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STRANGER OF THE HOUSE: THE EVOLUTION OF SENSATION'S NEW MAN

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STRANGER OF THE HOUSE: THE EVOLUTION OF SENSATION'S NEW MAN

A Thesis
Presented to
the Graduate School of
Clemson University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
English

by
Laura Ashley Mogel
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Accepted by:
Dr. Kimberly Manganelli, Committee Chair
Dr. Cameron Bushnell
Dr. Erin Goss

ABSTRACT

While Elaine Showalter argues that the “crisis in masculinity“ occurs with the emergence of the New Woman and the fin de siècle, this thesis suggests that men, specifically here wealthy men, were in crisis long before these phenomena due to their dissolved understanding of their place and position amidst immense changes in Victorian England. An interrogation of 1860s sensation fiction, and specifically Wilkie Collins’s *Basil* and Mary Elizabeth Braddon’s *Lady Audley’s Secret*, suggests that men grappled with their position and masculinity prior to the fin de siècle as evidenced by the heroine-prescribed social deaths of Basil and George Talboys. After historical and legislative events of the 1850s—Crimean War, Indian Mutiny of 1857, and the Matrimonial Causes Act—men’s competency and position as empowered patriarchs was questioned, and thus New Men emerged, who are recognized for this thesis’s purposes as aristocratic men who fail to socially evolve amidst these changes and thus are ultimately rendered as socially dead, feminized figures who reside as dependents with their sisters. This transformation from patriarchal figures to ornaments who disappear within the domestic sphere ultimately suggests that these men become strangers effectively threatening British national identity.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my husband, Roman, for all of his love and support. Thank you for your unwavering faith in my ability to be both a student and a new mother, and your encouragement when at times these two roles seemed impossible to reconcile. You make all of this possible.

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STRANGER OF THE HOUSE: THE EVOLUTION OF SENSATION'S NEW MAN

They were not rebels but refugees fleeing in
the face of bewildering social evolutions.
*Fraser Harrison*¹

Although Charles Darwin's seminal text *The Origins of Species*, published in 1859, explored the biological evolution of animals and plants, his theory of natural selection proved to be socially apropos for the time in which he was writing. Recognizing this, Herbert Spencer developed his theory of Social Darwinism from which he claimed that the "rich and powerful were better adapted to the social and economic climate of the time."² Amidst tremendous historical and social change, which I will explore in greater detail later, Spencer published his work, *Principles in Biology* (1864), which propounded his vision and understanding of the survival of the fittest (a phrase he, not Darwin, coined) as a dominant quality of the wealthy. While his theory may have proved true for the majority of upper-class Victorian society, it is that small minority that did not survive which this paper is primarily concerned with. Despite all of the wealth and opportunity available, many aristocratic men felt lost in an ever-changing world and struggled to secure their place in it as agents of their own personhood. These men ultimately transform from masculine patriarchal figures into feminized dependents as evidenced by

¹ This statement, quoted by Elaine Showalter in *Sexual Anarchy* (171), refers to the English decadents as the most dramatic casualties of the crisis in masculinity. This sentiment, too, reflects Sensation's New Man as he endures exile as a means of escaping the bewildering evolutions around him. His exile confirms his position as a stranger who does not fit in to society, ultimately challenging British national identity.

² For an in-depth discussion of Herbert Spencer's theory of Social Darwinism see Mike Hawkins's *Social Darwinism in European and American Thought 1860-1945*.

Wilkie Collins's *Basil* and Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *George Talboys*, sensation fiction characters who succumb to social deaths which ultimately cause these men to lose their place within the patriarchy and renders them as ornamental figures as they disappear into the domestic sphere.³

Sensation fiction of the 1860s and 70s, such as Collins's *Basil* and Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret*, presented a unique perspective in which the horrors experienced in Gothic literature—betrayal, bigamy, murder, and imprisonment to name a few—occurred at home in England, instead of in foreign locales as early works of Gothic literature, such as *Romance of the Forest* and *The Monk*. This focus on realism, as opposed to the supernatural inherent in Gothic works, alerted readers to the possibility and consequences of crime, death, and the always-present secrets that most often fractured families and ultimately affected identity. As Winifred Hughes suggests, sensation novels provide an alternative vision, which struck at the roots of Victorian anxieties: “It is sensationalism that disrupts this comfortable outlook; in mingling elements of both realism and idealism, the sensation novelists create something that belong to neither” (52). This statement implies a liminality experienced by both the characters and the readers of sensation fiction who reside in an in-between state in which they are forced to question what is real and what is constructed. This specific genre and the literary environments it created provided a space for characters to explore and acknowledge the changing atmosphere

³ For an historical example, see Algernon Charles Swinburne, lyric poet, who was born into an aristocratic family. Despite wealth and success, Swinburne suffered tremendously manifesting itself into alcoholism; oftentimes, until his forties, Swinburne was cared for by his parents before his agent, Theodore Watts-Dunton, intervened in 1879 and maintained guardianship over Swinburne for the remainder of his life. Although he continued to write, most critics agree that his poetry after his cohabitation with Watts-Dunton is inferior to his previous work. For more, see *The Life of Algernon Charles Swinburne* by Edmund Gosse.

inherent in Britain's political, legislative, and social evolution. Since many stories were appropriated from the newspaper headlines, sensation fiction's engagement with the issues of the day created a genre, that while recognized as low-brow and immoral, actually became social commentary on the immense transformation England was undergoing.⁴ For this paper's purposes, I will explore the interaction between the sensation genre, history, and masculine identity to better understand the changes in gender relations and the evolution of the position of wealthy men during this time.

To understand the complications and consequences of the fallen man, social death, and the New Man, I would like to take a moment to conceptualize these terms. The fallen man offers a way in which to recognize the position of a man who has collapsed as a result of his incapacity to retain his power and purpose while in constellation with empowered women; consequently, this manifests in his unwillingness to participate within the patriarchy. While the fallen woman suggests a loss of innocence, a designation that is prescribed for her by society, the fallen man is a figure who retreats within himself after he recognizes his inability to maintain authority and agency. For this man, specifically here Basil and George, this newly-inhabited position is a foreign space in which their identities as participants within the patriarchy can no longer be salvaged. They are fallen because they are now merely fragments of the men they once were. This status as a fallen man is intertwined with their condition as socially dead figures.

⁴ Literary critic, H. L. Mansel, writes of sensation fiction: "The sensation novel, be it mere trash or something worse, is usually a tale of our own times" (Braddon 492). Additionally, Victorian critic, Margaret Oliphant, asserts: "It is painful to inquire where it is that all of those stories of bigamy and seduction come from [...] Writers who have no genius and little talent, make up for it by displaying their acquaintance with the accessories and surroundings of vice, with the means of seduction, and with what they set forth as the secret tendencies of the heart" (601).

Although social death has been used to describe the condition of slaves, Holocaust survivors, immigrants, and most often today, Alzheimer's patients, this precarious state also refers to a change in the identity of an individual and the ways in which it precludes one's position as an agent of action. This term is certainly meant to evoke an extreme condition, since we must recognize that although the middle class was rising in the 1850s and 60s, aristocratic men still maintained a great deal of power and influence. Basil and George's social deaths are a tremendous moment in which the natural order is questioned and in some way dismantled. For these men, their fall is not a fall from grace, but a fall from power and position, which for them, compromises their very identity and personhood.

