

**Adaptive Transformations:**  
**Nineteenth-Century Stage Adaptations of Nineteenth-Century Novels**

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## **Abstract**

This study analyses nineteenth-century stage adaptations of Victorian novels. It argues that doing so, provides an important insight into the way that nineteenth-century society engaged with and responded to proto-feminism. A selection of nineteenth-century stage adaptations of three novels, which were both popular at the time and have subsequently become canonical, are analysed. The thesis focuses on how dramatists responded to the germinal proto-feminist elements in the novel when they transferred the plot of the original source to the stage. In Chapter One, the issue of female agency is looked at in the nineteenth century stage adaptations of *Jane Eyre*. Chapter Two focuses on the figure of the 'fallen woman' in the shape of Isabel Vane, Mrs Henry Wood's central figure in *East Lynne*. Finally, in Chapter Three the complex issue of madness, criminal culpability and femininity is examined in the stage adaptations of Mary Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret*.

Despite the attention devoted to the novels by feminist critics, the study of these popular adaptations has received comparatively little attention. One of the plays examined in this thesis has never been examined at an academic level before (*The Mystery of Audley Court* by John Brougham 1866). Building on the pioneering work of Patsy Stoneman, this thesis contributes to the growing interest in popular plays.

The argument of this thesis is that by studying popular adaptations it is possible from both a New Historicist and a proto-feminist perspective to identify how nineteenth-century society engaged with and responded to proto-feminism. The key findings of this thesis are to do with the amount of license that the dramatists gave themselves as they went about adapting the original source to the stage, for example, the characteristics of the main characters are altered, characters are omitted and new characters are created and inserted into the plot, themes are removed or highlighted and it is the argument of this thesis that those changes were made due to contemporaneous events.

## Declarations and Statements

### DECLARATION

This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree.

Signed ..... (candidate)

Date .....

### STATEMENT 1

This thesis is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. Other sources are acknowledged by footnotes giving explicit references. A bibliography is appended.

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**Contents Page**

**Acknowledgements**

..... p. 6

**Introduction**

..... p. 9

**Chapter One**

..... p. 36

**Chapter Two**

..... p. 85

**Chapter Three**

..... p. 134

**Conclusion**

..... p. 182

**Bibliography**

..... p. 205

**Appendices**

Chapter One

Appendix A ..... p.185

Appendix B ..... p.186

Appendix C ..... p.187

Appendix D ..... p.188

Appendix E ..... p.189

Appendix F ..... p.191

## Chapter Two

Appendix A .....	p.192
Appendix B .....	p.193
Appendix C .....	p.194
Appendix D .....	p.195
Appendix E .....	p.196

## Chapter Three

Appendix A .....	p.197
Appendix B .....	p.198
Appendix C .....	p.199
Appendix D .....	p.201
Appendix E .....	p. 203

## **Acknowledgements**

When I set out to complete this PhD in 2011, little did I know that it would take me a little less than a decade to complete. During that time, I juggled working and studying (and recently motherhood) with great difficulty and to the great annoyance to my family and friends who had to put up with my frequent complaints. As such I owe you all a huge debt of gratitude for which I will never be able to fully pay you back, therefore all I can say is thank you, thank you so much for sticking by me and for giving me such enormous encouragement. I bet you never thought this day would come!

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**List of Tables, illustrations, etc.**

Plot chart for Chapter One; nineteenth-century stage adaptations of *Jane Eyre*  
..... p. 191

Plot chart for Chapter Two; nineteenth-century stage adaptations of *East Lynne*  
..... p. 196

Plot chart for Chapter Three; nineteenth-century stage adaptations of *Lady Audley's Secret*  
..... p. 203

*The Governess* by Richard Redgrave.  
..... p. 36

*The Awakening Conscience* by William Holman Hunt.  
..... p. 85

*Lady Lilith* by Dante Gabriel Rossetti.  
..... p. 134

## **Definitions or abbreviations**

A term used frequently in the charts detailing the plot differences from the novels on pages 191, 196 and 203 is *dnf*, which means does not feature. This means that the event, or indeed character is absent from the adaptation.



## **Recognising Patchwork: Introduction**

The core argument of this thesis is that the analysis of nineteenth-century stage adaptations of Victorian novels provides unique insight into the way that nineteenth-century society engaged with and responded to proto-feminism.<sup>1</sup> This thesis seeks to show the academic value in studying these formerly dismissed works by revealing that they demonstrate new ways of understanding attitudes to women and germinal aspects of feminism in the nineteenth-century. There was a tendency in academia to dismiss plays such as these because they are populist, whilst the original sources are now held in high regard, becoming part of a female authored canon of literature deemed worthy of scholarly interest. However, in recent years this attitude to 'ephemera' has started to shift (Stoneman *Jane Eyre on Stage* 1).

This thesis suggests that by reading Victorian stage adaptations of novels like these in light of an interdisciplinary perspective which combines proto-feminist readings of literature, adaptation theory, Victorian and theatre studies, New Historicism and cultural materialism, it is possible to read the plays as vehicles for understanding the ways in which wider Victorian society responded to the novels' proto-feminist elements as well as the changing world around them. The plays are not merely examples of "patchwork" (Birch-Pfeiffer in Stoneman *Jane Eyre on Stage* 170), meaning poor quality copies of an original source. Ironically this dismissive attitude can even be found in one of the plays studied here. Rochester declares that poor quality copies are something that are not worth looking at:

*ROCH (calls after her):* If your portfolio contains only copies, you need not take the trouble to fetch it. I can recognize patchwork.

*JANE:* Then you shall judge for yourself, my lord, when you see them. I have never been able to reproduce what did not find an echo in my heart (Birch-Pfeiffer in Stoneman *Jane Eyre on Stage* 170).

These are the words that Rochester uses in German-born Charlotte Birch-Pfeiffer's adaptation of Brontë's *Jane Eyre* called *The Orphan of Lowood* (1870). Rochester has asked Jane to show him her artwork and this is what he calls to her as she goes to fetch her portfolio. His sneering dismissal of art that is 'only copy' reflects the negative attitude to novel to theatre, film and television adaptations, which was once held. The understanding that 'recognising patchwork' is important is increasing as a result of the work done by academics like Linda Hutcheon, Deborah Cartmell, Benjamin Poore, Jennifer Carnell, Jim Davis and Victor Emeljanow and Stoneman's *Brontë Transformations* and *Jane Eyre on Stage; 1848-1898*. All recognise the value to be found

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<sup>1</sup> Proto-feminism: The Oxford English Dictionary defines Feminism: "As an adjective; of, relating to, or advocating the rights and equality of women, or as a noun, Feminist; an advocate or supporter of the rights and equality of women."(OED, 2014) Proto means 'earliest, original, at an early stage of development', so the phrase 'proto-feminism' refers to books, poems, plays, texts, etc. that possess these qualities before the feminist movement commenced.

in studying adaptations (as will be discussed), like those examined in this thesis. It is the work done by them that this study contributes to.

As Rochester has already demonstrated above, people have long dismissed 'copied' ideas. This is despite the fact that the process of adapting a story from one medium into another goes back to the Ancient Greeks, who created plays based on well-known myths and also to the medieval period where mystery plays portrayed Bible stories, like the Creation story, to the masses (Balodis 14). In the scene quoted above, Birch-Pfeiffer's Jane says something startling in response to Rochester's condescending comment. Jane reveals the enduring success of adaptation as a process when she explains that she only reproduces things that 'find an echo in her heart'. This is why some novels and plays are adapted over and over again; some stories do indeed "find an echo in our hearts" and that it is "a particular kind of story that provides ... comfort that explains the popularity of [*certain*] adaptations" (Hutcheon 115). This is why books like *Jane Eyre*, *Wuthering Heights*, *Pride and Prejudice* and plays like *Romeo and Juliet* and *The Crucible* keep re-appearing in different forms. Each of these stories has 'found an echo in our hearts' with audiences eagerly awaiting fresh, new interpretations of their favourite story. The reason that those stories 'echo' with us is because they tap into what is relevant in society at the time and therefore occupy a 'unique presence in time and space' to paraphrase Benjamin (214). As Hutcheon says of stories that we tell over and over again, "the real comfort lies in the simple act of almost but not quite repeating, in the revisiting of a theme with variations" (Hutcheon 115). We like hearing or seeing the familiar told in a new way and, from a New Historicist perspective, because "nothing comes from nothing" (Greenblatt *Hamlet in Purgatory* 4), new approaches are being made constantly, therefore these plays demonstrate, as copies of an original source, the "mutual permeability of the literary and the historical" (Greenblatt *The Greenblatt Reader* 1-3). For me, these plays are physical, even tangible, evidence that this argument is true. They were created to answer to a demand for entertainment and yet they are different from the original source, the reason for this difference is because all art is a product of the period in which it was created as Linda Hutcheon, Deborah Cartmell, Benjamin Poore, Jennifer Carnell, Catherine Belsey, Jonathan Dollimore, Alan Sinfield, Stephen Greenblatt, Jim Davis and Victor Emeljanow and Patsy Stoneman would all concur. The original sources have evolved over and over again gathering meaning over time, changing, shifting and developing into different ideas for different people. However, this does not mean that the 'children' of the original source are inferior to the mother, "[m]ultiple versions exist laterally, not vertically" (Hutcheon xv), even a "plurality of meaning" (Holderness 207).

The academic study of novel to stage adaptations is developing from being simply an assessment of a play's fidelity to the original source since it has started to be accepted that the practice of adaptation is a mode of rejuvenating theatrical forms (Balodis 1). Additionally, adaptation is also now accepted as a process through which new theatrical genres can be created, such as the idea

of the *bildungsplay*<sup>2</sup> which is discussed in Chapter One on the stage adaptations of *Jane Eyre*. Adaptations, as Stoneman states, “act as unique markers of social and ideological change” (*Jane Eyre on Stage* 1). McCracken-Flescher explains that the reason that (film) adaptations were being overlooked for academic study was because

[w]ith inherent bias, literary critics tend to evaluate against their originary novels, while film critics gauge novels against the films they inspire. Moreover, literary critics tends to focus on what the novel does well, and film can only do poorly, while film critics do the reverse (McCracken-Flescher 116).

McCracken-Flescher’s argument relates to novel to film adaptations however it is still pertinent to this thesis’ discussion of novel to stage adaptations. A great deal of academic study has been conducted on novel to film adaptations, but proportionately less on novel to stage adaptations, as Janis Balodis makes clear in her doctoral thesis *The Practice of Adaptation: Turning Fact and Fiction into Theatre* (Balodis 5). Balodis argues that adaptations, in both art forms, were created to be performed and as such there are theoretical similarities between the two art forms. The academic fields of both theatre and film have dismissed academic study of adaptations at some point in their history.

This attitude towards adaptations is now changing because it has been recognised that adaptations have ‘ideological importance in the context of popular culture’ (Stoneman *Jane Eyre on Stage* 1). The discipline of cultural studies and poststructuralism in particular, as Stoneman indicates in her introduction to *Jane Eyre on Stage, 1848-1898*, has helped to challenge the “separation of high from low culture by arguing for the cultural interconnectedness of all textual production” (Stoneman *Jane Eyre on Stage* 1). Viewing adaptations on these terms means that they cannot be dismissed. Sustained critical analysis of adaptations will reveal that they “act as unique markers of social and ideological change” (*Jane Eyre on Stage* 1) making it possible to see in them the real evidence of the “mutual permeability of the literary and the historical” (Greenblatt *The Greenblatt Reader* 1-3) that is key to New Historicism and cultural materialism. The work of academics like Stoneman, Hutcheon, Poore, Cartmell and Paul Davis demonstrate the benefit of studying adaptations. Their studies have revealed the significance of studying popular culture, in particular adaptations of novels.

An important area in the study of adaptation theory is a focus on language and how it is used in from one media to another. The increase in the study of language comes directly from the rapidly increasing interest in poststructuralism, which has stressed the transience and inconstancy of language and meaning (Belsey 4). As such, for a scholar interested in both adaptation theory and

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<sup>2</sup> The term *Bildungsplay* refers to plays that chart the development of the central character through their formative years or during a period of spiritual awakening. I propose that it is the term that should be used to apply to plays that function in the same way as *Bildungsroman* novels.

poststructuralism, one might examine the difference in the ways in which a character is described or referred to in an adaptation compared to within the original source. It might then be possible to posit an argument explaining the differences by looking at contemporary events, for example, which would be a New Historicist approach.<sup>3</sup> The fresh avenues for inspiration to be found in studying works like these plays, have arisen because the link between “the pleasures of popular cultural consumption and the fashioning of cultural identities” (Jackson and Jones 6-7), has been accepted, so now it is not just through studying canonical texts but also more ephemeral texts that we are able to understand the “fashioning of cultural identities” (Jackson and Jones 6-7). Previously, the traditional literary canon had largely excluded ephemeral texts from receiving critical attention, so they have been little turned to in order to examine or analyse nineteenth-century culture. Patsy Stoneman has already examined the nineteenth-century stage adaptations of *Jane Eyre* in her book, *Jane Eyre on Stage, 1848-1898* (2007). This study, therefore, expands on her work by providing a sustained critical analysis of individual plays in her collection as well as the nineteenth-century stage adaptations of *East Lynne* and *Lady Audley's Secret*.

As this is an interdisciplinary study, feminist literary theory is also a key framework shaping this thesis' examination of the nineteenth-century stage adaptations of *Jane Eyre*, *East Lynne* and *Lady Audley's Secret*. Feminist literary theory traditionally “enter[ed] an old text from a new critical direction” (Rich) such as seeking to identify the ways in which women's struggle against a patriarchal society is presented, however there is also a branch of feminist literary theory (amongst many other splinter sub-sections of feminism) that seeks to find new texts authored by women in the hopes of creating and contributing to a female canon of literature (Showalter *New feminist criticism* 131). This was the original hope for this thesis as I had hoped to find more plays written by women than Charlotte Birch-Pfeiffer's *Jane Eyre* but this was sadly not the case. The feminist approach taken in this work is inspired by Braidotti's *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory*, in which she stipulates that the term 'woman' is an umbrella term “that brings together different kinds of women, different levels of experience, and different identities (154). Like Gubar in her article *What Ails Feminist Criticism*, the idea of getting tied up in arguments about “racialized identity politics” (901) or queer feminism detracts from the key objective of highlighting the role of women in society, historically and in the present. For Braidotti, feminism is

[t]he movement that struggles to change the values attributed to and the representations of women in the longer historical time of patriarchal history (Woman) as well as in the deeper time of one's own identity. In other words, the feminist project encompasses both the level of subjectivity, in the sense of historical agency, political and social entitlement, and the level of identity, which is linked to consciousness, desire and the politics of the personal:

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<sup>3</sup> A New Historicist approach holds that literature must be understood through its cultural context: “New Historicists ... [pull] historical considerations to the center [sic] stage of literary analysis” (Veeseer xi).

it covers both the conscious and the unconscious levels (Braidotti 155).

As such, this is the twenty-first century feminist approach taken in this thesis to the texts examined as evidence of New Historicism and cultural materialism. This means that I look at how the female characters in the play are presented versus how they were presented in the novel. This examination is then deepened by arguing why any differences between the two might have happened, positing potential explanations from a New Historicist perspective by looking at what was happening at the time that the stage adaptation was written. Before going any further with this thesis' argument, it is vital here to point out that from henceforth the phrase 'proto-feminist' will be used in the thesis. This is because none of the key texts studied here were written after the feminist movement commenced. Therefore, these texts pre-date feminism meaning that they can only be analysed as examples of proto-feminism. To further support this thesis' claim to contribute to feminist literary theory is the fact that the original novels that inspired the stage adaptations analysed here were all written by women and all of those novels feature a central female character. What is more, the way in which those female characters were presented on stage when they were adapted will be assessed and deepening the argument further is the fact that the plays examined were written (largely) by male dramatists. As such, the potential for identifying examples of proto-feminism being omitted or intensified is significant. This also demonstrates New Historicism's claim about the "mutual permeability of the literary and the historical" (Greenblatt *The Greenblatt Reader* 1-3). The nineteenth-century dramatists weaved easily between literature or theatre and contemporary events in order to construct their plays, doing what they wanted to the original sources in the attempt to create a successful play without feeling any kind of anxiety about approaching another writer's work.

Harold Bloom established the theory of a male "anxiety of influence" (Bloom xxiii), which indicates the intertextuality of writing and how the masculine literary tradition continued to contribute to the already existing examples of negative, or restricted images of femininity. Bloom states of this "anxiety of influence" that

[w]hat writers may experience as anxiety, and what their works are compelled to manifest, are the *consequence* of poetic misprision, rather than the *cause* of it. The strong misreading comes first; there must be a profound act of reading that is a kind of falling in love with a literary work (Bloom xxiii).

The question that Bloom's notion raises is: if there is 'a male anxiety of influence', then is it possible that there is a 'female anxiety of influence'? If the male anxiety of influence is felt by writers when inspired by a male written classic canonical text, for instance Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion* being inspired by the Greek myth of Pygmalion falling in love with one of his own sculptures, then Shaw's play *Pygmalion* is the "*consequence* of poetic misprision", which is the failure to appreciate the value or identity of art, literature or poetry because the reader has been

so inspired by the original source. Therefore, all the nineteenth-century dramatists of *Jane Eyre* could be said to have experienced “a profound act of reading that is a kind of falling in love with a literary work” (Bloom xxiii). But is this only felt by a man responding to a male authored text? In respect to the stage adaptations of Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* is there an anxiety of influence in relation to a female written text? Or because Charlotte was a female writer, is it possible that the male dramatist felt no anxiety at approaching her text because he did not experience “a profound act of reading that is a kind of falling in love with a literary work” (Bloom xxiii) when he read it?

This is not true of the first two stage adaptations by John Courtney 1847 and John Brougham 1848 as it was only in 1849 that Brontë publicly revealed her identity as Currer Bell, the author of *Jane Eyre* (London 33). As such Courtney and Brougham wrote their adaptations believing, as everyone else did at the time, that the author of *Jane Eyre* was a man. Therefore, did Courtney and Brougham experience ‘a male anxiety of influence’ when the other dramatists did not? And does this make a difference to the content of their adaptations? If there was a male anxiety of influence felt by Brougham and Courtney, then how are their adaptations different to the other adaptations which were written later on when it was public knowledge that *Jane Eyre* was written by a woman? Is it possible that Brougham and Courtney were less willing to dilute the proto-feminist elements in the original source because they read the book thinking that it was written by a man? This might be one way to find evidence of Harold Bloom’s theory of an ‘anxiety of influence’. It might also explain why Brougham’s Jane stands up so vociferously to Rochester’s aristocratic friends when one of them objectifies her publicly. However, when the 1879 adaptation by Willing’s play is considered, this is not the case. It was written after it had become public knowledge that Brontë wrote *Jane Eyre* and it is the most obviously proto-feminist of all the nineteenth-century stage adaptations with its picturing of an idealised mutually beneficial union amongst women and the request for women to find comfort in sisterhood (Stoneman *Jane Eyre on Stage* 330). Jane offers to share half of her newly inherited wealth with Blanche and the play even ends with Jane inviting Blanche to live with her and Rochester once they are married. Willing’s interpretation of the original source, however, might ultimately have been inspired by contemporary events. The 1870s was a decade when the Woman’s Rights Movement was gaining momentum (as will be discussed in Chapter One). It is the argument of this thesis that it is by studying these hitherto largely unexamined plays, it is possible to “determine the history to which [*they were*] subject throughout the time of [*their*] existence” (Benjamin 214). By doing so we can garner valuable information such as the impact of significant cultural, social and historical events, the impact of the fame of a particular actress or actor, the political leanings of the dramatist and more importantly how the characters of these phenomenally successful books were understood by their nineteenth-century audiences and readers. Contentious characters, as will be revealed, have been altered substantially in the Victorian stage adaptations.

In Chapter One, we see Jane Eyre represented at times as pretty, plain, fiercely opinionated to the point of being self-destructive, and also meek and mild. This chapter looks at why the dramatists chose to stage Jane in those ways, with the topic of representations of female agency as the focal point of the chapter; female agency being a dominant theme in the original source. Chapter One delves additionally into issues of theatrical and literary form by arguing for a recognition of the theatrical genre of a *bildungsplay*.

Chapter Two looks at the difference in approach to the contentious figure of the 'fallen woman' on the nineteenth-century stage versus in the Ellen Wood's novel. It is argued that the difference is due to the fact that melodrama is "subtle and has often been responsive to immediate social circumstances and concerns" (Mayer 145-146), whereas, in the novel, Isabel Vane is treated severely by Wood. The result of this was that *East Lynne* was a prime opportunity for nineteenth-century dramatists looking to respond to the widespread need for entertainment. The novel was therefore reborn on the stage as a seduction melodrama. Seduction melodrama was a genre that was able to treat the subject of the 'fallen woman' with more sensitivity than the novel. This is because playhouses were able to "confront issues and to mediate social values, where plays themselves intervene in and obliquely or directly critique matters of daily concern" (Mayer 146). These stage adaptations, therefore, seem to almost unanimously present their interpretation of *East Lynne's* message as 'hate the sin, not the sinner'.

Chapter Three examines the approach taken to the adaptation of Lady Audley in the stage adaptations of Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret* (1862). In this chapter, we see the complexity of Lady Audley's motivation to commit the crimes, expertly crafted by Braddon in the original, completely disintegrated as the characterisations of Lady Audley in the stage adaptations reduce Braddon's complex character into either a 'victimised heroine' (McWilliams 54), a villainous seductress and even a deranged madwoman.

The study of this thesis has been shaped by the desire to approach the adaptations from a proto-feminist framework. The intention in doing so was to expose the ways in which the novels (all female authored) were handled by the (usually male) dramatists as was discussed earlier in relation to the work of Harold Bloom and his theory of an 'anxiety of influence'. As such, due to the feminist stance that this study also takes, it fits alongside Patsy Stonewood's work on Charlotte, and indeed Emily, Brontë in her two books *Brontë Transformations* and *Jane Eyre on Stage; 1848-1898*, Linda Hutcheon's *A Theory of Adaptation* and Jim Davis and Victor Emeljanow's *Reflecting the Audience; London Theatregoing, 1840 – 1880*. It also relates to feminist literary and theatre study, as the adaptations are all examined from a proto-feminist framework in order to assess how the germinal proto-feminist elements in the novels were handled during the adaptation process by the dramatists. Therefore, as stated earlier, this study additionally fits alongside the work of feminist literary critics like Braidotti, RAich, Pykett, Gilbert

and Gubar, Toril Moi, and Elaine Showalter who coined the term “gynocritics” to describe literary criticism based on a female perspective:

In contrast to [an] angry or loving fixation on male literature, the program of gynocritics is to construct a female framework for the analysis of women's literature, to develop new models based on the study of female experience, rather than to adapt male models and theories. Gynocritics begins at the point when we free ourselves from the linear absolutes of male literary history, stop trying to fit women between the lines of the male tradition, and focus instead on the newly visible world of female culture (Showalter *New feminist criticism* 131).

As was mentioned earlier, the initial intention of this study was to use gynocriticism to analyse the stage adaptations of Wood, Braddon and Brontë. However, it soon became apparent that this would not be possible as the vast majority of the stage adaptations were written by male dramatists, which is why the focus of this study changed. Instead of using gynocriticism, a proto-feminist approach was taken to the stage adaptations. The crucial questions that ran through my mind when I looked at the playscripts were ‘What has happened to the proto-feminist elements that are within the original sources? Where have they gone? Or, why has this changed?’ As such, my goal was to analyse the nineteenth-century stage adaptations from a proto-feminist perspective to see what the dramatists changed and to try to propose a reason for the changes that they made, and therefore I have adopted a New Historicist approach as well as using a proto-feminist framework. This is a relatively new approach to take towards the study of adaptations. I did not set out with the intention of assessing how faithful they are to the original source; it was my intention to examine why the adaptations are the products that they are. Therefore, this thesis is interdisciplinary in its approach as it spans feminist literary theory, poststructuralism, New Historicism and adaptation theory. As a result of the interdisciplinary approach that this study takes, it can also sit alongside Karen E. Laird’s *The Art of Adapting Victorian Literature, 1848-1920: Dramatizing Jane Eyre, David Copperfield and The Woman in White* (2015). Laird contends that “[l]iterary critics and theatre historians alike have caricatured Victorian adapters as pirates and plunderers, bemoaned their audiences’ lowbrow taste, and dismissed their plays as woefully unoriginal copies of inviolable works of art” (Laird 1). She also points out that this attitude “stands in dramatic contrast to the careful critical reception bestowed upon film adaptations of the very same literary texts, many of which utilize adaptation strategies that were first popularized by Victorian playwrights” (Laird 1). Laird’s work focuses on literary adaptation in Victorian popular theatre and how this trend influenced silent cinema. She looks at *Jane Eyre* (1847), *David Copperfield* (1849-50) and *The Woman in White* (1859-60). She agrees with Linda Hutcheon that adaptation is “a transgenerational phenomenon” (Hutcheon 32) meaning that, for her,

the playhouses and picture houses of the long nineteenth century formed a natural laboratory, housing the steady workings of a transgenerational process ... [, so that with] *Jane Eyre, David Copperfield and The Woman in White*



[t]he reader can trace their evolution through successive generations of textual reproduction, as if seen through time lapse photography (Laird 3).

In this way, Laird's work sits alongside this thesis and even posits the further work that can be done in this field.

The nineteenth-century stage adaptations examined in this study are the adaptations of Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847), Henry Wood's *East Lynne* (1861) and Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret* (1862). These three novels were selected for the following reasons:

1. All three were written by women novelists;
2. All three contain elements of, or are, sensation literature, which has close connections to melodrama;
3. All three were monumentally popular when they were published;
4. All three were shocking in their own way when they were published.

The plays examined in this thesis were found in various places. The scripts for the adaptations of *Jane Eyre* were the easiest to identify as they had already been made available in Stoneman's *Jane Eyre on Stage, 1848-1898*. I cross-referenced the adaptations in Stoneman's work with the British Library's archive as well as their 'Lord Chamberlain's Plays' archive, and H. Philip Bolton's *Women Writers Dramatized: A Calendar of Performances from Narrative Works Published in English to 1900 (Novels on Stage)* (2000) to confirm that no previously unknown nineteenth-century *Jane Eyre* stage adaptation scripts had been discovered since Stoneman published her book, or had been omitted by Stoneman. Ascertaining the existence of the *East Lynne* adaptations was more complicated. The stage adaptations were discovered by searching the entirety of the British Library's archives, including the 'Lord Chamberlain's Plays' and also from referencing H. Philip Bolton's *Women Writers Dramatized*. The scripts were then obtained in various ways, such as, searching library catalogues, internet search engines and requesting digital copies from British Library if available there. Hamilton Hume's adaptation is available online in full on Google Books. As with the *East Lynne* adaptations, the search for the existence and then obtaining the scripts of the stage adaptations of Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret* started with searching the British Library's archives and their 'Lord Chamberlain's Plays' collection as well as H. Philip Bolton's *Women Writers Dramatized*. I then discovered The Sensation Press. They were able to provide the scripts for all of the stage adaptations examined in Chapter Three, with the exception of John Brougham's adaptation. The British Library provided the manuscript for Brougham's adaptation of *Lady Audley's Secret* entitled *The Mystery of Audley Court*, which was not known about by the Sensation Press. Once the British Library had furnished me with a CD-Rom containing scanned pages from Brougham's manuscript, the laborious process of digitising the script was undertaken. The digital version of Brougham's adaptation *The Mystery of Audley Court* that I created during this course of study is currently being made accessible online.

As the examination of the stage adaptations in this thesis is frequently focused on theatrical genres, I felt it was necessary to provide important information regarding the context of proto-feminist literary theory, theatre history, acting in melodrama and adaptation theory before the chapters in order to give them the space to focus solely on the argument presented in this thesis. First, the issue of proto-feminist literary theory will be discussed before the context of theatre history and melodrama are examined, and finally adaptation theory. The thesis' argument then commences with Chapter One on the nineteenth-century stage adaptations of *Jane Eyre*. The analysis of *Jane Eyre* is first because this is the first book chronologically to have been produced being written in 1847, *East Lynne* is the focus of Chapter Two because it was written in 1861 and the adaptations of *Lady Audley's Secret* are examined last in Chapter Three because the original novel was written in 1862.

### **Feminist Literary Theory in the context of Sensation Literature**

In *Contemporary Feminist Theories* (1998), Stevi Jackson and Jackie Jones state:

Feminists refuse to accept that inequalities between women and men are natural and inevitable and insist that they should be questioned. Theory, for us, is not an abstract intellectual activity divorced from women's lives, but seeks to explain the conditions under which those lives are lived. Developing this understanding has entailed looking at the material actualities of women's everyday experience and examining the ways in which we are represented and represent ourselves within a range cultural practices, such as the arts and media (Jackson and Jones 1).

Here they argue that feminist theory seeks to analyse the need to understand women's subordination and their exclusion from, or marginalisation within, a variety of cultural and social arenas and the ways in which women are represented and represent themselves within a range cultural forms. This study focuses on examining how the female literary characters of *Jane Eyre*, *Isabel Vane* and *Lucy Audley* were represented after they had been adapted. What makes this goal more intriguing from a feminist perspective is that the stage adaptations were largely written by male dramatists. As such, examining the changes that the nineteenth-century male dramatists made to the stories of the original sources might raise some interesting suggestions from both a feminist and a New Historicist perspective. This thesis continues from Jackson and Jones' work by putting the theory into practice with an analysis of the proto-feminist connotations of Victorian stage adaptations of *Jane Eyre*, *East Lynne* and *Lady Audley's Secret*. In addition, I draw on poststructuralist theory, especially when it relates to the variability of language and the influence of social perspectives, in this instance the differences in the way that the female characters are referred to, or described within the plays. Why is *East Lynne's* *Isabel Vane* described as "mad" in one play, but not in another? Critics like Stevi Jackson, Jackie Jones, Catherine Belsey and

Robert Young have all been influential. Jackson and Jones indicate “that language and discourse are not transparent media of communication, ... they construct rather than reflect meaning” (Jackson and Jones 25). The Brontë adaptations thus both construct and reconstruct the text’s proto-feminist meanings. For feminists examining such a text, certain questions will arise, such as ‘How is the central character described? In what way is she referred to? How do other characters treat her? How does she react to her treatment? How much prominence does she have in the text? Is there a power struggle between her and another character/s? How does she speak? How is she spoken about?’. Language is now a key facet of feminist analysis. Feminist theorists often seek to examine words themselves rather than just the action and events taking place in a novel. Jackson and Jones refer to the importance of studying “the language and discourse we use to think about and make sense of the world” (Jackson and Jones 7). There are instances in the stage adaptations studied in this thesis when there are notably different changes in the language, which would impact on the way that the audience understood the character: for example, Brougham’s Jane Eyre is described as “devilish pretty” (Brougham in Stoneman *Jane Eyre on Stage* 81). Making Jane ‘pretty’ moves away from Brontë’s original ‘plain Jane’ and makes the leap of her marriage to Rochester less remarkable. Rochester, in Brougham’s adaptation, did not fall in love with Jane purely for her mind and personality, his love for her was aided by her attractiveness. Identifying changes like this, which were made by male dramatists, reveal the way that Brontë’s proto-feminist message was being eradicated by male dramatists, for reasons which will be argued in Chapter One.

Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar were influenced by the feminist theorist Elaine Showalter (discussed earlier in this chapter), whose writings together with those of Ellen Moers, demonstrated that women have “a literature and a culture of their own – that, ... there was a rich and clearly defined female literary sub-culture, a community in which women consciously read and related to each other’s works” (Gilbert and Gubar xii). Curiously, despite the fact that each of the original sources examined in this thesis was written by a woman, there is just one adaptation that was also written by a woman. The only female authored stage adaptation is *Jane Eyre or The Orphan of Lowood*. It was written in 1870 by Charlotte Birch-Pfeiffer. This fact does not demonstrate much of a literary sub-culture, or community with women responding to each other’s works. However, the reason for this disproportionate number of female dramatists adapting *Jane Eyre* to the stage maybe a result of the fact that it was deemed by some factions of nineteenth-century society to be morally suspect for a woman to earn a living by writing. This was because the act of writing was an act of exposing herself, although acting held an even greater and more literal risk of exposure, therefore writing for the Victorian stage might have been considered as morally suspect as acting (Newey 145). Charlotte Brontë comments on the difficulty of having a public female voice in the nineteenth century when she refers to the initial publication of her and her sisters’ novels:

Averse to personal publicity, we veiled our own names under those of Currer, Ellis and Acton Bell; the ambiguous choice

being dictated by a sort of conscientious scruple at assuming Christian names positively masculine, while we did not like to declare ourselves women, because — without at that time suspecting that our mode of writing and thinking was not what is called 'feminine' — we had a vague impression that authoresses are liable to be looked on with prejudice (Charlotte Brontë in *Wolstenholme* 70).

The stage at this time was still a masculine sphere, as women actors were relative newcomers to acting, and the impact that this had on theatrical literature is clear in the writing for the stage. It was part of a masculine literary tradition that was even prepared to appropriate and refashion proto-feminist works in its own image and for its own purposes, as will be made clear throughout this thesis.

Whilst writing for the stage is part of a masculine literary tradition, Sensation Literature is teeming with femininity. Of the body of work classified as Sensation Literature, Lynn Pykett says:

Female characters are absolutely central to virtually all sensation novels. Indeed ... one of the genre's most distinctive features was the way in which it displayed women and made a spectacle of femininity, whether of the passive, angelic variety, or in the form of the *femme fatale* (Pykett *The Sensation Novel* 6-7).

Here Pykett reveals the reason for the many proto-feminist and feminist readings of Sensation Literature. Its focus on the feminine and the fact that so many sensation books are female authored is what made Sensation Literature “a natural candidate for critical revival in the period of scholarly feminist recovery in the late 1970s through the turn of the century” (Gilbert *A Companion to Sensation Fiction* 6). Sensation Literature is a “genre dominated by women and viewed as transgressive, [and] was quickly linked to the feminist concerns circulating broadly in the culture, as well as being seen as a precursor to the New Woman novels of the *fin de siècle*” (Gilbert *A Companion to Sensation Fiction* 6). Feminist, and proto-feminist, literary theory now moves beyond “the early critical binary in which these works were either seen simply as reinforcing or transgressing traditional gender roles, or were considered only in relation to the history of feminism” (Gilbert *A Companion to Sensation Fiction* 6), to examining texts in order to deepen “our understanding of these works in a wider variety of contexts” (Gilbert *A Companion to Sensation Fiction* 6). In the case of this thesis, the context is the context of theatre history and adaptation theory. However, this thesis also considers the context of contemporary social, legal and medical events to see how momentous events in those arenas influenced the adaptation of the original novels to the stage [in addition to analysing the issue of how the proto-feminist elements in the original novels were treated by the (primarily male) dramatists]. As the purpose of this thesis is to analyse the nineteenth-century stage adaptations of the original novels from a proto-feminist perspective, proto-feminist theory relating solely to the original sources is therefore mentioned sparingly. As such, the issue of why the original sources of the stage adaptations are

considered to be proto-feminist is looked at here in the introduction, leaving the chapters free to examine the adaptations exclusively.

The issue of whether *Jane Eyre* is indeed a sensation novel could take up the entirety of a thesis, so this question will be answered by simply referring to Jessica Cox, who succinctly argues that, “Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* unquestionably participates in or engages with a multitude of literary genres, including fairytale, gothic, Bildungsroman, realism, romance, and sensation” (Cox 2008). There are countless theoretical approaches to *Jane Eyre* and of course proto-feminist readings of the novel are numerous.

Proto-feminist readings of *Jane Eyre* often hinge on Jane’s rebellious refusal to conform to the social conventions expected of Victorian women and Jane’s demands for respect and equality. Gilbert and Gubar’s interpretation of *Jane Eyre* hinges on:

the striking coherence we noticed in literature by women could be explained by a common, female impulse to struggle free from social and literary confinement through strategic redefinitions of self, art, and society ... Charlotte Brontë ... seemed to us to provide a paradigm of many distinctively female anxieties and abilities (Gilbert and Gubar xi-xii).

The novel’s *Jane Eyre* demonstrates huge agency as she goes about trying “to struggle free from social ... confinement” (Gilbert and Gubar xii) on numerous occasions. As such, when the analysis of the plays commenced it was imperative to search for evidence within the plays where the dramatists were responding to Jane’s acts of agency in the original source. The focus of Chapter One is how the nineteenth-century dramatists responded to Jane’s demands for a life of agency, equality and freedom. Showalter’s reading of *Jane Eyre* is that Bertha is Jane’s foil. Showalter states that in *Jane Eyre*,

There is Charlotte Brontë’s extraordinary subversion of the Gothic ... in which the mad wife locked in the attic symbolizes the passionate and sexual side of Jane’s personality, an alter ego that her upbringing, her religion, and her society have commanded her to incarcerate (Showalter *A Literature of Their Own* 28).

As such, Showalter sees Bertha as a physicalized symbol of the pent-up emotion and frustration Jane feels, Jane being a representative of all mid-Victorian, middle-class dependent women. Jane’s lack of agency therefore lead to the creation of a Bertha-like character. But how did the nineteenth-century dramatists see these characters? In Chapter One, the focus is on the dramatists’ response to Jane’s agency in the novel where she is constantly battling to have the ability to act as a “free human being” (Brontë 255) and how that issue appeared in the dramatists’ versions of the play is therefore significant in the chapter. In examining the plays from this stance, it was possible to view Jane’s agency as an issue needing to be addressed by the dramatist. My

argument is that each dramatist reacted to the novel's theme of female agency in different ways depending on the social and legal events happening at the time of the adaptation's creation. Most notable is Wills' 1882 adaptation, where Jane's unchecked agency almost leads to her ruination.

Proto-feminist readings of *East Lynne* frequently focus on Isabel Vane's failure to conform to society's expectations of a middle-class wife and mother. Chapter Two focuses on how the contentious figure of the 'fallen woman' was approached by the nineteenth-century (male) dramatists. Lynn Pykett picks up on Gilbert and Gubar's theory of literature by women containing a sense of the "female impulse to struggle free from social ... confinement through strategic redefinitions of self" (Gilbert and Gubar xi-xii). Pykett states that "*East Lynne* ... is a novel whose nobly suffering heroine is incontrovertibly an adulteress" (Pykett *The Sensation Novel* 47). For Pykett, Isabel Vane's suffering (which is both the cause and the reason for her adultery) is her "deviance and transgressiveness. The sensation heroine's failure to conform to social codes is even more significant, and potentially more subversive, than her breaking of laws" (Pykett *The Sensation Novel* 49). It is Isabel's failure to conform to the expectations of middle-class wives that leads to her downfall and, ultimately, her sin. Despite Wood's conservatism, Isabel is treated sympathetically in the novel and she "remains the heroine" (Pykett *The Sensation Novel* 60) of *East Lynne's* plot. As such, when I approached the writing of this thesis, I wanted to discern whether the nineteenth-century stage adaptations took the same approach to Isabel. In essence, do the dramatists 'hate the sin, but not the sinner'? For Pykett certainly, Isabel in the original source "is represented as a sinner rather than a villain or criminal" (Pykett *The Sensation Novel* 60). What became evident when the analysis of the stage adaptations commenced was that there was a conflict between the way that Wood's narrator presents Lady Isabel versus the way Lady Isabel appears on the stage. This sparked a thorough investigation of contemporary social and historical events in the hopes of positing an answer to the diverse interpretation of Wood's contentious character.

Proto-feminist readings of *Lady Audley's Secret* often focus on Lady Audley's actions being the result of her failure to also conform to Victorian societal norms (Pykett *The Sensation Novel* 49), which relates to Gilbert and Gubar's theory of literature by women demonstrating a "female impulse to struggle free from social ... confinement through strategic redefinitions of self" (Gilbert and Gubar xi-xii). The reason for Lady Audley's actions swing from madness to badness in the theoretical responses, "[i]s she mad, or is she just bad?" (Pykett *The Sensation Novel* 54). As such, when I approached the analysis of the nineteenth-century stage adaptations of the novel, I wanted to look at how the issue of Lady Audley's culpability was approached by the male dramatists. It was then discovered that the dramatists each approach the character in different ways. Some take a sympathetic approach to her and try to turn her into melodrama's very recognisable 'victimised heroine', whereas others look at Lady Audley's actions as physical evidence of her madness making her a character worthy of the audience's sympathy. There is even the suggestion in some of the adaptations of Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret* that she was

driven to it, which connects to Gilbert and Gubar's idea of literature by women having a "female impulse to struggle free from social ... confinement through strategic redefinitions of self" (Gilbert and Gubar xi-xii). [Although intriguingly, the *Lady Audley's Secret* stage adaptations were all written by male dramatists].

In summary, what connects all of the stage adaptations is the impact of the momentous changes happening in the nineteenth-century in respect of all areas of life, even in theatres themselves. The nineteenth-century was a century where huge change occurred in the theatre as the next section will discuss.

### **The History of British Theatre: Minor Theatres and Legitimate Theatres**

Michael Booth comments on the negative opinion that was held of nineteenth-century theatre saying

No one can claim that the nineteenth century was an age of dramatic excellence; it was the opposite. Yet one cannot ignore a century of development in which the theatre abandoned traditional modes of expression and came haltingly into modernity (Booth *Prefaces* 2).

Despite Booth's dismissal of nineteenth-century plays, he signals to the merit of studying the plays of the century. Nina Auerbach also picks up on this attitude to the topic but signposts a specific point where a change in the attitude is apparent. She says that

the theatre is generally, and wrongly, dismissed as sub-canonical, at least until the 1890s, when the self-conscious literacy of Wilde and Shaw elevated it to the verbal sophistication that would become Edwardian drama (Auerbach "Before the curtain" 3).

Here Auerbach makes it clear how British theatre was split in two - the work occurring before Wilde and Shaw and the work after Wilde and Shaw - and how this distinction on the basis of assumed quality held by one side of the split is wrong. This division in attitude is due to the fact that British drama was divided by what was allowed to be offered by the minor theatres and what the patented theatre houses were licensed to produce. However, this separation of the theatres in London was a new thing in the nineteenth-century. At the start of the 1800s,

theatrical activity in London had centred on the patent houses, Drury Lane and Covent Garden, which operated throughout the year, and the Haymarket, which opened in the summer. An expanding population, however, necessitated more entertainment than the patent monopoly allowed. The consequence was a large number of "minor" theatres which sprang up in the early years of the century (Davis and Emeljanow ix).

Prior to 1843 there were only two legitimate theatres in England, Covent Garden and Drury Lane. These theatres were the only ones which were licensed to produce 'legitimate' drama therefore the other 'minor' theatres were restricted to "opera, pantomime, spectacle, ballet, and farce" (Pisani 73) in order to make the works that they were producing as far removed from the serious drama as possible.

This was because in 1843 the Theatres Act was passed by parliament in the United Kingdom. It made changes to the system introduced by the Licensing Act of 1737, which had given the Lord Chamberlain<sup>4</sup> the power to examine and control the performance of any plays. He could stop any play, or an existing play that had been altered, from being performed and he was not required to explain his decision. Before a new play could be performed it needed to be sent to the Lord Chamberlain for consideration in order to obtain a license entitling its performance. Theatre owners caught staging plays that had not been approved could be prosecuted. Moreover, the 1737 Licensing Act also limited spoken drama to the patent theatres: Theatre Royal on Drury Lane and Theatre Royal, Covent Garden in London. In 1788 the Theatrical Representations Act relaxed this system by giving powers to local magistrates to permit occasional performances, by licence, for periods of no more than 60 days. Then in 1843 the Theatres Act limited the power of the Lord Chamberlain, so that the performance of plays could only be vetoed if the play was not "fitting for the preservation of good manners, decorum or of the public peace so to do" (Thomas, Carlton and Etienne 62). The 1843 Theatres Act also gave power to local authorities to license theatres, breaking the monopoly of the patent theatres and encouraging the development of popular theatrical entertainments, such as saloon theatres attached to public houses and music halls. However, the effect of the 1737 Licensing Act took some time to undo. Theatres had had to get around the law for decades in order to meet the growing demand for entertainment coming from the rising population and eventually the work that they had been forced to do became inherent to their writing of new plays, such as the addition of music to heighten the emotion in a scene. Williams reveals that "illegitimate cultural realm, which, however, expanded to become highly productive and innovative, developing many genres – including melodrama – that evaded the Act by incorporating dance, pantomime, banners and signs, song, and orchestral music in order to fly under the radar of the restrictions on 'spoken drama' (Williams 6). Their innovative approach to theatrical entertainment meant that they could continue entertaining the masses, but the changes that they had implemented to evade the law were significant. The addition of music particularly was especially impactful. It did not simply make the plays sound 'nice' as Stoneman goes on to say of the effect of music:

Speaking over music 'inevitably led to a heightened,  
deliberate and passionate mode of delivery', with many

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<sup>4</sup> The Lord Chamberlain, or Lord Chamberlain of the Household, was a position held by the most senior officer of the Royal Household of the United Kingdom. Their role was to supervise the departments which give advice to the Sovereign of the United Kingdom. From 1737 to 1968, the Lord Chamberlain had the power to censor the theatre as he decided which plays would be given performance licences.



pauses to allow the words to carry; actors emphasised their words by facial and bodily gestures 'on an almost balletic scale'. (Taylor, pp125, 129; see also Booth, M., 'Acting', pp. 31-6) (Stoneman *Jane Eyre on Stage* 6).

The addition of music did not just create the loophole that the minor theatres needed to continue providing entertainment, it "had the magical effect of transforming" the play (Stoneman *Jane Eyre on Stage* 9). What's more, melodrama also became a way for people to deal with the social changes taking place in the era. It became so popular because "it spoke directly and appealed to nineteenth-century audiences and their concerns in a world that was fast changing in social, cultural, political and economic terms" (Mettinger-Schartmann 382). From a New Historicist perspective, the fact that there is clear evidence of literature responding to the context of the time in which it was produced gives great credence to the critical theory and, indeed, the argument of this thesis. Stoneman refers to Henry Mayhew's account of the Chartist audience at the Victoria Theatre as her evidence for melodrama being the vehicle through which the masses dealt with social change.

They were content to accept landowners so long as they were benevolent, and were much more eager for the come-uppance of hypocritical parsons, cheating shopkeepers and sadistic policemen – the 'rich' classes they had most to do with. The social order in melodramas is not overthrown but purged of its wickedness; melodrama is most vividly democratic in showing the oppressed poor as the arbiters of good and evil (Stoneman *Jane Eyre on Stage* 7).

Here Stoneman explains the need for dramatists to write for their intended audiences and how the style of work they were producing was affected by the need of the dramatists to appeal to their audience. For instance, a "drama with musical accompaniment, dumb show and visual sensation needed strong and simple moral contrasts, in which good and evil are clearly differentiated and motivations are unambiguous" (Stoneman *Jane Eyre on Stage* 6). This style typifies the approach that the nineteenth-century illegitimate theatres adopted when producing plays and can be seen in the fact that melodrama often relies on stock characters in order for the audience to clearly understand and empathise with the action of the play.

The functions and roles of these individual characters was to make their role in a play immediately clear to the audience, as Mettinger-Schartmann explains:

Stock character types are the hero, the villain, the heroine, the comic man, frequently partnered by a comic woman. The comic man is usually a member of the working-class, thus offering identification for the audience, and a friend or servant of the hero. He has to provide comic relief. The comic subplot is not completely independent of the main story ... the heroine, though mostly weak, is in many respects much stronger than the hero; she is far more

persecuted and suffering. Most of the necessary pathos attaches to her (Mettinger-Schartmann 383).

In respect of the plays that are the focus of this study, it is possible to identify the roles to which the characters conform very easily. The issue of the function of the heroine is, however, complex, as she does not always readily conform to the type of weak, persecuted heroine that Mettinger-Schartmann describes; as Chapter Two and Chapter Three both reveal.

The Lady Audleys, Jane Eyres and Isabel Vanes that this thesis identified are complex theatrical characters who feature in plays that often discuss, or at least engage with contentious social issues like women's rights. As such, they could be seen as the forerunners, or even 'mothers' of the problem play characters of Rebellious Susan, Paula Tanqueray, Hedda Gabler and Kitty Warren who emerged in the 1880s. The problem plays of the latter part of the nineteenth-century have certainly been said to have been influenced by the theatre that preceded it as much as by the cultural and social landscape of the time in which the plays were produced. Nina Auerbach has drawn parallels between Pinero's *The Second Mrs Tanqueray* and the Victorian stage adaptations of *East Lynne* arguing that "without the extravagance of *East Lynne* in the 1860s, *Mrs Tanqueray* might never have achieved her polish in the 1890s" (Auerbach 11). In this way we can see the way that nineteenth-century theatre progressed and evolved as well as how multi-connected it was to literature, other theatrical genres and the world at large.

Another notable fact evident in all of the stage adaptations examined in this thesis is that there are very few stage directions as well as a complete lack of character notes to explain how the characters should be played, which does complicate analysing them today. What we can be sure of, though, is the type of acting performed in nineteenth-century melodramas.

### **Acting in Victorian Melodramas**

There is some evidence of acting and staging techniques for nineteenth-century melodramas. Michael Booth is one of the most knowledgeable experts on the topic of nineteenth-century English theatre. He explains that at the beginning of the century,

English theatre was a theatre of illusion ... [as] ... [s]taging was symbolic rather than realistic... Players entered and exited through proscenium doors opening and shutting upon library and forest alike, and they made their most effective 'points' downstage dead centre. Acting, whether in tragedy, comedy, farce, or melodrama, was considerably larger than life: stylized, energetic, and highly emphatic. Costume was sometimes vaguely suggestive of period, sometimes traditional, sometimes exaggerated for comic effect, sometimes contemporary even in classical drama... (Booth *Prefaces* 2).

We can see the remnants of this popular theatrical style in some of the earlier adaptations examined in this thesis, such as in Courtney's adaptation of *Jane Eyre*. Slowly but surely, English theatre changes during the 1800s, so that one hundred years later, by "1900, for better or worse, the theatre was a theatre of realism: realism in staging, acting, costuming, and all aspects of production" (Booth *Prefaces* 2). It is possible to see this change slowly taking place during the century in the stage adaptations examined in this thesis. He goes on to explain that an enormous amount had to change before English theatre was able to alter so radically (Booth *Prefaces* 3) and makes it clear that this was only possible because the audience's taste had changed, as he signifies later when he states that "[w]hat determined the nature of all drama was public taste as it operated in the theatre" (Booth *Prefaces* 6). Booth provides an overview of how the style and taste in English theatre developed throughout the nineteenth-century into what we now recognise as English melodrama (Booth *Prefaces* 6-7). Booth clarifies that melodrama is 'strongly domestic': indeed all of the plays examined in this thesis have a domestic setting. The domesticity of nineteenth-century melodrama is what the genre has in common with sensation literature, as Pykett contends (Pykett *The Sensation Novel* 4). Booth's definition of melodrama extends to characterising it as deriving its

rigid moral pattern, character types, and much of its machinery ... from eighteenth-century sentimental tragedy and comedy with their excess of moral sentiment, exaltation of virtue, exhaustive exploitation of pathos and distress, generous but erring heroes, suffering heroines, comic servants, surprising revelations, mistaken identities, long-lost orphans, and missing documents ... [*that there is an*] emphasis on situation at the expense of motivation and characterization, [*and there are*] ... firm moral distinctions, the unchanging character stereotypes ... marked musical accompaniment, the rewarding of virtue and punishing of vice, the rapid altercation between extremes of violence, pathos, and low comedy (Booth *Prefaces* 24-25).

These are all features that are present in the stage adaptations examined in this thesis, even in the stage adaptations of *East Lynne*, which I argue should be called sensation drama. The only point where the stage adaptations of *East Lynne* diverge from this list of the identifiable characteristics of a melodrama is the character types; there is no easily identifiable heroine. This will be examined in depth in Chapter Two.

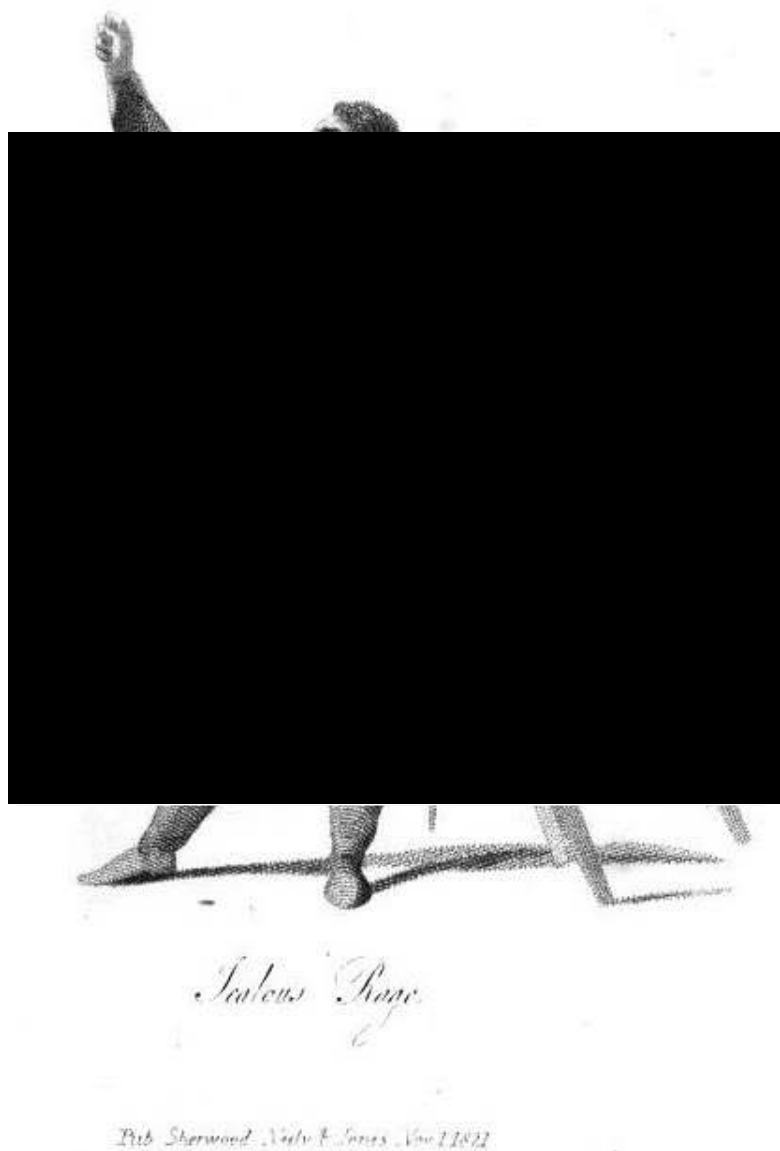
One of the melodramatic characteristics that certainly does unite all of the plays examined in this thesis is the issue of class. Booth states that:

Much melodrama, particularly the domestic, is permeated with class hatred and darkened by a grim vision of a wealthy, authoritarian, repressive upper class tyrannizing over a poor suffering proletariat... Naturally these sentiments could not be bluntly stated on a stage subject to control by government and magistrate, and anyway the English theatre vulgarized and played down foreign

idealism. However, melodrama provides the richest material in English dramatic literature for the study of a rebellious class spirit in action, and an illuminatingly different insight into nineteenth-century social history (Booth *Prefaces* 27).

Class issues are extremely apparent in all of the stage adaptations which will be examined in this thesis, such as in the adaptations of *East Lynne* where there is a significant focus on the servant characters in Palmer's 1874 adaptation. This focus on class issues means melodrama often "reflected popular and radical feeling, it frequently expressed, no matter how crudely and fantastically, the social problems of the day" (Booth *Prefaces* 27). Once again this is another link that gives weight to the contribution to knowledge that this thesis brings to New Historicism. Melodrama's "relevance to contemporary life and ... treatment of serious issues" (Booth *Prefaces* 27) is of course the core argument of this thesis. However, this statement raises the issue of the way that the original sources were altered by melodrama's need to make the plays relevant to the social problems of the day. The need to make the plays radical in content in order to make the stories into melodramas meant that the plots were sometimes changed, and characters were even added. This is certainly the case with Courtney's 1848 adaptation of *Jane Eyre* where he adds a whole host of servant characters into the plot. In addition to making the plot fit the social issue of the day, staging the play as a melodrama meant that the actors were speaking over the music. Music is inherent to melodrama and it meant that performances were marked by having a "heightened, deliberate and passionate mode of delivery" (Taylor 125). Actors used "stock gestures" to present the action of the play to the audience (Pisani 73). The "stock gestures: "characterized the action by nature of a strong active verb or illustrative noun – "commanding," "anger," "reproach," "irresolution,"" (Pisani 73). There are many existing copies of acting manuals from this period to indicate how the plays would have been performed and below I have given examples of these "stock gestures" as they appeared in Henry Siddons' acting manual.

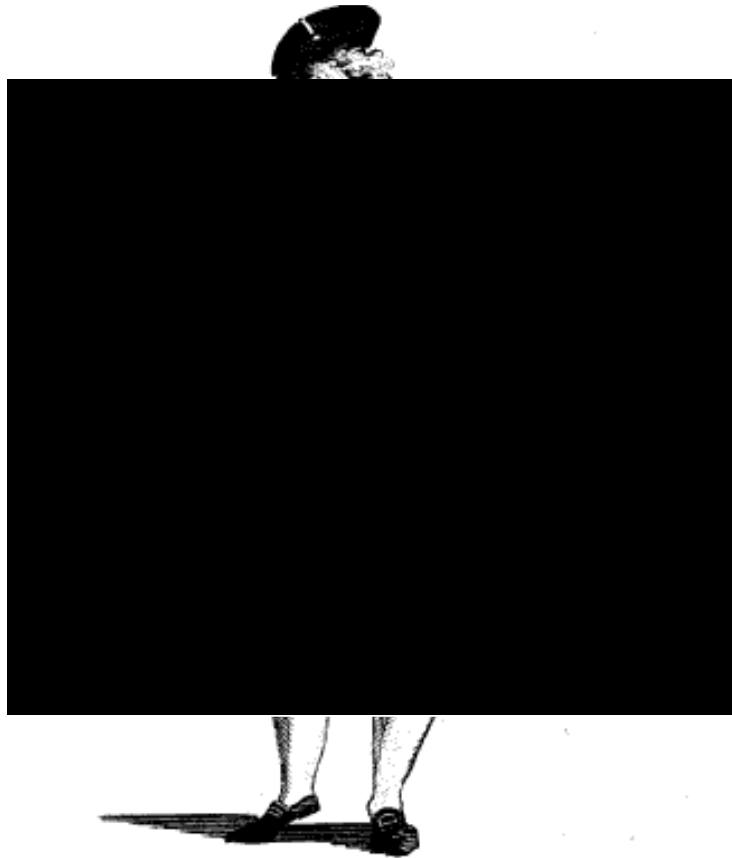
In terms of staging and acting melodramas, Alan Downer gives several accounts of how uniformly emotions were acted but that in the eighteenth-century various attempts were "made to select the and classify the gestures that were appropriate for use on the stage, ... each passion of man is analyzed [*sic*] into the movements which make up its expressions ..." (Downer 574). He gives several anecdotes about successful nineteenth-century actors and the way that they performed specific moments of distinctive roles like Kemble as Macbeth, for example (Downer 553). However, Henry Siddons' *Practical Illustrations of Rhetorical Gesture* (1822) is far more illuminating as it is an authentic acting manual from the period. Siddons opens his book with a series of letters explaining why his selection of gestures should be learned by someone wishing to enter into the acting profession. Essentially, it is that it is easier to be understood by the audience if one conforms to the convention of using the codified gestures within the acting manual (Siddons 31-36). He provides detailed information about how to perform emotions like jealous rage, the codified gesture for which should resemble this upon the stage:



'Jealous Rage' - Image from Siddons 256.

Using codified gestures like this would make it easier for one of the actresses playing Isabel Vane to indicate to the audience how the character was feeling at that precise moment, for instance, during the scene in the nineteenth-century stage adaptations of *East Lynne*, where Isabel states that she is “faint – ill – wretched – mad!” (Spencer 24) when she is watching her husband Archibald Carlyle with Barbara Hare together in the moonlight.

According to Siddons, the emotion of conceit should be performed like this:

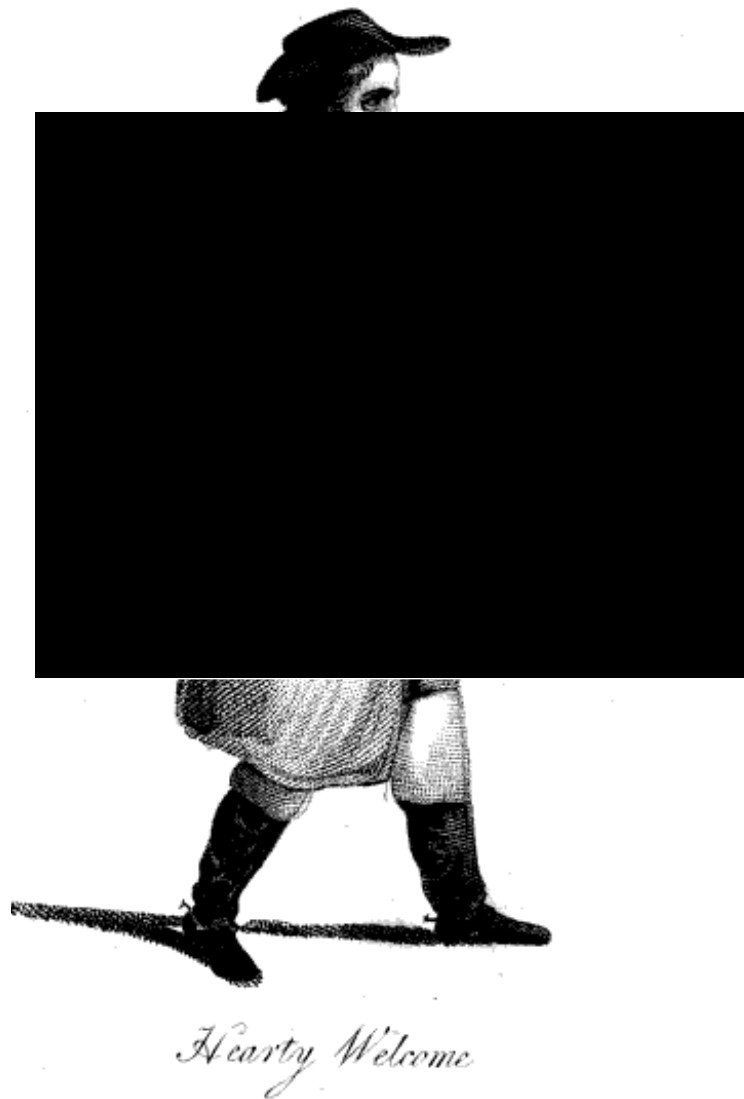


*Conceit*

*Act 1, Scene 1, by Sherwood, Veale & Jones, Nov 1827*

'*Conceit*' – Image in Siddons 376.

