

Lady Audley's Secret Study Guide

Lady Audley's Secret by Mary Elizabeth Braddon

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Plot Summary

The book, *Lady Audley's Secret*, by Mary Elizabeth Braddon is a story written by a woman in Victorian England and published in 1861 - 1862, about a woman who has a huge secret. Lady Audley is living the life of absolute luxury, married to a very wealthy man more than twice her years which seems to be a small price to pay for her new position in life. Just a few short weeks before the opening of the novel, Lady Audley was Lucy Graham, governess to two girls in a neighboring house. Her accomplishments in music and art simply cannot hold a candle to her exquisite beauty and effervescent charm. As soon as Sir Michael Audley meets Lucy, he knows he is in love with her. His daughter, Alicia, is nearly the same age as Lucy, and yet that does not stop the man from proposing.

Having reached the status of Lady Audley, the woman will do whatever it takes to maintain her position. A surprise visit from her husband's nephew strikes a note of discord in her life, for he brings with him one George Talboys. George, having recently lost his wife, is in mourning and takes no notice of the enchanting mistress of Audley. However, the mistress of Audley takes great notice of George, as he is her first husband. She moved on with her life, believing that her husband deserted her and died in the gold fields of Australia. Just as she achieves a life of perfection, the husband she once loved and had a child by, now reappears. Lady Audley will not allow this minor ripple to change her life.

Working with intense thought and devious intent, Lady Audley works through the possible contingencies and manages to list herself as having died, having first found a woman who resembles her in age and appearance. Once that woman dies, she posts an ad in "The Times" of the death of one Helen Talboys, as she was once known. She leaves her son with her father, a drunken old man who only wants to know from where his next bottle will come. She makes the mistake of holding on to a couple of keepsakes that make her the target of extortion through her maid and eventually her maid's husband. In order to keep her secret, she must give them money time and again.

Through all this, Lady Audley keeps up the appearance of being the most charming creature of all God's creation; able to twist those she needs to around her finger. Her husband, Sir Michael, is the most susceptible to her charms, for he believes he has found a second youth in his young wife and will hear nothing to her discredit. Lady Audley even goes so far as to claim that her husband's nephew is mad with the grief at his friend's disappearance in order to maintain her position as Lady Audley. What she does not consider is the determination of Robert Audley in avenging his friend's death. In order to keep his own sanity and to answer to his friend's sister, Robert continues to investigate the trail of one Lucy Graham and discovers that she is, indeed, Helen Talboys, wife to his dear friend, George.

Lady Audley stops at nothing. She sets fire to an inn so Robert will die in the fire and leave her in peace. Her plan does not come to fruition as Robert survives the fire and manages to save Luke Marks from immediate death in the conflagration. His testimony



on his deathbed gives Robert the last bit of information he needs in order to finally confront Lady Audley and force her to reveal her sordid story to her infatuated husband. After this confrontation, Sir Michael and his daughter leave England with instructions for Robert to do whatever is necessary to the woman he once believed to be his wife. Lady Audley spends the rest of her days in an insane asylum just as her mother had done, allowing Robert, Clara, Alicia, George, and Georgie to live their lives in peace and bliss.



Volume I, Chapters I - III

Volume I, Chapters I - III Summary

I - Lucy

Mary Elizabeth Braddon writes a story of intrigue, deceit, bigamy, and abandonment in *Lady Audley's Secret*. Lady Audley is not who she claims to be. Originally she was Helen Maldon, daughter of a perpetually drunken sea-captain and an insane mother. Seeking to better her position in life, she marries George Talboys, a young gentleman of means. What she never expected was for George to be disinherited by his father because he married Helen. George is confident they can make a life together, but with his father-in-law drinking all his income, and the addition of a baby boy, Georgie, life becomes very difficult for Helen and George Talboys. George leaves Helen and heads to Australia to seek his fortune in the gold fields there. It takes him three years to achieve this and by the time he returns to England, Helen is dead. George falls into a despondency that seems impossible to break. Fortunately for him, he meets his old friend Robert Audley who takes George under his wing and tries to divert his attention to other matters. A visit to Audley Court, where Robert's uncle Sir Michael lives with his daughter, Alicia, and new wife, Lady Audley, results in the disappearance of George Talboys. Robert spends the remainder of the story looking for his friend, convinced that George's disappearance is not an accident. Using deductive thinking and circumstantial investigative techniques, Robert uncovers the trail that Helen Talboys thought she had cleverly covered, for Helen Talboys is Lady Audley. The story is further complicated with Lady Audley's maid, Phoebe, and Phoebe's fiancé, Luke Marks extorting money from Lady Audley, when they discover her secret. Lady Audley's inherited insanity takes full hold when she pushes her first husband into a dry well, leaving him for dead and setting fire to Luke and Phoebe Marks' inn where Robert Audley is staying. Robert survives the fire and Lady Audley finally confesses all to her devastated second husband.

The author introduces the reader to the title character, Lady Audley, when she is known by all as Lucy Graham, governess to the Dawson family. Lucy's exquisite beauty and manner charms everyone in the village including the neighbor, an elderly, rich baronet, Sir Michael Audley. Sir Audley's enchantment of Lucy Graham allows him the fantasy of believing that such an exquisite creature might consider marrying him because he is the first to win her heart. It does not initially occur to him that his position and wealth could be reason enough for a positive response to his marriage proposal. Sir Michael's daughter, Alicia Audley, is just a little younger than Lucy. As a result, Sir Michael's daughter resents her father's new, young wife.

II - On Board the Argus

Braddon introduces George Talboys, a young man who marries the enchanting love of his life, Helen. His wife's beauty mirrors her lovely nature, but because she is of low birth, George's father disowns him, leaving the young couple destitute. After their son is



born, George realizes he must do something drastic to provide for his little family, while keeping his wife's father from spending what money they do make on drink. George leaves for the gold fields of Australia without telling Helen, hoping to make things up to her once he becomes rich. George is gone for there and a half years before he succeeds in getting rich. During that time he never writes to Helen. His sea voyage aboard the Argus finds George in fevered anticipation of being reunited with his wife. He expects to be able to pick up his life where he left off.

III - Hidden Relics

Phoebe, Lady Audley's maid, meets Luke, her cousin and fiancé, away from Audley Court. Phoebe has just returned from accompanying Lady Audley on a trip to the continent after the wedding. Phoebe reflects that Lady Audley herself had been nothing more than a servant only three months before. Phoebe's covetous admiration of Lady Audley's possessions haunts her. Being of the servant class himself, Luke only can think of the money Phoebe can now save for when they marry. He wishes to see first-hand inside of Audley Manor. Obtaining permission from the housekeeper to bring Luke through Audley Court, Phoebe takes Luke to Lady Audley's quarters. As Phoebe puts Lady Audley's dresses away, Luke admires the rich and luxurious furnishings. The pair find it very tempting to look in Lady Audley's jewelry box, believing that even one of the items would set them up for life. Inside the unlocked box, Phoebe discovers a hidden packet in which lie a baby slipper and a golden lock of baby hair. Immediately, Phoebe recognizes these to be of far greater value than any of the jewels in the box.

Volume I, Chapters I - III Analysis

Mary Elizabeth Braddon opens her sensational novel with the introduction of Lady Audley, formerly a servant in the Dawson's household. From the very beginning, Lady Audley hides a secret. Her true past is something of a mystery and then a baby slipper and lock of hair are discovered by her maid, well hidden among her things. Her maid, Phoebe, has a deep-seated jealousy of her lady, three months ago a servant. Despite the favor of being raised to the level of Lady's maid with greatly increased salary, Phoebe continues to look for her way out of servitude. If Lady Audley can do it, so, believes Phoebe, can she. The personality of the lady's maid seems insipid and insignificant at first, but a backbone of steel becomes apparent when Phoebe realizes that her lady has a secret. Phoebe's avarice is encouraged by her cousin and fiancé, Luke Marks, a big, coarse workingman. Back near London, the Argus, bound from Australia, carries an adventurer, George Talboys, who has made his fortune in the gold fields of the colony. He boasts of his eagerness to share his success with the wife and child he left behind three and a half years ago. Admitting his fault in not communicating with his wife the entire time he was gone foreshadows a less than perfect homecoming for the man. So far there is a woman, Lady Audley, who has a secret about a baby and a man, George Talboys, who left a wife and child behind. The plot is begun and thickened with the lady's maid, Phoebe, looking for a way out of her life of servitude.



Volume I, Chapters IV - VI

Volume I, Chapters IV - VI Summary

IV - The First Page of the "Times"

Braddon uses each of the beginning chapters to introduce a new character, this time it is Sir Michael Audley's nephew, Robert Audley. Robert's desire to move through life as easily and effortlessly as possible becomes his dominating characteristic. His personality makes him pleasant company, but he obviously prefers to avoid strife. By coincidence, he runs into his old friend, George Talboys, who tells him the tale of his adventures in Australia and his overwhelming need to contact his wife, Helen. Robert accompanies George to the coffee house where George expects to find a letter from Helen detailing her whereabouts. There is no letter. Worse, the newspaper, "The Times" lists an obituary for Helen Talboys, age twenty-two. George's wife has died while George was in Australia.

V - The Headstone at Ventnor

Because of the notice in the paper, George insists on traveling to the Isle of Wight, Ventnor, to visit his wife's grave. Robert decides to accompany his grief-stricken friend. At Ventnor, they inquire about Helen's father, Captain Maldon and George's young son, Georgie, and are directed to his lodgings; but the Captain and his grandson are not there. The landlady invites the Robert and George to wait inside for Mr. Maldon and the boy. She also answers questions about Helen's last days before she died. George's grief only intensifies at the graveside. As an honor to his wife, he orders a headstone to be made for her grave.

