subtle enactment of power and the overt violence associated with traditional masculinity.

<5>The nineteenth century saw a dramatic shift in English perception and treatment of animals. In *The Animal Estate*, Harriet Ritvo writes, “At the beginning of the nineteenth century the English would have been surprised to hear themselves praised for special kindness to animals” (125). Animals were exploited as commodities, labor, and entertainment, and the cities were crowded with abused and neglected species. Brutality was so common in England that Queen Victoria once pronounced, “[T]he English are inclined to be more cruel to animals than some other civilized nations are” (qtd. in Ritvo 126). As animal protection societies sprang up throughout Europe and the United States during the century, England also experienced what has been termed a “revolution in morals” that transformed the nation’s relationship to the nonhuman (127). The rhetoric of animal protection societies and other animal welfare advocates associated responsibility and sympathy toward animals with social evolution, and the humane treatment of animals slowly became a mark of civilized society (127-30). Ritvo explains, “[A]s early as the 1830s...the English humane movement had begun to claim kindness to animals as a native trait and to associate cruelty to animals with foreigners” (127). Laws regulating the treatment of animals delegitimized their traditional uses as beasts of burden and fodder for violent sport, and humaneness became associated with “solid English virtue” (130). To be English was to be humane. In fact, Braddon’s apparent preoccupation with humaneness contributes to her novel’s “Englishness.”

<6>The animal welfare movement led to the rise of pet-keeping in all English classes, and scholarship has sought to understand the role that pets, especially dogs, took in Victorian society and literature. In his discussion of anthroprosthesis in the nineteenth century, Ivan Kreilkamp argues that, just as animals had previously been used as tools for sport or labor, pets became a “projection or extension of human desires and needs” and developed into a kind of emotional prosthesis for the Victorians (38). The prosthetic use of animals in *Lady Audley* is especially evident in Alicia’s character. As “[p]oor Alicia” experiences social and emotional isolation in the wake of her father’s marriage and Robert’s apparent indifference, she seeks emotional support from her dog and her horse (Braddon 249). The fact that she has “her favorite mare, her Newfoundland dog, and her drawing materials” is enough to make her “tolerably happy,” and when she is in turmoil, she seeks “consolation from her dog Caesar and her chestnut mare Atalanta, whose loose box the young lady was in the habit of visiting every day” (249, 245). Caesar and Atalanta function as emotional prostheses for Alicia’s character as they satisfy emotional needs that are not met by the people in her life.

<7>In addition to acting as emotional prostheses, Kreilkamp argues that, by the latter half of the century, humans began to use dogs more and more to “define and buttress

their own identity” as beings with affective capacity that exceeded that of the animal (38). In a society that was often preoccupied with “excess affect” in the form of displays like sentimentality, passion, and hysteria, Keridiana Chez explains that the Victorians were also “preoccupied with its lack” (5). Chez claims that the animal welfare movement was driven by questions of what it meant to be human and how to distinguish human from nonhuman in a post-Darwinian world. For the Victorians, identifying as human revolved around the question of emotional capacity, so “[w]ho could feel what, and how much, became a central measure of being worthy of protection, if not rights” (5-6). According to Chez, “Those who were identified as humane would feel appropriately sympathetic at the sight of another’s suffering and appalled by its intentional infliction on a helpless being; the inhumane, in contrast, exhibited a diminished capacity to feel certain feelings in the face of animal suffering and were no longer recognized as wholly human” (7). For the Victorians, observed affective capacity, especially in relation to the nonhuman, confirmed a person’s humanity.

<8>In Braddon’s novel, Robert’s dogs serve both as emotional prostheses and to establish his humanity. They are constantly with him and frequently listed alongside his pipe—the “great consoler”—and French novels as things that bring him comfort (Braddon 116, 145). In addition to their notably constant presence, Robert appears to connect emotionally to the dogs in ways he does not, or cannot, with other human beings. Except for his growing affection for George Talboys, Robert only seems to care about two people—Sir Michael and Alicia—and even Alicia questions his affection. Early in the novel, she passionately exclaims, “To have only one cousin in the world...my nearest relation after papa, and for him to care about as much for me as he would for a dog!” (60). Oddly, Robert shows more affection for his dogs than he does Alicia. Later, as she compares Robert’s fondness for his dogs with his indifference to her and others, she implies Robert cares for his dogs more than the people in his life. For instance, multiple times in the text, when Robert is having intense discussions with a frustrated Alicia, Robert is shown “placidly stroking” his dogs’ ears rather than comforting her (111).