In Brougham's adaptation it is possible to imagine the gathered Dents and Ingrams treating Jane like this as they belittle and objectify her by calling her "devilish pretty" before she chastises them for their behaviour (Brougham in Stoneman *Jane Eyre on Stage* 81). Finally, Lucy Audley's flirtatiousness and merriment with her husband's young nephew could also be performed like this in order to plainly demonstrate to the audience the emotion that she is experiencing and the action of the scene:



*Pub by Sherwood Neely & Jones Nov 1 1821*

'Hearty Welcome' – Image in Siddons 390

Despite the popularity of codified gestures in nineteenth-century theatre, by the end of the century, the plays were being praised for the realism of their staging as the responses to Willing's adaptation of *Jane Eyre* reveals (Stoneman *Jane Eyre on Stage* 276).

## Adaptation Theory and Poststructuralism

This thesis is not purely an examination of nineteenth-century theatre; it is also the study of adaptation. Adaptation theory can be said to have parallels with poststructuralism as both are concerned with “the practice of making and reproducing meanings” (Belsey 5). In respect of adaptation theory, the fact that the meaning of the original can change when it is interpreted by someone else is therefore a key factor linking adaptation theory to poststructuralism. The importance of meaning in terms of adaptation theory cannot be underestimated. As Catherine Belsey explains,

meanings control us, inculcate obedience to the discipline inscribed in them. And this is by no means purely institutional or confined to the educational process. A generation ago campaigners for women’s rights recognized (not for the first time) the degree to which ‘woman’ meant domesticity, nurturing, dependence, and the ways in which anti-feminist jokes, for instance, reproduced the stereotypes of the helpless little girl or the ageing harridan (Belsey 5).

Here Belsey reveals the exact issues that will be looked at in this thesis. The importance of meaning in terms of recognising how Jane, Isabel or Lucy were changed by the dramatists and the impact that those changes had on how they were understood by the audience are crucial to this thesis’ argument. Belsey focuses her argument here on the meaning of the word ‘woman’ which meant ‘domesticity’, ‘nurturing’, ‘dependence’, etc., but in terms of this thesis the meaning of the characters is key. For audiences watching Brougham’s adaptation of *Jane Eyre* in 1848 in New York, what did the character of Jane mean to them? What about for the Nottingham-based audiences watching the 1874 adaptation of *East Lynne* by Palmer? And for the London audiences watching C. H. Hazlewood’s 1863 adaptation of *Lady Audley’s Secret*, what did Lucy Audley mean for them because of the way that the dramatist chose to portray her? Robert Young supports a poststructuralist view of literature as he asserts that it is the principle through which we derive meaning from life by the relationship of certain things from their place in an “interconnected system” (Young 3). Indubitably this is the same for adaptations; we derive meaning from them due to their relationship with certain things. From a New Historicist perspective, the meaning that we derive from the adaptations versus the meaning that the audiences who first saw the plays stems from the contemporary events of the time, events like the Marital Property Act and the Women’s Suffrage Movement, for instance. The meaning of the plays is therefore unique to the time in which they were created as well as understood, whether that is through performance or us reading them now in the twenty-first century. On the topic of reproducing art, Walter Benjamin said that,

Even the most perfect reproduction of a work of art is lacking in one element: its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be.



This unique existence of the work of art determined the history to which it was subject throughout the time of its existence. This includes the changes which it may have suffered in physical condition over the years as well as the various changes in its ownership. The traces of the first can be revealed only by chemical or physical analyses which it is impossible to perform on a reproduction; changes of ownership are subject to a tradition which must be traced from the situation of the original (Benjamin 214).

This thesis argues that we should view the stage adaptations of these novels in the same way as a work of art and by doing so it is possible to identify layers of meaning. Benjamin argues that a reproduction is lacking in time, space and purpose purely because it is a reproduction. He therefore dismisses the idea of studying reproductions, and for the same reasons, adaptations could also be dismissed. However, this overlooks the fact that a reproduction, or an adaptation, also has its own reason for being and its own 'unique existence at the place where it happens to be'. A New Historicist approach to this issue might argue that the original story of *Jane Eyre* has been adapted into a moral missive cautioning audiences on the dangers of the Women's Suffrage Movement, or indeed the figure of the New Woman in reference to W.G. Wills' 1882 adaptation of the original source. An adaptation, as much as the original source, has its own significant 'presence in time and space'. Linda Hutcheon agrees with this concept of adaptations, saying that they are "deliberate, announced, and extended revisitations of prior works" (Hutcheon xvi). She also contends that "the different media and genres that stories are transcoded to and from in the adapting process are not just formal entities..., they also represent various ways of engaging audiences" (Hutcheon xvi). In saying this, Hutcheon identifies that the changes that are made to an original source are for specific reasons and with the ultimate goal of attracting audiences. This is what makes them, in Benjamin's words, significant in "time and space" (Benjamin 214). Whilst focusing largely on novel to screen adaptations, Deborah Cartmell contests Benjamin's dismissal of studying adaptations. She states that the difference between novel and film "extend[s] from formal considerations to their very conditions of production – which themselves have quite distinct meanings attached to them" (Cartmell 6), thus supporting the argument raised in this thesis. It is by analysing the stage adaptations of the novels that we are able to discern changes in meaning. Hutcheon describes this journey that an 'original' source goes on, hinting at the argument that this thesis picks up:

And there is yet another possibility: our interest piqued, we may actually read or see that so-called original *after* we have experienced the adaptation, thereby challenging the authority of any notion of priority. Multiple versions exist laterally, not vertically (Hutcheon xv).

The argument that is central to this thesis is that meaning evolves in different ways because of the work, connection or interference, of different people. Paul Davis' *The Lives and Times of*

*Ebenezer Scrooge* posits the idea of a “culture-text”, which demonstrates the way that the meaning of a work of literature evolves over time:

*A Christmas Carol* could be said to have two texts, the one that Dickens wrote in 1843 and the one that we collectively remember ... The text of *A Christmas Carol* is fixed in Dickens' words, but the culture-text, the Carol as it has been re-created in the century and a half since it first appeared, changes as the reasons for its retelling change. We are still creating the culture-text of the Carol (Davis 4).

The story within *A Christmas Carol*, like *Jane Eyre*, is known across the globe. It is evolving, morphing, transforming, every time it is adapted into a film, play or television series with dramatists and directors putting their own interpretation on the screen or stage at the same time as trying to make it compelling for audiences watching in the twenty-first century.

Benjamin Poore has conducted various studies of adaptations of novels, such as his article for the *Neo-Victorian Studies* journal on recent theatrical adaptations of *Oliver Twist* in the light of Lionel Bart's phenomenally successful musical *Oliver!* In 'Re-Viewing the Situation: Staging Neo-Victorian Criminality and Villainy After *Oliver!*', Poore raises the issue of how it is possible for modern adaptors to make “melodramatic villainy compelling on the modern stage” (Poore 122). Thus, showing that the nineteenth-century dramatists of the novels examined in this thesis would have had to complete the very same exercise. This issue of villainy in melodramas will be resumed later on in this thesis. Jim Davis and Victor Emeljanow support this argument as they reveal that nineteenth-century dramatists did indeed write for their audiences at the time. They explain that,

Sadler's Wells prided itself on being the oldest theatre in the metropolis, and its repertoire and those associated with the theatre as performers or staff identified themselves with the local community. The 1839 adaptation of *Oliver Twist* emphasized the connection between Clerkenwell, Pentonville, and the novel... (Davis and Emeljanow 114).

In no way were the theatres for which the adaptations analysed in this thesis different from the 1839 *Oliver Twist* adaptation. They were adapted specifically with the intention of attracting an audience. The way that they attempted to attract an audience to see their show is the same as it is today for any producer, director or dramatist. From a New Historicist perspective, this proves that they would try to make the play relevant to the people watching it demonstrating the way that melodrama, and literature more widely, reflects and engages with contemporary life.

On a final note, Stoneman's *Brontë Transformations* also considers the way that Emily and Charlotte Brontë's books have been reworked over and over again in different media to the extent that they are now part of general culture. This study fits alongside both Stoneman's *Jane Eyre on Stage, 1848-1898* and *Brontë Transformations* in that it picks up on the same argument raised in

both her books; the significance of understanding how an original source is altered when it is adapted because it reflects changes in meaning.

### **Conclusion**

To conclude briefly, in providing the broader background of melodrama and its acting style, British theatre history, sensation literature and proto-feminist literary theory, I have attempted to make it evident how each of these backgrounds or theoretical frameworks relates to the argument posed by this thesis, for example, how were the proto-feminist elements in the original novels, which span a period of approximately fifteen years in the middle of the nineteenth-century, handled by the (male) dramatists when they adapted the original source to the stage? This question was answered by analysing these 'lost' plays from a New Historicist and proto-feminist perspective to identify the types of changes the male dramatists made when they adapted the original to the stage. Some of the plays had long been forgotten about and lay in archives like those at the British Library, making this thesis an original and worthwhile contribution to existing knowledge as well as the thesis being significant in its interdisciplinary approach. It also contributes to existing work on stage adaptations conducted by academics like Karen E. Laird and Patsy Stoneman. This thesis' connection to feminist theory, adaptation theory, sensation literature and melodrama makes it of importance to any scholar seeking to conduct research into either the phenomenon of the original works, or scholars working on research in theatre history.

## Chapter One

“I am a free human being with an independent will”;

Agency in Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* and its Nineteenth-Century stage adaptations



Redgrave, Richard. *The Governess*. 1844.

This chapter discusses and analyses the theme of female agency in five little known nineteenth-century stage adaptations of Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* (1847) within a proto-feminist framework, as female agency is a significant theme in Brontë’s novel. Elsie B. Michie concurs, saying that “*Jane Eyre* is a novel that hovers on the horizon of middle-class English women’s bid for social power” (Michie 97) in her 2006 work *Charlotte Brontë’s Jane Eyre: A Casebook*. However, the focus of this thesis is, of course, on the nineteenth-century stage adaptations of Victorian novels, therefore the attention of this chapter will be devoted to how the primarily male dramatists approached the theme of female agency in the novel when adapting it to the stage and into an example of the then popular genre of stage melodrama. Therefore, any references to interpretations of *Jane Eyre* in Brontë’s novel will be limited and will come from key scholars in the field of feminist literary criticism.

This chapter was inspired by the work of Patsy Stoneman’s anthology *Jane Eyre on Stage, 1848-1898* (2007) and as such could be read by students wishing to expand their knowledge about the cultural phenomenon of Brontë’s work or for students of adaptation theory as a companion to her book. Without Stoneman’s work this study would not have been possible.

In addition to a proto-feminist approach, this chapter adopts a New Historicist approach, as identified in the introduction to this thesis. Therefore, the argument of this chapter is that by analysing these stage adaptations it may be possible to reveal how a wider faction of nineteenth-century society, aside from the critics and notable nineteenth-century personages, responded to

this key theme in the novel. Jane's declarations, assertions and expression of herself as an independent being are scattered throughout the novel in the things that she says, the things that she does and the things that she refuses to do or be subjected to. How those scenes and themes in the novel are approached by the dramatists is the central focus of this chapter. *Jane Eyre* is richly endowed with examples and discussions of female agency, necessitating my focus on a few, salient examples in the novel and their treatment in the adaptations of the novel. Therefore, rather than proceeding chronologically as I will do in the following chapters on *East Lynne* and *Lady Audley's Secret*, this chapter analyses the texts thematically. The structure of this chapter went through numerous drafts in order to try to make the core argument clear. It was structured and argued on a scene by scene basis, from play to play, thematically and by historical event, however none of the other drafts were able to achieve the same degree of clarity in proposing the chapter's argument in order of theme. The comparative analysis section at the core of this chapter commences with an analysis of how the dramatists approached transferring a *Bildungsroman* to the stage, Jane's agency in her art, agency in her escape from Gateshead, Lowood and Thornfield, her agency in the defiance of social norms; and the institution of marriage. As with the other chapters, summaries of each of the plays studied in this chapter are provided in the appendices.

From the outset, the novel displays the theme of agency in its very form, for the narrator of her own life story from childhood to late adolescence, Jane's desire to be in control of her life is strongly indicated to the reader. Her reason for wanting to assert control is also shown, which is that at many points in her life she lacks the freedom to make choices for herself, as the novel shows. The plot of Brontë's *Jane Eyre* shows the journey that she goes on in order to achieve a life of equality and freedom.

[It is a] story of enclosure and escape, a distinctively female *Bildungsroman* in which the problems encountered by the protagonist as she struggles from the imprisonment of her childhood toward an almost unthinkable goal of mature freedom (Gilbert and Gubar 339).

Traditionally of course, a *Bildungsroman* is a story of the education and development of a central, usually male character: however, Brontë uses the form to write a story of female development, particularly a woman's struggle to achieve equality and emancipation in a limiting, male-dominated world. This in itself makes it one of the first proto-feminist novels (Dunn 504) and it was subject to great condemnation from some factions of society at the time of its publication because of its rebellious content, as Elizabeth Rigby's review in the *Quarterly Review* attests

Jane Eyre is proud, and therefore she is ungrateful, too. It pleased God to make her an orphan, friendless, and penniless – yet she thanks nobody, and least of all Him, for the food and raiment, the friends, companions, and instructors of her helpless youth ... On the contrary, she looks upon all that has been done for her not only as her

undoubted right, but as falling far short of it (Rigby 153-185).

Despite the very negative responses that *Jane Eyre* received from some critics at the time, it was adapted for the stage numerous times in the nineteenth-century revealing how well loved the plot and its eponymous heroine were by some in the nineteenth-century. This is not the arena for this question to be answered, but it could be argued that *Jane Eyre* went on to be so well-loved because of all of the changes made to the novel by the dramatists in response to the notoriety of the original source.

From a New Historicist approach, an analysis of the stage adaptations' treatment of the controversial, proto-feminist elements will therefore go some way towards understanding the world in which the novel appeared and how some factions of society responded to Brontë's seminal novel. The selection of *Jane Eyre* as the novel from which to examine the impact of contemporary events on the creation of the stage adaptations was simple. In choosing one of the most celebrated novels of the nineteenth-century, which is also one of the most adapted novels of the nineteenth-century, the hope was that the results of the examination would be clearer to discern as there is significant evidence, both primary and secondary, to analyse, that would be able to reveal which of the nineteenth-century dramatists eliminated or enforced the proto-feminist elements in the original source and why. Issues like changes in the protagonist's behaviour or mannerisms, for example, radically alters the dynamics of the play. Questions of form are thus crucial, like the concept of a *Bildungsplay* discussed later in this chapter, as are understanding key themes, such as the way Jane Eyre is (or is not) portrayed as an artist, the way in which Jane defies social conventions, the notion of escape and the portrayal of marriage. Thus, I will examine these key themes in the context of feminist literary theory in what follows.

This chapter will begin by examining the socio-historical and legal contexts, as well as literary representations of female agency in Victorian culture to which Brontë was responding and contributing. From then, the chapter examines the treatment of the lead character, Jane Eyre, as she was adapted to the stage by each of the nineteenth-century dramatists. The adaptations are John Courtney's *Jane Eyre, or The Secrets of Thornfield Hall* (1848), John Brougham's *Jane Eyre; A Drama in Five Acts* (1849), Charlotte Birch-Pfeiffer's *Jane Eyre; Or the Orphan of Lowood* (1870), James Willing's *Jane Eyre; or Poor Relations* (1879) and W. G Wills' *Jane Eyre* (1882). The 1877 play *Jane Eyre: A Drama in Four [Two] Acts* by Mme von Heringen Hering has not been examined as it is "clearly a version of Charlotte Birch-Pfeiffer's play" (Stoneman *Jane Eyre on Stage* 201). The only difference is the addition of lengthy stage directions, which "seem to have been added in later" (Stoneman *Jane Eyre on Stage* 203). As a result of the lack of certainty surrounding this play and because it is a copy of Birch-Pfeiffer's play it has not been examined in this chapter. Additionally, Stoneman's *Jane Eyre on Stage, 1848-1898* contains the script for T.H. Paul's 1879 Manchester-based adaptation of *Jane Eyre*. I chose to study James Willing's play in favour of Paul's play as Willing's was a more widely reported play with more information about it to study. I ran into a few obstacles in attempting to find out sufficient information about Paul's

adaptation to conduct a significant study of it with Patsy Stoneman also experiencing the same difficulties (Stoneman *Jane Eyre on Stage* 339-343). In order to understand the changes, omissions and additions made by the dramatists, I will examine the context of the plays, the dramatists, the choices of actress and where available analyse the critical responses to the adaptations especially where they contribute to the analysis of Jane's agency.

In this study the term 'agency' when applied to Jane's struggle for freedom is viewed amidst women's struggle for freedom, equality and emancipation in the nineteenth century. It means the ability to act, behave, express one's self and live freely and without any imposition from external social forces or pressure as one desires. It is important to address what agency means in a feminist context before going further. Before moving on to a feminist understanding of 'agency', for sociologists, agency means the capacity of individuals to make their own choices free from the pressure of social structures like class, religion, gender, ethnicity, customs, in other words, "the capacity of human beings to shape the circumstances in which they live" (Emirbayer and Mische 962-963, 965).

Bronwyn Davies looks at agency from a feminist poststructuralist framework, which views agency in a very similar manner with the exception that a feminist standpoint appreciates that a woman's ability to act as she chooses has changed through history as a result of the impact of various structures restricting women's lives (Davies 42). Davies refers to the individual who is "seen to stand out from the collective" and states that "[m]odern [Western] history is thus the story of celebrated individuals and of their impact on the world" (Davies 42). Brontë's *Jane Eyre* is celebrated because she created a character who stood out from the collective and then Brontë's Jane went on to take on a life beyond the pages of the book due to the multiple adaptations which appeared. As such Brontë's Jane is a literary depiction of just such an individual. However, is this true of the Victorian stage adaptations treatment of her? And, if not, why not? If there is no evidence of Jane being a character like that then it could be the consequence of the kind of "male anxiety of influence", which Harold Bloom argued existed (Bloom xxiii). Arguably, the first dramatists, Courtney and Brougham, tasked with adapting *Jane Eyre* might be the only dramatists to have experienced a feeling of trepidation at the thought of altering Brontë's words, given that it was not known who had written the book until 1849 (London 33). Therefore, for Courtney and Brougham there might have been a sense of the sanctity of the original text and a desire to preserve it because it was male authored and therefore a superior work. However, both of these dramatists entirely omitted Jane's artistic ability and altered the plot of the original significantly as will be shown later. Further to Bloom's notion of 'a male anxiety of influence' as discussed in the thesis introduction, there is also the 'anxiety' felt by writers (like Courtney and Brougham) when inspired by a male-authored text. When we consider this issue the following question is raised: would the result of their approach to the original source alter the way that the original was understood in anyway? More succinctly, if the hypothetical Jane Bloggs is only ever aware of *Jane Eyre* the way that Courtney or Brougham present her, does that mean that Jane Bloggs believes that Brontë's *Jane Eyre* is the same as Courtney or Brougham's characterisation of the

character? Would Jane Bloggs be surprised to see or read Brontë's characterisation of Jane Eyre? Would the fictional Jane Bloggs be surprised by the way that Brontë had presented Jane Eyre, or even be disappointed by Brontë's Jane Eyre? As mentioned in this study's introduction, Hutcheon raises this issue in her introduction to her work *A Theory of Adaptation* when she says:

we may actually read or see that so-called original *after* we have experienced the adaptation, thereby challenging the authority of any notion of priority (xv).

To go further with this hypothesis, what would the consequence be if Jane Bloggs never ever read the original source? And, even if she were to read the original text, for Paul Davis in his *The Lives and Times of Ebenezer Scrooge*, the 'damage' is already done. Davis explores the cultural afterlives of *A Christmas Carol* through an examination of "six moments in *A Christmas Carol's* career when, to the author's mind, the novel's patterns met the anxieties of a given era and were reinscribed to reflect and defuse them" (McCracken-Flesher 117). Davis focuses his attention, and indeed argument, on considering "the film versions of *A Christmas Carol* only one generic variant in the tale's manifestation as culturally determined intertext" (McCracken-Flesher 117). In other words, the story of *A Christmas Carol* that everyone remembers is often a mishmash of the numerous adaptations that have occurred in the last few decades and that idea that we have of the story of *A Christmas Carol* is constantly evolving as more adaptations of the story appear and we "are still creating the culture-text of the Carol" (Davis 4). This is the same for Brontë's *Jane Eyre*.

Today, television and film adaptations of *Jane Eyre* often prioritise the romantic relationship between Rochester and Jane above anything else, choosing to dilute the original source's proto-feminist elements creating a culture-text that may be very different to the story that Brontë set out to tell. Evidence of the change in the way that the culture-text of *Jane Eyre* represents can be found by looking at the opinions of the twenty-first century online book group, *Bibliofemme* (Rubik and Mettinger-Schartmann citing *Bibliofemme* 9) According to them, Brontë's novel, paradoxically, is now perceived by some to be a potentially conservative "lesson in standing by your man" and a reward for female "humility" (Rubik and Mettinger-Schartmann citing *Bibliofemme* 9). This is a very different message to the one that proto-feminists look for in their analysis of *Jane Eyre*. That the culture-text has changed so greatly from being a struggle for liberty and a right to expression into a missive akin to the medieval tale of *Patient Griselda* indicates the different ways that people respond to the novel. In addition, the fact that *Jane Eyre* is understood by some twenty-first century women as a test of the love felt by a woman for her partner could indicate that the proto-feminist aspects of the novel may be lost on some modern readers. Perhaps the adaptations have encouraged this reading? Vitaly, this indicates that an adaptation, or adaptations, can change the way that an original source is understood as Davis would concur.



Analysis of female agency is vital to a feminist reading of literature, or drama. In terms of literature generally, the understanding of the extent to which a female character has, or lacks, agency is an indication of whether a text is proto-feminist or feminist, or not at all. In the case of *Jane Eyre*, for instance, Jane lacks agency at the start of the novel. However, as the plot develops she manages to overcome obstacles, which leads her to becoming empowered and independent. Do the stage adaptations of *Jane Eyre* contain the same message? Chris R. Vanden Bossche gives another interpretation of the theme of agency in *Jane Eyre* in his 2005 work "What Did *Jane Eyre* Do? Ideology, Agency, Class and the Novel". He states that "Jane begins as an angry narrator, but then learns to repress this anger ... [and that Jane also moves] from expression to repression" (Vanden Bossche 47). As such, it might be possible to view some of the stage adaptations presenting an image of Jane's battle for equality and emancipation as decreasing, rather than being achieved.

*Jane Eyre*, the novel, is not unique in its depiction of a woman striving for agency. There are other nineteenth-century novels, which are subversive in their arguments for women's emancipation. Chapter Two of this thesis examines the stage adaptations of a novel that depicts that very thing; Mrs Wood's *East Lynne*. There are numerous nineteenth-century novels which also approach the issue of women's agency subversively like *Anna Karenina* (1878), *Madame Bovary* (1856), *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1848) and *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881). However, are there Victorian stage adaptations and plays, which also call women to assume agency? The character of Blanche Ingram in Willing's adaptation of *Jane Eyre* might well meet this description. In this chapter, Jane Eyre's agency in the stage adaptations will be analysed in the same way that it is possible to analyse it in the novel. Firstly, by analysing her ability to act as she wishes, by looking at dialogue, then by analysing how she expresses herself, then how she reacts to other characters who seek to control her, and finally, by examining how she sets about living a life of her own choosing rather than simply being subject to others' wishes.

### **Socio-historical context**

The nineteenth-century was a period marking significant changes in women's everyday lives where they gradually claimed more and more agency. Women's expectations of their lives changed remarkably as the century developed with the publication of Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* in 1792 being a pivotal moment in the history of the women's rights movement. From then on, the nineteenth-century marked many notable events calling for women's equality and independence in all aspects of life.

In 1823 John Stuart Mill was jailed for distributing a pamphlet on birth control. He argued that if women could have power over their reproductive systems then they could be free to live as they pleased and would not be forced to be dependent on men, thereby giving them more agency. Arguments against women having access to birth control largely revolved around women's

purpose in the eyes of God, and, consequently, the role of women in society more generally. It was into this society that Brontë published *Jane Eyre* and the novel reflects restrictive attitudes like that of biological determinism (meaning that your behaviour and role in life is determined by your genes). Attitudes towards women like this and the rigid Victorian class system contribute towards Jane's anger. Lisa Sternlieb states that whilst Jane is supposed to have achieved a happy state of equal union in her marriage to Rochester, the fact that she feels obliged to write her life story after so many years of happiness indicates that she "is not completely satisfied with any of the benefits of marriage" (Sternlieb 454). This sense of anger at the strict society of the time can be identified in John Courtney's 1848 stage adaptation of *Jane Eyre*. It reflects the growing resentment felt by the working and middle-classes towards the oppressive and limiting class system of the nineteenth-century. It also reflects the impact of the social hierarchy of the era and the impact it had on women's roles. It does this through the content and tone of Jane's soliloquies as well as the action between the minor characters, such as between the additional servant characters and other types of character that Courtney inserted into the plot, Betty Bunce, Piper and Joe Joker in Act 2: Scene 2. Betty Bunce is the victim of sexual harassment by her employer, Piper, but she is defended by her former colleague and intended love match in the play, Joe Joker, who attacks Piper:

*PIPER: That's dear Betty – ah, you don't know what I felt when I first saw you – oh, Betty, take pity on your wretched master, let me have one faithful heart to repose upon – smile upon him – oh, Betty, suffer him to take (about to kiss her)*

*BETTY: That (a slap).*

*PIPER: Oh!*

*JOE (from cupboard): And that as a plaister, Daddy Piper (throws flour) (Courtney in Stoneman Jane Eyre on Stage 48-49).*

This act of 'fighting back' is just one of many physical examples that Courtney attempts to make with the working-class 'heroes' in his play. It could be argued that Betty and Piper's relationship parallels Rochester's own attempt to seduce his employee, Jane. Courtney also seizes the opportunity of vocalising the working-class' growing resentment of the restrictive class system and the terrible working conditions that they were subjected to, with his characters reflecting the views of their real life nineteenth-century counterparts in the play's opening scene (Courtney in Stoneman *Jane Eyre on Stage* 33). The impact of the class system on nineteenth-century working and middle-class women is reflected by Betty Bunce, and of course Jane Eyre, in their speeches and dialogue in the play from its opening. Betty opens the play complaining about the conditions at the school and even the cruelty of homes that the female students have come from and reveals the hypocrisy of the Christian values within the class system by showing how poorly the girls are treated:

*BETTY: Dear me, what a life is mine – servant of all work to a charity school – for the Lowood Institution, as they calls*

it, ain't no better than a charity school - £15 won't pay the board and teaching of they poor girls, so they makes the rest up by subscriptions and such like – poor things. I'm afraid most of our scholars are not sent to be edicated – they are sent out of the way by fathers and mothers that can't very well account for their being in the way – or else the poor things are orphans with cruel uncles and aunts who send them out of the way to be thumped, bumped and consumptionized – they none of them look half-fed and half-fed they are not either (Courtney in Stoneman *Jane Eyre on Stage* 33).

From a New Historicist perspective, this reveals one of the ways that nineteenth-century society engaged with and responded to the proto-feminist elements in the novel. Betty Bunce's complaint about the lack of education that the girls are receiving could be said to mirror the opinions of advocates for women's emancipation, equal rights and education, which had been famously vocalised by Mary Wollstonecraft, amongst others, in *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792), one of the earliest written works advocating education for women and "gender equality in English" (Bergès x). The nineteenth-century continued to witness the publication of works devoted to advocating gender equality with the topic becoming widely discussed both in private and public. In 1869 John Stuart Mill advocated female emancipation and equal rights in his essay *The Subjection of Women*, which contains ideas he developed with his wife Harriet Taylor Mill, also a philosopher and advocate for women's rights. In it, Mill argues that because women have always been raised to believe that they were weak, emotional and inferior to men, they have never had the opportunity to reach their potential and as such it is impossible to know what women are capable of:

I deny that any one knows or can know, the nature of the two sexes, as long as they have only been seen in their present relation to one another. Until conditions of equality exist, no one can possibly assess the natural differences between women and men, distorted as they have been. What is natural to the two sexes can only be found out by allowing both to develop and use their faculties freely (Mill 38).

As evidence for his argument, Mill points to Queen Elizabeth, Joan of Arc and even the then queen, Queen Victoria, to support his argument that women could achieve as much as men. Women were thought of as inferior to men physically and intellectually and that they must perforce be dependent on men for direction, a sentiment that Courtney's Jane certainly espouses (Courtney in Stoneman *Jane Eyre on Stage* 35). Thus, it was commonly believed that women did not require agency beyond supporting their husbands, sons and fathers in living their own successful, prosperous lives; a sentiment which might account for Courtney's Betty describing the girls at Lowood as not having been "sent to be edicated – they are sent out of the way by fathers and mothers that can't very well account for their being in the way" (Courtney in Stoneman *Jane Eyre on Stage* 33).

The desire for better, equal education was pivotal to the women's rights movements. The belief was that if women could have the benefits of an equal education then they would not be forced to be dependent on men to support them. In 1848 Queen's College, London was established for women who intended to teach and then in 1869, Girton College, Cambridge was established as one of the first degree awarding residential colleges for women. The opening up of academia to women meant that the way that young women were taught was changing as well as what they were taught. More women than ever before were given access to the classics, mathematics and science, when previously drawing, music, dance, some study of European languages and possibly some knowledge of great English writers, like Shakespeare, would have formed the body of a woman's education (Hughes 17-18). Some women, all of whom were required to remain unmarried, of course, were thus given agency in educational settings, something that *Jane Eyre* plays on. This is echoed in the majority of the stage adaptations as they present Jane expertly taking charge of her student's education as well as other classroom type environments; as in Brougham (Stoneman *Jane Eyre on Stage* 80-82), Birch-Pfeiffer (Stoneman *Jane Eyre on Stage* 169), Wiling (Stoneman *Jane Eyre on Stage* 320) and Wills (Stoneman *Jane Eyre on Stage* 401-403).

In their preface to *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979), Gilbert and Gubar refer to a "striking coherence ... in literature by women [which] could be explained by a common, female impulse to struggle free from social and literary confinement through strategic redefinitions of self, art, and society" (Gilbert and Gubar xi). Whilst Gilbert and Gubar's above comment is certainly true of *Jane Eyre*, *East Lynne*, *Lady Audley's Secret*, *North and South* and *Middlemarch*, amongst other Victorian novels, whether it can be said to apply to **all** female authored novels is dubious, and whether it applies to Victorian stage adaptations is even more questionable but is also highly pertinent to this study. In the novel, Jane Eyre desperately tries to 'redefine' herself. She refuses to be bound by the restrictions imposed on her as a middle-class woman without any family support, either financially or emotionally.

The issue of female agency is often noticeable in the body of work produced by female playwrights, like Aphra Behn, Margaret Cavendish, Fanny Burney and Hannah Cowley, which is also marked by "a female impulse to struggle free from social and literary confinement through strategic redefinitions of self, art, and society" (Gilbert and Gubar xi). But does Brontë's image of Jane attempting to "struggle free from social and literary confinement through strategic redefinitions of self, art, and society" survive the process of adaptation and continue to permeate the stage plays? Or did the male dramatists obliterate these elements when they transferred the plot of the novel to the stage? This is the ultimate crucial and complex question of this chapter.

### **Legal context**

*Jane Eyre* was published in a period where the subjugation of women that had been "enshrined in English law and custom for nine hundred years" (Perkin 1) was finally being challenged. The

Victorian era saw a conflation of arguments about the women's rights movement starting at the very beginning of Victoria's reign. The 1839 Custody of Infants Act was one of the first acts passed to give women rights, and consequently greater agency. With the passing of the act, it was acknowledged that women had limited rights over their children after a divorce. Prior to the act being passed, custody of any children after a divorce was granted to the father. The act permitted a woman to petition the courts for custody of her children up to the age of seven and for access to any older children. This eventually paved the way for the current legal practice of allocating custody of any children in the best interests of the child(ren). Wroath confirms that with the passing of the Act "the welfare of the children was considered as overriding the interests of the father" (Wroath 115) and the "importance [of it] lay in the fact that a mother now had a legal right to seek access to the children" (Wroath 114).

The Act was largely brought about by the wealthy authoress Caroline Norton (1808-1877) who separated from her husband in 1836 but was prevented from seeing her children as they were considered the 'property' of the husband (Mill 58). She used her connections to petition the courts to give her access to her children but was ultimately denied access by the courts. Further evidence of the zeitgeist of the time is that a year later, in 1840, a judge upheld a man's right to lock up his wife and beat her in moderation (Williams 6). *Jane Eyre's* Bertha Mason could arguably be said to reflect this treatment of married women given that Brontë would have been working on *Jane Eyre* in the 1840s and Bertha is of course locked up in Rochester's attic under the watchful gaze of Grace Poole. The stage adaptations, however, essentially reduce Bertha's presence to her briefly running across the stage screaming. This treatment of Bertha in the stage adaptations could be argued to be representative of Brontë's own treatment of the character in the novel, meaning that the same lack of sensitivity to the subject of mental health is taken by both Brontë and the dramatists due to contemporary attitudes towards mental health. This is an issue looked at in detail in Chapter Three on the nineteenth-century stage adaptations of Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret*.

It must have seemed as though women's emancipation was increasingly within reach in the 1850s as act after act was passed advancing women's rights. In 1851 the Women's Suffrage Petition was presented to the House of Lords, 1852 saw a judge rule that a man cannot force his wife to live with him and in 1857 the first of the Matrimonial Causes Acts was passed. It ensured that a legally separated wife was given the right to keep what she earned. The conditions of divorce changed as well. Previously, a man might divorce his wife for adultery alone, but a wife had had to prove adultery aggravated by cruelty or desertion. The 1857 act also made it legal for divorced parties to remarry. The lack of options for Rochester in dealing with his insane first wife is reflected by Brontë in the novel as Rochester has to wait for Bertha to die to be free of their marriage. All of the stage adaptations depict Rochester's frustration at being tethered to Bertha, even Birch-Pfeiffer makes Bertha his deceased brother's wife in order to not diminish Rochester's power as a romantic lead for Jane. However, Bertha always remains a minor character so that the

audience's focus is on Jane, or indeed on another character as with Courtney whose play highlights the heroic working-class servants he inserted into the plot.

In 1864 the Contagious Diseases Act ruled that women liable to be declared prostitutes, living in certain garrison towns, could be forcibly examined in order to identify venereal disease. The Act was introduced in the hope of eradicating syphilis, which was the plight of the armed and naval forces. According to Judith Walkowitz "[b]y 1864, one out of three sick cases in the army were venereal in origin" (Walkowitz *Prostitution* 49). In theory, the Contagious Diseases Act had been a good idea in order to attempt to limit the spread of disease. However, campaigns to repeal the Act revealed the "injustice done to innocent young women" (Walkowitz *Prostitution* 178), who were apparently being mistakenly detained, causing irrevocable damage to their reputations. Josephine Butler petitioned to change the act complaining about the unfairness of the act's enforcement as soldiers and sailors were not subjected to the same mandatory physical examinations as women. She also raised concerns about the efficacy of the act, given that it was believed that prostitutes in garrison towns would flee before they could be examined (Walkowitz *Prostitution* 78). There was also the issue of not being able to correctly identify other sexually transmitted diseases at the time. Whilst the act would decrease the spread of syphilis, other symptomless illnesses could not be countered with the forced genital examinations (Vicinus *Suffer* 96). In 1870 the Act was successfully repealed. This was another important moment in the women's rights movement as it indicates the lack of agency that women had over even their own bodies. Admittedly the women in question were working-class prostitutes, but the fact that respectable women were being wrongly detained indicates the wider reaching impact of the attitude that was held by the patriarchy about women's bodies. From a New Historicist perspective, we can see this discourse in Courtney's *Jane Eyre* when Betty Bunce's employer forces himself on her (Courtney in Stoneman 48)

In the same year, the first Married Women's Property Act was also established. The Act gave women an even greater degree of agency over their lives. It allowed married women to be the legal owners of the money they earned, or inherited, paving the way to the greater legal successes of the women's suffrage movements of the twentieth century. These acts can be seen to have influenced the later nineteenth-century stage adaptations of *Jane Eyre*. Wills and Willing's adaptations contain the most obviously recognisable proto-feminist elements, such as the notion of 'sisterhood' between Blanche and Jane in Willing's play as well as his depiction of Blanche who wants marriage on her own terms:

*BLANCHE*: ... whenever I marry (*pause*) I am resolved my husband shall not be a rival, but a foil to me. I will suffer no competitor near the throne; I shall exact an undivided homage; his devotions shall not be shared between me and the shape he sees in his mirror... (Willing in Stoneman *Jane Eyre on Stage* 308).

Willing's Blanche espouses a very 'modern' idea of marriage, which is at odds with the conservative, fairy-tale love story that is normally featured in melodrama (Booth *Prefaces* 118) as in Dion Boucicault's *The Colleen Bawn* (1860), W.T. Montcrieff's adaptation of *Jack Sheppard, The Housebreaker or London in 1724* (1825) and Thomas Holcroft's *A Tale of Mystery; A Melodrama in Two Acts* (1802). Blanche's description of her ideal marriage, where the wife is respected as her husband's equal, can certainly be understood as a proto-feminist interpretation of what marriage should be. Willing is not alone in presenting an adaptation of *Jane Eyre*, which has been inspired by contemporary events like the 1870 Married Women's Property Act as Wills' play features a vehemently independent and bold Jane who behaves with the utmost self-determination and independence.

As we have seen, female agency in the British legal system, at the start of the nineteenth-century, was arguably non-existent. The histories of people like Caroline Norton show the poor resources in the British legal system for women's rights (Caine 70). Nineteenth-century British women did not have any automatic right to their children, they did not have a right to vote, they had no right to their money inherited or otherwise, and until 1857 the former husband of a legally separated woman was still entitled to any money or property she inherited or earned. It is evident that in Victorian society, due to the restrictions of the nineteenth-century British legal system, female agency was a highly contentious topic. Decades after 1857, some people still felt, as Winston Churchill expressed at the time, that "[t]he women's suffrage movement is only the small edge of the wedge, if we allow women to vote it will mean the loss of social structure and the rise of every liberal cause under the sun. Women are well represented by their fathers, brothers, and husband" (Parish 81). This type of resentment towards the rise of the women's suffrage movement explains the stultification of Jane in Wills' adaptation whose fearless individuality almost causes her to suffer a moral 'fall' akin to Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (1891).

### **Literary Representations of Female Agency**

In this study of the stage adaptations' treatment of the theme of female agency in Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, I have not looked at the way that other female characters in the novel display agency, such as, Mrs Reed, Bertha Mason, *et cetera*. This is because the stage adaptations have so minimised these secondary characters in the book as to make them almost disappear from the adaptations because they play such minor parts or are so rarely seen. As such, they will only be discussed when pertinent to the core argument of this chapter. Brontë's *Jane Eyre* is, of course, full of characters who express female agency in the figures of Bertha Mason, Mrs Reed, Mrs Fairfax, Helen Burns and Celine Varens, to name a few. Their absence from the respective stage adaptations might be due to a variety of reasons from simple problems like staging logistics, or the demands of a theatre's budget to the dramatist's artistic vision. Whatever pragmatic reasons for their absence or the minimising of their role, the result is a heightened focus on the other

characters which often contributes to the overall diminishment of the novel's proto-feminist content from being present in the adaptations.

To put the treatment of Jane's agency into context, it is helpful to consider some other portrayals of female agency in theatre. One of the earliest plays to depict this is William Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew* (1590), in which the heroine, Katharine, starts the play as a ferociously assertive woman but is gradually beaten into submission by her abusive, domineering husband Petruchio. Victorian stage adaptations of *The Taming of the Shrew* responded in differing ways to Shakespeare's depiction of the treatment to which Katharine was subject by Petruchio in the original play. David Garrick's arrangement of William Shakespeare's original play was entitled *Catharine and Petruchio* and is considered to have been the "sole version of Shakespeare's *Shrew* on the English and American stages from 1754 to 1884" (Haring-Smith 54). However, in 1887 Augustin Daly wrote and produced his own version of *The Taming of the Shrew*, which dramatically stepped away from Garrick's arrangement of the original source. Augustin Daly wrote in the program to his 1887 production that there has been:

A very much Abridged, Emasculated, and Farcical arrangement of the Play, by David Garrick, in Two Acts, is frequently performed, but as arranged from the text of Shakespeare with the Famous Induction Scenes, this will be *the First Representation in this City* (Program Note, Royalty Theatre).

It is particularly noteworthy that Daly described Garrick's production as 'emasculating'. A twenty-first century reader of Garrick's *Catharine and Petruchio* would be hard pressed to find anything in it that could possibly be seen to 'emasculate' Petruchio. The entirety of Garrick's adaptation appears to be centred on the violent, physical and mental domination of women. Garrick's Petruchio even turns a whip on Catharine in order to force her to submit to his will. There were 234 performances of Garrick's misogynistic arrangement of *The Taming of the Shrew* between 1754 and 1844 before interest in it tailed off, according to Haring-Smith (15). The reason for the lack of interest after 1844 was that the language, and characters, were too crude.

Widely recognized in the nineteenth century as the greatest English poet, Shakespeare was expected to write like a Victorian – with refined language and characters. The moral of *The Taming of the Shrew*, the subservience of a wife to her husband; was suitably Victorian, but the ribald language and coarse characters posed a problem (Haring-Smith 43).

This explains why when Augustin Daly wrote and produced his adaptation of *The Taming of the Shrew* in 1887, the language was elevated, as were the characters, but the content of the play, its message about men's dominion over women, was retained. In fact, Katharine appears to "surrender more easily" to Petruchio's brutal, tyrannical supremacy (Haring-Smith 55). Daly's Katharine, like Garrick's, does not seem to want agency. In both productions, Catharine, and



Katharine, gives up her agency readily. She appears to welcome Petruchio's immediately assumed power over her. The 1887 audience of Daly's production would have been able to read Katharine's sudden transformation as motivated either by a clandestine adoration of Petruchio or from sheer terror of him. Daly's production appeared at a time during which the various women's equality and suffrage movements were increasing, as was shown in the socio-historical and legal context sections of this chapter. Therefore, it is possible to see Daly's production as a conservative, patriarchal attempt to remind women of their place at a time when more and more women were vocalising their desire for emancipation and equality. When the Victorian stage adaptations of *Jane Eyre* are viewed in the same way, it is possible to identify the reasons why each one is so different. It particularly explains why Courtney's 1848 production is so different to Wills' 1882 production. The nearly forty-year gap between the two adaptations witnessed some of the most significant and drastic changes in terms of society's attitudes to and expectations of women's roles and their place in the world, no wonder they are so different in respect of their treatment of Jane's agency.

Adaptations of Charles Dickens' *Oliver Twist* (1837-1838) were some of the most popular stage adaptations of the Victorian era. The book, published in serial form, had been a runaway success leading inevitably to its adaptation to the stage, which was the norm for phenomenally successful literature in the century (Hutcheon xiii). The Victorian stage adaptations' treatment of Nancy largely present an image of female agency being punishable on pain of death despite how necessary and courageous Nancy was in defying Bill Sykes; Nancy dies in all of the Victorian stage adaptations of Dickens' original. There is not one adaptation where Nancy escapes with just a severe beating, which is puzzling given the public's love of the character and that this was an age where Shakespeare was not yet sacrosanct and could be altered and changed at will. The reason for this lack of willingness to bring Nancy back to life might be due to the influence of the conventions of melodrama, which hinges on heightened emotions and sensationalism. As such, a bloody, gory death for poor Nancy is more fitting for a melodrama as it provokes a stronger emotional response from the audience than a happier ending in which Nancy lives happily ever after as a redeemed 'fallen' woman. This is what Benjamin Poore suggests in *Re-Viewing the Situation: Staging Neo-Victorian Criminality and Villainy After 'Oliver!'* (Poore 121). The Victorian audiences' bittersweet delight in Nancy's death and their willingness to revel in her moribund glory might well be the reason for the lack of an alternative ending for Nancy in the Victorian stage adaptations as John Hollingshead describes the audience's response to the staging of Nancy's death in the 1842 production staged at the Old Vic in London:

The 'murder of Nancy' was the great scene. Nancy was always dragged round the stage by her hair, and after this effort Sikes always looked up defiantly at the gallery, as he was doubtless told to do in the marked prompt copy. He was always answered by one loud and fearful curse, yelled by the whole mass like a Handel Festival chorus. The curse was answered by Sikes dragging Nancy twice around the stage, and then, like Ajax [in *The Iliad*], defying the lighting.

The simultaneous yell then became louder and more blasphemous. Finally, when Sikes, working up to a well rehearsed climax, smeared Nancy with red-ochre, and taking her by the hair (a most powerful wig) seemed to dash her brains out on the stage, no explosion of dynamite invented by the modern anarchist, no language ever dreamt of in Bedlam could equal the outburst (John Hollingshead, *My Lifetime*, 1895, I, 189-190; cited in Fulkerson, 88, cited in Allingham *Theatres in Victorian London*).

Hollingshead reveals the bloodlust of the Victorian theatrical audience and their eager willingness to rejoice in savage bloodthirstiness, despite the harsh futility of Nancy's murder. This gory, passionate staging of Nancy's death displays an eager willingness to rejoice in bloodlust, which Poore also comments on (Poore 122). This review of Nancy's death scene uses hyperbole to indicate the high emotions it provoked by saying that "no language ever dreamt of in Bedlam could equal the outburst". Melodrama is characterised by its ability to provoke heightened emotions in its audience, hence the revelry in bloodlust and madness in these nineteenth-century stage adaptations of *Oliver Twist*; and this same enjoyment of gore and lunacy can be identified in the early nineteenth-century stage adaptations of *Jane Eyre*. Reviews comment on the actresses' ability to achieve high levels of drama, which was frequently the focus of the nineteenth-century reviews of the later stage adaptations of *Jane Eyre* as they centred on the actress playing the crazed Bertha despite the fact that Bertha had such a minimal role in the plays in terms of lines and on stage time. One review of Willing's adaptation even draws allusions to Bedlam:

The fiendish glare of the eyes, looking as if they were about to start from the head, the wild, disordered appearance, the fearful clutching of the hands, and the unearthly tones, made one fancy for a moment that an inmate of Bedlam had broken loose and was revelling at the Park Theatre in the very worst of paroxysms (Stoneman *Jane Eyre on Stage* 276).

Willing's production contained some exceptionally emotional scenes. This shows that, although public favour was turning away from melodrama in favour of realism at this point in the century, it still prevailed in some minor theatres. The popularity of melodrama seems to depend on the audience of the theatre. Theatres like Courtney's Victoria were said to be the favourites of the "vulgar and the ignorant, ... who throng ... to witness atrocious melodramas fit only for an audience of felons, care not what an actor is so long as he is but vociferous and tears a passion to rags" (Stoneman *Jane Eyre on Stage* 28). As such, Bertha's madness becomes highly sensationalised and dramatic - not as an attempt to highlight her lack of agency in a biased world, because that is a twentieth or twenty-first century reading of the character, - but because the audience cried out for gore, guts and spectacle. Ultimately the genre of melodrama reduced the humanity of Bertha's character in much the same way that all of the characters were being shaped to fit the stock character types that are features of the theatrical genre.

As the nineteenth century progressed, the dramatic styles appearing in London theatres widened and the subject of female independence and equality was portrayed in both melodrama and realist stage productions. The works of dramatists like Ibsen and Shaw frequently reflect the contentious topics of the time. Although, it is noted here that some of the female acts of agency portrayed by Ibsen and Shaw were often still punished by death despite the fifty-year gap between *Jane Eyre's* first appearance in print and on stage and the emergence of some of their works. In the staging of Bertha Mason, this factor remains consistent in all of the Victorian stage adaptations of *Jane Eyre*; Bertha is always dead at the end of each play. Not a single nineteenth-century stage adaptation (that we are aware of) focused on a Bertha-centric retelling of *Jane Eyre* and none of them changed the ending to enable Bertha to have as happy an ending as Jane and Rochester.

Acts of female agency on the nineteenth-century stage are frequently punishable by death as was the case for Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler* (1891), which is centred around the titular character of Hedda. Although it must be noted that *Hedda Gabler* was written a lot later than many of the plays studied in this chapter. Arnold Weinstein's 2018 article presents Hedda as a married woman who cannot cope with male oppression and her lack of agency to the point that she commits suicide; the only act of agency she commits in her life (128). Bertha Mason's fiery and bloody death could also be viewed as an act of agency. From a twenty-first century feminist perspective, it would be possible to argue that Bertha's suicide derives from her lack of control over her life, so because she chose her own death by committing suicide, her death becomes her greatest act of self-determination, independence and agency.

Despite Ibsen's bleak depiction of a woman struggling to claim independence and control over her own life in the character of Hedda Gabler, stage representations of female agency were beginning to shift, as George Bernard Shaw's *Mrs Warren's Profession* (1894) attests. It is pertinent to note at this point that despite Shaw writing *Mrs Warren's Profession* in the late nineteenth-century, the play was initially banned by the Lord Chamberlain indicating that it was viewed as an unacceptable image of female agency due to its discussion of prostitution (Shaw 181-182). It was first performed in 1902 nearly a decade after it was written. This suggests that although attitudes to female agency were starting to shift, they had not improved to a great extent. Mrs Warren has managed to navigate her way through patriarchal Victorian society by using men's sexuality against them in order to reach a position of power as a madam of a brothel. Shaw's play is a problem play in that it deals with prostitution arising from economic need, not because of women's moral feebleness. It also deals with female agency, as Mrs Warren has dug herself out of a financial hole (as Jane does by advertising her services as a governess in the newspaper). Mrs Warren is the author of her fortune as she has no one to thank for raising her from poverty. She rescued herself from untenable circumstances: therefore, she is an excellent image of burgeoning representations of female agency in Victorian theatre. Although, preventing Mrs Warren from being a wholly positive image of female agency, is her own daughter's attitude

towards her. Vivie Warren is mortified when she learns that her mother is still supporting herself using profits made from prostitution, despite no longer being impecunious. Vivie's initial praise of her mother's ingenuity vanishes and she says that she will work in an office in the city and vows never to marry. Vivie leaves, rejecting her mother, who is distraught as she had imagined a companionable future with her daughter in her dotage. It is possible to identify melodramatic tropes in Shaw's *Mrs Warren's Profession*, despite Shaw's campaign against the "melodrama, sentimentality, stereotypes and worn-out conventions" (Berst 71) present in London's theatres in the 1890s. In fact, Shaw adopted melodramatic tropes as a means of sharing his concerns about society with the public. However, Bowman states that by the 1890s

melodrama was a disreputable and exhausted dramatic genre ... [but] when Shaw became the drama critic for the *Saturday Review*, in 1895, he saw he could use melodrama as a stick for beating the prevailing drama then on the London stage; he also discovered how suitable melodrama would be for his own "drama of ideas" (Bowman 30).

This led to Shaw manipulating melodramatic tropes, resulting in the creation of lines like Kitty Warren's "But I was more afraid of the whitelead factory than I was of the river" (Shaw 247-248) in a scene representing a tense moment between Vivie Warren and her mother. Although melodrama was seen as unfashionable at the time, his adoption of melodramatic tropes meant that his work

was more successful, not because he had copied the commercially successful formula, but because he had relied heavily on bits from old farces and melodramas he remembered from the 1870's and 1880's, when he had gone to the theatre for entertainment (Bowman 31).

From a New Historicist perspective, Shaw's borrowing of 'outdated' dramatic techniques demonstrates Greenblatt's avowal that "nothing comes from nothing" (Greenblatt *Hamlet in Purgatory* 4). The negative reception that Shaw's play, which features a female character who displays great agency in transforming her life, received nods to the fact that positive literary and theatrical representations of female agency from the Victorian era are uncommon. When they do appear, the responses they provoke from the other characters in the book, or play, appear to indicate that the author was trying to provoke the reader to condemn female agency and instead to encourage women for remaining under male care and guidance, as with Mrs Warren or Isabel Archer in Henry James' *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881). There is a distinct sense of this in Wills' adaptation of *Jane Eyre* (1882), which features a Jane who is so fuelled by a heightened sense of agency that she nearly suffers a shocking moral fall as she has refused to listen to the helpful advice of her acquaintances and friends. So determined is Wills' Jane to do as she pleases that she chooses to ignore evidence of Rochester's existing marriage, and even rips up the physical evidence of it that she has been given by the Ingrams in the form of a letter from Mr Mason (Wills

in Stoneman *Jane Eyre on Stage* 418). This is the most obvious example of female agency being presented negatively amongst the Victorian stage adaptations of *Jane Eyre* examined in this chapter. Ultimately, they each respond to Jane's struggle to achieve agency in differing ways depending on the dramatist's political leanings and the socio-historical and legal context.

### **Comparative Analysis**

In this section, an analysis of the dramatists' approach to the original source and how they approached transferring a female *Bildungsroman* (with a female narrator) to the stage is conducted first. The section then moves on to an analysis of the key proto-feminist themes found within the novel, such as Jane as an artist; her escape from Gateshead, Lowood and Thornfield; defiance of social norms; and the institution of marriage.

According to Debra Teachman, "it is the story of the education of an individual, both through formal education and by growing into maturity ... as she creates the life she wants to live" (Teachman 2). Jane's journey, during which she acts with more and more agency to gain equality and independence, is what defines the novel as a *bildungsroman*. A *Bildungsroman* is a narrative literary structure that refers to the novel, but I argue that the term *bildungsplay* can in fact apply to the several different stage adaptations of *Jane Eyre*, as they have retained the same sense of a character's journey of development. It should be added here that a '*bildungsplay*' is not a term that is entirely unique to this thesis. I could find only one other usage of the term, which was in José Lanter's *Missed Understandings: A Study of Stage Adaptations of the Works of James Joyce* (1988). In relation to which, he uses the term in reference to his analysis of the stage adaptations of Joyce's work. Lanter must have experienced the same need as myself in that because there is no existing term for a play which does the same thing as a *bildungsroman*, a new term needs to be coined. The German for a stage play is '*ein Bühnenstück*', so the closest would be *Bildungsbühnenstück*, which is more of a tongue twister for a UK reader than a term that could be easily adopted to encompass this genre. As such, the term '*bildungsplay*' will be used for the remainder of this thesis. It is accepted that it is a term, which is currently rarely used.

In the case of nineteenth-century stage adaptations of *Jane Eyre*, the term is most appropriate as Jane's story is about her personal development and struggle to gain agency. The definition of *Bildungsroman* is that it is the journey of the central, typically, male protagonist to a position of psychological and moral growth, which is something that can be transferred from the pages of a book to the main stage of a theatre. A *bildungsroman* is typically focused on the themes of "innocence, self-knowledge, sexual awakening, and vocation" (Birch 127), all of which are core themes of *Jane Eyre*. How she goes about achieving those goals is her defiance of the accepted societal norms of behaviour for dependent, poor and orphan women and in the way that she facilitates her numerous escapes; from Gateshead, Lowood, Thornfield and even from St John

Rivers. As such, the *Bildungsroman* of Jane Eyre's life is bound up tightly in her desire to have agency of her own person.

Whilst the academic discussion and examination of Brontë's *Jane Eyre* as a *bildungsroman* is considerable, little study has been conducted on the stage adaptations of *Jane Eyre* in relation to the *bildungsroman* form. As discussed in the introduction, this is most likely a consequence of the same academic dismissal of ephemera and populism which prevented popular stage adaptations, and adaptations (Hutcheon xiii-xiv) from being considered worthy of academic examination (Stoneman *Jane Eyre on Stage* 1). In the same way that melodramas were considered ephemera, plays that have the same conventions as the *bildungsroman* seem to have been overlooked in being ascribed a recognised theatrical genre.

The novel's charting of "the heroine's growth to mature womanhood and self-realisation" (Lodge 51) is what makes the novel a *bildungsroman*, so in what ways could the Victorian stage adaptations be considered *bildungsplays*? Charlotte Birch-Pfeiffer produced the most obviously *bildungsplay*. The other dramatists do not present a characterisation of Jane which is as rebellious or as outspoken as Birch-Pfeiffer's, nor is there as much a sense of her being on a journey as there is in Birch-Pfeiffer's play, presumably because Jane does not say as much in the other plays as she does in Birch-Pfeiffer's adaptation. Birch-Pfeiffer<sup>5</sup>, like John Brougham, was extremely well-known and celebrated during the nineteenth-century. Birch-Pfeiffer was writing during the *Biedermeier*<sup>6</sup> period in Central Europe between 1815 and 1848, which was focused on promoting the domestic sphere. This is immediately apparent in Birch-Pfeiffer's adaptation *Die Waise von Lowood* (in English, *The Orphan of Lowood*), as it is the first of the stage adaptations to return the opening of the play to Gateshead when Jane is a young girl living with her aunt and Reed cousins. The two earliest plays (by Courtney and Brougham) both open at Lowood School where Jane is already a miserable teacher. The English translation was by Clifton W. Tayleure and is dated 1871. The action, of course, for any stage adaptation of a novel, is condensed to fit the time constraints of a piece of drama. Despite being the most similar to the novel in terms of its plot, Birch-Pfeiffer's adaptation completely excludes any scenes from Lowood School. The setting of the play is within entirely domestic spaces, which is undoubtedly the influence of the *Biedermeier*

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<sup>5</sup> Charlotte Birch-Pfeiffer started her career as an actress as Mary Braddon also did. In addition to acting and writing plays, Birch-Pfeiffer also worked as a manager for the Stadttheater in Zurich for six years (Stoneman *Jane Eyre on Stage* 139). Birch-Pfeiffer wrote approximately a hundred plays, which were largely stage adaptations of the novels of Victor Hugo, Alexandre Dumas, George Sand and Charles Dickens (Stoneman *Jane Eyre on Stage* 139). Birch-Pfeiffer had once "dominated the German stage in an unprecedented way, especially for a woman [and] she was by far the most successful dramatist of the time in financial terms" (Stoneman *Jane Eyre on Stage* 139).

<sup>6</sup> The *Biedermeier* period was when the middle-classes expanded and the Arts were developing amongst the bourgeoisie. *Biedermeier* literature is marked by its focus on the domestic sphere as the style arose during the boom of the middle-classes. The middle-classes in Germany were affected by the domestic sphere in the same way that British society was, by an urge to keep business and public life outside of the home and a masculine domain in response to Europe becoming increasingly industrialised (Murray 744).

style mentioned earlier. However, it is interesting to note that as a “champion of underdogs and women” (Stoneman *Jane Eyre on Stage* 141), Birch-Pfeiffer does not present any scenes at Lowood School to demonstrate how miserable Jane’s life was before arriving at Thornfield, thereby creating a contrast between Jane’s early life and her life at the end of the story. Catherine Evans states that Birch-Pfeiffer’s plays largely focus on “young women whose stations in life are inferior to those with whom they are in contact [in plays where they] maintain their personal integrity and individuality, thereby demonstrating their superiority, in order that they be treated as equals” (Stoneman citing Catherine Evans *Jane Eyre on Stage* 141). Despite the fact that any scenes at Lowood School are omitted from Birch-Pfeiffer’s adaptation, there is still a strong sense of the personal journey which Jane is on to achieve equality. In this way Birch-Pfeiffer has retained the *Bildungsroman* elements in Brontë’s novel.

Jane has numerous speeches, monologues and soliloquies in Birch-Pfeiffer’s adaptation, which are aimed at heightening the audience’s pity and empathy for her. From the start of the play the audience is encouraged to appreciate the despondent, wretched life which Jane has been living with the Reeds in the dialogue between Mrs Reed and Henry Whitfield, one of Jane’s uncles.

*HENRY*: I have been too long absent to comprehend at a glance just how matters stand here. It is easy, however, to see that the position of this orphan in your family is a false one, for she suffers severely from your hatred.

*MRS R*: You are right – I do hate her. It is possible I have not understood her, and that I have not tried to understand her. I have done everything in my power, have indeed used every means to make her obedient, but all has been in vain. She hates my children, defies my authority, and now I am determined to send her away. This is the only way to establish peace under this roof. She is the very counterpart of her mother – as wilful and obstinate as she was (Birch-Pfeiffer in Stoneman *Jane Eyre on Stage* 154).

Birch-Pfeiffer immediately sets out to the audience how extremely unhappy and unloved Jane’s early years have been by showing this startling confession from Aunt Reed. Her firm avowal of her loathing of the orphaned Jane provides exposition for Jane’s life so that when Jane enters the stage in the next scene, the audience knows to pity and support her, although there is no doubting that the audience is being encouraged to do that given the language and tone of Jane’s opening soliloquy:

*JANE*: Uncle Reed, dear Uncle Reed! Do you see me? You smile, You *do* see me! Why do you smile? No, weep, weep! They all say that I am an ugly, spoiled, ungrateful child – it must be so! Oh, why did you leave me? I loved you so dearly, and you too, loved me, did you not, Uncle? But they all hate me – should I, *can* I be grateful for their *hate*? ... Oh, Uncle, I can bring you nothing but my tears, they are all I have, they deny me everything else – take them; they are tears of love and gratitude, and yet they say

I am ungrateful ... (Birch-Pfeiffer in Stoneman *Jane Eyre on Stage* 155).

Birch-Pfeiffer uses emotive language in order to encourage the audience to sympathise with Jane's plight. Birch-Pfeiffer's use of rhetorical questions provokes pity in the audience in this tearful soliloquy. However, Jane's sad tone does not last long as a moment of climax follows shortly afterwards with Aunt Reed and Brocklehurst:

Mrs Reed tells you that I am ungrateful: it is not true! I never forget a favor. Those who are kind to me always have a place in my heart... If I were a liar I might tell you that I loved Mrs Reed, that she has been kind to me, has been a mother to me; if I were deceitful I would weep and lament because I am turned out of the home of my childhood... Oh, to the day of my death I shall remember how, because I defended myself when your wicked son knocked me down with the hammer, you locked me up all night in the garret, although I cried out, half dead with pain, 'Have mercy! Be compassionate, Aunt Reed!' Oh I will tell the whole world how merciful, how compassionate you are! If I am bad, it is you who have made me so – yes, you, who are what you say I am, deceitful; yes, you are more than deceitful – you are a perjured woman (Birch-Pfeiffer in Stoneman *Jane Eyre on Stage* 161-162).