VI - Anywhere, Anywhere Out of the World

Tired of waiting, Robert and George go out in search of the Captain, finally meeting up with George's father-in-law on the beach. The old captain's composure slips when he recognizes George. The Captain seems too agreeable to having George return to Australia and leaving Georgie with his grandfather. Because he is not as emotionally burdened as George, Robert notices this eagerness and remarks on it, but George's grief consumes him entirely. Having made his decision, George appoints Robert to be the guardian of his son, Georgie, but leaves the boy with his grandfather, Captain Maldon. Finding that he has missed the boat to Australia, George apathetically accompanies Robert on a trip to St. Petersburg, Russia and the rest of the European continent, a trip that will last nearly a year.

Volume I, Chapters IV - VI Analysis

A chance meeting between George Talboys and Robert Audley connects the two men for this portion of the story. George, at first jubilant, is thrown into a deep depression



upon receiving word of his wife's death. Robert Audley, up to this point, is very happy-go-lucky, and essentially a lazy man. He now becomes drawn into his friend's personal crisis and finds it within himself to render emotional support to George. From that initial meeting, Robert and George join forces. For George, the news of his wife's death affects him very badly as he falls into a dead faint that takes hours of time and a physician's care to resolve. While Robert prefers the path of least resistance, his basically good nature emerges as he helps George through this crisis.

A trip to the Isle of Wight confirms the news of Helen's death, yet the astute reader will notice some peculiar discrepancies in everyone's stories. George remembers his wife's hair as being wavy, yet the lock the landlady claims to have clipped from her head as she lay in the coffin is straight. George's father-in-law appears shocked to see him, almost as if he were some sort of ghost. When George determines to provide for his son, Georgie, then return to Australia, his father-in-law actually encourages this course of action rather than attempting to dissuade him. The average person would believe that a father's place is with his son, especially a man who is elderly and without much money. Lastly, when George inquires about the financial affairs of his late wife, he is slightly puzzled to hear that the lad wanted for nothing and that the captain always had some money with him. Before, the captain drank every penny in the household. All evidence points to a puzzle.



Volume I, Chapters VII - VII

Volume I, Chapters VII - VII Summary

VII - After a Year

A year has passed since the death of George's wife and while George appears to be recovered physically, emotionally he is still bereft. Robert wrangles an invitation from his uncle, Sir Michael, to visit Audley Court; hoping another change of scene might lift George's spirits. To Robert's surprise, a letter from his cousin, Alicia, indicates that Lady Audley feels too ill to have house guests at this time and rescinds the invitation. Undaunted, Robert arranges for them to still go to Audley, but to take up lodgings in the Sun Inn in the village. In this way he can continue to divert George's attention without encroaching on Sir Michael's hospitality or worsening Lady Audley's condition. When Robert chances upon his uncle's carriage, he meets his new aunt, who is not as ill as reported, and instantly her beauty and manner enchant him. Lady Audley, herself, prevents an introduction to George Talboys, claiming fatigue. Robert and George are invited to Audley Court for dinner the following evening, but that invitation, too, is rescinded, as Lady Audley has been called to the side of a sick friend in West Brompton and dinner is canceled.

VIII - Before the Storm

Robert and George intend to return to London the very next day; however, Robert suffers a terrible headache the following morning, which prevents their return. Lady Audley specifically asks Alicia to inform her when Robert and George intend to return to London, but the information is wrong due to Robert's indisposition. Due to their extended stay, Robert determines that he will show George Audley Court before they leave the village. Alicia is delighted at their company and the opportunity to show Robert's friend around her home. She specifically wishes to show them Lady Audley's chambers. Unfortunately, Lady Audley keeps her rooms locked, and the key always travels with her. Having lived at Audley Court throughout their childhoods, Alicia and Robert remember a secret passageway that will give access to Lady Audley's chambers. Robert and George use this secret passageway to gain access to the rooms. In those rooms are twenty valuable paintings which the men wish to view. Additionally, there is a new portrait in progress of Lady Audley. Both men examine the portrait by candlelight; Robert enraptured, George queerly silent. As Robert and George leave Audley Court, a storm begins to brew, and they surprise Sir Michael and Lady Audley who are just returning home from Lady Audley's visit with her sick friend. Due to the weather and the lateness of the hour, the Audleys continue on home and George and Robert hurry to the village where they take shelter in their rooms at the inn.



Volume I, Chapters VII - VII Analysis

George accompanies Robert to Audley Court as passively as he has done everything else in the year since his wife's death. For George, life no longer has any meaning or purpose. He is flotsam and jetsam in the stream of life. At Audley, George is not put out by Lady Audley's inability to entertain them. George really does not care that Robert is enchanted by his new aunt. His presence at Audley Court is merely incidental for it is Robert who wishes to see the mansion. It is only when they gain access to Lady Audley's rooms and George looks at the portrait of Lady Audley that he shows any interest in anything. He intently studies the portrait for a good quarter of an hour. There is, about the portrait, a strange quality of diametric opposition. "Yes, the painter must have been pre-Raphaelite. No one but a pre-Raphaelite would have painted, hair by hair, those feathery masses of ringlets with every glimmer of gold and every shadow of pale brown. No one but a pre-Raphaelite would have so exaggerated every attribute of that delicate face as to give a lurid lightness to the blonde complexion, and a strange, sinister light to the deep blue eyes. No one but a pre-Raphaelite could have given to that pretty pouting mouth the hard and almost wicked look it had in the portrait." pg. 70, Vol. I, Ch. VIII. The beauty of Lady Audley seems to give way to a fiendish quality that is not readily apparent to those around her. The painter has captured a strange, mercurial quality in the beauty that portends malignancy rather than things benign. George's interest in the portrait foreshadows its true meaning and importance.



Volume I, Chapters IX - XI

Volume I, Chapters IX - XI Summary

IX - After the Storm

That night, after they return to the inn in the village, a horrible storm unleashes its fury on the area of Audley Court and the surrounding village. Both George Talboys and Lady Audley are independently terrified of it. George denies that he has any terror of the thunder and lightening, yet his violent response to the teasing surprises Robert, who chooses to let his friend alone. By the following morning George returns to his usual equable nature and agrees to another day of fishing, for the storm has passed and the weather quite fine. While the two men fish, Robert falls asleep. Taking advantage of the opportunity to be alone, George walks to Audley Court and asks at the door for Lady Audley, but is told that she is not home. She, too, has gone for a walk after the previous night's storm. When Lady Audley returns from her walk, she appears cheerful and rejuvenated, looking forward to dinner with George Talboys and Robert Audley.

X - Missing

Back at the river, Robert awakens to find George gone. He initially believes his friend simply returned to the inn without him. However, there is no sign of George at the inn. Keeping his appointment to have dinner at Audley Court with Sir Michael, Cousin Alicia, and Lady Audley, Robert goes to Audley Court only to discover that George had been there earlier looking for Lady Audley. Robert asks the servants more questions, but George has not been seen since. Thinking that his friend has had enough of the quiet country visit, Robert suspects that George has merely returned to London without him. Inquiries at the rail station convince Robert that George has returned to London. Satisfied, Robert returns to Audley Court for dinner.

XI - The Mark Upon My Lady's Wrist

At dinner, Robert continues to fall under the charm of his new aunt, Lady Audley. However, he soon realizes that the woman is superficial and very childish. His thoughts stray from the frivolous conversation at dinner and his concern for George. Robert worries that George is sitting alone at his flat at Fig Tree Court in London, pining for his lost wife. When asked what he is thinking about, Robert startles Lady Audley when he answers that he is thinking of George Talboys. Lady Audley seems puzzled that Robert should be so concerned for his friend. After dinner, Lady Audley plays a pensive Beethoven sonata on the piano with Robert attentively at her side. His close proximity allows him to see that she has a badly bruised wrist, looking much as if a hand had clamped it very tightly. Lady Audley claims to have tied a ribbon around her wrist too tightly. Robert knows this to be a falsehood.



Volume I, Chapters IX - XI Analysis

The metaphor of the horrible storm as a prescience to the upcoming events reflects the genre of sensational Victorian fiction which Braddon incorporates into her novel. Additional features of such fiction include secrets in someone's past, specifically a well-to-do woman such as Lady Audley. Another trait of the sensation genre is that the reader watches as the crime unfolds, rather than the well-known detective mystery genre that solves the puzzle after the event. Braddon writes about much of the emotion George Talboys experiences and yet does not allow the reader to get into his head in order to hear his thoughts. The dark storm and the character's dark mood work together to create a scene in the readers mind filled with threat and suspense. Once that is established, George heads to Audley Court for an interview with Lady Audley. The reader knows that Lady Audley, too, goes for a walk at the same time, but the events following are unrecorded. All that the reader is allowed to know is that George Talboys disappears and Lady Audley is in very good spirits when Robert Audley comes alone to dinner at Audley Court. The only clue is the bruise on her wrist that resembles the gripping fingers of a man. Robert knows Lady Audley's story about tying a ribbon too tightly around her wrist as the cause of the bruise is false, yet Braddon does not tell the reader how Robert knows this fact.



Volume I: Chapters XII - XIV

Volume I: Chapters XII - XIV Summary

XII - Still Missing

George is not at Robert's flat in London as Robert expected. Believing that only one other attraction could attract George, Robert immediately goes to visit George's son and father-in-law. George's father-in-law tells Robert that George did stop by the previous night to say goodbye to his sleeping son, because George intends to return to Australia, never to return to England. Robert is puzzled that George did not bother to tell him about his plans to leave England. Then Robert discovers the charred remains of a telegram that seems to confirm the old captain's words, and yet cause some vague suspicion.

XIII - Troubled Dreams

Acting on the information from the charred telegram, Robert checks out all ships having sailed for Australia and comes to the conclusion that George Talboys never sailed to that far away continent. Robert concludes that George must still be in England, but with no word from George, Robert fears that his friend may have met with some serious misfortune. Using his powers of reasoning, Robert lists all the events he can remember from the time he and George headed down to Essex to Audley Court to the present. Not sure where to start looking for his friend, Robert chooses to return to Essex and Audley Court to begin his search.