Despite their position as socially dead fallen men, Basil and George are suggested here as Sensation's New Man because they are representative of the inevitable changes between the sexes. Their existence predates the emergence of the New Woman and suggests the evolution of gender relations to come. Through Basil and George we see men who are unable to both interact with strong women and maintain their own position and identity; if we look to literature just thirty-five years later, however, specifically to Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897), we see an aristocratic man who maintains his masculinity and agency while betrothed to an autonomous woman. Arthur Holmwood's engagement to Lucy Westenra confirms the evolutionary trajectory imparted by Basil and George, and as Charles Darwin's work suggests, it is through this process that beings ultimately evolve: "I may recall a remark formerly made, namely that it might require a long succession of ages to adapt an organism to some new and peculiar line of life; but that when this had

been affected, and a few species had thus acquired a great advantage over other organisms, a comparatively short time would be necessary to produce many divergent forms, which would be able to spread rapidly and widely through the world (271-272). Basil and George are unable to fully adapt to “some new and peculiar line of life”—that is, living in constellation with bold and empowered women—they can be recognized as nascent figures who unknowingly initiate the transformation in gender relations through their acceptance of this new woman’s presence. In their attempts to initially placate Margaret Sherwin and Lady Audley, both Basil and George demonstrate their capacity for this new woman’s existence despite their inability to coexist alongside of her. Ultimately, Basil and George function as the New Man in that they are the first generation who later regenerate into evolved and adapted men who succeed at interacting and living with the New Woman.

While masculine identity is the focus of this paper, a look at women, and specifically the emergence of the New Woman, is necessary to understand the origin and the consequences of the New Man as his existence predates and perhaps contributes to the New Woman’s presence. The New Man’s existence, a direct result of his interaction with sensation’s heroine, forces us to question the tremendous power and influence these women possessed. Often conniving and deceitful, bold and outspoken, these women proved to be nothing like the angels of the house Victorian society accepted and approved; instead, many of these women used their wits and assets however they needed to in order to secure their future fortune and desired social status. Sensation heroines ultimately were the harbingers of the New Woman, a recognized phenomenon of the

1880s and 90s in which women emerged from the domestic space into the public sphere, a moment that would enormously alter gender relations in Britain and abroad. Although the New Woman was a recognized figure by the 1880s, the ways in which she was portrayed and acknowledged presented dualistic interpretations:

The New Woman was by turns: a mannish amazon and a Womanly woman; she was oversexed, undersexed, or same sex identified; she was anti-maternal, or a racial supermother; she was male-identified, or manhating and/or man-eating or self-appointed saviour of benighted masculinity; she was anti-domestic or she sought to make domestic values prevail; she was radical, socialist or revolutionary, or she was reactionary and conservative; she was the agent of social and/or racial regeneration, or symptom and agent of decline. (Pykett xii)⁵

This New Woman, a contradiction from conception, embodied the anxieties of the patriarchy as they were forced to recognize women as more than fixtures within the home. As harbingers of the New Woman, such sensation characters as Margaret Sherwin and Lady Audley prove to be “man-eating” agents of social degeneration and decline, at least as recognized by Basil and George, as they propel these men to their social deaths in which both Basil and George ultimately themselves become the symbol of social decline. Not surprisingly, the anxieties concerning the New Woman extended beyond her ability to affect social change as evidenced by Henry Maudsley and Charles Harper’s articulation on the concern of her future offspring: “Nature, which never contemplated the production of a learned or a muscular woman, will be revenged upon her offspring,

⁵ For more on the New Woman and her interaction with sensation fiction, see Lyn Pykett’s *The ‘Improper’ Feminine: The Women’s Sensation Novel and the New Woman Writing*.

and the New Woman, if a mother at all, will be the mother of a New Man, as different, indeed, from the present race as possible” (Giorgio 488-489). Although they argue that the New Woman threatens the well-being of the British Empire in producing progeny raised by “overeducated” women, I contend that sensation fiction’s fallen aristocratic man who endures a social death already threatens the British Empire from his lack of participation and feminized inscription.

After the increased presence of women in the public sphere, men were forced to question who they were and where they belonged in a changing world that questioned their competency as evidenced by the Crimean War and 1857 Indian Uprising, and their position as empowered patriarchs after the Matrimonial Causes Act. Despite its reputation as low-brow literature, sensation fiction reacted to these changes—historically, politically, and socially— occurring in Britain at the time, and used these changes as fodder for reimagining gender relations. Unlike Gothic literature’s damsels in distress, as we will ultimately see in Agnes from Matthew Gregory Lewis’s *The Monk*, sensation fiction imagined a new heroine who provoked and challenged the heroes affecting her identity and agency. These changes ultimately prompted Wilkie Collins and Mary Elizabeth Braddon to engage with the previously unheard of notion of the fallen male, that is, the male who succumbs to a social death in which his agency and personhood is diminished. As Giorgio Agamben’s theory suggests, these men have been reduced to bare life, which is achieved once a space is created where those placed within it are stripped of

not only their political or social status, but also their sense of humanity.⁶ Although these men could participate politically or socially if they chose to, it is the trauma of losing their place in the world, of realizing they are weak against powerful women that renders them socially dead. This figure, suggested here as Sensation's New Man, becomes a feminized subject and is transformed into a stranger in his own land resulting in his exile, during which he is stripped of agency and personhood, culminating in his social death. Indeed, the eponymous character from Wilkie Collins's *Basil* and George Talboys from Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *Lady's Audley's Secret*, both experience social deaths at the hands of conniving and disingenuous women who break their spirits and challenge their masculinity as realized by temporary exile followed by permanent cohabitation with their sisters. Through their exile and eventual cohabitation resulting in (assumed) celibacy, neither Basil nor George participate in nation-building, the Empire, or patriarchal roles from the private sphere thus rendering them as feminine figures who reside in the domestic space as dependents without agency.

Male characters in Victorian literature have received far less attention than their female counterparts; most often, scholars explore female agency and the crucial moments in which heroines fight for their own voice and rights.⁷ Historian John Tosh investigates the changing roles of Victorian men in an ever-changing world and can be credited with reintroducing the term "New Man" in relation to these evolved males. In his essay "New

⁶ For more on Agamben's theories on biopolitics and identity see *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*.

⁷ See Susan Zlotnick's "From Involuntary Object to Voluntary Spy: Female Agency, Novels, and the Marketplace in *Northanger Abbey*" and Alison Case's "Tasting the Original Apple: Gender and the Struggle for Narrative Authority in *Dracula*" for example.