The fierceness with which Jane expresses herself as an independent agent continues to the end of the scene and is maintained throughout the play. Jane leaves Gateshead happy to go to school and to be away from the cruel, callous Reeds. Jane condemns Aunt Reed for not providing her with the care and kindness which she should have given as Jane's aunt and guardian. Here Jane is not simply 'talking back' to her elders and betters out of mere ingratitude, she is righteously condemning Aunt Reed for her failure to fulfil the image of the ideal Victorian middle-class wife; or, more appropriately given Birch-Pfeiffer was influenced by the Biedermeier period, her failure to fulfil the domestic role of a wealthy Christian German wife and mother. By using the conventional image of femininity to demonstrate how cruelly Aunt Reed treated the orphaned Jane, Birch-Pfeiffer subverts Brontë's proto-feminist message. Jane condemns Aunt Reed for her failure to conform to the idealised image of femininity, the same image that Jane also grows up to fail to conform to by refusing to accept her position as a dependent orphan who should feel grateful for her lot in life rather than seeking more. But Jane remains likeable for the audience, and her argument against Aunt Reed gains credibility, because a woman's role was more readily associated with being a loving, caring, kind and protecting caregiver at the time than being ambitious.

Of equal interest in this key speech is Jane's anger at being called a 'liar' by Aunt Reed. Truth and lies are a significant theme in Brontë's *Jane Eyre*. There are numerous examples of lying in the novel. Aunt Reed lies to her husband by promising to raise Jane like she was one of her own children, and she also lies about Jane's existence to John Eyre who wants to adopt Jane and



make her his heir. Rochester lies to Jane about Bertha. He lies to the rest of his 'sophisticated society' friends and to Blanche to make her believe he wants to marry her. As such a lot of the significant people in the plot are liars. Therefore, the fact that Jane is outraged at being called a liar at such a young age, and so early on in the plot, is a foreshadowing of the lies the future Jane will have to face in her journey to obtain equality and become a free agent.

Jane also alludes to true and false love in her vociferous accusations against Mrs Reed's coldness and neglect:

If I were a liar I might tell you that I loved Mrs Reed, that she has been kind to me, has been a mother to me; if I were deceitful I would weep and lament because I am turned out of the home of my childhood (Birch-Pfeiffer in Stoneman *Jane Eyre on Stage* 161-162).

Here she describes deceit of affection, pretending to love someone purely for appearance's sake, which is the same thing that Rochester does with Blanche Ingram in pretending to consider her an eligible bride. Jane ends her outspoken diatribe about lies and truth by calling Aunt Reed a 'perjured woman', referring to Aunt Reed's deathbed oath to her husband. Perjury is a criminal offence under British law and has been since the sixteenth-century (Turner 421). In addition to perjury being a criminal offence, it is also a holy offence as the perjurer has sworn a false oath on the Bible. The principles of Christianity are also an issue affecting Aunt Reed and Brocklehurst's deceit. Aunt Reed knows that she's meant to love and protect Jane, not simply because she promised her dying husband or because as a nineteenth-century middle to upper-class woman she is meant to assume a loving, caring maternal role, but because as a Christian she is meant 'to love her neighbour' and to be charitable. As such Aunt Reed has failed three times to provide what Jane needed as a child. Brocklehurst (Birch-Pfeiffer calls him Blackhorst in her adaptation) preaches about the "christianizing influences" of Lowood Institution seconds before Jane vents her fury. He says that Aunt Reed has been "too indulgent" and that the "goodness of [*her*] heart has blinded [*her*] judgment" (Birch-Pfeiffer in Stoneman *Jane Eyre on Stage* 161). However, this is the opposite of Jane's account of her life with the Reeds. Brocklehurst believes in denial, self-restraint and hardship in moulding good, hardworking Christian girls and therefore his view of the life Jane lived with the Reeds is skewed by his own opinion. Jane's rebellious outburst and her determination to live a free life where she is respected and lives with equals seems to hinge on the cruelty that she suffered living with the Reeds.

The issue of agency as the determination to live her life as she pleases seems to be reduced to the personal for Birch-Pfeiffer, rather than political. As such Birch-Pfeiffer presents a *Bildungsplay* where Jane's pursuit for equality and emancipation is a consequence of her childhood misery. Birch-Pfeiffer omits any scenes showing Jane's years at Lowood Institution, which would have cemented the journey that Jane goes on. Birch-Pfeiffer's *Jane Eyre* remains "the story of the education of an individual, both through formal education and by growing into maturity (Teachman

2). During her journey, Jane experiences numerous disheartening setbacks where her “hopes are inevitably crushed” (Teachman 2). Ultimately these moments are where Jane assumes agency over her life by protesting against the unfair treatment she is receiving. First is the moment the play opens with Aunt Reed describing how much she hates Jane, then Jane being attacked by her cousin John Reed, followed by rescuing Rochester from the fire. This is all before she “has learned the lessons she needed to become a strong, adult woman” (Teachman 6) and has claimed her inheritance and then subsequently married Rochester. There are numerous other examples like this scene in Birch-Pfeiffer’s adaptation of Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* (see Appendix F for Chapter One for further plot events in Birch-Pfeiffer’s adaptation) which demonstrate the principles of the *Bildungsroman* genre, making it a kind of *Bildungsplay* as Jane protests verbally about the treatment to which she is being subjected at every moment, either privately in a soliloquy or publicly, for example, in front of Aunt Reed and Brocklehurst in the play’s opening or when she discovers Bertha. In addition to the fact that Jane expresses herself vocally in Birch-Pfeiffer more often than in the other adaptations, she also expresses herself artistically in Birch-Pfeiffer’s play. Notably she is the only dramatist to include any of the scenes featuring Jane’s artwork. Jane’s attempts at self-expression through her art are now considered to be important examples of female agency by feminist literary critics as the next section will discuss.

### **Jane as an Artist**

There is a growing tendency to present Jane Eyre as an artist in twenty-first century adaptations of the novel for television and film. The 2006 BBC miniseries of *Jane Eyre* starring Ruth Wilson as Jane Eyre and Toby Stephens as Edward Rochester prioritised shots of Jane painting or drawing over other B-Roll (‘filler’) shots like Jane staring longingly and dejectedly out a window onto the wild moors for dramatic effect to highlight her desire for a more fulfilling life. This might well be part of the urge for twenty-first century adaptations of the novel to romanticise the story concentrating on celebrating it as a love story across the classes, rather than highlighting the proto-feminist elements. Prioritising Jane’s artistic abilities supports an image of Jane as creative, passionate and wild, which are all terms that have connotations of romance and love. As such, the importance of the theme and motifs strengthening Jane’s battle for agency has been demoted. The ease with which this was done in 2006, 2016 and even today is much the same as the ease with which Courtney or Brougham or Wills approached reshaping Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* to suit their own particular needs and the tastes of their intended audience. Hutcheon suggests that the ease with which original sources are approached and then altered is what makes adaptations such a loved phenomenon, “the real comfort lies in the simple act of almost but not quite repeating, in the revisiting of a theme with variations” (Hutcheon 115). Thus Hutcheon raises the question of whether the faithlessness of the adaptation process is actually the secret ingredient of its enduring popularity. The introduction to this thesis discussed in depth the value of studying adaptations as “aesthetic objects in their own right” (Hutcheon 6) but it is worth stating here that this new television and film trend of characterising Jane as an artist contrasts with Benjamin’s view of

reproductions, that they have their own “presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be” (Benjamin 214). What this concept misses is that the 2006 adaptations are situated in 2006 and are influenced uniquely by the way of life in 2006, as well as by prior adaptations as Davis’ notion of a culture-text contends. Viewing adaptations in this way moves away from the “fidelity criticism” perspective of adaptations, which used to proliferate in academia and helps adaptations to be viewed as important works in their own right.

Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* asks the reader to think about the restrictions on female agency in nineteenth-century Britain; but one of the areas in which Victorian women were able to exercise self-expression and to have agency was art (Bermingham xi). Although middle and upper-class Victorian women were discouraged from making a living as an artist, as actresses were, middle and upper-class women were encouraged to develop good skills for drawing and painting as a hobby to show off their feminine talents (Zakreski 64). Female culture in the Victorian era included subjects like French, music, embroidery and sewing and art, which are some of the reasons that Jane was excited to attend Lowood School (Ioannou and Kyriakidou 19-20) as was the case in Birch-Pfeiffer (Birch-Pfeiffer in Stoneman 161, 169, 171 and 179) and Willing’s adaptations (Willing in Stoneman *Jane Eyre on Stage* 289). Although, Jane appears to be more delighted at the opportunity of leaving the Reeds and becoming self-sufficient, than finally having the opportunity of being “studious” after years of being banned from reading the Reeds’ books:

*JANE*: Oh, I desire to learn! I will be studious! I will do everything – everything that will tend to make me independent of others (Birch-Pfeiffer in Stoneman *Jane Eyre on Stage* 161).

Birch-Pfeiffer appears once more to be the dramatist who devotes the most attention to ensuring that her adaptation of *Jane Eyre* is not only similar to the novel in terms of the plot, but also in terms of the key themes that have been retained. The line ‘everything that will tend to make me independent of others’ is a prime example of the kind of phrasing that Birch-Pfeiffer’s Jane uses to express her desire to be uninhibited and autonomous. Therefore, Birch-Pfeiffer’s inclusion of scenes depicting the artistic side of Jane can be read as a deliberate embrace of Brontë’s proto-feminist themes. Additionally, any adaptation celebrating Jane’s artistic ability could be doing this to highlight either a view of Jane as a figure of romance or a view of her as a restricted, oppressed nineteenth-century woman lacking agency. In the extract from the original source which Pfordresher (53) discusses in his book, there is a strong sense of Jane attempting to escape through her art; an attempt to create a landscape for herself that is both one with nature and in union with herself, unlike any setting she had previously occupied. The fact that scenes like this do not appear in the nineteenth-century stage adaptations might well be dismissed by some as the result of it making for a poor visual spectacle for the audience, particularly for a Victorian audience for whom, we have already learned, spectacle, piqued emotions and passion were the core attractions of attending a performance.

The way that the nineteenth-century stage adaptations handle the scenes showing Jane as an artist provides an indication for how the dramatist viewed the novel as a whole. Feminist readings of Brontë's original identify passages like the following as proof of the author's attempt to describe the restrictions imposed on women in the century and how they found solace in their imaginations.

Then my sole relief was to walk along the corridor of the third story, backwards and forwards, safe in the silence and solitude of the spot, and allow my mind's eye to dwell on whatever bright visions rose before it-and certainly they were many and glowing; to let my heart be heaved by the exultant movement, which, while it swelled it in trouble, expanded it with life; and, best of all, to open my inward ear to a tale that was never ended-a tale my imagination created and narrated continuously; quickened with all of incident, life, fire, feeling, that I desired and had not in my actual existence (Brontë ed. by Dunn, Volume 1, Chapter XII, page 138).

Jennifer Gribble argues that Brontë "shares with her heroine the tremendous energy of an imagination pressing at the confines of a governess's social context and a nervously retiring personality" (Gribble 279). For Gribble this passage from the original source reveals the way that certain Victorian women escaped the restrictions of their age. By seeking emancipation in their imaginations, they were able to craft a world around them of their own creation and achieve what they wanted in their mind's eye as they were unable to in reality. In effect their imaginations became a place of wish fulfilment where they could make themselves happy as they had agency over the inner workings of their minds, which supports my analysis of Pfordresher's reading of Jane's participation in acts of artistry. In the novel, Jane reveals the extent to which escaping into her imagination through her art made her content. Pfordresher looks at the scene in the novel where Rochester is viewing Jane's portfolio as an important example of the way that Jane expresses herself through art as an act of female agency. Rochester interrogates Jane about her paintings, not only asking where she was when she made the pictures but whether she was "happy".

To which Jane gives the most extraordinary response: to paint them "was to enjoy one of the keenest pleasures I have ever known." Rochester tries to brush this aside, assuming there have been but few pleasures at all in Jane's young life (Pfordresher 128).

Pfordresher regards Rochester's disinterest in Jane's response as Rochester seeing Jane's statement as a hyperbole caused by the miserable life that Jane must have lived until that point. Rochester, in Pfordresher's mind, does not see Jane as an artist expressing herself in her truest form. Rochester's failure to recognise this mirrors the lack of appreciation or quality that was accorded to the female mind in the era and which was the cause of Jane's desire to escape into her art. She was not being stimulated by her narrow life and education, so she sought her own mental stimulation by constructing new worlds around her from paint, charcoal and pencil, and in

that way she exerted the little agency that she did have to create a world in which she was happy. Pfordresher also believes that this scene between Rochester and Jane in the novel is important in showing Rochester seeing the true Jane as expressed in her art, although he might not have been aware of that at the time. His interest in those paintings is the first turn of the spinning wheel which creates the “cord of communion” (Pfordresher 129) between them. This is arguably why the twenty-first century adaptations approach Jane’s artistic ability as a vehicle to support a romantic retelling of the story, rather than as an important element that reveals Jane’s desire for agency in a world of patriarchal oppression.

Evidently the theme of female agency being expressed through art is significant for feminist critics of the novel. In the novel, there are three main scenes where Jane’s ability as an artist is significant to the plot. The first is when having first been introduced to Rochester, he asks to see her portfolio. Birch-Pfeiffer’s *Jane Eyre; Or the Orphan of Lowood* (1870) is the only nineteenth-century stage adaptation to include any scenes where Jane expresses herself as an artist. All of the other nineteenth-century dramatists omit any reference to Jane’s artistic ability altogether:

*JANE:* Yes sir – with the pencil I was only able to express the thought; in order to embody the feelings, the colors became necessary.

*ROCH (examines the sketches. He cannot conceal his astonishment):* What strange ideas! Here nothing but clouds low and livid, rolling over a soulless sea – a half-submerged mast, on which sits a cormorant – his wings flecked with foam – holding in his beak a bracelet set with gems, which have been torn from a fair arm, that alone is visible above the waters. No living thing is to be seen but this king of the cliffs, and yet all is life. Where did you get your copies?

*JANE:* Out of my head.

*ROCH:* Out of that little head I see on your shoulders?

*JANE:* Yes, sir! (Birch Pfeiffer in Stoneman *Jane Eyre on Stage* 170-171).

This scene reveals not only the extent of Birch-Pfeiffer’s fidelity to the original text in her heavy line borrowing but also the condescending, patriarchal attitude, which permeated the nineteenth-century’s treatment of middle- and upper-class women.

In Brontë’s original the scene is as follows:

“And when did you find time to do them? They have taken much time, and some thought.”

“I did them in the last two vacations I spent at Lowood, when I had no other occupation.

“Where did you get your copies?”

“Out of my head.”

“That head I see now on your shoulders?”

“Yes, sir” (Brontë 106).

The book goes on to describe the paintings whereas in the play, Rochester describes them to the audience in his dialogue with Jane. In the novel and in Birch-Pfeiffer's play, this scene presents Rochester as surprised that Jane was capable of thinking, or even feeling this way. After Jane has discussed her particular artistic method regarding using colour to embody her feelings in order to explain the creation of the scene that Rochester has found in her portfolio, he asks her where she gets her ideas and is surprised to find that they came "[o]ut of that little head I see on your shoulders?" (Birch Pfeiffer in Stoneman *Jane Eyre on Stage* 171). The question is made even more condescending with the diminutive use of 'little' in reference to her head. Rochester's surprise at learning that Jane did indeed create the painting from her own imagination entirely results in him staring at her in the same critical fashion that he was using to examine her painting. While the novel and the play are more than a century before Mulvey's work *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* (1973), this scene clearly demonstrates Rochester's "pleasure in looking" (Mulvey 62) at Jane. Rochester is clearly depicted objectifying Jane in much the same way that he had been objectifying her paintings a few seconds before. He was perusing her and her art at the same time, however Jane shrugs off his 'male gaze' (Mulvey 62) and readily admits to her talent with a confident "Yes, sir!" (Stoneman *Jane Eyre on Stage* 171). There is none of Gilbert and Gubar's suggested 'withdrawal' that Brontë's women artists are supposed to do (Gilbert and Gubar 82) in this scene as Jane accepts, even welcomes, Rochester's gaze. Mulvey's argument is that women are depicted as the passive recipients, objects even, of male desire in the media. While her argument is directed more at films, it can certainly be applied to nineteenth century plays and novels despite the change in art form and distance of over hundred years. At the time, there was no term for the fact that women were being portrayed as objects of male desire in the nineteenth century, but they were indeed objects of male desire in society at large, as well as in art. This fact is demonstrated particularly well by William Holman Hunt's painting *The Awakening Conscience* (1853) in Chapter Two. It is rather apt that the only stage adaptation to have depicted the 'male gaze' in action is the only one to have been written by a woman.

Jane's brazenness in this scene supports Birch-Pfeiffer's portrayal of a Jane who is only able to assert herself. She does not appear to have any capacity to 'withdraw'. As such, Birch-Pfeiffer's approach to adapting *Jane Eyre* seems to be focused on presenting the figure of Jane as a champion for women and their ability to express themselves through art and any other way they choose to as independent beings. It is an idea which the child Jane expresses at the beginning of the play when she says that she will do "everything - everything that will tend to make me independent of others" (Birch-Pfeiffer in Stoneman *Jane Eyre on Stage* 161). Birch-Pfeiffer is therefore picking up on the same proto-feminist elements in the novel that led to Lady Eastlake, Elizabeth Rigby, criticising the novel on its publication due to its depiction of a woman whom Rigby felt had "long forfeited the society of her own sex" (Rigby 153-185) because of Jane's rejection of the social order in terms of the way that women were expected to behave in the nineteenth-century.

Whilst Birch-Pfeiffer underpins her adaptation with scenes and lines that accentuate Jane's drive for autonomy and emancipation, the other nineteenth-century adaptations of *Jane Eyre* omit Jane's artistic ability altogether. The reason for that might be as simple as a consequence of the time constraints that a melodrama had to contend with when staging a play in the minor theatres of Victorian London, combined with the feasibility of staging someone painting or appealing to a bloodthirsty audience as the previous section examining the stage adaptations of *Oliver Twist*'s Nancy has shown. Alternatively, it could be the result of a deeper issue like the Married Woman's Property Act, which was passed in 1870; therefore, the other dramatists might well have made a conscious decision to eradicate Brontë's proto-feminist message particularly if they were not in favour of the passing of the Act. Given that contemporary reviews of productions like *Oliver Twist* and the reviews of productions of *Jane Eyre* reveal a tendency towards bloodlust and excessively roused emotions, it seems most likely that scenes showing Jane expressing her desire for freedom, equality and respect through art would be cut in order to focus on allowing the audience to achieve the high level of sensation that melodrama is famed for (McWilliam 56).

Many of the scenes depicting Jane's desire for female agency, for equality, for respect, for love and for freedom in the novel have been altered or omitted entirely in the male written stage adaptations, arguably as an attempt to bend the plot of the original source to suit the dramatists' political leanings or to suit the audience of the theatre where the adaptation was due to be performed. As discussed in this chapter's introduction Harold Bloom's theory of a male "anxiety of influence" might well be the cause of the removal of Brontë's message from the story (Bloom xxiii). As such, the Victorian stage adaptations of *Jane Eyre* after Brontë became known as the author might be the product of this lack of concern for preserving the content of the original source because the original was known to have been written by a woman. This might explain the omission of Jane's artwork, which could be read as a product of their guilt-free willingness to alter the original source in favour of supporting a patriarchal, conservative view of women's roles and behaviour.

This section has explored the omission of scenes where Jane's ability as an artist is presented in connection to the theme of female agency, contextual issues and feminist theory. These issues have been discussed in order to reveal why Jane's ability as an artist is an important aspect of female agency. An examination of the context has suggested that Birch-Pfeiffer was motivated to include references to Jane's art because of her own experience as a creative, professional woman. Modern adaptations of *Jane Eyre* focus heavily on Jane's art presumably as part of a twenty-first century desire to enhance the romance elements in the original plot, which consequently de-privileges the political elements in the original story. For Jane, her paintings become a form of mental escape to which she can turn for relief when she cannot physically escape. All of the nineteenth-century dramatists (bar Birch-Pfeiffer) studied here choose to omit all reference to and scenes including Jane's ability as an artist and how this relates to female agency in their adaptations of the novel, choosing instead to focus on scenes which more

obviously present the themes of escape and defiance. Jane's desire to escape is one of the themes of the original novel which still mark it today as a proto-feminist novel. Arguably, before Jane learnt to escape either physically or mentally, she had to learn to be defiant.

### **Female Agency as an Act of Defiance**

Before Jane learns to take steps towards physical escape, acts which are examined in the following section, she practises defiance as another way of exerting her agency. For the reader of the novel, Jane feels like a woman on the edge of a collapse. There is so much pressure on her to conform, or to simply vanish; initially from her aunt, then from Brocklehurst and some of the other teachers at Lowood, as well as from the rest of the patriarchal Victorian society that surrounds her. There is an abundance of examples which could be analysed to identify Jane's defiance in the five adaptations on which this chapter is focused. However, as the opening of a play sets the tone for the audience regarding how a character should be viewed (in much the same way that a book does) this section will focus on the first occasion of defiance, which Jane exhibits in each of the plays.

Female agency in the Victorian era was limited as the contextual sections of this chapter revealed. Brontë's novel tests the restrictive pressures of the era by showing Jane rebelling against the oppressive forces being imposed upon her; she does this by defying people. Most often this defiance is a public condemnation of a person's behaviour towards her. The first time the reader of the novel sees Jane defying someone, it is her cousin John Reed, who attacks her in the library when she refuses to prostrate herself before him. Male superiority was accepted as the *status quo* even amongst children, so defying her cousin, despite his puerility, was still a considerable act of defiance. This small, but significant act of defiance is then followed by a greater show of defiance against Aunt Reed. Jane criticises her aunt in front of Mr. Brocklehurst who has arrived at Gateshead to discuss Jane's behaviour and education with the view of sending her away to school. Courtney's stage adaptation skips any action taking place at Gateshead, thus opening at Lowood School where Jane is already a teacher; as does Brougham.

*BROCK:* Why you ungrateful –

*JANE:* Stay, sir!

*BROCK:* Silence, Miss –

*JANE:* I will be heard, for my pent-up feelings must have vent. For eight years I have endured all that falls to the lot of the poor orphan girl, discarded by those that should protect her and cast upon the cold care of an unfeeling world – all that I could do in patience, suffering, industry and obedience to those above I have done. You sir, by the munificence of others, are placed here as our protector. Instead of kindness from you, I and those around me meet but scorn. In place of the bland smile and mild reproof for our errors we meet but your continuous frown, your determined opposition. Charity! Oh, 'tis a monstrous mockery of it, 'tis persecution upon the helpless and



unprotected – and I tell you, sir, that you should blush to own such feelings as inhabit your cold and uncharitable heart.

*BROCK:* And dare you talk thus to your kind protector?

*JANE:* I do... (Courtney in Stoneman *Jane Eyre on Stage* 35).

This scene represents a turning point for Jane. She has suffered the consequences of domineering structures too often and now she has decided that it is time to fight back. This is a prime example of female agency as Jane has decided that she will not submit to Brocklehurst's rules and then acts on her decision. The language is very emotive and is designed to gain the audience's sympathy for Jane's plight as well as for her struggle and her escape from Lowood School. Jane voices her unhappiness at the eight long years she endured at Lowood, not just as an act of female agency because she is bored and wants a new challenge, but because she is seeking to vent her righteous indignation. She is rebelling against the system to which she is meant to give obeisance and points out that the system she is supposed to be grateful to has not actually treated her very well. By publicly bringing Brocklehurst's cruelty to light, Jane is exposing his hypocrisy as well as the hypocrisy of the system which attempted to forcibly keep the working classes suppressed, particularly women, who were taught to be dependent on men no matter their social class because of their alleged physical and mental weakness. Here Jane is identifying not just Brocklehurst's failure to adequately protect the poor, but the system's failure to protect women. Polite Victorian society hinged crucially on the notion that women needed to be protected by men. The type of 'protection' that middle-class males were supposed to provide women with was centred around the separate sphere ideology. Middle- and upper-class women were supposed to inhabit the 'domestic sphere', caring for the home physically in terms of its maintenance as well as morally. Men were supposed to make this possible by keeping women safely at home by working outside it and earning the financial resources necessary to support a wife and children (Mitchell *Daily Life* 141-142). So entrenched in Victorian society was the separate sphere ideology that it became an intrinsic aspect of a "man's gender identity" (Tosh 108). Therefore, Jane's verbal criticism of Brocklehurst can be read not just as an attack on his failure to perform his role as superintendent of the school, but as a failure to perform as a man and therefore an attack on his manhood. There is an interesting power battle taking place in this scene between Brocklehurst and Jane. Jane is not only verbally refusing to submit to Brocklehurst's will, she also physically refuses to submit her body to what he demands. Jane even orders Brocklehurst to submit to her by telling him to be quiet in this scene.

In this speech, Jane points out that Brocklehurst has failed to keep the women under his protection safe because they have suffered persecution and scorn. As such Jane is demanding that Brocklehurst give her what she, and the other women under his protection, are owed. Jane's assertion of her female agency at the opening of Courtney's adaptation is only the first instance of political radicalism in his adaptation. John Courtney wrote *Jane Eyre, Or The Secrets of Thornfield Manor* in 1848 for The Victoria Theatre. Little is actually known about John Courtney as a man, even his date of birth is uncertain. However, there is evidence that John Courtney was

the stage name of John Fuller, a London actor and playwright (Stoneman *Jane Eyre on Stage* 20). As so little is known about John Courtney, there is little use in speculating about his political beliefs in the hope of shedding some light on the potential motivations behind the decisions he made when adapting *Jane Eyre*. However, it is known that G. Dibdin Pitt's *Susan Hopley, The Vicissitudes of a Servant Girl* had been performed in recent years at the Victoria and it had been a tremendous success due to the focus on the servant characters. Stoneman suggests that this "explains the prominence of the servant characters in Courtney's *Jane Eyre*" (Stoneman *Jane Eyre on Stage* 29). The area surrounding The Victoria was described as one of the worst in London and a typical audience at The Victoria consisted mainly of costermongers (a person who sells goods from a handcart in the street), which explains the numerous comedic scenes of violence delivered at positions of authority in his play as costermongers were always being asked to 'move on' by the police (Stoneman *Jane Eyre on Stage* 26). Henry Mayhew's *London labour and the London poor, Vol. 1* reveals that costermongers were "nearly all Chartists" (Mayhew 20). As such, Courtney's approach to Jane's agency might well lie in the zeitgeist of the time, which witnessed the growth of the Chartist movement. Chartism was a movement which sought political reform particularly for the working-classes. Its peak was between 1838 and 1857 and as such Courtney's adaptation which appeared in 1847 was right in the middle of the movement's most popular years. 1848 was "the year of revolutions throughout continental Europe and of potential Chartist rebellion at home" (Hartley *Charles Dickens and* 11). Therefore, the melodrama can actually be seen to be politically radical because of Jane's assertions that it is her right to be treated as Brocklehurst's equal. To understand Courtney's Jane, she needs to be viewed as a representative for the working-class poor, despite her middle-class background, and therefore, she reflects their principles. Her position, at the time, would have been considered to be radical, particularly in the context of this conservative theatrical genre, as she is openly stepping outside of women's traditionally identified role of meek, silent submission. It is possible to argue that Jane is even suggesting here that women are equal to men and require no protection, as the alleged protection that they have been given by Brocklehurst at Lowood School was so poor that the women had to do the best that they could by themselves. Viewing Jane in this way we can draw another parallel between the problem play characters of the 1880s, like Shaw's Kitty Warren and the nineteenth-century stage adaptations examined in this thesis.

Brougham omits this scene at Lowood with the action moving straight to Thornfield after a short scene at Lowood School, in which one of her fellow teachers gives Jane a letter telling her she has the job as governess at Thornfield. At the start of Brougham's production, Jane merely complains to Miss Gryce about how horrid Brocklehurst is rather than actually having a scene where she accuses him of failing in his duty:

*JANE:* Poor girl, his heart is clad in steel, no mortal can reach it; but you hinted at a change; what do you mean!

*MISS G:* In the first place, he says you are not sick, that it's nothing but laziness.

*JANE:* The hypocrite! the false-tongued hypocrite! Go on.

*MISS G:* And that unless you attend to your duties, you'll have to go.

*JANE:* Where?

*MISS G:* Anywhere – out into the road; he'd do it.

*JANE:* He would – I know he would. What shall I do? Oh, pity me, for I need pity much. Homeless, friendless, and an orphan; what is to become of me?

*MISS G:* Why don't you try and get something to do? (Brougham in Stoneman *Jane Eyre on Stage* 76-77).

This scene demonstrates a very different kind of Jane to Courtney's defiant, highly vocal Jane. Brougham's Jane makes no public cries for freedom, agency nor fair treatment. Instead, her biggest act of agency is her advertisement for new employment. The reason for Brougham's downplaying of Brontë's theme of the desire for female agency might well be his preference for the romance elements in the novel, as was discussed in the section of this chapter exploring Jane's artistic ability as an expression of agency. Although, Brougham does still highlight Jane's desire for agency by giving Jane numerous soliloquies and monologues where she cries out for liberty and equality, such as when Jane is first introduced to the audience:

*JANE:* Ah, aunt, aunt! you do not, you cannot know the bitter slavery to which your hate has doomed me; eight long years of joyless, hopeless, pitiless imprisonment – life dragged along in one unvarying level, in the very springtime of my youth – with heart and brain astir, and yearning for the love of kindred, full of bright thoughts and glorious impulses, the world and all its chances, changes, forever closed against me – it is terrible. Oh for freedom! freedom! my heart bounds like an imprisoned bird against its wiry barrier, at the mere thought – freedom – blessed freedom; those only, who lose thee, know thy worth. (*Throws open window.*) Oh, I have prayed for liberty until my loud cry seemed scattered on the passing wind. I cannot rest – I cannot think – my tortured brain, in wild confusion, whirls. Heaven send me a change, no matter what – a break to this heart-cankering monotony – a change, or I shall go mad (Brougham in Stoneman *Jane Eyre on Stage* 76).

Stoneman states that it is Jane's "spirited self-reliance, which makes her an ideal heroine of melodrama" and that "Courtney and Brougham revel in the emphatic display of Jane's virtue but the melodramatic ideal does not easily map onto modern ideas of feminism" (Stoneman *Jane Eyre on Stage* 9). This might explain why Brougham has omitted Jane's fierce admonishment of Brocklehurst leaving just Jane's virtue in her suffering with the Reed family to be admired by the audience. Although given that this scene is not in the original source, Brougham's omission might simply be as a result of his attempt to construct a play that differs from Courtney's. Birch-Pfeiffer, on the other hand, skips any scenes at Lowood and starts the action at Gateshead where Jane learns she is being sent to school and then the action moves to Thornfield. In this scene, the opinion of Birch-Pfeiffer's Aunt Reed contrasts with Henry, who seems to care about Jane and encourages Aunt Reed to confess that she hates Jane. As all action at Lowood is omitted from Birch-Pfeiffer's story a gap is left in the plot. The result of which is that Jane needs a moment to

shine out against the hypocrisy and cruelty she has faced in order to gain the audience's sympathy for being brave and resilient. Birch-Pfeiffer bridges this gap by intensifying Jane's final scene with Aunt Reed at Gateshead. Whilst this is different to Brougham's scene between Jane and Brocklehurst, it produces a similar effect due, to the accusations which Jane levels at her aunt regarding her failure to live up to her role as Jane's primary caregiver:

Mrs Reed says that I tell lies, and am deceitful. That, too, is false. If I were a liar I might tell you that I loved Mrs Reed, that she has been kind to me, has been a mother to me; if I were deceitful I would weep and lament because I am turned out of the home of my childhood. But I tell you there is nothing in the world I so abhor as this woman, whose glances have been thorns to me, whose words daggers, since I could think and feel! For five long years she and her heartless children have treated me with unrelenting cruelty. I hope that I part from them forever! Never again will I call her 'aunt', never, never!

*MRS R (terrified):* Jane, how dare you talk to me thus?

*JANE (passionately; almost in tears):* How dare I, Mrs Reed, how dare I talk to you thus? Because I tell you the truth! You say that I have no heart, that I am insensible to love and kindness. A little love would have made me good and gentle; for a little love I would have worshipped you, as I did Uncle Reed. But love and pity are strangers to your bosom. Oh, to the day of my death I shall remember how, because I defended myself when your wicked son knocked me down with the hammer, you locked me up all night in the garret, although I cried out, half dead with pain, 'Have mercy! Be compassionate, Aunt Reed!' Oh I will tell the whole world how merciful, how compassionate you are! If I am bad, it is you who have made me so – yes, you, who are what you say I am, deceitful; yes, you are more than deceitful – you are a perjured woman (Birch-Pfeiffer in Stoneman *Jane Eyre on Stage* 161-162).

As she speaks out so fiercely about her aunt's treatment, Jane commits a formidable act of agency. This is something more than simply talking back to her elders (and perceived betters); she is declaring her own personhood. Jane's argument for justice hinges on her aunt's failure to provide her with a happy, loving home. Caring for Jane was not just a deathbed promise that her aunt made to her uncle, but should have also been the embodiment of her natural role as a caregiver, nurturer and moral Victorian woman.

Jane points out her aunt's flaws, making the audience sympathise with her plight. This act also elucidates the fact that her aunt's complaints about her alleged misbehaviour could actually have been prevented had her aunt shown love, care and guidance. Therefore, it is possible to read Jane's rebelliousness in this scene as being born of the cruelty to which she was subjected as a child. As such, if Mrs Reed had loved Jane, would Jane no longer have wished to seek her equals in the world? This seems to be Birch-Pfeiffer's message, and makes reading Birch-Pfeiffer's adaptation from a proto-feminist framework very complex. If Birch-Pfeiffer is suggesting that Jane only rebels because she was mistreated, then this brings up many conflicting points about

women's agency and whether they only ask for agency when they have been maltreated. Once more the issue of agency as the determination to live her own life on her own terms seems to be reduced to the personal for Birch-Pfeiffer's Jane, rather than the political desire for universal women's equality as was also examined in the *Bildungsplay* section.

In this scene Jane is also angry at being called a liar, which interconnects with the theme of truth and lies that is apparent in Brontë's novel. Notably, Jane appears to be most upset in this scene because she has been called a liar, which makes her feelings towards Rochester's secrecy about his marriage and Mrs Reed more resonant, as Jane seems to have a deep desire for moral justice and truth. However, in Birch-Pfeiffer's adaptation Bertha is not Rochester's wife. Instead she is his deceased brother's mentally unhinged wife whom he is caring for clandestinely due to an apparently extremely significant feeling of family loyalty, "His dying wish was that I should bring Adele to England, remove the maniac mother to Thornfield Hall, and carefully conceal our disgrace" (Birch-Pfeiffer in Stoneman *Jane Eyre on Stage* 195).

In theory this would downplay the shock factor of the secret that Rochester is keeping from Jane as there is nothing to legally prevent them from marrying, and Rochester's flirtation with Blanche looks more innocently like an attempt to force Jane into confessing her love for him. However, Jane does inherit her long-lost uncle's fortune, so this 'lie' from the novel does make it into Birch-Pfeiffer's adaptation. Mrs Reed is also affected by Birch-Pfeiffer's Jane's insistence on sticking to the truth as she is deeply shocked by Jane calling her a 'perjured woman' in this scene. Upon hearing Jane's condemnation of her, Mrs Reed shouts a horrified "Jane!" (Birch-Pfeiffer in Stoneman *Jane Eyre on Stage* 162). Then, at the end of the scene, there is a kind of tableau of shock, as the stage directions describe the remaining cast members on stage as follows:

*MRS R (sinks on sofa, and covers her face with her hands).*  
*BLACK (follows Jane greatly embarrassed).*  
*HENRY (shrugs his shoulders, and goes towards Mrs R).*  
*Curtain falls (Birch-Pfeiffer in Stoneman Jane Eyre on Stage 162).*

This indicates that the issue of truth and lies was a significant one for Birch-Pfeiffer in her dramatization as far it related to the emotional and private sphere, not the political. This supports my previously stated theory that Birch-Pfeiffer appears to reduce everything to the realm of the emotions and the private, depoliticising Brontë's original. As such it is no wonder that Jane's outspoken, heartfelt confession of her treatment in the Reeds' home is not as impassioned as it is in Courtney when Jane criticises Brocklehurst, as Courtney was more driven by politics than Birch-Pfeiffer was - as discussed earlier in this chapter.

The same scene also appears in Willing's adaptation. Willing also starts his adaptation (1879) at Gateshead with the Reeds. Jane is meek, timid and mild until she finally unleashes her pent-up

frustration. Willing also chooses to show Jane's defiance at the beginning of the play with Aunt Reed before the action jumps forward to Thornfield. She is meek and mild initially, as the stage directions reveal; however, Jane eventually fights back. She has had enough of her aunt's cruelty and of being told to be grateful for receiving abominably cold treatment. She leaves the room but then returns fuelled with a desire to speak her mind:

*MR BROCK:* It is the truth – Heaven, would you try to corrupt me into telling a lie – my pupils must be prevented from associating with such an odious little viper – from one who has repaid the kindness and the generosity of her benefactress by an ingratitude so bad, so dreadful that at last her excellent patroness was obliged to separate her from her own young ones lest she might by example contaminate their purity – we shall crush that spirit, we shall combat the demon – come Miss Eyre – you must be taught, you are a dependent, a pauper.

*JANE:* Goodbye, Aunt Reed – forgive me – I'm not a liar – I'm not deceitful, indeed I'm not – say goodbye once?

*MRS REED:* No – begone, ungrateful girl, and never let me see you more.

*JANE:* What would Uncle Reed say to you if he were still alive?

*MRS REED:* What?

*JANE:* My uncle Reed is in Heaven and can see all you do and think – So can my poor Mamma and Papa – though you have never loved me, Aunt Reed – and though you wish me dead and won't say good bye – I say it to you, Good Bye, and when I say my prayers – I'll still say, Heaven bless Aunt Reed (Willing in Stoneman *Jane Eyre on Stage* 292-293).

Willing's Jane, despite reaching an angry climax, reverts back to seeking sympathy, pity and even love from Mrs Reed as can be seen from her request before she leaves for school that her aunt say goodbye to her. Jane even says that she will always pray for 'Heaven to bless her aunt', which has been done by Willing to encourage the audience to recognise Jane's innate goodness in the face of her aunt's vehement dislike, envy and hatred of her niece. Willing also appears to have engaged with more aspects of Brontë's proto-feminist missive than any of the other dramatists, most likely because "[b]y the 1860's [sic] the woman question had become one of the most important topics of the day" (Vicinus *Suffer* 161).

In comparison, Wills' adaptation breaks this mould. Wills moved away entirely from the original source's plot. His Jane is obstinate, headstrong and reckless. She is almost constantly defiant in his adaptation. From the instant the curtains part, the audience learns that this Jane is not the same poor, orphan wandering the planet alone, helpless and friendless that was the eponymous heroine in Brontë's original, let alone in other the stage adaptations. Wills' Jane has the guidance and protection of Mr Prior, a countryside clergyman, and his elderly mother. Marriage to Mr Prior most certainly would have meant social advancement and yet Jane pushed him aside and left to seek her own happiness elsewhere. After meeting Rochester, she becomes even firmer in her

conviction not to return to her village home with Mr Prior. The obstinacy and tenacity appear reckless in the play as though she is leading herself to her moral and social damnation. She ignores the advice of everyone she meets. All of the characters in the play, no matter how fleetingly they appear, are quick to advise her to run away from Thornfield because Rochester is a dangerous man.

Will's Jane is such a fiercely defiant character who appears to be so tenacious in asserting her agency that it does make a twenty-first century reader wonder whether Wills was presenting Jane as a ridiculous stereotype of the 'New Woman', or an hilarious cliché of an advocate of women's suffrage designed to make people laugh at women's desire for equal rights and equal treatment because without a man's guidance they will lead themselves to damnation because of their mental inferiority.

Wills is responding to the zeitgeist of the time in his presentation of Jane as a kind of 'New Woman' figure. The term 'New Woman' first appeared in 1894 after being "extrapolated" by Ouida from Sarah Grand's essay 'The New Aspect of the Woman Question' (Ledger 9). Ledger states that many of the images of the 'New Woman' from the late nineteenth-century came from "[A] particular class (male and bourgeois) [who] held power at the *fin de siècle*, and the ideological discourses on the New Woman were undoubtedly promoted in order to ridicule and to control renegade women" (Ledger 9). Appearing as a reaction to the wide debates regarding women's roles which were proliferating from the 1860s onwards (Vicinus *Suffer* 161) the figure of the 'New Woman', despite being used by many to ridicule and attack the women advocating equal treatment, actually ended up creating a "discursive space... which was quickly filled by feminist textual productions sympathetic – not antagonistic – towards the claims of the New Woman" (Ledger 9). My allegations of Jane's absurdity in Will's adaptation lie not within the stage directions, for there is little to indicate this there. Instead Jane is made ridiculous in her actions and behaviour, for example, her persistent denial of the truth despite being given tangible evidence. Her refusal to listen to sensible advice, in the face of evidence, could have ruined her reputation and caused a moral 'fall'. By being headstrong to the point where she nearly suffers a moral 'fall', Jane's agency is devalued. It suggests that women do not deserve agency or independence because they are unable to look after themselves. However, Wills' characterisation of Jane might not be wholly negative (in proto-feminist terms), as his Jane's adamant fight for agency and her utter confidence in her convictions ultimately leads her to marry Rochester and getting a conventionally suitable happy ending. This might well be the case. However, for the twenty-first century reader of the play, reading his adaptation with the benefit of the last hundred plus years of the feminist movement to influence our reading, Wills' creative vision appears to present Jane as only narrowly avoiding a moral 'fall,' rather than actually presenting *Jane Eyre* as a proto-feminist *Bildungsplay*.

### **Female Agency Expressed Through Acts of Escape**

Jane's attempts to escape are ultimately forms of defiance and female agency in the novel. She refuses to accept the role that Victorian society had carved out for her, so she exerts her own agency to live the life she wants. First, Jane advertises her services as a governess in the newspaper in the hope of finding a new position, then she confesses to her true feelings for Rochester, a man significantly her social superior. Then Jane escapes his attempt to make her a bigamist before going on to escape a marriage of convenience to her cousin. Her final escape is her choice to return to Rochester not knowing whether he is still married. These acts of escape in the novel are all conscious, calculated acts of female agency and the dramatists have responded in varying ways to Brontë's novel.

The opening of Courtney's play is the main instance of Jane escaping through an act of agency. Courtney's play opens at Lowood School where Jane, and the school, are introduced by the additional servant characters Betty Bunce and Sally Suds whom Courtney has inserted into the plot. They make it clear, albeit subtly, that Jane is there because her aunt wants her out of the way. Jane is evidently a poor, helpless orphan but as the play progresses the audience learns that rather than accepting her fate and being grateful of her promotion to the position of teacher, rather than being cast off as a friendless nobody, she is applying for other jobs in order to escape from the misery that is Lowood School. This is obviously a very similar plot to the one that fills the novel's first few chapters, but Courtney does not just mirror the emotion of the novel, he intensifies it with stagecraft like Jane's monologue, which he uses to gain the audience's sympathy for her plight:

*JANE: Cold and chill, will my spirit bear on this bleak and cheerless fate? Infancy passed in a dull lethargy – girlhood encountering every day the frowns and scoffs of those who should have cherished and caressed me, and now womanhood dawns with a still darker prospect. Eight years have passed away since as a care-stricken child I quitted my aunt Reed for this place and from that hour, no friendly letter or inquiry has reached me – no mother's caress or father's kindly regard lives in my memory. I am as one dead to the world save that I live and move, for even my aunt sent with me evil reports, painted me in the blackest dye to Mr Brocklehurst. Oh, what hope have I but in flight – should my advertisement for a situation fail I must linger here till death shall end my suffering – they come – let me dry my tears (Courtney in Stoneman *Jane Eyre on Stage* 33).*

In this emotional monologue Jane reveals the lack of control she has over her own life. She is in a hopeless situation and feels despondent. We see the structures in place which keep her from being content and satisfied with her life, such as gender roles ("girlhood"/"womanhood") and social class, meaning her position as a dependent orphan ("care-stricken child I quitted my aunt Reed ... no friendly letter or inquiry has reached me"). In this soliloquy, Jane does speak of "flight", a literal escape, which does offer her some hope, but she appears to be waiting in a state of frustrated desperation worried about her fate if she is unable to find a new situation. The high level of emotion demonstrated in this scene, as well as the others that will be examined in this



thesis, displaying Jane's thought process are arguably part of the same melodramatic conventions that Poore sees in the adaptations of *Oliver Twist*'s Nancy in his article '*I have been true to you, upon my guilty soul I have!*': Negotiating Nancy 'hyperauthenticity' and 'hyperfidelity' in the 2007 BBC adaptation of *Oliver Twist*, which originate in Dickens' original. Poore argues that, "Emotion is externalized, and language follows set conventions [*and that*] Perhaps most significantly for pinpointing the theatrical, pre-realist fictional form in which Nancy is represented, her thoughts tend to be externalized by speech rather than explored in omniscient-narrator mode or first-person interior monologue" (Poore *I have been true* 160). As such, the demonstration of emotions and externalising of a character's thought process can be said to be a melodramatic trope.

In this scene, Jane appears to be seeking something more than simply a new job. Instead, what she is looking for is freedom, self-actualisation and love, which is stressed in each of the plays as in the novel. Jane's talk of her "mother's caress", "father's kindly regard" and being "cherished and caressed" in this section shows that Jane is not simply trying to escape a miserable work environment: she is using her independence and empowerment to find a position where she will be treated as an equal after years of living despondently in a place where her family has constantly tried to make her inferior. Later in Courtney's play, Rochester is surprised to learn how Jane has used her agency to find her position at Thornfield. He appears to have assumed that a relative would have found the position for her in his home. Rochester seems to be impressed by Jane's agency:

*JANE*: I have no brothers or sisters.

*ROCH*: Who recommended you to come here?

*JANE*: I advertised and Mrs Fairfax answered the advertisement (Courtney in Stoneman *Jane Eyre on Stage* 39).

This is a small segment showing Jane's liberated independence. Rochester appears to be testing how independent Jane is by asking how she discovered that they were in need of a governess. Jane reveals how she set about obtaining the position and that she did it alone. It appears that Rochester is surprised to learn that Jane found her own occupation without familial assistance. The difference between 'who recommended you' and 'I advertised' is very well brought out here and it is clear to see that Rochester is impressed by Jane's independence by his numerous questions about her background, which not only indicate that he is interested in Jane as a person, but that he is trying to understand her, which speaks to a deeper accord or a mutual attraction between them from the very beginning of the play. The opening of Courtney's play is more an example of the impact of social structures than of female agency. As Courtney's play progresses, Jane's lack of agency does not really transform into fully-fledged agency, which would create a well-structured, developed character arch of development fitting a *Bildungsplay*. Admittedly Courtney's Jane does end up marrying the man she loves, but this end-result was not brought about by her own actions. Courtney's Jane is helped constantly by male characters and so she has them to thank for making her dream a reality because of this it is possible to view Courtney's Jane disempowered and lacking agency, rather than possessing it. The end of Courtney's play

makes this point most evident as will be discussed in the final section of this comparative analysis of the plays.

Brougham's adaptation starts with Jane at Lowood School as does Courtney's and as with Courtney's adaptation, Jane has already advertised her services as a governess in the newspaper. When the audience is first introduced to Jane she is begging for an escape from her miserable, loveless, life:

Ah, aunt, aunt! you do not, you cannot know the bitter slavery to which your hate has doomed me; eight long years of joyless, hopeless, pitiless imprisonment – life dragged along in one unvarying level, in the very springtime of my youth – with heart and brain astir, and yearning for the love of kindred, full of bright thoughts and glorious impulses, the world and all its chances, changes, forever closed against me – it is terrible. Oh for freedom! freedom! my heart bounds like an imprisoned bird against its wiry barrier, at the mere thought – freedom – blessed freedom; those only, who lose thee, know thy worth. (*Throws open window.*) Oh, I have prayed for liberty until my loud cry seemed scattered on the passing wind. I cannot rest – I cannot think – my tortured brain, in wild confusion, whirls. Heaven send me a change, no matter what – a break to this heart-cankering monotony – a change, or I shall go mad (Brougham in Stoneman *Jane Eyre on Stage* 76).

Brougham's play, like Courtney's, opens with Jane despairing about her lack of agency due to the pressure of various structures upon her particularly in reference to her place in the social hierarchy. She again uses her agency to find a form of escape, again employment at Thornfield where she meets Rochester. Brougham's key theme is imprisonment or the lack of freedom, which denotes a lack of agency for Jane. This is shown particularly poetically in the simile of the "imprisoned bird" in this soliloquy, which is, of course, a famous image in Brontë's original novel. For Brougham certainly, Jane, as a caged bird, finds her escape due to her act of agency in seeking out a new position. However, Jane's acts of agency are safe acts that lead her to a new life under the guidance of a superior male, who is a friend to all men, not just women, as the final tableaux of Brougham's adaptation indicates with its hailing of Rochester as "The Farmer's Friend" (Brougham in Stoneman *Jane Eyre on Stage* 108). Therefore, from a proto-feminist framework Brougham's Jane does not fully live up to the ideal of an independent, emancipated woman. In addition, Brougham's Jane is more attractive than Brontë's original and is frequently described in ways that are surely designed to make the audience believe that she is supposed to be attractive. One of Rochester's aristocratic friends, Lord Ingram, describes Jane as "devilish pretty" (Brougham in Stoneman *Jane Eyre on Stage* 81). The fact that Jane was beautified for Brougham's audience signifies a need for his audience to make sense of Rochester's attraction to Jane and that it needs to be more than an equal union of souls. Placing the chief of Jane's attractions on to her physical appearance objectifies her and consequently devalues the enormous significance of her marrying up. By being unusually attractive, Jane is cast as a more eligible wife. She might not be rich or titled, but she is attractive, and has an equally attractive

personality, whereas, Jane only has her personality to commend her in Brontë's original when Rochester falls in love with her, making their love more impressive.

In Act 1 when Jane is described as "devilish pretty" by Lord Ingram, she responds by challenging him on the impropriety of his remark:

*JANE:* Sir, your sisters, I believe, are in the room – were anyone to address either of them as you have now addressed me, what would be the result?

*LORD ING:* Positively I don't know, I can't imagine; it's a very different thing – they are –

*JANE:* Made of different clay: their hearts are more sensitive, their feelings more refined, perhaps. Reverse the picture, my Lord, and you will be nearer to the truth. In the school of poverty is oftener found that intuitive delicacy which fears to wound – inured to suffering themselves, they know and feel for that in others.

....

*LORD ING:* Dent, damme, did you hear that?

*COL DENT:* Distinctly!

*LORD ING:* And must I swallow it? Oh, I wish you were a man.

*JANE:* Pray calm yourself, my Lord. I shall retire, not out of dread of your contumely, but from very pity of your infirmities: and it may be, that the poor, lowly-nurtured drudge, whom you sent for to bring you unworthy amusement, will have given you a wholesome, though unwelcome lesson.

*LORD ING:* Snubbed, by Jove!

*COL DENT:* Prodigiously.

(Brougham in Stoneman *Jane Eyre on Stage* 81-82).

Jane's refusal to be objectified by Rochester's upper-class guests does suggest an attempt by Brougham to make his adaptation mimic, to a degree, some of the more radical messages in Brontë's original, rather than entirely eradicating the proto-feminist elements of the original source. Jane's criticism of Lord Ingram's behaviour is a display of the same kind of behaviour that she demonstrates in her refusal to be criticised by Aunt Reed for bad behaviour of which she was not guilty. She openly stands up for her principles and her rights as an individual. Brougham's production was written for the Bowery Theatre in New York in 1849, which was similar in the class of its audience to the "transpontine London theatres, where comedy was an essential part of the entertainment" (Stoneman *Jane Eyre on Stage* 9). This helps to explain Jane's ridiculing of the aristocratic guests at Thornfield. This was not done to simply demonstrate Jane's unwillingness to be condescended and scorned, depicting her thirst for control over the way she is perceived and treated, but on a practical level Jane wittily defending herself and humiliating the Ingrams would have appealed to the working-class audience of the Bowery.

The final line of Jane's monologue resonates particularly when read as a potentially proto-feminist play. The idea of Jane going mad because of the monotony of her life (Stoneman *Jane Eyre on Stage* 76) relates to the argument that, during the nineteenth-century, "[t]here was an underlying

belief that women could not speak freely or naturally in masculine discourse, and that hysteria was better understood as a frustrated or muted discourse” (Tolan 24). This notion is looked at in significant detail in Chapter Three, which examines the Victorian stage adaptations of Mary Elizabeth Braddon’s *Lady Audley’s Secret* (1862).

There are other less literal forms of escape in the Victorian stage adaptations, as in the original novel. Jane’s reading is a kind of escape as she is able to immerse herself in a different, albeit fictional realm.

*BESSIE*: I should like to let you remain, but if they should find you out –

*JANE* (*springs to the book-case and takes a book*): No one will see me. Here it is! Hume’s History of England. (*Comes down breathless with joy.*) Do you see? I found it instantly and I remember where I left off, too. (*She hurries to the window, the lower casement of which is aside. Places a chair before it, springs up on the chair and sits on casement. Her face is radiant with joy.*) Now, Bessie, I will close the curtains and no one will see me – so nobody can see me and I can go on reading Hume. I am determined to know something in spite of them all!

*BESSIE*: Stay then, if you are determined to; I will come for you in an hour. Mind you do not stir. Think of me if you do not think for yourself. You know Mrs Reed (Birch-Pfeiffer in Stoneman *Jane Eyre on Stage* 157).

Birch-Pfeiffer’s play is the closest to the novel of all the plays and is one of only two to show the Reeds at Gateshead. The play starts by indicating Jane’s agency as Jane reveals her determination to do what she wants in spite of the Reeds’ attempts to stifle her, even with an act as simple as reading on her own terms. Bessie is kind to Jane and is certainly more sympathetic than the Reeds, but she seems torn by her loyalties to the Reeds as their servant and as such tries to enforce the structures which restrict Jane as a consequence of her social class as a dependent orphan. Here, Jane is choosing to have agency over reading because it is something that she seems to be able to navigate and obtain by herself. Jane’s desire to learn here seems to be how she chooses to empower herself. Access to knowledge, in the original novel, is a driving force for Jane and that also appears to be the case in Birch-Pfeiffer’s adaptation. As Jane says, “I am determined to know something in spite of them all!” (Birch-Pfeiffer in Stoneman *Jane Eyre on Stage* 157). By beginning her stage adaptation by so closely following Brontë’s original, albeit with a change in the text that Jane is reading in the library, Birch-Pfeiffer has immediately set the tone of the rest of the play, as Jane has entered and immediately set out upon completing an act of agency, albeit a clandestine one. In the novel Jane is reading a book about British birds but Birch-Pfeiffer’s Jane has opted to sit down and enjoy the page-turning David Hume’s *History of England* (1754-61), which was considered to be a radical book in its day. That Jane is keen to devour this radical Tory history of England hints at Birch-Pfeiffer’s awareness of the potential political impact her play could have. As such, Birch-Pfeiffer could have been ahead of her time in producing drama with a social function akin to Ibsen, Shaw or Brecht. Whilst Jane is aided and

abetted in this rebellious act of agency by Bessie, this opening scene presents a very headstrong, independent Jane who will let nothing stand in her way from achieving a life on her own terms. As such, Birch-Pfeiffer's Jane is extremely powerful from the moment the curtains are drawn, which creates a stark contrast when viewed in comparison to the other Victorian stage adaptations of *Jane Eyre*, which all largely start with Jane living a life of a victim, a pawn in someone else's game. Birch-Pfeiffer's construction of female agency is very positive: but there is a caveat. Bessie appears to pull Jane back down to earth by reminding her that her consequences have actions "Think of me if you do not think of yourself" (Birch-Pfeiffer in Stoneman *Jane Eyre on Stage* 157). Jane's act of agency, if discovered, could cause Bessie considerable difficulties, if not the termination of her employment. Despite the suggestion that female agency could come at a cost, Birch-Pfeiffer's depiction of female agency is ultimately positive. For Birch-Pfeiffer's Jane, not only does agency mean choosing how she spends her time, but also *where* she spends her time, ideally away from people that she does not like.

For Birch-Pfeiffer, Willing and Wills the reason for their omission of this scene is harder to identify. Birch-Pfeiffer's focus on the domestic setting and Jane's relationship with the other characters seem to have taken priority over her own desire for individual fulfilment. Instead Birch-Pfeiffer's Jane wants fulfilling domestic relationships. Willing's adaptation was concerned with the 'sisterhood', which is even alluded to in his play (Willing in Stoneman *Jane Eyre on Stage* 330) and, therefore, the political message might well have been his primary concern. Wills' adaptation also appears to have been focused on the political as it appears to be attempting to prevent any more women from joining the growing numbers of women aligning themselves with the women's suffrage movement by making images of women who desire to live on their own terms ridiculous and, therefore, undesirable.

Wills' play starts with Jane demonstrating her agency straightaway. She has left the care of the Priors who brought her up as she did not want to marry Reverend Prior who would have been considered an entirely suitable and appropriate marriage, even a desirable match, for an orphaned girl. Jane's rejection of Prior's hand is slowly revealed as the plot unfolds:

*JANE*: I once was at Boulogne.

*ROCH*: Mr Prior is, I think the Clergyman of your parish – he is young – I suppose your ladies of the school worshipped him.

*JANE*: Not at all, but he and his mother were very kind friends of mine. If they had known I was going away they would have prevented me.

*ROCH*: A village tyrant – eh?

*JANE*: A tyranny of fondness, Sir (Wills in Stoneman *Jane Eyre on Stage* 392).

Jane has evaded Prior's engagement on the grounds that she does not love him. From a twenty-first century perspective these are grounds enough. However, we now live in an age where we have long romanticised marriage, but the Victorians were used to matches being made for the

benefit of the families of the bride and groom. Although, concerns regarding “companionate marriages” were growing during the nineteenth-century (Williams 3). As such, Jane’s reason for refusing Prior may have been considered to be foolish or even shocking at the time. This cements my opinion for believing that Wills’, rather than showing a positive depiction of woman seeking agency, was actually presenting the potentially dangerous consequences of giving women agency. Wills suggests that Jane only narrowly avoided becoming a ‘fallen woman’ as Rochester luckily ended up making her an honest woman. Wills’ Jane might have thought that she had used her agency to escape one horrendous situation but her fierce determination to live a life of her own choosing nearly plunged her into a state of abject poverty and moral shame.

To conclude this section, it is important to look at whether Jane does ever actually manage to escape into living a happy life of female agency. Ultimately, Jane gets the life she wants because she inherits money, not because she used her agency to earn the money herself. Once she has received her inheritance, she is able to do whatever she wants with it and at that point she goes back to Rochester where she soon becomes his wife. The money Jane inherits has been left to her by her uncle in Madeira, not by a wealthy aunt who made the money herself and as such Jane is able to obtain the life of her dreams through the assistance of men depicting her as a ‘damsel in distress’ rather than as a woman of agency and independence. What’s more, given the state of the marriage laws at the time, as soon as Jane enters into her marriage contract with Edward Rochester, her miraculous, life-changing fortune becomes his, so the little power she had achieved was lost to her as soon as she became Mrs Rochester. Therefore, it is possible to argue that Brontë’s novel does not have a very proto-feminist ending and as a consequence the final question to ask of the Victorian stage adaptations of *Jane Eyre* is whether any of them present any evidence of female agency in the way that they conclude the plot.

### **Victorian Marriage and the Question of Female Agency; Dear Reader, I married him**

It is one of the most discussed aspects of Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* that Jane’s fervent struggle for agency ends with her marriage, which, given the condition of the marriage laws at the time, made her the legal property of her husband, thereby by bestowing on him her hard-won inheritance. Despite knowing this, Jane returns to him after their supernatural moment of telepathy has connected them. Jane correctly senses from this that Rochester is in danger and so returns to him, not knowing if she is returning to a still married man. Regardless, Jane does not seem to care. Given that the chances of Bertha dying so suddenly would have been slim (even in the Victorian era of pandemics), Jane’s decision to return to Rochester can only be viewed as having been done knowing that society would have heaped scorn and shame upon them for their relationship. Thus, Jane’s return to Rochester can be viewed as one of her most independent, agency-fuelled acts. Jane was essentially lucky (though it may seem in poor taste to describe the death of a suicidal lunatic in such terms) to have found Rochester a widower on her return, as it meant that they could finally be married legally and on equal terms, given that she was now

coming to him with a fortune. Rochester having been maimed in the fire at Thornfield also made their union even more equal, not socially and financially, but now also aesthetically, as Jane is of course still the same 'plain Jane'. The dramatists respond to Jane's return to Rochester and their subsequent marriage in differing ways, although each stage adaptation ends with the news of Jane's engagement to Rochester. Appendix F for Chapter One clearly indicates the differing approaches to the original source's plot points, but this final section will now examine how Jane and Rochester's marriage is brought about, on whose terms, and whether the dramatists have chosen to conform to the patriarchal view of a 'happy ending' as opposed to constructing a proto-feminist conclusion championing female agency.

Courtney's adaptation reunites Jane with Rochester after she decides to go back to him having learned about her cousins, the Rivers, as well as discovering that she has an inheritance to claim too. Unlike in the novel, Courtney's Jane does not share it with her cousins. Bertha is Rochester's wife in Courtney's adaptation. Jane experiences no telepathic connection with Rochester in Courtney's adaptation she returns to him purely because she is no longer "dependent on him" (Courtney in Stoneman *Jane Eyre on Stage* 61). Therefore, Jane's return to Rochester is one of pure agency suggesting that Courtney's somewhat slapstick adaptation might not be as conservative as it initially appeared. Once they are reunited with each other and Jane has learned of Bertha's fortuitous demise they swiftly become engaged, with Rochester's sight miraculously being returned to him almost as soon as Jane has promised to become his wife. However, their rosy future is interrupted by the now deranged Richard Mason's spontaneous attack:

*Mason rushes in. MASON: Ha ha! I have you, I know you, give Bertha back to me or I'll tear her from your heart! (Noise and cries of 'Follow – follow – this way')*

*JANE: He is mad!*

*ROCH: Watch – stand back!*

*MASON: Bertha – where is she – you have hidden her from me – I will have her (flies upon Rochester)*

*JANE: Help – help – Mary – John – Help! (They enter)*

*Business – Rochester is weak and as Mason is dragging him down Jane swings him round – he staggers, recovers and makes another furious rush upon them both – at this Joe Joker enters and seizing Mason by the throat shakes him*

*JOE: No, you don't do anything of the kind, you rascal!*

*Carter with others arrive. Farm servants enter*

*CARTER: Secure him – pinion him – he is mad (they do so) (Courtney in Stoneman *Jane Eyre on Stage* 62-63).*

This sudden return to comedic violence, heightened emotion and sensation returns Courtney's adaptation firmly to the conventions of melodrama (McWilliam 56). Testament to the fact that Courtney is primarily concerned with appealing to his working-class audience is the fact that he alters who Jane shares her inheritance with. Instead of sharing her inheritance with her middle-class cousins who saved her life, Jane keeps the full £20,000 until she appears to say that she

will share it with the invented servant character Joe Joker in the final scene, the news of which is received with great aplomb by everyone:

*BRIGGS: As a march here, I'll affirm that fact – You, I believe, are Jane Eyre – I, as attorney for your late uncle John Reed, Merchant of the Island of Madeira, place into your hands a fortune of twenty thousand pounds, left you according to his will and testament*

*JANE: Edward, do you hear? – you are safe, and Jane Eyre the orphan girl your wife. Joseph, the preserver of my husband and myself, be happy; for I will make you so!*

*JOE: Huzza!*

*OMNES: Huzza! (Courtney in Stoneman Jane Eyre on Stage 63).*

As such, Courtney's Jane certainly brings about her marriage to Rochester on her terms, but it falls firmly within the conventions of melodrama, which was dependent on the marriage of the heroine at the conclusion. Courtney twists this to include the news that the invented servant character becomes as much of a hero as Jane and Rochester and he gets a well-earned happy ending and recognition for his bravery.