XIV - Phoebe's Suitor

Lady Audley's manner easily wins most men to her. This very same manner often makes women despise her. Alicia, certainly, despises her stepmother and this causes Lady Audley to grow closer to her maid, Phoebe. What Lady Audley takes for a reciprocation of feelings turns out to be a streak of avarice in Phoebe, for it comes out that Phoebe has shared some secret of Lady Audley's with her cousin and fiancé, Luke. Lady Audley promises fifty pounds to Luke, for he plans to open a public house and serve alcohol after he and Phoebe are married. Luke rejects the offer of fifty pounds and insists on extorting one hundred in order to set up his inn.

Volume I: Chapters XII - XIV Analysis

For the very first time in his life, Robert Audley demonstrates genuine concern for another human being. George's disappearance initially seems to be the act of a still distraught man, but as Robert furthers his investigation, he begins to believe that George did not disappear out of despondency and grief, but that some tragedy has befallen him. Initially Robert suspects George's father-in-law of being responsible for George's disappearance in order to lay hands on the money George set aside for his



son, Georgie. Finding nothing but the burnt telegram to substantiate his belief, Robert lays out what he remembers and knows about the case. As an author, Braddon uses this technique that is commonly used in detective novels of today. While some of the author's prose is incidental and filled with coincidence, other techniques she uses are still in effect in modern day mystery writing. Charles Dickens and Wilkie Collins, her contemporaries, both use such devices in their writings in the mid-1800s.



Volume I: Chapters XV - XVII

Volume I: Chapters XV - XVII Summary

XV - On The Watch

Phoebe leaves Lady Audley and marries Luke Marks. Together they purchase the public house in the center of a village called Mount Stanning with Lady Audley's money. Lady Audley acquires a new maid to replace Phoebe. Then the festivities of the Christmas season begin, bringing people and gaiety to Audley Court. Robert Audley numbers among the visitors, convinced that George Talboys never reached his father-in-law's quarters in Southhamptom. Rather, he grows ever more suspicious of his new aunt and spends most of his time in her presence. Alicia believes her cousin to be besotted with Lady Audley and grows to despise him, all the while still wishing for his attentions herself. Robert is unable to see his cousin as anything but an engaging young woman, but nothing more. With his attention focused on watching Lady Audley, he gives Alicia the impression that he is in love with his uncle's wife.

XVI - Robert Audley Gets His Conge

As all the Christmas guests take their leave of Audley Court and Sir Michael, one guest chooses to meet with Alicia with an offer of marriage. Sir Harry Towers claims undying fealty to Alicia, present since the last hunting season. Sir Harry believes his proposal will be met with enthusiasm. Unfortunately, he is unaware of Alicia's infatuation with Robert. Alicia turns down Sir Harry's proposal and he leaves dejected. Sir Michael recognizes Alicia's attachment to Robert and is willing to allow his nephew to stay at Audley Court indefinitely. This decision strikes horror in Lady Audley's heart and Lucy asks her husband to remove Robert. She professes to be unsettled by the attentions of her husband's young nephew. At Sir Michael's request, Robert leaves immediately, but rather than returning to London, he takes up quarters at Mount Stanning. The inn is conveniently close to Audley Court and Luke Marks, when drinking, might offer a clue to the mystery of George Talboy's disappearance.

XVII - At the Castle Inn

The Inn's construction is of rickety wood rather than solid masonry. Luke rants against Lady Audley that she could, if she wanted, have provided enough money for a much better inn. Phoebe is surprised that Robert Audley would wish to stay in their place. As a gentleman, Phoebe expected Robert to stay at a better inn. Once he is in residence, Phoebe immediately sends word to Lady Audley that Robert Audley is staying at their inn. Robert determines that Phoebe would be a good adversary in the witness box with her way of answering only what is asked and offering no more. When Robert questions the innkeeper, Luke Marks, Phoebe interjects repeatedly in a vain attempt to keep their secret. Her efforts are futile, for Robert Audley had very nearly guessed that Luke and Phoebe Marks both know something to Lady Audley's discredit.



Volume I: Chapters XV - XVII Analysis

The very title of the book tells the reader that Lady Audley has something to hide. Now Robert Audley is on her track, and he uses his training as a barrister to create a trail of his missing friend that seems to lead right back to Lady Audley. Lady Audley appears to be unafraid of his investigation. But, when all the guests leave Audley Court, Lady Audley wishes for Robert to be gone as well. Her control over her husband is total and complete. Once she makes her request, Sir Michael immediately asks Robert to leave his home. Robert leaves with alacrity, for he wishes not to hurt his uncle. However, Robert is not satisfied with his findings to date, and suspects that Phoebe and Luke know part of the secret. Luke's passion for alcohol may loosen his tongue, and Robert believes that he will eventually worm the secret of Lady Audley from the innkeeper and his wife. What the reader really cannot determine is Phoebe's role. She seems to have the determination to live a better life than a mere servant, and yet being the wife of a coarse innkeeper is not her idea of a perfect life either. She still demonstrates her loyalty to her former mistress by informing her that Robert Audley is staying with them at the inn after being asked to leave Audley Court. This character development shows confusion on the part of the author, for she wants Phoebe to be greedy and acquisitive, yet she also shows her to continue to be loyal to Lady Audley. At this point in the book the reader can only imagine that Phoebe is not finished extorting money from Lady Audley. The description of the inn as being made of rickety wood rather than durable masonry shows foreshadowing.



Volume I: Chapters XVIII - XIX

Volume I: Chapters XVIII - XIX Summary

XVIII - Robert Receives a Visitor Whom He Had Scarcely Expected

The next day it begins to snow; hard enough that the average person chooses to stay indoors. Despite the accumulating snow, Lady Audley braves the inclement weather to visit Robert Audley at Mount Stanning. She affects to be saddened by her husband's decision to evict Robert from Audley Court. Robert claims that he has no hard feelings toward his uncle, rather his mood is due to the disappearance of his friend, George Talboys. He informs Lady Audley that he has placed ads in the Australian papers asking for information from anyone regarding George. He also reveals that he will begin investigating in earnest if he does not receive an answer by the end of the month. Lady Audley gets Robert to disclose that he will start by reading papers and letters George left at Fig Tree Court. As soon as Lady Audley leaves Robert, she takes the next train to London rather than returning to Audley Court. As if he expected such a move, Robert takes the express back to London himself.

XIX - The Blacksmith's Mistake

Once Robert arrives at the station in London, he is surprised to find Lady Audley already heading back to Audley Court. Initially he believes that he is mistaken about the woman's intentions, that she had some other errand to run in London. However, when he arrives at his flat, he discovers that George's luggage has been handled. Interrogating his housekeeper, Robert discovers that no one has been in his quarters but a blacksmith. Robert finds the blacksmith intending to question him about coming to Fig Tree Court and working on his locks. Robert interrupts a celebration of a number of people with the blacksmith telling a story about a lady who, "Walked off as graceful as you please." Volume I, Ch XIX, Pg. 149. The blacksmith admits only that he made an error in going to Mr. Audley's quarters and that his locks were in fine shape. The man adamantly refuses to admit anything further. The statement Robert overhears might be about Lady Audley, or someone else entirely.

Volume I: Chapters XVIII - XIX Analysis

By the end of Volume I of *Lady Audley's Secret*, the reader is convinced that Lady Audley and George Talboys know one another and that whatever has happened to George has been done at the hand of Lady Audley. Robert is not a detective, but he becomes very intrigued with the idea of seeking out who is responsible for George's disappearance and finds he enjoys shadowing Lady Audley. She is cocky and brazen. Her confidence rarely falters, and yet Robert believes that he is having an effect on her. The very fact that she braved the elements to come to visit with him is nearly proof enough that her intentions are not honorable. Lady Audley appears to have an



incredible ability to persuade people to do her bidding, likely through her money. Her ability to go directly from the inn to London, and once there managing to bribe a blacksmith to get the letters she seeks from George's luggage and then return to Audley in such a short period of time almost seems uncanny. Robert's openness with Lady Audley also surprises the reader. It seems to make more sense that he might want to keep such information more secret than he does, as if he believes Lady Audley to be in need of his hints and vague threats. This is part of the sensation genre, and Braddon is using techniques that her readers expect. The reader is absolutely certain that Robert will investigate George's disappearance until the mystery is solved. This is the end of Volume I of the novel, where the lines are drawn and the reader knows that Lady Audley hides a very wicked secret.



Volume II: Chapters I - III

Volume II: Chapters I - III Summary

I - The Writing in the Book

Once he returns to his rooms at Fig Tree Court and hoping he is wrong, Robert searches George's trunks for evidence of the letters from his wife, Helen. George spoke of the letters often, and Robert had seen the packet, but it is no longer with George's belongings. At first, Robert despairs of ever finding out what happened to his friend, but he decides to continue his investigation. He looks through the remainder of the books and papers among George's things. His efforts are rewarded when he discovers an inscription in the front of one of George's books. It is written in the hand of Helen Talboys. It is a hand that Robert recognizes. The knowledge makes him sad, for he must now take George's son away from the boy's grandfather. It is obvious that Helen Talboys and Lady Audley are one and the same, and Georgie is Lady Audley's son. What role Mr. Maldon plays in this is unknown, but Robert takes his position as guardian of Georgie very seriously. He fears that Lady Audley or Mr. Maldon have killed George. He cannot leave Georgie with a murderer.

II - Mrs. Plowson

Once he made his decision, Robert travels immediately to Southampton to see little Georgie. The young barrister is determined to take him away from his grandfather. Mr. Maldon is not at the house when Robert arrives; he is at the bar drinking. Mrs. Plowson, who cares for Georgie from time to time, greets Robert. She tries to keep Georgie quiet when the boy begins to tell Robert about the pretty lady who gave him a watch. The woman makes an attempt to get Georgie away from Robert. This action deepens the barrister's suspicions about her and Georgie's grandfather, and how they might be in collusion in some way. Right now, he cannot tell just how involved George's father-in-law is with George's disappearance. Mr. Maldon returns from the bar; an inebriated man who is terribly frightened at the most recent development.