<9>While a collection of stray dogs might act as an emotional prosthesis for Robert, standing in for the emotional connections with people he seems to lack, they also exist in the text to confirm Robert’s identity as “wholly human” with the affective capacity to recognize and respond to the suffering of others. Robert’s humanity is certainly in question, especially early in the narrative. For instance, Alicia illuminates the contrast between Robert’s treatment of humans and animals during one of their arguments. She accuses Robert of being selfish and exclaims,

You take home half-starved dogs, because you like half-starved dogs. You stoop down, and pat the head of every good-for-nothing cur in the village street, because you like good-for-nothing curs. You notice little children, and give them halfpence, because it amuses you to do so. But you lift your eyebrows a quarter of a yard when poor Sir Harry Towers tells a stupid story, and stare the poor fellow out of countenance with your lazy insolence. (Braddon 103)

Robert “likes” and shows affection to the animal rather than the suffering human, which merely amuses him. Lady Audley exclaims early in the novel that she does not believe men are capable of “deep and lasting affections,” and without his dogs as evidence of his ability to show affection and empathize with other beings, it would be easy for readers to side with her and Alicia as they dismiss Robert’s humanity (77). Though his humanity may be in question, Robert’s reaction to the suffering of the stray dogs that follow him demonstrate that he does in fact have the emotional capacity that, according to Chez, identifies him as fully human. As the novel progresses, this capacity continuously dictates his treatment of Lady Audley, if not Alicia.

<10>In contrast to Robert’s sympathy and compassion, Lady Audley demonstrates no such capacity. She is associated with the animal—the wild but hunted hare—so she cannot be wholly human, but, as she is human, she cannot fully identify with the animal. Lady Audley’s otherness is evident in her relationship with the nonhuman. For example, she cannot develop a positive connection with Caesar. Alicia tells her father that Lady Audley “may bewitch every man in Essex, but she’d never make friends with [her] dog” (Braddon 93). In fact, Caesar is afraid of Lady Audley: “There was something in the manner of the dog which was, if anything, more indicative of terror than of fury, incredible as it appears that Caesar should be frightened of so fragile a creature as Lucy Audley” (93). Lady Audley also lacks humanity when dealing with other humans. When Luke Marks tells Robert the story of his dealings with Lady Audley, he describes her in this way:

Whatever she give me she throwed me as if I'd been a dog. Whenever she spoke to me, she spoke as she might have spoken to a dog; and a dog she couldn't abide the sight of. There was no word in her mouth that was too bad for me; there was no toss as she could give her head that was too proud and scornful for me. (367)

Lady Audley’s stunted affective capacity is placed in contrast with Robert’s tenderness to the nonhuman, effectively highlighting Robert’s humanity.

<11>This dichotomy between humane and inhumane behaviors contributes to our understanding, not only of the connection between affective capacity and what it meant to be human in the Victorian period, but also to our understanding of Victorian gender roles. As Chez asserts, the animal welfare movement was intricately connected with performances of gender. She explains that the growing connection between man and animal complicated “the notion that becoming a man required a traumatic distancing from nature and compassion in order to cultivate postures of indifference and strength. Middle-class masculinity became redefined as the power to affectively connect with animals such as the dog, thereby developing the ability to govern via affective intimacy rather than violence” (3). Traditional masculinity defined by domination and violence transformed into a new middle-class masculinity partially defined by the capacity for humaneness toward the animal. By this reasoning, Robert’s humaneness defines his masculinity.

<12>Viewed in light of the gender performances of other male characters, Robert’s difference is evident—he appears to be failing in his performance of traditional masculinity. As Rachel Heinrichs explains, the Victorian period was a historical moment in which “masculinity was radically decentered.” By the 1860s, industrialization and the rise of the middle class had interrupted the class system that was integral to defining masculinity in England (103). Sir Michael Audley and Harcourt Talboys represent the old ideal of manhood based on principles like inheritance and honor, while Robert and George Talboys occupy a liminal class position in which “emerging middle-class values of work and professionalism contest their elite upbringing” (104). Because of his borderline position, Robert can enjoy a life of leisure and the benefits of gentility even though he is also “supposed to be a barrister” (104).