Men? The Bourgeois Cult of Home,” Tosh examines the diminished presence of men in the home, since after industrialization, middle-class men found their occupations in cities or towns instead of within their domestic space. In relation to other countries, however, Tosh suggests that the middle-class man invested “more heavily in domesticity [...] and their legacy is more perceptible even now in the phenomenon of the New Man, whose loyalties and energies are centred on the home (86). Tosh’s New Man, then, can be recognized as a family man involved in his home’s management. In *Manliness and Masculinities in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, Tosh cites John Stuart Mill as the ‘new man’—a new kind of male hero, one who would provide a role model for the anti-sexist man (16). Since John Stuart Mill never “wavered in his belief in the equal rights of women,” as evidenced by “The Subjection of Women,” he proved to be a paradigm of modern masculinity in his belief and support in women’s social evolution. It should be noted that Tosh’s focus centers around the middle class, while my look at the New Man focuses on men who are born into wealthy and prominent families, and despite Spencer’s assurance that they are fully prepared for the changing world, prove to be ill-equipped against empowered women who challenge their masculinity and thus their identity.

While Elaine Showalter has argued that the “crisis of masculinity” occurs with the emergence of the New Woman and the fin de siècle, as we will see, wealthy men were in crisis long before those phenomena due to their diminished understanding of their place amidst immense changes in Victorian England. Quoting Regenia Gagnier, Showalter recognizes the tremendous impact the shifting world had on the male populace: “Men, too, faced changes in their lives and sexual identities. In England, there was a crisis in the

1890s of the male on all levels—economic, political, social, psychological, as producer, as power, as lover [...] The crisis of masculinity marked an awakening consciousness of what it meant to be a man” (9). While this is certainly true, it is clear through sensation fiction that men grappled with their position and masculinity prior to the fin de siècle and struggled to understand their place and purpose. In the same way that sensation heroines are the harbingers of the New Woman, the New Man, as I have suggested, is the harbinger of the affected male often explored by scholars as a consequence of the New Woman’s emergence.

(Re)Writing Gothic Heroines: Agnes’s Evolution from Preserved Woman to Kept Woman

To better understand the impact of social death on societal and gender constructions and the ways in which they converge to ultimately reimagine gender relationships, an interrogation of Gothic fiction is necessary to understand the changing climate of gender roles within England during the end of the eighteenth century into the nineteenth century. To do this, I will explore the role of female social death in Matthew Gregory Lewis’s novel, *The Monk* (1796), often referred to as sensationalist gothic, with a focus on Agnes’s imprisonment, survival, and ultimate status as the angel of the house despite her moment of masculine agency. In the same ways that the historical, social, and political conditions in Britain affected sensation fiction, the French Revolution’s impact on Gothic fiction, and specifically here, *The Monk*, should not be ignored. Emmett Kennedy suggests that while “still moral in its message, *The Monk* offered a ‘parable’ of the French Revolution’s atrocity and violence” (Markman 81). While this statement

suggests a complete disruption of social and political norms that Lewis engages with to construct a narrative that humanizes and personalizes the experiences of those forced onto the periphery of society for one reason or another, regardless of these conditions, characters Raymond and Lorenzo preserve their authority as empowered males. Despite the effects of the French Revolution in unsettling class structures in France, and thus positions of power, many wealthy men abroad retained patriarchal power, and regardless of the revolutionary changes, gender relations failed to shift to any great degree. While Agnes proves to be a proto-New Woman, due to her time and place, she is ultimately relegated as a fixture of the house with limited agency and identity.

The roles of men and women in Gothic literature of the 1790s are often explored in binaries: women as good and powerless, men as potentially devious and powerful. The gothic heroine as a literary convention, therefore, is often imagined as virtuous as she navigates the terrors inherent in these works and seeks to ultimately marry as a symbol of social stability. While marriage is recognized as the ultimate and desired fate for women of this time, it should be noted that once married, these women existed as dependents of their husbands under the coverture laws present in England at this time. These laws provided no legal or political rights to women, so much so that even the children she bore lawfully belonged to her husband. This legal construction confirms the anxiety of the patriarchy to possess the female subject and maintain authority within the public sphere. Mary Wollstonecraft's "A Vindication of the Rights of Woman," published in 1792, initiates discourse on the treatment and role of women during her lifetime and suggests a reimagining of the feminine subject from ornament to human being. Wollstonecraft

asserts: “I wish to shew that elegance is inferior to virtue, that the first object of laudable ambition is to obtain a character as a human being, regardless of the distinction of sex” (172). In this way, Wollstonecraft wishes for women to transform from pseudo-children (as evidenced by the ways they dress, paint, and nickname God’s creatures) into rational and educated equals who can prove themselves worthy of respect from male society. This monumental document expressed discontent with the patriarchal system that sought to limit women’s rights and opportunities.

As a common gothic trope, imprisonment both denies female agency and provides a space in which female identity is explored through the captive heroine’s actions and reactions to her patriarchal-prescribed social death. Often, gothic female characters, such as Adeline from Ann Radcliffe’s *Romance of the Forest*, are imprisoned and saved by male characters: the first wicked and the latter chivalric; ultimately these men seek power over their feminine subject as they either imprison or protect. In Matthew Gregory Lewis’s *The Monk*, female identity and agency is explored through Agnes and Antonia, who are both relegated to literal prisoners who endure social death at the hands of their religious superiors. In this unique case, both a man and woman function as their wicked captors. These religious figures—the Prioress of St. Clare’s convent (who through her actions hopes to secure respect as a patriarchal figure), and Ambrosio, the abbot, represent the perils of Catholicism often present in gothic literature as they ultimately seek to imprison the female body as an emblem of total domination. Therefore, both Agnes and Antonia become anonymous objects in which imprisonment delegitimizes their social existence. Ultimately, Antonia’s social death leads to her physical death,

while Agnes survives imprisonment and is rewarded with marriage. Since it is Agnes who survives her imprisonment and social death, I will only focus on her experience since she proves to be an agent of her own destiny up until her marriage to Raymond. Despite the strength she exhibited to survive a monastic tyrant, Agnes ultimately succumbs to her husband's will and relinquishes her agency as a woman in control.

Once Agnes's plot to escape the convent and marry Raymond is discovered by her dropped letter, Ambrosio and the Prioress intervene to determine her fate. Agnes's punishment is handed over to the Prioress, and from this point forward, the Prioress represents a monastic tyrant as she develops and carries out Agnes's sentence. Despite agreeing with the other nuns that Agnes will be given poison to drink for her punishment, she in fact gives Agnes an opiate, and transfers her to a prison beneath the convent so that Agnes may forever live in a space of nonexistence. In retelling the Prioress's crimes, Mother St. Ursula describes Agnes's fate to all of those in attendance at the St. Clare parade: "This law decreed that the offender should be plunged into a private dungeon, expressly constituted to hide from the world for ever the victim of cruelty and tyrannic superstition. In this dreadful abode she was to lead a perpetual solitude, deprived of all society, and believed to be dead" (Lewis 298-299). This narrative represents the Prioress's desire to imprison Agnes physically, psychologically, and socially in an attempt to control Agnes and delimit her agency and existence through entombment. As Agnes drinks the goblet, of what she assumes is poison, she never once calls out for God's assistance, but instead promises to endure any punishment, shame, or torture if she is permitted to live. This moment confirms Agnes's agency as an autonomous woman who

is reliant on her own being for salvation. Agnes recognizes that God must not exist within the Prioress, who participates in deeds of terror against her, and thus she relies only on herself and her powers of persuasion to convince the Prioress that she need not be killed, but instead can exist under imprisonment and torture.