III - Little Georgie Leaves His Old Home

Robert tells Captain Maldon that he intends to take Georgie from Captain Maldon's care and place him in a school. Robert goes on to inform the former military man that he suspects that George Talboys is dead. This information actually shocks the old man, who sobs from true emotion. Robert is unable to tell whether this display of emotion is from grief or something else. Showing some compassion, Robert tells the old man to go ahead and warn whoever he needs to warn, for if that individual should leave without fuss, Robert will not pursue. Robert really hopes that Lady Audley will simply go away quietly. Robert also promises Captain Maldon not to try to get information out of Georgie. True to his word, Robert finds a good school for Georgie and for the boy's



safety, insists on no unauthorized visits from anyone. He also keeps his promise not to interrogate the five-year-old boy.

Volume II: Chapters I - III Analysis

Volume II begins the second portion of the novel where Robert is convinced that Lady Audley is responsible for George's disappearance, and likely his death. This part of the novel details his efforts to establish circumstantial evidence, a notion he mentions over and over again in the novel. Braddon finds this to be a unique approach to solving a crime, and makes a great deal out of it in her book. Robert knows that Lady Audley is responsible for his friend's disappearance and for the sake of his friend he feels compelled to pursue her. He suspects that Lady Audley's father, Captain Maldon, might also be involved, but he cannot determine that. Robert also knows what an awful shock it will be for his beloved uncle, Sir Michael, to learn the true nature of his new wife. This weighs heavily on Robert, for he truly loves his uncle. "The moment in which the tears rose to his eyes and dimmed the piteous scene before him, was long enough to take him back to Essex and to show him the image of his uncle, stricken by agony and shame." Vol. II, Ch III, Pg. 172. In an attempt to get Lady Audley to do the honorable thing and leave quietly and without a fuss, he tells Mr. Maldon to warn her that he is on her trail. This would be the easiest path for Robert, and the nature of his character would prefer it. However, Robert has been maturing throughout the novel, and he develops a determination to avenge the death of his good friend, George, even if it means ruining Sir Michael's idyllic life. Lady Audley has met a worthy adversary.



Volume II: Chapters IV - VI

Volume II: Chapters IV - VI Summary

IV - Coming to a Standstill

Robert visits George's father, Harcourt Talboys. George's father has long since disowned his only son when the boy married Helen, the daughter of a drunken pauper. So inflexible is Mr. Talboys that even Robert's presentation of the facts of George's possible murder falls on deaf ears. Mr. Talboys remains convinced that George is merely playing on his sympathies. Despite all his efforts, nothing Robert says sways the hard and inflexible patriarch. Robert initially hopes Clara, George's sister, will show some sign of remorse or grief at his news but the woman put her face in her hands and never even tries to meet Robert's gaze. Meeting with such solid resistance to his story, Robert believes he ought to give up on the search for his friend's killer.

V - Clara

As Robert's carriage leaves the Talboys home, Clara pursues him. The previously remote and unaffected woman has changed dramatically. Her emotions have been kept secret for so long, for her father is a cold-hearted man and quite icy in his emotions. Because he has disowned George and believes his disappearance to be a trick, he will not allow Clara the natural emotions due to the situation. However, Clara's love for her brother destroys any obedience to her father, and she runs after Robert begging him to either avenge George's death himself, or allow her to do it. Mercurially, Robert renews his determination to find George's killer. He owes no less to his friend. Clara's entreaty touches Robert to the core and he agrees to continue investigating.

VI - George's Letters

Robert returns to his quarters in London musing over how women make life complicated for men. He reflects that women fight for their place in life and play any role required of them in order to survive. In his reflections, he makes it known to the reader that he is aware of Alicia's regard for him and knows she wants to marry him, but his feelings for her are mere fondness. Clara, on the other hand, reminds him greatly of George and he imagines her sitting opposite him in his sitting room. The next day, Robert receives the letters from George to Clara as Clara had promised. The letters are written by George shortly after his marriage to Helen Maldon. In the letters, Robert finds even more clues that are damning to Lady Audley.

Volume II: Chapters IV - VI Analysis

Robert's investigation takes him to George's childhood home where he meets George's father, Harcourt Talboys. Mr. Talboys is a cold-hearted and regimented man who refuses to believe that George could possibly be dead. Harcourt Talboys prefers to believe his



only son is playing on his feelings. Because George's sister, Clara, makes no initial response to his tale, Robert begins to believe that he has done all he can for his friend. If George's family wishes nothing further to be done, it would be far easier on Robert to allow Lady Audley to stay in her place as his uncle's wife and spare his uncle untold grief. However, once Clara comes to Robert begging him to either avenge George's death or allow her to do it, Robert realizes that the right thing to do is not always easy. He is compelled to continue investigating George's death. His reflections on the complications of women on the lives of men is a look inside the author's head. The entire story of Lady Audley is focused on the role of women in Victorian society, and how they must fight in order to achieve any position at all. Robert sees this as an impediment, but the author's real point is to highlight the plight of women in her era. This portion of the story even allows the reader to have some feelings of sensitivity and compassion for Lady Audley. While Lady Audley is the antagonist, she is also seen as a dark heroine, fighting for the rights of women in her patriarchal society.



Volume II: Chapters VII - IX

Volume II: Chapters VII - IX Summary

VII - Retrograde Investigation

Robert delays his return to Essex, hoping that Lady Audley will heed his warnings and flee. However the woman continues to live her gay and frivolous life as if without care. It is only when Robert receives word that Sir Michael's has fallen ill that Robert is prompted into action. He now fears that Lady Audley grows impatient for more money and his uncle might possibly be in danger. This motivation makes Robert travel to Audley Court with the greatest haste. At Audley Court, Robert interrogates Mr. Dawson about Lady Audley's previous position and references. Mr. Dawson does not want to speak ill of Lucy Graham, now Lady Audley, but agrees to give him the information on her references. Robert takes note of the name of Mrs. Vincent, Lucy Graham's superior at the school in Brompton and her address. Robert decides to investigate this reference and then plans to return to Audley Court and remain there until his uncle recovers.

VIII - So Far and No Farther

After much investigating, Robert Audley finds Mrs. Vincent, looking alive enough. He recalls that Lady Audley claimed to receive a telegram about Mrs. Vincent's illness some months before and had to cancel dinner with him and George because of it. Mrs. Vincent denies the story claiming to have never been ill in all her life. More circumstantial evidence that Lady Audley's stories are not always true. Robert discovers that Lucy Graham came to Mrs. Vincent in August of 1854 looking for a job because she had quarreled with her father. Lucy did leave a box behind when she went to work for the Dawsons. Miraculously, Mrs. Vincent still has the box. Careful examination reveals a label that Robert removes and takes away with him.

IX - Beginning at the Other End

The label gives Robert a clue which takes him to Wildernsea where George met Helen and her father. Robert discovers that the two were married at the seaside village of Wildernsea. More investigation and questioning leads Robert to Mrs. Balkham who remembers Helen well. She tells Robert that after George departed for Australia, Helen tried to make a living by giving piano lessons, but her father drank most of the proceeds. On August 16, 1854, Helen Talboys leaves Winternsea and her father and son behind seeking a new fortune. She left a note with Mrs. Balkham. The note is signed by Helen Talboys and dated August 16, 1854 and is in the hand that Robert Audley knows to be Lady Audley's. He has made the last necessary connection between Helen Talboys and Lady Audley. They are one and the same woman.



Volume II: Chapters VII - IX Analysis

Once Robert's uncle becomes ill, Robert realizes that he cannot allow the matter to drop. It is entirely possible that Lady Audley may grow impatient for Sir Michael's fortune, and attempt to hasten the man's death in order to get her hands on it. Robert immediately goes to his uncle's bedside and is greatly relieved to find out that it is merely a cold in an older man that causes the concern. While there, he does interrogate Mr. Dawson about Lucy Graham's previous life. The doctor can only give Robert the name of the proprietress of the school, a Mrs. Vincent. Robert takes the name and searches diligently in order to locate the woman. From that point on it is relatively easy to trace Lucy's footsteps back to Wildernsea where she and George were married. There is no longer any doubt that Lady Audley is Helen Talboys and that she married Sir Michael in the state of bigamy. As if that were not crime enough, she abandoned her son and her father in order to live a life of luxury.



Volume II: Chapters X - XI

Volume II: Chapters X - XI Summary

Summary:

X - Hidden in the Grave

Once Robert makes the connection between Helen Talboys and Lady Audley, he returns to Essex where he runs into Clara Talboys. He knew she said she would be visiting friends in Essex, but as Audley is such a tiny village, he never expected her to have a reason to be there. He is careful not to tell her his suspicions, only that he continues to build the case on circumstantial evidence. Robert still has hope that he might somehow prevent his uncle's disgrace by convincing Lady Audley to leave Audley Court quietly. Clara discovers for herself that Lady Audley strangely resembles the description of George's young wife. "My childish little wife is watching me as I write this. Ah! how I wish you could see her, Clara! Her eyes are as blue and as clear as the skies on a bright summer's day, and her hair falls about her face like the pale golden halo you seen round the head of a Madonna in an Italian picture." Vol. II, Ch. X, Pg. 261.

XI - In the Lime Walk

Robert insists on a private interview with Lady Audley in the Lime Walk. His cousin, Alicia, still believes his interest in Lady Audley is infatuation, and this disgusts her. She does not know that her stepmother is a bigamist and a liar. In the Lime Walk, Robert tells Lady Audley that her mind is diseased, that she is unbalanced. The woman's audacity comes to the fore and she laughs at Robert's words. In her opinion, he has no evidence. Even when Robert lays out his findings, Lady Audley continues to believe her tracks are so well covered he will find nothing to connect Lucy Graham with Helen Talboys. Perhaps because Robert already mentioned mental illness, Lady Audley declares that Robert must be mad and threatens him with an insane asylum. This terrifies Robert. Lady Audley even plants a seed of an idea in Alicia's head that Robert must have gotten his eccentricity from his father. To ensure her position, Lady Audley decides to put Sir Michael on his guard against his nephew—fully aware that Sir Michael will take her word over anyone's.