<13>In addition to his shaky class and professional position, Robert’s difference is especially evident when his relationship with the nonhuman is contrasted with that of other men in the novel. Robert’s dogs are described as “absurd” in contrast with the expensive purebred hunting dogs of other gentlemen, and Robert is openly mocked because of both their mangy mutt-ness and his compassion for them (Braddon 102). The narrative describes Robert’s reception when he brings two dogs with him on a visit to Audley court. Upon his arrival, Robert encounters a “country gentleman who gave fifty pounds for a pointer; and traveled a couple of hundred miles to look at a leash of setters before he struck a bargain” (101). This man “laughed aloud at the two miserable curs, one of which had followed Robert Audley through Chancery Lane, and half the length of Holborn” (101). Robert’s dogs are often mentioned alongside his laziness and smoking when other characters discuss his faults, and his insistence that his dogs be allowed to sleep under his chair leads

the visitors of Audley Court to look “upon the baronet’s nephew as an inoffensive species of maniac” (101). In the nineteenth century, pure dog breeds were status symbols, and Robert violates masculine norms by keeping mutts instead of purebred hunters.

<14>Robert is further marginalized by his views on and unwillingness to participate in seasonal hunting. Hunting in the nineteenth century was a decidedly masculine occupation. Robert is disgusted by “letting a girl follow the hounds,” but he is not a hunter himself (Braddon 104). The reader is introduced to Robert’s position on hunting just after learning of his relationship with his dogs:

Robert would always spend the hunting season at Audley Court; not that he was distinguished as a Nimrod, for he would quietly trot to covert upon a mild-tempered, stout-limbed bay hack, and keep a very respectful distance from the hard riders; his horse knowing quite as well as he did, that nothing was further from his thoughts than any desire to be in at the death. (33)

Robert later tells George Talboys that he does not care for hunting. He says, “Why, man, I don’t know a partridge from a pigeon, and it might be the 1st of April instead of the 1st of September for aught I care. I never hurt a bird in my life, but I have hurt my own shoulder with the weight of my gun” (48). The narrative places Robert in a strange position—deeply connected to nature and animals but distanced from traditionally masculine manifestations of that connection.

<15>Robert’s position on hunting is sharply contrasted with Sir Harry Towers’, who is consistently referred to as the “young sportsman” or “the fox-hunting baronet” (Braddon 104, 111). Towers’ life and identity revolve around hunting and expensive purebred dogs and horses. In her work on animals and empire in the nineteenth century, Kathleen Kete explains,

In the “hunting cult” of upper-class British males we see how the expression of violence in the nineteenth century was reserved for those for whom the exercise of power was both a sign of dominion over the animal (and the animal-like) and a mark of the aggressor’s civility. Since they could so patently rule themselves—maintain their humanness in the face of the animal and their own animal practices—hunting declared the imperial elites’ right to rule, or so it was supposed. (12-3)

By this logic, Sir Harry Towers is invested with the right to rule. We can assume, though we are not provided with Towers’ hunting habits in the narrative, that his passion for hunting, purebred dogs, and well-bred horses would translate to an

adherence to hunting tradition, which included both the act of hunting and the treatment of the hunted. Adherence to this tradition would mean that, though he expresses violence and exercises dominance during the hunt, Towers practices restraint and humaneness toward his prey at the end of it.

<16>In contrast, Robert's dislike of hunting and his apparent inability to perform as a hunter might negate his right to dominate. Lynda Hart argues that Robert's distaste for "manly" activities like hunting, along with his lack of interest in Alicia and general lack of purpose, effectively "feminizes" him (6). However, I contend that Robert reasserts his privileged masculinity through pet-keeping. As Kete explains, in the nineteenth century, pet-keeping might be viewed as "a different kind of ritual enactment of power" (15). Robert exercises dominance over his pet dogs, but his humaneness toward them marks his self-restraint and civility, declaring his right to rule. Robert's masculine identity, then, is rooted in the humaneness evident in the connection he maintains with his dogs, regardless of other elements of the text that might feminize him. In this way, though he may differ from the traditionally masculine, he embodies Chez's definition of a "new" masculinity that is partially defined by the capacity for humaneness toward the animal and animal-like beings in the novel.