Upon waking to discover that she was given an opiate instead of poison, Agnes recognizes that to all she must be assumed dead. This social death is mitigated by Agnes's concern for her unborn child, for whom she promises to live. When the Prioress visits Agnes after she awakens, she declares:

All Madrid believes you to be no more; your relations are thoroughly persuaded of your death [...] Beneath these vaults there exist prisons, intended to receive such criminals as yourself: artfully is their entrance concealed, and she who enters them must resign all hopes of liberty. Chained down in one of these secret dungeons, shut out from the world and light for ever, with no comfort but religion, no society but repentance; thus must you groan away the remainder of your days.
(338-339)

In interpellating Agnes as a criminal, the Prioress positions herself as the dominant force controlling Agnes's existence. In stating that religion is Agnes's only comfort, the Prioress confirms her faith in God, and her mission, although Agnes disavows religion as a turn away from all that the Prioress and the convent represent. This resistance proves Agnes's autonomous nature, and through this process, she recognizes that she can only seek comfort in herself and her now stillborn child whose "presence was her only comfort" (342). Although Agnes remains on the periphery of Madrid society as a woman

who no longer exists, she retains her agency by distancing herself from the very God and religion that forces her to inhabit a social death within the convent walls.

For Agnes, the typical fallen woman narrative is rewritten, as she, a dishonored and shamed woman, is rewarded with marriage for all that she has endured. Although many scholars read Lewis's work as antifeminist, my reading confirms Agnes as an empowered female subject. On Agnes, Kari Winter suggests: "Agnes has been sexually indiscreet; therefore, the nuns entomb her alive. Like millions of people before and after him, Lewis suggests that the victim is to blame for her own suffering" (27). This statement, certainly a gross generalization, fails to acknowledge both Agnes's exhibition of agency in choosing to be sexually indiscreet with Raymond and her ability to remain an autonomous being while entombed. Agnes is ultimately granted masculine agency—that is, even after sinning, like a man, she is able to remain part of society despite her transgressions—and in this way, Lewis bestows his female heroine with a second chance at life. Instead of residing in a permanent social death, as narratives of this time would suggest for a woman like Agnes, she is freed and achieves liberty even greater than she had before she was forced into the convent. Ultimately, Agnes's fight for life is rewarded with marriage and the opportunity to tell her story.

In this novel, Lewis dismantles the traditional Gothic conventions in which the innocent and chaste survive. In *The Monk*, Antonia, the emblem of purity, dies a perilous death as she is used and dishonored despite her protests to man and God. We must recognize, also, that at the end of the novel it is Lucifer, and not God, who restores order. The Prioress and Ambrosio succumb to violent fates, while both Agnes/Raymond and

Virginia/Lorenzo are granted happy endings. This construction suggests a privileging of experience over innocence, and experience over evil. In surviving impropriety, Agnes remains true to her desires and she becomes a feminine subject who is granted masculine agency. In this way, Lewis challenges the conventions which inscribe fallen women as nothing, as ghosts of society, as beings who no longer exist. Agnes's survival of imprisonment and social death after sin, therefore, moves her from an anonymous object to a visible social subject, thus reimagining female identity. Agnes, as Lewis's *preserved woman* thus ushers in a modern paradigm of what it is to be feminine in a masculine patriarchal world as she traverses spaces of sin and nonexistence into spaces of autonomy and agency, emerging as a visible feminine subject worthy of life and liberty.

Although Agnes represents an early version of the New Woman, Raymond remains firmly in the patriarchy, since historically at this time, male supremacy was unquestioned. Upon learning about Agnes's supposed death, Raymond falls into a serious illness from which he is unlikely to recover. On his sick bed he is confined within the domestic space, a weak and broken version of his former self. Without Agnes he questions the value of his existence and believes death would be the best choice for him: "As for Raymond himself, he wished for nothing more earnestly than to join Agnes in the grave" (293). Raymond's happiness is predicated upon Agnes's existence, and without her, he falls ill. Once Raymond is alerted to Agnes's survival, he recovers quickly and they are soon reunited. Despite Agnes's status as a woman with masculine agency, she assures him of her fallible position, thus reasserting Raymond's patriarchal power over her. She tells him: "Still my conduct has been highly blameable; and while I attempt to justify myself, I

blush at recollecting my imprudence [...] Raymond, you shall have no cause to repent our union, and that, the more culpable have been the errors of your mistress, the more exemplary shall be the conduct of your wife” (345). Lewis’s preserved woman ultimately becomes Raymond’s kept woman as Agnes becomes the angel of the house when they relocate to Raymond’s castle in Andalusia in which he is master. Lorenzo, Agnes’s brother, also accompanies them and he resides in their home, although he eventually marries Virginia, thus confirming his and Raymond’s positions as patriarchal figures.

From Gothic Literature to Sensation Fiction: History and its Impact on Genre

Although Gothic fiction of the 1790s was most often written by English writers, the characters and plots focused on foreign locales as a means to displace the horrors that characters experienced. As of the 1850s and 60s, however, with the emergence of the sensation genre, these moments of terror took residence in England as a trend towards realism, and functioned as commentary on the profound changes at home that both men and women experienced as a result of Britain’s social and political evolution. Most notably, attitudes at home and in the press illustrated the growing dissatisfaction with men of power abroad to secure British victory and thus perpetuate a strong British national identity. Consequently, the changing role of men within British society from the late eighteenth century to the mid-nineteenth century can be traced to a number of historical moments in which tension between the domestic and the foreign exist. First, the reception of soldiers during the Crimean War initiated negative public discourse

concerning the British public's confidence in their soldiers' abilities to secure victory. This dissatisfaction contributed to debates in Parliament concerning England's role abroad; this tension between legislators and soldiers ultimately raised questions about the competency of the men fighting in foreign territory. In fact, at home in Britain, the hero of the Crimean War turned out to be a heroine in the form of do-gooder nurse, Florence Nightingale. Unlike the men fighting on the front, Nightingale and her fellow nurses achieved respect and admiration from the British public.

Shortly after the conclusion of the Crimean War, Britain again was involved in a foreign dispute, this time in India, in the form of the Indian Mutiny of 1857. At home, press reports of these conflicts criticized the East India Company and its officers for their mishandling of the situation, and the subsequent fractured relations between Britains and Indians. Reacting against rifles that were rumored to be greased, and thus contaminated, with cow and pig fat, the Bengal Army retaliated against the British, culminating in a massacre of British men, women, and children.⁸ This moment suggests not just a military mutiny, but also a race war in which mutineers made it clear that they would rather live under Mughal rule than under British imperialism. Ultimately, this conflict contributed to the denigration of public opinion concerning empowered males and their ability to protect and preserve British national identity.