Volume II: Chapters X - XI Analysis

Robert believes that he has enough evidence to convince Lady Audley to leave her place as his uncle's wife and just disappear quietly. He reckons without Lady Audley's fierce determination to live the life of a lady of luxury. She has achieved the status of Lady Audley and will not give up easily. Her mania runs so deeply that she threatens to have Robert put into an insane asylum merely by telling her husband that his nephew's head has gone soft. "The young man started at the sound of his cousin's fresh young voice, 'Good heavens!' he thought, 'Can these two women be of the same clay? Can

this frank, generous-hearted girl, who cannot conceal any impulse of her innocent nature, be of the same flesh and blood as that wretched creature whose shadow falls upon the path beside me?" Vol. II, Ch. XI, Pg. 276. Robert's is truly bewildered by Lady Audley's arrogance and nerve, but he realizes that Lucy's mind is diseased and tries to sway her with this information. Lucy simply turns it around and threatens to use the same argument against Robert. The investigation is not quite complete, and Robert knows that he must persevere, if only for the sake of George and Clara.



Volume II: Chapters XII - XIII

Volume II: Chapters XII - XIII Summary

XII - Preparing the Ground

Lucy immediately puts her plan into action and joins Sir Michael in his study. She allows the stress and anguish of her time with Robert in the Lime Walk to overcome her and she dissolves into hysterical tears. Sir Michael responds as she expects, with great concern and a desire to put things right so that she is happy again. She presents her theory that Robert is mad, but Sir Michael claims there is no madness in the Audley line. She persists with the idea, insisting that the disappearance of George Talboys has unbalanced Sir Michael's nephew. Sir Michael's captivation by his young wife allows him to be persuaded. He agrees to keep Robert from Audley Court and plans to have a physician visit his nephew in London to ascertain his sanity. Lastly, Sir Michael promises to never allow anyone to speak against his wife.

XIII - Phoebe's Petition

That night Phoebe comes to Lady Audley and their conversation reveals the numerous demands for money Phoebe and Luke Marks have made on Lady Audley. Phoebe acts as if Luke will abuse her if she does not request the money. The former maid claims to wish to take Luke away from being a public house keeper for his drunkenness has nearly burned them in their beds in the past. Then Phoebe hands Lady Audley a letter from Robert Audley. The letter threatens to have someone who knew her as Helen Talboys identify her. This last volley turns Lady Audley homicidal; she will happily kill Robert Audley.

Volume II: Chapters XII - XIII Analysis

Lady Audley's nature reveals just how far she will go to keep her position as Lady Audley. She knows that Robert has uncovered some very damning evidence against her, and yet she also knows she is able to twist Sir Michael around her little finger. "My lady's face was so much in shadow, that Sir Michael Audley was unaware of the bright change that came over its sickly pallor as he made this very common-place observation. A triumphant smile illumined Lucy Audley's countenance, a smile that plainly said, 'It is coming—it is coming; I can twist him which way I like. I can put black before him, and if I say it is white, he will believe me.'" Vol. II, Ch. XII, Pg. 281-282. With this kind of control over her husband, Lady Audley believes that she will be able to put Robert into a mad house and she will no longer have to fear her position as Lady Audley. But then a final threat from Robert turns her quite insane, for he now threatens to have someone identify her as Helen Talboys. The time has now come for truly drastic action, and having rid herself of her first husband, Lady Audley now has no qualms about ridding herself of Robert Audley in a similar manner.



Volume III: Chapters I - III

Volume III: Chapters I - III Summary

I - The Red Light in the Sky

Lady Audley decides that either Robert must be committed or otherwise removed from the scene. She decides to go back to Mount Stanton with Phoebe on the pretext of settling yet another debt for Phoebe and Luke Marks. Even though it is very dark outside, Lady Audley steals out of Audley Court and walks three miles in the dead of night to finally take care of Robert Audley. After handling the most recent debt for Phoebe and Luke Marks, Lady Audley locks Robert's room from the outside. She then sets fire to the inn and quickly goes out. She insists that Phoebe return to Audley Court with her. Three quarters of a mile from Audley Court, Phoebe looks back and sees the red glow of the fire. She has known for some time that her lady was wicked, but now her wickedness touches her life and those close to her. Phoebe voices her suspicion aloud that her former mistress started the fire. Lady Audley brushes off the accusation and returns to her home.

II - The Bearer of the Tidings

The next morning Lady Audley breakfasts with Sir Michael and Alicia as if nothing had happened. Sir Michael has held an internal debate within himself regarding his wife's decision that Robert is mad. If Lady Audley is wrong and Robert is not mad, then the diagnosis must be placed on this creature he loves most in the world. For Sir Michael, this is a dreadful realization. The day drags on, for Lady Audley knows of the fire but must wait until news reaches Audley Court before she can act on the information. She imagines herself mad with the torment of waiting. Finally, word does come, and the bearer is none other than Robert Audley. He managed not to be burned alive.

III - My Lady Tells the Truth

The shock of seeing Robert Audley in the flesh finally persuades Lady Audley to tell her whole story to Robert and to Sir Michael. Lady Audley tells the men that when she was an infant her mother had become mad and was consigned to a mad-house. Lucy claims to know that her madness is inheritable. She also tells the men what it means to be miserably poor, so she decided to change her future. She tells how she met, married, and was eventually deserted by George Talboys. She relates the horrors of their poverty after George left, and how she tried to make a living, but did not believe she was destined to remain poor forever. She justifies becoming the wife of Sir Michael and relates the lengths to which she went to convince George of her death. Lady Audley's cunning and planning is nothing short of brilliant. Unfortunately, the story's substance repels Sir Michael. He leaves the room and asks Robert to take custody of Lucy Graham, a.k.a. Helen Talboys. Sir Michael departs that night, wishing never to see the woman he loved so much ever again.



Volume III: Chapters I - III Analysis

Robert Audley has dogged Lady Audley through every step of her subterfuge. Finally, she can stand it no longer, and decides to eliminate the man from her life. She accompanies Phoebe back to the Castle Inn where she intends to finally do away with Robert Audley once and for all. After setting fire to the inn, she manages to get Phoebe to return to Audley Court with her. It is unclear to the reader whether she has concern for Phoebe's welfare or not, but she does insist on her company. Just as they are at Audley Court, Phoebe realizes that there is a fire behind them and she finally voices her suspicions aloud that Lady Audley started the fire on purpose. Lady Audley knows that Phoebe will not speak of this aloud, and wastes no time concerning herself with that information. Her arrogance and invulnerability remain intact. Lady Audley must wait all the next day for news of the fire, for no one in the house knows Lady Audley was at the inn the previous night. The stress of the wait tells on her, for when Robert himself comes to tell her of the fire, she collapses and finally admits all. Robert forces his uncle to hear the sordid story. He knows it will break Sir Michael's heart, but he also knows that his uncle must hear it from Lady Audley's lips in order to believe it. Sir Michael leaves that night, for he cannot bear the thought that the woman he loved most in the world is not really his wife, and that she would go to such lengths for riches.



Volume III: Chapters IV - VI

Volume III: Chapters IV - VI Summary

Summary:

IV - The Hush that Succeeds the Tempest

Knowing that Sir Michael is an elderly man, and has received a horrible shock, Robert convinces Alicia to accompany her father. Robert tells Alicia nothing about Lady Audley's story, but asks Alicia to support and love her father as best she can. Robert knows that it is not necessary to tell Alicia the details of the entire story, only that her father needs her as he has never needed her before. Once they leave, Robert turns to the matter of what to do with Lady Audley. Because he feels a bit sorry for Lucy, her background and inherited tendency toward madness, Robert secretly solicits medical advice.

V - Dr. Mosgrave's Advice

With the worst behind her, Lucy sleeps as deeply as she has ever slept. Robert has done his worst and still she lives. Answering Robert's secret message, Dr. Mosgrave comes to Audley Court to evaluate Lady Audley. Initially, the psychologist believes Lady Audley to be as sane as anyone. However, when he hears from Robert that she may have murdered her first husband, Dr. Mosgrave agrees that she should be confined in order to protect others from her. At that, the doctor gives Robert the name of an institution in Belgium, a place where he can safely take Lady Audley and her secrets will remain hers forever.

VI - Buried Alive

Once they reach the madhouse, Lucy/Helen tells Robert that George is at the bottom of the well in the Lime Walk at Audley Court. She admits she was willing to do anything in order to maintain her position as Lady Audley. She tells Robert how she tried to bribe George; however, her husband was determined he would expose her to Sir Michael. At this, Lady Audley struck her husband and he fell into the dry well. At last, Robert believes he knows what happened to his friend.

Volume III: Chapters IV - VI Analysis

Having finally accomplished his mission in unmasking Lady Audley, Robert now must take care of his uncle's wife in a very careful manner. Even though he believes her to be responsible for George's death, Robert is not willing to have her face charges of murder. It would destroy Sir Michael with that kind of publicity and humiliating shame. Instead, Robert summons a man who is known to understand diseases of the mind to evaluate Lady Audley. At first Dr. Mosgrave believes Lady Audley to be as sane as the next



person, but once he hears that she probably murdered first husband, he agrees that she should be institutionalized. Once Robert gets Lucy to the insane asylum, she finally tells him what really happened to George, that he lies at the bottom of the dry well in the Lime Walk back at Audley Court.