<17>The animal and animal-like take two forms in Braddon's narrative—the helpless prey and the vulgar uncivilized—and Robert treats both with humaneness. For instance, Sir Michael is placed in the role of prey, a helpless target snared by his dishonest wife. Though he is a mature, wealthy, and powerful man, he is portrayed as a victim. When Lady Audley begins telling him and Robert the true story of her life, the narrative states that Sir Michael "cried, in a voice whose anguish struck like a blow upon the jarred nerves of those who heard it, as the cry of a wounded animal pains the listener" (Braddon 295). Later, Robert describes his uncle as "that grey-headed sufferer in this cruel hour, in which he had been awakened from the one delusion of a blameless life to discover that he had been the dupe of a false face" (306). Sir Michael, who views love as a "snare," is "stricken" and "wounded" by Lady Audley's treachery (282, 306). When his efforts to protect Sir Michael fail, Robert does everything possible to care for him in his woundedness. He tasks Alicia with taking Sir Michael away to comfort him, he takes on all responsibility for dealing with Lady Audley's crimes, and he is merciful to Lady Audley in order to "shield" those he loves from "sorrow and disgrace" (181).

<18>If Sir Michael is animal-like in his woundedness, Luke Marks is animal-like in his vulgar incivility and lack of affective capacity. He is ruthless in his treatment of his wife, remorseless in his blackmail of Lady Audley, and devious in his refusal to



deliver George Talboys' letters. Phoebe describes Luke as having a "dogged nature" and being "almost wild" when he drinks (Braddon 258, 272). He is also portrayed as "savage" and speaking with a "roar" several times during his dealings with Phoebe, Lady Audley, and Robert (349). Nevertheless, Robert treats him with humaneness at the end of his life. After Luke tells his story to Robert, he looks at Robert, "fully expecting some reproof, some grave lecture; for he had a vague consciousness that he had done wrong" (367). But the narrative states that Robert does not lecture Luke and that he "sat until long after daybreak with the sick man" (368). Robert is in a position of authority based on his own class superiority and Luke's physical incapacity, and he treats Luke with civility.

<19>Evidence of the affective capacity displayed in Robert's relationship with his dogs can be seen in his relationships with the male animal-like characters in the text, and this also holds true in Robert's treatment of Lady Audley, who is animal-like in her woundedness and lack of empathy. She likens herself to Robert's prey and is portrayed as a victim of her circumstances, a wild animal that has been ensnared by vanity, poverty, and lack of social mobility. Throughout the narrative, Lady Audley is described using words and images that connote the animal. For instance, she is a "pet" who is "admired and caressed" wherever she goes, and her impulses, gestures, and emotions are often described as "wild" (Braddon 114, 50, 41). Robert responds to her suffering with the compassion we might expect from someone who takes in starving mutts. Though his actions may be motivated by a desire to protect Sir Michael, Robert provides Lady Audley with frequent opportunities to run and escape prosecution, and he eventually opts to leave her in the relative comfort of an insane asylum rather than subject her to a trial and possible death or imprisonment.

<20>Though she wrongs Sir Michael and kills George Talboys, at least according to Robert's understanding and her own confession, Robert treats Lady Audley with mercy, proving once again his affective capacity. Near the beginning of the second volume, Robert determines, "Justice to the dead first...mercy to the living afterwards" (Braddon 135). However, in the chapters that follow, he offers mercy to Lady Audley again and again. He explains that he wishes to "save" her from "degradation and punishment" and pleads with her to accept his mercy and take the chance to run away (229). When it is finally within his power to exact justice, Robert chooses to relinquish it in favor of mercy. After Lady Audley's confession, Robert tells Dr. Mosgrave that his "greatest fear is the necessity of any exposure—any disgrace" (323). Robert's desire to keep the truth hidden to protect his family leads him to commit Lady Audley to a madhouse in another country, relinquishing any possibility for trial and punishment according to the law. He tells Lady Audley,

I have done that which I thought just to others and merciful to you...I should have been a traitor to society had I suffered you to remain at liberty—after the disappearance of George Talboys and the fire at the Castle Inn. I have brought you to a place in which you will be kindly treated by people who have no knowledge of your story—no power to taunt or reproach you. (333)

According to Robert, he has justly fulfilled his duty to society by removing Lady Audley while granting mercy, at least in his eyes, to her.