These conflicts abroad forced British men to question their roles as patriarchs and progenitors of both foreign and domestic power. Ultimately, these struggles suggest a weakening of British national identity, which traversed oceans and land to take up

⁸ For more detail on the Indian Mutiny of 1857, its causes and effect, see Kim Wagner's *The Great Fear of 1857: Rumours, Conspiracies and the Making of the Indian Uprising*.

residence at home in Britain, reminding men of their failures. Not only were men challenged abroad, but with the Matrimonial Causes Act of 1857, their sovereign power was challenged at home, as well. Recognizing the blow men received abroad and at home, Lillian Nayder suggests that men's identity and secure social place began to crumble seemingly at once: "While 1857 was the year of the Indian Mutiny, it was also the year in which the Divorce and Matrimonial Causes Act was passed by Parliament, creating a civil divorce court in England, and altering the law in such a way that divorce was no longer solely a male prerogative. The Act also stipulated that wives legally separated from their husbands were entitled to the same property rights as single women. Thus at the same time in which imperial rule was threatened in India, the sanctity of the marriage bond and its patriarchal privileges were challenged at home" (33). In this way, natives abroad and women at home were seen simultaneously as a threat to Britain's long-held patriarchal system inciting rebellion in most men except a select few. Thus, all of these changes in the 1850s suggest the shifting nature concerning the interaction between men and women as male power is questioned during the Crimean War and Indian Uprising, and mitigated through the law as evidenced by the Matrimonial Causes Act. It is only natural, then, that for some, male agency would be compromised and ultimately dismantled.

Since much of sensation fiction's plots were appropriated from the newspaper headlines, it is only natural that sensation novelists would engage with the decreasing position of male power either directly or indirectly. In sensation novels a new type of man, the New Man, is revealed as a lost figure without a place to call his own, who

ultimately finds refuge with his sister as a ghost to society. This condition is prescribed for him by sensation heroines, Collins's Margaret Sherwin and Braddon's Lucy Audley, as we will see, who in appearance represent the angel of the house, but in actuality embody the villainess as they emerge as powerful and devious women who are the dominant force behind both their own and their male partner's downfall. It is these horrors (bigamy, attempted murder, adultery) that shocked readers for taking place within a seemingly "proper, bourgeois, domestic setting" (Brantlinger 1). Ultimately, this literary environment provided the space to question men and women's roles and reenvision an alternative narrative to the fallen female as previously seen in Gothic novels.

Basil and Beyond: Sensation's New Man as Exilic Alien

Although Wilkie Collins's *Woman in White* (1859) is typically heralded as the beginning of Sensation fiction, Collins's *Basil* (1852) is certainly included in the genre as this novel explores the secret and unconsummated marriage between Basil, the second son from a wealthy and prominent family, and Margaret Sherwin, a common man's daughter. Their union, riddled with betrayal from the beginning, ends badly when Basil discovers that his wife has been unfaithful; ultimately, he loses her, and consequently, his former life, once the truth is revealed. In his dedication, Collins recognizes that "On its appearance, it [*Basil*] was condemned off-hand, by a certain class of readers, as an outrage of their sense of propriety" (*Basil* xliii). This reaction is one Collins and Braddon would experience repeatedly as their works were often considered immoral and low-

brow. Despite the criticism surrounding the genre, readers, mostly women, immersed themselves in the texts and were surprised to discover a new interpretation and suggestion of woman's power. This reading experience intimated the fall of man, which was a new experience for women who most often read of the perilous danger a female encountered only to be rescued by a chivalric hero.

Basil's story captures his transformation from agent to patient as he navigates his place in society and attempts to reconcile the alienation he feels as he straddles class divisions.⁹ Basil's fatal story begins with a chance encounter on an omnibus in London. After seeing a beautiful woman he is immediately struck by her: "I felt her influence on me directly—an influence that I cannot describe—an influence which I had never experienced in my life before" (Collins 29). After learning that he is infatuated with the daughter of a linen draper, Basil questions whether he still loves her despite this knowledge, and decides that he does: "Prudence, duty, memories and prejudices of home, were all absorbed and forgotten in love—love that I encouraged, that I dwelt over in the first reckless luxury of a new sensation" (38). Basil's obsession with Margaret results in his visiting her home and speaking with her father, declaring to him, Mr. Sherwin, his desire to marry Margaret with the stipulation that it must be kept secret due to his fear of his father's reaction: "My father, on whom I am dependent as the younger son, has very strong prejudices—convictions I ought to call them—on the subject of social inequalities [...] Therefore, we must keep the courtship and marriage a secret" (67-68). Basil's first word choice, prejudices, confirms the inexorable fear that he possesses toward his

⁹ Patient here refers to a lack of agency in which both Basil and George are static figures; the rhetoric of patienthood certainly applies as well since both men suffer as dependents within their sisters' homes.

intolerant father; despite this, Basil still chooses to marry Margaret, and while he does not view this as an act of betrayal against his blood line and family lineage, this act certainly forces him to negotiate who he was with who he will become.

In fear that Margaret's reputation will be ruined if Basil's father discovers their secret engagement and marriage, Mr. Sherwin proposes his own stipulation:

You should marry my daughter—privately marry her—in a week's time.

Supposing, then you marry her in this way, I make one stipulation. I require you to give me your word of honour to leave her at the church door; and for the space of one year never to attempt to see her, except in the presence of a third party. At the end of that time, I will engage to give her to you, as your wife in fact, as well as in name. (81-82)

This marriage, contracted in secret, proves to be Basil's downfall: "Up to the time of my marriage, I have appeared as an active agent in the different events I have prescribed. After that period, and—with one or two exceptional cases—throughout the whole year of my probation, my position changed with the change in my life, and became a passive one" (101). Basil's transformation from agent to patient occurs as he waits an entire year to claim his wife, which he agrees to as a gentleman, but it is this very agreement that prompts his bride to dismiss his masculinity and ultimately dooms their relationship from the start. Collin's construction of this secret marriage and year of probation forces us to question Basil's character as he marries but agrees to wait an entire year to consummate his union. In this way, their marriage is no union at all, but an agreement between men in which the commoner ultimately has the upper hand. From the beginning, Basil is

rendered impotent as he succumbs to both his own father's and Mr. Sherwin's desires. Unlike the La Mottes and the Marquis in *Romance of the Forest*, Raymond in *The Monk*, and Henry Tilney in *Northanger Abbey* who all remain the architects of their lives, Basil surrenders his future to fear, duty, and obligation; the moment he and Margaret are legally wed, despite its outward disobedience, actually marks the moment in which he transforms from agent to patient.¹⁰

Despite being legally married, Margaret is still “covered” by her father even though under the coverture laws of the day Basil would and should subsume Margaret's legal rights. Under Mr. Sherwin's proposition, he retains the rights of his daughter, and posits Basil as an ornamental figure who possesses none of the rights—physical or legal—a husband then had over his wife. This representation of marriage suggests Basil's impotency and failure to play an active role in his life, ultimately positing him as a feminine figure. In accepting his position, Basil situates himself as a voiceless being who allows others to dictate his life's terms for him. In hindsight, Basil recognizes that during this time his life became a “passive one”; however, it is during these moments of transit that he most represents a bride, an ornamental figure without the ability to do and say as he pleases. Basil's chaperoned presence in the Sherwin household is further complicated by Robert Mannion's arrival. Mr. Sherwin's assistant and right-hand man, Margaret's former tutor, and close family friend, Mannion is presented as a foil to Basil since he

¹⁰La Motte and the Marquis, characters from Radcliffe's *Romance of the Forest*, are typical Gothic villains as they imprison Adeline and wield their patriarchal power to maintain their position. Although La Motte ends up in a prison and the Marquis poisons himself, these men's fates are ultimately determined by their own choices and agency. *Northanger Abbey's* Henry Tilney, the novel's hero, remains firmly in control as he engages with Catherine and ultimately marries her despite his father's disapproval.

holds sway over Mr. Sherwin. Although Mannion remains silent about his history, he possesses a voice in a way that Basil does not—he guides Mr. Sherwin and thus has influence over their home. In a moment of intimacy, Mannion confides to Basil that he believes Mr. Sherwin’s year probation is too strict and suggests that he will talk to Mr. Sherwin to allow more time between the young lovers. This offer situates Mannion as Basil’s ally when his influence proves to provide Basil more time with Margaret under loosened supervision.