Volume III: Chapters VII - VIII

Volume III: Chapters VII - VIII Summary

Summary:

VII - Ghost Haunted

Back in London, Robert receives letters from both Alicia and Sir Michael. His cousin informs him of her intention to keep her father so busy as to never remember his wife. Sir Michael's letter tells Robert he never wishes to hear his wife's name again, yet he wants her to have the best of care. Sir Michael gives Robert as much access to his vast wealth, and he requires seeing to her needs. At first Robert believes his dilemma is solved; George must remain at the bottom of the well. Robert would rather that than to hurt his uncle any further. But Robert then changes his mind when faced with his own torment at the knowledge. He just cannot leave his friend's body at the bottom of a dry well, and not allow him a Christian burial. Just then, a summons from Luke Marks brings Robert Audley back to the village. Luke specifically requests to see Robert and so Robert goes to see the badly injured man.

VIII - That Which the Dying Man had to Tell

Luke knows that he is still alive because Robert risked his life when he pulled him from the fire at the inn that Lady Audley set. To show his gratitude, he gives Robert two notes written by George Talboys after his wife had pushed him into the well. The news stuns Robert. George survived the murder attempt, but his heart was so broken by this absolute rejection that he decided to leave England forever. Luke had been near Audley Court when he heard George moaning. The servant took the injured man to his mother's house to dry off and be safely out of the way. George insisted on absolute secrecy. He wrote a letter to Lady Audley telling her that he will never bother her again. He then wrote to Robert to thank him for his kindness after Helen's "death." Luke chose not to deliver the letters because Phoebe had witnessed Lady Audley pushing George into the well. Lady Audley was finally caught and easily blackmailed by Phoebe and Luke. If Luke were to give either letter to either party, then his blackmailing scheme would end. Now, nearing the end of his life, Luke wishes to make restitution to Robert Audley, and gives him both letters that George wrote.

Volume III: Chapters VII - VIII Analysis

Robert had a difficult decision to make and in order to spare his uncle any public shame and humiliation, he takes Lady Audley to an insane asylum in Belgium where she will be well cared for, but her secret will remain hers forever. What bothers Robert is that his friend lies at the bottom of a dry well. Now Robert must choose whether to retrieve George's body and give him a Christian burial, or leave the poor man at the bottom of the well. As he struggles with this decision, Robert receives word from Luke Marks to



come to the village at Audley immediately. Luke is dying from the burns he sustained the night of the fire. Luke does realize that he is still alive because of Robert's heroic efforts in saving him. In a gesture of gratitude, Luke reveals that George did not die in the well but was able to crawl out and sought the help of Luke to keep his existence a secret. George had hoped that he could convince Lady Audley to return to him as Helen Talboys, but when she tried to kill him rather than return to a life of poverty, George decided that he would leave England forever in order to allow her have her way. Luke had not given the letters to Robert and Lady Audley because he wanted to be able to extort money from Lady Audley as long as he wanted. Phoebe had witnessed Lady Audley pushing George into the well. As a minor character, Luke had the most significant clue of all. It was his greed that kept him quiet.



Volume III: Chapters IX - X

Volume III: Chapters IX - X Summary

IX - Restored

Robert goes to see Harcourt Talboys and Clara. He tells them that George is still alive. A greatly relieved Harcourt Talboys invites Robert to stay with them as long as he wants, and every morning they talk about the absent George. Within three weeks, Robert and Clara are deeply in love with Clara lecturing Robert about the futility of his idle ways. A changed man, Robert turns his back on his old ways. He purchases some land and a cottage. He promises Clara he will go to Australia to look for George and they ultimately decide to make their trip a honeymoon trip. George, however, appears in Robert's quarters at Fig Tree Court in person eliminating the need for the trip. George's story matches the one Luke Marks told Robert. However, rather than heading to Australia, George went to America. He decided to return to England because he could not forget Robert's kindness to him during his time of need.

X - At Peace

Two years later find George living with Robert and Clara, their infant and Georgie, who is a frequent visitor when away from his scholastic endeavors at Eton. Robert receives a letter informing him of the death of Mrs. Taylor. Mrs. Taylor is the pseudonym Lady Audley took when she entered the mad-house. Alicia is soon to become Lady Towers for she has given in to Sir Harry and agreed to be his wife. Sir Michael intends never to return to Audley Court, and has purchased a new home where he hopes to live a relatively peaceful life near his daughter and her new husband.

Volume III: Chapters IX - X Analysis

These two chapters tie up most of the loose ends created throughout the story. No mention is made of Phoebe and what becomes of her after her husband dies. However, most everyone else is accounted for, and they have all discovered a sort of happiness in their lives. Lady Audley dies as Mrs. Taylor in the mad-house. Even though she confessed to her deception, lies, bigamy and desertion, she never really faces the fact that she tried to kill her husband, George. Nor does she face that she set fire to the inn so that Robert would die. There is a strange sort of justice in that Luke Marks dies as a result of the fire, for he had no intention of ending his extortion of Lady Audley. Braddon ties everything up in a tidy package and even hints that everyone lives happily ever after.



Characters

Lady Audley

The main character is introduced as having arrived as a governess to the Dawson family. She is a beautiful, child-like woman with blonde curls, a very engaging manner, and a true artistic and musical ability. She manages to capture the attention and heart of Sir Michael Audley and becomes his bride. She is about twenty-two to his fifty-six years. Lady Audley is able to enchant just about everyone she meets, even Robert Audley falls under her spell initially. The truth of Lady Audley is that she was once Helen Maldon, daughter to a drunk. She seeks her salvation by marrying George Talboys, who she believes to be very rich. Initially he is rich, but is disinherited by his father upon his marriage to Helen. After George deserts Helen, Georgie, and her father, she leaves and takes on a new identity, that of Lucy Graham. As Lucy Graham, she is hired into the household of the Dawson family as a governess. At that point she wins the heart of Sir Michael and becomes the bigamist wife of Sir Michael. Once she has achieved her heart's desire of becoming a rich lady, she will go to great lengths to keep her position, including attempting to murder her first husband, George Talboys. Lady Audley is clever, always keeping one step ahead of Robert Audley, who pursues her quite openly. She believes she has covered her tracks well enough. When she believes herself to be cornered, she sets fire to the inn owned by Phoebe and Luke Marks, believing that Robert Audley would be killed in the fire. Unfortunately for her, he escapes unharmed, and that much more determined to bring her crimes out in the open. Finally she confesses all to her husband who disavows her immediately. Lady Audley's future is set as Robert takes her to an insane asylum where she dies a short time later.

Robert Audley

The twenty-seven year old nephew to Sir Michael Audley. His focus in life is to do as little as possible, though he has taken the path to becoming a barrister, more for reasons of avoiding criticism than any great desire to become a barrister. He is a barrister in all ways but in habit. A handsome, carefree, lazy man, he is independently wealthy, engaging, and generally does what he likes to do, and nothing else. His indifference to his uncle's wealth and his cousin's potential inheritance set him apart from typical fortune hunters. Until George Talboys reenters his life, Robert has had little need or desire to do anything unpleasant. George's emotional crisis continues for more than a year, during which time Robert takes very good care of him. When George disappears, Robert draws on an inner strength he did not know he had in order to investigate his friend's disappearance. Robert follows a very logical approach to solving the puzzle, determining that Lady Audley is not all she appears to be. He investigates her past deeply and finds that she was George's wife, who was to have died just as George reached England. By piecing together bits and parts of circumstantial evidence, Robert is able to build a very strong case against Lady Audley, eventually forcing her to reveal all to her husband. Once Sir Michael knows the story, he puts Lady Audley's



future into Robert's hands and leaves the country to assuage his bitterness and grief. Robert did not want to hurt his uncle, and tried numerous ways to solve the problem without this result, but Lady Audley was too determined to remain where she was. Robert had to find it within himself to force Lady Audley's hand and reveal the entire truth about her past. Robert's reward is to win George's sister's hand in marriage, and regaining his friend who eventually reappears at the end of the story.

George Talboys

George, twenty-five years old, is introduced at the beginning of the book as a man who went to Australia to seek his wealth in the gold fields. He has left behind a wife and child for whom he was unable to provide because he was disinherited by his father upon his marriage. George spends years in Australia but finally strikes it rich and returns to England to reclaim his place as Helen's husband and Georgie's father. Back in England, he discovers that his wife has recently died, and George becomes despondent and depressed. He has no desire to do anything, and without Robert Audley's intervention, he might have slipped into oblivion in his grief. George's wife, however, is not dead as he soon discovers. She is the new Lady Audley, and she attempts to kill George. This consummate rejection causes George to leave without word and go to America. However, he is unable to stay in America without thanking Robert for having given him such stout friendship. Once returned to England, George reunites with his father and sister, and ends up living with Robert and his sister, and being a father to young Georgie.

Phoebe

Lady Audley's maid at Audley Court. She is nineteen when the story first opens. She is a strange character for she appears to have a close relationship with Lady Audley, and yet she knows that the lock of hair and the baby slipper are much more valuable than taking any of Lady Audley's jewelry. Phoebe marries her cousin, Luke Marks, who extorts money from Lady Audley on a regular basis. Phoebe is another character who seems to be trapped by the social mores of her society. She has some resentment against Lady Audley, for Lady Audley was nothing but a servant just a few short months before. She remains loyal to Lady Audley until the night of the fire, when she openly accuses Lady Audley of setting the fire.

Luke Marks

The twenty-three year old ox-like admirer of Phoebe's, who has dark red hair, green eyes and every intention of marrying his cousin, Phoebe, and using Phoebe's relationship with Lady Audley to get money to open a public house. Luke's intentions are realized and he forces Phoebe to continue to ask Lady Audley for money whenever they need it. He is badly burned in the fire set by Lady Audley and is rescued by Robert Audley to whom he now owes a debt of gratitude. To absolve that debt, Luke confesses



to Robert that he had helped to rescue George Talboys and kept two letters written by him a secret from both Robert and Lady Audley; letters that prove George was not killed by Lady Audley.

