

# Lady audley's secret: the duality within lady audley's character



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In *Lady Audley's Secret*, Braddon portrays the character of Lady Audley as a truly complex one. She is shown to be intelligent and manipulative when she supposedly kills her husband George while also manipulating her new one, Michael, for his wealth. However, despite such cruelty, she is also depicted as a vulnerable character who is constantly in fear of discovery for her misdeeds that were born from necessity. These two aspects of Lucy Audley add to her intricate personality. Her sensitivity doesn't redeem her from her sins but creates sympathy within the eyes of the reader and allows her to become a more likeable female role.

Lucy Audley has done many horrible things within the novel. From the beginning, we begin to learn that she is not truly in love with Michael when we see her response to the proposal. She says, " Love you! Why there are women a hundred times my superior in beauty and in goodness who might love you dearly; but you ask too much of me. You ask too much of me!" (Braddon 15). She clearly shows little love for Michael and thinks that he wants something she does not want to provide. She only agrees to the marriage when Michael puts it in terms of a " bargain" which is exactly what it is to Lucy. " No more dependence, no more drudgery, no more humiliations" (Braddon 16). She knows that marrying Michael will relieve her of her struggles due to poverty and will be free of " dependence" and other hardships she had. Having this newfound wealth and to not be concerned about money are her motivations. Lucy's lack of wealth seems to be the one sympathetic quality of Lucy within this scene. " I have never seen anything but poverty. My father was a gentleman; clever, accomplished, generous, handsome - but poor... Poverty, poverty, trials, vexations, humiliations,

deprivations! You cannot tell; you, who are amongst those for whom life is so smooth and easy; you can never guess what is endured by such as we... I cannot be blind to the advantages of such an alliance” (Braddon 15). Lucy talks of her difficulty living in poverty and that it is difficult for her to refuse the offer, despite not loving him, because of the obvious advantages of gaining such wealth from him. She even states before how there were “superior” women to her which is commenting on her own impoverished state. She feels almost unworthy of these riches and position that Michael wants to give her and it is clear that she feels almost pushed into this situation by her need of money and Michael’s unshared love. This shows that her intentions were not malicious when she accepted his proposal but were out of desperation due to poverty.

However, years later, she does seem to manipulate Michael even more by using his unwavering affection and devotion to her advantage. When Robert Audley announces that he is to be staying at Audley Court, Lucy gets him to leave early by persuading Michael. “ It isn’t that Mr. Audley is a very agreeable young man, and a very honourable young man; but you know, Sir Michael, I’m rather a young aunt for such a nephew... Poor is Alicia is rather jealous of any attention Mr. Audley pays me” (Braddon 114). She insinuates that Robert is attracted to her and is giving her more attention than Alicia which causes Michael to become defensive and ask him to leave. When he returns later and starts to accuse Lucy, she goes back to Michael and convinces him that Robert is mad. “ A little out of his mind... But madness is sometimes hereditary... People may generally keep these things a secret. There may have been madness in your sister-in-law’s family” (Braddon 243-

244). Michael believes whatever she tells him and Lucy even comments that " I can put black before him, and if I say it is white, he will believe me" (Braddon 240). Lucy knows how easily convinced Michael is when it comes to herself because of how blinded by love he is. She constantly uses this to her advantage, without remorse, and pushes Robert away through Michael whenever he is about to uncover her secrets.

Despite this callous influence of Lady Audley, they are also done out of necessity. Robert Audley is constantly threatening Lucy that she will become exposed. Lucy is under much pressure when Robert is trying to pull the truth from her and his suspicions makes Lady Audley nervous. When he discusses the " circumstantial evidence" with Lucy at the end of Chapter 15, Lucy becomes distraught. She exclaims, " How can you ask a poor little woman about such horrid things?", and then shortly after, " Lady Audley had fainted away" (Braddon 107). She faints after hearing his suspicions of her and that makes it clear that she is under a lot of anxiety with Robert pushing her. " Will he stop now that he has once gone so far? Will he stop for fear of me?... Will anything stop him - but death?" (Braddon 253). Lady Audley knows that Robert is overzealous in his investigation of Georges disappearance and will stop at nothing to uncover the truth. That is why she goes through such lengths to persuade Michael because it is the only way she can keep him from her with his constant tormenting of her and threats of uncovering her secret. She later even questions why he hates her so much which shows that Robert is displaying very negative feelings towards her.