<21>The kindness and mercy Robert shows to the “animal”—both his dogs and the animal-like humans in the text—are evidence of his capacity to respond with sympathy and humaneness when confronted with the suffering of others, especially those under his authority. As Chez explains, the animal welfare movements of the nineteenth century complicated the idea that masculinity is founded upon a distancing from nature and compassion. For the Victorians, masculinity came to be defined as the ability to affectively connect with the animal and govern via affective intimacy rather than violence and control, and Chez would probably argue that Robert embodies the characteristics of this transformed masculinity.

<22>Nevertheless, though masculine performances based on compassion, humaneness, and affective intimacy appear an improvement over the violence and control that characterized traditional masculinity, Braddon’s narrative forces us to question if this “new” idea of masculinity actually strays much from the traditional. Further examination reveals that, though the narrative places Robert in a liminal position which highlights his difference, it then incorporates a pet-keeping ethos and violent hunting metaphors that bring him back into the fold of traditional masculinity. Ultimately, despite his empathy and humaneness, Robert reveals the problematic nature of this “new” masculinity as he continues to express the violence and dominance that characterized the traditional. Robert enacts his power. He is a pet-keeper and hunter—he just pursues a different prey than Sir Harry.

<23>The enactment of power through pet-keeping gives Robert the privileged ability to choose who becomes a cherished, protected pet and who becomes prey. Like his stray and benighted curs, we see Robert take on the role of protector for abandoned and wounded people throughout the novel. Speaking of George Talboys, Robert tells Harcourt Talboys, “I had known him and been with him through the great trouble of his life; and because he stood comparatively alone in the world—cast off by you who should have been his best friend, bereft of the only woman he had ever loved” (Braddon 164). Later, Robert thinks, “Poor George, you had need of one friend in this world, for you have had very few to love you” (166). Clara

Talboys is also portrayed as abandoned and suffering. She tells Robert that she has lived in an “atmosphere of suppression” and later asks him, “You talk to me of suffering, when the only creature in this world who ever loved me has been taken from it in the bloom of youth. What can there be for me henceforth but suffering?” (171, 173). Like stray dogs, George and Clara need to be rescued, and Robert spends the novel pursuing resolution and justice for them.

<24>Similarly, Robert views the child George as a kind of neglected pet in need of rescue. The narrative places the child in the context of Robert’s pet-keeping, explaining that “[p]oor Robert had about as much notion of the requirements of a child as he had of those of a white elephant. He had catered for silkworms, guinea-pigs, dormice, canary-birds, and dogs, without number, during his boyhood, but he had never been called upon to provide for a young person of five years old” (Braddon 153). Nevertheless, Robert sees the child as a responsibility, so he removes him from an unsuitable home and places him to be kept at school. He “patt[s] the boy’s head encouragingly” like he does his stray dogs, and the child “trott[s] away contentedly at Robert’s side” (142, 152). Robert’s tendency toward pet-keeping is evident in the way he treats those he views as “strays.”

<25>As he encounters the abandoned, wounded, or suffering, Robert chooses who is worthy of his protection and who will be hunted. His hunter identity is expressed through a thread of violent hunter/prey metaphors throughout the novel. Luke describes Robert’s tactics of investigation in this way: “You’ve made game of me in a general way...and you’ve drawn me out, and you’ve tumbled and tossed me about like in a gentlemanly way, till I was nothink or anythink in your hands; you’ve looked me through and through, and turned me inside out till you thought you knowed as much as I knowed” (Braddon 351-2). Though he treats Luke with humaneness at the end of his life, Robert’s pursuit of information is likened to a “gentlemanly” game that ends in what sounds very much like a hunter skinning his prey. Similarly, Sir Michael’s woundedness is attributed at some points, not to his deceitful wife, but to Robert’s relentless pursuit of justice for George. Robert is aware of this: “He knew enough to know that Sir Michael Audley went away with the barbed arrow, which his nephew’s hand had sent home to its aim, rankling in his tormented heart” (305). The violent language here likens Robert to a hunter.