Sir Michael Audley

Robert Audley's uncle and father to Alicia Audley. As a widower, he becomes enchanted by the governess of Mr. and Mrs. Dawson, one Lucy Graham, and eventually asks her to be his wife, making her the new Lady Audley. Before getting married again, Sir Michael and his daughter Alicia had been very close, but by marrying a woman his daughter's age, Sir Michael manages to alienate his only daughter, and enters a period of his life of total enchantment with his new wife. He bends so easily to her will that he will do anything she asks. When he is told of her bigamy and intention to defraud, he turns his back on her. He asks Robert to do what must be done, but to remember that he loved her.

Alicia Audley

Sir Michael's daughter and Robert Audley's cousin. Alicia and her father were very, very close until his marriage to Lucy Graham. From that point on, Lady Audley and Alicia lived a forced neutrality, but Alicia lost her close relationship with her father. She is in love with Robert Audley, and hopes that one day he will finally see her for the jewel she believes herself to be. She even turns down an offer of marriage from a besotted suitor, believing that Robert will one day come to his senses. When Sir Michael learns of his wife's betrayal, Alicia agrees to accompany her father and be his companion much as she was prior to his marriage.

Mr. Dawson

The doctor who lives near Sir Michael. Lucy Graham came to work in his household as a governess prior to becoming Lady Audley. Mr. Dawson treats Sir Michael during his illness and Luke Marks after his burn injuries.

Mrs. Dawson

Mr. Dawson's wife, who is mistress to Lucy Graham, the new governess to her two children.

Mr. Maldon

Helen's father, Captain Maldon. An alcoholic who is unable to keep any money, and regularly pawns items of value in order to stay ahead of the money collectors.



Georgie

George Talboy's son, who is little more than a toddler. He loves his grandfather, frequently refers to a fancy lady, and is initially very suspicious about George, his father. After George is believed to have died, Robert puts Georgie in school where he thrives. He later visits Robert and Clara and his father on school holidays.

Sir Harry Towers

Suitor to Alicia Audley. Initially he is rebuffed, but eventually Alicia begins to see him with a kinder heart.

Mrs. Plowson

A caretaker of little Georgie, who was involved in the secret of Helen Talboy's apparent death, for it was her daughter who died.

Harcourt Talboys

George's father. A very wealthy man whose inflexibility permits him to cut off all communication with his only son when George married Helen Maldon. At first his belief was that George was merely pretending to be dead in order to soften his father. Refusing to bend, Harcourt Talboys continues to believe that George is merely trying to manipulate him. Eventually he softens to the point of allowing Robert marry his daughter Clara.

Clara Talboys

George's sister. Another woman who is under the domination of men in the Victorian era. At first, Robert believes her to be as cold-hearted as her father, but when Robert leaves the estate, Clara runs after him imploring him to continue searching for George's murderer and begging him to not rest until George has been either found, or his murderer brought to justice. Eventually, Clara and Robert marry.

Blacksmith

The man Lady Audley hires to break into Robert Audley's flat in London to steal George's letters.

Mrs. Maloney

Robert's housekeeper and cook at Fig Tree Court.



Miss Morely

Governess aboard the Argus to whom George Talboys expresses his ardent desire to be reunited with his love. She, alone, worries that his expectations are too high. She fears that though she has been absent from England and her fiancé, that some ill fate could befall him and all will be lost.

Mrs. Vincent

Proprietress of a school, listed in the Directory. Lucy Graham is hired to teach in her school. Mrs. Vincent also gives Lucy a reference in order to gain employment as a governess with the Dawsons.

Mrs. Barkamb

Lady at Wildernsea who actually kept Helen Talboys' letter indicating her intention to leave her old life and move on.

Mr. Alwyn Mosgrave

Psychiatric doctor who commits Lucy to an asylum despite believing her possibly guilty of murder.

Mrs. Taylor

Lucy/Helen's name (pseudonym) at Villebrumeuse.



Objects/Places

Clock

A one-handed clock that jumps abruptly from one hour to the next outside of Audley Court.

Audley Court

Where Sir Michael, his daughter, Alicia, and his new wife, Lady Lucy Audley live.

Baby Slipper

Evidence against Lady Audley taken by Phoebe.

Lock of Baby Hair

More evidence taken by Phoebe.

Black Ribbon

Around Lady Audley's neck that is attached to a folded piece of paper.

Helen Talboy's obituary

Obituary detailing Helen Talboy's death.

Lock of Helen's Hair

This hair is strangely straight, but George remembers his wife's hair as being wavy.

Ventnor

The town where Helen is said to be buried.

Lady Audley's Portrait

Portraying a "beautiful fiend."



Sun Inn

The inn in Audley where George and Robert stay.

Fig Tree Court

Robert Audley's living quarters in London.

Charred Telegram

Casts suspicion on George's disappearance.

Castle Inn

Mount Stanning - The inn Luke and Phoebe Marks buy with Lady Audley's money that later burns to the ground at the hands of Lady Audley.

Watch

Given to Georgie by the pretty lady and pawned on a regular basis by his grandfather.

Helen Talboys' letter

Sent to Mrs. Barkam; this is the connection between Helen Talboys and Lucy Graham.

Wildernsea

The seaside community where Helen and George met and married.

Lime Walk

The area at Audley Court that is lined with lime trees, a common area for walking.

Insane Asylum

Mad House - Where Helen's mother lives and where Helen herself will finish out her life.

Villebrumeuse

City in Belgium where Lucy/Helen is consigned.

George's Letters

Left to Luke Marks to inform both Robert and Lady Audley that he has departed for America.



Themes

Women's Roles and Rights in Victorian England

Women's Roles and Rights in Victorian England

Lady Audley's Secret handles the issue of the role and rights of women in Victorian England very well. Braddon brings to light no fewer than four female characters in her novel who suffer to varying degrees at the hands of the men in their lives. The women of Victorian England certainly found her writing to be appealing given her immense popularity after the publication of Lady Audley's Secret. The social structure of England was changing in the 1860s, and women were being given more and more choices than ever before. Braddon reins in her heroine from her transgressions by the end of the story, but up until that point she highlights the disadvantages that women experience in the society of her time. Each of her four major characters suffers either from marital or filial obligations. Alicia Audley and Clara Talboys are both young women in their fathers' homes and are subjugated to their fathers' wills. Alicia had a wonderful relationship with her father until he marries Lucy Graham; then she was relegated to the periphery of his life. Clara Talboys loves George very much, but because her father had disinherited him so she is not allowed to speak of him. When Robert Audley arrives at her home to give them his version of the events that prompt him to believe in George's death, Clara is unable to give any sign in front of her father that the news troubles her in any way. Phoebe Marks is held in place by her position as a servant, and her only way out is to marry her brute of a cousin, Luke Marks, at which point she becomes further abused as his wife. Lady Audley knows what it means to be a woman and poor in her time and decides she will do whatever it takes to get away from that kind of life. She finds a man who loves her to distraction in Sir Michael, and he is very wealthy. She is able to cast off both the stigma of poverty as well as the burden of marital compliance with this one act. Her bid for independence titillates and fascinates the women of Victorian England, for small emancipative steps are on the way. By committing bigamy and murder, Lady Audley achieves her dream for a short time until she is locked away in an asylum for her audacity.

Madness

Madness

The idea of mental illness in Mary Elizabeth Braddon's time is very mysterious and misunderstood. Few practicing physicians really understand what causes a mind to become "diseased," and the only way to manage such a biologic travesty is to consign that individual to a mad house. For the reader, it is interesting to note that Braddon lived with her lover, John Maxwell, and bore him six children because his wife was insane, and he was not able to marry Braddon. Lady Audley's Secret gives vent to a very real difficulty in Braddon's life, for to live with a man who is not one's husband in 1860 is to



be branded a harlot. Braddon, however, believed so firmly in the problem that she made her heroine a victim of the very same diagnosis. In the novel, Lady Audley's mother is revealed to have succumbed to madness shortly after Lady Audley was born, and her insanity is believed to be passed from one generation to another. Lady Audley even threatens Robert Audley with an accusation of madness if he will not stop his investigation, a threat that strikes terror in the hearts of everyone of that day because the diagnosis of insanity sometimes hinged on material gain rather than putting an individual in an asylum for safety. The mystique of madness is a prevalent theme throughout *Lady Audley's Secret*, for the reader must understand that Lady Audley reveals her slow journey into madness with her choice to abandon her child and father and pretend to be another woman. She commits bigamy and believes she has committed murder in order to achieve and maintain the life she believes is due her. Throughout the book, Lady Audley never appears to show normal emotions or stress after a difficult encounter with George or Robert. She is cunning and brilliantly devious in how she decides to have a young woman buried in her name. From that point forward, she shows no remorse for any of her actions. The question remains as to whether or not that deserves a diagnosis of insanity. Putting someone in a madhouse seems to be a very common occurrence, given the fear that Robert feels when threatened and the credence Sir Michael gives the thought when his wife suggests that Robert might be showing signs of insanity.

Circumstantial Evidence

Circumstantial Evidence

While *Lady Audley's Secret* is not a mystery or detective novel as defined by the genre of the time, it is a close cousin to it as Braddon uses a number of techniques shared by that genre. Her protagonist, Robert Audley, is an amateur detective at best. He is a barrister by training, but has never worked in that capacity as he is lazy and without ambition at the beginning of the story. Once his friend, George Talboys, disappears, he realizes he must do something to discover the truth about George. At this point, Robert puts forth great effort in determining just what happened to his friend, which leads him to the mystery of his new aunt, Lady Audley. By piecing together pieces of the puzzle from the time he reunites with George at the beginning of the story and then diligently working backward, Robert puts together enough circumstantial evidence that combined with deductive reasoning brings him time and again to the conclusion that Lady Audley is none other than Helen Talboys. Throughout the story Robert follows clue after clue, making lists of events, imitating the steps of other detective novels of the time. There are times when he makes a leap of deduction that eludes the reader, who is able, however, to get to the next logical step without a great deal of difficulty. Circumstantial evidence and deductive reasoning were a theme in Victorian literature that was avidly followed, and Braddon demonstrates her own fascination with it by overtly referring to Robert's efforts in that direction.