Brougham's adaptation also concludes by forcing an impression of Jane's self-determination, in returning to and marrying Rochester. By ending his play with the confirmation of Jane's marriage, Brougham's play is able to conform to the conventions of melodrama whilst also demonstrating that Jane is a free agent as she returns to Rochester not knowing if his wife is still alive. Jane also returns without a fortune; therefore, she is not his equal financially, which is arguably another strong indication of her demonstrating her willingness to act as she pleases. However, Brougham's Jane, despite returning to Rochester to act as his nurse and his wife, is not the one praised at the end of the play. Instead, it is Rochester who is hailed and praised:

*Jane leads Rochester to seat, a device is fixed by the peasants having printed thereon in flowers 'The Farmer's Friend'. Garlands depend from the center, which are held up by Peasants, forming a canopy for Jane and Rochester: Music. Curtain (Brougham in Stoneman Jane Eyre on Stage 107-108).*

This suggests that Jane is not meant to be the intended hero in Brougham's play, and this is a troubling notion. Admittedly this 'praising' of Rochester takes place because it is his birthday: however, this final scene is problematic. A realistic approach to the scene would take into account that Rochester's secret would probably be known by his tenants at this point, given that everyone had witnessed Bertha jumping from Thornfield's battlements as well as Rochester's attempts to marry Blanche and Jane, which would have been bigamy had he succeeded. Therefore, it seems unlikely that he would be praised by his tenants in this way. Brougham therefore places the audience's focus on Rochester and on his own invented servant characters who provide the comic



relief in the piece rather than on Jane's agency stifling Brontë's original message, although it is still there in very germinal form.

Birch-Pfeiffer's approach to Jane's agency and her marriage to Rochester is more obviously conservative and patriarchal, as Jane is almost violently and physically bullied into her engagement:

*ROCH: And do you think I will allow you to go, after what you have said. (Throws both arms around her) Do you know, little girl, that in my hands you are powerless, that unless I will, you cannot move?*

*JANE (stands motionless in his arms, and looks at him full and calmly in the face): True, for my body is weaker than yours, but my soul is stronger, and my soul is my own!*

*ROCH: Oh, how well she knows me and herself! How truly she speaks! What would I then? (Releases her) And you will, shall decide your destiny. At last you have shown me your inner self. Now look at mine – Since first we met, since in your nature I recognized a resemblance to my own, I have struggled manfully to resist the strange spell that drew me towards you, but all in vain! I am, and long have been, yours, heart and soul. Accept now what alone you have left me to offer you – my hand!*

*JANE (stares at him, and steps back some distance): Oh, sir, how cruel thus to mock me!*

*ROCH: Jane, come to me.*

*JANE: You bride stands between us.*

*ROCH: I have no bride!*

*JANE: Then you have deceived Georgina, who loves you.*

*ROCH: Georgina loves nothing but herself, and my fortune.*

*JANE: Then why is she here?*

*ROCH: To unlock the casket of thy hidden thoughts, obstinate girl. Jealousy alone could disclose even to you the secrets of your own bosom. Never have I spoken to Georgina of love or marriage. No one, no one but you, has any claims to my heart. 'Tis you I would possess! I would have you, and you only! Jane, say that you will be mine!*

*JANE: Are you in earnest? truly in earnest?*

*ROCH: I am, and if an oath be necessary to convince you, I swear it.*

*JANE: Oh, Rowland, my lord, my love, I am thine! (Throws herself into his arms)*

*ROCH: And shall be forever!*

*(The End) (Birch-Pfeiffer in Stoneman Jane Eyre on Stage 197).*

This lengthy, unexpurgated extract from Birch-Pfeiffer's adaptation has been included in order to demonstrate the rapid transformation of Jane's feelings for Rochester once she has learned that he does not love her cousin Georgina. Birch-Pfeiffer's Jane inherits a significant sum and Bertha Mason is altered so that she becomes Lady Henrietta Rochester, his deceased brother's lunatic wife, making Rochester into the cliché of a cad who was out to seduce Jane rather than a potentially dangerous, amoral cad intent on bigamy. As such, Birch-Pfeiffer has romanticised Jane's agency by making the two of them free to marry as equals financially by the end of the

play. This reduces the significance of Jane's act of agency, because the structures opposing Jane's marriage simply are not in place as they are in the novel and in the two earlier adaptations by Courtney and Brougham. This could also be the influence of the *Biedermeier* period on Birch-Pfeiffer's work as the focus of her play was on restoring and creating domestic happiness.

Willing's adaptation more obviously constructs a conclusion which celebrates female agency. By the end of his play, Jane has inherited a sum of money, has physically and financially assisted the disgraced Blanche Ingram (who has become a 'fallen woman' because of her cousin John Reed), has turned down Brocklehurst's proposal, has battled with her cousin John Reed over her inheritance and has returned to Rochester. Despite these clear acts of agency, Jane has been tricked into marrying Rochester as he has feigned blindness to encourage her to return him rightly believing that she would come to help him:

*ROCH:* Yes – he can see – I was blind even to the one I loved – blind to learn if her love was deep enough to fly to my side as a cripple – but blind no longer to see my darling's heritage stolen by a robber and a scoundrel –

*Noise, all doors broken open – Brocklehurst enters*

*JANE:* Rochester – Edwards – you can see.

*ROCH:* Yes. Pardon the deception, Jane – my sight is slightly injured but it was given out I was stone blind. And anxious to test the sincerity of your love – I feigned blindness. That was the secret I told you I had, and which I longed to tell you – when you had consented to link your life to one you thought abandoned by the world.

...

*JOHN REED:* Curse you all – well – Blanche I suppose you'll come with me? – you can't both marry Mr Rochester.

*BLANCHE:* Tempter – I am proof against you now. (*Exit Reed L.H. door*)

*JANE:* My home shall be yours.

*BLANCHE:* Call me Sister?

*JANE:* Sister – dear Sister. (*To Rochester*): to Blanche you owe my early presence with you.

*ROCH:* My love – my life – to-morrow will see our hands united as our hearts have long since been – my Jane – my darling Jane Eyre.

*JANE:* To-morrow, indeed to become, Jane Rochester.

*Curtain* (Willing in Stoneman *Jane Eyre on Stage* 335-336).

The most unusual aspect of Willing's conclusion is his decision to have Jane invite Blanche to live with them. "My home shall be yours" (Willing in Stoneman *Jane Eyre on Stage* 336) Jane tells Blanche (without consulting Rochester first), on top of offering to share her inheritance with her (Willing in Stoneman *Jane Eyre on Stage* 330). Willing's Jane certainly acts with agency to bring about her marriage to Rochester on precisely her terms, even down to with whom they will be sharing their marital home. This might be a consequence of the higher-class audience who attended the Park Theatre, Camden, London. They might well have been more aware of the content and themes of Brontë's original and therefore Willing might have felt compelled to give greater fidelity to the text. There is also the influence of the time in which the play was written.

The 1870s was a decade which witnessed growing attention being paid to the women's suffrage movement as this was when the Married Women's Property Act took place giving women more control over their property. The Education Act, which was also passed at that time, improved the level of schooling received by girls and numerous institutions and industries opened up to women due to the increased campaigning by the women's suffrage movements, which were building traction in all factions of society.

Wills' adaptation, being the most dissimilar to the original source, continues to focus on the romance between Rochester and Jane after presenting a Jane who has used her arguably obstinate and ludicrous determination to have agency to lead her to near moral damnation. Luckily, Jane narrowly avoided this fate because Rochester did genuinely intend to marry her, so the proposal scene between them is extremely poignant (Wills in Stoneman *Jane Eyre on Stage* 427) once the obstacle of his wife has been removed. The issue of Rochester's wife in Wills' adaptation makes Rochester even more of a Byronic hero. Under duress, he tells Jane a half-truth in order to string her along a little longer. He tells her that the madwoman in the attic is his half-sister. It is only much later on that Rochester confesses to her being his wife, causing Jane to leave with Prior to go back to her village home. Jane ignored all advice to remove herself from danger in the face of people telling her Rochester was already married but she consistently refused to listen, or believe anyone (Wills in Stoneman *Jane Eyre on Stage* 417). As such, she does act with agency, but it is not a positive image of it as she is in so much danger. During the proposal scene, however, there is one potentially positive image of female agency as she tells Rochester that she 'doesn't care about being married' (Wills in Stoneman *Jane Eyre on Stage* 426), which might support an acceptance to view women having another role other than solely being a wife and mother:

*ROCH:* Yes – you understand one thing – by staying with me – I understand another – you pity me. I want more than that – you came to be my [nur]se?

*JANE:* Yes, Sir.

*ROCH:* But you must marry some day.

*JANE:* I don't care about being married, Sir (Wills in Stoneman *Jane Eyre on Stage* 426).

The conclusion of Wills' play is similar and yet also dissimilar to Brougham's. In Wills' play, the blessings are heaped on Jane by Rochester, rather than on Rochester by his tenant farmers. Rochester tells Jane "Oh, my love – God bless you and reward you! (*Embrace*) (Wills in Stoneman *Jane Eyre on Stage* 427) in the play's conclusion. Thus, the play's ending supports a positive depiction of female agency, which contrasts with the rest of the play. The rest of Wills' play implies that women should not crave agency over their own lives because they are not capable of having it.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, this chapter has sought to analyse the ways that the Victorian dramatists approached staging Jane's desire for agency when they each transformed Brontë's phenomenally successful novel to the stage. The purpose for this engagement with adaptations of female authored nineteenth-century novels was to identify whether there was a difference between the way that a female authored text was adapted to the stage versus the way that a male authored text was adapted to the stage. The first two *Jane Eyre* stage adaptations were written when it was not known who Currer Bell was. It was the intention to discover, to paraphrase Bloom, whether a 'female anxiety of influence' existed and this chapter has shown that there is arguably less of a desire to preserve or protect the work of a female author than there is in the case of a male authored text. However, ultimately in the process of adaptation there is a sense of the adaptor's complete freedom to adapt, reinterpret and reinvent the source anew (Hutcheon xv), which is the key to adaptations' ongoing popularity. As Hutcheon describes adaptation "there are many and varied motives behind adaptation and few involve faithfulness" (Hutcheon xv).

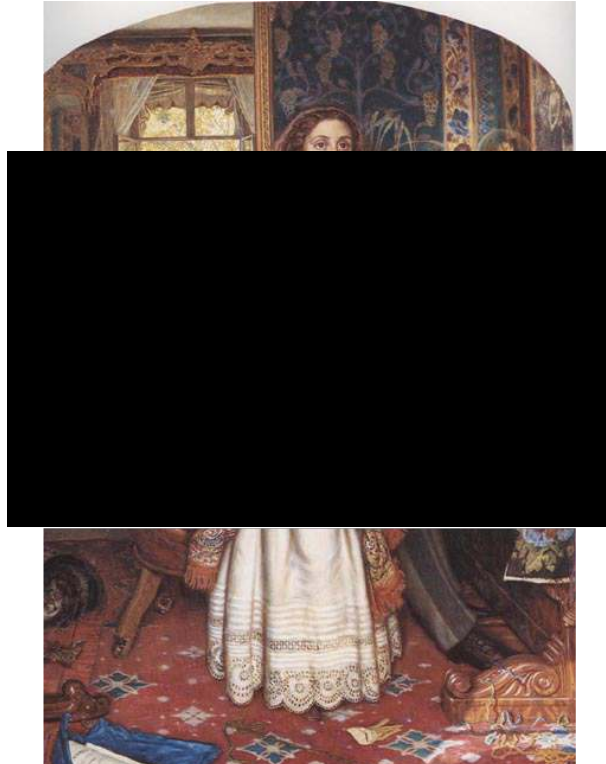
In this chapter, we have seen how the key nineteenth-century adaptations have approached the concept of female agency and discussed why the dramatists responded in the manner that they did. There is evidence of engagement with contemporaneous events like the Married Woman's Property Act 1870, Chartism and popular melodramas like Dibdin Pitt's *Susan Hopley*. We have also seen that the primary response to the issue of female agency was to either eradicate or ridicule it preferring to focus on forcing Brontë's novel to fit the conventions of Victorian melodrama. Some of the Victorian stage adaptations, like Willing's and Birch-Pfeiffer's, do, however, present a kind of mitigated version of Brontë's novel translated to the stage with some of the proto-feminist elements in an extremely germinal form. It is sometimes hard to say whether this was an accident of chance. What has been most significant in this chapter is the examination of the potential factors that led the Victorian dramatists to stage their version of Jane the way they did, which is the case for all of the stage adaptations examined in this thesis.

This examination of the influence of socio-historical and legal context on the theatrical process of adapting a novel to the stage continues with the following chapter's examination of the Victorian stage adaptations of Mrs Ellen Wood's *East Lynne* (1861) focusing crucially on the image of the 'fallen woman'. *East Lynne* has been described as a reworking of the *Jane Eyre* story:

Later Victorian treatments of the 'governess novel,' a genre heavily indebted to *Jane Eyre*, often push their plots in directions that develop themes that are present but submerged in Brontë's text (Lodge 145).

## Chapter Two

### Hate the Sin and Not the Sinner; Nineteenth-Century Stage Adaptations of Ellen Wood's *East Lynne*



Holman Hunt, William. *The Awakening Conscience*. 1853.

I never knew till now that there was good even in a fallen woman... Turn not away from the most degraded of our sex. None are so bad but that a kind word will not sink into their hearts... Too true, too true! you have taught me to respect misfortune, and to look with kindness on the faults of my fellow-creatures (Hamilton Hume 64).

With these lines, Hamilton Hume concludes his adaptation of *East Lynne* (1861) entitled *The Tangled Path*. His lines reveal the extent of the sensitivity towards the figure of the 'fallen woman' that is obvious in his adaptation of Mrs Henry Wood's seminal novel. Hamilton Hume's sympathy for the character is not unique amongst the collection of nineteenth-century stage adaptations of Wood's novel. However, whilst the stage adaptations all respond with sympathy towards Isabel Vane, the figure of the 'fallen woman' was highly contentious in the Victorian era and in the novel itself, the figure of the 'fallen woman' is presented as an extremely undesirable character. Tom Winnifrith alleges that "[i]n standard Victorian novels like *East Lynne* the fallen woman is clearly guilty of sexual immorality, and with varying degrees of condescending broadmindedness the author pities but never pardons her fall" (Winnifrith 76). However, Wood's *East Lynne* divides critics. Critics like Winnifrith believe that Wood was unsympathetic towards the figure of the 'fallen

woman'<sup>7</sup>. Whereas for some, like Audrey Jaffe, in her novel *Wood* was “[w]orking the borders between sympathy and transgression, [as] they attempt to redeem figures defined as marginal or deviant and in the process complicate the social categories and identities they seek to stabilize” (Jaffe 21). Regardless of where the truth of the matter lies, it is likely that the issue of sympathy for the figure of the ‘fallen woman’ was as significant at the time of its publication as it is now.

The focus of this chapter is to demonstrate that the reason for this difference in approach to the ‘fallen woman’ on the stage versus in the novel is because melodrama is a subtle genre that was able to be “responsive to immediate social circumstances and concerns” (Mayer 145-146), whereas, in the novel, Isabel Vane is treated by *Wood* severely. The result of this was that *East Lynne* was a prime opportunity for nineteenth-century dramatists looking to respond to the widespread need for entertainment. The novel therefore was adapted on to the stage where the story was reborn as a seduction melodrama. Seduction melodrama is a genre that was able to treat the subject of the ‘fallen woman’ with more sensitivity than the novel. This is because playhouses are able to “confront issues and to mediate social values, where plays themselves intervene in and obliquely or directly critique matters of daily concern” (Mayer 146). According to Williams, seduction melodrama explores the problem of the ‘fallen woman’ from

various angles, many blaming the woman for her moral and sexual lapse, while others seem to defend the heroine against what is clearly a sexual double standard. This ideological disparity in attitudes can exist within the same play, leading some critics to argue that melodrama not only reinforces gender conventions but also points the way toward greater freedom from them. Often the seducer is of a higher class – though ‘class’ is not precisely the correct term, especially early on, since the language of class and class-consciousness is itself in the process of formation (Williams 3).

From this description of seduction melodrama, it is easy to see the parallels with *Wood*’s novel and therefore why it was adapted to the nineteenth-century stage. In this chapter, the contentious nature of the figure of the ‘fallen woman’ is used as a vehicle through which it is possible to examine, to manipulate Greenblatt’s phrase to fit a different topic, the mutual permeability of sensation fiction and melodrama. The differing ways that the dramatists approached the adaptation of Isabel Vane from the novel to the stage reveal the vast number of influences that shaped sensation fiction into the genre it is known as today. The interplay between the two genres of melodrama and sensation fiction is evident when Isabel Vane’s characterisation on the stage is examined. The link between melodrama and sensation fiction is well-accounted for. Lyn Pykett cites Peter Brooks argument that it is possible to gain “considerable insight into the cultural

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<sup>7</sup> It is important to establish that today the use of the term ‘fallen woman’ is problematic as it is obviously derogatory. As a consequence of the changing attitudes towards women’s roles in the twentieth century, the term is now anachronistic. However, in the context of this chapter, the term is used in recognition of the literary/cultural figure of the ‘fallen woman’ as it is represented in nineteenth-century fiction and drama.

meaning and significance of the sensation narrative and the sensation genre if we view it as a particular manifestation of 'the melodramatic imagination'" (Pykett *The Sensation Novel* 11). Therefore, for the dramatists adapting *East Lynne* to the stage and having to cross the border from sensation fiction into melodrama with a complex character who is at once, villainess and heroine, they have allowed a work of sensation fiction to be absorbed by the conventions of stage melodrama. As such, this chapter addresses the following crucial question: how did the issue of theatrical form vs. literary form affect the figure of the 'fallen woman' in the nineteenth-century stage adaptations of Ellen Wood's *East Lynne* (1861)? The expected answer to this question is that because melodrama is a genre that is able to discuss and engage with contemporary events it was able to respond with sympathy to the figure of the 'fallen novel' where Wood was not able, or willing to.

Whether Ellen Wood had any sympathy for Isabel Vane is a matter of some debate. Tom Winnifrith alleges that Wood wrote her novels with a 'pious morality' (Winnifrith 1) and that Wood held a 'firm conviction that for a married woman adultery is far worse than [sic] death' (Winnifrith 2) due to her long narratorial diatribes debasing Lady Isabel's actions in the plot (1994: 2-3). However, Winnifrith does concede that there are now "modern critics [who are] eager to show ways in which Wood did sympathise with, even glorify, the sins she was condemning" (Winnifrith 4). Here, Winnifrith asserts that Wood was not attempting to garner sympathy for Isabel from the reader. Whilst Winnifrith acknowledges some of the reasons that twenty-first century critics find sympathy in Wood's novel for the figure of the 'fallen woman', ultimately Winnifrith's argument supports a view that has Ellen Wood condemning Isabel Vane because "Wood was a writer with strong views" (Winnifrith 4). George Watt hails Wood as the "'moral' voice of the middle classes" (Watt 4), which also supports an interpretation of Wood's novel as a criticism of the figure of the 'fallen woman'. Winnifrith also states that issues like "[d]runkenness and gambling, worldliness and flirtation are condemned in her novels as severely as adultery, even if they do not always lead to death, as they frequently do" (Winnifrith 4-5). What is clear in the stage adaptations of *East Lynne* examined in this chapter is that they turned away from Wood's allegedly sharply defined morality favouring a more complex, but ultimately sensitive portrayal of the figure of the 'fallen woman'.

The core research question of this chapter 'how did the issue of theatrical form vs. literary form affect the figure of the 'fallen woman' in the nineteenth-century stage adaptations of Ellen Wood's *East Lynne*?' will be met by an analysis of the nineteenth-century stage adaptations of the novel. As with the other chapters in this thesis, it is evident that each of the dramatists discussed in this chapter approached the adaptation of *East Lynne* in a unique way depending on contemporaneous events and concerns supporting Roland Barthes' view of adaptations as "a 'text,' a plural 'stereophony of echoes, citations, references'" (Barthes 160). The 'stereophony of echoes' that affect a story when it is adapted in this case could also include the reception that the novel received when it was first published.

Andrew Maunder provides evidence for a hostile reception of the novel, arguing that the furore around *East Lynne* was caused by the “moral contamination of the wife and mother” depicted in the novel (Maunder *Victorian Crime* 59). Instead of being a moral guardian for her children, Isabel allows herself to act immorally, thus potentially blighting the lives of her children. This concern particularly affected middle-class men who wanted a wife who was able to morally guide their children (Nelson 25). If the wife failed to conform, then she became a danger to their children. This indicates why the divorce courts of the nineteenth-century preferred power to remain with judges (all male) to determine custody arrangements (Nelson 8). From 1839 this *status quo* started to shift when a series of laws under The Custody of Infants Act established that women separated from their husbands could petition the Court of Chancery to give them custody of children under seven and visitation rights to children under sixteen (Nelson 8).

As the nineteenth-century dramatists were tasked with adapting a phenomenally well-known example of sensation literature depicting a ‘fallen woman’ into a melodrama, they were placed in a difficult situation particularly as the central character was so contentious. The approach that they all took was to bring to life Wood’s plot as a seduction melodrama. The arena of the nineteenth-century playhouse gave them the arena to address the contentions social problems that the novel raises and allowed them to encourage the audience to engage with sympathy with the figure of the ‘fallen woman’. In terms of the classification of Lady Isabel Vane as a ‘fallen woman’, ‘fallen women’ are not just prostitutes as is sometimes understood to be the definition of the word. Therefore, it is vital to state at this juncture that there are certainly no indications in *East Lynne* that Lady Isabel Vane became a prostitute after she abandoned her family. In the Victorian era, many people considered women to have ‘fallen’ after they committed acts like adultery and sexual intercourse before marriage, etc. not simply selling their bodies for money. The issue of female ‘fallen-ness’ will be looked at later in this chapter before moving on to an exploration of contemporary events, theatrical representations of the figure of the ‘fallen woman’ and secondary criticism of the figure, followed by the comparative analysis of all of the stage adaptations (organised by key proto-feminist scene).

The key sources for this chapter’s analysis of the image of the ‘fallen woman’ and *East Lynne* are the writings of Mrs Oliphant and newspaper reviews of both the stage adaptations as well as the novel as the primary sources. Tom Winnifrith, David Mayer, Carolyn Williams, George Watt, Rohan McWilliams and Lynn Pykett are secondary sources. As with Chapter One, the analysis of the impact of literary and theatrical form on the figure of the ‘fallen woman’ in the nineteenth-century stage adaptations of *East Lynne* is also conducted from a proto-feminist framework. As such, there is a secondary research question: What evidence is there of a proto-feminist approach to the nineteenth-century stage adaptations of *East Lynne*? The Victorian era was certainly marked by a strict moral code and piety, which might have made some people very critical of people who had transgressed societal codes and were happy to leave them to their lives of “mortal



agony” (Hamilton Hume 63). However, Victorian Great Britain also saw a trend towards philanthropism, which was sometimes directed towards helping ‘fallen women’. Wood’s missive in *East Lynne*, whether it is subversive or not, to married women makes it evident that women who acted similarly to Lady Isabel would face a situation worse than death: “she had found herself plunged into an abyss of horror, from which there was never more any escape; never, never more” (Wood 283). The Victorian stage adaptations turn away from this black-and-white view of the ‘fallen woman’ as a woman who ‘fell’ due to her moral weakness and inability to safeguard herself as the comparative analysis section of this chapter will reveal. Instead the Victorian stage adaptations treat her with sympathy, and she is recast into a “victimized heroine” (McWilliam 54).

In this chapter four stage adaptations of Wood’s novel *East Lynne*, produced between 1863 and 1879, are examined. The stage adaptations are Andrew Hamilton Hume’s *The Tangled Path, A Tale of East Lynne: A Dramatised Version of Mrs. Henry Wood’s Celebrated Novel* (1863) which was written in Calcutta for the Members of the Calcutta Amateur Theatrical Society, Charles Spencer’s Bostonian adaptation of *East Lynne: A Drama in Five Acts* (1865), T. A. Palmer’s Nottingham based production of *East Lynne: A Domestic Drama in a Prologue and Four Acts* (1874) and John Dicks’ London production of *East Lynne: A Drama, in Four Acts* (1879). These are also the widest geographically distributed adaptations analysed in this thesis. These nineteenth-century stage adaptations of *East Lynne* have been selected as they are significantly lesser known, albeit very popular productions that are worthy of in-depth study. They provide vital information about subjects like Anglo-Indian Amateur Dramatics, transatlantic cultural sharing (in this instance Spencer’s Bostonian adaptation of *East Lynne*) and highly successful Victorian productions originating outside nineteenth-century London. In all, there are six nineteenth-century stage adaptations that are recorded in the Lord Chamberlain’s Archives, which have been cross-referenced with the compilation of adaptations by H. Philip Bolton in his text *Women Writers Dramatized: A Calendar of Performances from Narrative Works published in English to 1900* (2000).

This chapter contributes to the existing study of the nineteenth-century adaptations of *East Lynne*, which has thus far focused to a large extent on John Oxenford’s adaptation of *East Lynne* and J. W. Archer’s adaptation of *East Lynne*. Andrew Maunder in Harrison and Fantina’s *Victorian Sensations: Essays on a Scandalous Genre* (173-187) discusses these two adaptations in great depth and looks primarily at how “*East Lynne* was recast for working-class audiences” (Maunder *Victorian Sensations* 174). As such there is some overlap of approach to the Victorian stage adaptations of *East Lynne* because Maunder also focused on the influence and impact that society has on the adaptive process, which is the principle at the core of the study. This chapter examines a wider selection of texts than Maunder’s chapter in *Victorian Sensations* does. Additionally, this chapter focuses on the figure of the ‘fallen woman’ instead of class. Additionally, this chapter also looks at the impact of theatrical vs. literary form in creating the nineteenth-century stage adaptations of *East Lynne*. Maunder’s work has influenced my own only in terms

of our shared belief that, to paraphrase, we need to pay attention to the environment in which a play was performed and created (Maunder *Victorian Sensations* 183). There is already a fairly significant amount of existing study of Archer and Oxenford's adaptations, in comparison to the four stage adaptations of *East Lynne*, which are the focus of this chapter so any analysis and reference to the adaptations by Archer and Oxenford is provided only if it is relevant to this chapter's examination of the figure of the 'fallen woman'.

There has also been some study of the Victorian stage adaptations of *East Lynne* in Gilbert Cross' *Next Week—East Lynne: Domestic Drama in Performance, 1820-1874* (1977). The study of the nineteenth-century stage adaptations of *East Lynne* is not the core focus of Cross' book, instead the book looks at the history of melodrama and domestic drama looking particularly at the Victorian era. The adaptations of *East Lynne* are only referred to in order to support his points about the shape and form of Victorian melodrama and domestic drama. Cross' work has helped to inform this study's knowledge of the broader picture of Victorian theatre and the impact of context on the adaptive process, but it had little to offer in terms of in-depth knowledge of the plays. However, crucially Cross' work also makes it apparent that socio-historical and legal events could and indeed did influence the creation of a play or novel as he draws frequent links between events, like the 1857 Matrimonial Causes Act, and the creation of a play or book (Cross 214). As such, Cross' work has been important for providing important details about the wider face of Victorian theatre.

In addition to these books, *Scenes of Sympathy: Identity and Representation in Victorian Fiction* by Audrey Jaffe was also of great significance to writing this chapter. Jaffe's chapter 'Isabel's Spectacles: Seeing Value in East Lynne' in *Scenes of Sympathy* (95-118) assisted in the analysis of Isabel's 'fall' in the original novel in terms of ways it is possible to see authorial sympathy with Isabel Vane. Elaine Showalter's *A Literature of their Own* (1977) was also influential in terms of analysing the character of Isabel Vane in the original novel (Showalter *A Literature of their Own* 171-173) as was Lyn Pykett's *The 'Improper' Feminine: The woman's sensation novel and the new woman writing* (1992), which acknowledges how challenging the moral of *East Lynne* would have been to a Victorian readership but alleges that this was deliberately so. Although it is important to point out once more before moving on with this chapter that the focus of this thesis is solely how the dramatists approached the proto-feminist elements of the original novel, not just on the proto-feminist elements of the novel. Tom Winnifrith's argument was also key to this study. Like myself, he argues that Isabel Vane was not created by Wood in order to challenge existing social norms about marriage and women's roles, but instead was feeding into concerns about those roles due to events like the 1857 Matrimonial Causes Act and people like Caroline Norton bringing attention to the like of rights women had over their children.

The socio-historical context and the legal context of 'fallen women' are first examined followed by an examination of nineteenth-century theatrical representations of the figure of the 'fallen woman'.

The final section of the chapter is then devoted to an analysis of the stage adaptations. The analysis has been organised by key proto-feminist scene taking place chronologically in the original novel.

### **Socio-historical context**

From a New Historicist approach, the examination of the work which was done to help 'fallen women' in the 1860s and '70s (and surrounding years) made it possible to identify the events that influenced the Victorian productions of *East Lynne*. This made demonstrating the impact of contemporaneous real-life events on the productions feasible. The aim in studying these historical events was to show that the productions were influenced by genuine concern for and sympathy with 'fallen women'.

Philanthropical campaigners like Charles Dickens, Josephine Butler and Angela Burdett-Coutts all worked to improve the lives of prostitutes (Mitchell *The Fallen Angel* 38) by bringing discussions about 'fallen women' into the public domain. Whilst Isabel Vane was not a prostitute, as was established earlier, she was still a 'fallen woman', which was considered to be a life of "blackness of darkness" (Wood 283) as Wood shows in the novel. Many people in the Victorian era were concerned with supporting their plight and wanted to alleviate the dire circumstances many women found themselves in, sometimes due to no fault of their own. 'Fallen women' and prostitutes were at the centre of many of the eighteenth and nineteenth-century's debates about how society's morals could be improved: "mid-century perceptions that the number of prostitutes was increasing were tied to more general concerns about the disorder and social chaos that seemed to pervade England" (Williams Elliott 37-41). As such, if female purity fails then it is not just the woman's family who suffer, it is the whole of English society who suffer to. This way of thinking started in the eighteenth century where it was thought that an *en masse* issue could, and indeed, would lead the country to devolve:

If ... the major social aims of philanthropists in the middle of the century were to increase the population and to improve society's morals, the prostitute was a convenient figure on which to pin both concerns. While the prostitute could be used to figure these widespread anxieties about social dislocation and crime, her supposed opposite the domestic woman, was represented as the reservoir of morality and stability... This domestic ideal, which pictured women as modest, chaste, and devoted only to the interests of their families, was an integral part of the bourgeois ideology that gradually displaced the older aristocratic model of society during the eighteenth century (Williams Elliot 37-38).

In the Victorian era, this domestic ideal eventually became the pinnacle of middle-class femininity, which was centred around female purity. The middle-class woman eventually became "the repository of a social morality that countered the anxieties about general moral laxness and shifting economic and social conditions" (Williams Elliot 38). This concern is evident in the novel,

“do you forget the disgrace reflected on her through the conduct of her mother?” (Woods 597) as well as in the plays wherein the notion of the sin of a parent is shown to dishonour and impinge on the whole family, “*CAR*. Joycel that name no more – no more – My children motherless – my home dishonoured – oh! God! give me strength to bear this blow (*sinks in chair*) my children – you will see her no-no more” (Palmer 22). Isabel’s failure to keep herself morally pure is seen to be the fault of Victorian society by some twenty-first century critics, and it is for that reason, alongside others, that they identify germinal proto-feminist tendencies in Wood’s writing. Sally Mitchell wrote that in the nineteenth century

[p]urity was said to be natural, but it was also so valuable that extreme precautions were needed to preserve it. Prudery kept girls pure by concealing the basic facts of human existence; they therefore did not have the knowledge necessary to make rational choices (Mitchell *The Fallen Angel* xii).

Hence, it is possible to view Isabel as an innocent victim because she was not equipped by society with the skills to be able to understand her attraction to and manipulation by Levison. This makes Isabel not just Levison’s victim but also society’s victim.

The separate spheres ideology<sup>8</sup> only pertained to the middle and upper classes, working-class women could not afford the luxury of sexual exclusivity or chastity outside marriage. The poverty in which the working classes often lived meant that women frequently had to “eke out a precarious living in the urban job market” (Walkowitz *Prostitution* 15), such as by working as a prostitute in times of need. A Victorian middle and upper-class woman’s role was privileged in comparison as it was felt that their role should be a nurturing one only, which was a view that was enabled by their husbands earning enough money to support the whole family. Consequently, some people felt that as women were biologically intended to be mothers, women had to behave in certain ways. As such they aspired to meet the idealised images of virtuous, pure femininity which dominated the nineteenth-century. According to Winnifrith, “[t]hroughout the novel *Lady Isabel* is shown as kind and generous, even though she has no money, a dutiful daughter and a devoted mother, full of genuine religious feeling in spite of every kind of disaster” (Winnifrith 4), despite her later ‘fall’. Wood’s sympathetic and positive depiction of Isabel’s personality is one of the reasons that the novel could be hailed as subversive. Reader sympathy is evoked by Lady Isabel’s attempts to escape from Levison, her jealousy of Barbara Hare, Levison’s manipulation of Isabel’s feelings, Miss Carlyle’s obstruction and Carlyle’s frequent meetings with Barbara, the purpose of which must remain unknown to Isabel. Isabel’s death is also presented sympathetically, thereby heightening the reader’s compassion for her. *East Lynne* could have been seen to undermine public morality as there may have been concern amongst conservative Victorians that the general public would sympathise with the character so much that they would

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<sup>8</sup> The separate spheres ideology is the belief that men and women should live and exist in separate spheres. “The patriarchal, male sphere was held to be that of the public world of activity: commerce, politics, the arts and sciences. The female, maternal sphere was its passive, domestic, private complement, centred on a moral, nurturing role” (Szreter 450).

forget the immorality of her actions in abandoning her family (Maunder "Stepchildren of Nature" 61). An additional concern may have been that Isabel's behaviour would inspire other women to behave in the same manner. A direct address advising women not to follow in Isabel's path is included in the novel as well as in each of the plays (Hamilton Hume 65, Spencer 26, Palmer 27 and Dicks 8).

However, Victorian society was not as prurient as the twenty-first century sometimes portrays it; it is important to remember the liberation and accepted promiscuity of the Georgian era a few decades prior. Humanity had not changed, but attitudes towards human functions had. Female sexuality was an accepted fact in the seventeenth-century, where the scientific understanding of conception was hinged on the female orgasm. It was believed that for a woman to conceive not only did the man have to orgasm, but the woman also (Laqueur 1). Evidently there was a great shift in the Victorian era which resulted in female sexuality being condemned and denied, potentially as a consequence of the advances in anatomy or evolution theory. This attitude can be seen in the plays' treatment of Barbara's obvious infatuation with Archibald Carlyle. Miss Corney, Archibald's sister, and Isabel both tell Archibald at various points in the adaptations that Barbara is in love with him, with him responding by denying being in love with her. Carlyle's response to learning about Barbara's alleged love is to allege that she is mentally weak, 'senseless' and even "reprehensibly foolish" as shown here in Dicks' 1879 play:

*ARCH.* If this was so, she was more weak, reprehensibly foolish than I could have thought her. I had given her credit for having better sense. A woman may almost as well love herself as suffer herself to love unsought (Dicks 6).

The same scene and lines are also contained in Spencer's 1865 adaptation (Spencer 17). In Hamilton Hume's 1863 adaptation similar sentiments are expressed in terms of Miss Corney Carlyle's ridiculing of Barbara Hare and her desire to take her down "a notch or two" by telling her of her Carlyle's marriage to Isabel (Hamilton Hume 5). Barbara's depiction as a woman who is mentally weak, even "reprehensibly foolish", but who goes on to marry the hero and plays almost as large a part as Isabel Vane in the play helps to support the fact that nineteenth-century playhouses attempted to engage with the key issues of the age. Mayer concurs saying

Melodramas, however much they would seem to be offering a narrative distant from our daily lives, ... are always about something far more immediate, even if we fail to recognize what that *something* is (Mayer 146).

This depiction of Barbara as mentally inferior suggests a complex portrayal of femininity by Dicks and it is yet another example of a woman playing something other than a 'victimised heroine' (McWilliam 54). For Dicks, Barbara has brought about her fate through her own actions. For all Barbara and Isabel's failures to preserve their modesty and protect their purity, neither character is ridiculed or made into a villainess. Afy Hallijohn, however, is made into a reductive character in all of the plays; she becomes the town flirt and that alone. Therefore, it appears that there was

softening and sympathising with Isabel and Barbara, but not with Afy. This might be because neither Barbara, nor Isabel do anything deliberately wrong and later they express remorse. They act in error and from emotion. Isabel makes the mistake of trusting Levison when he tells her that Carlyle is having an affair with Barbara, so she runs away with him in a fit of jealousy feeling keen to inflict revenge. However, she is shown to regret her actions later on in the plot. Barbara simply loves a man without requited affection being sought and certainly there are hints in the novel and in the plays that show how she could believe that Carlyle was paying suit to her, for example, the gifts he gave her and the physical contact of an arm around her shoulder, etc. Afy Hallijohn, however, appears to deliberately seduce men and seems to be trying to catch the most eligible husband she can, never mind how many hearts she breaks in the process. As Afy shows no remorse in either the novel, nor in the plays, this might be why this character was easily transferred to the play as a cliché of a vain female seductress. Ultimately in the plays Afy Hallijohn is a one-sided character whereas Barbara and Isabel are more complex characters suggesting an engagement with nineteenth-century discussions about the role of women.

From a New Historicist approach, the dramatists' approach to staging Afy and Barbara might have been influenced by the increase in knowledge about conception in the nineteenth-century. It meant that female sexual pleasure was marginalised, especially after Darwin's theory of evolution was published in 1859. These advances revealed that men and women have very different biological roles as the female sexual organs are not an inversion of the male penis as was previously assumed (Laqueur 4). This resulted in the separate spheres ideology and the desexualisation of women as the nineteenth-century developed (Laqueur 4-5). The denial of women's sexual feelings is frequently associated with Dr William Acton who wrote that the "majority of women (happily for them) are not very much troubled with sexual feeling of any kind" in 1862 (Acton 101). What Dr Acton reveals is that he believed that it was the "majority" of women who did not derive any pleasure from sexual intercourse. This indicates that Acton believed that the few women who did enjoy sex were 'unfortunate' women. An 'unfortunate woman' might also be described as a 'fallen woman' as she had failed to meet the standards of the Victorian ideal. There are a couple of instances in T. A. Palmer's 1874 Nottingham-based adaptation of *East Lynne* when Isabel displays sexual longing, either for her husband Archibald at the end of the play ("Oh, how the pressure of that hand thrilled me to my heart" (Palmer 32), or with Levison at the beginning of Palmer's play ("when *he* leaves me, it seems as though the sunshine had faded from my life" (4).

A prostitute is the most commonly acknowledged representation of a 'fallen woman', even today. The population increase in the nineteenth century led to an increase in the spread of sexually transmitted diseases such as syphilis as more men frequented prostitutes and more prostitutes were required to meet their demands. However, philanthropic campaigners such as Dickens, Josephine Butler, W. T. Stead and Angela Burdett-Coutts, who established Urania Cottage, drew attention to the problem faced by prostitutes and worked to help these fallen women by re-educating former prostitutes (Mitchell *The Fallen Angel* 38). This also points towards the impact made by class in nineteenth-century expectations about female behaviour. Dr Acton refers

to the “majority” of women, and by this he meant middle- to upper-class women, he was not referring to working-class women. Victorian women were expected to fulfil different roles depending on their class background. As Isabel was the wife of a wealthy, middle-class solicitor, her failure to meet the expectations of a respectable Victorian wife would have been condemned by that level of society because ‘respectable’ Victorian society was dominated by a desire to preserve female chastity as is demonstrated in all of the nineteenth-century stage adaptations (Hamilton Hume 65, Spencer 26, Palmer 27 and Dicks 8). Hamilton Hume’s 1863 adaptation stresses the importance of a woman preserving her reputation in one of its opening scenes when Miss Corney Carlyle tells Barbara Hare not to go out unaccompanied at night to a gentleman’s house, “Never call upon gentlemen unless you have a lady with you, or unless you intend to see the gentlemen you call upon in the presence of a lady. Keep clear of men, there is not one that is worth a rush or that can be trusted” (Hamilton Hume 8). A concern to protect middle-class female purity at all times is also raised by Hartley, “Middle-class women could not go out without some sort of escort, even when they went out in pairs” (Hartley *Charles Dickens and* 12) as “[O]ne sexual mistake was enough to condemn a woman as fallen” (Hartley *Charles Dickens and* 25). In addition to the concern about protecting middle-class women’s chastity and purity, there was also a concern to preserve the virtue of working-class women. Jenny Hartley describes how Urania Cottage was set up as a refuge for ‘fallen women’; a safe place of hope, a fresh start, a new life and more importantly a home for women who had nothing and otherwise would have been forced back out on to streets after serving their prison terms. In terms of the argument of this chapter, the fact that events like this were happening at the time suggests that there were people who were sympathetic towards the figure of the ‘fallen woman’.

Urania Cottage was the brainchild of Angela Burdett Coutts. She had been troubled by the number of “young women and children patently selling their bodies to all comers, beneath the windows of her Piccadilly residence” (Askwith 106). She decided to set up an institution, or some sort of centre where such girls as those parading beneath her windows “could be institutionalised, re-educated and reclaimed for God, before being shipped off to Australia to start new lives” (Askwith 106). She invited Charles Dickens, her friend, to help her to develop a plan to get working class women off the streets and to stop them from selling their bodies. Eventually the plan evolved into a grander one; to

open a small-scale refuge, a home for fallen women which would take girls from the prisons, workhouses and streets of London. Here they would be educated and given a second chance. Then they would be dispatched abroad to start new lives. They would go to England’s colonies, where good servants were always in demand. This is what the home would train the girls to be. It was a unique opportunity for reinvention (Hartley *Charles Dickens and* 14).

They had started out calling the setting or location of their idea, an 'Asylum' or an 'Institution', but eventually Dickens started to call it a 'Home' in his letters to Burdett Coutts. Hartley raises the issue of the importance of Dickens' change in phrasing:

A Home, however, is definitely and explicitly what he wants it to be, with its invocation of the healing powers of domesticity. To create for these young women 'an innocently cheerful Family' was the point of the thing, to be at once both cosy and daring (Hartley *Charles Dickens and* 16).

Charles Dickens was concerned about creating an environment that was different to the types of places that were already available claiming that they would assist women in being restored to society. The judgmental attitude towards unmarried mothers in some workhouses was such that they had to be "constantly reminded of their pariah status by their distinctive yellow uniforms" (Hartley *Charles Dickens and* 10). Penitentiaries and refuges, which were frequently run by Anglican nuns, had a "philosophy of abjection. In order to turn her life round the prostitute must take responsibility for her actions. Her fall was her fault, she must take blame and shame as her deserved lot" (Hartley *Charles Dickens and* 16). Dickens wrote to Angela Burdett Coutts on 26<sup>th</sup> May 1846 explaining why their Asylum (as it was then called) must not be allowed to take such an approach in educating their wards. He advises her that any woman who arrives at the Asylum will have the following message relayed:

[I]t is explained to her that she has come there for *useful* repentance and reform, and because her past way of life has been dreadful in its nature and consequences, and full of affliction, misery and despair *to herself*...It is explained to her that she is degraded and fallen, but not lost, having this shelter; and that the means of Return to Happiness are now about to put into her own hands, and trusted to her own keeping (Hartley *The Selected Letters of* 163-164).

The idyllic ambition for the women joining them would be that she would "be 'restored to society': not here but in a vague 'distant country' where she could marry an honest man and 'die in peace'" (Hartley *Charles Dickens and* 13). The stage adaptations of *East Lynne* demonstrate the same desire to be 'restored to society' as Isabel bemoans her situation as an 'outcast' from society,

What I am now – an outcast, whom men pity, and from whom all good woman will shrink, I have abandoned my husband, children, my home, cast away my good name, wrecked my happiness for evermore, and deliberately offended heaven, for him – for *him*-oh! (Palmer 28).

In all, the goal for Dickens and Burdett Coutts in establishing Urania Cottage appears to have been to educate the 'fallen women' into a new life of chastity and moral uprightness by instilling a sense of, and love of, the middle-class notion of domesticity and the sanctuary of the family in them. After all, "Dickens always loved [*the*] domestic" (Hartley *Charles Dickens and* 30). This



sense of the sanctuary provided by the Victorian middle-class home and its healing morality can be seen in the nineteenth-century stage adaptations of *East Lynne* in elemental form from the way that Isabel talks about what she has lost after her fall as seen here in Spencer's 1865 play:

Why did I ever leave my home and my dear husband? Oh! would I could wake and find it all a terrible dream; that I could find myself once more at East Lynne with my husband and children about me, a happy, contented mother (Spencer 30).

The language here implies that Isabel has lost something exceptionally precious in running away with Levison, something more valuable than simply her husband and children; her good name, her reputation, even her soul. This notion can be seen in all of the stage adaptations but most clearly in Palmer's 1874 play when Isabel says that she has 'offended heaven':

What I am now – an outcast, whom men pity, and from whom all good woman will shrink, I have abandoned my husband, children, my home, cast away my good name, wrecked my happiness for evermore, and deliberately offended heaven, for him – for *him*- oh! my punishment is hard to bear-but I have deserved it, all my future life spent in repentant expiation can never atone for the past, never, never (Palmer 27-28).

However, what is different is that Isabel's new life seems to be hopeless as she says that she cannot do anything to 'atone for the past'. What Urania Cottages offered 'fallen women' was hope for a new life, a fresh start, even possibly marriage "to an honest man" and the chance to "die in peace" (Hartley *Charles Dickens and* 13). As such, it is on this point that the stage adaptations diverge from the moral value systems that are seen at work in Urania Cottage because Isabel is beyond saving and dies a grief-stricken death after suffering severe punishments like being disfigured and losing her illegitimate child. Although, despite the severity of the events which happen to Isabel in her final months, there is a sense of a softening in approach to her in the way that the characters in the play respond to her. When Isabel is revealed to be the governess Madam Vine in Hamilton Hume's 1863 adaptation, Cornelia Carlyle treats her with (uncharacteristic) kindness:

*MISS C.* I must, Isabel, I must. I never knew till now that there was good even in a fallen woman.  
*LADY I.* Turn not away from the most degraded of our sex. None are so bad but that a kind word will not sink into their hearts.  
*MISS C.* Too true, too true! you have taught me to respect misfortune, and to look with kindness on the faults of my fellow-creatures. (Hamilton Hume 64).

This scene reveals a sympathetic and even empathetic approach to the figure of the 'fallen woman' that has similarities with the approach taken in the work at Urania Cottage. It is the notion of seeing women like Isabel, not as a stereotyped 'bad' woman who should be castigated and condemned, but instead as 'fellow-creatures' as deserving of kindness as any human and just as

capable of good. Scenes like this which sympathise with Isabel, a 'fallen woman', are what indicate a direct engagement with contemporary social and cultural discourses on femininity.

From a New Historicist perspective, this sympathy for the figure of the 'fallen woman' could be attributed to the zeitgeist of the time. Dickens' philanthropical attitude to the women in *Urania Cottage* is rooted firmly in his belief that the Victorian home had a moral function and that men and women each had their own moral roles to fulfil within it, with the men crucially being the head of the household. On the influence of Christian paternalism, David Roberts alleged that in

early Victorian England, no social outlook had deeper roots and wider appeal than that which twentieth-century historians call paternalism. It was an outlook held by landowners, captains of industry, clergymen, members of Parliament, justices of the peace, civil servants, newspaper editors, novelists, poets, and university dons...agricultural laborers [*sic*], operatives, and the worthy poor. It informed social attitudes at all levels of society and expressed itself in countless ways. It was an outlook as diffuse and varied as it was widespread and popular (Roberts 1).

Paternalism, although it had "no specific name" at the time, was the belief that the figure of the 'father' was "synonymous with sovereignty" (Roberts 2). This notion of a man being head, or supreme commander of whatever type of vessel he was in command (like a father figure), applied to every aspect of Victorian society for an unarguable reason:

Fathers command and exact obedience. So do kings, judges, lords lieutenant, magistrates, bishops, archdeacons, squires, parsons, constables, and workhouse governors; their authority is of a paternal nature...God had created a hierarchical society and that such a hierarchical society was necessary and beneficial (Roberts 2).

The roles people held within society were therefore ordained by God, like the Divine Rule of Kings, and people who contested the order of society were therefore rebelling against God. As such, women who defied their role within the family by committing transgressive acts, had 'fallen' from God's grace. This alone could explain why some critics do not feel that Wood was sympathetic to the figure of the 'fallen woman'. However, paternalism also holds that a "a paternal lord owed protection... [*and it*] was also his duty to prevent ... disturbances by guiding the lives of those dependent on him" (Roberts 5), which is one of the reasons for Dickens' philanthropical work with the women in *Urania Cottage* and also could be why the dramatists take a sympathetic approach to staging Isabel Vane. Roberts explains that a wealthy model paternalist had a duty to help "the poor in their afflictions and sufferings" (Roberts 5). Dickens believed in this notion as evidenced by the characters who feature in his novels, like Scrooge in *A Christmas Carol* (1843) who faces the scorn of those who know him for his failure to help those less well off than him. Roberts, however, contends that Dickens "should be considered a humanitarian" as his novels have an

added “dimension to them that led them away from paternalism and toward humanitarianism, and away from deference and toward rebellion” (Roberts 95). The impact of the Christian paternalism on Victorian society’s attitude towards ‘fallen women’ can be viewed in two ways. It can show the lack of sympathy for ‘fallen women’ because some Christian paternalists might feel that the women earned their miserable fates by failing to fulfil their “function and ... appointed place in ... society” (Roberts 3) as they believed that everyone in society had “appropriate duties” to fulfil (Roberts 4). Roberts states that “A belief in social duty and function, not in individual and inalienable rights, defines a good paternalist” (Roberts 5). Those who could not “learn obedience, humility, sobriety, and right conduct ... [could go to] the poor house and the jail, [which were] useful instruments of discipline” (Roberts 5). However, the principles of paternalism might also be the reason for there to be sympathy for the ‘fallen woman’ as it was “incumbent on a model paternalist [to] help... the poor in their afflictions and sufferings” (Roberts 5). As outlined in the introduction to this thesis, it is core to this thesis’ argument that the individual attitude of the dramatist influences the adaptation of a novel to the stage and in the case of this chapter specifically, that the opinions of the dramatist influences the transformation of the figure of the ‘fallen woman’ to a dramatic character from a literary one. What Victorian Christian Paternalism shows is how differently nineteenth-century people might have responded to the figure of Isabel Vane. Despite the potential for a wide range of different responses to the character, the nineteenth-century stage adaptations of *East Lynne* offer little variety in their approach to Lady Isabel Vane (compared to the different approaches to adapting the character of Jane Eyre which were explored in Chapter One). *East Lynne*’s dramatists all tend to show sympathy for the figure of the ‘fallen women’ and yet none of them alter the characterisation of Isabel enough that she becomes what McWilliam calls a ‘victimised heroine’ (McWilliam 54). This unanimously sensitive approach to the figure of the ‘fallen woman’ displayed in the work discussed here cements the view that Williams promulgates of melodrama that it was used as a means of encouraging people to think beyond the rigid social conventions of the age. She explains:

With the rise of companionate marriage – which predates melodrama – women felt more independent from their families than before, but at the same time were less protected by family constraints than they had been in the past; therefore, they were more subject to certain dangers. Seduction melodrama attempts to think through this social problem, and one can clearly see in these plays gender norms in the long process of their formation. These plays look at the problem from various angles, many blaming the woman for her moral and sexual lapse, while others seem to defend the heroine against what is clearly a sexual double standard. This ideological disparity in attitudes can exist within the same play, leading some critics to argue that melodrama not only reinforces gender conventions but also points the way toward greater freedom from them (Williams 3).

In the case of the stage adaptations of *East Lynne*’s treatment of the leading female characters, there is a significant indication that the dramatists were deliberately approaching the staging of

them with sensitivity most likely as a result of the contemporary social and legal events of the age.

### Legal context

When Mrs. Wood first wrote the novel, divorce was sufficiently in the air (the Matrimonial Causes Act was passed in 1857) for her to make her erring heroine not only an adulteress, but a divorcee (Cross 214).

A divorced woman was frequently considered to be a 'fallen woman' by a patriarchal, conservative Victorian society because it was seen "as such a morally reprehensible action for a wife to take, however wronged" (Jordan 509), which is why, in addition to Isabel's adulterous relationship with Levison, she is considered a 'fallen woman'. Therefore, this section examines the influence of the legal context surrounding Victorian matrimonial law and its effect on female characters in melodrama and sensation literature. This is done by examining the significant influence of high-profile contemporary divorce cases on theatrical dramatisations of novels as well as on the creation of sensation novels, like the Yelverton case (1861) on the creation of Wood's *East Lynne* and Collins' *Man and Wife* (1870), etc.

The Victorian era witnessed numerous high-profile Victorian divorce court cases, such as, those of Isabella Robinson (1858), the well-publicised Yelverton case (1861), Kelly v. Kelly (1869), Harriet Mordaunt (1870) and Lady Colin Campbell (1886), etc. These cases seized nineteenth-century society's imagination due to their sometimes scandalous content turning them into sources of salacious gossip. The divorce cases did not just fill the mouths of an eager public, they also started to fill the pages of some of the nineteenth-century's most popular sensation novels, arguably making them the phenomenal successes that they became. Melodrama, like sensation fiction, also picked up on the events filling the papers during the era, not just as a means of monetising a current affairs issue, but as Rohan McWilliam says because "[m]elodrama ... was a source of pleasure [and] also a way of exploring some of the serious issues in Victorian society" (McWilliam 65) and after the 1857 Act, the number of divorces per annum rose considerably and "the more celebrated cases were widely reported. Many sensational plots drew on actual trials, involving divorce, bigamy, or murder" (Jordan 509). Melodrama, like sensation fiction, took inspiration from events in the newspapers of the day to create exciting plots for both drama and literature.

Terrible murders made their way onto the stage (for example, Maria Marten's murder in the Red Barn), whilst Charles Reade made it his stock in trade to pluck sensational news stories out of the headlines and turn them into bestselling novels (McWilliam 60).

If real accounts of brutal murder could be made into theatrical entertainment for the public, then why not high-profile divorce cases too? Notably for this chapter, it is alleged that "Mrs. Henry Wood was inspired by the notorious Yelverton divorce case (which involved bigamy) when writing

*East Lynne*” (McWilliam 60) because her book was being serialised at the same time that the papers were full of news about the case<sup>9</sup>. The Yelverton divorce case is also said to have influenced the writing of several other Victorian novels, such as Wilkie Collins’ *Man and Wife* (1870), Mary Elizabeth Braddon’s *Lady Audley’s Secret* (1862) and *Aurora Floyd* (1863), for example. Bigamy plots and novels that deal with divorce are an extremely popular occurrence in Victorian literature (Mcaleavey 1), due to the significant changes to the divorce laws which were made during the Victorian period. *East Lynne* is not, of course, a bigamy novel because Isabel and Archibald did get divorced. However, for morally upright Archibald Carlyle, his divorce from Lady Isabel was merely a human separation, not a religious one and therefore he would remain married to her until her death and could not marry again. For him to remarry, Carlyle needed Isabel to predecease him: “She - who was my wife – lives” (Wood 319). Therefore, upon learning of Isabel’s death in the train crash in France, he marries Barbara Hare as only at that point did he consider himself to be free to marry again. Albright explains that Archibald “divorced Isabel under the terms of civil law but continues to adhere to traditional Christian teachings that one commits adultery if one remarries while one’s wife still lives” (Albright 200). As such, for Archibald, on discovering that Isabel was indeed still alive at the time of his marriage to Barbara Hare, he might have felt that he had committed bigamy in the eyes of God.

Actual cases of bigamy do not however appear in the novel, nor in the adaptations. Carlyle’s reluctance to remarry when Isabel was still living does appear in the stage adaptations by Hamilton Hume in 1863 (31) and Palmer in 1874 (23) as such a lot of the drama in the later pages of the novel, and scenes in the play, derive from the implication of bigamy and how close Carlyle was to being a bigamist. Maunder alleges that Wood was attempting “to exploit the powerful psychological appeal and the moral complexities inherent in [her] use of bigamy as a narrative device” in his introduction to Wood’s *East Lynne* published in 2000 (Wood 31).

Lynn Pykett alleges that “Carlyle’s reaction dramatizes a new moral experience created by the reformed divorce laws: a tension between marriage merely as a socio-legal arrangement, and moral and religious conceptions of marriage” (Pykett *The Sensation Novel* 47). Pykett states that sensation novels “were generated by a range of interconnected anxieties arising from contemporary social changes and the attendant challenging and questioning of the social and moral *status quo*” (Pykett *The Sensation Novel* 9-10). Pykett goes on to cite Peter Brooks arguing that it is possible to gain “considerable insight into the cultural meaning and significance of the sensation narrative and the sensation genre if we view it as a particular manifestation of “the melodramatic imagination”” (Pykett *The Sensation Novel* 11). By this Pykett, and Brooks too, contend that melodrama functioned as a means of making sense of a new world order

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<sup>9</sup> The Yelverton bigamy trial in 1861 surrounded Protestant Irish aristocrat Major Yelverton’s marriage to English Theresa Longworth disputed and ultimately declared invalid in a series of cases in Ireland, Scotland, and the House of Lords between 1859 and 1868 (Steinbach 172). Maria Longworth had married Major Yelverton in a secret Catholic ceremony in 1857, however Major Yelverton remarried within a year and after that he spent years desperately trying to have the marriage denied legally (Schama 62).

perform[ing] different kinds of ideological work, functioning either as subversive critique or escapist entertainment ... [for] social groupings adrift on the sea of social change, and confused or ambivalent about their new role in the emerging social order (Pykett *The Sensation Novel* 1).

As such theatrical dramatisations of divorce, such as those in the nineteenth-century stage adaptations of *East Lynne*, must be viewed as an attempt by society to make sense of the new world that was being created in the wake of the Matrimonial Causes Act of 1857. Considering melodrama and the change in the divorce laws in these terms supports the view of melodrama held by theatre historians, “that making sense of the theatre, and of theatricality and performativity more generally, can make a contribution to understanding cultural history, popular taste, urban life, postmodernism, structures of feeling, spectatorship, and even love itself” (McWilliam 59). This helps to cement the argument of this chapter, as well as this thesis more widely, that nineteenth-century dramatists used melodrama as a means of exploring and engaging with contemporary events and that there is a need to understand the way that literature and history are intermingled if we are to fully understand the literature and art of the time.

During this period, theatrical dramatisations of ‘fallen women’ or divorced women increased, which supports the view of melodrama as a means of making sense of change in the *status quo* as the following section will discuss.

## Theatrical Representations of 'Fallen Women'

According to Winnifrith, in the 1860s:

there was a sudden rash of novels dealing with bigamy, apparently a way of including a heroine technically guilty but morally innocent. Novelists may have been seizing upon a temporary topical scandal or making some comment about the divorce laws (Winnifrith 8).

The rise of the figure of the 'fallen woman' in nineteenth-century literature was a response to the changing divorce laws of the time and *East Lynne* is certainly an example of a novel where the influence of contemporary events on literature can be clearly seen. Arguments surrounding whether or not there is sympathy for Isabel Vane in *East Lynne*, the novel, vary as the introduction to this chapter discussed. But there are other novels spanning the nineteenth-century, such as Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* (1848), Gaskell's *Mary Barton* (1848), Dickens' *David Copperfield* (1850) and Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (1891), which also demonstrate the Victorian era's sometimes more complex relationship with an arguably morally corrupt woman. However, what of the theatrical representations of 'fallen women', how many of those appear in the canon of Victorian plays? And how are they represented?

This section explores theatrical depictions of the 'fallen woman' on the Victorian stage – does the figure of the 'fallen woman' appear in melodrama? And, if so, how is she treated? Before this question is answered, the journey that *East Lynne* went through before it first appeared on the stage must be looked at initially.

Adapting the novel *East Lynne* to the stage worked because it, like Braddon's *Aurora Floyd*, was written in an almost inherently dramatic way making it easier to adapt to the stage. It was quickly recognised that the novel would translate well onto the stage due to its inherently melodramatic elements, distinguishable characters and emotive plot (Wood xxxv) and quickly proved to be enormously successful as a play. In fact, the popularity of the play continued well into the twentieth-century. A review in Johnston's *Let's Go to the Grand!* reveals that even when *East Lynne* was performed in the early 1900s,

[t]here was never a dry eye in the house, and that was the point; if the players could ensure a good weep at the end of the evening, playgoers were grateful, and would return a visit to the Grand Opera House whenever *East Lynne* posters appeared around town (Johnston 9).

Evidently, theatrical representations of that particular 'fallen woman' continued to be tear-jerking and an enduringly popular show well into the twentieth century. Where, then, are all of the other melodramas about 'fallen women'? Surely, there are countless plays about 'fallen women' which

were written in the Victorian era in order to cash in on the huge success that *East Lynne* was enjoying?