After his marriage, Basil’s life is fractured in two as he is forced to negotiate his identity as a wealthy second son and the secret husband of a commoner. Basil constantly lies to his father and sister, Clara, concerning his daily whereabouts, and his only exposure to Margaret is over books in the living room under the watch of her mother. Basil is ultimately relegated to a liminal space in which the position of his past and the arrangement of his present cannot collide or else he is doomed. Of course, the entire construction of his marriage is predicated on Margaret’s faithful participation. After visiting his father and sister at their country home, Basil returns to London and visits Margaret. He is immediately struck by a marked change in both her and Mannion. He ponders: “I left Margaret and Mr. Mannion well—I returned, and found them both ill. Surely this was something that had taken place in my absence, though they all said that nothing had happened” (147). Despite questioning their behavior, Basil fails to analyze or fully consider the possible reasons behind both Margaret and Mannion’s different attitudes. This dismissal suggests an innocence and gullibility of character, traits Basil

has been able to preserve due to his wealthy upbringing and lack of real-world experiences.

Within Basil's year probation he has transformed from an active participant in his life to a passive one, ultimately culminating into a figure gone mad. When Basil visits Margaret on the final night of his probation and discovers that she is at her aunt's party, accompanied by Mannion, he sets out to join them, but upon his arrival he witnesses Mannion and Margaret entering a cab together. Believing they are going home to the Sherwin residence, Basil follows them, but soon realizes he is mistaken. He observes:

Margaret and Mannion hastily left the cab, and without looking either to the right or the left, hurried down the street. They stopped at the ninth house. I followed just in time to hear the door closed on them, and to count the number of doors intervening between them and the Square. The awful thrill of suspicion which I hardly knew yet for what it really was, began to creep over me—to creep like a dead-cold touch crawling through and through me to the heart. I looked up at the house. It was an hotel—a neglected, deserted, dreary-looking building. I listened; and through the thin partition, I heard voices—*her* voice, and *his* voice. *I heard and I knew*—knew my degradation in all its infamy, knew my wrongs in all their nameless horror. He was exulting in the patience and secrecy which had brought success to the foul plot, foully hidden for months and months; foully hidden until the very day I was to have claimed as my wife, a wretch as guilty as himself! (159-160)

In this moment, Basil's small and protected world opens up to all of the horrors and ugliness that he had been shielded from. The realization of truth creeps over him like a "dead-cold touch" from which he never recovers. The shock of this moment causes Basil to remain partially dead and cold for the remainder of his life, like a vampire, who is neither fully alive nor dead. Additionally, the moment of hearing their voices—Margaret's and Mannion's—alerts Basil that his own voice has been silenced for far too long. For Basil, there is an important connection between being heard and knowing the truth as if to actively listen reveals all that was there all along. Without hesitation, then, Basil casts Margaret as fully accountable as Mannion for their deceit and it is this realization that ultimately crushes him and sends him into madness. After Mannion emerges from the hotel, Basil confronts him, and in a moment of clouded anguish, he beats Mannion with the intention to kill him.

The trauma of that night, of discovering the truth about Margaret and Mannion and their capacity for deceit, affects Basil indefinitely. He falls ill shortly after his encounter with Mannion and for many weeks he remains in a feverish state. One day, however, Basil recovers: "But though they gave up my life as lost, I was not to die. There came a time, at last, when the gnawing fever lost its hold; and I awoke faintly one morning to a new existence—to a life frail and helpless as the life of a new-born babe" (175). Unlike Raymond who falls ill upon learning of Agnes's supposed death, but fully recovers upon discovering that her life is intact, Basil never fully recuperates in body and soul. This feeling is further exacerbated upon revealing the truth of his secret marriage to his father. After his confession, Basil's fears are confirmed when his father denounces him as his

son: “I have no faith or hope in you more. I know you now, only as an enemy to me and to my house—it is mockery and hypocrisy to call you son. Now, Sir, we treat together as strangers” (203). In this moment, Basil is expelled from his home and forced to start life anew, disconnected and fragmented from the life he once knew and the man he once was. He is a stranger in his own home, and after residing temporarily in the impoverished district of London, he is a stranger in his own city as well. Basil muses: “As a stranger I had been driven from my home, and as a stranger I was resigned to live” (254). After losing his wife, this moment confirms Basil’s social death as he has lost his family, his home, his position, and his name. Socially, Basil is an outcast, a ghost on the periphery of society who upon the suggestion of Clara and his brother, Ralph, leaves London and moves to Cornwall. This exile confirms Basil’s status as socially dead as he is first denied by his father, and then, upon moving to Cornwall, by the Cornish themselves: “The Cornish felt half inclined to identify me with these mysterious visitors—to consider me as some being, a stranger to the whole human family, who had come to waste away under a curse, and die ominously and secretly among them” (313). The rhetoric here again suggests a half-dead being that Basil has been altered into. Despite remaining in England, Basil’s strangeness follows him in transit ultimately transforming him into an alien to be questioned and feared.

Basil’s tenuous position as a resident of Cornwall suggests his inability to comfortably belong anywhere since he has failed to imbed himself within the community. After his experience with Margaret and his exile from home, Basil is reduced to a quasi-man, since physiologically he remains a man, but socially he fails to fulfill the social

requirements of his gender. Basil subsequently fails to demonstrate any active role in his life after Mannion follows him to Cornwall and confronts him, and instead of finishing what he started, Basil runs away. We see a disfigured and nearly unrecognizable Mannion, created from Basil's hands at the moment when reality and madness intersected, who has returned with the hope of revenge against Basil. As both men walk along the precipice of the Cornish cliffs we are reminded of Victor Frankenstein and his monster, crossing the snowy white abyss of the Arctic. Basil and Mannion, his deformed creation, chase one another and this barren space provides refuge for the "monster" to exist in constellation with Basil, the two bodies crossing into unknown territory also suggest what Katarzyna Marciniak refers to as "trespassing bodies"—those who ultimately reside in a place of liminality in which their disorientation and unfamiliarity marks their otherness.¹¹ Despite the refuge and solitude of the Cornish cliffs, this space circumscribes both Basil and Mannion as an alien presence since their trespassing confirms them as strangers in this space both marked domestic and foreign. And although Basil has a momentary desire to truly kill Mannion, he stops himself from reaching for Mannion's throat and instead flees. In disgust, Mannion shakes his fist at Basil and loses his balance; he falls into the cliffs with only a splash of water to suggest that he was ever there at all. Basil passes on the chance to seek revenge and finish the job he started many