<26>Though, in many ways, Lady Audley just has much claim on Robert’s sympathy as George, Clara, or the child, Robert chooses to take on the role of hunter in his pursuit and treatment of her. This choice is seen in the violent images used to describe his investigation. The chase effectively changes Robert’s character from empathetic protector to violent predator. The narrative describes “a cold sternness

that was so strange to him as to transform him into another creature—a pitiless embodiment of justice, a cruel instrument of retribution” (Braddon 231). His investigation into Lady Audley’s actions is likened to a hunter pursuing his prey. She asks him, “Why have you tormented me so? Why could you not let me alone? What harm had I ever done you that you should make yourself my persecutor, and dog my steps, and watch my looks, and play the spy upon me” (235). She describes herself as “pursued and tormented,” and, when Robert’s investigation begins to close in on her, she wonders, “What warfare could such a feeble creature wage against her fate? What could she do but wind like a hunted hare till she found her way back to the starting-point of the cruel chase, to be there trampled down by her pursuers” (255, 256)? Like many animals, she lashes out when she is cornered, pushing George into the well and setting fire to the Castle Inn, and when there is no possibility of escape, she cries out with a “long, low, wailing cry” and throws “her arms above her head with a gesture of despair” (235).

<27>The actions Robert views as humane and merciful are in fact horrifying to Lady Audley. She spends her life afraid of madness, or her mother’s “horrible inheritance,” only to be locked in a madhouse (Braddon 334). She accuses Robert: “You have brought me to my grave...you have used your power basely and cruelly, and have brought me to a living grave” (333). She is not given the choice of a fair trial. Instead, Robert decides her fate of “life-long imprisonment” in a cage, which is consistent with his views on hunting—he has no “desire to be in at the death” (336, 33). It is easy to envision Lady Audley in the place of the unnamed woman they see as they approach the madhouse: “One of the windows was shrouded by a scanty curtain of faded red; and upon this curtain there went and came a dark shadow, the shadow of a woman in a fantastic head-dress, the shadow of a restless creature, who paced perpetually backwards and forwards before the window” (329). By the end of the novel, Lady Audley is clearly placed in the role of animal, but she is neither pet nor prey. She is neither privileged and protected like George and Clara nor pursued further through a trial. Perhaps, she is a trophy—placed in a cage to represent Robert’s dominion and skill as a hunter.

<28>Robert’s capacity for empathy and humaneness are evident in his treatment of both human and nonhuman animals under his authority, and according to Chez, this capacity defines the Victorian perception of a new kind of masculinity that governs through affective intimacy rather than violence and control. Yet, Robert leaves a captured, suffering Lady Audley in a cage to pace back and forth while awaiting her death. The thread of violence woven throughout the narrative makes us question the newness of “new” Victorian masculinity. Kathleen Kete wonders,

Pet keeping is a kindness toward only a few favored animals. The practice of pet keeping operates in a world where other animals are used for work and food....Is not pet keeping, then, another way to hide from ourselves the real violence between humans and animals beneath an image of sensibility, or even a means to deflect us from awareness of the violence between ourselves and others....” (15)

In this same vein, Robert’s humaneness in *Lady Audley* may be yet another way to hide the violence and privilege of masculinity beneath a façade of sympathetic connection with the animal. The idea of hidden character or identity here is especially chilling. Nobody in the narrative questions who Sir Harry or Sir Michael are—they are men in the traditional sense, as evidenced by their performances of gender throughout the text. Though nobody can assume what goes on behind closed doors, their dominance is on display for the world, leaving less room for the unpredictable. Robert’s dominance is not on display. It is subtly enacted through his choice of pet-keeping or violent pursuit, leaving me to question with Kete if a veneer of empathy and humaneness deflects us from awareness of his true violence and, in turn, if positive changes in nineteenth-century human/animal relationships can truly be evidence of positive changes in the ways humans treat other humans.

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