At the time of the novel's publication the topic of 'fallen women' was a particularly contentious issue due to the unfair marital laws which left women who were "sufficiently goaded, or sufficiently bold, [*only able to resort to*] the sensational crimes of adultery, bigamy, or even murder (Jordan 509). One example of a melodrama that directly engaged with the social discourses of the time is *The Stranger* (1790) by German August von Kotzebue, some seventy years before Wood published her novel or her story was adapted to the stage. Kotzebue's play was translated by Benjamin Thompson into English in 1798. It poses the question "what happens if society is not willing to forgive after a fallen woman's repentance?" (Cross 214). Kotzebue seems to suggest that a happy ending is possible because at the end of the play 'justice' has been restored, however adultery in women was "inexorable" for English writers (Cross 214). However, the theme of women's rights and women's treatment under unfair marital laws is indeed evident in Victorian melodramas. These concerns are typically voiced by female characters who are keen to remind women of their place in a society which was starting to change after the 1857 Marital Causes Act reiterating "the very common and approved nineteenth-century point of view that even though men stray, a woman's life consists of patient waiting until he reforms" (Cross 217). Arguably, Isabel's problem is that she does not wait patiently for long enough. Isabel does remind women of their place and the necessity of a woman doing her duty ("Whatever trials may be the lot of your married life ...*resolve* to bear them" (Wood 334), however she fails in being patient with her very self-involved husband Carlyle.

The Victorian subgenre of melodramas of London life often features the trope of the 'fallen' or 'transgressive' woman. Charles Selby's *London By Night* (1844) starts in a similar way to the stage adaptations of *Lady Audley's Secret* by George Roberts in 1863, *Lady Audley's Secret*, and John Brougham, *The Mystery of Audley Court* in 1866 in that one of the lead characters returns from making his fortune abroad and is hoping to reunite with his long lost love. In the case of *Lady Audley's Secret*, George Talboys is returning to his wife with his fortune but returns to find out that she has died according to a notice in the newspaper. Although, this turns out to be incorrect and that George's wife has actually assumed a false identity and has remarried a wealthy and elderly aristocrat. In Selby's *London By Night*, the newly-wealthy Henry Marchmont has returned to London to discover that the 'woman of his dreams', Miss Louisa Fairleigh, is "betrayed to ruin, shame, and dishonour" (Selby 3) as she has become "the mistress of another man!" (Selby 3). Jack, Henry's old schoolfriend asks Henry if he is going to rescue Louisa, to which Henry responds,

Not !! Let the frail one follow her own bent; I am too old a  
salt to allow myself to drift on the quicksand of woman's  
perfidy... (Selby 3)



Ironically, Henry has decided instead to focus his energies upon rescuing his older brother, who is now the “associate of some of the worst characters in the metropolis” (Selby 3), after living beyond his means. This is a clear example of the way that a very patriarchal Victorian Britain approached men and women. Henry feels it is his duty “not to abandon [*his brother*] in extremity” (Selby 3) and yet he has dismissed the woman who was once the love of his life as “frail” (Selby 3) and “perfidious” (Selby 3). Henry later witnesses a woman attempting to commit suicide by jumping in the Thames. He does not know who it is and shouts for someone to rescue her, ultimately saving her life. It transpires that the woman he has saved his older brother’s ‘mistress’, who is also called Louisa. Frank and Louisa have been apart for several days with Louisa not knowing his whereabouts in the city. He vows that he will unite the two of them and make his brother marry her. Their imminent marriage is confirmed at the end of the play. Despite the initial denigration of fallen women at the start of the play, Louisa is praised throughout the play by both Henry and Frank Marchmont and therefore there appears to be a sense that because she is a good woman, she deserves a happy ending and to be reunited with Frank. As such, Selby might well have been attempting to engage with the changing world around them.

*After Dark: A Tale of London Life* by Dion Boucicault also depicts the contentious figure of the ‘fallen woman’ in the figure of the deceased Mrs Fanny Dalton. She was seduced by the charismatic and villainous Chandos Bellingham and decided to leave her husband and elope with Bellingham taking her daughter Eliza with her. However, Bellingham ended up being transported to Australia after committing a felony leaving Fanny Dalton to die in a workhouse and her daughter Eliza to be brought up by a gambling-house keeper called Dicey Morris. The infidelity of his wife devastated Frank Dalton, a former army officer, and rendering him a homeless alcoholic. In this way Boucicault is presenting an image of the ‘fallen woman’ as being so dangerous that the repercussions of her ‘moral fall’ are still being felt years afterwards by her family. This reveals a more severe attitude to the figure of ‘fallen women’ in nineteenth-century melodrama.

*The Case of Rebellious Lady Susan* by Henry Arthur Jones (1894) is written thirty years after Wood’s novel and the adaptations that this chapter examines but it demonstrates the way that melodrama reflected and engaged with challenging contemporary topics. It is about the aftermath of Lady Susan’s discovery that her husband has been unfaithful and her determination to “pay him back in his own coin” (Jones 3), however Susan’s own adulterous relationship is merely hinted at in the play rather than shown directly on the stage. After a brief dalliance with Edensor, Susan eventually returns to her adulterous husband after being showered with expensive gifts. The moral of Jones’ story was to highlight the unjust double standard that existed in Victorian society in terms of the expectations of men and women: “The female mates for life; the male mates whenever he can, although, to reward her loyalty, he will especially cherish his formal partner” (Jenkins 151). As such it is clear that even by the end of the Victorian era, there was still a huge degree of moral ambiguity surrounding the figure of the ‘fallen woman’.

In summary, this section has shown how nineteenth-century dramatists engaged with the social discourses of the time, which often resulted in a sensitive approach being taken to issues pertaining to female rights. Williams and Mayer have both stated that nineteenth-century playhouses were the “place to confront issues and to mediate social values, where plays themselves intervene in and obliquely or directly critique matters of daily concern” (Mayer 146). According to Williams, the sensitive approach to the figure of the ‘fallen woman’ that the dramatists have taken finds its origin in the fact that seduction melodrama attempts to think through social problems (Williams 3). Mayer goes further with this idea by saying that the fourth-wall of nineteenth-century theatre creates a sense of safety that allows the audience to engage at a safe distance with themes that might otherwise be considered distasteful, or even morally dangerous:

Melodrama enables the immediate concern, the cause of stress, to appear before us in partial disguise. It offers a brief, palatable, non-threatening metaphor which enables an audience to approach and contemplate at close range matters which are otherwise disturbing to discuss (Mayer 147).

Thus, explaining seduction melodrama’s sensitivity to the figure of the ‘fallen woman’ and the categorisation of the nineteenth-century stage adaptations of *East Lynne* as seduction melodramas.

### **Comparative Analysis**

Unlike the structure of Chapter One, which analysed the issue of agency in the Victorian stage adaptations of *Jane Eyre* thematically, the analysis of the figure of the ‘fallen woman’ in the Victorian stage adaptations of Wood’s *East Lynne* is organised by scene starting with the first key proto-feminist scene in the novel. This same structure is used in the final chapter of this thesis examining the Victorian stage adaptations of Mary Elizabeth Braddon’s *Lady Audley’s Secret* (1862). The selection process used to determine which scenes will be examined will be discussed first. The scenes that will be examined were selected after extensive study of existing feminist literary theorists’ analysis of the novel. This section of this chapter also analyses the stage adaptations in relation to their form as a piece of theatre vs. the conventions of melodrama. Reviews and information about the productions, including actress/actors/dramatist/director will be discussed when relevant to the analysis of the key scenes, which are:

1. The opening of the plays;
2. Levison seducing Isabel to come with him to catch Archibald with Barbara Hare;
3. Isabel abandoned and alone after her ‘fall’;
4. The conclusion of the plays.

These key scenes will be examined in the above numerical order.

### The opening of the plays

As with the nineteenth-century stage adaptations of *Jane Eyre* examined in Chapter One, there is a distinct amount of line 'borrowing' in many of the plays. For instance, the first scene featuring Barbara and her brother Dick Hare are almost identical at times in both Spencer and Hamilton Hume's adaptations. Hamilton Hume wrote his adaptation in 1863 in Calcutta for the Members of the Calcutta Amateur Theatricals Society whereas Spencer's 1865 adaptation was written for a professional production in Boston. It might be possible to conduct further work to ascertain how Spencer got hold of his script and if he ever obtained Hamilton Hume's 1863 script. It would be interesting to find out if Spencer ever went to Calcutta or whether anyone he knew went there. As such they might have brought a copy of Hamilton Hume's play back with them from Calcutta. The preface Hamilton Hume wrote for his play states that it was only printed fifty times and those were "solely intended for the amusement of private friends" (v). He added that "although the sanction of the talented authoress of the work has been asked with a view to its future publication, until that permission is granted, I have to request that no person to whom I may send a copy will allow it to leave his hands" (Hamilton Hume v). As such, it seems unlikely that the play was distributed publicly at the time and therefore the similarity of the lines is not due to Hamilton Hume's play being read by the other dramatists.

Hamilton Hume's adaptation of *East Lynne*, *The Tangled Path*, is the first adaptation to have been produced and it was written in Calcutta, India. When the first London-based stage adaptation of *East Lynne* appeared in 1866, reviewers expressed surprise at the delay as Maunder explains:

When it is remembered [...] that the popular novel of *East Lynne* furnished many striking situations capable of effective stage treatment, the lapse of five years between the date of publication and the period of its publication on the London boards in a dramatic form would seem to involve a mystery quite as provocative of wild guesses at a solution as any which perplex the readers of Mrs. Henry Wood's highly interesting story (Maunder *Victorian Sensations* 173-174).

This fact is so surprising that it does beg questioning. Given that the Victorian era was a time when all plays needed to be submitted to the Lord Chamberlain for permission to be staged, it is possible that there were 'illegal productions' in the 1860s, which were staged without the script being submitted to the Lord Chamberlain. If this is the case, then there would be no record of them. From looking at the Victorian stage adaptations of *Jane Eyre*, it is highly likely that there were illegal productions of *East Lynne* soon after its publication, if not at home (by which I mean the UK) then possibly abroad.

Hamilton Hume's 1863 adaptation of Wood's "highly interesting story" (Maunder *Victorian Sensations* 174) begins with a prelude where Thorn, aka Francis Levison, says the line "[s]he

shall yet be mine. A woman's scruples are hard to overcome; but marriage, that soothing balm to a frail beauty's conscience, must effect my purpose!" (Hamilton Hume vii). This instantly presents Levison as a 'cad' with low morals who intends to seduce women by lying to them. By portraying Levison as a villain from the very opening of the play and by presenting him seducing Afy Hallijohn with no intention of marrying her, Lady Isabel's fate in the play is foreshadowed. The opening act then moves on to Hallijohn's murder after he discovers Thorn with Afy. This furthers the audience's negative impression of the character and enhances the audience's pity for Isabel later in the play overall indicating that Hamilton Hume was attempting to provoke sympathy for Isabel from the audience by showing how she was Levison's 'prey' or victim, as opposed to being a promiscuous, wanton and unprincipled woman. There is a sense that Hamilton Hume is presenting Levison as a complex creation capable of psychological manipulation like *Othello's* Iago. Disguise is a common trope for sensation fiction that is also shared by melodrama. Wood's Levison uses a disguise to carry out his illicit relationship with Afy Hallijohn, so that he is able to evade suspicion and shame from tarnishing his public reputation.

Palmer's Levison also highlights the impact of reputation on a gentleman's public persona with his Levison telling Isabel:

Well, Isabel, you must be aware that it would be an awful sacrifice for a man in my position to marry a divorced woman. I am now the representative of an ancient and honourable baronetcy, and to make you my wife would –  
(Palmer 26).

This also highlights the impact of class on nineteenth-century melodramas with Palmer's adaptation having been written for an agricultural Nottingham-based audience. His play prioritises the servant characters for precisely this reason and, therefore, might have made an enthusiastic attempt to demonise the upper-class Levison as a result of the location of the play.

Hamilton Hume's adaptation, *The Tangled Path; a tale of East Lynne, a dramatised version of Mrs H. Wood's Celebrated Novel* was performed in Calcutta. Little is known about Hamilton Hume: however, the nineteenth-century censuses confirm that he was born in London in 1838 and then married Elizabeth Harris in 1865 in Surrey. Simple internet searches also indicate that he was an author and journalist writing on subjects such as, Wilkie Collins and the Governor of Jamaica, Edward John Eyre.

Information regarding Hamilton Hume's production of *The Tangled Path* is limited. Hamilton Hume's preface to his adaptation confirms that the production was at the Calcutta Amateur Theatricals Society. Massey's *Recollections of Calcutta for over half a century* shows that Calcutta did not have a professional theatre in the nineteenth-century and that the Theatrical Society "used to give about six productions during the cold weather season", usually with an all-male cast (Massey 15). Hamilton Hume's adaptation was privately printed in 1863 and distributed to fifty friends whilst he waited for Wood's permission to publish his work (Hamilton Hume vi). He

discusses his approach to adapting Wood's original source, claiming that he invented the scenes of Hallijohn's murder in the Prelude as he considered it to be "absolutely necessary" to introduce Afy Hallijohn to the audience so that the audience were prepared for the events of the plot (Hamilton Hume 5). He goes on to justify further decisions, such as the invented scene at the end of Act II where Judge Hare arrests Richard Hare, his own son, for Halliohn's murder, writing this was "merely done for the purpose of creating a sensation, and for scenic as well as dramatic effect" (Hamilton Hume vi). This is an interesting admission as it confirms that authors were prepared to forego fidelity to the original source in favour of gaining audience approval. However, key to this chapter is Hume's comment on the difficulty he experienced in approaching adapting Lady Isabel to the stage. He wrote that the:

greatest difficulty I encountered was in bringing Lady Isabel back to her old home. I found it perfectly impossible, in the limited space to which I was restricted, to carry out the idea of the authoress and let her return to East Lynne in the capacity of governess. The termination of the piece necessarily differs from the original, although the main plots have been strictly adhered to, viz., the death of Lady Isabel and the marriage of Barbara Hare (Hamilton Hume vi).

Hamilton Hume confesses here to not being able to reconcile Isabel's return to her family in disguise in his stage adaptation. He states that this was due to the 'limited space', by which it is probable that he meant the time of the play and even perhaps the practicality of convincingly staging a disguised and disfigured Lady Isabel returning to her family without being spotted earlier than she is in the novel. From this it is clear that Hamilton Hume did not think that a theatre audience's willingness to dispel disbelief would be great enough to permit them to believe Isabel's secret return to East Lynne. The other nineteenth-century dramatists evidently did not have this same problem. Sadly, Hume does not comment on any difficulties he encountered when adapting the novel to the stage due to Isabel's melodramatically unconventional behaviour. It has not been possible to find any information relating any other performances other than that described by Hume in his preface. Nothing is known regarding the production, although we may safely assume that all characters were played by men from the information Massey provides (Massey 150). The impact of the role of Isabel being played by an actor, rather than an actress, would be significant. By the 1860s, audiences had grown quite used to seeing women acting on the stage. By then women had been appearing in theatre on the stage for two hundred years (Lafler 75). Why then was the Calcutta Amateur Theatricals acting group formed entirely of male players? Massey makes no direct statement to confirm this point, and in fact does not to the fact that readers of his book would be surprised to learn that the troupe was composed of all male players in this day of female actresses. Given that the Calcutta Amateur Theatricals was made up of middle- and upper-class British subjects working in India, it is possible that it might have been considered unseemly for a respectable married woman to be acting, even in an amateur production, to a public audience where she could be looked upon by anyone. As Hamilton Hume's adaptation was

very traditional in that it had a male cast, it is possible that that it used codified gestures to indicate the roles that the characters serve in the play, however it's impossible to know if The Calcutta Amateur Theatricals did use them or not. Although it is quite probable that they did given that this was the dominant manner of staging the dramatic form at the time. What is, however, evident from Hamilton Hume's adaptation is that his approach to adapting Lady Isabel was sympathetic and that for him the key issue in adapting Wood's novel to the stage was how to make the plot credible for the audience, rather than being worried about scandalising his audience with his portrayal of Wood's 'fallen woman' character.

In the opening of Spencer's 1865 adaptation, sympathy with Isabel is also evident right from the start, however it is made clear that she is to blame for her transgressive behaviour. Whilst the audience are encouraged to find sympathy for Isabel as Miss Corney Carlyle, Archibald's sister, is so excessively, unreasonably jealous of her that she says that she will never "tolerate" Isabel (Spencer 4), Spencer's adaptation differs from the others most radically by having Levison appear as late as Act II, Scene 1 (Spencer 14). He is only referred to as 'Thorn'. This means that Isabel's jealousy in the initial scenes is completely unprovoked. Levison has very little trouble in manipulating her to leave Carlyle. Additionally, when Carlyle and his sister learn of Isabel's elopement, it is Isabel who is the victim of their criticism and contempt, not Levison (Spencer 24).

Spencer's *East Lynne: A Drama* was performed in Boston on three occasions, namely in 1865, 1867 and 1869. Each production had a different cast. Spencer was not the author of this script, but he was the publisher of the *Spencer's Universal Stage* series, where this script is found, and which does not list a specific author for the adaptation. Information is limited for Spencer's production and no reviews have been found. It is worth noting that in the 1867 production at The Continental Boston, the role of Isabel Vane was performed by Lucille Western, a celebrated contemporary actress, who also performed the role of Isabel Vane. Lucille Western also performed the same role for Clifton Tayleur's adaptation for many years (Kabatchnik 451).

Spencer's 1865 production was opened by Dill and Miss Corney who are discussing Carlyle and Lady Isabel's marriage. This introduces Lady Isabel to the audience on Miss Corney's terms. Miss Corney describes Lady Isabel as "idle and extravagant" and by using the term "beauty is but skin deep" in reference to her (Spencer 3). The exposition of the play is designed to encourage the audience to dislike Miss Corney, especially after her unpleasant condescension towards Carlyle's business manager Dill's wedding outfit (Spencer 4). In the initial scenes, Lady Isabel is also presented as an obedient and appreciative wife, which encourages the audience's positive opinion of her, although this changes as the play progresses because they are reminded of Isabel's ultimate blame for her moral downfall and the collapse of her marriage. In this, Spencer's play follows the novel closely: as the play approaches its conclusion it encourages the audience to criticise Isabel whilst also finding sympathy for her character as can be seen in Archibald Carlyle's final few lines to his wife:

*ARCH.* You nearly broke mine when you left me, Isabel.  
(*Goes to her and takes her hand.*) May He so deal with you,

as I fully and freely forgive you. May He bless you and take you to his rest in heaven! (Spencer 43).

Archibald uses accusatory language when he says, 'You nearly broke mine when you left me, Isabel', and clearly places the fault of their marriage's destruction with her rather than with Thorn aka Levison for seducing her. Isabel is seen to have 'left' Carlyle as opposed to having been tricked by Thorn, which supports a view of Spencer's Isabel as being something other than a 'victimised heroine'. She is a complex character in that she is worthy of sympathy, but her misdeeds are due to her own actions and no one else's. Spencer, therefore, presents a complex approach to the contentious figure of the 'fallen woman' in this seduction melodrama, providing evidence of Williams' contention that seduction melodramas

look at the problem from various angles, many blaming the woman for her moral and sexual lapse, while others seem to defend the heroine against what is clearly a sexual double standard. This ideological disparity in attitudes can exist within the same play, leading some critics to argue that melodrama not only reinforces gender conventions but also points the way toward greater freedom from them (Williams 3).

As such, it is possible to see Spencer's confused approach to Lady Isabel as evidence of his attempt to engage with the 'sexual double standards' of the age and therefore, further evidence of the fact that a novel to stage adaptation "inevitably subsists in a milieu forever altered by its ... representation" (McCracken-Flescher 117. Williams' also identifies the fact that the seducer is often "of a higher class" (Williams 3) in seduction melodramas, which Levison is in all of the stage adaptations of *East Lynne*.

Palmer's 1874 play opens with Lord Mount Severn providing the exposition to the play, which is an unusual change. The role of Lord Mount Severn was played by T. A. Palmer himself in this production, so it is unsurprising that Lord Mount Severn plays such a pivotal role in this play, for example, being privileged to start the play. Palmer's wife also appeared in the play performing the role of the servant, Joyce. The importance of the character Joyce to the plot was, therefore, elevated in order to promote her appearance in much the same way as was her husband's role by having him open the play. Lord Mount Severn's introduction does not just foreground Palmer's appearance in the role, but also presents the first description of Isabel that the audience hears. Lord Mount Severn is extremely complimentary about Isabel, which indicates that Isabel should be viewed positively by the audience. They are meant to like and pity her, especially when Lord Mount Severn reveals that his wife is jealous of her ("I very much fear that my wife's dislike to Isabel arises from jealousy of the poor girl's youth and beauty" (Palmer 3)).

*LORD M.* ... I wish my unfortunate cousin had not died in the prime of life, leaving that poor girl Isabel penniless, ...

Ah! there's Isabel with Levison again. I hope she will not lose her heart to him, he's a bad man, vain, idle, and unprincipled, and were he not my wife's cousin, should not be suffered here, to trifle with Isabel. I wish my lady could be made to see his faults and behave more kindly to that gentle girl, fatherless and as she is, with no home but ours (Palmer 3).

There is a clear moment of foreshadowing in Lord Mount Severn's mention of Levison being a bad man and his hope that Isabel "will not lose her heart to him". Once Lord Mount Severn has exited, Isabel and Levison enter and it is revealed that Levison is 'toying with' Isabel's affections. Levison tells Isabel that if he was richer then he would give her a home. Isabel responds to this by saying that "Love and contentment can make the humblest home happy" (Palmer 4), which is potentially a discreet nod towards to Palmer's working-class audience, which will be discussed in more detail shortly. The implications of Isabel's statement are that even the working-class audience members watching the play can live happy, fulfilled lives. This is a sentiment that would appeal to an audience composed of such a demographic. As the scene goes on, Isabel comments on the fact that Levison might be insincere in his affections towards her in an aside: "He does not love me, or he –" (Palmer 4), which suggests that she believes that were Levison genuine in his professed love for her then he would marry her no matter the financial difficulties. Isabel, however, does appear to be sincerely in love with Levison. The two are disturbed from their conversation by a servant announcing that Mr Carlyle has arrived to see Isabel. Hearing this Levison decides to take his leave, through a window enigmatically, and in an aside reveals that he is going to see Afy Hallijohn who "will be anxiously awaiting me" (Palmer 4). Isabel watches Levison's departure whilst saying to herself "when *he* leaves me, it seems as though the sunshine had faded from my life" (Palmer 4). Isabel is, therefore, depicted by Palmer in his opening scene as a woman who is being toyed with by a roguish cad, which with Lord Mount Severn's favourable description of her in his opening monologue suggests that Palmer sympathised with Isabel Vane seeing her as a vulnerable woman who was manipulated cruelly. Isabel's marriage to Archibald appears to be a marriage of convenience for Isabel as it was a means of escape, not just from Lord Mount Severn's wife, but from Levison's seductions.

*ISA.* You are more than "*deserving*" of the truest love which the best of women could bestow, but I – (*She rises and goes to window. Looking off through window*) (*aside*) His wife, and I fear that I love, or almost love another) ah! if *he* would ask me to be his wife, or that I had never seen him (*abstracted*) (Palmer 5).

In this way, Palmer depicted Isabel at the opening of his play as a 'victimised heroine' (McWilliam 54) because she is presented as being manipulated by Levison. This makes her worthy of the audience's sympathy. However, as Palmer's play goes on it becomes clear that Isabel, whilst being worthy of sympathy, is also to blame for her 'fall' providing evidence of yet another seduction melodrama juggling with the 'sexual double standards' of the age as well as the way that "melodrama functions as an essential social and cultural instrument" (Mayer 145). Palmer's



Isabel is portrayed as someone who should have done more to resist Levison's attempts to seduce her. His Isabel later delivers the line: "May heaven help all to think of it when they are tempted as I was" (Palmer 26) supporting this interpretation of her. However, that is not to underestimate Levison's role in the play. Palmer's Levison was certainly very forceful as shown in Act One: Scene Two (Palmer 15-16). Palmer's play might be interpreted in line with Maunder's belief that Wood felt that she had a "moral superiority over the self-indulgent aristocrat, [*who was*] lacking in both self-discipline and a sense of responsibility" (Maunder *Victorian Crime, Madness and Sensation* 5). According to Maunder this was in tune with mid-century anxieties regarding an aptitude for crime being hereditary (Maunder *Victorian Crime, Madness and Sensation* 5). It is suggested in Palmer's play that Lady Isabel is a representative of a morally and physically weak aristocracy when Joyce says that Cornelia Carlyle drove Lady Isabel to 'it'. 'It' at that point is a suspected suicide. They discover a few moments later when they read Isabel's letter that Isabel has in fact run away with Levison. Joyce says that Isabel has committed suicide because Miss Cornelia had made "her life a misery; yes ma'am you have; I've seen her with tears in her eyes after enduring [*sic*] your reproach a gentle high-born lady like her to be – eh! you've driven her to desperation! I know it!" (Palmer 22). This criticism of the aristocracy, seen in Palmer's play through the suggestion that Lady Isabel is mentally and physically weak, supports a reading of Palmer's adaptation as a politically motivated play. Maunder states that British fears of degeneration became a ... source of recurrent panic to middle-class Victorians" (Maunder "Stepchildren of Nature" 60) and as T. A. Palmer's adaptation was written for a Nottingham audience, which at that point was an agricultural area, this might explain why he favours the middle-classes over the aristocrats who appear in the piece. Undoubtedly it would have been the richer members of the farming community in Nottingham who would have been able to afford to see a play, or even live close enough to the city to make it possible to attend the theatre.

The impact that the class background of an audience makes on an adaptation is also noticeable in Spencer's adaptation, which is an American production. America is known for being a country where there is no class hierarchy, although this is called a misconception by many (Fussell 17) and there is certainly a sense of a social hierarchy in place in Spencer's play. Spencer even appears to encourage the audience to support Carlyle throughout the play, which suggests that the author might have favoured working professionals, such as the middle-class solicitor Archibald Carlyle as opposed to sympathising with aristocratic Lady Isabel.

Palmer's adaptation was performed in Nottingham at The Theatre Royal in 1874. The Theatre Royal was opened in 1865 and famous actors, such as "Ellen Terry, Sir Henry Irving, Matheson Lang, Seymour Hicks and Fred Terry" performed there (Lloyd n.d.). The Theatre Royal produced a wide range of work, including melodrama, drawing-room comedy, ballet, burlesque and opera, etc. (Lloyd n.d. n.p). The fact that Palmer's wife played Joyce highlights Palmer's intention to emphasize the class issues within the text by casting an important and renowned actress in this role as she would have dominated the audience's attention and does indeed dominate the stage

at times, for example, when it is initially suspected that Isabel has committed suicide (Palmer 22). The decision to do this highlights Williams' assertion about the role of "cultural discourses of gender, class, empire, and race" (Williams 3) in melodrama, which "does not simply reflect but actively contributes to the emergence and development of these modern categories of social and cultural analysis" (Williams 3).

Madge Robertson (1849-1931) played the role of Isabel Vane: she was from a known acting family and later married W. H. Kendal, also a celebrated Victorian actor. She performed in America with her husband and had played roles such as *Hamlet's* Ophelia, Desdemona in *Othello* as well as Lady Macbeth. She was known for her roles in these dramatic Shakespearean plays and this may have influenced her staging of Isabel Vane as there is no emphasis on comedy in Palmer's adaptation. Palmer's play is the origin of one of the most famous lines attributed to *East Lynne*, though not actually included in the original novel (or other adaptations), being Palmer's own invention: "Oh, Willie, my child! dead, dead, dead! and he never knew me, never called me mother!" (Palmer 38).

Dicks' play, like Spencer and Palmer, also seems to have been strongly influenced by the social class of his audience. He opens his adaptation with a scene between Richard and Barbara Hare where they are discussing Hallijohn's murder and how Richard might attempt to clear his name. As Barbara opens the play performing the role of dutiful, caring sister and is clearly from a comfortable, middle-class background, this may have encouraged the audience to support Barbara over Isabel. Especially as Dicks' production at the Adelphi Theatre in London was an area where the audience was made up of members of the gentry as well as the "salaried clerks of barristers and solicitors" (Allingham *Theatres in Victorian London*) Therefore, the audience may have leaned towards the middle-class, obedient Barbara rather than support the aristocratic Isabel who married outside her class.

Regrettably the author of Dicks' play is unknown. The adaptation appears in *Dicks' Standard Plays*, which is why it is referred to as Dicks' throughout here. Miss Bella Pateman (1841-1924) played the roles of Isabel and Madam Vine in a production at the Adelphi Theatre. The role of Isabel Vane was one of the highlights of her career, and she appeared in productions of *East Lynne* in America as well as in England. Only very few reviews survive, one of which appeared in *The Times* and was clearly not favourable:

Miss Pateman plays the part of the sinning and suffering heroine, and plays it in a style which has apparently its admirers at the Adelphi. However, the piece, under no conditions an exhilarating one, cannot be said to have attained any fresh distinction in its present circumstances (Nelson, Cross and Donohue "Calendar for 1879-1880").

Apart from showing that *East Lynne* was a popular play which, on this occasion, did not thrill the reviewer with a new approach to plot and characters, there is unfortunately no indication as to

how the play was performed. However, Dicks' approach to staging the character of Isabel Vane is not as sympathetic as Hamilton Hume or Spencer's. Dicks' Isabel is more complex as the review in *The Times* indicates as Miss Pateman was able to present both sides of Isabel's character; both sinner and saint. This supports Williams' argument that

Melodrama portrays both femininity and masculinity in flux and under pressure from a changing world; in melodrama we can see these pressures writ large, even in the contradictions articulated in and between individual plays (Williams 4).

Therefore, it is evident that for nineteenth-century dramatists approaching the adaptation of *East Lynne* to the stage, the novel offered the possibility of engaging very directly with contemporary gender concerns.

### **How was Levison able to seduce Isabel?**

This section begins by examining the issue of 'how' Levison was able to convince Isabel to run away with him. There are many arguments that could be given to answer this question, for example:

- She was miserable in her marriage especially as she is 'much put upon' by Corney Carlyle; her husband's sister, who was living with them;
- Husband's apparent desertion of her and her jealousy of Barbare Hare;
- Her inability to speak out about her feelings, as well as Levison's behaviour due to the idealised image of womanhood that dominated society at the time;
- Moral and physical weakness from degeneration;
- Madness.

The above arguments will now be examined in the above order as well as how the dramatists then approached staging Isabel's seduction.

### **Miserable Marriage**

With the rise of companionate marriage – which predates melodrama – women felt more independent from their families than before, but at the same time were less protected by family constraints than they had been in the past; therefore, they were more subject to certain dangers. Seduction melodrama attempts to think through this social problem, and one can clearly see in these plays gender norms in the long process of their formation (Williams 3).

Wood's depiction of Isabel's unhappiness and "calm boredom" (McAleavey 63) in her marriage to Carlyle reflects a focus on seeing "romantic love as an important factor in marriage" (Nelson 27), which was growing in the Victorian era. Claudia Nelson says that

in the nineteenth century, as today, couples frequently married without being passionately in love on their wedding day. Many were motivated rather by a desire for children (or for a stepparent for existing children), for sexual release, for financial support, for higher social status, or for companionship, or simply by a feeling that the surrounding culture expected adults to pair off. Nevertheless, there was a cultural insistence, often rather desperate in tone, that especially among the middle classes, marriage should mean a loving lifetime commitment (Nelson 27-28).

This is certainly echoed by Maia McAleavey who argues that Isabel "is persuaded to marry him [Carlyle] in large part so that she may remain" (McAleavey 63) in her home, rather than out of any feeling of affection towards Carlyle. Certainly, Palmer took this view of Isabel's marriage to Carlyle. For him, Isabel's marriage to Carlyle was simply the best option available to her at that moment when he approached the adaptation of the novel to the stage. In Palmer's 1874 play, Isabel ponders Carlyle's proposal after he has made it saying:

*ISA. You are more than "deserving" of the truest love which the best of women could bestow, but I – (She rises and goes to window. Looking off through window) (aside) His wife, and I fear that I love, or almost love another) ah! if he would ask me to be his wife, or that I had never seen him (abstracted) (Palmer 5).*

Palmer might well be picking up on the belief that love between spouses "was thought to make moral influence easy" (Nelson 28). It was believed that

Wives who adored their husbands ... would eagerly seek out ways to add to their happiness and would show the kind of interest in their lives and experiences that would keep men attached to their homes (Nelson 28).

As such, from a New Historicist perspective, Palmer's portrayal of Isabel's lack of love for her husband at the time of their marriage and therefore the fact that it was not a "companionate marriage" (Williams 3) might be the reason that Levison was so easily able to seduce Isabel. There is an additional issue which added to Isabel's dissatisfaction with her marriage to Carlyle; living with her domineering and possessive sister-in-law. In the novel, as in the adaptations, Isabel is shown to not be able to run a household effectively, which is made apparent in Spencer's adaptation when Isabel is reliant on Miss Corney to even order the food necessary to feed her household (Spencer 9). As Isabel is from an upper-class background, in addition to the fact that she is just eighteen years old, she has not been required to take any part in running a household and as such this makes her an inadequate wife before her attraction to Levison is even considered.

Cornelia Carlyle's interference in her brother's marriage is not just about her micromanaging of it, she is also jealous of her brother's wife as Hamilton Hume suggests.

Miss Corney brought up her brother Archibald Carlyle and this might be one of the reasons that she is so jealous of his marriage to Isabel, and later on his marriage to Barbara. Barbara even asks Miss Corney if she is jealous of Carlyle's marriage, which Miss Corney initially denies before musing whilst alone whether this might be the root of her distress as shown here in Hamilton Hume's 1863 play:

Jealous! The little minx! (*Calling after her.*) Perhaps I am, perhaps I am. Perhaps had you brought up a lad as I have brought up Archibald, since he was breeched, and loved nothing else in the world far or near, you would be jealous when you found him discarding you with contemptuous indifference, and taking a young wife to his bosom, to be more to him than you had been (*Exit.*) (Hamilton Hume 8).

As a spinster, Miss Corney could be perceived to be a victim of ridicule rather than pity in the nineteenth-century stage adaptations as she has not managed to secure a husband as her friends and family have done. The figure of a spinster as a victim of ridicule appears frequently in literature (Flegel 56) as can be seen in the works of Jane Austen, for example Miss Bates in *Emma* (1815) and Charles Dicken's Miss Havisham in *Great Expectations* (1861) and therefore she could be fulfilling a similar role in Hamilton Hume's play in order to provide some comic relief as a contrast to the dominant tragedy.

### **Jealousy of Barbara and her husband's apparent desertion of her for Barbara**

Given that Barbara and Archibald do end up marrying, Isabel's concern about her husband's attentions to Barbara were arguably well-founded. However, it is also possible to argue that Isabel's jealousy pushed the two of them together particularly after Isabel abandoned Carlyle and her family. Certainly, there are arguments, which focus on Isabel's jealousy of Barbara as one of the primary causes of her desertion of her husband and family. In Elisabeth Jay's 2005 edition of *East Lynne*, she states in the introduction that:

*East Lynne* is punctiliously careful to eschew detailed accounts of sexual chemistry, allowing hysterical outbursts of feminine jealousy to do the work by proxy, but it nevertheless probes many of the legal, financial, and emotional implications of the new Act (Jay xi).

Here Jay suggests that it is Isabel's jealousy regarding Barbara that drove Archibald into Barbara's arms, and indeed Isabel into Levison's arms. In Dicks' 1879 adaptation, the cause of Isabel's 'fall' is shown to be her jealousy of Barbara, which could be read as a more obvious presentation of Isabel as a 'fallen woman' and, consequently, a bad woman. Dicks appears to favour Barbara

over Isabel in this adaptation given that it is Barbara who opens the play (Dicks 3). In this opening scene Barbara demonstrates all of the characteristics of the idealised Victorian 'angel in the house' (Patmore 1854) in the care and love which shows towards her brother:

O Richard! my dear brother, - is it indeed you? What brings you here? How could you run such a risk? If you are discovered, it is certain death upon – you know (Dicks 3).

The heightened language and terms of endearment which Barbara uses in this scene indicate Barbara's kind, loving nature. Barbara is also shown to be better qualified to be Archibald's wife. Isabel is shown to not be experienced in household management whereas Barbara who is a young, middle-class woman with a sick mother, probably would have taken a more active part in the running of her parents' household, making her more prepared for taking on wifely duties. It is Dicks' Isabel out of all of the adaptations who illustrates the most jealousy towards Barbara Hare. Although Dicks' Barbara says very little in respect of her feelings for Carlyle, apart from a brief soliloquy at the beginning of the play:

And she is happy with him, - the only man I ever loved, or ever can love. Why did he pass me by for a baby-faced girl like that? It cannot be that she is capable of loving him with the deep affection I might have bestowed on him. Ah! they are coming this way. I'll retire into the conservatory. I could not endure a meeting now (Dicks 4).

Essentially, Barbara is Isabel's foil as she continues to love Carlyle even though it is unrequited. Barbara loves Carlyle despite him bypassing her for Isabel, showing how loyal Barbara is, whereas Isabel runs away with Levison when she thinks Carlyle is having an affair, showing how easily she is led astray compared to Barbara. This is the only indication of Barbara's love for Carlyle to come directly from her in the play and she acts only as a friend trying to clear her brother's name. The audience is made aware that Isabel is unjustly jealous of Barbara from the first instance that she appears in Dicks' adaptation (Dicks 4):

Who is this Barbara Hare of whom I hear so much, and whom East and West Lynne are busy associating with the name of my husband? Oh, I remember now; I noticed her at the church door the first day we came to East Lynne; and Mr. Carlyle said, as he pointed her out, "That is Miss Barbara Hare. Don't you think her a very pretty girl?" Perhaps he has loved her; perhaps he loves her still, and only married me out of sympathy. Oh! if I only thought that, it would drive me frantic! (Dicks 4).

Isabel demonstrates her jealousy of Barbara very clearly before she has even been given a concrete cause for it, thus giving Levison the opening to manipulate her: "Who the deuce is that Barbara Hare? She's a devilish pretty girl. She seems to have a good understanding with your

husband” (Dicks 6). Later, Levison even tells Isabel that because of her jealousy, she was easier to seduce:

*ISABEL.* I pray Heaven they may! May Heaven help all so to do, who may be tempted as I was!

*LEVI.* If you mean that as a reproach to me, it’s rather out of place. The temptation to sin lay not in my persuasion half so much as in your ridiculous, jealous anger against your husband.

*ISABEL.* Quite true! Quite true!

*LEVI.* With regard to your husband and that Hare girl, you were blindly, outrageously jealous. For my part I don’t believe Carlyle ever thought of the girl in the way you imagine he did (Dicks 8).

Isabel learns here that her jealousy was misplaced and later acknowledges on her deathbed that this made her vulnerable to Levison’s seduction: “I thought you false and deceitful to me; that your love was given to her who is now your wife, and, in my sore jealousy, I listened to the temptings of that bold, bad man, who whispered of revenge” (Dicks 14). Other than overhearing her servants gossiping, Isabel is given very little evidence of Carlyle’s alleged infidelity and this is because Dicks favours Barbara over Isabel. As such Dicks would not present too many obvious examples of Barbara’s jealousy in order to encourage the audience to favour Barbara over Isabel. Dicks’ Barbara even wishes Carlyle and Isabel well when she learns of their marriage: “On the contrary, I wish him all the happiness possible. He has ever treated me most kindly, and I sincerely hope he has found a wife worthy of him” (Dicks 4). This line is delivered in a dialogue with Miss Corney where Barbara is defending herself from Miss Corney’s attacks regarding her own alleged jealousy. The adapter’s attempt to conjure sympathy for the idealised Barbara may be a consequence of the more middle-class audience of *The Adelphi*, London (Davis and Emeljanow 186). Isabel has “hysterical outbursts of feminine jealousy” (Jay xi) in this adaptation suggesting that Dicks’ favoured a more complex approach to adapting Wood’s novel and demonstrates what Williams describes as an “ideological disparity in attitudes” (Williams 3), being at once sensitive to Isabel as well as condemnatory.

### **Inability to communicate effectively**

In her introduction to Wood’s *East Lynne* (2005), Elisabeth Jay says that “Lady Isabel Vane, a peer’s daughter, is apparently genetically incapable of communicating successfully with Archibald Carlyle, her middle-class lawyer husband” (Jay viii). The argument that Isabel is “genetically incapable of communicating successfully” (Jay viii) to explain Isabel’s decision to run away with Levison is particularly evident in Spencer’s adaptation, where Isabel spends some time debating whether she should tell Carlyle about Francis Levison’s flirtatious behaviour. However, Spencer’s Isabel ultimately decides not to tell Archibald because she is frightened that Archibald could be involved in a duel. However, she does ultimately decide to tell him and goes to find him to tell him everything about Levison as shown here in Spencer’s 1865 play:

*ISABEL.* Oh! how can I ever tell my husband that this man, whom he has befriended and sheltered from the law, has thus dared to speak to me of love! Heaven only knows what the consequences would be, - a duel, perhaps. No, no, I cannot tell him; yet I feel I ought to tell him all. I will seek him instantly, my kind, my good, my noble husband (Spencer 15).

From a New Historicist perspective, this scene might therefore be reflecting the concerns about “companionate marriages” (Williams 3) that were discussed earlier in this chapter as well as the issue of communication for Victorian women, which is significant for feminist literary theorists. Ann Cvetkovich argues that Wood’s *East Lynne*

encouraged female readers to weep in sympathy with the multiple causes of Isabel’s suffering and conclude that her miseries, like her own, would have been soluble if only they could be given utterance, while in fact pathologizing Isabel, and representing women’s drives as lover and mother as ‘naturally’ irreconcilable and therefore, at best, to be nobly borne (Cvetkovich cited in Wood ed. by Jay xxvi).

That Isabel’s suffering, in her marriage to Archibald, is something to “be nobly borne” (Cvetkovich cited in Wood ed. by Jay xxvi) is an idea which resembles the story of *Patient Griselda*. Isabel’s ‘falls’ because she does not ‘nobly bear’ her lot. There is also some irony to this situation. The irony of *East Lynne* is that Isabel is punished (with her ‘fall’) for failing to communicate Levison’s attentions to her, in a time when women, especially “unhappy wives were brought up to believe it was their duty to suffer in silence” (Wood ed. by Jay xxv). Silence in a woman was something to be aspired to, particularly with relation to any feelings of a romantic nature. The attitudes of some Victorians towards women who expressed love without being married are voiced by Carlyle when he says this of Barbara in Spencer’s 1865 play:

*ARCH.* If this was so, she was more weak, reprehensibly foolish than I could have thought her. I had given her credit for having better sense. A woman may almost as well love herself as suffer herself to love unsought (Spencer 17).

In this scene Isabel has told Archibald about her suspicions that Barbara is in love with Carlyle. He espouses a traditional view of women’s behaviour on the matter of affairs of the heart. Jay says that Barbara’s

decision to break the widely held Victorian convention which insisted that no young woman should give her heart unsought receives its fictional punishment in a temporary loss of dignity; but ... Barbara’s ultimate happiness suggest to the reader that voicing grievances is preferable to Isabel’s foolish decision to nurse the silent pangs of jealousy that ultimately lead to her downfall (Jay xxvi).

As such, it is possible that the reason for Isabel’s ‘fall’ could be rooted in her failure to communicate effectively given that Barbara is rewarded for her ability to ‘voice her grievances’.



### Moral and physical weakness from being part of a degenerate aristocracy

Sometimes it is possible to detect a schematic arrangement of death and survival within Victorian novels, allowing us to discern which classes the author believes to be so riddled with endemic disease and corruption that they must die out, and which will win through to form a new dispensation, but in *East Lynne* there is no easily traceable pattern for the symbolic weight of disease and death (Jay ed. Wood xxx).

Whilst it is possible that there is no pattern of social class-based death and disease in Wood's *East Lynne*, Jay's above interpretation of the book seems unlikely when the deaths of Isabel Vane's children are taken into account. The death of Isabel's eldest son from 'consumption' "in days when this was usually seen as a matter of inherited constitutional susceptibility seems also to suggest that he carries the seeds of his mother's moral 'contamination'" (Jay xxx). Therefore, in much the same way that Isabel inherited her aristocratic father's weakness, Isabel and Archibald's son inherited Isabel's weakness.

The contribution which class makes to Isabel's 'fall' is particularly evident in both Spencer and Hamilton Hume's adaptations. However, the particular class issue which is presented is the degeneracy of upper-class society, most particularly amongst the aristocracy. In Spencer's 1865 play, Miss Corney says on learning of his brother's marriage to Lady Isabel:

A pretty bride for him to take, an Earl's daughter! And I've no doubt she'll prove as idle and extravagant as her worthless father. She'll waste his means and bring him to beggary (Spencer 3).

Although Miss Corney is cast as a miserly, penny-pinching middle-aged woman in all of the stage adaptations, as well as in the original novel, Miss Corney's comments here might well be based in her unhappiness with Isabel's aristocratic background. In the nineteenth-century there was concern that society was devolving and would return to the wanton morality of the eighteenth-century with the excesses associated with the aristocratic lifestyles at that time (Maunder "Stepchildren of Nature" 59). In Spencer's 1865 adaptation it is made clear how ill-prepared Isabel is to run a middle-class household because of her position as the daughter of an earl as a consequence of which she has not received an education in how to run a middle-class home. Miss Corney seizes upon this flaw as a means of criticising her:

*MISS C.* Lady Isabel, they are waiting for the order for dinner.  
*ISABELI.* Order a dinner, Miss Corney? (*Aside.*) What shall I say? I never ordered a dinner in all my life ...  
*MISS C.* Something to roast and something to boil! Are you aware that such an order would puzzle the butcher to know whether you desired a few pounds of meat or a whole cow? (Spencer 9).

Miss Corney dislikes Isabel not just because she is an aristocrat's daughter but because of the cost that her presence will cause as she is depicted frequently as someone who is particularly concerned about pecuniary matters. This concern about saving money contrasts with Isabel's father who was a spendthrift and died in debt, debts later paid by Carlyle. Miss Corney's objections to Isabel touch on the distinct differences between Isabel and Carlyle's social backgrounds and she is not the only character who raises the issue of class disparity as a point of objection to their marriage. As such, it is possible to argue that the reason Isabel and Archibald's marriage failed is because of the inequality in their social backgrounds. In marrying out of their class echelon, their marriage was instantly doomed. Both characters are aware of their social differences and therefore both are guilty of this error.

Spencer's *Lord Mount Severn* also raises the issue of the class difference between Carlyle and Isabel's social positions (Spencer 11). He also uses Levison as a means of making Carlyle's status as a middle-class country solicitor look inferior by adding a scene where Levison tells Isabel that she threw herself away by marrying Carlyle (Spencer 14). However, despite the claim for superiority which Levison and Lord Mount Severn both make in Spencer's 1865 play, the representation of the aristocracy is not wholly positive. This might be because Spencer was influenced by the "climate of degeneration" (Maunder "Stepchildren of Nature" 62). The issue of a hereditary degenerative mental weakness could be used as an argument to explain Isabel's abandonment of her home, family, marriage and former life. A computer search of the play texts reveals that Spencer uses the word 'mad' to describe Isabel more than any other dramatist, which could be the impact that the location of the theatre had on Spencer's approach to adapting the original source. Spencer's stage adaptation in Boston, America, appears at a crucial time in Boston's history because of the development of the Transcendentalist and Unitarian movements of Christianity which took place in Boston in the early and mid-nineteenth-century. Transcendentalism is a philosophical movement that holds that people and nature are inherently good. It is a corrupted society and its institutions that have tainted the inherent goodness of the individual. They argue that people are at their best when people are truly self-reliant and independent. Both of which are states of being that Isabel, like most Victorian women, did not have. For them, maybe it is this lack of independence and agency that has affected Isabel's ability to act purely? Maybe for them, Isabel has been driven 'mad' by her lack of self-reliance?

These movements are branches of a reactionary strain of Protestantism: therefore, this attribution of madness at the root of Lady Isabel's 'fall', might also be part of an attempt to make Lady Isabel's character more palatable for the conservative, Christian audience. From a New Historicist perspective, there may have been concern that the audience would have been shocked by the notion of a 'fallen woman', so by portraying Isabel as mad removes some of the responsibility of her actions. This might also explain why in Dicks' 1879 adaptation Isabel faints at the sight of Carlyle with Barbara allowing Levison to 'carry her off' (Dicks 22). This is also the approach taken by Hamilton Hume earlier in 1863 (22). These three dramatists have taken the agency out of

Wood's Isabel's decision to leave East Lynne. Finally, what these stage adaptations indicate is that Isabel 'fell' not just because she was a bad woman but because she did something wrong, suggesting that despite the sensitivity that all of the dramatists demonstrate at times for the character, ultimately the burden of blame lies with Isabel for her moral fall. From a New Historicist and proto-feminist perspective, this reveals the dominance of the conservative and patriarchal attitudes relating to the gender discourses of the time.

### **Madness**

... Isabel's decision to leave East Lynne was, we are told, an act of temporary insanity: 'A jealous woman is mad; an outraged woman is doubly mad (Wood ed. by Jay xxii).

This is the final explanation for Levison aka Thorn being able to seduce Isabel. Female madness was often used to justify women's sexual transgressions in the Victorian era as the next chapter on the stage adaptations of Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret* will discuss.

The idea of female madness to explain the behaviour or actions of women who had transgressed the conventional gender identity of the idealised 'angel-wife' can be identified in many works of literature. The word *hysteria* although now attributed to any excess of or uncontrollable excitement either on an individual level or a wider social scale is neither masculine nor feminine. However, the word's Greek root *hystericus* defines a specifically female condition 'a suffering in the womb' (Peterson 52). Any female mental distress or disturbance was attributed to this suffering. There are numerous literary examples of mentally ill 'fallen women', such as Madame Bovary, Bertha Mason and even Lady Audley, who is the focus of the next chapter. Andrew Maunder feels it is possible to view Lady Isabel's actions as caused by 'madness' and that Isabel Vane too had "gone mad with uncontrolled sexual longing" (Maunder "Stepchildren of Nature" 59) and that:

One of the most earnest messages of *East Lynne* is that what woman must learn to rule is this passionate side to her nature, which threatens to destroy "all that reticence that woman loves to observe ... as to her inward feelings (Maunder "Stepchildren of Nature" 65).

In support of this is the fact that at times in Wood's original novel Isabel does attribute her abandonment of her husband and children to 'madness'. This might be an act of self-denial (and indeed an instance of hyperbole) where Wood might be intending to depict Isabel telling herself (and others) that she left her husband out of madness, rather than coming to terms with the fact that she left her husband because she was spitefully jealous, for example,

Oh, Archibald, I was mad, I was mad! I could not have done it in anything but madness. Surely you will forget and forgive! (Wood 614)

Not only does Isabel attribute her 'fall' to madness, but other characters state that Isabel must have been mad to leave her husband for Levison:

When she quitted for the other. It could have been nothing less than madness. I could understand a woman's flying from Francis Levison for love of Mr Carlyle; but now that I have seen your husband, I cannot understand the reverse (Wood 561).

There are frequent occasions in the plays when Isabel says she is 'mad' or 'must have been mad' but this does seem to be hyperbole rather a genuine attempt to diagnose her state of mind. In Spencer's play, however, upon going to find Archibald, Isabel overhears the servants gossiping about what they have seen happening between Barbara and Archibald over the last few months:

Well, this evening I crept down behind the hedges, and then I heard Mr. Carlyle tell her that in future he could only be a dear brother to her; and then I saw him kiss her (Spencer 16).

The servants suspect that Barbara and Archibald are having an affair and because Isabel is already suspicious of her husband, she is all too willing to believe what she overhears. There is little indication in this scene that Isabel is 'mad', although it is made clear that she is extremely unhappy as she says:

*ISABEL. (Advancing, C.)* O misery, misery! O how palpable to all eyes must be that woman's love for my husband! Palpable indeed when all East and West Lynne are talking of it; and even my servants daily gossip over it, and extend their pity to me. Oh! (Spencer 16).

Rather than Isabel's 'fall' being due to her madness in Spencer's play, Levison is shown to be the reason for her 'fall' as he is portrayed as a charismatic tempter of women. It is in his manipulation of Isabel's vulnerability that the majority of the blame for Isabel's 'fall' lies and as such this is the closest that any of the plays come to staging Isabel as a 'victimised heroine'. Levison takes advantage of Isabel's unhappiness convincing her to leave her home, husband and family:

*LEVISON. (L.)* That's right; be avenged on the false hound. He never was worthy of your love. Leave your home of misery, and come to one of happiness. Come, let me prove his perfidy to you (Spencer 21).

As such, for Spencer, Isabel is both a 'victimised heroine' of the melodramatic type as well as a complex figure because she seems to walk willingly towards her fate when she tells Levison:

*ISABEL. Ay, with you. I care not who shall be the instrument of my vengeance. Exeunt, C. D. L. (Spencer 21).*

It is hard to know whether Spencer's Isabel, despite saying she is "faint – ill – wretched – mad" (Spencer 23), behaves like this physically as there are no stage directions saying that she faints, nor is there a tableau to indicate that she was meant to be carried off as in Hamilton Hume:

She falls senseless into his arms; he carries her off (Hamilton Hume 22).

This ultimately leads to the conclusion that Spencer's adaptation is an example of sensation drama as stated in the previous section of this chapter.

### **Isabel abandoned and alone after her 'fall'**

When the audience next sees Isabel Vane it is too late. She has 'fallen'. The state in which she is living, despite being fairly financially comfortable is still 'a fate worse than death' and should be avoided at all costs by any wife. The message that this sends about Isabel and Victorian women is that above all things their purity must be preserved. In the book, the narrator moralises over Isabel's fate, telling the reader directly:

Oh, reader, believe me! Lady – wife – mother! Should you ever be tempted to abandon your home, so will you waken! Whatever trials may be the lot of your married life, though they may magnify themselves to your crushed spirit as beyond the endurance of woman to bear, *resolve* to bear them; fall down upon your knees and pray to be enabled to bear them... for be assured that the alternative, if you rush on to it, will be found far worse than death (Wood 334).

The stage adaptations certainly present the life of a 'fallen woman' as a fate "far worse than death" (Wood 334). Dicks' 1879 Isabel is alone in her room in a state of "wretchedness" (Dicks 31) in conversation with Levison when the audience is next reunited with her. Isabel tells Levison that "the injury to their child can never be repaired" (Dicks 32) when she complains about him failing to return to her in time to marry her before the birth of the baby. She tells him that nothing can "undo [*her*] sin" (Dicks 32), to which Levison callously responds: *Sir F. L. (Derisively.)* Oh-sin! you ladies should think of that beforehand" (Dicks 8). In his 1874 play, Palmer also takes up the exact same approach with Levison as he responds in the same way, "The sin! ha, ha! you women should think of that beforehand (Palmer 26). Spencer's 1865 adaptation also uses the same line in this scene (Spencer 28) as does Hamilton Hume (Hamilton Hume 32). This scene with the exception of a few words has been taken directly from the original source (Wood 344) suggesting that the stage adaptations agreed with Wood's impression of the behaviour of someone like the caddish Levison and what's more, potentially, that they agreed that Isabel, and women like Isabel, should have considered the consequences of their actions more. This negative approach to the figure of the 'fallen woman' is indicative of a conservative, patriarchal opinion of the figure, she deserves a life of misery, rather than a sympathetic view of her. This harsh view contrasts with the sympathetic

approach generally taken by all of the dramatists as they produced their stage adaptations. Palmer's play is an exception as he does show Isabel being carried off by Levison in a semi-conscious state rather than making a reasoned decision to leave her home. Ultimately, despite not choosing to leave, Isabel is still criticised for her actions in the stage adaptations making her a very complex character, who is able to demonstrate that in nineteenth-century melodramas, seduction melodramas particularly, "ideological disparity in attitudes can exist within the same play" (Williams 3).

When Palmer reintroduces the character of Lady Isabel, she is in a similar state of distress, although there are no stage directions indicating that she is in a state of 'wretchedness' as in Hamilton Hume (Hamilton Hume 31). In Palmer's 1874 play, Isabel is seated alone by the fire when the audience next sees her. She says to herself of Levison "He comes too late now, too late to save the poor child from the life-long reproach that must rest on him" (Palmer 26) clearly indicating the bleak mood of the scene. The scene then happens as described above, with Isabel reproaching Levison for not coming back to her fast enough for them to be married before the birth of the baby. Isabel accuses Levison of never intending to marry her, regardless of the deceit of his actions since they found out she was with child. Levison's response makes evident the impact of feminine ideals on a person's perceived class and their status in society:

Well, Isabel, you must be aware that it would be an awful sacrifice for a man in my position to marry a divorced woman. I am now the representative of an ancient and honourable baronetcy, and to make you my wife would – (Palmer 26).

This scene further illustrates the importance of social discourses relating to the class system in nineteenth-century melodramas as Levison is so concerned about protecting his status as a "representative of an ancient and honourable baronetcy" (Palmer 26) that he refuses to right his mistakes. Isabel does not allow Levison to go any further by saying

I understand you, you need not be at any trouble to invent or seek for excuses. The injury to the child can never be repaired now; and for myself, I cannot imagine any worse fate in life than being obliged to pass it with *you*. You have made me what I am, but all the reparation in your power to make now, cannot undo my sin- that-and its effect must life upon me forever more (Palmer 26).

Isabel interrupts Levison fiercely stopping him before he is able to finish his point, which would be that 'it would bring shame' on his family to marry a 'fallen woman', a 'divorced woman', even though he would be correcting a wrong he had created: the fault lies with the woman ultimately for not guarding herself adequately. This is another example of the way that the nineteenth-century dramatists manipulated the tropes and conventions of melodrama in order to encourage sympathy with a much-criticised subject. In Spencer's 1865 play, Barbara also presents the social

mores of the time which considered divorced women to be scandalous when she tells Madam Vine aka Isabel:

*BARB.* But of course the disgrace is inflicted on the children, and always will be, - the shame of having a divorced mother (Spencer 33).

In Palmer's 1874 play however, after Levison has exited with Isabel swearing that she will have nothing more to do with him, Lord Mount Severn (played by T.A. Palmer) arrives, seemingly to add to her misery. He asks her:

what demon tempted you to sacrifice yourself to that bad, heartless man... I warned you at the commencement of your married life, not to admit him to your home.  
*ISA.* His coming to East Lynne was not my doing – Mr. Carlyle invited him.  
*LORD M.* Invited him in unsuspecting confidence, believing his wife to be a true woman, to whom honour was dear as life, a woman whom trusted, as he loved... (Palmer 28).

This double dose of sin and shame is really felt in this scene due first from being given in her conversation with Levison who points out that she should have better self-control and then Lord Mount Severn arrives to add to the list of guilt-inducing admonishments. It is noteworthy that Palmer's Isabel chose to run away with Levison. The moment is staged with Isabel making a reasoned decision to leave, including writing a letter to Carlyle where she blames his relationship with Barbara for forcing her hand:

*ISA.* Go, I will rejoin you in a few minutes. (*he goes off C L., she sits at table R.C., and writes, reading as she writes*) "When years have passed and my – my – children ask where is their mother and why she left her home, then tell them that you, their father, goaded her to the rash act. Tell them that you deceived, outraged her feelings and her pride, until driven to the verge of madness, she-she-quitted them for ever." (*rises from table*) Now, Francis Levison, I trust my future in your hands, and may heaven forgive me (Palmer 22).

As Palmer's Isabel made a conscious decision to run away with Levison, this might be why the punishment for her actions is so strongly stressed in Palmer's play. Isabel faints in the heat of the moment in Hamilton Hume, Spencer and Dicks' plays, which reduces the agency of her leaving her family and husband as she is carried away by Levison in those versions as has already been discussed. Palmer's Lord Mount Severn's purpose in the play is to echo the same sentiments as the narrator in the original source. He is there to remind the audience that Isabel's life is not enviable and should be avoided at all costs and in his parting words to her, he describes how she is referred to by her family now:

Your name is never mentioned there; you are thought of as one, who was once dearly loved, but now dead, no stop. To your husband and your children: you are mourned with gentle pity, but the name of Isabel is never heard in that deserted home, The happiness of which you have for ever blighted. Adieu (Palmer 29).

Here Palmer conjures vivid depictions of the cruel fate of the 'fallen woman', which have strong associations with shame, however the image he creates of Isabel is not without pity, although her 'sins' are agreed to be significant, even Lord Mount Severn pities her despite his remonstrations. The stage directions add to the pathos conjured at the end of Lord Mount Severn and Isabel's conversation:

*Moved by her look of despairing anguish he kisses her on the brow and exits slowly* L.H.D. ISA. (*music p.p. plaintive to drop*) My name is never mentioned, I am mourned as one dead...

My husband, my children! – Oh, never again to hear *him* say "Isabel, my wife!" Never again to hear *their* infant tongues murmur the holy name of "*mother*... Alone – utterly alone – for evermore! *Sinks on her knees despairingly as* THE CURTAIN FALLS. *Music, "Home, sweet home."* (Palmer 29).

This is a pitiable depiction of the figure of the 'fallen woman', which contrasts strongly with the earlier criticisms that Levison and Lord Mount Severn both levelled at Isabel. Indeed, all of the stage adaptations depict the life of a 'fallen woman' as rightly harsh, unforgiving and cruel at times. However, there are significant moments of sympathy for the figure. In Spencer's 1865 play, he demonstrates some compassion for the figure of the 'fallen woman' in an unexpected way. In the moments immediately after it is discovered that Isabel has fled with Levison, Corney wants to condemn her, but Archibald seems to feel sympathy for her, despite the pain that Isabel has just caused him:

ARCH. She has eloped with Francis Levison!  
MISS C. Oh! the disgraceful, unworthy –  
ARCH. Hush, Cornelia! Not one word against her – no – not one! (ARCHIBALD *in chair, overcome by deep grief* – JOYCE, R. H., *appealing to Heaven* – MISS CORNEY *bending over ARCHIBALD.- Picture.*)  
CURTAIN. (Spencer 24).

This is either an indication of the dramatist's sympathy for the 'fallen woman', or more likely this was an attempt by Spencer to cast Carlyle in a strongly favourable light, as a good Christian man, capable of 'turning the other cheek' and capable of forgiveness on a huge scale. As stated earlier, in the 1860s, Boston was a hub for the Transcendentalist movement and as such this scene might have been another way for Spencer to appeal to a devout, conservative and indeed Christian audience. Regardless of this, Spencer and Palmer, like Hamilton Hume and Dicks, both create a complex characterisation of Lady Isabel that pinpoints the way that nineteenth-century dramatists used the stage as a means of encouraging the audience to engage with contentious topics.