Style

Point of View

The novel, *Lady Audley's Secret*, opens with an omniscient and very involved narrator. The description of Audley Court is given as if one is approaching as a visitor for the very first time or watching events unfold from afar. Only at the end of the first chapter does the reader hear anything a character is thinking, which is Sir Michael wondering if he ought to propose to Lucy Graham. The next chapter begins in much the same way, a distant position of the narrator, giving an accounting of the gregarious young man aboard the *Argus*, heading back to England with a fortune made in Australia. All the information given to the reader is in the form of dialogue, with little intrusion from the author.

Once Robert Audley is introduced to the story does the reader have a grounding point; a character point of view that will endure throughout the remainder of the novel. The opening chapters of the book provide necessary information to the reader, information that the point of view character does not have, hence the third person narration to give the reader necessary facts.

From time to time the narrator will enter the thoughts of Alicia Audley, Sir Michael, Lady Audley, and Clara Talboys for short periods in order to give the reader a better understanding of a plot point in the story; however, the vast majority of the story-telling task is given to Robert Audley.

Third person omniscient with Robert Audley the main point of view character, though the narrator does enter the heads of Alicia Audley, Sir Michael, Lady Audley, and Clara Talboys for short periods. The question of reliability does come up, as each of the characters believes their thoughts to be true, and yet for the reader, truth may be far different than that understood by the characters. From time to time the author shows her inexperience when she interjects certain thoughts and facts into inappropriate places. However, her understanding of human nature in Victorian England shines through the entire novel.

Setting

Lady Audley's Secret is set in Victorian England in the mid-1800s, at the time the author, herself, lived there. While the story talks about events in Australia, America, and the Continent, the entire book is set within approximately a hundred mile radius of London. Robert Audley lives in London. His cousin and uncle live at Audley Court, Audley village, Essex, about fifty miles northeast of London. George Talboys returns from Australia and discovers the news of his wife's recent death and burial at Ventnor on the southern edge of the Isle of Wight, an island south of Southampton, approximately fifty miles southwest of London. The setting of *Lady Audley's Secret* reflects that which the author, Mary



Elizabeth Braddon, knew. She writes of the people and places she knows and uses Victorian sensation literature techniques as previously used by Wilkie Collins in *The Woman in White*, published the year prior to *Lady Audley's Secret*. Robert Audley lives in a set of rooms at Fig Tree Court in London where he whiles away his time, being taken care of by his housekeeper Mrs. Maloney. When George insists on traveling to Ventnor to visit his wife's grave, Robert accompanies his friend to the seaside town. There they find the grave without a headstone, an omission that George immediately rectifies. Robert insists that George accompany him on a trip to the Continent where they travel for a year, but this is not detailed in the book. When they return, they visit Audley Court, a huge house, fitting for Sir Michael, the baronet who is Robert's uncle. The home is very large, gothic, has many rooms, and secret passageways. The village of Audley, in contrast, is a small village where the inn does not truly reflect the high standard of living to which Robert is used. The setting reveals the great disparity between the very rich and the very poor, and is a vital tool for the plot of the book. From time to time Braddon makes use of weather as setting with a violent thunderstorm affecting both Lady Audley and George Talboys when they both suspect Lady Audley's secret.

Language and Meaning

The language of *Lady Audley's Secret* reflects the esoteric and highbrow terminology frequently found in Victorian literature. Braddon is a contemporary of Charles Dickens and of Wilkie Collins. As such, she was as aware of their writings as they were of hers. In order to maintain her own position of popularity, Braddon made very good use of the language of the day as well as using language to divert attention in her novel. Most of the time her work is simple, straightforward, and easy to understand. At other times, her language becomes convoluted and complex reflecting the inner turmoil of a character.

The author often interjects with authorial narration to help the reader better understand the motives of individual characters, as if she is unable to have her characters relay that information to the reader themselves. She also refers to Lady Audley as "My Lady" throughout the entire book, giving the reader the feeling that the author is immediately over one's shoulder, supervising the reading of the novel to ensure that it is well understood. The topic of bigamy and murder among the ranks of the privileged is frightening to Braddon's initial audience, and yet novels of sensation and melodrama were the fodder of the day.

Because the novel was serialized, the chapters usually end when a specific portion of the story has been related. She uses her chapters in the beginning of the story to introduce each new character, and when reading the novel as just that, the reader can be put off by that technique. However, when it is understood that the novel was read in a serialized fashion, it is much easier to understand the use of such a writing and language technique.



Structure

The book was first serialized in 1861 in a magazine, and is formatted into three volumes, Volume I, Volume II, and Volume III. In Volume I, Chapters I - XIX the story of George Talboys is told to Robert Audley. George had a lovely young bride who bore him a son, but because money was tight due to George being disinherited by his father, the young man set off for Australia and the gold fields there. Volume I begins with George returning triumphantly to England, expecting to find his wife and taking care of her in the manner in which he had always dreamed. Instead he discovers that his wife is dead and for George, life now has no meaning. Robert Audley takes an interest in his friend George and tries for over a year to help the young man regain some sort of interest in his life. At Audley Court George sees a portrait of Lady Audley, and from that point on, he becomes morose and withdrawn. He disappears shortly after that and Robert begins to realize that George has met with some sort of misfortune. Volume II, Chapters I - XIII, covers the portion of the novel where Robert Audley must try to track down his missing friend, but instead of finding George, he finds George's wife, Helen. Helen is alive and well and living as Lady Audley at Audley Court. Time and again, Robert tries to get Lady Audley to admit to her bigamy and leave Sir Michael, but the woman is determined not to give up her rich lifestyle. Through the use of circumstantial evidence and inductive reasoning, Robert is able to determine who Lady Audley really is, and what likely happened to his friend, George. At the end of Volume II, Lady Audley realizes that Robert Audley will have to die, for he shows no sign of giving up. Volume III, Chapters I - X, demonstrates Lady Audley at her most disturbed and evil level. She sets fire to an inn in order to kill Robert Audley. The stress of waiting tears at her nerves, and when Robert comes to Audley Court himself to confront her, she can no longer continue fighting the inevitable. She confesses everything to Robert and to her husband, Sir Michael. It is revealed that her mother suffered from insanity and has passed it down to her. Lady Audley is consigned to an insane asylum, receiving the very best of care until her death a couple of years later.



Quotes

"The big dragoon was as helpless as a baby; and Robert Audley, the most vacillating and unenergetic of men, found himself called upon to act for another. He rose superior to himself and equal to the occasion." Volume I , Ch. V, Pg. 39.

"'Do you know, Bob,' he said, 'that 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.'" Pg 49, Volume I, Ch VII.

"'Do you remember, Phoebe,' she said presently, relaxing her pace, 'do you remember that French story we read—the story of a beautiful woman who committed some crime—I forget what—in the zenith of her power and loveliness, when all Paris drank to her every night, and when the people ran away from the carriage of the king to flock about hers, and get a peep at her face? Do you remember how she kept the secret of what she had done for nearly half a century, spending her old age in her family chateau, beloved and honoured by all the province, as an uncanonised saint and benefactress to the poor; and how, when her hair was white, and her eyes almost blind with age, the secret was revealed through one of those strange accidents by which such secrets always are revealed in romances, and she was tried, found guilty, and condemned to be burned alive? The king who had worn her colours was dead and gone; the court of which she had been the star had passed away; powerful functionaries and great magistrates, who might perhaps have helped her, were mouldering in their graves; brave young cavaliers, who would have died for her, had fallen upon distant battle-fields; she had lived to see the age to which she had belonged fade like a dream; and she went to the stake, followed only by a few ignorant country people, who forgot all her bounties, and hooted at her for a wicked sorceress.'" Volume I, Ch. XIV, Pg. 105.

"A false move my lady, and one I never expected for from you." Volume I, Ch. XVIII, Pg. 137.

"Whatever the mystery may be, it grows darker and thicker at every step; but I try in vain to draw back or to stop short upon the road, for a stronger hand than my own is pointing the way to my lost friend's unknown grave." Vol. II, Ch II, Pg. 167.

"A hand that is stronger than my own is beckoning me onward upon the dark road." Vol. II, CH V, Pg. 199

"'I know that,' she said, 'those who strike me must strike through him.'" Vol. II, Ch. VII, Pg. 217.



"How if she had taken advantage of George's absence to win a richer husband? How if she had married again, and wished to throw my poor friend off the scent by this false announcement?" Vol II, Ch XI, Pg 267.

"Phoebe replenished the fire and reassumed her bonnet and shawl. She was anxious to get home to that brutal husband, without was only too apt to fall into some mischief in her absence." Vol. III, Ch. I, Pg. 311.



Topics for Discussion

Discuss Mary Elizabeth Braddon's motivation for writing *Lady Audley's Secret*.

Give a timeline of Lady Audley's life, beginning as Helen Maldon.

Explain Lady Audley's reason for leaving her son and father and her justification for her continued absence.

Is there justification for the actions of Phoebe in working with Luke to extort money from Lady Audley?

Does Robert Audley's character change? Explain.

Discuss George Talboys' reasons for keeping his disappearance a secret. Is this logical and well thought out? Explain.

Compare and contrast Clara Talboys and Alicia Audley.

Explain why the author compares Harcourt Talboys to the ancient Romans.

How is Lady Audley able to keep her secret for so long? Explain the specific areas of her life that require her attention.

At what point do you believe Lady Audley snaps? Support your position with evidence from the text.

What is circumstantial evidence? Discuss the importance of circumstantial evidence in the story.

Discuss Braddon's status as an author. Are there any points of the story where she failed to bring things to resolution? Be specific.

Why do you believe Braddon brings the end of the story to as happy an ending as possible?