Not only does Robert treat her so harshly, but Luke does so too. Phoebe, her handmaid, must marry him but doesn't want to and Lucy tries to bribe him <https://assignbuster.com/lady-audleys-secret-the-duality-within-lady-audleys-character/>

so he'd agree to it. The tables are then turned around on her when she finds out Luke knows her secret. In response to her bribe, Luke says, " Fifty pound ain't much to start a public. You'll make it a hundred, my lady" (Braddon 98). He knows a secret about Lady Audley, which is later found out to be the truth about George's death, and instead of being like Robert and turning her in, he decides to take money from her. " He's not fit for his present business, though. He's scarcely ever sober after dark, and when he's drunk he gets almost wild, and doesn't seem to know what he does" (Braddon 258). Luke is constantly drunk and is a terrible businessman in constant threat of losing his inn. Lady Audley has to give him money so he can keep his business afloat or else he will reveal her secret. This constant mistreatment from Luke makes Lucy a more sympathetic character because it gives her this feeling of helplessness that audiences can't help but feel compassion towards.

Yet this mistreatment also leads her to commit even more terrible acts.

Reacting to Luke's demands for more money, Lucy says, " It would have been a good thing for me if that precious creature, your husband, had been burnt in his bed before to-night" (Braddon 259). She later goes on to burn down his inn which leaves Luke fatally wounded. Her decision to kill Luke is a drastic one and is done with little grief upon his death. She also decides to set fire to the inn as a way of getting rid of Robert. " She stopped and looked at the number on the door... Then a horrible expression came over her face, and she turned the key in the lock; she turned it twice, double locking the door" (Braddon 275). She sees Robert's room and decides to lock him in before setting fire to the inn. She attempts to get rid of two birds with one stone and does so without any shadow of a doubt. After seeing the inn on

fire in the distance, she is not surprised. The next day, she has anxious feeling, but they are only because she wants to know if Robert is truly dead. Upon finding out that he isn't, she is shocked. Her only feelings are ones of surprise but there is no guilt in her actions which highlights her dangerous cunning.

After all her deeds are done, she eventually does confess them to Robert. While it may just have been because she had no other option, Lucy does admit to her crimes. She says, " When you say that I killed George Talboys, you say the truth. When you say that I murdered him treacherously and foully, you lie. I killed him because I AM MAD!" (Braddon 294). Lady Audley finally admits to killing George but claims that the reason she did it was because she was " mad". This furthers the idea of her vulnerability because it is making it seem as if she cannot help who she is and has almost no control over her actions. She is then taken to an institution learned to have later died in isolation. Her loneliness garners her a lot of compassion from the reader because she seems to not have much control over her life. Upon confessing her crimes, she tells her life story. " My mother was away... at a very early age I found out what it was to be poor... my mother was a madwoman" (Braddon 296). Finding out how much she struggled as a child and learning of her mother's hereditary madness makes some of her deeds more understandable. While not excusing her crimes, the audience begins to see that desperation was what drove Lucy to do the things she had done and not hatred or malice.

Lady Audley is a character with dual personalities. She shows cleverness and treacherous intelligence. Lucy constantly manipulates those around her and <https://assignbuster.com/lady-audleys-secret-the-duality-within-lady-audleys-character/>

has no fear of murdering others to keep her secret. However, she is a troubled character who is exposed to many hardships. She cannot help her past for it seems to continue to follow her until the very end. The attempted murder of George Talboys, her previous life as Helen, and even her mother's hereditary madness that she inherited are things that she cannot escape from and affect all her decisions. The horrible acts that she committed are not to be condoned at all. There are many instances of betrayal and manipulation that Lucy had done for many years. Yet they are not out of wicked intentions. What redeems her character from the point of view of the reader is her fear. She is afraid of her past coming out and of her poor condition. That is what drives her to carry out many of her actions. As creatures of understanding, one cannot help but sympathize with Lucy's situation and begin to feel some empathy to her character. That is exactly what Braddon had intended when crafting this character and employing the duality within her persona so that she could become a more enjoyable and sympathetic role.

## **Works Cited**

Braddon, Mary Elizabeth. *Lady Audley's Secret*. Edited by Lyn Pickett, Oxford World Classics, 2012.