### **Exits and Curtain Calls**

All of the stage adaptations conclude with Isabel's death, each delivering a warning to any women in the audience regarding the importance of resisting any temptations thrown at them. However, none of the final comments are as obvious as Hamilton Hume's:

*LADY I. (Placing Barbara's hand in that of Carlyle.) Then may Heaven bless your union and send you both every happiness now and for ever! (Panting and raising herself up, and supporting herself on her right arm.) One last word, and I am gone. Whatever trials may be the lot of your married life, though they may magnify themselves, beyond the endurance of woman to bear, resolve to bear them; fall down on your knees and pray to be enabled to bear them: pray for patience; pray for strength to resist the demon that would urge you so to escape; bear unto death, rather than forfeit your fair name and your good conscience; for be assured the alternative, if – you – (her voice getting weaker) – if you rush on to it, - will be found – far worse – than – DEATH!!! (She falls back lifeless into her husband's arms.) TABLEAU! (Hamilton Hume 65).*

Isabel is evidently a heroine and not just a 'fallen woman' in Hamilton Hume's adaptation as she blesses Barbara and Carlyle's marriage by uniting their hands. Hamilton Hume's adaptation casts Lady Isabel as an innocent victim whose life is destroyed by Levison, who operates as a stock two-dimensional aristocratic villain. Levison opens Hamilton Hume's 1863 play with the line "[s]he shall yet be mine. A woman's scruples are hard to overcome; but marriage, that soothing balm to a frail beauty's conscience, must effect my purpose. Marriage!" (Hamilton Hume vii). Although Levison is talking about his intention to seduce Afy Hallijohn at this point by telling her that he intends to marry her, this sets the scene for the audience to recognise him as the stereotype of the aristocratic cad, an image depicted in nineteenth-century art and literature as well as on the stage, thereby instantly telling the audience that Levison is the true villain of the play and that Isabel is his victim. Hence the extent of the pathos conjured in the final scene quoted above. In her last moments, Hamilton Hume's Isabel also acknowledges that she should have attempted to defend herself better (Hamilton Hume 63). Furthermore, as in Palmer's adaptation, with its greater focus on the innocence and vulnerability of the central character, Hamilton Hume also opens his play with Isabel as a defenceless, pitiable young girl attracting viewer sympathy with Miss Corney even calling Isabel a "fine lady-child" (Hamilton Hume 2) further encouraging the audience to have sympathy for the character. However, Hamilton Hume's approach to Isabel's fall is more complex than the other stage adaptations' explanations for her 'fall', so we cannot dismiss his approach to Isabel's fall being for one single reason. From a New Historicist perspective, this quotation could be said to reflect the high importance that female purity had in the Victorian era. However, given that Isabel remains a likeable figure even after her 'fall' in Hamilton Hume's adaptation, this furthers the compassionate approach to the figure that Hamilton Hume's adaptation embodies.

Nineteenth-century middle- to upper-class women had to live within strict moral boundaries as even nineteenth-century “thinking about women [was] informed by the idea of feminine purity” (Mitchell *The Fallen Angel* x), although the idea that keeping women pure through ignorance was dangerous was rapidly gaining ground. Female sexual and emotional ignorance meant that women were unable to defend themselves properly from any men taking advantage of them nor were they able to deal with their sexual urges. Women were not supposed to have any knowledge of money, anatomy, political power “or almost anything else that might help them master the physical circumstances of their own lives” (Mitchell *The Fallen Angel* xii). This prudery and rigidity of female existence was a largely middle-class experience. However, these standards eventually informed all of society’s expected view of femininity (Mitchell *The Fallen Angel* xiii).

On the other hand, it is important to note that there were differing expectations for working-class women compared to middle- to upper-class women, which we can see in the final treatment of *East Lynne*’s two ‘fallen women’, Afy Hallijohn and Isabel Vane. Afy is able to marry a respectable shopkeeper and continue her life seemingly without any punishment other than some whispers behind her back (see Palmer 41), whereas Isabel loses her home, her children, her looks and eventually dies. This extreme difference in the outcome of both women’s fates is rooted in their different class backgrounds. Isabel had been deliberately kept pure and unaware of the dangers which some men present. Mitchell confirms that “[f]or women, whose sexual desires were [deemed] weak or non-existent the offense had to be deliberate: a conscious and knowing choice of evil over good” (Mitchell *The Fallen Angel* xi), which indicates the reason that Isabel’s ‘fall’ is reacted to more severely than Afy’s. The difference is a consequence of Afy’s working-class background: the working-classes had the privilege of less restricted sexual boundaries than the middle-classes in the nineteenth-century. Some working-class women were less concerned by ideals of female purity than middle-class women because they were often driven to prostitution in order to make ends meet as was discussed earlier in this chapter (Walkowitz *Prostitution* 15).

The importance of middle-class women being able to defend themselves from men clearly became a mass social issue as it filtered into the popular fiction of the era. Magazines such as *London Journal* and *Family Herald* provided fiction, where the characters’ “moral standards and habits of mind the reader was willing to take for her own”, finding “a confirmation of her own values as well as an escape from what was unsatisfactory in her surroundings” (Mitchell *The Fallen Angel* 3-4). The fiction in these magazines were often didactic, one of the most common stories being of a woman being pursued by a lascivious aristocrat with the moral being “to beware of sweet-talking men, whoever they say they are” (Mitchell *The Fallen Angel* 6). This message was being presented in the popular presses of the time; therefore it is unsurprising to see it also appearing on the Victorian stage in these stage adaptations of *East Lynne*. It is definitely apparent in Palmer’s 1874 adaptation, where Isabel’s ‘fall’ is placed explicitly with Levison, for example, “oh! Isabel my poor girl, what demon tempted you to sacrifice yourself to that bad, heartless man” (Palmer 28). Although Lord Mount Severn does consider Isabel to be at fault for her ‘fall’, the blame does go to Levison and therefore there is a sense of pity for Isabel in Palmer’s play despite the severe condemnation she receives from Lord Mount Severn and even Levison herself (Palmer 26 and

28). From a New Historicist standpoint, another reason for Palmer's refusal to lay the blame of Isabel's 'fall' with her might be the influence of contemporary concerns about society failing to properly educate women about how to control their feelings (sexual or otherwise) (Mitchell *The Fallen Angel* x) as has been mentioned earlier in the chapter. This lack of education and guidance was, therefore, what made it possible for Levison to take advantage of her vulnerability and innocence. Certainly, the end of Palmer's play makes much comment on how innocent, naïve and like a girl Isabel was when she married Carlyle:

*ISA.* Try and forget the dreadful time; let your thoughts do back only to those days when you first knew me – here – a happy, innocent girl, with my dear father. Ah, how gentle you were with me when *he* died! Oh, that the past could be blotted out, that I might die with a pure conscience, as I *might* have died then!

*CAR.* For your sake, as for mine, *I* wish the dark past could be blotted out.

*ISA.* Let what I *am* be erased from your memory, think of me (if you can) as the innocent, trusting girl whom you made your wife. Say one word of love to me before I pass away! Oh, Archibald, my heart is breaking for one last word of love.

*CAR.* As mine was when you left me!

*ISA.* You forgive me?

*CAR.* May God bless you, and so deal with me, as I forgive you, Isabel, dear Isabel, my first, *first* love, who once was as *light* and *life* to me! (Palmer 44)

Palmer's final scene shows that although Carlyle is now married to Barbara, he still treasures his love for Isabel, which indicates that he does not condemn Isabel entirely for her fall. Isabel even stresses her innocence in this scene and that she was too trusting. The trust which Isabel had in Carlyle saved her from the cruel, miserable experience she had with the Mount Severns, and yet this same trusting nature led her to believe Levison and inadvertently conspire in her fall. This scene is more focused on Carlyle and Isabel's love for one another rather than on criticising Isabel as a 'fallen woman'.

On the other hand, Dicks' final scene is not so kind to Isabel. Here Carlyle questions her severely, although he also forgives her and confirms that he once loved her:

*ISABEL.* Archibald, I could not die till I had your forgiveness. Oh, do not turn away from me, - bear with me one little minute, - only say that you will forgive me, and I can rest in peace.

*ARCH.* (L.H.) Why did you come here?

*ISABEL.* I could not stay away from you and my children. The longing for the sight of them was killing me. I never knew one moment's peace after the mad act I was guilty of – in quitting you. Not an hour had I departed ere repentance set in. Even then I would have come back, but I did not know how. My sin was great, and my punishment

has been greater; it has been one long scene of mental agony (Dicks 14).

In Dicks' 1879 version, despite the fact that Carlyle is ultimately kind to Isabel there is a distance between them caused by his judgmental questioning of her that makes the final scene significantly less tender than Palmer's. This is because Dicks' Isabel is not cast an innocent victim of the aristocratic Levison in the same way that Palmer's adaptation does.

Palmer's demonizing of Levison and the numerous asides which present Levison as a villain in the play might be the result of the influence that the socio-economic background of his agricultural audience in the Nottingham theatre had on the play. As was established earlier, the Enclosure Act had come to Nottingham late (Briggs 368) in 1845 and therefore a section of the audience may still have felt some animosity towards the aristocracy at that time. Palmer furthers his more sympathetic approach to Lady Isabel as 'fallen woman' by presenting her as Levison's dupe and innocent victim. Although Palmer's sympathy towards the figure of the 'fallen woman' does not extend to her being cast as a 'victimised heroine'. Palmer's Isabel has 'sinned' monumentally and is at fault. She should have controlled herself better. She is a complex character, not a stock character, showing that melodrama "portrays both femininity and masculinity in flux and under pressure from a changing world, in melodrama we can see these pressures writ large, even in the contradictions articulated in and between individual plays" (Williams 4).

Spencer's 1865 adaptation concludes in the same complex way. Isabel having been revealed to be the governess Madam Vine, has finally been reunited with her former husband. She tells him:

I could not stay away from you and my children. The longing for the sight of them was killing me. I never knew one moment's peace after the mad act I was guilty of – in quitting you. Not an hour had I departed ere repentance set in. Even then I would have come back, but I did not know how. My sin was great, and my punishment has been greater; it has been one long scene of mental agony (Spencer 41-42).

These lines make clear the approach taken by the nineteenth-century dramatists. Isabel had indeed 'sinned', but the punishment she received far outweighed her error. In this way all of the nineteenth-century dramatists were able to create a complex stage characterisation of Wood's Isabel Vane, which closely fit the conventions of seduction melodrama. For the nineteenth-century dramatists and the audiences attending their plays, Isabel is a woman who has made a mistake but has paid the highest price.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has shown the influence that dramatists have on shaping an adaptation, which has supported Hutcheon's theory that adaptations become "aesthetic objects in their own right"

(Hutcheon 2013: 6) and that “melodrama functions as an essential social and cultural instrument” (Mayer 145).

The dramatists have been responsive to the changing world around them, resulting in the plays offering a complex approach to the challenging issues of female sexuality and ideals about women’s behaviour that were proliferating in the nineteenth-century. Mayer states that

In being responsive, the form as well as the content of melodrama has regularly changed, and these transformations must be accounted for (Mayer 146).

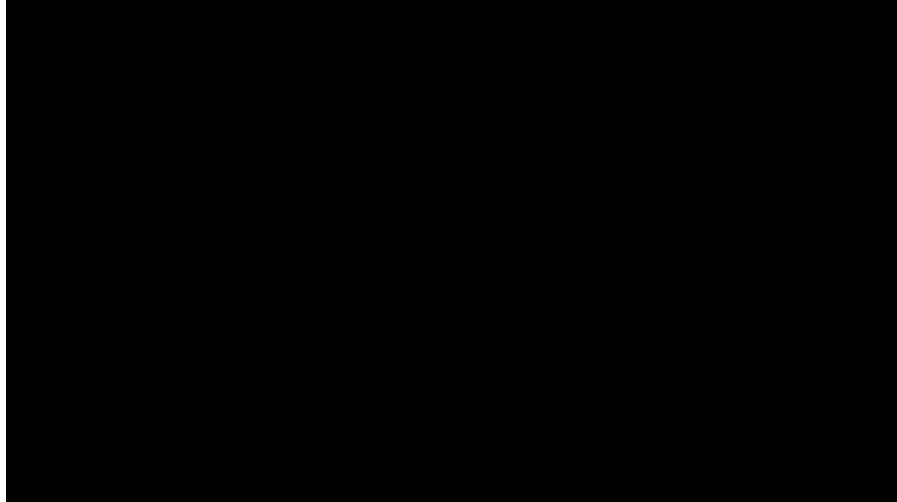
Adapting Wood’s *East Lynne* therefore resulted in the story’s transformation into a seduction melodrama, which was able to highlight the class inequality and gender inequality discourses that were proliferating in the era.

In all of the stage adaptations examined in this chapter, there is a confusing mix of sensitivity and condemnation levelled at Isabel Vane. It appears to be the accepted opinion in all of the plays that whilst Levison (or Thorn) did manipulate Isabel, she should take the soul burden of responsibility for her actions. In two of the plays examined in this chapter, Isabel wrote a letter explaining her actions to Carlyle (Dicks 8 and Palmer 21), evidence of her deciding to leave her old life behind her as an act of agency rather than simply being carried off by Levison after fainting. As it turned out, the ‘grass was not greener on the other side’ for Isabel. Levison was full of false promises. He deceived her cruelly, and yet she decided to leave with him knowing that he was not a ‘good man’ and that what she was doing was wrong. As such, she failed to preserve her purity making her a pitiable character; neither a ‘victimised heroine’, nor a villainess. From a New Historicist perspective, the plays encourage sensitivity and sympathy towards the figure of the ‘fallen woman’, a sensitivity which certainly existed in the century and is clearly seen in the work of people like Charles Dickens and Angela Burdett-Coutts. Overall, what the study of these plays shows is not only that there was concern for ‘fallen women’ at the time but that this concern was reflected and engaged with in the popular entertainment of the era. In this way this chapter has shown the value and knowledge to be found in studying these little-known plays.

## Chapter Three

### 'The Blame Game': Is Lady Audley culpable?

### Nineteenth Century Stage Adaptations of Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret*



Rossetti, Dante Gabriel. *Lady Lilith*. 1866 (approx.)

The central research question of this chapter is how did nineteenth-century (male) dramatists approach the staging of the complex issue of Lady Audley's criminal culpability when they adapted Mary Braddon's contentious novel to the stage? The theme of Lady Audley's criminal culpability is an undercurrent that is present throughout the novel:

'You would wish to prove that this lady is mad, and therefore irresponsible for her actions, Mr. Audley?' said the physician ... 'Yes, I would rather, if possible, think her mad. I should be glad to find that excuse for her' (Braddon 320).

Here Dr Mosgrave and Robert Audley suggest that madness might exempt someone from being criminally culpable. However, as the novel develops it becomes evident that clearly identifying someone either as mad, and therefore not culpable, or morally bad is more difficult than it at first appears. This chapter will deal with the representations of the spectrum of behaviours ranging from mental disturbance to moral badness in nineteenth-century adaptations of *Lady Audley's*

*Secret* (1862), and specifically the way in which the representation of Lady Audley becomes an example of the changes of form and a representation of morality and madness in Victorian melodrama. As with the previous two chapters, this chapter continues to look at the issue from both a proto-feminist and a New Historicist perspective.

It is important to establish at this point how the term 'culpability' is defined in this chapter. Calling someone 'culpable' means that they are responsible for their actions on a moral, or on a legal level. Today it is still possible to plead madness under the M'Naghten Rules<sup>10</sup>, which is still in effect in the English law courts, despite receiving criticism over the last forty years. As such, when Lady Audley's culpability is analysed, or referred to in this chapter, the question being raised is whether she is considered morally to blame or responsible for her actions, or whether she would not be considered culpable under the M'Naghten Rules of 1843.

This chapter will begin by examining the medical, socio-historical and legal contexts, as well as literary representations of madness and culpability in Victorian culture to which Braddon was responding and contributing. From thence, the chapter examines the treatment of the lead character, Lady Audley, as she was adapted to the stage by each of the nineteenth-century dramatists. The adaptations are William Suter's *Lady Audley's Secret: A Drama in Two Acts* (1863), George Roberts' *Lady Audley's Secret; A Drama in Two Acts* (1863), C.H. Hazlewood's *Lady Audley's Secret* (1863) and John Brougham's *The Mystery of Audley Court* (1866). In order to understand the changes, omissions and additions made by the dramatists, I will examine the context of the plays, the dramatists, the choice of actress and where available analyse the critical responses to the adaptations especially when they contribute to the analysis of her culpability. The original contribution to knowledge that this chapter makes lies not only in the analysis of these little known plays, in respect of which one is the handwritten manuscript I located in the archives of the British Library and have digitally recorded for posterity (Brougham's *The Mystery of Audley Court*), but also in the analysis of these plays from a New Historicist and proto-feminist perspective. By examining these plays within the framework of those critical theories, we might be able to read these plays not just for how they demonstrate nineteenth-century attitudes towards madness and culpability but how those issues related to and reflected Victorian ideals of femininity. This chapter sits alongside the existing work done on the nineteenth-century stage adaptations of Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret* by Doris Ann Frye in her PhD thesis "*Vulgarized*": *Victorian women's fiction in minor theatres* (2013) who also raises the issue of what happens to female authored texts when they are adapted by a man. This chapter also joins the work of scholars like Kate Mattacks in "Regulatory Bodies: Dramatic Creativity, Control and the

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<sup>10</sup> The M'Naghten Rules originated in the 1843 acquittal of Daniel M'Naghten who was charged with murdering Edward Drummond mistaking him for his desired victim the then Prime Minister Robert Peel. In preparation for his trial, the House of Lords consulted a panel of judges on the defence of insanity resulting in a standardised test for criminal culpability in relation to mentally deficient defendants. These same rules, although subject to a few alterations, are still used today to determine if a plea of insanity is valid.

Commodity of *Lady Audley's Secret*" (2009), Ian Henderson's "Looking at Lady Audley: Symbolism, the Stage, and the Antipodes" (2006), Amnon Kabatchnik's *Blood on the Stage, 1800 to 1900: Milestone Plays of Murder, Mystery, and Mayhem* (2011), Kerry Powell's *Women and Victorian Theatre* (1997) and Renata K. Miller's "Imagined Audiences: The Novelist and the Stage" (2002). It also sits alongside studies of women and madness in the nineteenth-century like Lisa Appignanesi's *Mad, Bad and Sad* (2007) and Phyllis Chesler's *Women and Madness* (1997) as well as Elaine Showalter's *The Female Malady* (1987). It also contributes to the existing work by feminist critics like Elaine Showalter, Phyllis Chesler, Lisa Tuttle, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar due to the special attention that is paid to how the male dramatists responded to the proto-feminist challenges of the original novel.

In this chapter, the analysis of the stage adaptations attempts to reveal whether the proto-feminist elements in the novel were taken out of the plot entirely, amended to conform to the patriarchal, repressive view of women's place in society or potentially even emphasised in order to make the play a political manifesto. Doris Ann Frye states that these stage adaptations of Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret* "represent the appropriation of a female author's material by male playwrights who not surprisingly alter much of the material surrounding gender performance" (Frye 58). Frye is not alone in this assertion. Indeed in 1997 Kerry Powell said that "the subversive content that has been detected generally in women's novels of sensation and sentiment is notably missing in men's adaptations of these works for the stage" (Powell *Women and Victorian Theatre* 111). Powell then goes on to explore the complex approach taken to the issue of Lady Audley's madness, and consequently her culpability for her crimes, before declaring that "The novel's recognition of Lady Audley's sanity, her authentic womanhood, and the rational bases for her crimes is missing in all of the stage adaptations of Braddon's novel" (Powell *Women and Victorian Theatre* 112). This chapter sought to ascertain if Powell and Frye's assertion were correct when the plays, including the unknown Brougham adaptation *The Mystery of Audley Court* are examined from a New Historicist and proto-feminist perspective.

Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret* (1862) is now studied as a proto-feminist text because it contains themes that are read as examples of early feminism, such as its documentation of the struggles of women in the nineteenth-century. This is why the stage adaptations examined in this chapter are analysed from a proto-feminist perspective. From a New Historicist perspective, it is possible to argue that the writers of these stage adaptations were also responding to popular current affairs, like the numerous changes to the Matrimonial Causes Act in the nineteenth century or Isabella Robinson's public divorce case, rather than developing a feminist agenda of their own. What's more the preceding two chapters of this thesis has shown that the reason melodrama was such a popular genre is because "it spoke directly and appealed to nineteenth-century audiences and their concerns in a world that was fast changing in social, cultural, political and economic terms" (Mettinger-Schartmann 382), as indeed does the plot of the original novel.



Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret* (1862) is the story of the titular young woman who is abandoned by her husband shortly after the birth of their first child. In order to support herself, her alcoholic father and her infant son, she assumes a false identity and finds work as a governess. A wealthy aristocrat becomes besotted with her and she marries him bigamously. Some years later she is reunited with her husband whilst living under her new name. In order to keep her true identity hidden she attempts to murder her first husband, commits arson and resorts to murder again in an attempt to get rid of a blackmailer, who had witnessed her attack on her first husband. She is eventually exposed as a bigamist to her second husband and is sent to an asylum where she spends the rest of her short life.

Braddon's novel revolves around the aftermath of a woman living as an abandoned wife and mother, and centrally engages with the complex issue of the authenticity of Lady Audley's madness. Viewed within a proto-feminist framework, Lady Audley's madness could be the outcome of women's

repressed energies eventually struggl[ing] free, demanding long overdue and therefore heavier prices: marital and maternal 'disloyalty,' social ostracism, imprisonment, madness, and death (Chesler 46).

With that in mind, I view Lady Audley's actions in the novel, such as trying to kill her estranged husband, as expressions of her struggle against the repressive society in which she lived rather than as clear examples of insanity. The novel is deliberately unclear about the issue of Lady Audley's sanity, thus encouraging the reader to question the *status quo*. Lady Audley's obsession with luxury items like fine furs, jewels, silk and satin gowns and beautiful ornaments could all be understood as symptoms of hysteria in the period (Appignanesi 148 and 161) as will be examined later in this chapter. Another argument finding Lady Audley mentally unbalanced is that the character 'inherited' her mother's madness. Insanity was viewed as hereditary in the period and therefore Lady Audley could be understood as having inherited her mental instability from her mother. Lady Audley had grown up with that fear after visiting her mother in the asylum, where she discovered her to be a beautiful, childlike, girlish woman (Braddon 298), therefore foreshadowing her own fate. Another possible reading of her erratic, wild and overly emotional behaviour might hold that it is evidence of puerperal fever, post-natal depression, or potentially hysteria – a diagnosis thousands of women were subjected to in the nineteenth-century (Pykett in Braddon xxi). On the other hand, there are plenty of arguments for Lady Audley's sanity. In her introduction to the 2012 Oxford World's Classics edition of Braddon's novel, Lyn Pykett states that:

Dr Mosgrave's rapid recanting of his initial advice to Robert that the 'lady is not mad ... She has the cunning of madness, with the prudence of intelligence' [*Braddon* 323], suggests something of the way in which madness was used to label and manage dangerous, disruptive femininity in the nineteenth-century" (Pykett in Braddon xxi).

Labelling her 'mad' might thus have been a way to contain this unruly, self-willed woman. Furthermore, there is also the fact that Dr Mosgrave was getting paid by Robert Audley. Dr Mosgrave knows on which side (patriarchal) power rests and provides a suitable diagnosis: calling Lady Audley 'mad' was convenient for both men, thus showing how his, debatable, misdiagnosis is "part of a homosocial conspiracy lubricated by capital" (Matus cited in Henderson 7). In a sense, after having outmanoeuvred Lady Audley, the question of her sanity no longer matters. Elaine Showalter agrees: "Lady Audley's real secret is that she is *sane* and, moreover, representative" (Showalter *A Literature of Their Own* 167). According to Showalter Lady Audley's behaviour was considered dangerous because it was 'unwomanly' and therefore did not support the conventional image of femininity. The novel is thus deliberately vague, supporting both interpretations of Lady Audley as sane, but also transgressive and potentially wicked. It is also easy to see the argument that Lady Audley was driven to insanity because of her genetic inheritance and/or because of her circumstances in the original source. Indeed, it could be said that Lady Audley oscillates between sanity and madness, rather than being a stereotype of literary representations of villainesses, or mad women. From a New Historicist perspective, this complexity in Braddon's writing shows a subtle engagement by her with the nineteenth-century's interest in madness and criminality, which contrasts with the criticism which had previously been levelled at the sensation genre as being "written and read quickly rather than discerningly" and of appealing "directly to the nerves" (Gilbert *A Companion to Sensation Fiction* 2).

The complex issue of culpability has puzzled the criminal justice system since its inception and can be said to have been reflected by Mary Braddon as the central question of her sensation novel *Lady Audley's Secret* (1862) with the eponymous heroine's contentious sanity. As with the two preceding chapters, this chapter will now examine the key historical contexts relevant to the analysis of the plays from a New Historicist and also proto-feminist framework, before the plays themselves are considered in comparison with each other in relation to the issue of portraying Lady Audley's culpability, or indeed lack of.

### **Medical and Philosophical context**

Medically speaking, the study of the mind was originally referred to as 'alienism'. The founding father of this separate sphere of science was Philippe Pinel (1745-1826). He abolished the antiquated cures of purging and bleeding in favour of close observation of patients and obtaining their full case histories (Appignanesi 64). Showing the characteristic mixing of discourses, his treatment became known as "moral treatment" (Appignanesi 68), which was an attempt at getting to grips with a problem thought to have roots in moral disorders, but with new scientific methods. Pinel's work was influential in shifting society's understanding of the causes of madness on to either "erroneous ideas or pathological reasoning ... [or] pathological passions – extreme emotions stirred by the traumas of life" (Appignanesi 69). In the novel, this is fictionalised as the diagnosis given to Lady Audley, which hinges on her experiencing "extreme mental pressure"

(Braddon 323), that is “traumas of life” (Appignanesi 69). Pinel’s student and disciple, Jean-Etienne Dominique Esquirol (1772-1840), developed the idea of monomania<sup>11</sup>, which went on to become the fashionable illness of the age as well as the form of madness which took the doctors out of the hospital and into the court room (Appignanesi 72). Charcot was influenced by Pinel’s practice of observing and noting the behaviours and statements of his patients covering “physiognomy, minute details of behaviour over time as well as past history” (Appignanesi 73). This was eventually employed by the court as doctors would appear as expert witnesses on criminal cases where the culpability and sanity of the accused was in question, thus illustrating how a medical model of madness came to influence the new science of criminology and actual legal practice. This is easily relatable to Dr Mosgrave’s comment in the novel that he could not envisage any judge in England would accept that she was mad (Braddon 321). Monomania was “that partial madness dependent on exciting, expansive and buoyant passions” (Appignanesi 73), on which Lady Audley’s malady in the novel may well be based.

Later in the century, Jean-Martin Charcot (1825-1893) developed the medical diagnosis of hysteria, which became one of the most commonly used diagnoses of the nineteenth century. Whilst Charcot’s specialism was neurology, he also worked on hysteria cases and he was particularly famous for using hypnotism as a means of treating his patients. Despite the growing interest in alienism, what was agreed by all of the experts was that the treatments only provided relief not cure. The patients were repeat ‘offenders’ as it were because no one was permanently cured (Appignanesi 220). For Charcot this might have been due to the fact that he understood mental illnesses, but particularly “hysteria as a genuine illness which had a neurological basis in a hereditary degeneration of the nervous system” (Appignanesi 165). Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) is, of course, the father of modern psychoanalysis, the treating of mental illnesses with dialogue between the clinician and the patient. He studied under Charcot for three months in Paris in 1885. Freud would later argue that “modern nervousness, far from having an undiscovered organic cause as many physicians assumed, resulted from the sexual repression and self-control required by bourgeois civilization” (Freud xvi). At the end of *Lady Audley’s Secret*, a medical specialist is called to diagnose and then certify Lady Audley, and the range of potential symptoms of madness she presents throughout the novel. From a New Historicist perspective, this suggests that Braddon was keenly alive to contemporary discussions about madness, especially where they relate to the notion of culpability for her central character.

Current theories on madness see female madness specifically as a result of a variety of factors, which were mentioned in the introduction to this chapter. However, Fiona Tolan argues that, during the nineteenth-century, “[t]here was an underlying belief that women could not speak freely or naturally in masculine discourse, and that hysteria was better understood as a frustrated or

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<sup>11</sup> The medical definition of monomania in 1848 was “monomania, or partial insanity, in which the understanding is partially disordered, or under the influence of some particular illusion referring to one subject, and involving one train of ideas, while the intellectual powers appear, when exercised on other subjects, to be in a great measure unimpaired” (Hooper 779).

-muted discourse" (Tolan 24). If Lady Audley's madness is read in that context, it is not surprising that the novel received such scrutiny. Arguably the message it gave for some was that if blonde-haired, blue-eyed, angelic, puerile Lady Audley could commit murder, bigamy and identity fraud then so could any woman. As Pykett says "Braddon represents Lucy as an actress and a chameleon, and thus plays on the reader's fears and fantasies about the duplicity of women" (Pykett *The Sensation Novel* 54). In creating confusion about Lucy Audley's sanity, Braddon "suggests something of the way in which madness was used to label and manage dangerous, disruptive femininity in the nineteenth century" (Pykett in Braddon xxi).

Lady Audley's "erratic ... behaviour might be attributable ... to the nervous hysteria to which all women were prone according to many Victorian medical practitioners and theorists" (Pykett in Braddon xxi). In the nineteenth century, hysteria was considered to be a form of madness with many differing discourses discussing its origins over the period. As a nervous condition, hysteria was particularly common in English men and women, it was even called the "English malady" (Scull 47) and as such should also be considered alongside the discussion of Victorian concepts of 'madness'.

Real life symptoms of hysteria included "nervous prostration, fits, headaches, paralyses, floods of tears, and exhibitions of emotional lability, insomnia, and invalidism" (Scull 93). Treatment for hysteria ranged from causing "the most violent Vomits, the strongest purging Medicines, and large Bleeding ... often repeated" to "calming prescriptions" (Scull 40-1) and also very strict bed rest where even reading and writing was banned (Scull 101). More extreme treatment involved clitoridectomy, the surgical removal of the clitoris in order to prevent what was considered to be the cause of the hysteria, female masturbation (Scull 77). Masturbatory insanity represented the very real concern that was felt regarding the issue of female sexual desire in the nineteenth-century. It was felt that sexual excitement "imposed immense strain on the brain and nerves and could prompt hysteria or even outright insanity" (Scull 73). One of the unconventional behaviours which was subsumed under the heading of madness in the nineteenth-century was heightened sexual proclivity. Surprising given that for hundreds of years, it was commonly accepted that in order for a woman to conceive both the man and woman had to achieve orgasm, as stated in Chapter Two (Laqueur 1). In the nineteenth-century there was a shift from this mode of thinking. Dr Acton was one of the key exponents of the idea that women had no sexual desire at all (Acton 101). This meant that female sexual desire was deemed to be abnormal and "was considered one of the chief symptoms of moral insanity in women; it was subject to severe sanctions and was regarded as abnormal or pathological" (Showalter "Feminine Heroes" 231). In Hazelwood's adaptation (1863), Lady Audley could be viewed in this way as she has been cast as an evil villainess, or seductress, who set about winning Sir Michael's attention specifically to raise her social status and obtain wealth, which is quite different from the novel. Braddon's novel opens with Sir Michael's proposal to Lady Audley, which is clearly described as unwelcome and uninvited (Braddon 13-15). Not only was enjoyment of sex dangerous for a woman but a woman's natural bodily functions were also harmful and required close monitoring. Menstruation could have

a powerful impact on a woman's mental health, making her abandon her sanity for spells seeing her destroying furniture, attacking people and running amok (Showalter *The Female Malady* 121). As such madness was inherently connected to female bodies, minds and emotions, with sexual desire being a real indicator of a woman's mental weakness or depravity.

There was a genuine concern that hysteria could be imitated, which is recorded in nineteenth-century medical texts (Scull 93), due to either a fashionable trend of self-flattery (Scull 96) or even as a means of obtaining power or control (Scull 99). Despite the attention that mental illnesses received and the development of treatments for madness in the era, it was commonly understood that a cure could not be effected (Appignanesi 220), particularly with regard to hysteria, which Charcot understood as a symptom of degeneration (Appignanesi 165). Degeneration theory popularised by, among others, Max Nordau, was never quite at the mainstream of Victorian culture, but did have enormous influence in literature and culture more broadly. Social Darwinism presented living creatures as hierarchical, with a mysterious protoplasm at the bottom and the white, European male at the top. Evolution was a purpose-driven development towards obtaining (morally) better lives. Degeneration theory responded to the prevailing mood of pessimism which permeated the latter part of the century by arguing that in certain circumstances, the process of evolution could be reversed: "biological inheritance, it was now thought, paved the way to madness as well as to criminality. Degeneration was abetted by alcohol in an ever downward generational spiral which gathered physicality, morality and poverty in its swoop" (Appignanesi 105). In *Lady Audley's Secret*, the spectre of degeneration is evoked by the fact that her uncertain mental health is, or at least might have been inherited from her mother, an inmate of a mental asylum. The animal-imagery used to describe her in the novel when she is in the thrall of extreme emotion hints at a lack of control, such as,

Her footfall was as light as that of some graceful wild  
animal (Braddon 268).

This description of Lady Audley comes when she is about to set light to the Castle Inn indicating to the reader that she has begun to lose control of herself. Whether she loses control of her behaviour due to inheriting bad genes from her mentally unwell mother, or even from her weak, alcoholic father is something that will be discussed in more detail later.

However, invoking degeneracy does not mean subscribing to its tenets: the novel represents not only the symptoms of degeneracy, but it also shows what effects a belief in degeneracy could have with regard to women in particular, as "the late nineteenth century stoked up a moral panic which envisaged that middle-class women's attempt to change their lives would result in madness and the decline of the species" (Appignanesi 125). Hack Tuke's *Insanity in Ancient and Modern Life, with chapters on its prevention* (1878) is not specific to female madness and he does not state that women specifically are prone to the condition, but he does explain that "the forms of disease" (types of insanity) vary from person to person but that one of the main purposes of his

work is to identify the “acknowledged causes of insanity” (Hack Tuke 2). The causes of insanity are discussed, and include intoxication and defective nourishment:

leading to exhaustion and mal-nutrition of the nervous centres, to degeneration of the race, idiocy, &c., as witnessed in any miserably under-fed population... The transmission of insanity by hereditary descent is a most important cause, ... conditions universally acknowledged to cause sooner or later a thorough depravation of the bodily organs, and therefore of that upon which the integrity of the mental faculties depends... [*there are*] various causes, chiefly moral, but partly mixed in character, which excite or depress the emotions profoundly, as a dissolute life or depraved habits, domestic sorrow and misery, commercial speculation and losses, religious excitement, disappointments in love, and the worry of life in general – overwork... intellectual strain... when rigidly eliminated from all emotional accompaniments, ... causing loss of sleep – prove highly injurious... (Hack Tuke 3-4).

Hack Tuke lists degeneracy as a cause for insanity, which supports a reading of Lady Audley’s madness being caused by degeneration. A major contributor to the notion of degeneracy was the criminologist Cesare Lombroso, whose work had great influence on sociology and criminology, despite being controversially discussed by Havelock Ellis and others. Lombroso proposed that deviancy and criminal tendencies were inherited and that, among various classes of criminals, the worst was the “atavistic ‘born criminal’ whose degeneracy was identifiable through physical features such as fleshy lips, large jaw, pitcher-shaped ears and high cheekbones” (Appignanesi 172). It cannot be anything else than an ironic challenge of this representation of the ‘born criminal’ that Braddon creates a villain who is consistently described as being “lovely” (Braddon 172).

Lombroso’s notion of the ‘born criminal’ can often be seen in context with James Cowles Pritchard’s concept of ‘moral insanity’. Pritchard defined this term in his work *Treatise on insanity and other disorders affecting the mind* (1837) to describe a particular kind of mental disorder where the madness consisted of “a morbid perversion of the natural feelings, affections, inclinations, temper, habits, moral dispositions, and natural impulses, without any remarkable disorder or defect of the interest or knowing and reasoning faculties, and particularly without any insane illusion or hallucinations” (Pritchard 16). Pritchard’s concept, it was felt, made it possible to diagnose the types of madness that were “often ... invisible to the untrained or lay eye, though quite conspicuous to the expert psychiatrist” (Porter *Illustrations of* xiv). It was one of the most obvious cases of conflating moral ‘wickedness’ with mental illness. If one chooses to read Lady Audley as a degenerate and as potentially a ‘born criminal’ – the idea that she was born with criminal tendencies, which she had inherited from her weak mother – her actions, such as attempting to murder her husband, but, also perhaps her readiness to leave her small child in the care of her alcoholic and inept father, point to a potential diagnosis of ‘moral insanity’.

The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries saw a wide range of opinions developing, and clashing, on the subject of mental health. For one, definitions of what exactly constituted 'madness' differed. An example is the case of James Tilly Matthews, a man in public life, who spent time in 'Bedlam', formally known as Bethlem Hospital, (originally Bethlehem, then Bethlem, then Bedlam) and ended his life in a private asylum. Three doctors, George Birkbeck, Henry Clutterbuck, and the owner of the private asylum, Dr. Fox, assessed him at different times of his life but could not agree on a common diagnosis (Porter *Illustrations of xv-xvi*). Matthews' case not only highlights the difficulties of diagnosing mental illness, but also the comparative ease with which individuals could be detained in a mental institution. The only redress they had was a suit of *habeas corpus* (unlawful detention or imprisonment), which was often not successful. Roy Porter states that the conditions under which the mentally ill were living in the 1700s meant that that abuses of the system easily occurred because under an Act of 1714 "pauper lunatics could be detained on the authority of a magistrate, while families continued to be able to lodge supposedly insane relatives in private asylums without the need for any formal authorisation at all, by either a JP or a medical practitioner" (Porter *Illustrations of xii-xiii*). Abuses of the system like this continued to happen long into the twentieth century. It is possible, from a New Historicist perspective, to see this influencing *Lady Audley's Secret* when Dr Mosgrave, the medical practitioner whom Robert Audley calls in at the end of the novel, finds it equally difficult to diagnose Lady Audley, and, potentially bowing to the pressure exerted by Audley, finally produces an assessment which allows Audley to rid himself off his troublesome aunt.

Conditions in asylums, such as the one Lady Audley has nightmares about as a child in the novel (Braddon 297), could be deplorable, and the first 'lunacy', or mental health, act was passed in 1774 in an attempt to ameliorate the conditions in the asylums. The Madhouses Act 1774 laid out a legal framework to regulate 'madhouses'. The care of mentally ill people had traditionally taken place either in the home or in 'madhouses', private homes where the patients were detained for a fee. Standards of medical care provided in these 'madhouses' varied from place to place as there was no framework that they had to adhere to, and in some places no medical care was provided at all. Abuses were prolific and largely concerned the false confinement of sane people or genuinely mentally unwell people living in terrible conditions. Acts such as the Madhouses Act of 1828, led to the amelioration of conditions, but only with the Lunacy Act of 1845 and the County Asylums Act 1845 were the inmates finally regarded as patients in need of medical care. This, however, also led to a radical loss of rights: patients could not challenge their detention in court. Any requests to end a patient's detention had to be reviewed by the commissioners or by county visitors. To a patient, who is as likely as not falsely detained, this meant imprisonment until death.

Further complicating the issue of criminal culpability in the nineteenth century, is the fact that the moral and medical categories of the scientific and popular arenas rely on notions of wickedness to explain criminal and other 'evil' acts. This is something that we still do today when an act, or person, is truly abhorrent. As a society, our media still calls people like Fred and Rose West and

Ian Brady and Myra Hindley 'evil'. It is possible to argue that the scientific, medical world was trying to turn away from religion and explaining human behaviour through morality and towards an engagement with science and understanding of humanity. However, in doing so they actually reinforced an almost biblical understanding of wickedness in their view of madness, shown in the nineteenth-century's diagnosis of 'moral insanity'. 'Moral insanity' was not a diagnosis for an illness but instead was considered to be the result of a moral defect in the patient or defendant. The problem was, and is for us analysing this today, that 'moral insanity' was attributed to people who simply wanted to be different from the social norm rather than having committed an atrocious act due to mental deficiency. This is why establishing whether Lady Audley was considered to be criminally culpable by nineteenth-century readers and audience members alike is a complex undertaking.

### **Cultural and Legal Contexts**

As mentioned in the previous section, the image of the madhouse is prominent in Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret*. Lady Audley is described as terrified of being entered into one ever since she was a young girl when she saw her beautiful childlike mother there (Braddon 298). As such the conditions in madhouses in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century is an important context, which needs to be examined by us from a New Historicist perspective in order for us to make sense of Lady Audley's abhorrence of them.

Conditions in 'madhouses' were certainly deplorable in the eighteenth century. Appignanesi describes the conditions in a typical asylum as follows "Chains and various forms of restraint, brutality, theft by vicious carers, were all too common. So were dirt, filthy accommodation and worse sanitation, not to mention rape and beatings by carers" (Appignanesi 25). The first 'lunacy', or mental health, act was passed in 1774 in an attempt to ameliorate the conditions in the asylums. After that there was a significant improvement in the conditions and regulations after the Act but abuses still took place so in 1828 the Madhouses Act was passed, which stipulated that the Home Secretary would appoint 15 commissioners on an annual basis to visit all of the 'madhouses' holding two or more patients at a time. Whilst these forward-thinking transformative acts were being passed in relation to the care of mentally ill people, pleas of madness were increasing from husbands accusing their wives in divorce courts across the country. The Lunacy Act of 1845 and the County Asylums Act 1845 shaped mental health law in England and Wales until 1890 with the most important change being that the inpatients, or detainees, were now recognised as mentally ill. Patients and all asylums had to be registered with the Commissioners in Lunacy and had to have a resident physician. However, despite this improvement in the treatment available, patients lost all of their rights to challenge their detention in court and any requests to end a patient's detention had to be reviewed by the commissioners or by county visitors. Braddon reflects the Victorian madhouse in her depiction of Robert Audley using the failings of the system in order to dispose of Lady Audley. Despite knowing of the horrendous



conditions in the 'madhouses', Robert Audley is very ready to accept the move to incarcerate his aunt in one for the rest of her life in order to conveniently obviate her from his family. His decision to do this might also be motivated by revenge for her criminal actions.

John Connolly (1794-1866), a doctor specialising in mental health, was a more progressive voice in the century. He thought that "excessive eccentricity', 'utter disregard of cleanliness and decency', 'perversions of the moral feelings and passions' and a disposition 'to give away sums of money which they cannot afford to lose'" (Pedlar *John Conolly*) were also all symptoms of madness. Thus, behaviours considered to be undesirable and perhaps morally wrong were also labelled 'madness', meaning that the categories of madness (understood as an illness), morality and criminality overlap. David Jones said that:

the nature of the relationship between sanity, partial insanity, offending and criminal culpability has been highly problematic because it not only crosses conceptual boundaries, but is also embedded in unresolved questions about the nature of virtue and how order and relationships can be managed between individuals in modern, industrialised, urbanised societies (Jones *Disordered Personalities* ix).

As such what separated madness from wickedness might have been minor, transient and also specific to a point in time as feminist readings of Victorian literature have argued ever since.

### **Representations of Madness in Victorian Literature and Theatre**

Some of the most famous examples of madness in British theatre include those portrayed in Shakespeare, such as, Ophelia in *Hamlet* and Poor Tom in *King Lear*, who is really the character Edgar feigning madness in order to evade his treacherous half-brother. In Victorian literature there are numerous examples of madness that can be examined to provide a more complete background in terms of this chapter's analysis of the stage adaptations' treatment of Lady Audley's mental health.

Whilst appearing some twenty years after the publication of Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret*, Robert Louis Stevenson's *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886), also explores the scientific discourses surrounding madness and wickedness with Dr Jekyll's possible diagnosis of dissociative identity disorder (split personality disorder). The novella hinted that underneath the civilized veneer that British middle-class and upper-class society wore there was a brutal savage capable of anything. A similar notion is present in the duality in *Lady Audley's Secret*, in that Braddon wrote a complex characterization of Lady Audley to encourage the readership to debate whether Lady Audley was genuinely mad or not. There is also a duality in Lady Audley in terms of her outward appearance of innocent beauty but her wicked, or mad, disposition (Porter *Illustrations of* xiv). Stephenson was also responding to the contemporary discussions about

degeneracy in *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*. Degeneration remained a prominent theme in Victorian literature even until the approach of the *fin-de-siècle*. It is a prominent theme in Arthur Machen's work. *The Novel of the White Powder* (1895) responds to the contemporary concern that intellectual overwork could cause madness. A white powder is then prescribed to restore the patient to health, but the powder becomes the man's undoing transforming him back into "primordial plasm" (Eckersley 280). The white powder suggests that what separates man from degeneracy is so little that an innocent and simple looking powder could return humanity to it "primordial plasm" (Eckersley 280).

In Wilkie Collins' *The Woman in White* (1860), which can be read as a 'companion text' to *Lady Audley's Secret* similar questions are raised with relation to degeneration, morality and madness with the characters Anne Catherick, the infamous woman in white, and wealthy, upper class Laura Fairlie. Laura Fairlie is also the victim of false incarceration in a madhouse as her husband attempts to seize her fortune from her by alleging that she is no longer mentally capable. Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* (1856) depicts a now famous image of female madness stemming from the marital boredom of the lead character, Emma Rouault. It causes her to have extramarital affairs and sends her seeking luxury and high society, desires shared by Braddon's Lucy Audley. She ultimately commits suicide.

In summary, this section and the two that preceded it, helped to elucidate the context in which Braddon wrote *Lady Audley's Secret* and that the stage adaptations were also written. These sections have indicated that the topic of culpability was widely argued with a dramatic range of opinions on the topic making it evident that the Victorian era was a key moment in terms of public engagement with these scientific, moral and popular discourses. The engagement with these topics did not just end with Braddon's novel as when the novel was adapted for the stage, the dramatists too then sought to engage with these topics altering them to fit their own agendas. Rohan McWilliam said that "melodrama was a mode that could not be contained by the proscenium arch but shaped the wider culture, including human behaviour itself" (McWilliam *Melodrama* 55) and these plays prove that this is the case, as will be demonstrated in the next section.

The Victorian stage adaptations examined in this chapter are examined next in order to ascertain whether the complexity with which Braddon approached the creation of *Lady Audley's Secret* was also adopted by the male dramatists. Was Doris Ann Frye correct in saying that the male dramatists of *Lady Audley's Secret* "alter much of the material surrounding gender performance" (Frye 58)? Was Kerry Powell correct in saying that "the subversive content that has been detected generally in women's novels of sensation and sentiment is notably missing in men's adaptations of these works for the stage" (Powell *Women and Victorian Theatre* 111)?

### **Comparative Analysis**

As with the other chapters in this thesis, in the appendices to this chapter there is a chart where a direct comparison of several key scenes in the adaptations of *Lady Audley's Secret* and the original novel has been made. In order to allow a direct comparison of these very different texts, the chart in Chapter Three: Appendix F summarises each text and juxtaposes key elements of the text. In this way both similarities and differences become obvious at a glance in order to assist with the comparative analysis of these little-known texts.

The novel opens with Sir Michael Audley's proposal to Lady Audley, then known as the poor, orphan governess Lucy Graham. None of the plays start with this scene despite the theatrical potential from the existing drama and suspense that had been written by Braddon. The reason for this omission might be a consequence of the restrictions of drama as a form of medium, not just in respect of the time limit imposed on a play, but the transference of plot from one media to another. If the dramatists had elected to stage the proposal scene first, this would not allow for the usual theatrical convention of building up tension to a climax as the play would start with a moment of intense heightened emotion. As discussed in the introduction, melodrama is a very conservative form which adheres to the conventions of drama as outlined first by Aeschylus and then gradually streamlined through the centuries to Shakespeare and beyond even to today to pantomime.

In the novel Lady Audley is described as "crouching" (Braddon 15) fearfully whilst she considers accepting Sir Michael's marriage proposal at the book's opening. This behaviour suggests an animalistic wildness about her, as well as a peculiarity. She behaves in a manner uncommon to Victorian society and even to twenty first century society as her reaction to the proposal is so extreme. In the novel, this 'crouching' sends the reader a cue from the beginning, that we should be alarmed by her, as is Sir Michael. The title of the novel also signals to the reader not to trust her. Lady Audley's 'crouching' is only included in Suter's play during her confession to Sir Michael (Suter 60-61). The closest that the plays come to recreating the effect of Lady Audley's extreme reaction to Sir Michael's proposal is a mirroring of the thunderstorm later in the novel. Brougham is the only dramatist to do so, potentially because Brougham's play *The Mysteries of Audley Court* focuses on presenting a more complex, less obviously stereotyped stock villain characterisation of Lady Audley. The thunderstorm is inserted into a scene with Alicia Audley, who reacts in a very different manner. Presumably this is to more obviously demonstrate that Alicia and Lady Audley are polar opposites of each other. Alicia is illuminated by a flash of lightning as she gazes up "fearlessly at the passing storm" (Brougham *The Mystery of Audley Court* 51-53) highlighting Alicia's bravery and revealing Lady Audley's weakness and animalistic tendencies. Animals are well-known to be terrified of storms. As such the overall effect is that Lady Audley is a woman, who regardless of your opinion of her sanity, behaves in a way that is abnormal. In the novel this is the reader's first clue about her duplicity. Sir Michael Audley's proposal is one of the most promising scenes to analyse when considering the novelist's approach to how Lady Audley should

be perceived by the reader. However, Brougham's scene is the only instance of this kind of animal terror which Lady Audley exhibits in the plays and it is the only time where she seemingly gives into or is overwhelmed by her emotions. This lack of control of her emotions is arguably her real transgression against society (Hansson and Norberg 443).

Suter's play opens with comedic action from Bibbles and Bubbles, invented servant characters, before Luke and Phoebe enter and reveal that Sir Michael has married a poor but beautiful governess:

*LUKE:* Like your missus, eh? But 'taint every poor girl, merely because she happens to have been born pretty, that is lucky enough to find an old fool of a rich baronet to fall in love with and marry her...

*PHOEBE:* And what was Miss Graham, now Lady Audley, only three months ago, when she lived in Mr. Dawson's house? nothing but a governess, a servant like me, taking small wages, and working for them as hard, or harder than I did. You should have seen her shabby clothes, Luke, worn and patched, and turned and twisted, yet always looking nice upon her somehow, and now she is a great lady (Suter 21-22).

It is not notable that Lady Audley does not introduce herself in the opening of Suter's play as this does not happen in any of the plays. Her introduction to the audience is always the responsibility of another character. In Suter's case, she is introduced by Luke and Phoebe Marks, which might be a consequence of the theatre's location in a less affluent part of London. Suter's production at The Queen's Theatre in London, later called The Prince of Wales's Theatre, was the only theatre in the borough of St. Pancras. In its earlier days, the theatre did not attract a very illustrious audience with the majority coming from the skilled working-class trades, for example, shoemakers, carpenters, tailors, bricklayers, etc. and the common occupations for women being domestic servants, cooks, charwomen, milliners, seamstresses, etc. (Davis and Emeljanow 149). There is a great focus on the servant characters in Suter's interpretation. The invented servant characters Bibbles and Bubbles occupy the sub-plot of Suter's play and interject the novel's original plot at various points in the action for comedic effect. Phoebe and Luke Marks are equally dominant in Suter's adaptation. That her newly acquired social status and swift rise to a position of power is mentioned in the opening by these clearly working-class characters, noticeably working class because of their accents and use of colloquialisms, supports the notion that Suter wrote his play with a working-class audience in mind. It is possible that Suter deliberately used these working-class characters to introduce Lady Audley because the audience might have felt that they could relate to, and therefore, trust these characters better than an upper-class character such as Alicia Audley. Their use of colloquial language is a feature not unique to melodrama as the previous two chapters have indicated, nor is the refocusing of the audience's attention on to the servant characters. This exchange between Phoebe and Luke indicates that Luke and Phoebe might be jealous of Lady Audley's new-found wealth. As such, at this point the only indication that the audience has regarding how Lady Audley should be viewed is that she was

once poor but is now rich because her beauty helped her to find a rich husband. It also hints at the complex relationship which develops between Luke, Phoebe and Lady Audley as their jealousy of her position as the wife of a local aristocrat might lead them to act against her given the opportunity. Phoebe has also been regarded as a 'bad spirit' akin to Christopher Marlowe's Mephistopheles in *Dr Faustus* and this is the analysis which Lynn M. Voskuil provides in "Acts of Madness: Lady Audley and the Meanings of Victorian Femininity" (Voskuil 614).

Roberts' also opens his play with another character, Robert Audley, introducing Lady Audley with a letter, which also contains an allusion to the 'dark arts' or sorcery:

Wax doll! – that's my aunt – "who's dying to make your acquaintance." Poor Alice; there's clearly not room for two rival queens at Audley Court. Dying to make my acquaintance, is she? Well, I'll gratify her, I'll go; for I am anxious, I own it, to see the fair-haired Circe, who has taken captive sober sixty-five... (Roberts 20-21).

Again, Lady Audley is depicted as a sorceress. Robert Audley's initial description of his new aunt indicates to the audience that when the character appears, she might transpire to be artificial, fake, insincere or false as she is described as a "wax doll". Lady Audley is also described as a "fair-haired Circe" clearly telling the audience that Lady Audley is not to be viewed as the wholly good 'damsel in distress' or heroine of a classic melodrama. In Greek mythology, Circe was the goddess of magic and was sometimes known as a sorceress or enchantress. She was skilled with potions and could transform people into animals. In Homer's *Odyssey* she seduced Homer into staying on her island with his men for a year feasting and drinking wine instead of continuing his quest. References to mythology may have been more commonly used in the 1860s due to the Victorians' educational focus on studying the Classics and so this reference might have been easily understood by the audience. This language is a strong indication that Lady Audley is the villain of the play. Roberts' focus on Robert Audley more closely mirrors the novel which follows Robert Audley's journey as a gentleman detective solving the mystery of the disappearance of his friend, George Talboys. This might be why Robert Audley starts and finishes the play. Roberts' use of language more clearly sets out in the play's opening that Lady Audley should be viewed as a villain by the language than Suter's opening does. At this point not enough action has taken place or information has been exchanged to begin a discussion of whether or not Lady Audley is culpable or inculpable because despite Alicia's description of her new step-mother as a 'fair-haired Circe' and a 'wax doll', Robert dismisses Alicia's opinion of her aunt as being prejudiced by the girl's own jealousy of her 'rival'. Certainly, however, this introduction does encourage the audience to be suspicious of Lady Audley.

Hazlewood's play, mirrors the other 1863 adaptations, by beginning with Phoebe and Luke Marks' discussion of Lady Audley's recent marriage to Sir Michael Audley. They reveal that she had been

a poor governess prior to her marriage and as with Suter's opening there is an indication that Luke might seize the first opportunity to work against Lady Audley:

*LUKE:* Well, I know I'm not over steady; but it riles me Phœbe, to see the luck o' some folks; look at Lady Audley, for instance,--why, what was she a couple of years ago? why, only a governess, a teacher of French and the *pianny*, and now she be mistress o' Audley Court. Ecod, she has played her cards well, to get the right side o' Sir Michael; why, he must be old enough to be her grandfather (Hazlewood Act One Scene One, no page numbers).

Luke's jealousy lays the groundwork for his later blackmail of Lady Audley. Phoebe, however, is the one who appears to be the most jealous of Lady Audley in Suter's adaptation potentially supporting the view of Phoebe as a kind of 'female Mephistopheles' (Voskuil 614). In Hazlewood, Phoebe dominates the stage less and has fewer lines leaving the audience's attention with Luke. This is because Luke and Lady Audley are obvious nemeses in this adaptation. Luke Marks is as keen to manipulate, bribe and prosper by Lady Audley's errors as Robert Audley is to reveal his aunt's true identity and find out what happened to his friend, George Talboys.

Brougham's 1866 play returns the opening to Robert Audley's reading of Alicia's letter and in so doing keeps the audience's attention on the tension that will arise between Robert Audley and Lady Audley as well as between Alicia and Lady Audley:

(reads letter)-of course, a good wiggling for not having written, as if I had anything to write about.- "My father has married a wax dollish young person, a governess; with flaxen ringlets and a perpetual giggle: she takes great pains to make herself agreeable to me; but I can't endure her." -Pleasant for both,- they'll go at it hammer and tongs:-I hope they won't quarrel in the hunting season, or say unpleasant things to each other at dinner time.-Well I always said the old noodle would marry, and so I am not disappointed, it is rather a sell, tho, for all that ... (Brougham *The Mystery of Audley Court* 4).

Brougham's opening also paints a negative picture of Lady Audley using the same kind of language as Suter, she is described as "wax dollish", for example, however the manner in which Robert Audley interjects his own comments introduces doubts as to Alicia's possible bias. Brougham's Robert, like Roberts' 1863 Robert Audley, indicates that Alicia is jealous of her new step-mother, her opinion could be said to be prejudiced. Brougham's play provides a foreshadowing of the difficult relationship between Alicia and Lady Audley in this scene and therefore the audience is encouraged to expect some 'drama' between those characters. Brougham also nods towards the hinted romantic relationship in the novel as Robert and Alicia are clearly being lined up as a romantic match heightening Alicia's jealousy of her new step-mother (Brougham *The Mystery of Audley Court* 90-91). The reason that Brougham's play's

opening is the closest to that of the novel might be because by 1866 realism had started to become a more prominent feature on the Victorian stage. As such fidelity to the text might also have been considered to be part of that move towards theatrical realism as Braddon's *Lady Audley* is a more complex character than the villainous Lady Audleys who had appeared in Suter and Hazlewood in 1863.

The openings suggest that the dramatists' approaches were to build suspense and create an exposition of the central character by introducing the audience to other characters first and with whom the audience can build trust, or not. They then go on to describe Lady Audley and her relationship to the other characters. Whether these first characters were 'good' or 'bad', or whether a more complex idea of character and personality was given, also indicated to the audience how the character in question should be viewed. This indicates a great deal regarding the theatrical conventions of melodrama as a dramatic style. Melodrama is a theatrical form that usually relies on stereotypes and stock characters, however the previous two chapters of this thesis have indicated that this was not always the case. In addition to this, the structure of the plays normally also includes an opening scene in which the central character, or characters, are introduced by the more preliminary characters. In the case of the stage adaptations of *Jane Eyre* it is clear that the primary purpose of this exposition is to get the audience to sympathise with Jane's plight, whereas for *Lady Audley's Secret* the intention for all of the dramatists is to encourage the audience to be mistrustful of Lady Audley from the very first. This initial mistrust is mirrored by the title of the novel, and most of the plays too, which tells the audience to be mistrustful of the eponymous figure, aside from the issue of Lady Audley's sanity and her culpability.

Lady Audley's entrance is also worthy of comment when examining the nineteenth-century dramatists' approaches to staging her because it either confirms or denies the exposition which preceded it and how that character should be viewed as well as the characters who provided the exposition. When Lady Audley first appears in Suter's adaptation, she enters accompanied by Sir Michael Audley. They enter and behave as though they were in throes of 'young love' as they are seemingly completely absorbed by one another and living entirely for the other's satisfaction:

*LADY A:* ... you are so good, so noble and generous; there are women a hundred times my superior in beauty and goodness who might love you dearly!

*SIR M:* You are the delight of my life – where'er you go you carry joy and brightness with you – all love, admire, and praise you.

*LADY A:* (*aside*) If they knew me rightly they would curse me.

*SIR M:* You are the best and sweetest creature that ever lived, and I the most blessed of men in having won you to be my wife. Till I saw you I had never loved. My marriage with Alicia's mother was but a dull, jog-trot bargain, made to keep an estate in the family that would have been just as well out it... (*draws her to him, and presses his lips to her forehead*)

*LADY A: (aside) No more dependence, no more drudgery, no more humiliations – every trace of the old life melted away, every clue to identity buried and forgotten (Suter 30-31).*

In Lady Audley's first scene in Suter's play, the audience would have little inkling, other than the title of the play, that Lady Audley is actually playing the role of the villain in this play, unless they had already read the book. The asides only reveal that she has a dark secret and that she has been raised up from poverty and dependence. The tone is certainly mysterious at this point but there is no hint at her later 'madness' or criminality.

Roberts first introduces Lady Audley to the audience when she is arguing with Alice Audley (usually Alicia), her husband's adult daughter:

*SCENE THIRD:- Library at Audley Court; at c. large bay window opening into garden; view of Well at back; picture covered with cloth on chair.*

*LADY AUDLEY discovered at work, Alice reading.*

*LADY A: Alice?*

*ALICE: Yes, Lady Audley. (closing book)*

*LADY A: Lady Audley! Your formality freezes me. Why not Lucy?*

*ALICE: I don't know; it seems more natural to-*

*LADY A: Reject my affection when I offer it? Come, come, Alice ... why should we quarrel? You look upon me as an intruder; I'm sorry for it. In marrying Sir Michael, I never contemplated robbing you of your father's love.*

*ALICE: You could not, if you would. (engaged with book)*

*LADY A: Of course not; all I have to ask of you in return is not to injure me.*

*ALICE: Injure you! Lady Audley, how should I injure you?*

*LADY A: By seeking to deprive me of his affection.*

*ALICE: It would be idle to attempt so much. Your own act alone could wrest that from you.*

*LADY A: Now Alice, Alice, that is a roundabout way of saying I am deceitful. I am quite aware I am no better than other people, but it is not my fault if I am pleasanter, Alice. It's - it's - constitutional. (pause) Well, I must use my influence with your cousin, and try and get him to reconcile us (Roberts 31).*

The tone in this scene is very ominous and it hints significantly at the disquiet which will grow between Lady Audley and Alice as the play develops. Lady Audley's suggestion to Alice that she is trying to sabotage her so far happy marriage with Sir Michael is a very bold comment, to which Alice responds with equal brazenness by saying that only Lady Audley could deprive herself of her father's love. As Lady Audley says, this is a more polite way of saying that she is deceitful. Alice distrusts Lady Audley from very early on in the play, as the discussion of Brougham's opening revealed, and as such the audience is being encouraged to be suspicious of Lady Audley



from very early on and there are clear messages being sent that Lady Audley is the antagonist to Robert Audley's protagonist.

Hazelwood first introduces the audience to Lady Audley after Phoebe and Luke Marks have been discussing her, as is also the case in Suter's adaptation. Hazelwood's stage directions for his 1863 play are far more detailed than Suter's and they reveal a great deal about how Lady Audley and Sir Michael's relationship should be viewed by the audience:

*Enter SIR MICHAEL AUDLEY, a grey-headed gentleman of 70, arm in arm with LADY AUDLEY, supposed to be about 24.*

*LADY A [to SIR MICHAEL].* Come along, come along my dear Sir Michael, you shall have no rest today. I'll take you all over the park and grounds, to see all the festivities I've arranged in honour of my dear husband--my pet--my treasure--my only joy! [*Patting his cheeks.*

*SIR MICHAEL.* Bless you, my dear, bless you! What a happy old man you make me! The last two years of my life have been a new existence; with you, my second wife, all is bliss, and domestic happiness--you make this earth heaven to me. The first Lady Audley made it the other place! Ah! I wish we had met thirty years ago.

*LADY A.* Thirty years ago? Why, my dear Sir Michael, I was not born then.