¹¹ See Marciniak's *Alienhood: Citizenship, Exile, and the Logic of Difference* for further discussion on the ideological construction of aliens and the ways in which they are interrogated and interacted with.

months ago, confirming his lack of masculine agency which would encourage such a duel after Mannion's affair with his wife.¹²

The encounter with Mannion leaves Basil shaken as he again struggles to find his place in the world. He becomes ill and word is sent home to Clara and Ralph who rescue him. Although he makes up with his father and is welcome in the family home again, Basil remains a shell of the man he once was:

For the last five months I have lived here with Clara—here, on the little estate which was once her mother's, which is now hers [...] The years of retirement which I spent at the Hall, after my recovery, have not awakened in me a single longing to return to the busy world [...] I am still resolved to live on in obscurity, in retirement, in peace. I have suffered too much; I have been wounded too sadly, to range myself with the heroes of Ambition, and fight my way upwards from the ranks [...] To live more and more worthy, with every day, of the sisterly love which, never tiring, never changing, watches over me in this last retreat, this dearest home—these are the purposes, the only purposes left, which I still cherish.
(341-342)

In residing with his sister at her estate, Basil ultimately confines himself within the domestic space, as a feminized subject, and relinquishes any patriarchal power he could have assumed. Unlike Lewis's Lorenzo, who marries while living with Agnes and her husband, Raymond, Basil is content to remain single and takes pleasure in Clara

¹² Speaking of his wife, after visiting Mannion in the hospital, Margaret contracts typhoid and dies a sad death. Despite her treatment towards Basil, he visits her on her deathbed and she mocks him for his gentleman behavior telling him that he deserved their affair since he wasn't man enough to act like a real husband.

watching over him. Basil's resignation from society confirms his social death and his status as a New Man; this existence further exacerbates his strangeness as a male figure of means who fails to contribute to the patriarchy. As Sara Ahmed suggests strangers are suspicious because "they have no purpose; that is, they have no legitimate function within the space which could justify their existence or intrusion" (31). Thus, as she explains, the proximity of strangers within the nation space is a mechanism for the demarcation of the national body and a way of defining borders within it.¹³ Ultimately, then, Basil functions as a fallen male who despite wealth and opportunity fails to emerge beyond the domestic space, and instead resides as an alien presence threatening English national identity through his lack of purpose and participation.

Echoing Collins's construction of a feminized and fallen man is Mary Elizabeth Braddon's anti-hero George Talboys in *Lady Audley's Secret*. Like Basil, George is also forced to endure a social death when he is lied to by his wife, Helen Talboys turned Lucy Audley, and is forced into exile at her hands. Perhaps even more so than her predecessor, Braddon drastically reimagines gender roles as her heroine, Lady Audley, possesses the capacity and ability to disrupt traditional social roles: more so than Margaret Sherwin, Lady Audley represents a woman trying to exist under the patriarchal social conventions that determine a woman's fate at this time.¹⁴ To preserve her hard-earned life, Lady Audley "murders" George Talboys, and despite his bodily survival, she compels him into

¹³ For more on the interaction between strangers and the community/nation see Sara Ahmed's *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality*.

¹⁴ Helen Talboys fakes her own death, after George is denounced by his father and sets sail to make his fortune in Australia. Not content with her poor reality, she "kills" herself and finds work as a tutor before she weds Lord Audley and transforms herself from a poor girl into the lady of an estate.

a space of nonexistence as realized through his social death. By ultimately residing with Robert and Clara, his sister, George becomes a figure that socially ceases to exist as he is reduced to a stranger within their home, socially alienated and alone.

Upon George Talboys's marriage to Helen Maldon, George's father disinherits him for marrying beneath his class. Similar to Basil's experience with his father, Mr. Talboys circumscribes George into a social death, however, unlike Basil, it is this death which has little effect on his son's life. Harcourt Talboys tells Robert: "My son did me an unpardonable wrong by marrying the daughter of a drunken pauper. And from that hour, I no longer had a son. I wish him no ill. He is simply dead to me" (Braddon 184-185). This disinheritance is reminiscent of the Jewish practice of *Kaddish*, in which, as John Edgar Wideman explains in *My Brother's Keeper*, a father declares his child, who has committed an unforgivable crime, dead. He further explains: "The child becomes a nonperson, cut off absolutely from all contact, a shadow the father will not acknowledge, a ghost referred to in the past tense as who he once was" (187). Despite his father's renouncement of him, George enjoys the first year of his marriage with Helen, tours the continent, has a child, and after experiencing the bitter position of poverty, he leaves for Australia to make his fortune. These actions confirm George's ambivalence towards his father's condemnation as he maintains his agency and seeks fortune for himself and his family.

Upon returning to England from Australia, George serendipitously runs into his old friend, Robert Audley, and together they depart for the coffeehouse where George hopes a letter from his wife will be waiting. Instead, George discovers Helen's obituary in the

Times and must reconcile his dreams for their future with the reality of his widowed existence. Despite the tragedy, George is reunited with his son when he visits his father-in-law, and although this should be a moment of overwhelming love for a son he has not seen since he was an infant, instead, recognizing Georgey's fondness for his grandfather, George immediately dictates the terms of his son's education and determines the amount of money needed to sustain his life. George, who intends to return to Australia, also appoints Robert Audley as Georgey's guardian who protests the role and suggests that George himself would be better suited to care for his child: "I think for his own sake he'd much better stay in England and look after his son" (Braddon 48). George's behavior illustrates the heaviness of his grief which consequently causes him to neglect his child.

A year after his wife's death, George looks the same but recognizes changes within. He parallels his feelings with that of wounded British soldiers: "When some of our fellows were wounded in India, they came home bringing bullets inside them. They did not talk of them, and they were stout and hearty, and looked as well, perhaps, as you or I; but every change in the weather, however slight, every variation of the atmosphere, however trifling, brought back the old agony of their wounds as sharp as ever they had felt it on the battle-field. I've had my wound, Bob; I carry the bullet still, and I shall carry it into my coffin" (52). In creating a metaphor linking wounded British soldiers with himself, George recognizes and articulates the pain he, and the soldiers, feel as they both return to their homeland and find themselves injured beings who are forever affected by their physical and emotional damages. This rhetoric reminds us also of George's position as an outsider since upon his return to England his identity is dismantled and he, neither

invested in himself or England, fails to participate in the patriarchy as someone in his position would during this time. Additionally, George's inability to cultivate favor with his son, despite the sweets and toys he presents to Georgey, further inscribes George as a stranger who has no home or family.