*SIR MICHAEL.* Then you ought to have been--on purpose to have saved me from making a fool of myself with a woman who only married me for my money, and measured her love for me according to the measure of my acres (Hazelwood Act One, no page numbers).

As with Suter's first scene to feature Lady Audley, the relationship between Lady Audley and Sir Michael seems to be one of domestic bliss from the tone and the language that they use when speaking to one another. However, the stage directions which reveal that Sir Michael is meant to be a grey-haired gentleman in his seventies and that Lady Audley is only twenty-four years old sends a strong message to the audience, and the reader that their relationship might not be based on mutual physical attraction, but for financial or social benefit instead on the part of Lady Audley. The audience already knows from Luke and Phoebe Marks' opening dialogue that Lady Audley has 'humble origins' and is not from the same echelons of society as her new husband. The audience does not however know from Luke and Phoebe Marks' exposition that Lady Audley's husband is over three times her age and is old enough to be her grandfather. The sight of the beautiful, blonde Lady Audley next to her elderly, grey husband might even make his appearance look all the frailer and therefore vulnerable, setting him clearly as her victim, whom she has easily manipulated in order to secure her fortune and her social standing. Lady Audley is shown to be easily influenced by money and could therefore be viewed as shallow and superficial and is also to be viewed with caution.

Brougham's first scene to feature Lady Audley shows Lady Audley meeting members of local society, who are all greatly impressed with her beauty, charm and polish:

*SIR M:* Here she is! – here comes my heart's treasure!  
(Enter Lady Audley. D.R. U.E.- very splendid morning costume, - profusion of jewelry.)  
I believe you know every body but my good friend. Mrs Oakleigh and her daughter let me present you, - Lady Audley; - Mrs Oakleigh – Miss Oakleigh!  
*MRS O:* My dear Lady Audley, - I must say, that, for once, realisation outcries report.-  
*LADY A:* A little delicate flattery, dear Mrs Oakleigh yet, I am sure you are sincere, for something attracts me towards you in my own despise, similar natures are irresistibly drawn towards each other, are they not, Doctor? (holds her hand out to the Dr at the same time turning to and looking up in Sir Michael's face)  
*DR. P:* (advancing, takes her hand) Undoubtedly, Lady Audley...  
*MRS O:* (to Mrs Dr) Certainly, a most charming person!  
(Brougham *The Mystery of Audley Court* 18-19)

Again, Sir Michael dotes on Lady Audley and appears to be enthralled by her making him appear to be her victim. However, this impression is only gained because of the opening scene featuring Robert Audley reading Alicia's letter informing him of her father's marriage in highly derisory terms. In this scene, she seems to be the delight of the neighbourhood charming everyone she meets. As such, the audience is unsure who to trust as Alicia's letter in the opening scene could be prejudiced by her own jealousy; however, Lady Audley could also have significant powers of manipulation enabling her to charm everyone.

There are four key instances in the plays in which Lady Audley's culpability is questionable for a nineteenth-century audience member, as well as to a twenty-first century reader. These scenes are arguably proto-feminist, the term 'arguably' is used here because it depends how the dramatist and, indeed, the director approached the scene. Analysis of these scenes can reveal whether the dramatist approached the original novel with a view to expunging or enhancing the germinal proto-feminist elements. In the novel, these scenes are key to the reader's understanding of Lady Audley, especially in respect of how she reacts and what she says. These points in the novel indicate to the reader that although her sanity is questionable, and therefore also her culpability, she has been driven to these acts by a prejudiced, misogynistic society and by a man who constantly hounds her threatening to reveal her true identity, an identity she was forced to assume after another man treated her cruelly by abandoning her and their child to fate.

Arguably the most proto-feminist scene of the novel does not directly appear in any of the stage adaptations, nor does it even directly feature in the novel, it is only described or referred to. The instant is when Lady Audley decided to leave her old life as Mrs George Talboys and assume the identity of Lucy Graham, analysing it contributes to our understanding of Lady Audley as either

culpable or inculpable. In this moment Lady Audley is described as she was before she set out on her assumed life, before George Talboys abandoned her and their child, and how she felt after she had done this. In the novel, she explains the circumstances she was left in after George's desertion:

His father was rich; his sister was living in luxury and respectability; and I, his wife, and the mother of his son, was a slave allied for ever to beggary and obscurity. People pitied me; and I hated them for their pity (Braddon 300).

She was evidently jealous of her husband's family's seemingly disproportionate affluence and was becoming progressively embittered and, notably, 'fitful', and from a New Historicist perspective behaving in a way that could be said to mirror Charcot's definition of hysteria. However, the reader and, later the audience, is only privileged to a description of Lady Audley aka Helen Maldon given by herself. As the reader and audience know to be mistrustful of Lady Audley from the outset with the title, we have reason to doubt her depiction of her hardship and even her sanity. Braddon's Lady Audley jealously describes her poverty compared to the relative luxury of her husband's family saying that she was in such dire circumstances that she started to suffer with 'fits of desperation' and she describes the exact moment that she decided to turn her back on her old life:

At last these fits of desperation resolved themselves into a desperate purpose. I determined to run away from this wretched home which my slavery supported. I determined to desert this father who had more fear of me than love for me. I determined to go to London, and lose myself in that great chaos of humanity (Braddon 301).

Despite the intensity of her emotion expressed in the first quotation, when she describes the build-up to her assumption of the role of Lucy Graham, the impoverished, orphan governess, and that she was experiencing "fits of desperation", she uses the word 'determined' repeatedly. 'Determined' implies that there was thought behind the act. Although the words she used at the beginning of the monologue imply a crisis of emotion and indeed she does state that after the birth of her son, George, she fell prey to the same "crisis which had been fatal to [her] mother" (Braddon 300). She uses the terms 'fits' and 'fitful' too which could indicate that Braddon wanted the reader to believe that Lady Audley was in poor health, either mentally, or physically, or perhaps even both. 'Fits of desperation' might mean that she was experiencing moments where she was unable to control her emotions, as referred to by Hansson and Norberg (443). However, if she was actually just acting 'mad' then Lady Audley could be read as a depiction of a 'bad', or even degenerate person. This supports Pykett's opinion that Lady Audley manipulated stereotypically female characteristics to achieve her own ends: "[Lady Audley] perform[s] the masquerade of the domestic angel to achieve her own ends" (Pykett "Sensation and New Woman Fiction" 136). However, the use of 'determined' does mean that she had 'reached a decision', and that her abandonment of Georgey was a considered action. It was not the act of a 'mad' woman. Instead, it could be the action of a woman pushed to the edge, who was suffering from what might today

be diagnosed as postnatal depression. According to the NHS the main symptoms of postnatal depression include “feeling that you're unable to look after your baby, problems concentrating and making decisions ... feeling agitated, irritable or ... feelings of guilt, hopelessness and self-blame, difficulty bonding with your baby with a feeling of indifference and no sense of enjoyment in his or her company, frightening thoughts – for example, about hurting your baby” (NHS Conditions Postnatal Depression). Whilst today we would not describe postnatal depression as 'madness' but would definitely concur that it was a type of mental illness, these symptoms experienced during the nineteenth century's years of mass public vocal contention regarding 'madness' might well have been diagnosed as 'madness' or as Lady Audley diagnoses them "fits of desperation" (Braddon 301).

Braddon's Lady Audley tells Robert about her fear of inheriting her mother's madness, however she does also state that she had not shown any sign of insanity until her son was born. A further argument to support the notion that Lady Audley is 'acting mad' is the circumstance of her confession. She ultimately confesses at Robert's feet after he has hounded her and tracked her into a corner, so it is possible that Braddon was attempting to create the impression that Lady Audley was simply saying what Robert wanted to hear as she might suspect that Robert hopes she is mad as it would save his family from the shame of a public court case.

If she is consciously acting 'mad' in order to avoid punishment as Robert suspects, then Lady Audley's culpability is confirmed. Robert Audley certainly doubts Lady Audley's madness, considering that she might be feigning madness strategically. Women have been considered to be "natural actresses" due to their necessary compliance to the socially imposed stereotyped image of femininity (Byerly 55) and Robert already knew Lady Audley had the talent to act having discovered her real identity. Henderson comments on this issue too suggesting that Lady Audley was not just acting mad for Robert Audley but also for Dr Mosgrave:

Lady Audley is at once a clinical case and a theatrical display, a madwoman and an actress”, performing madness for Mosgrave. [and] Lady Audley's Secret is itself a play: I do not see an actress playing an actress playing mad, I see an actress playing her dramatic art as did the Pre-Raphaelites and Braddon herself for visual and literary art respectively (Henderson 15).

Here Henderson supports the idea that Wood intended Lady Audley to be understood to be pretending to be 'mad' in order to conform to the dominant image of femininity at the time that held that women were natural actresses. The image of Lady Audley that Braddon presents, and then later the dramatists, therefore could be intended to be a calculating villainess rather than actually 'mad'. This is because there is proof in Braddon's novel that she made well-considered decisions to commit criminal acts purely to serve her own ends, such as assumed identity, bigamy, attempted murder and arson (Braddon 253). Braddon's intention here appears to be that she intended Lady Audley's decisions to have been made in order to save herself, either from poverty

or from public retribution because she was desperate. As such, they could be viewed as examples of Lady Audley choosing the easiest option and therefore this might also contribute to a reading of her as a moral degenerate, not strong enough mentally or physically to make the right, and often hard, choice.

Suter's Lady Audley certainly appears to have been influenced by moral degeneration theory. We can see this in the scene where she explains to George the moment that she decided to reinvent herself when they are first reunited in the gardens of Audley Court. She recounts the piteous situation she was left in and her consequent actions made to save herself and her child from penury. Whereas, in the novel, this happens towards the conclusion when she is recounting to Robert Audley what happened when she was reunited with George Talboys in the *maison de santé*. Braddon's Lady Audley at this point appears to be almost incensed and is indignant at her treatment by Robert Audley, Suter's Lady Audley is authoritative and assertive:

*LADY A:* Listen to me. After your departure, I vainly sought employment – a wife whom her husband had deserted could not be innocent of all fault – and no one would receive me as the instructress of their children. I was penniless – helpless – hopeless; before me was starvation or a repulsive life of infamy! I shrunk from both and resolved to live anew, and for myself alone. I ceased to be Mrs. George Talboys, forgot even that I had ever been Helen Maldon, and became Miss Lucy Graham... I became Sir Michael's wife... (Suter 34).

The line "a wife whom her husband had deserted could not be innocent of all fault" reveals how strict the Victorian image of idealised womanhood was. Despite the fact that George abandoned her and their child and left her with little money, knowing her to be incapable of earning a decent living, Lady Audley was the one saddled with the blame. No one, apart from Lady Audley, condemns George for leaving his wife and child as he recounts his tale in either the novel or the adapted plays, clear evidence of criticism of Victorian double standards. Lady Audley's dubious madness in this section is debunked with the line "I shrunk from both and resolved to live anew, and for myself alone..." (Suter 34). Suter's speech indicates that he believes that Lady Audley put thought and calculation into her assumption of a false identity, rather than it being a rash act of madness. This was not the act of a lunatic; it was the illegal act of a trapped woman left with few options to support herself. This stance maybe due to the dramatist's own political leanings or experiences. William Edmund Suter<sup>12</sup> (Suter appears to be the spelling of his stage name), as he is recorded in the Births, Marriages, and Deaths Indexes 1851-1901, was an actor and playwright appearing at Sadler's Wells in London as well as being a member of Charles Mathews'

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<sup>12</sup> William Edmund Suter was also a successful playwright most known for writing melodramas and comedies for minor theatres in London. His success was such that his plays continued to be performed in provincial theatres for decades. The Surrey Theatre, London was where many of Suter's plays were performed for their debut performances.

acting company<sup>13</sup>. He knew people like Mary Braddon, who had appeared in one of his plays, *Sarah's Young Man*, in 1856 in the role of Araminta in Suter's one act farce (Carnell 5). Braddon had a liberal, progressive upbringing as her parents had separated when she was five years old when her mother discovered that her father had been having an affair and at seventeen Braddon's started to pursue a career in acting, supported by her mother, in order to contribute to the household income (Beller 27). Suter not only wrote plays for minor theatres, he also contributed articles to magazines at the lower end of the cultural market and was editor of *Bow Bells*, a magazine owned by penny dreadful publisher John Dicks (Carnell 5) indicating an affinity with the pressures and desires of the working classes. His experiences working amongst the lower classes and with liberal people like Braddon might, therefore, have influenced his political opinions. Suter's presentation of Lady Audley as a trapped woman indicates that he might have considered her to be both culpable but also comprehensible as Lady Audley's monologue clearly details the harsh restrictions imposed on her.

George Roberts<sup>14</sup> Lady Audley is calmer and more calculating, or more identifiably 'bad', than Suter's. Roberts has transformed the character into a more credible, even relatable, 'villainess', rather than a replica of an 'evil' stock character. This softening of Lady Audley's explosive anger as seen in the earlier adaptations is presumably the influence of Roberts' chosen leading lady, Louisa Ruth Herbert, who was famous for playing meek roles and 'damsels in distress' instead of villainesses:

*LADY A: Wrong! have not you wronged me? You prate to me of toil and suffering. You do not know the labour that has been my lot for many a weary day. What was my life when you were gone? No helping hand held out to me by your proud family; I, your wife, left to choose 'twixt death and drudgery. I chose the latter, bitter though that choice was. Three years had passed, and I had received no token of your existence, for I knew well had you returned you would have found me under any name, in any place. I argued, I reasoned, and last I*

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<sup>13</sup> Charles James Mathews (1803-1878) was a renowned British actor who later in his career took over the management of the Olympic Theatre in London. He also managed the Theatre Royal, Covent Garden and the Lyceum Theatre.

<sup>14</sup> George Roberts was born Robert Walters in 1832 in London, the son of a barrister. He initially followed into the family profession and worked as a barrister in Oxfordshire before moving to London to pursue his career as a playwright. He pursued his second career whilst living in chambers with five other barristers (cited in Roberts 1863: 5). This dramatisation of Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret* was Roberts' greatest success with productions continuing regularly in Britain throughout the century. In order to avoid a court case similar to that which Braddon experienced over the lack of appropriate copyrighting for her novel, Roberts protected his play by personally overseeing the printed edition of his work. The St James' Theatre, London had a capacity of 1,200 people and was built in 1835. It was demolished in 1957. During the nineteenth-century the predominant theatrical style of the works performed at the theatre was light vaudeville (Davis and Emeljanow 247). It was one of the theatres which commanded a more select audience (Davis and Emeljanow 247) in nineteenth-century London. It became renowned in the mid-nineteenth century for French dramas with Queen Victoria eventually attending one performance. The more select audience might be the reason for the refocusing of the attention on to Robert Audley and Alicia Audley, between whom it is strongly hinted that they will marry.

*justified* myself. I have a right to think that he is no more to me, nor I to him, and why should I let his shadow stand between me and prosperity? (Roberts 39-40).

The language and tone used in this monologue are very direct, designed to make the audience, and George, sympathise with Lady Audley. She spells out point by point every consequence of George's desertion of her and their child in a decisive, considered manner. This coolness indicates that Roberts believed Lady Audley was 'bad' rather than 'mad' at this point, and therefore culpable. There is a tone of accusation in Lady Audley's monologue as though she is telling George 'What did you expect I could do to support myself? You did this to me!' She starts her monologue with an exclamation, "Wrong!", which indicates that her self-control was low as she describes the situation that she was in and the build up to her assuming a new identity and running away. She is recounting very clearly that she made a conscious choice to do 'bad'. The definition of 'bad' or 'evil' is that it is an action that is done consciously, and that pleasure is derived from it. Psychopaths derive pleasure from doing evil, but Lady Audley does not. Instead she's saying, 'what choice did I have?'. Roberts' motivation for this scene might be the theatre itself, which was said to be 'respectable' and therefore was attracting a more middle-class audience. Therefore, by presenting Lady Audley recounting how she rationalised her actions, the audience is being encouraged to view her as culpable. For Roberts, she is culpable because she is sane and therefore criminal. As Roberts' Lady Audley was unused to playing 'villainesses', it is possible that the dramatist approached the adaptation of the character with intention of making Lady Audley a figure with whom sympathy could be found as the actress might not have had the desire to play a wholly disliked character as she was famous for playing 'damsels in distress'.

In Hazlewood's<sup>15</sup> play, Lady Audley is even more controlled, cold and calculating than in Roberts'. She explains how believing herself to have been deserted, she changed her name and became a governess:

*LADY A.* ... not one letter reached my hands; I thought myself deserted, and determined to make reprisals on you; I changed my name; I entered the family of a gentleman as governess to his daughters; became the patient drudge for a miserable stipend, that I might carry my point--that point was to gain Sir Michael Audley's affections; I did so, I devoted all my energies, all my cunning, to that end! and now I have gained the summit of my ambition, do you think I will be cast down by you, George Talboys? No, I will conquer you or I will die! ... I have fought too hard for my position to yield it up tamely. Take every jewel, every penny I have and leave

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<sup>15</sup> The dramatist, Colin Henry Hazlewood, was born in 1823 and started his career as a low comedian on the Lincoln, York and other provincial stages. He eventually progressed into writing and wrote stories for some penny weekly publications. Hazlewood wrote mainly for the Britannia and Pavilion Theatres and was paid about fifty shillings an act (about £100 today), with a bonus if the play was successful. He was the Britannia's most prolific contributor and his major successes were his adaptations of Braddon's *Aurora Floyd* and *Lady Audley's Secret*. He died in London in 1875 aged fifty-two.

me! ... I am no longer the weak confiding girl you first knew me, no, I am a resolute woman--and where I cannot remove an obstacle I will crush it (Hazlewood Act 1: Scene 1 no page numbers).

Here Lady Audley admits to plotting to marry Sir Michael as part of a long-hatched plan to marry a rich husband casting her as a melodramatic villainess in this play. She even admits to becoming a governess purely with the intention of this career putting her in the way of marrying a highly eligible suitor. This is a diversion from the novel and not a change that any of the other adaptations make. Hazlewood's motivation for this change might be the theatre itself. By presenting a scene where Lady Audley recounts how she rationalised her actions, the audience is being encouraged to view her as culpable. For Roberts, she is culpable because she is sane and therefore a criminal. In modern parlance she could easily be called a 'gold digger' for this behaviour. She tells Talboys that she did this to 'make reprisals' on him, meaning that she intended to hurt him for hurting her. Hazlewood's Lady Audley, is not a trapped, frightened, naive, little girl; she is "a resolute woman" who saved herself from dependent poverty. She even tries to bribe George in this play, reminding him of her newly obtained wealth. It is only when her bribe fails that she realizes that she will have to get rid of George another way. In other words, this is further evidence to support the argument that Lady Audley is a murderess and is sane and a criminal. Suter's Lady Audley also attempts to bribe Robert and as such both dramatists seem to be criminalising Lady Audley at this point and therefore making her recognisably culpable to the audience. Hazlewood wrote largely for the Britannia Theatre in London, where Charles Dickens was a regular visitor. Given Dickens' interest and, even work, in the theatre it is possible that they might have been known to each other. However, given Hazlewood's vilification of Lady Audley, there is no obvious sympathy for the character's plight which could be said to mirror the same concern Dickens felt for the working classes and is expressed in novels like *Oliver Twist* (1838), *David Copperfield* (1850) and *Little Dorrit* (1857). However, this difference might be purely a consequence of Hazlewood appealing to the type of drama appreciated at The Royal Victoria Theatre, London which was "homely melodrama" by the 1860s (Stoneman *Jane Eyre on Stage* 26). However, prior to this due to a change in the theatre's management, the theatre was defined by having a "transpontine theatrical style", which involves a heavy focus on melodrama and in the 1830s the Victoria was said to have "touched new depths in spine-chilling melodrama" (Dickens qtd. in Stoneman *Jane Eyre on Stage* 26), which does indicate that Hazlewood's Lady Audley might well have been an example of the 'spine-chilling' work for which they were famous.

The last stage adaptation, chronologically, by John Brougham (1866) also supports that Lady Audley acted in a calculated manner when she assumed her false identity and ran away from her father and child rather than being mad:

*LADYA*: Letter, - what letter? You left not letter, but fled like a dastard, leaving me penniless, friendless, - hopeless! - The abandoned wife finds little pity from the charitable world, in vain I sought for employment, - there



was nothing before me but starvation, or a life of infamy. – I shrunk from both, determined to blot out the past for ever, and under a new name began the world again as Lucy Graham. – I went into a family as Governess, and toiled there for a miserable stipend; Sir Michael Audley saw, admired and married me, you now know everything; and to all this, let me add that I will never give up the wealth and splendour I have obtained; therefore, if you are wise you will forget me and go! (Brougham *The Mystery of Audley Court* 61 - 62).

Again, the language here appears to have been 'recycled' from the earlier plays, Suter's specifically, as there are many similarities in the accusations that she throws at her newly returned husband. The similarities between the language in the two plays might indicate that Brougham had seen Suter's play when it was produced in 1863. However, the rest of the play is so different that it is more likely that this shared lexicon originates with some shared source, which is the novel. However, both adaptations present Lady Audley as being 'rescued' by Sir Michael. It is not her intention in either play to deliberately set out to ensnare Sir Michael, which is not the case for Hazlewood. Hazlewood's Lady Audley sets out to win herself a 'better' second husband than her first as she does not want to return to her life as a governess or back to being penniless, helpless and friendless. After her husband's abandonment of her, she became nameless and lost without a supportive family to rely on or shape her identity. Lady Audley does not set out to seduce Sir Michael in Brougham's adaptation, instead Sir Michael Audley "saw, admired and married" her (Brougham *The Mystery of Audley Court* 61 - 62) implying that she was the object of his affections and was wooed by him rather than that she set out to seduce him in order to make her fortune. In this scene, for Brougham, Lady Audley is a victim thrown around by society suggesting a sensitivity to the character that might be similar to the sympathy that the stage adaptations of *East Lynne* have towards the character of Lady Isabel Vane, which was discussed in the previous chapter. The emphasis is completely different in this scene than in the same scene by Hazlewood, who describes her as 'cunning' three times in this scene at the end of Act One. She is presented clearly as someone who plans their social rise far in advance with Sir Michael as a hapless, ensnared victim. For Brougham, on the other hand, Lady Audley is pictured as the victim as she desperately tries to make a living to support herself. Here, Sir Michael is not ensnared, but is the 'knight in shining armour' to her 'damsel in distress'. He rescues her from toiling for a "miserable stipend" (Brougham *The Mystery of Audley Court* 61-62). Although, George Talboys' revelation that he sent Lady Audley a letter telling her that he would return when he had made his fortune confuses the view of Lady Audley as a victim in Brougham's adaptation as it increases the audience's sympathy for George Talboys and also gets the audience to question how much they believe Lady Audley. Is she telling the truth when she says she did not receive his letter? Did the letter go missing? Did George even actually send a letter? This additional plot point complicates the audience's view of both Lady Audley and George Talboys in Brougham's play. It is the only one to do so. None of the other dramatists mention such a letter. By alluding to this letter, George Talboys is even more exonerated from leaving his wife and child. Lady Audley appears to be even more 'in the wrong'. She seems, to the audience, to be impatient and could be viewed as a greedy

opportunist who was happy to find a new husband, which is evidence of the kind of “ideological disparity” (Williams 3) that we can see taking place in the nineteenth-century stage adaptations of *East Lynne*.

The second key scene in the novel shows Lady Audley stabbing George and pushing him down a well; whilst not directly shown in the novel, it is reported by Lady Audley to Robert when he has taken her to the Belgian asylum. Key to the plot, it is a scene of immense action and energy, propelling the story forward and enabling an examination of Lady Audley's culpability through her actions and comments:

I had prepared myself ... to meet him. I was determined to bribe him, to cajole him, to defy him; to do anything sooner than abandon the wealth and the position I had won, and go back to my old life... He did not know that it was possible to drive me 'mad'. He goaded me as you have goaded me; ... I rose at last, and turned upon him to defy him, as I had determined to defy him at the worst... It was then that I was mad” (Braddon 335).

This is the most dramatic scene in all of the Victorian play versions of *Lady Audley's Secret* and it is clear to see why when the novel is examined. Braddon's use of language indicates that a high level of emotion and suspense was the aim for the mood in this scene. Despite this, it is hard to decipher whether Braddon intended Lady Audley to be culpable or inculpable. She says that she was 'determined' and 'prepared to meet him', but she also explains that she can be goaded to 'madness' and confirms very clearly that she was 'mad' at that moment. In the novel she is certainly placed in the care of a '*maison de santé*', however this is because Robert Audley is eager to believe that Lady Audley is 'mad' as an excuse for her crimes and therefore cannot be taken as proof of her insanity. Lady Audley's lunacy would especially benefit Robert Audley as it would save his family from the shame and attention that a public court case would bring (Braddon 320) as with Rosina Bulwer Lytton, who had been incarcerated in 1858 by her husband, who had evidently arranged for his former wife to be 'taken out of the picture'. She was later released following public outcry (Tomaiuolo 4-5).

Lady Audley's assertion, in Braddon's soliloquy, that she was 'goaded to madness', could simply be a hyperbole or she could genuinely believe that she had indeed been 'goaded to madness'. Attitudes to madness such as this did exist at the time but a twenty-first century perspective on this statement would understand it as a hyperbole. It is also notable in this scene that she stresses strongly that she is prepared to do anything to preserve her status, wealth and position. She does not include preserving the love of Sir Michael for her in the same list, lending further support for her culpability as she reasons her actions on a materialistic level rather than for love.

The Victorian understanding of madness was certainly such that it would not be doubted that extreme mental and physical pressure could drive someone, particularly a woman, mad as was

discussed in the medical contexts section at the beginning of this chapter. In the novel, Lady Audley's allegation is certainly plausible as Dr Mosgrave's later diagnosis of "latent insanity" reveals, he says that "it would only arise under extreme mental pressure" (Braddon 323). Consequently, the novel's depiction of what constitutes madness appears to be that it is something that women can be subject to when pressured more than they are able to cope with. However, for men this does not seem to be the case in the novel as neither Robert nor George suffer the same mental illness as Lady Audley, despite each in their turn suffering similar pressures and stresses. However, if Lady Audley meant that she was merely 'goaded into' losing her self-control because she was extremely angry, then she is 'mad' with rage instead, which is an issue of self-control rather than lunacy. Hansson and Norberg state that by the nineteenth-century, medical understanding of madness had developed so that there was a "belief in an intimate relationship between women's bodies and their inability to control their pathologized female expressions of emotion" (443). As such, whilst men could also suffer from madness, women were perceived more often to be the victims of it. Thus, this scene in the original novel indicates that for Braddon, Lady Audley was at this point inculpable of her crimes as an unfair society had pushed her to it.

In Suter's 1863 play, words like 'convulsively', 'fiercely', 'thrusting', 'wild' and 'rapidly' are used frequently in the enactment of this scene. These words indicate that Lady Audley has been pushed to her limits in her desperation to keep her past life a secret and as such this is very similar to Henderson's earlier reference to the *Illustrated London News* that Roberts' Lady Audley is a woman "prompted to crime by hereditary insanity and untoward circumstances, and therefore impelled by both external and internal motives" (Henderson 15) and as such Henderson's comments also apply to Suter's Lady Audley. The stage directions indicate that Lady Audley has reached a peak of emotion:

*LADY A:* (advancing fiercely towards TALBOYS) I defy you – I defy you! denounce me to Sir Michael, I will declare you to be a madman, or a liar, ... farewell. (is hurrying off L.U.E. – TALBOYS follows, seizes her by the wrist, and drags her back)

*TALBOYS:* You go not yet.

*LADY A:* (shaking him off) You have bruised my wrist! (again thrusting her hand beneath her dress) ...

*LADY A:* Ah! (with a wild exclamation she suddenly brings her hand holding the poniard from her dress; turns rapidly on TALBOYS and stabs him; he utters a cry; staggers back against the wall of the well; the wall gives way with a crash, and he disappears, falling down into the well (Suter 35-36).

Suter's Lady Audley mirrors Braddon's here by saying that she will tell everyone that Talboys is 'mad', although in the novel it is Robert Audley who Lady Audley threatens. Unlike the novel however Suter's Lady Audley has evidently pre-meditated violence as she had hidden a dagger on her person prior to meeting Talboys. Although, it could be argued that Suter's Lady Audley had 'malice aforethought', the act which, as far as she is aware ends Talboys' life in this scene, is an

act of self-defence after Talboys has attacked her. Whereas in the novel, Lady Audley commits an act which indirectly 'causes a death', by removing the loose iron spindle from the well so that her husband falls in and then by not reacting to his fall. As such in the novel, she is more recognisably criminal as she does more direct action to cause harm.

As Lady Audley's emotions gather momentum; she becomes more and more agitated and more desirous to escape from Talboys. Indicative of her increasing lack of control, Lady Audley is described as 'wild', 'fierce', etc. here in the stage descriptions, Lady Audley's assumed murder of George Talboys is the result of a physical struggle between them as he has grabbed her so firmly that he has bruised her wrist. Although Lady Audley is easily able to lose Talboys' grip on her arm implying that he was not actually using much force, but instead of turning and running away, she decides to stab him. This does not happen in the novel. Braddon's Lady Audley removes the loose iron spindle and does not react to his fall, which are far more indirect actions. Therefore, Lady Audley's actions in Suter's adaptation, could be described as an act of terrified self-defence. During this period, physical punishment was still a legally approved admonishment for errant wives and as such George's physical attempt to restrain Lady Audley would not have been as shocking for a Victorian audience, especially as he was acting under such extreme circumstances. *The Era's* review of Suter's play picks up on Lady Audley's declaration that she was "goaded to madness" and describes Adelaide Calvert's performance highly:

The whole of the interest centres on Lady Audley, which, interpreted by Mrs. C. Calvert, is worthy of the highest praise. In the earlier scenes, she is charming in her manner, and later, where she is goaded to madness, she plays with a thrilling intensity (*The Era*, Sunday 14 June 1863, p12).

This review reveals that Suter's approach was that Lady Audley was indeed 'goaded to madness' as the reviewer directly states that that was the case.

George Roberts' approach to staging this scene also appears to be that Lady Audley committed the act in the heat of a physical struggle. However, the most brutal actions are not directly shown:

*TALBOYS*: I swear, if there is but one witness of your identity living, and that witness were removed from Audley Court, by the width of the whole earth, I would bring him here to swear to, and denounce you. (*MARKS* creeps in and watches, as *LADY AUDLEY* and *TALBOYS* are hidden from audience)  
*MARKS*: (in a low voice) She defies him! who'd a thought there was the devil's spirit in that lily face? He threatens her; she follows him – he turns again – a last word, no! a curse of bitter hate! and now his back is turned (with horror) Ha! (retires quickly by side door)  
*LADY AUDLEY* re-enters hurriedly – her face is deadly pale – she casts an anxious look back, covers her face, then comes down (Roberts 41).

There is a long history of violent actions taking place off stage because it is both easier to stage and also because the audience's imagination is more easily able to conjure up images of horrendous deaths than the stage is able to produce. In this scene, the stage descriptions and Luke's reported speech indicate that the action taking place is criminal and that it was performed in a fast-paced, rushed, heated manner, almost like a dance, as Luke Marks emerges on stage with Talboys at exactly the same time that Lady Audley is carefully choreographed off it. The fact that Luke witnesses Lady Audley's attempted murder of George Talboys is important as it gives him the material to blackmail her later in the play. It is advantageous for Luke Marks to report the crime, rather than Phoebe Marks, as it gives him direct control over Lady Audley. He manipulates the opportunity to his advantage and blackmails her. That it is Luke and not Phoebe, her servant, who witnesses Lady Audley's crime is convenient because as a criminal, the audience suspects that he will do so. The audience has been encouraged to think that something like this will happen since Act One: Scene Two when they first met Marks at which point, he expressed his jealousy of Lady Audley's recent social promotion (Roberts 28). In this way, it is clear to see that for Roberts the criminal in the story is Luke Marks, not Lady Audley.

In the novel, the action is also not directly presented as Lady Audley reports it, although this is sometime after the event. The reason that in both the novel and in Roberts' play the attempted murder was not directly shown might be a result of audience sensitivity at seeing a woman committing murder as this is undeniably an extreme transgression of the Victorian ideal of the 'angel in the house' (Patmore 1854). Although, this might also be due to the constraints of stagecraft as an artistic medium, where the practicality of actually staging the scene is too difficult to surmount. However, by choosing not to stage the scene, this allows the audience's imagination to fill in the gaps of the omitted scene. Braddon's Lady Audley is aware of the difference between plotting a terrible crime and actually committing one as this quotation demonstrates:

My worst wickednesses have been the result of wild impulses, and not of deeply-laid plots. I am not like the women I have read of, who have lain night after night in the horrible dark and stillness, planning out treacherous deeds, and arranging every circumstance of an appointed crime (Braddon 253).

In this scene, Lady Audley debates setting light to the inn in order to get rid of Robert Audley and Luke Marks at the same time. Braddon analyses the difference in society's stance on crimes of passion versus premeditated murder. Ethically the end results of both are the same, however society treats them very differently. Particularly if the crime of passion arose from extreme circumstances such as self-defence from rape or assault. In the novel there is a different understanding of 'evil' than the understanding that society had of it, as it could be easily argued that Lady Audley's 'evil' acts, attempted murder and arson, were acts committed under duress and yet all of the characters in the novel condemn her. Lady Audley does not enjoy committing her 'evil' acts, which Duntley and Buss argue is an important element when defining something

as 'evil' (Duntley and Buss 111). Thus, Braddon's Lady Audley, although described as 'evil' in the novel by the other characters, is not recognisably 'evil' for the reader. However, it is still possible that Lady Audley is 'mad', but that she is experiencing a lucid period as 'mad' people are not permanently deluded. This might also explain why she is able to recognise her 'wild impulses' and the fact that she can recognise the moral difference between people with poor self-control and more devious people who plan ahead to commit evil acts, as she does this just hours before she goes on to commit a seemingly pre-meditated act. This complicates her culpability further. The reader therefore doubts whether she did pre-meditate the act, or whether it was an impulse and consequently any trust in her is shaken.

Additionally, this section raises issues regarding what Braddon meant by 'wickednesses' and 'wild impulses'. Is Braddon's understanding of 'wickedness' and 'wild impulse' gender specific? Hansson and Norberg suggest that these concepts could be. They state that by the Victorian era

An increasing number of newspaper reports of female madness and criminality were published, strengthening the association between women's lack of emotional control and insanity. The fictional equivalents of these women criminals appear in the sensational plots and, even if the characters do not always commit murder, their unbridled emotions make them socially disruptive (Hansson and Norberg 443).

From a New Historicist perspective, Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret* could be reflecting this contemporary discourse, admittedly going further by having Lady Audley attempt murder and arson. In this inner monologue, Lady Audley debates whether she can actually make the jump from simply thinking about doing wrong to performing wrong deeds. As with the previous chapter looking at the nineteenth-century stage adaptations of Wood's *East Lynne*, it is interesting to consider how the stage adaptations approached staging a character's thought process. In this section of the novel, Lady Audley is clearly trying to work out what to do about the obstacle in her life that is Robert Audley but the thought process shown in this scene does not always make it into the stage adaptations. This is despite the fact that externalising thought is a melodramatic trope (Poore 'I have been true' 160). The fact that this scene does not transfer to the plays might be due to the dramatists worrying about how to stage the scene, although a soliloquy or monologue would work to achieve this. Returning to the novel, the fact that Braddon's Lady Audley is considering in depth the moral difference between thinking and acting suggests that she is not 'mad' as she is still in control of her actions and decision making. She does not cast herself as a villainess but knows that the action she intends to commit in order to keep her identity a secret would really make her one. Lady Audley views these women as very different to her because they have lain awake plotting their crimes which does indicate that she sees a real difference in being bad and doing wrong by accident. This relates to the twenty-first century view of badness and madness that they are different states of being rather than the Victorian concept that they were

on a spectrum and were closely related. As such Braddon could also be testing these publicly discussed scientific concepts in her configuring of the character.

Both Suter and Roberts present Lady Audley as a woman who has been pushed to the edge of her limits at this point. There is one key difference in that Roberts masks the key moment from the audience's view by having the murder take place off-stage and having Luke Marks watch and report it taking place. For Roberts, Lady Audley has lost control of her more civilised self and she lashes out in the only way she can think of in order to defend herself. At this point she is probably somewhere in between being 'mad' and 'bad' and is definitely not pretending to be 'mad'. She has broken under the strain of maintaining her second identity and under the pressure that Talboys was putting on her to confess her crimes.

Hazlewood's approach to staging the murder scene is more sinister and Lady Audley's actions appear more deliberate as she tricks George into thinking she is ill so that she can get him to turn his back in order to attack him and push him down the well:

[GEORGE goes up, and as his back is turned she goes to the well, takes off the iron handle, and conceals it in her right hand behind her--aside.] It is mine! that is one point gained--now for the second. [Aloud, pretending faintness.] Water, water, for mercy's sake! [GEORGE comes down.] My head burns like fire!

George. This is some trick to escape me; but I will not leave you.

LADY A. I do not wish you. Stoop down and dip this in the well, [gives him her white handkerchief] that I may bathe my throbbing temples. [GEORGE takes handkerchief and goes to well.] ... Quick, quick! [LADY AUDLEY creeps up behind him unperceived. LADY Audley [striking him with the iron handle]. It is indeed--die! [Pushes him down the well, the ruined stones fall with him.] He is gone--gone! and no one was a witness to the deed! ... [exulting]. Dead men tell no tales! I am free! I am free! I am free!--Ha, ha, ha! [Raises her arms in triumph, laughing exultingly-- LUKE looks on, watching her as the drop falls (Hazlewood Act One: Scene One no page numbers).

Hazlewood's approach to Lady Audley is very much to present her as the archetypal stereotype of a villainess and she even uses clichés like her comment that "Dead men tell no tales" – (Hazlewood Act One: Scene One no page numbers). This is the only play to use such language and might be an attempt to relate to the audience by using colloquial language. It is evident that she had premeditated the attack as she takes the iron handle and pretends that she needs some water by manipulating the idealised view of femininity as weak and fragile in order to catch him offguard and attack him. Hazlewood, like Suter, moves away from the novel by having Lady Audley commit an unprovoked act of violence (Suter's Lady Audley stabs Talboys), but unlike in any of the other adaptations, Lady Audley positively exults in the violence she is capable of by laughing

wildly. This personification of her is also the first one to present her as recognisably evil because she is deriving pleasure from committing evil acts. However, her hysterical laughter, if it is to be interpreted like that rather than adhering to the stereotype of the villainess, supports the reading of her as 'mad' and again raises issues of her culpability. However, she might be a combination of both. Whilst she seems cool, calm and collected earlier in the scene as she attempts to find a way to be rid of George Talboys, her behaviour and her mood quickly escalate. Once she believes he is dead, she is 'exulting' and 'triumphant' and even laughs. This kind of behaviour does not match the profile of a criminal murderer. It is more fitting for someone who is not mentally balanced and matches the symptoms of hysteria detailed by Scull (93). This is the closest that the plays come to presenting any obviously 'mad' behaviour from Lady Audley. This might be because Hazlewood's play at the Royal Victoria Theatre, London might have needed to provide more drama, more tension and more violence because of the theatrical tastes of the audience. Hence, this 'black and white' approach has resulted in not only the obviously villainous Lady Audley but also the heroic Robert Audley, who needs to not only rescue his friend but reveal his new aunt's identity in order to rescue his family's reputation.

In Brougham's play, Lady Audley reaches a climax of intense emotion screaming at George after their physical confrontation:

*LADY A: (with a scream of rage) Ah! Will you? Will you? (chord) (she draws a dagger from her waist and stabs George Talboys, who, with an exclamation staggers backwards to L. ...*  
*LADY A: He brought it on himself, for he set my brain on fire! – but with him all my fears are buried: - Fate, I defy thee! (She looks again down into the well, then hurries off, R.) (Brougham *The Mystery of Audley Court* 63-64).*

Brougham, who had been sensitive and sympathetic to Lady Audley's plight earlier in the play, also has Lady Audley stab George Talboys. Given Brougham's play was written three years after Suter, it is possible that he has borrowed this plot point from Suter. Brougham's Lady Audley does not need to push Talboys into the well, he falls in after she has stabbed him and as such Brougham's Lady Audley commits a far more direct attempt at murder than in Roberts and Hazelwood. Lady Audley had also brought a dagger to her meeting implying that she may have pre-meditated violence between them, and possibly the murder too. Further to this suggestion of her criminal culpability is that she immediately tries to rationalise her actions by saying that he "brought it on himself, for he set [*her*] brain on fire!" (Brougham *The Mystery of Audley Court* 63-64). This parallels Braddon's Lady Audley who tells Robert Audley that George Talboys deserved his fate at her hands because he "goaded" her (Braddon 335). This suggests that she was pushed to her actions and that she was not happy to commit them; it could also suggest that she was not mentally balanced at the time. Ultimately the stage directions state that Lady Audley 'screams with rage', which indicates that Brougham intended for her lack of sanity in this moment to be viewed as an explosion of her pent-up emotions. She states that with Talboys all of her "fears are buried"



(Brougham *The Mystery of Audley Court* 63-64), so her scream might not be simply a scream of rage but also a scream of fear too suggesting that she feels trapped and is therefore doing whatever she can to save herself. Brougham's characterization of Lady Audley is by far the most complex of all the dramatists' approaches to adapting the novel and her culpability in this scene is highly complicated by her premeditated thought to bring a dagger with her to the meeting versus her comments that Talboys set her mind on fire.

Brougham's play was written for Astley's Theatre, which Charles Dickens writes about it in *Sketches by Boz* (1836). He states that Astley's was a suitable venue for young respectable families to attend an entertainment (Dickens 270-273). Evidently from the fact that there are literary references to the theatre, Astley's Theatre was very popular. The actresses that Astley's was able to afford were rising stars, such as, Sophie Young, who was very well known at that point even before taking over the management of Astley's Theatre for that season. Despite the thirty-year gap between Dickens' reference to the theatre and Brougham's adaptation the theatre had not changed much as they continued to put on very similar shows. Therefore, the respectability of the audience combined with the prestige of the starring heroine might have influenced the more rounded, complex characterisation of Lady Audley.

The third key scene in the novel is the scene where Lady Audley is deciding whether or not to change from making rash, wrong decisions in the spur of the moment to plotting vengeful acts. The action, as such, is merely described. Lady Audley's time in Phoebe's room at the inn is not fully described. It does not contain much inner monologue from which an analysis can be made to decide if she is 'mad' or bad because Lady Audley had arrived at the inn resolved to set it alight (Braddon 253). The actual act of arson is not described in the novel as an obvious and deliberate attempt, it appears to be a mistake and the reader is left in suspense to know if Lady Audley did actually set fire to the inn as it is not certain. This scene is important in the novel and in the plays because it indicates her state of mind when deciding to commit her most criminal and immoral acts:

... a horrible expression came over her face, and she turned the key in the lock... She set the candle on the dressing-table, flung off her bonnet and slung it loosely across her arm; then she went to the wash-stand and filled the basin with water. She plunged her golden hair into this water, and then stood for a few moments in the center of the room looking about her, with a white, earnest face, and an eager gaze that seemed to take in every object in the poorly furnished chamber... My lady smiled as she looked at the festoons and furbelows ...there was something in that sardonic smile that seemed to have a deeper meaning ... She was obliged to place the flaming tallow candle very close to the lace furbelows about the glass, so close that the starched muslin seemed to draw the flame towards it by some power of attraction in its fragile tissue (Braddon 275-276).

This long extract has been provided in this section as the build up to her arson attempt is very revealing. The descriptions of Lady Audley portray her as having a “horrible expression”, “white, earnest face” and a “sardonic smile” (Braddon 275-276). Lady Audley seems to have decided on her actions despite the fact that the muslin seems to be acting under its own volition rather than being controlled by Lady Audley. This implies that Lady Audley is not supposed to be culpable for her crimes here as the blame is shifted onto the muslin and away from her for setting light to the inn. Despite the fact that Braddon is evidently trying to remove the culpability from Lady Audley in this scene, she is acting as though she is guilty with her tortured demeanour and pale complexion. Despite the whiteness of her face, she appears to be fully in control of her senses at this point. However, the metaphor for the muslin being attracted to the candle flame might instead be a metaphor for the control her madness has over her. Despite the fact that Braddon’s scene is full of suspense as she builds to her climax, the plays all ‘reinvent’ this scene to achieve greater theatricality and make the arson attempt more obvious. Suter’s Lady Audley is shown deciding to set light to the inn when she has arrived to pay Luke and Phoebe’s debts:

*LADY A:* Go, I tell you! That which I have to say to Luke is for his ear alone, and I must be certain that you are not within hearing. (Music. – PHOEBE looks wonderingly at LADY AUDLEY, who goes to and opens door, L., signing to PHOEBE, who crosses and goes off – LADY AUDLEY looks after her a moment, and then closes door – advancing) If this old house were burnt to the ground, who would wonder? All would cry, “A fire caused by the landlord in one of his drunken fits, and there would be an end. Once set a-going, how rapidly this old building would be levelled with the earth; and my two enemies shall perish with it. (goes up to door, R.U.E., and looks off) Luke is there, drunk. Robert Audley in yonder chamber. (pointing, and advancing slowly) A light applied to the curtains, the dresses, and the old tapestry in Phoebe’s room – Yes, ‘tis there the fire must commence. (Music – she takes the candle from the table, and slowly and cautiously ascends the stairs on to balcony – stops and listens at the door there). Not a sound. Ah! the key is here in the lock (Suter 49).

This scene is another example of the melodramatic trope of externalising thought (Poore ‘*I have been true*’ 160. Suter’s Lady Audley appears to be in some distress and her brain is working furiously to find a solution. She appears to be rationally weighing up the costs and benefits of setting light to the inn as she processes her idea, or maybe she is realising the full implication of her idea, that it pushes her from “wild impulses” thought of in the heat of the moment to pre-meditated wickedness. Pushing her from being a ‘normal’ person who commits errors by accident to what society would ethically view as an ‘evil’ person. She also seems to be considering how likely she will be to escape recrimination because of Luke’s known negligence and drunkenness. At this point, because she does decide to set light to the inn, she is culpable. She has not committed this error in the heat of the moment. Although, she certainly did not arrive at the inn

with this intention as she does in Braddon's original. She is still completely amoral and could be considered to be criminally bad and in full control of her mind and body. The stage directions reveal that music was played as an accompaniment to this scene, although there is nothing to reveal what the music was or what kind of music with respect to the tone, mood or style. What can be said though is that music was only played in the scenes with great drama and that the music was emotive and related to the tone of the scene.

Roberts' Lady Audley also arrives at the inn without having decided on setting alight to the inn. She seizes on Phoebe's comment regarding her concern for their safety given her husband's drinking causing Lady Audley to ponder:

*LADY A: Burnt in their beds! He sleeps in the front room. Why this old lath and plaster house would burn like tinder in a moment. (pause) Those letters still in his keeping. If I were to – I was not 'wicked' when I was young. My worst crime was the impulse of the hour. Dare I defy him? Dare I? Will he stay his hand now that he has gone so far? Will anything stay it but – but death? (Roberts 56).*

This soliloquy shows Lady Audley hatching a plan but when she realises the implications of acting on her idea, she temporarily stops herself. She realises the ethical difference between premeditated actions and impulses and initially bolts at the idea. She soon decides though that this is the only thing she can do to free herself. What the audience must decide is whether her action is rational, that in order to save herself from being revealed as a bigamist and murderer she must cause someone's death? Also, whether Lady Audley has the right to decide to take any action to save herself after the actions she has already committed, should she just give herself up and face the consequences of the crimes she has already committed? Or do her circumstances exonerate her from any culpability? Robert Audley is certainly an enormous opponent, and in the novel, he is truly horrid to her as he hounds and harasses her constantly. In Suter, Robert Audley also seems to be more intelligent and intuitive than Braddon's characterisation. Suter's Robert Audley questions Talboys from the first about his wife's behaviour (Suter 25-27) as he is immediately suspicious of her (Suter 31 and 32). Suter's Robert Audley also targets Lady Audley very early on and by the end of the first act he has set his eyes on her as being a mystery that he must solve. In Roberts, Hazelwood and Brougham, Robert Audley is the same formidable hero who sets out to restore justice. Despite the fact that he is such a fearsome opponent, none of the plays suggest that Lady Audley is right to act as she does to get rid of him. As in the novel, Robert is a heroic gentleman detective bent on rescuing his family's name and finding out what happened to his friend. Lady Audley is the villain, whether she is 'mad' or 'bad', culpable or inculpable, who needs to be stopped. Roberts' Lady Audley acknowledges that Robert Audley is determined to reveal her and appears to be genuinely puzzled about what will stop him when she says, "Will he stay his hand now he has gone so far?" (Roberts 56). That she assesses him as an opponent whilst also ethically weighing up the action that she is about to take, indicates that Roberts' Lady

Audley is a more cerebral character than Suter's. As with George's murder in Roberts' play, the actual action of setting light to the inn is not staged. Both instances could be due to the technicalities of staging the action, for instance, having the wall of a well give way on impact and setting fire to an inn on stage, or it could be, as suggested earlier, that the transgression from the Victorian idealized image of femininity was considered too great to stage directly.

Hazlewood's approach to staging this key moment is similar to both Suter and Roberts' in that Lady Audley also seizes on Phoebe's comment regarding the dangers of Luke's drinking:

*LADY A* [aside, starting]. The 'house on fire!' A good idea. [Aloud.] Go, go, good Phœbe; if your husband is too far gone to listen to me, I will soon overtake you. Go, go, I say.  
*PHOEBE* [aside]. Whatever can she have to say to Luke.  
[Exit, L.--Music  
*LADY A.* [looking towards R. door]. I wonder if he sleeps. [Music--she peeps in at R. door, and speaks through Music.] All seems quiet. [Locks R. door.] He's safe. I have but one terrible agent to aid me, and that is fire (Hazlewood Act II: Scene Three no page numbers).

Hazlewood's Lady Audley does not have to think for long about the implications of committing arson, presenting her firmly in the role of villain. She appears to be quite willing to commit any evil act as long as it serves her purpose. She is highly culpable for her crimes as she appears to simply accept Phoebe's casually made remark regarding the safety of the inn when Luke drinks heavily. Although this is another diversion from the novel's plot, as with all of the earlier plays, replacing her idea to set light to the inn to when she has arrived there rather than having planned it hours earlier. Brougham returns this scene to Audley Court and back in line with the plot of the novel:

*LADY A:* Let me think, let me think, I can't think for thought is madness! in his power to – What is to be done?  
(Xs to R corner and back to C.) Oh that I could see them both burnt in their beds. (she throws herself a slight pause) Might they not be? (starts up) ... Burnt in their beds – what more likely than that "This drunken Ruffian might in his carelessness set the crazy place on fire – the night is dark and stormy, its not far to Mount Stanning I should not be missed  
(takes money from box on table) Yes – yes – anything rather than go back to my old life of poverty (Brougham *The Mystery of Audley Court* 114 - 115).

Brougham's Lady Audley, as does Roberts', hesitates initially when realising that she can get rid of both Luke Marks and Robert Audley by committing arson. However, she continues on her mission after justifying her actions to herself. Lady Audley does consider the implications thoroughly before committing her actions in Brougham's adaptation, making her thoroughly culpable. Although her desperation to escape from Robert Audley's crusade to reveal her true

identity is positively palpable, she is ultimately culpable at this moment as she is fully in control of her senses. Whilst she is culpable, her frustrations and consequently her actions are to a degree comprehensible because she has been pushed into a corner by first, her husband who abandoned her and then, by Robert Audley who is obsessed by revealing her identity. This more complex version of Lady Audley is another indication of Brougham's realism. Additionally, Brougham includes scene where her mind fluctuates in the adaptation between being entirely rational, as in this scene, and 'wild', as in the thunderstorm scene when she cowers like a frightened dog (Brougham *The Mystery of Audley Court* 51-53). This Lady Audley appears to suffer from mental and emotional extremes, which she struggles to control as is suggested by her line "I can't think for thought is madness!" (Brougham *The Mystery of Audley Court* 114). Her response when threatened is to save herself anyway possible as she vows to do 'anything' in order to escape having to 'go back to [her] old life of poverty' (Brougham *The Mystery of Audley Court* 115). She is evidently experiencing an emotional crisis as her language is fragmented and disjointed. For instance, she repeats the word 'yes' several times as she makes up her mind to set light to the inn. That she appears so distressed when deciding how to act implies that she is aware of the consequences and is also not taking any pleasure in her actions and she is therefore not acting recognisably 'mad', even from a Victorian perspective. Although as she reaches a climax in her thoughts, she grows more distressed and wilder and she eventually "crouches down" and laughs wildly (Brougham *The Mystery of Audley Court* 115), which is stereotypical madwoman behaviour. It is also animalistic behaviour, with connotations of savagery as well. Arriving at the inn determined to set the place alight, she is then stopped by Robert appearing. He was lying in wait for her after Alicia visited him earlier on in order to warn him of her concerns regarding Lady Audley's intentions (Brougham *The Mystery of Audley Court* 123). Therefore, Brougham is the only dramatist to show Lady Audley pre-meditating her crime making her a criminal. Whereas Suter, Roberts and Hazlewood all show Lady Audley quickly deciding to get rid of her problem as an easy solution to her problem.

The behaviour of the different Lady Audleys can be summarised as follows until this point. Suter's Lady Audley has gone from being a woman committing bad acts to a woman unable to control her emotions as the plot has unfolded as has Roberts' Lady Audley. But neither characterisation of Lady Audley appears to be mad yet. Whereas, Hazlewood's Lady Audley up to this point has demonstrated the most obvious harsh criminal behaviour. On the other hand, Brougham's Lady Audley has displayed the most out of control, or arguably mad behaviour, with her earlier comment after attempting to kill Talboys that 'he had set her brain on fire' (Brougham *The Mystery of Audley Court* 63-64). Therefore, the final scene is the last opportunity to verify the truth of her sanity.

The final scene in all of the plays ends either with Lady Audley collapsing or, as in Hazlewood and Suter, dying. In the source text Lady Audley is forced to confess her crimes to Robert Audley after he escaped the fire at the inn. She then reveals to him and Sir Michael that she has always been afraid of inheriting her mother's 'madness'. She confirms to them both that she is living

under an assumed name and is married to Sir Michael bigamously. Sir Michael asks Robert to look after Lady Audley as he had loved her. Robert sends for a mental health specialist doctor hoping that the doctor will deem her 'mad':

'You would wish to prove that this lady is mad, and therefore irresponsible for her actions, Mr. Audley?' said the physician.

Robert Audley stared wondering at the mad doctor. By what process had he so rapidly arrived at the young man's secret desire. 'Yes, I would rather, if possible, think her mad. I should be glad to find that excuse for her' (Braddon 320).

However, Dr Mosgrave tells Robert that he cannot diagnose insanity because

there is no evidence of madness in anything that she has done. She ran away from her home, because her home was not a pleasant one, and she left it in the hope of finding a better. There is no madness in that... When she found herself in a desperate position, she did not grow desperate. She employed intelligent means, and she carried out a conspiracy which required coolness and deliberation in its execution. There is no madness in that (Braddon 321).

Dr Mosgrave goes further by saying that he does not "think any in England would accept the plea of insanity in such a case as this [*and that*] the best thing that you can do with this lady is to send her back to her first husband; if he will have her" (Braddon 321). Dr Mosgrave notices that Robert is disappointed with his diagnosis and identifies that Robert is withholding further information regarding Lady Audley's behaviour and actions and so encourages Robert to tell him his suspicions regarding George's disappearance. Dr Mosgrave agrees to examine Lady Audley and returns to Robert saying:

'I have talked to the lady,' he said quietly, 'and we understand each other very well. There is latent insanity! Insanity which might never appear; or which might appear only once or twice in a life-time. It would be dementia in its worst phase perhaps: acute mania; but its duration would be very brief, and it would only arise under extreme mental pressure. The lady is not mad; but she has the hereditary taint in her blood. She has the cunning of madness, with the prudence of intelligence. I will tell you what she is, Mr. Audley. She is dangerous!' (Braddon 323).

It's not entirely clear what Dr Mosgrave's diagnosis is. He says, 'the lady is not mad, but she has the hereditary taint in her blood' (Braddon 323). Victorians believed that madness was hereditary (Arnold 221) and this is frequently alluded to or commented on in the novel with a key issue in the novel being whether or not Lady Audley had in fact inherited her mother's curse of 'madness'. Victorian readers might have considered it plausible that she was born weak and therefore made the wrong choices as a result. As such she could be considered to be a degenerate. Alternatively, Dr Mosgrave's 'diagnosis' could be false. He could be misdiagnosing Lady Audley because either

Lady Audley has scared him or because he has told Robert what he wants to hear because Robert is paying Dr Mosgrave for his services. His diagnosis comes as a surprise as before hearing about George's disappearance and Robert's suspicions about Lady Audley, he does not consider her 'mad'. He considers her merely to have committed criminal acts when pushed into a 'desperate position'. He only agrees to examine Lady Audley when hearing of Robert's suspicions regarding George's unknown whereabouts so obviously the thought of a woman potentially murdering a man was madness for Dr Mosgrave. The plays are as complex in their approach to staging Lady Audley's 'madness' as the novel was. The novel, whilst delivering a diagnosis from Dr Mosgrave still leaves the issue of her sanity unresolved. The plays, however, seem to have a more set opinion on whether Lady Audley was 'mad' or 'bad'. The final scene of a play is the writer's last chance to deliver his message so examining these key scenes should enable a clearer analysis of Lady Audley's culpability.

When examined independently of the rest of the play, Suter's final scene indicates that Lady Audley was not 'mad'. Suter's Lady Audley is so determined not to be incarcerated in an asylum that she commits suicide by taking poison. Her suicide could also be viewed as being spurred on by her guilt over her actions:

*LADY A:* (entering tottering, L.) I shall not go to a madhouse – I shall not! I – (seeing TALBOYS and standing petrified) Ah! It is his spirit I – I have seen it in my dreams! but thus – oh! mercy! – mercy

*TALBOYS:* Helen, let it comfort you to know that you have failed in your dreadful purpose – that I pardon you, and will go where you may never more behold me – where I shall be as though I were, indeed, dead to you!

*LADY A:* Talk not to me thus; it is to mock my agony, for I am dying!

*BOTH:* Dying!

*LADY A:* Your threat (to ROBERT) – the madhouse! I have taken poison – death is on me even now! (sinking to the ground) If I had but delayed a few minutes only! – but this torture heaven had reserved for the supreme moment! Oh, agony more terrible than those with which the poison racks my frame! but 'tis almost over. You will not give my memory to infamy? No, you will not dare! – for your own sakes you will not dare! and buried in the grave with her will be "Lady Audley's Secret" – ah!

(half raises herself, presses both hands to her heart, and falls back dead; SIR MICHAEL appears, door, R., and gazes on her with grief and terror; TALBOYS kneels beside her, covering his face with his hands; ROBERT raises his hands towards heaven. Music) Curtain (Suter 62-63).

Lady Audley kills herself in Suter's adaptation, and he is the only dramatist to conclude the play in this way. It is a much more plausible conclusion than Hazelwood and Brougham, both of whom conclude their adaptations with her dying suddenly at the age of twenty-four, as though her madness has suddenly become as fatal as a heart attack. However, in Suter's final scene, she

appears to be asking for pity and Talboys even appears to pity her here. This might be because he has realised his own errors during her final speech. The final tableau is very dramatic with all of the men she has affected surrounding her looking aghast. Phoebe is intriguingly absent in this final scene which follows on from Lady Audley's arson attempt at her inn and the subsequent loss of Phoebe's husband in the fire. Phoebe is as such either understood to be absent because she is arranging the burial of her deceased husband, or because she is choosing to be absent out of principle. If Phoebe possessed long-borne loyalty, then she should be there caring for her former mistress. Consequently it is hard to tell from the behaviour of the other characters in Suter's play whether Suter's final message to the audience is one of pity or sympathy for Lady Audley, but it is interesting that the stage directions state that Sir Michael looks at Lady Audley with "grief and terror" (Suter 63). As stated earlier, the fact that she decided to commit suicide could mean that she feels remorse and therefore decided to end her life, alternatively, she could just feel incapable of facing the consequences of her actions and is therefore choosing to take an easier path, which is definitely one way of interpreting that the character as the previous discussion about contemporary concerns about degeneracy indicates. In addition, there is also the possibility that the threat of the madhouse was so frightful, she preferred to die. This is certainly a distinct option as Victorian madhouses were very bleak places and, of course, in the novel, she is terrified of ending up like her mother, but this is not mentioned in Suter's adaptation. Despite her extreme reaction to being revealed, she does not appear to be unanimously forgiven and says to Robert Audley that he will not reveal her after her death "You will not give my memory to infamy? No, you will not dare!" (Suter 62-63). Immediately prior to Lady Audley's entrance, Robert told George that Lady Audley "confessed her guilt" (Suter 62). Robert stated that he did not believe that she was 'mad' but that, as in the novel, he is going to believe that she is as an excuse for her crimes (Suter 61). It is only when George re-appears that Robert then doubts Lady Audley's sanity:

*ROBERT:* I have mourned you as dead; believed that your wife - but, where have you been? Why did she confess to having slain you, if - oh! can it be true that she is 'mad' indeed (Suter 62).

With this and the cool, calculated manner in which Lady Audley discussed her abandonment of her past life with George and set light to the inn, I believe that Suter's approach to Lady Audley was that she was a 'bad' woman and not a 'mad' woman and was therefore culpable because she has psychopathic tendencies.

Roberts' final scene is more obviously indicative of Lady Audley's 'madness' as she collapses into a trance-like state with Robert saying that "the soul still lingers, but the mind, the mind is gone! CURTAIN" (Roberts 63-64). In Roberts' final scene, Lady Audley's behaviour is certainly wild and uncontrolled before she finally collapses under the mental strain, but she lapses into a catatonic state extremely abruptly and it is unclear what this climax is a consequence of. In the final tableau, Alicia comments on the similarity of Lady Audley's catatonic expression to that captured in the painting of her:



*LADY A: (makes a movement towards TALBOYS as if entreating his compassion, he turns from her) He spurns me now! (to AUDLEY) And you – you have schemed and plotted to a noble purpose. You have your reward, Robert Audley. You have brought your victim to a living grave! (after a look of fury at AUDLEY, she lapses into a fixed stare, as of madness)*

*ALICE: (pointing to LADY AUDLEY) See, see, the look! the look that is in the picture!*

*LADY A: (pressing her head as if in pain – takes a step towards AUDLEY, then stops, and throwing her arms up with a cry) You have conquered a – MAD WOMAN! (she sinks, supported by ALICE and PHOEBE)*

*ALICE: Dead!*

*AUDLEY: Not yet, not yet! The soul still lingers, but the mind, the mind is gone!*

*CURTAIN (Roberts 63-64).*

Robert reveals that she has had some kind of breakdown in his last line. The final tableau with Lady Audley collapsed on the floor held by Alice and Phoebe seems to suggest that she is not repentant and blames Robert Audley for her fate. As such it could be perceived that Roberts' approach to staging Lady Audley was that she was a 'madwoman' driven to her limits by a restrictive, critical and patriarchal society. However, her behaviour in the other key scenes of the play indicates that Lady Audley acted in full control of her senses in a calculated and determined manner, for example, when she deliberates setting alight to the inn, so this does complicate the issue.