George's precarious position as a man of social status without purpose is fully realized upon meeting Lady Audley, who we suspect, and later confirm, is actually George's wife Helen. Recognizing this, George leaves Robert by the pond and calls on Audley Court in what we assume is to interrogate his wife who he believes to be dead. It is only after his confrontation with Lady Audley, when she pushes him into the well, that his resistance to social death falters and he accepts his fate as dictated by his former wife.¹⁵ After Luke, Lucy's housemaid's husband, discovers George in the well, he brings him home, and later, tells Robert that George had "to be cared for like a baby, and dressed and dried, and washed, and fed with spoonfuls of brandy that had to be forced between his locked teeth, before any life could be got into him" (411). After the trauma of first losing his wife, then discovering her existence as another woman, George is physically and emotionally a broken man as he collapses into a helpless condition. Luke tells Robert of the state he found George in and how he feared to be seen: "I want to get away from this place without bein' seen by any livin' creetur, remember that. I've been lyin' here since four o'clock to-day, and I'm half dead, but I want to get away without bein' seen" (415).

¹⁵ Lillian Nayder's article "Rebellious Sepoys and Bigamous Wives: The Indian Mutiny and Marriage Law Reform in *Lady Audley's Secret*," referenced earlier, presents the image of the well as a symbol of Indian cruelty and barbarism since English men, women, and children who were killed, raped, and mutilated by the Indians during the Rebellion of 1857 were subsequently discarded in the well, similar to how Lady Audley disposes of George.

George's state as a broken man, literally and emotionally, confirms Lady Audley's power over him; despite her small stature she was able to physically push George into the well, positing her as the agent of his fate. Ultimately, Lady Audley transformed a strong, virile man into a helpless and weak being whose only goal is to become a stranger to everyone, including himself. This moment marks Lady Audley's triumph as she is the architect behind George's collapse as a patriarchal figure and a man of agency.

Robert, whose behaviors change dramatically once he realizes his friend is missing, devotes his life to solving George's disappearance. In search of the truth, Robert visits with Luke who shares letters written by George to himself and Lucy. In a letter to Robert George writes: "I can only tell you that something has happened which will drive me from England, a broken-hearted man, to seek some corner of the earth in which I may live and die unknown and forgotten (412). In a subsequent letter to Lucy he assures her: "Rest in peace. You shall never hear of me again; to you and to the world, I shall henceforth be that which you wished me to be to-day. You need fear no molestation from me" (413). In these letters, George acknowledges his lack of agency against Lady Audley, and he leaves England alienated from the life he created for himself. His status as a stranger is fully realized as he once again disappears to a foreign country and isolates himself as an anonymous figure. Ultimately, this moment of exile confirms Lady Audley's ability to sentence George to an absolute social death, unlike that which George's father attempted.

It is ultimately George's return to England and most notably his living arrangement, residing with Robert and Clara, that fully confirms his social death as he is stagnant,

unmarried, and therefore without a social position. Although George's son resides in the same space as his father, it is Robert and Clara who raise him, alongside their own baby: "He is very happy with his uncle Robert, his aunt Clara, and the pretty baby who has just begun to toddle" (435). As Tosh suggests it is the creation of a home that represents the emblem of masculinity: "In most societies that we know of, setting up a new household is the essential qualification of manhood. The man who speaks for familial dependants and who can transmit his name and his assets to future generations is fully masculine" (36). With no home or family to call his own, George is transformed into a feminized figure and despite the narrator's half-hearted attempt to remain optimistic about George's future—"He is a young man yet, remember, and it is not quite impossible that he may by-and-by find some one who will be able to console him for the past. There may come a time in which the shadow my lady's wickedness has cast upon the young man's life, will utterly vanish away" (Collins 436)—it appears as if George, nearly absent in the final chapter, represents a ghostly presence living with his married sister in Teddington, has relinquished any other fate, since his heartbreak over Helen and her socially fatal blow to him as a man of social existence or position has led George to transform into a New Man and merely exist as a patient without agency. Ultimately, George becomes a ward of Robert and Clara, and like Basil, a dependent, who seeks asylum with family, forfeiting individual status and identity.

As John Tosh suggests the New Man is the anti-sexist man, although sensation fiction would suggest that for the wealthy man, there were borders, both physical and metaphorical, that needed to be crossed before the wealthy New Man could be heralded

and celebrated for such behavior. As these novels, as well as Tosh's own historical research suggests, it was the middle class who benefited from social change far before the wealthy. Surprisingly, it is Robert Audley's transformation from a man of leisure to a man of purpose that most similarly resonates with Tosh's definition of the New Man. For instance, early on Robert is described as "a handsome, lazy, care-for-nothing fellow [...] who exhausted himself with the exertion of smoking his German pipe and reading French novels" (35). Robert begins the novel as a feminized figure who admits to his domestic preferences: "Why, man, I don't know a partridge from a pigeon. I never hit a bird in my life, but I have hurt my own shoulder with the weight of my gun. I only go down to Essex for the change of air, the good dinners, and the sign of my uncle's honest, handsome face" (53). Instead of hunting with the men, Robert reads his novels and smokes his pipe, in the company of women, ambivalent to the gender shift he participates in. It is only after he launches the investigation to find George Talboys that his life has purpose. This quest ultimately becomes Robert's moment of transformation as his investigation moves him from his feminized inscription within the domestic space into the public sphere as a respected masculine man.

After Robert discovers Lady Audley's complicity and guilt in George's disappearance he sends her to a sanatorium to spend the rest of her days. Afterwards, recognizing the vast changes in his character, Robert remarks: "How can I believe that it was I who used to lounge all day in this easy-chair reading Paul de Kock, and smoking mild Turkish [...] Heaven knows I have learnt the business of life since then" (393-394). After marrying Clara—who "lectures him on the purposeless life he had led for so long, and the little use

he had made of his talents and opportunities that had been given to him” (427)—Robert actively becomes a barrister, winning notoriety for a case, and moves to a middle-class suburb of London. Despite Clara’s harsh words, Robert values them and remarks how pleasant it is to humiliate himself before her, confirming his belief in woman’s right to speak her mind. Ultimately, Robert exiles himself from reading novels and smoking pipes in favor of work and family; this transformation suggests a shift in class identity, from upper to middle, and thus a move of survival in which he prospers with a wife, child, and home. Robert’s success, and thus survival, is a contrast to Basil and George’s existence in which they quietly reside with their sisters, and like the women Mary Wollstonecraft wrote of, they, too, become ornaments within the domestic space. This inscription suggests an arrested development, or social death, of which Basil and George do not survive and thus are relegated to patients without agency. Ultimately, then, Robert represents social Darwinism in action as he crosses class lines and succeeds at establishing himself as a “rising man” (435) who is rewarded with a happy home, moving him from the liminal space he previously occupied as a feminine subject into a masculine agent with an active and purposeful existence.¹⁶ Although Robert should have inherited Audley Court, his move to the suburbs confirms a break with his past and ultimately a rewriting of his history as he traverses the borders between the upper and middle classes

¹⁶ In “Poisonous Plots: Women Sensation Novelists and Murderesses of the Victorian Period,” Randa Helfield suggests of Robert Audley’s metamorphosis: “Braddon’s novel may be read as the story of his [Robert’s] transformation from a passive and rather effeminate reader of foreign fiction into an active writer in the detective genre, a transformation that makes him both man and hero [...] Robert becomes the author of his own destiny, instead of the helpless witness of other people’s plots” (181).

and saves himself from becoming another one of sensation's new men, evolving instead into England's modern man.

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