Hazlewood's Lady Audley is more recognisably 'mad' and dies from the intensity of her reaction to her confrontation:

*LADY A [vacantly]. But I do not heed. I have a rich husband. They told me he was dead--but no, they lied--see--see, he stands there! Your arm--your arm, Sir Michael. We will leave this place--we will travel. Never heed what the world says--I have no husband but you--none--none! It is time to depart, the carriage is waiting. Come--come--come!*

*GEORGE: What does she mean, Robert?*

*ROBERT: Mean! Do you not see she is mad?*

*OMNES: [retreating from her] mad!*

*LADY A: Aye--aye! [Laughs wildly.] mad, mad, that is the word. I feel it here--here! [Places her hands on her temples.] Do not touch me do not come near me--let me claim your silence--your pity--and let the grave, the cold grave, close over Lady Audley and her Secret.*

*[Falls--dies--Music tableau of sympathy--GEORGE TALBOYS kneels over her. CURTAIN (Hazlewood Act II: Scene Five no page numbers).*

The last scene mirrors Hazelwood's first scene where Lady Audley and Sir Michael are seemingly very happy in their relationship and are besotted with each other. Her illusion conjures up

memories of her relationship with Sir Michael rather than her first marriage to George Talboys. She appears to be experiencing this illusion as a moment of psychosis and indeed Robert Audley confirms this. Rather than pitying her, they seem to be frightened of her as they retreat when Robert states that she is mad. She also self-diagnoses as 'mad', which might reveal that the Victorian understanding of madness was so germinal that people believed that they could self-diagnose. Certainly, medicine was far more self-governed in the Victorian period due to the cost of employing a doctor. People readily treated their own ailments by purchasing 'over the counter' curatives or by making herbal remedies themselves (Goodman 276). However, it could simply be hyperbole and an indication that she is merely 'acting' the stereotypical role of madwoman with her wild gestures and hollow laughter. Hazelwood also ends Lady Audley's life with 'death by acute madness', like she has experienced a heart attack or stroke. Rather than it being that Hazelwood believed that death by madness was possible, instead it is more likely that this is dramatic feature. It is easier for Hazelwood to conform to the conventions of melodrama by killing off Lady Audley this way as it neatly restores justice. Lady Audley is more obviously a 'mad' villainess in this play than in any of the others and this is because Hazelwood approached his adaptation as a melodrama rather than a story of women's suffering. For Hazlewood, Lady Audley is wholly culpable and is an evil villainess.

The final scene in Brougham's play is in line with his approach to the character in the other key scenes. Lady Audley says that she is 'mad' or uses synonyms, for example, 'set my mind on fire', etc. frequently as in George Talboys' murder scene, but ultimately her behaviour is controlled and considered as was her decision to set alight to the inn. Here she declares herself a 'madwoman' and then says that they have all goaded her to it:

*LADY A:* Yes a madwoman! When you say that I killed George Talboys, you say the truth. (general movement) I killed him because I am mad – He – you – all of you goaded me to madness, if you would find the relics of your work search the old well in the Lime Tree Walk! For there his body lies,  
 (George Talboys descends and comes forward, L.G. between Lady A and Robert – Robert recoils in amazement when he hears him.)  
*TALBOYS (L.G.):* Helen!  
 (Lady Audley starts at his voice, turns towards him recognizes him, and shrinks back in terror – then bursts into a shrill laugh, falls to the ground – Phebe (sic) rushes to him – Sir M advances R.  
*SIR M:* (wildly) Helen!  
*DR. P* (leaning over her): The world is a blank to her for ever  
*ROBERT:* Unhappy woman! The mystery of her life is solved.  
 (Tableau)  
 (Curtain)  
 R. Alicia and Sir M. embrace – Dr. P standing behind Lady A Phebe (sic) kneeling behind her – Talboys kneeling at her L. (Brougham *The Mystery of Audley Court* 124 -125).

Lady Audley again falls into a catatonic state in this dramatisation's conclusion. Brougham's adaptation has been the most sympathetic to Lady Audley's plight and so it is unsurprising that right at the end of the play sympathy and pity are being encouraged from the audience and even Robert Audley, her former enemy, calls her an "unhappy woman" (Brougham *The Mystery of Audley Court* 125). She goes mad after thinking that she has seen Talboys' ghost, when it was actually George who managed to escape from the well. This again raises the question of whether the Victorians' truly believed it was possible to goad someone to madness. There is a break between Lady Audley saying she's mad and her seeing Talboys, which sends her actually mad. She sounds agitated at first, but she is not incoherent. Seeing Talboys, whom she believes is a ghost, sends her over the edge. Weirdly, this mental malady immediately turns into a bodily one and she falls down dead, as with the previous adaptations that end in 'death by madness'. Presumably a typographical error, Sir Michael calls Lady Audley Helen, not Lucy. There is also the fact that Brougham's play, like many other melodramas written for minor theatres, was written very quickly and as such this might simply be an example of the kind of errors that occur when plays are written very quickly.

To conclude this section, it is evident that the dramatists have all approached Lady Audley with different objectives in mind. Suter focused on presenting a Lady Audley whose madness is a consequence of being pushed to the edge as was also Roberts' approach. Both suggest that the Victorian understanding of madness was such that you could be provoked to madness. Whereas Hazelwood's Lady Audley is wholly bad, she is not mad at all. Of all the adaptations, Hazelwood's play most presents an image of Lady Audley as a degenerate villainess, who is capable of anything. Whereas, Brougham's presentation is very sympathetic, suggesting that madness is something that people, women specifically, can be pushed into because of the injustice of the society in which they live. Thus demonstrating Dollimore and Sinfield's belief in the importance of studying "the implications of literary texts in history" (Dollimore and Sinfield vii) in order to understand their meaning.

Suter, Roberts and Hazlewood all include the scene in the novel where Lady Audley explains why she assumed her new identity, although they have transferred the conversation from Lady Audley and Robert Audley to Lady Audley talking to George Talboys. Therefore, Lady Audley's madness in all of the plays stems from the restrictions placed on her gender during the nineteenth-century and there is little evidence that Braddon's germinal proto-feminism was completely eradicated in these stage adaptations as Doris Ann Frye (58) and Kerry Powell allege (Powell *Women and Victorian Theatre* 111). In fact, what these plays most reveal is the way that melodrama responded to "what interests and concerns" (Mayer 146) within the safe confines of a "brief, palatable, non-threatening metaphor which enables an audience to approach and contemplate at close range matters which are otherwise disturbing to discuss" (Mayer 147). All of the plays studied in this thesis have revealed the way that nineteenth-century playhouses responded to

contemporary events and issues as a means of providing entertainment for the masses. By discussing topics like madness, women and sexuality, and female agency, the dramatists knew that they would be able to engage with their audience on a very real and personal level as those were issues affecting their audiences on a daily basis. We can see the children of this approach today. Think of a twenty-first century soap opera like *Eastenders* and *Coronation Street*, for example. At the end of an episode that has just featured a particularly traumatic scene, a charity hotline telephone number appears accompanied by a voiceover recommending that anyone affected by the events depicted in the programme should contact the free phone number for advice. Despite the purpose of the show being to entertain, writers, producers and television executives know that one of the best ways to draw an audience is to present real-life events and topics, even if what is being shown is sometimes a very challenging and contentious issue. In this way, we can see how today's popular culture might well be the focus of a New Historicist PhD thesis in another twenty or thirty decades.

### **Chapter Three conclusion**

This chapter has sought to analyse the choices made by the dramatists when adapting Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret* to the stage. I posed that the choices made were driven by a combination of the dramatists' political leanings, experiences, their background, the location of the theatre, the time in which the adaptation was being created, the influence of the cast on the play, the actress playing Lady Audley and also of the theatrical genre that was being used to structure the production. This chapter has subsequently proved that the contentious character of the literary Lady Audley was at times problematic for the dramatists because of the conflicting discourses on femininity and madness that dominated society at the time. The result of this is that, at times, the characterisation of Lady Audley is sometimes a little one-sided. Hazlewood's characterisation is therefore more obviously a stereotype of an evil madwoman. Whereas Brougham's adaptation is more complex in its approach to staging Lady Audley as he appears to have been juggling with the ideological disparities of the day. Suter and Roberts both approached Lady Audley with a greater degree of sympathy highlighting the fact that the nineteenth-century playhouse was "a place to confront issues and to mediate social values, where plays themselves intervene in and obliquely or directly critique matters of daily concern" (Mayer 146). Additionally, the adaptations examined in this chapter show the way that a broad cultural context influenced Victorian melodrama and theatre, as was shown in the previous chapters looking at the nineteenth-century stage adaptations *Jane Eyre* and *East Lynne* discussed in Chapters One and Two. From a New Historicist and a proto-feminist perspective, they show that even popular fiction engaged with contemporary political issues and events and as such should not be dismissed simply as ephemera. Each play examined in this chapter, like those examined in the preceding chapters, presents a unique approach to both the themes of the original source as well as the genre of melodrama making the study of these plays vital on several levels.

## Conclusion

It has also been shown that what *Oliver Twist*, and the characters therein 'meant', was also very much dependent on other discourses circulating in the 1830s (Poore *I have been true* 160).

Ben Poore, Paul Davis, Harold Bloom, Jim Davis and Victor Emeljanow, and Patsy Stoneman are all aware of the same truth that the meaning of a character or a story (like the meaning of a word) evolves over time gathering layers of meaning as the years tick by. The aim of this study was to reveal that the analysis of nineteenth-century stage adaptations of Victorian novels provides unique insight into the way that nineteenth-century society engaged with and responded to proto-feminism, thus demonstrating evidence of Greenblatt's argument that "nothing comes from nothing" (Greenblatt *Hamlet in Purgatory* 4) and that literature and history are mutually permeable (Greenblatt *The Greenblatt Reader* 1-3). This study has attempted to show that the texts analysed are worthy of study despite, so far, having been largely unexamined, what was examined within them was done from a proto-feminist framework to demonstrate how a story or character can change depending on the interference of, or reading of another person or group of people, who are influenced by their own "unique position in time and space" (214).

The plays examined in this thesis have indeed demonstrated the unique insight into Victorian life that studying stage adaptations of novels affords, such as, how contemporary events influenced drama and how drama was used to challenge accepted views. In respect of their contribution to knowledge the contents of the chapters of this study have revealed both from a New Historicist and a proto-feminist perspective that not all of the male dramatists set ought to eradicate the proto-feminist elements of the original source when they transferred the plot to the stage. Instead, the greater concern for the dramatists, in every case, was to attract as many people as possible to the production. This was done by changing the plot of the original source to make it more relevant to the area in which the production was taking place. This is why we see the insertion of additional characters, usually servants, in the work of John Courtney (*Jane Eyre, or The Secrets of Thornfield Hall* 1848) and William E. Suter (*Lady Audley's Secret* 1863). This is the clearest evidence possible of the ways in which Victorian dramatists made their plays speak "directly and appeal... to nineteenth-century audiences and their concerns in a world that was fast changing in social, cultural, political and economic terms" (Mettinger-Schartmann 382). Without doubt, what this thesis has proved is the varied ways in which melodrama "reflected popular and radical feeling... it frequently expressed, no matter how crudely and fantastically, the social problems of the day (Booth *Prefaces* 27). From a poststructuralist perspective, what these chapters have contributed to knowledge is the layers of meaning that people were able to interpret from the original source and from an adaptation theory perspective, these plays have shown that they are unique in their "presence in time and space" (Benjamin 214) and that the plays are "deliberate, announced, and extended revisitations of prior works... [that] represent various ways of engaging

audiences” (Hutcheon xvi). For those reasons, it is clear that the plays studied in this thesis have significant academic value for a wide variety of academic disciplines.

The core chapters of this thesis focused on the nineteenth century stage adaptations of three nineteenth-century novels. In Chapter One, we saw the different portrayals of Jane Eyre by the nineteenth-century dramatists. Some dramatists portrayed her as pretty, others presented her as plain, and in some Jane was fiercely opinionated to the point of being self-destructive, whereas in another she was cast as meek and mild. This chapter looked at why the dramatists chose to stage Jane in those ways, with the topic of representations of female agency as the focal point of the chapter; female agency being a dominant theme in the original source. Chapter One also delved into issues of theatrical and literary form by arguing for a recognition of the theatrical genre of a *bildungsplay*. Chapter Two demonstrated the way that nineteenth-century melodrama responded to “matters of daily concern” (Mayer 146) approaching and engaging with contemporary discourses relating to a wide variety of topics in order to provide entertainment for the masses. In the case of *East Lynne*, this led to the story’s re-birth on the stage as a seduction melodrama. Chapter Three examined the approach taken to the adaptation of Lady Audley in the stage adaptations of Mary Elizabeth Braddon’s *Lady Audley’s Secret* (1862) focusing on the complex issue of her culpability. The chapter revealed that the complexity of Lady Audley’s motivation to commit the crimes, that was expertly crafted by Braddon, largely disintegrated for a variety of different reasons. Characterisations of Lady Audley in the stage adaptations vary from ‘victimised heroine’ (McWilliams 54) to villainous seductress and even deranged madwoman. However, in one adaptation, the ‘lost’ script by John Brougham, *The Mystery of Audley Court*, there is a sensitivity and complexity to the characterisation of Lady Audley. The reason Brougham’s play stands out when compared to the other stage adaptations is due to the fact that there is a very clear sense of him battling with the fact that “both femininity and masculinity [were] in flux and under pressure from a changing world” (Williams 4).

The allegations made by Doris Ann Frye (58) and Kerry Powell (Powell *Women and Victorian Theatre* 111) that the proto-feminist elements of the original source were eradicated by the male dramatist are not wholly correct. There is no sense of there having been a lack of “anxiety of influence” (Bloom xxiii) towards the female authored original sources by the male dramatists after all. Instead, the key influence was how to make the story appeal to as wide an audience as possible showing only the extent to which the writers of popular theatre believed that they could ‘tamper’ with a story. There was no “law prevent[ing] a playwright from appropriating, without compensation or acknowledgement, the plot and characters, even the title, of a successful work of fiction” (Powell *Women and Victorian Theatre* 98), as such, this lack of legal ownership meant that dramatists had complete license when they were adapting the plot of a novel into a play.

In respect of there being any limitations to this research, there is always the risk of further plays being ‘found’ as with the case of John Brougham’s 1866 script for *The Mystery of Audley Court*. However, the most thorough searches possible were conducted in order to prevent any existing

scripts from being overlooked. The reason that any plays were not examined in this thesis, such as, T. H. Paul's 1879 *Jane Eyre* and Mme von Heringen Hering's 1877 play *Jane Eyre: A Drama in Four [Two] Acts* was identified in the introduction chapter of the thesis.

A significant amount of future research could be conducted into the plays that have been the focus of the previous three chapters. Attention could be paid to a wide variety of different topics from the same New Historicist, proto-feminist and poststructuralist perspectives, for instance, the image of the Victorian governess is one that appears in all three of the novels at the heart of this thesis. How the Victorian governess was portrayed on the stage might well provide a unique insight into Victorian society's attitude to governesses and working female professionals. Another avenue that could be explored is the representation of class and/or servant figures in Victorian melodramas. As stated above, there is a pattern of dramatists inventing additional servant characters and inserting them into the plot when they adapt a novel. This could help to reveal the way that the Victorian theatre "mediate[d] class tensions, engage[d] in public conversations, and even imagine[d] new modes of class relations" (Frye 14).

The interdisciplinary nature of this thesis has shown the power of theatre in the nineteenth century, and its capacity for quickly responding to social events and discussions. Most notably, however, this study has raised awareness of John Brougham's *The Mystery of Audley Court* (1866) in bringing its existence to light. By doing this, new channels for scholarly exploration are made possible from a wide variety of disciplinary standpoints.



## **Appendices**

### **Chapter One**

#### **Appendix A**

##### ***John Courtney's Jane Eyre, or The Secrets of Thornfield Hall (1848)***

The servants at Lowood School open Courtney's production. Having been tormented at Lowood School, Jane leaves the institution, having become a teacher herself, after years of cruelty inflicted by Brocklehurst on the pupils and instructors. Jane finds employment at Thornfield Hall and meets Rochester on her first journey to the Hall. Jane scares Rochester's horse causing him to fall. Adèle and Jane are briefly introduced before Jane and Rochester are left alone together to converse. Rochester begins to tell Jane of his former sins but is interrupted by Mason's arrival. Rochester leaves Jane alone to speak with Mason. Later that night Mason is attacked by the mysterious mad woman in the attic, who is the originator of the eerie laugh, which Jane has noticed since her arrival and which has helped build up audience suspense to this point. Dr Carter attends to Mason's wounds, as Mason relives his attack whilst Jane assists. Rochester's guests, the Ingrams, do not appear directly on stage in Courtney's adaptation, instead reported speech is employed. Rochester escorts Mason away from Thornfield Hall, which is followed by some comedic action between the servants. Rochester then proposes to Jane after he forces her into confessing her feelings for him. Richard Mason interrupts their wedding revealing Rochester is already married and Jane runs away but is luckily united with her long lost cousins. Jane returns to Thornfield after she has learnt from her cousins about her inheritance and is reunited with Rochester, who is now free to marry Jane as Bertha died in the same fire which crippled and blinded him. Bertha appears on stage on a couple of fleeting occasions to build suspense but her attack of Richard Mason, setting fire to Rochester's bed and setting fire to Thornfield are not staged, merely reported.

## **Appendix B**

### **John Brougham's *Jane Eyre; A Drama in Five Acts* (1849)**

Brocklehurst's arrival at Lowood School opens the play. Brocklehurst describes Jane as lazy; however, Jane's opening soliloquy presents her as an exhausted, miserable, trapped, young woman. Shortly after Brocklehurst's departure one of Jane's colleagues, Miss Gryce, brings Jane a letter, which reveals that Jane has been offered the position of governess in Thornfield Hall. Jane moves to Thornfield. The Ingrams' visit Thornfield where Jane is working. The Ingrams are shown to be materialistic and shallow. Rochester is not present for the Ingrams' discussion of his wealth and eccentricity as they reached Thornfield before him. They have been left to amuse themselves and quickly grow bored so they call for the governess, Jane, to be sent to them in order to entertain themselves by ridiculing and deriding her. However, Jane defends herself amply and scorns the Ingrams. Act II opens with the servants, Grace Poole and John Downey, an invented manservant, discussing Thornfield Hall. Attempting to entice Grace to tell him Rochester's secrets, John teases Grace, however, Grace deliberately scares him off. Jane meets Rochester in the lane startling his horse and causing him to fall. Rochester returns to Thornfield Hall and an elaborate game of charades is played by the Ingrams. That evening, Rochester, disguised as a gypsy, calls Blanche and Jane to him alternately to read their fortunes. Rochester teases Jane into admitting her feelings for him and proposes to her. Rochester escapes his engagement to Blanche by telling her that he is poor, knowing that Blanche's materialism will make her call off their engagement. Hearing of Rochester's alleged poverty; the Ingrams decide to confront Rochester about his dishonesty, whilst Bertha Mason has escaped from the attic. On going to confront Rochester, the Ingrams disrupt Rochester and Jane's wedding ceremony; however Bertha has started a fire in the house which ultimately concludes the wedding on that day. It is revealed later on that Bertha died in the fire, which leaves Rochester free to marry Jane.

The play then jumps forward a year, presenting Jane alone and miserable before a telepathic connection reunites her briefly with a spectral form of Rochester stretching his hand towards her. This vision prompts Jane to return to Thornfield Hall where she learns that the servant John has married Grace Poole and that together they care for the now blinded and impoverished Rochester. Reunited, Rochester and Jane become engaged, as the play ends with the peasants celebrating their loving master by hailing him 'The Farmer's Friend'.

## **Appendix C**

### **Charlotte Birch-Pfeiffer's *Jane Eyre; Or the Orphan of Lowood* (1870)**

Jane's aunt, Sarah Reed, opens the play in conversation with Henry Whitfield at Gateshead House. Aunt Reed reveals that she intends to send Jane away to school because she cannot bear Jane reminding her of Jane's mother's low marriage. Henry objects to Aunt Reed's plan so she advises him to raise Jane himself. However, he states that he cannot as he has no money. Jane is then found by Bessie, the servant, remembering her deceased uncle's birthday by. Bessie reminds her that she should not be in that room as Aunt Reed has forbidden it, although she eventually allows Jane to remain on the proviso that she hides. Jane is then attacked by John, her cousin, so she loudly defends herself but hearing the commotion Aunt Reed and Henry enter the room. Blackhorst [*sic*] then arrives and reprimands Jane for her ungrateful behaviour but Jane continues to defend herself revealing her aunt's cruelty before leaving Gateshead with Brocklehurst to go to Lowood School. Jane next appears at Thornfield Hall preparing the house for Rochester's arrival with the servants. The audience learn that, on returning to Thornfield Hall from posting a letter, Jane has met Rochester who had fallen from his horse on Hay Lane. Rochester enters and is properly introduced to Jane by her pupil, Adèle, but shortly after Rochester goes missing shortly. Rochester's next arrival is made known when Jane is instructed to put on a silk dress sent by him so that she can entertain his guests but Jane refuses to wear it. Rochester arrives ahead of his guests and criticises Jane her obstinate refusal.

The Ingrams are replaced by the Reed family in Birch-Pfeiffer's adaptation, who recognise Jane and publicly demean her abilities but Rochester defends her by showing them Jane's paintings. Jane is embarrassed by his defence and she attempts to regain her portfolio later that evening when everyone has gone to bed. Jane notices a fire in Rochester's cabinet and saves his life. The next morning Rochester's guests go on an excursion leaving Rochester and Jane together. Rochester attempts to force Jane to confess her love for him but fails to do so. Aunt Reed asks Jane to meet her and warns Jane to leave Thornfield Hall so that Georgina (a substitute Blanche Ingram) can marry Rochester. Having kept Jane's inheritance a secret for years out of spite, Aunt Reed reveals this to Jane to encourage her to leave. Henry Whitfield returns and announces that John has disappeared having been declared bankrupt. Jane asks Rochester's permission to leave Thornfield where he confesses to keeping his deceased brother's insane wife in the attic and reveals that Adèle is Lady Henrietta Rochester's illegitimate child. Jane then weeps at having to leave Thornfield Hall to go to Madeira to live with her uncle. This forces Rochester into confessing that he only summoned Georgina Reed to Thornfield Hall to act as an impetus to get Jane to confess her feelings for him. The play ends with Rochester and Jane's embrace.

## **Appendix D**

### **James Willing's *Jane Eyre; or Poor Relations* (1879)**

Opening at Gateshead House with Georgina, Eliza and Mrs Reed discussing Jane Eyre, it is not long before Aunt Reed publicly strikes Jane across the face in front of Dr Lloyd. Dr Lloyd attends to her and recommends that she be sent away to school. Brocklehurst visits Gateshead House and takes Jane to Lowood School. Brocklehurst reveals the hypocrisy of the school's management by describing the treatment which his own children receive in contrast to the school's pupils.

Jane is next found at Thornfield Hall where Jane and Mrs Fairfax are discussing the imminent arrival of Rochester's guests as well as Adèle's background. Mason visits Rochester. The Ingrams then arrive at Thornfield Hall with John Reed. Brocklehurst also visits Rochester at Thornfield Hall. Whilst Jane, Rochester and his guests go out for a walk, Mason is attacked by his mentally unstable sister, Bertha, but is rescued by Rochester as he returns. Rochester summons Jane to help him. The next night Bertha sets light to Rochester's bed but Jane saves him. Rochester proposes to Jane and reveals that he never intended to marry Blanche Ingram. Jane and Rochester are then shown preparing for their wedding before they are interrupted by Bertha running amok.

Jane leaves Rochester and begs Brocklehurst for charity agreeing to become a teacher again. John Reed visits Brocklehurst revealing that he did not marry Blanche Ingram despite their elopement. Reed asks Brocklehurst to sign a letter confirming that Jane died when she was at Lowood School so that he can claim her inheritance, but Jane interrupts seizing the paperwork and confronts John. Brocklehurst and John Reed both propose marriage to Jane but are both refused. John he flies into a vicious temper and attacks Jane but she is saved by Rochester's sudden entry. Jane refuses to stay with Rochester whilst his wife still lives in spite of his appeals that she remain as his mistress and his protestations that, due to his wife's madness, his marriage is void. Jane is shown to have settled into life as a schoolmistress when Blanche begs at her door for food and water; she eventually reveals that Rochester was crippled in a fire in which his wife was killed. Rochester's wife appears just twice very briefly in the play and does not have any lines other than directed maniacal laughter. Jane and Rochester are reunited when Jane goes to Ferndean. Brocklehurst arrives and some comic misdirection takes place. Intending to steal back Jane's paperwork and claim her inheritance, John Reed sneaks into Rochester's room believing Rochester to be blind and therefore oblivious to his presence. But Rochester reveals that he only feigned blindness in order to test Jane's love and apprehends John. Rochester and Jane end the play with the promise of marrying the next day. Jane promises to share half of her inherited wealth with Blanche as she feels partially responsible for Blanche's fall at John's hands.

## **Appendix E**

### **W. G Wills' *Jane Eyre* (1882)**

Jane arrives at Thornfield Hall as a governess where she tells Mrs Fairfax and Adèle of her meeting with a man who fell from his horse on her way to Thornfield Hall. Mrs Fairfax confirms that this was Rochester. Rochester arrives shortly afterwards and they are formally introduced. He interrogates Jane with regards to her background and schooling before Mrs Poole interrupts Rochester to pass him a letter from her patient's brother. In questioning Jane, Rochester encourages Jane to reveal that she was previously cared for by the clergyman of her parish, Mr Prior and his mother. Rochester's guests, the Ingrams, the Miss Beechers and Lord Desmond appear and there follows some social entertainment. However, Blanche warns Jane not to accept Rochester's friendship and to remember her social place with Jane rejecting her advice. Mr Prior arrives at Thornfield Hall and also warns Jane to leave Thornfield Hall because Rochester is immoral. Mr Prior makes it evident that he previously courted Jane as he asks Jane if he has any rivals to her affection. Rochester interrupts and Jane confirms that she will remain at Thornfield.

The action is picked up two months later when Rochester has hired a gypsy to watch the boats arriving from Jamaica as he is expecting an unwelcome visitor. No one arrived matching the description Rochester gave the gypsy so Rochester assumes that he is safe. He leaves Thornfield to conduct some business. Rochester has guests staying at Thornfield who ridicule Jane but she defends herself well. Upon Rochester's return he is clearly shown to be playing Jane and Blanche against one another as Jane overhears Blanche telling Rochester that she is jealous of the attention which he is paying to Jane. Rochester tells Blanche that he has been ruined by a poor business speculation and their relationship ends. Blanche leaves Jane and Rochester together as she goes to advise her mother of Rochester's financial ruin. Jane advises Rochester that she is leaving Thornfield to visit Mr Prior's mother who is ill and to take her wages before requesting that Adèle be sent away to school to be out of his new bride's way. Then Rochester's friends enter the room and request that they have the gypsy in the room for some entertainment. When alone with Jane, the gypsy, Rochester in disguise, attempts to force her to confess her feelings for him. Rochester proposes to Jane before leaving her alone, at which point, she is attacked by Bertha Mason before Rochester rescues her. The following morning Mrs Fairfax advises Jane that the Ingrams have left and that Rochester and Blanche Ingram are to be married and that the person who attacked Jane is Rochester's half-sister, who is mad and is being looked after by Rochester. Mr Prior arrives at Thornfield and attempts to persuade Jane to leave Thornfield Hall. Jane refuses to listen to Mr Prior and defends Rochester passionately. Mr Prior declares that he will speak to Rochester to find out the truth and waits downstairs for him. The Ingrams then arrive to warn Jane to leave Thornfield Hall as well, but Jane continues to defend Rochester as her only friend remaining adamant that she will stay at Thornfield Hall. However, Jane is shocked when Blanche eventually reveals Rochester's secret marriage, although she continues to refuse to believe Blanche until Grace Poole confirms the facts. The half-sister Rochester had told her about was really Rochester's wife as such Rochester was even more

obviously trying to fool or trick Jane into marriage. Rochester arrives shortly afterwards and confesses his secret which prompts Jane into leaving Thornfield with Mr Prior. The final scene shows Rochester being cared for by Mrs Fairfax and Grace Poole, as they discuss the fire which has ruined Thornfield Hall after Jane's departure, and in which Rochester's wife died (Rochester's wife appears on just one occasion in the play, in a scene where she attacks Jane but Rochester enters and rescues Jane). Jane returns telling Mrs Fairfax that Rochester was calling to her because he was in danger. Mrs Fairfax and Grace Poole tell Jane again to leave and advise her that there is as much danger to her good name now as when Rochester's first wife was alive. Having been told that Rochester is in London, Jane prepares to leave but is recalled as she feels something pulling her back; Rochester is there, and the lovers are reunited.

## Appendix F

This chart makes understanding the inclusion of key scenes from the original source instantly accessible. It also outlines the major differences between the stage adaptations. The chart also permits a wider understanding of the approach towards the staging of *Jane Eyre*. The novel's crucial feminist scenes are listed in the chart below in the first column before the scene's inclusion is then confirmed in the relevant stage adaptation. These are the pivotal scenes from the novel and how these scenes are treated by the dramatists indicates their response to the contentious character, Jane Eyre. Please note that the abbreviation dnf which is repeated throughout this section stands for does not feature. Does not feature is a more relevant term for some of the scenes listed below as the characters crucial to the scene in the novel do not feature in the play.

<b>Novel's Key Feminist Scenes</b>	<b>Courtney 1847</b>	<b>Brougham 1848</b>	<b>Birch-Pfeiffer 1870</b>	<b>Willing 1879</b>	<b>Wills 1882</b>
John Reed's assault of Jane	No	No	Yes	No	dnf
The Red Room	No	No	Mentioned	Mentioned	dnf
Brocklehurst & Aunt Reed's Confrontation	No but Brocklehurst humiliates Jane in front of the school later on	No but Brocklehurst criticises Jane to other members of staff at Lowood	Yes	Yes	dnf
Humiliation and placement on stool at Lowood	Yes but not placed on stool	No	No	No	dnf
Rochester's fall from horse	Mentioned	Yes	Mentioned	Mentioned	Mentioned
Jane & Rochester's Orientalism silk warehouse discussion	No	No	No	No	No
Jane rescuing Rochester from burning	No	Yes but sequence of events altered	Yes	Yes	Mentioned as taking place before Jane arrived
Bertha rending Jane's veil	No	No	No	Yes	No
Rochester's attempt to make Jane his mistress	Yes but no mention of moving to another home	No	No, Bertha is Rochester's brother's Wife	Yes	Yes but no mention of Rochester's other home
Jane and the mother moon	No	No	No	No	No
St John's proposal	St John present but no proposal	dnf	dnf	dnf – Brocklehurst proposes instead	dnf – Mr Prior loves and wishes to marry Jane
Jane's inheritance	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No
Rochester & Jane married with children	Engaged	Engaged	Engaged	Engaged	Engaged – but Jane implies that she would not mind being unmarried

## Chapter Two

### Appendix A

#### **Andrew Hamilton Hume's *The Tangle Path; a tale of East Lynne, a dramatised version of Mrs H. Wood's Celebrated Novel* (1863)**

Hamilton Hume's adaptation opens with a Prelude in which Thorn, aka Levison, seduces Afy Hallijohn and then accidentally murders Hallijohn, Afy's father, before running away. Miss Carlyle opens Act One, Scene One complaining about her brother Carlyle's affection for Isabel Vane. She then receives word from her brother in a letter delivered by their servant Dill that he has married Isabel and that they are on their way to her. Miss Carlyle jokes about how hurt Barbara Hare will be hearing of this news as she knows that Barbara hides an unspoken love for Carlyle and has done for some time. Miss Carlyle tells Barbara about Carlyle marriage to Lady Isabel. Barbara leaves. Isabel and Carlyle arrive and greet Miss Carlyle who is rude, abrupt and unpleasant to Isabel who is keen to embrace her as her sister. Carlyle tells Isabel not to be worried by his sister's behaviour towards her and says he is sure that they will get on well soon.

Lady Isabel and Carlyle have been married for fifteen months the next time they appear on stage. Lady Isabel faints when she sees Barbara with her husband and Levison carries her away. Carlyle refuses to remarry whilst Lady Isabel is still alive despite the fact that they have officially divorced. Levison is nearly ducked by the men of West Lynne when he returns for the election. Lady Isabel does not return as Madam Vine, she returns as a stranger in disguise at the election and confirms that Levison she is one of Levison's victims, alongside Afy Hallijohn. Carlyle takes the disguised Lady Isabel into his home to be cared for after she fainted during Levison's arrest at the election. Carlyle marries Barbara Hare. Richard Hare's innocence is proved and he is reunited with his father. Levison summons Dick Hare and Carlyle to the jail where he reveals that Lady Isabel is the stranger who spoke up at the rally. Lady Isabel asks for Carlyle's forgiveness in front of Barbara, Dick, Lord Mount Severn and Miss Carlyle in the final scene. Lady Isabel approves of Barbara and Carlyle's marriage before she dies and Barbara kisses Isabel before she dies. Lady Isabel delivers a cautionary manifesto to women in the audience to bear the trials of their married lives.



## **Appendix B**

### **John Dicks' *East Lynne. A Drama, In Four Acts* (1879)**

Richard Hare opens the play having returned in order to get some money from his mother after being accused of Hallijohn's murder. The focus is on Barbara Hare, who opens the play demonstrating the role of the respectable, dutiful, caring sister. Lady Isabel and Carlyle have recently married when the play opens. Lady Isabel is jealous of Barbara from the beginning of the play. Lady Isabel decides to tell Carlyle about Levison's alleged love for her but stops when she hears Joyce and Wilson gossiping about Barbara's love for Carlyle. Isabel begs Carlyle not to marry Barbara when she dies. Carlyle comforts Lady Isabel and she decides not to tell him about Levison. Miss Corney tells Carlyle that she does not like Levison but Carlyle ignores her and tells her to treat Levison with respect as one of his guests. Levison manipulates sightings of Carlyle with Barbara to make Isabel jealous. Levison tells Isabel that he thinks Barbara is "devilish pretty" (Dicks 1879: 6). Lady Isabel tells Joyce to put her child to bed. Lady Isabel tells Miss Corney that she no longer has the right to countermand her orders. Isabel asks Carlyle what Barbara has been discussing with him so much recently but Carlyle refuses to tell her. Isabel leaves with Levison but the scene is not shown. Instead Carlyle reads Isabel's leaving letter out loud. When the action resumes in Act Three, Barbara and Carlyle are married. Barbara tells Carlyle that she thinks that Levison and Thorne are the same man. Lady Isabel appears as Madam Vine. Levison is arrested when he returns for the election. William, Isabel's son, dies in her arms calling Isabel 'Mother' after she has thrown off her disguise. Lady Isabel, still disguised as Madam Vine, falls ill after William's death and is looked after by Joyce. Richard Hare is cleared of Hallijohn's murder and Levison is sentenced for the murder. Isabel dies in Carlyle's after he discovers her true identity and she receives his forgiveness.

## **Appendix C**

### **T. A. Palmer's *East Lynne. A Domestic Drama in a Prologue and Four Acts* (1874)**

Lord Mount Severn opens the play confirming that Lady Isabel's father has died leaving her penniless and alone. Lord Mount Severn confirms that his wife is jealous of Isabel's beauty and he can see that Levison is trifling with Isabel's affection. Levison confuses Lady Isabel regarding his intentions towards her. Carlyle arrives and proposes to Isabel in order to save her from the misery of her situation with the Mount Severns. Barbara is relieved that Lady Isabel has left East Lynne so that she can have Carlyle to herself again. Judge Hare tells Barbara that Carlyle has bought East Lynne. Richard Hare visits Afy Hallijohn where Levison is also courting her. Levison accidentally murders Hallijohn and the blame is laid on Richard Hare. Carlyle hides Levison from his bailiffs in his home. Barbara visits Carlyle to ask him to help his brother. Levison manipulates Isabel's jealousy over Carlyle. Isabel overhears Joyce and Wilson discussing Barbara's love for Carlyle. Lady Isabel begs Carlyle not to marry Barbara when she dies and he assures her. Miss Corney asks what Barbara Hare has been speaking with Carlyle about so much recently and he tells her but does not disclose this to Lady Isabel, which makes Isabel even more jealous. Isabel tries to resist Levison but struggles when they are thrust together so often. Carlyle cannot go to a dinner that evening with Isabel and she suspects that he is meeting Barbara Hare instead. Carlyle had received a letter from Barbara asking him to meet them that night which he threw into the fire after reading it. Levison had pulled Barbara's note to Carlyle from the fire and Isabel reads it however the content of the letter has been damaged by the fire and the message has been altered so that Isabel believes that Carlyle is meeting Barbara after all. Isabel sees Barbara and Carlyle together and agrees to leave East Lynne with Levison. Lady Isabel writes a leaving letter for Carlyle saying that he goaded her to it. Carlyle reads Isabel's note and their children enter asking for their mother, Carlyle tells them they are now motherless and that they will never see her again. Carlyle tells Barbara that he will not remarry whilst Isabel is still alive although their divorce has been finalised. Judge Hare has been sent a letter saying that Richard Hare has returned to East Lynne in disguise but Carlyle convinces him to ignore it. Lord Mount Severn and Cornelia discuss Carlyle's marriage to Barbara Hare and Isabel death in a train accident in France. Barbara Hare tells Madam Vine off for exhausting herself too much with the children. Lady Isabel is tormented by watching Barbara and Carlyle together happily married. Carlyle delivers a monologue where he reveals how angry he is at Levison because of his seduction of Isabel (Palmer 1874: 36). Willie dies in Madam Vine's arms not knowing that she is his mother. Isabel throws off her disguise and Joyce recognises her. Levison has returned to East Lynne for the election but the men from the village try to duck him in a pond until he is arrested for Hallijohn's murder. Richard is cleared of Hallijohn's murder and he meets Afy Hallijohn in the street where she attempts to flirt with him and to rekindle their relationship, but Richard rejects her. Isabel has fallen unwell and Carlyle visits her believing that she is Madam Vine. Isabel then reveals her identity and asks for Carlyle's forgiveness before she dies.

## **Appendix D**

### **Charles Spencer's *East Lynne: A Drama, in five acts* (1865)**

Miss Corney and Dill open the play discussing Carlyle's marriage to Lady Isabel with Miss Corney confirming how unhappy she is with Carlyle's marriage. Isabel and Carlyle arrive at East Lynne and Carlyle leaves Isabel alone with Carlyle whilst he discusses business with Dill. Isabel attempts to make small talk with Miss Corney but she is very snappy and unwilling. Richard has returned to East Lynne following being falsely accused of Hallijohn's murder to ask for money. Lady Isabel overhears Joyce and Wilson discussing Barbara's unspoken love for Carlyle. Isabel struggles with the household duties and Miss Corney readily takes control of the house in her place. Lord Mount Severn arrives having learned of Isabel's marriage to Carlyle. Lord Mount Severn learns of Isabel's former affection for Levison. Lord Mount Severn questions Carlyle on his motives for marrying Isabel. Barbara arrives at East Lynne to ask for Carlyle's help. Isabel questions Carlyle on the nature of his relationship with Barbara but Carlyle confirms that he has only ever loved Isabel. Isabel deliberates whether she should tell Carlyle about Levison's behaviour. Isabel overhears Joyce and Wilson discussing Barbara's love for Carlyle and when Carlyle appears she begs him not to marry Barbara when she dies. Carlyle comforts her and Isabel says that she will believe him. Miss Corney complains about Levison to Carlyle but Carlyle tells her to treat his guest with respect. Levison manipulates Carlyle and Barbara's meetings in order to make Isabel jealous. Isabel tells Joyce to put her child to bed angrily. Levison tells Isabel that he thinks that Barbara is "devilish pretty" (Spencer 1865: 19). Miss Corney asks Carlyle what Barbara has been wanting to discuss with him but he refuses to tell her or Isabel. Levison tells Isabel that he has seen Carlyle and Barbara walking in the moonlight together. Isabel says that if he proves this then she will leave East Lynne with him. Isabel and Levison see Carlyle and Barbara together and Isabel tells Francis to take her away. Carlyle returns from his meeting with Barbara and Richard and asks where Isabel is, at which point it is discovered that she is missing. Carlyle discovers Isabel's letter confirming that she has eloped with Levison and when Miss Corney criticises her, Carlyle defends her saying "Not one word against her" (Spencer 1865: 24). Carlyle reads Isabel's letter out loud confirming that he wishes her well. Barbara and Carlyle have married and Levison has returned to East Lynne to stand against Carlyle in the election. Barbara tells Carlyle that she believes that Thorn and Levison are the same person. Lady Isabel arrives disguised as Madam Vine, the children's governess. Carlyle comments on Madam Vine's likeness to someone, meaning Isabel. Madam Vine and Barbara discuss Isabel's death in the train accident. Levison is arrested for Hallijohn's murder. William dies in Lady Isabel's arms whispering 'Mother' after she has thrown off her disguise. Richard is cleared of Hallijohn's murder. Miss Corney comments on Afy Hallijohn being dressed inappropriately. Richard and his father are reunited. Carlyle visits Madam Vine who is dying and discovers that she is Isabel. Isabel asks for forgiveness and then dies in Carlyle's arms.

## Appendix E

This chart makes understanding the inclusion of key scenes from the original source instantly accessible. It also outlines the major differences between the stage adaptations. The chart also permits a wider understanding of the approach towards the staging of *East Lynne*. The novel's crucial feminist scenes are listed in the chart below in the first column before the scene's inclusion is then confirmed in the relevant stage adaptation. These are the pivotal scenes from the novel and how these scenes are treated by the dramatists indicates their response to the contentious character of the 'fallen woman', Isabel Vane. Please note that the abbreviation *dnf* which is repeated throughout this section stands for does not feature. Does not feature is a more relevant term for some of the scenes listed below as the characters crucial to the scene in the novel do not, or might not feature in the play.

Novel's Key Feminist Scenes	Hamilton-Hume 1863	Dicks' 1879	Palmer 1874	Spencer 1865
Isabel and Levison flirting	The play opens with a prelude that shows Levison seducing Afy Hallijohn instead.	The plays opens with Richard Hare on the run but having returned to his childhood home in desperate need of money. He meets Barbara, his sister, who is keen to exonerate him from being Hallijohn's murderer.	Lord Mount Severn, Isabel's uncle, opens the play by confirming that he can see that Levison is flirting with Isabel.	The play opens with Miss Carlyle complaining to a servant character called Dill about how unhappy she is that Carlyle has married Isabel.
Isabel marries Carlyle to escape debtors	Yes	Yes	Yes, and because she does not think that Levison wants to marry her/will ever marry her.	Yes
Isabel suspects Carlyle and Barbare Hare are having an affair	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Isabel elopes with Levison	Yes – she faints and Levison carries her away	Yes, but <i>dnf</i> , instead a letter that Isabel has written saying she is leaving Carlyle is read out.	Yes	Yes – Isabel tells Levison to take her away after seeing Carlyle walking with Barbara in the moonlight
Levison refuses to marry Isabel	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Isabel is disfigured in the train crash and her illegitimate child dies	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Isabel disguises herself as a governess returning to her former home	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Isabel tells Carlyle who she is on her deathbed	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

## Chapter Three

### Appendix A

#### **William E. Suter's *Lady Audley's Secret* (1863)**

Lady Audley, a former poor orphan girl working as a governess, has recently married Sir Michael Audley, who fell in love with her beauty. The play opens with comedic action between two invented servant characters, Bibbles and Bubbles. Bibbles is in love with Lady Audley's maid, Phoebe Marks, whom she used to work with when she was a governess and Phoebe was a housemaid, but Phoebe has been engaged to her cousin, Luke Marks, since she was a young girl. Phoebe's fiancé, Luke Marks, lacks real ambition and the tenacity to make his own freedom, despite wanting to run a public house. He tells Phoebe to stay as close to Lady Audley as possible so that they might achieve this through her friendship with the now wealthy Audley. Robert Audley, Sir Michael's nephew, and his recently widowed friend, George Talboys, arrive to congratulate Sir Michael on his marriage. George discovered that his wife had died when he returned from India. When George meets Lady Audley, she tells him to meet her in the Lime Tree Walk. Lady Audley stabs George and pushes him down the well in Walk as he insists he will reveal her true identity as his wife and therefore her bigamy.

Later, Luke Marks blackmails Lady Audley hinting the he saw her murder George Talboys. She agrees to give him £100. Robert is puzzled by George's disappearance and tells her that he believes she is Helen Talboys, George's reportedly dead wife. She tells him if he continues to investigate her then she will tell Sir Michael that he is mad, but he refuses to be swayed from discovering the truth. Sometime elapses and Lady Audley arrives at Luke and Phoebe's inn to pay off their debts. She discovers that Robert is staying there and seizes the opportunity when no one is around to set alight to the inn. Phoebe and Lady Audley walk back to Audley Court together. In Lady Audley's chambers, Phoebe notices the inn is on fire from the window and suspects Lady Audley set fire to the inn in order to get rid of Robert and Luke. Lady Audley tells Phoebe to go back to the inn if it's so important. Robert enters and reveals how he escaped from the fire and dragged Luke from the fire saving his life.

Lady Audley tells Robert he has conquered a madwoman and that he and George goaded her to it. Robert goes in search of Sir Michael so she can confess to him. Robert finds Alicia Audley whilst searching for Sir Michael and he confirms that he will marry her one day. He leaves to continue searching for Sir Michael. Lady Audley confesses to Sir Michael and Sir Michael entrusts her to his care and leaves. Robert Audley tells Lady Audley he will believe her plea of madness and have her entered into an asylum. Lady Audley runs from the room. George enters and reveals how he escaped Lady Audley's attack. Lady Audley enters and says that she has taken poison rather than be placed in an asylum. She collapses and dies. Sir Michael enters the room and gazes at her from the doorway. George kneels over her and Robert raises his hands to the heavens. Music then final curtain.

## **Appendix B**

### **George Robert's *Lady Audley's Secret* (1863)**

Robert Audley opens the play in his chambers where he reveals that his uncle, Sir Michael Audley, has just married a poor orphan governess and that his niece Alice Audley, Sir Michael's daughter from his first marriage is jealous of her. He resolves to visit them at the hall. George Talboys enters having returned from making his fortune in Australia. George says he left after an argument with his wife and never wrote to her or their baby son. George looks at the newspaper and discovers his wife has died. Robert and George visit Audley Court but stay at the local inn. Robert visits Audley Court alone as George is grieving. He tells Lady Audley who his friend is and she realises that he is her husband. When Sir Michael and Robert leave to get a drink, she calls Phoebe to her giving her a letter to give to her after dinner. Phoebe then tells her that Luke recently found her bag. Lady Audley guesses that they know her secret and agrees to set them up with a public house when they marry. George walks to the Court and Alice shows Robert and George Lady Audley's portrait. George runs away startled when he sees the painting and Robert and Alice then also leave the room. Lady Audley enters and George confronts her, but she refuses to confess to her bigamy. They fight but this is all seen by Luke Marks, who had snuck into the room. The action resumes a year later where Robert reveals that he has been investigating his friend's disappearance and that he is sure that Lady Audley is connected to it. He confronts Lady Audley, but she evades and dismisses him. When he leaves she says that she will convince Sir Michael that Robert is infatuated with her to get him to banish Robert. Sir Michael banishes Robert. Robert finds Alice and tells her he has been sent away from the Court but that he is going to stay at the local inn so that he is not too far away. Robert hints that he will marry Alice in time if she calms down. At the inn Luke is drunk and Phoebe is questioning him about where they will find the money to pay off the bailiff who has come to collect their debts. Luke tells her not to worry as Lady Audley will pay them. Robert enters the inn and asks for a room. Phoebe prepares a room for him whilst Robert tries to question her, but she reveals nothing about Lady Audley. Lady Audley enriches to pay off their debts, whilst there she decides to set fire to the inn in order to get rid of both Robert and Luke at the same time. Seizing the opportunity, she sets light to the inn and she and Phoebe, who was waiting outside when Lady Audley set alight to the inn, walk back to Audley Court. On the journey Phoebe sees the inn is on fire in the distance, she suspects Lady Audley and rushes back to the inn. Robert enters and reveals how he escaped and saved Luke too. He says that he will now reveal her true identity. Alice arrives and reveals that her father just died. Robert tells Alice that Lady Audley killed George Talboys. Luke arrives being carried by peasant workers because of his injuries, he tells Robert how George survived Lady Audley's attack and George steps out from the crowd. Lady Audley collapses after telling Robert that he has brought her to a "living grave" and that he has "conquered a – MAD WOMAN!". Curtain.

## **Appendix C**

### **C. H. Hazlewood's *Lady Audley's Secret* (1863)**

Phoebe Marks, Lady Audley's maid, and her cousin and fiancé, Luke Marks enter discussing their plans to marry but the conversation turns to Lady Audley's recent marriage, which has raised her from the position of poor orphan governess. Luke tries to convince Phoebe to steal from Lady Audley but she refuses and they exit. Lady Audley and Sir Michael enter and Phoebe re-enters, Sir Michael suggest finding Luke some work so that the two can marry but Lady Audley says that she cannot spare her. Phoebe exits. Alicia enters and Lady Audley and Alicia argue about Alicia's attitude towards her. They all exit. Robert Audley, Sir Michael's nephew, arrives with his recently widowed friend George Talboys, who is still grieving. Robert has come to congratulate his uncle on his recent marriage. Alicia shows Robert and George her new stepmother's portrait. George leaves suddenly saying he will find her. Robert and Alicia's discover his absence; they assume he has headed into the house. They turn to go into the house and meet Lady Audley, with whom Robert is enchanted. Alicia and Robert leave Lady Audley alone, where George finds her. He confronts her about her bigamy, and says that he will expose her to Sir Michael. She tries to bribe him but they fight and she attacks him and pushes him down the well. Luke Marks sees this from a hiding place. Six months pass and the second act opens with Alicia and Sir Michael discussing the delays in Alicia and Robert's marriage as a result of George's disappearance. Alicia and Sir Michael argue about Lady Audley but she enters and excuses Alicia for her comments. Alicia and Sir Michael exit and Luke Marks arrives to blackmail Lady Audley over George's attack to which she consents. Robert Audley arrives having investigated George's disappearance, he suspects that Lady Audley is involved and that he believes she is George's first wife who has been reported as dead. He warns her to disappear or tomorrow he will reveal her and leaves. Alicia and Sir Michael enter and Lady Audley plays on Alicia's jealousy of the amount of attention Robert lays her and tells Sir Michael to send him away which he does. Robert goes to stay at Luke and Phoebe's inn, where they are arguing about where they will get the money to pay off their debts but Luke says he has asked Lady Audley for the money. Lady Audley arrives to pay their debts and learns from Phoebe that Robert has arrived to stay at the inn. She tells Phoebe to keep her arrival a secret from Robert. Phoebe takes Robert to his room as Luke has passed out. Phoebe then waits outside for Lady Audley so that did can walk her home. Lady Audley seizes the opportunity to set alight to the inn having ascertained in which room Robert is sleeping from Phoebe earlier on. As they walk back to Audley Court, Phoebe and Lady Audley bump into Alicia who has been searching for her to tell her that a Sir Michael has had a fit. Alicia tells Phoebe to fetch Robert from the inn and leaves. Phoebe turns to go back to the inn to get Robert and sees the inn is on fire. She suspects Lady Audley set alight to the inn so that she could get rid of Robert and Luke. Robert enters and reveals how he escaped and pulled Luke from the fire. Luke enters being carried by peasant workers saying he will expose Lady Audley but Robert begs him to spare his uncle's good name to which Luke agrees before collapsing dead. Alicia enters saying that her father has died, so Robert says he will expose her true identity and her crimes. George Talboys

enters revealing that Luke saved him from Lady Audley's attack. Lady Audley says that she is mad and behaves wildly. She then collapses dead. Music tableaux of sympathy and George kneels over her.



## **Appendix D**

### **John Brougham's *The Mystery of Audley Court* (1866)**

Robert Audley opens the play in his chambers learning of his uncle's second marriage. George Talboys freshly returned from making his fortune in Australia arrives but quickly learns of his wife's death in the paper. At Audley Court, Lady Audley's maid, Phoebe, is showing her cousin, and fiancé Luke Marks, Lady Audley's jewels. Luke discovers a hidden compartment in the jewellery box, in which there is a baby's sock and lock of hair. Luke says that he will keep them so that he can blackmail Lady Audley into setting them up with a public house and leaves. Notable members of the area and an aristocrat, Sir Harry Towers, have arrived at the Court for a hunt. They all agree that the new Lady Audley is charming. Sir Harry Towers has only got eyes for Alicia and asks her to marry him, but she dismisses his proposal. When everyone has left, Lady Audley reveals in a soliloquy that she is living under a false identity and that she will destroy all that remains of her past. She calls Phoebe to her telling her to fetch her jewellery box and learns that Luke stole the baby's sock and lock of hair. Luke is brought to her and she agrees to give him £100 to set him up in a public house in order to buy his silence. He returns the items and she burns them. Robert and George arrive at Audley Court to congratulate his uncle in his remarriage but are told by a servant that they are out. Robert's cousin, Alicia, meets them and shows them Lady Audley's portrait, which shocks George. Robert tries to help George but he runs away. Robert apologises for George's behaviour to Alicia, explaining that he is grieving. Robert goes after George and leaves. Lady Audley enters enquiring about the visitors and Alicia tells Lady Audley who they are and that they are staying at the inn. Sir Michael enters and they tell him about the visitors. A thunderstorm starts which terrifies Lady Audley. When it has passed she goes for a walk in the grounds alone. She bumps into George Talboys which threatens to expose her. She tries to bribe him but they fight and she stabs George before pushing him down the well. Luke saw this from his hiding place. Robert investigates George's disappearance, he goes to the court to say goodbye and begins to suspect Lady Audley's involvement in George's disappearance. Robert continues to investigate eventually believing that Lady Audley is George's reputedly dead wife. Sir Harry Towers is trying to convince Alicia to marry him but she refuses. Robert arrives at Audley Court and guesses that Sir Harry has proposed to Alicia. He tells her that he will marry her when the time comes. She leaves crying. Lady Audley enters and tells Robert that Sir Michael is feeling better after his recent illness. Robert then tells her that he is going to expose her true identity now that he knows she is George's wife and is bigamously married to Sir Michael, and returns to the inn. Lady Audley tells Alicia and Sir Michael that Robert has gone mad. Sir Michael believes her and leaves to instruct the doctor to visit him. Luke then blackmails Lady Audley to pay off his debts, she asks him to kill Robert in exchange but he refuses. Alicia goes to the inn to warn Robert that Lady Audley is plotting against him and leaves. Lady Audley arrives at the inn to pay off Luke's debts but is planning to set fire to it when given the opportunity. Robert says he is going to go to bed, but he is actually waiting for her arrival. When Luke has then been left alone on the stage, George Talboys enters informing Luke that he

is going to Australia the following morning. George thanks Luke for saving him and leaves. Robert has emerged from his room hearing voices but seeing no one hides in a cupboard. Phoebe and Lady Audley enter; Lady Audley gives Phoebe the money and asks for a receipt from the bailiff, which Luke goes to get. Lady Audley says she is going to faint and tells Phoebe to fetch her bucket of water to plunge her head into in order to revive herself. Phoebe exits and Lady Audley goes to set alight to Robert's room but Robert enters from his hiding place and confronts Lady Audley. Having heard the shouts, Luke and Phoebe enter followed closely by Sir Michael, Alicia and Dr Pilsbury. Lady Audley shouts that she is a madwoman and that she killed George Talboys. George then enters causing Lady Audley to collapse, Dr Pilsbury checks Lady Audley and confirms that she is dead. Robert states "Unhappy woman! The mystery of her life is solved." Tableau. Curtain.

## Appendix E

<b>Braddon <i>Lady Audley's Secret</i> (1862)</b>	<b>Suter (1863)</b>	<b>Roberts (1863)</b>	<b>Hazlewood (1863)</b>	<b>Brougham (1866)</b>
Opens with the narrator's description of Audley Court. Lucy Graham, the poor governess, has married the wealthy Sir Michael Audley.	Opens with comedic action from Bibbles and Bubbles, servants, before Luke and Phoebe enter and reveal that Sir Michael has married a poor pretty girl.	Opens with Robert Audley receiving and reading Alicia's letter telling of his uncle's marriage and then George Talboys' enters	Opens with Phoebe and Luke Marks discussing Lady Audley who has married Sir Michael Audley recently, they reveal she was a poor governess.	Opens with Robert Audley reading Alicia's letter informing him of his uncle's marriage before George Talboys enters.
George arrives from Australia and meets Robert. George learns of his wife's death in the paper. George finds his son being cared for by his father-in-law. George makes Robert guardian of George's inheritance. George mourns. They go to Audley Court together as a diversion.	Luke and Phoebe discuss their marriage plans. Luke asks Phoebe to stay close to Lady Audley so that they can get as much from her as possible.	Luke and Phoebe find Lady Audley's bag with a secret section holding a lock of hair and a baby's shoe.	Scene does not feature.	Luke and Phoebe find a secret compartment in Lady Audley's jewellery box with a lock of hair and a baby's sock in it.
Lady Audley meets George Talboys in the gardens of Audley Court and tries to kill him by stabbing him and pushing him down a well, but Luke Marks rescued him and put him on the train to London after walking to a surgeon with him to set his arm.	Lady Audley meets George Talboys in the woods. She tries to kill him by stabbing him and pushing him down a well.	Lady Audley meets George Talboys in the woods and tries to kill him by stabbing him and pushing him down a well.	Lady Audley meets George Talboys in the woods and tries to kill him by stabbing him and pushing him down a well. Luke sees this and blackmails her.	Lady Audley meets George Talboys in the woods and tries to kill him by stabbing him and pushing him down a well.
Robert tours the country gathering evidence against Lady Audley. He goes to George's boyhood home and falls in love with George's sister, Clara. She encourages him to keep searching. Robert returns to	Bibbles and Bubbles argue over Bibbles' love for Phoebe Marks (comic relief). Luke blackmails Lady Audley over George's murder which he saw. Robert warns Lady Audley that he is gathering evidence	Robert warns Lady Audley of his suspicions regarding her involvement in George's disappearance. Lady Audley tells Sir Michael that she thinks Robert is in love with her and to send him away.	Alicia is concerned that her marriage to Robert is being delayed because Robert is distracted. This is put down to George's disappearance but Alicia fears he loves Lady Audley.	Sir Harry Towers proposes to Alicia. She refuses. Alicia hears Lady Audley telling Sir Michael that Robert is 'mad'. Alicia warns Robert.

<p>Audley Court warns Lady Audley that he suspects her. Sir Harry Towers proposes to Alicia, she rejects him as she loves Robert.</p>	<p>about her. He says he is going to stay nearby.</p>			
<p>Luke and Phoebe are in debt. Phoebe asks Lady Audley for money. She confirms Robert is staying in the inn. They go to the inn. Lady Audley sets the inn alight. Phoebe and Lady Audley walk to the inn but Phoebe sees the inn and turns back. The next day Robert reveals how he escaped.</p>	<p>Bubbles has become a bailiff since being fired and has come to collect Luke and Phoebe's debts. They send to Lady Audley to pay their debts. Lady Audley sets fire to the inn in order to get rid of Robert and Luke.</p>	<p>Robert tells Alicia that he will marry her if she calms down and stops acting like a child. Robert stays at the inn. Luke and Phoebe are in debt and send for Lady Audley to pay their debt. She comes to the inn and sets it alight.</p>	<p>Robert warns Lady Audley that he is gathering evidence to reveal her. Luke blackmails Lady Audley for money. Lady Audley sets fire to the inn.</p>	<p>Lady Audley decided to set alight to the inn in order to get rid of Luke Marks and Robert but Robert was waiting for her and stops her.</p>
<p>Robert reveals Lady Audley to Sir Michael. Lady Audley is taken to Belgium to a mental institution where she is to be looked after.</p>	<p>Lady Audley and Phoebe walk to Audley Court. Phoebe sees the fire and turns back to the inn. Robert appears and Lady Audley tells him she'll confess to Sir Michael. Robert looks for Sir Michael, finds Alicia and tells her he'll marry her someday.</p>	<p>Lady Audley and Phoebe walk towards Audley Court. Alicia meets them on the path telling them that Sir Michael is not well. Phoebe sees the fire and runs back to the inn. Robert arrives and reveals he pulled Luke from the fire. He confronts Lady Audley.</p>	<p>Robert drags Luke from the fire and confronts Lady Audley about her identity in front of Alicia, Robert, Phoebe, George and some peasants.</p>	<p>George has forgiven Lady Audley and is going to leave for Australia so she can stay married to Sir Michael, he gives Luke a note for her telling her this.</p>
<p>Sir Michael has taken Alicia to Europe to travel and get over the shock. Robert returns, marries Clara Talboys. George Talboys returns from New York where he was hiding and George, Robert, Clara and George's son live together in a country cottage. Alicia marries Sir Harry Towers. Audley Court is left abandoned. Luke Marks dies.</p>	<p>Lady Audley confesses to Sir Michael in front of Robert. Sir Michael tells him to be kind to her and leaves. Robert tells her he will take her to an asylum but does not believe she is 'mad'. She runs off. George enters and reveals Luke kept his presence a secret. Lady Audley dies after taking poison. It's reported that Luke Marks died from his injuries in the fire. Clara Talboys – DNF</p>	<p>Lady Audley is out of mind after her identity is revealed in front of Luke, Alicia, Phoebe, Robert and peasants carrying Luke. Sir Michael dies so Robert reveals her true identity publically. Luke reveals George is alive. It is hinted that Alicia and Robert Audley will marry. Clara Talboys – DNF</p>	<p>Luke Marks dies after revealing George is alive. Lady Audley dies after her true identity is revealed. Clara Talboys does not feature, nor is she mentioned.</p>	<p>Lady Audley collapses out of her mind after she is exposed in front of Sir Michael, Alicia, Dr Pilsbury, Robert Audley, Phoebe, Luke and Robert. It is hinted that Alicia and Robert Audley will marry. Luke Marks survives the fire. Clara Talboys does not feature, nor is she mentioned.</p>

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