"Could someone else's hand have sawn that trunk and dragged the frame away?": Laudy Audley's Secret as a revision of Homer's Odyssey

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"Could someone else's hand have sawn that trunk and dragged the frame away?":

*Lady Audley's Secret* as a revision of Homer's *Odyssey*

by

Charles Andrew Rybak

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"What kind of ship is yours, and what course brought you here?": INTRODUCTION, OVERVIEW, AND BASIC CONNECTIONS

Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret* (1861) is a novel that has been largely marginalized by the critical community. This marginalization is seen in the scarcity of articles dedicated to Braddon, and the tendency to quickly label her work as "detective" or "sensational" fiction. And while these generic elements are definitely worth recognizing, one needs to look no further than the *Select Bibliography* in the Oxford edition to find the pigeon hole Braddon's work has been placed in. I believe that Braddon was working with much more artistic range than the "melodrama" she is given credit for, and that her elaborate use of classical myth is one of her overlooked achievements. *Lady Audley's Secret* not only illustrates Braddon's knowledge of Homer's *Odyssey*, but also her active restructuring of the epic and its male archetype.

Braddon does not restructure Odysseus' plight to read as a feminist fairy tale, where women actively venture out into the world and receive timeless praise for their bravery; she restructures the plot's engine rather than its ends. By putting a heroine in the role traditionally inhabited by the male Odysseus figure, Braddon unfolds the plot in order to show her readers the injustice of societal gender roles. This injustice is revealed in Braddon's having all of the "Odyssean" traits initially credited to Lady Audley eventually turned back against her by the ruling patriarchy. It is my goal to show how Braddon both adopts and manipulates Homer's *Odyssey* and to what ends, eventually illustrating that *Lady Audley's Secret* is in many ways an "author-response" criticism which magnificently responded to the call of Adrienne Rich's "Diving into the Wreck" over 100 years ahead of time.
A quick summary of *Lady Audley's Secret* is in order. George Talboys returns from a mining expedition in Australia to find dead the wife he had abandoned, and to whom he hoped to return. In reality, Helen Talboys has feigned her own death, abandoning George and eventually marrying Sir Michael Audley to become Lady Audley. George Talboys is coincidentally best friends with Robert Audley, the nephew of Sir Michael and the now Lady Audley. In seeing a portrait of Lady Audley, George discovers that his wife had faked her death and he attempts to reclaim her. Lady Audley, in a scuffle, throws George down a well, to his apparent death. It is the disappearance of George that initiates Robert's search for his lost friend; this search develops into the quest to prove that Lady Audley and Helen Talboys are the same person. Much of the novel is the struggle between Robert and Lady Audley, the climax being when Lady Audley burns down an inn with the intention of killing Robert. Robert escapes, but the inn's proprietor, Luke Marks, is killed. This death leads to Lady Audley's confession not only of her past actions, but also that she is a madwoman, this trait having been "hereditarily received" from her once institutionalized mother. Robert, fearing that this news will shame the Audley house, arranges for the exile of Lady Audley to a madhouse in Belgium, where she eventually dies in obscurity. The ending is a "happy" one, with George returning safe and sound from what everyone thought had been death. Robert marries George's sister, Clara Talboys, and their home is the idealistic pastoral setting which Robert has always hoped for, with children of his own running around the yard.
Beyond what I feel are some basic connections between *Lady Audley's Secret* and the *Odyssey*, which I will detail for the remainder of this chapter, here is a brief overview of the chapters that follow.

The second chapter is an investigation of the maturation of Robert Audley; its similarity to the Telemachy reveals the dichotomy of "ideal" versus "real" women. A discussion of "wicked women" follows in the third chapter; this comparison of both work's subtexts shows that for Braddon, stories of "wicked women" are actually primary, not secondary. The fourth chapter explores the parallels between Odysseus' trip to the underworld and the violation of Lady Audley's chamber, with the comparison helping to illuminate issues such as prophecy and predestination. The fifth chapter explores the issue of madness through Braddon's "the test of the bow" metaphor, referring to the challenge given to the suitors by Penelope. Discussion of the ritual planting of the oar is the sixth chapter's focus; here I show how Lady Audley actually becomes the oar which needs to be planted. The seventh chapter revolves around the issue of identity and names, with Lady Audley showing herself to have a Protean, rather than a consistent individuality. Throughout this paper, Lady Audley will be shown as identifying with a number of epic figures, ranging from Odysseus to Aphrodite; this uncertainty contributes to the discussions of identity and its instability. The conclusion includes a discussion of Braddon's revisionist enterprise in the thematic context of Adrienne Rich's "Diving into the Wreck." I find Rich's poem to be an important one, and its theme serves as bookends for this paper.

Why would Braddon choose the Odysseus story to convey her message? The story is perfectly suited for Braddon's needs because the Homeric cultural
assumptions involving women were much the same as Victorian England's. The society Homer depicted is what is referred to as a "shame" culture, which removes significance from individuality. For example, as the *Iliad* opens, Achilles is not personally offended because Agamemnon has taken the woman Briseis from him; he's angry because the community has seen her taken from him: Achilles has been shamed. What brought shame within the English culture is important to keep in mind when reading *Lady Audley's Secret*. All of the dominant cultural assumptions were patriarchal, involving the inscription of women into traditional social roles. Women were supposed to stay at home and be wives and mothers, while the husbands made their fortune. Penelope is not unlike what many Victorian men expected their women to be: faithful and waiting at home for the husband's return. It may have been very distressing for Braddon to look around her and see that a classical setting and its cultural assumptions had not evolved much through the centuries; with this urgency she set out to change the basic engine of the myth, supplying heroine instead of hero, in order to show how these basic cultural assumptions were unjust.

What helped convince me that Braddon is intentionally working with the Odysseus archetype is the fact that she also operates on other mythological and theological levels. One of these is the Biblical convention of "meeting at the well," signifying the eventual marriage of the people who rendezvous there. Robert Alter wonderfully describes the workings of this convention in his book *The Art of Biblical Narrative*; Braddon shows that she shares Alter's sharp perception, considering her innovation with the well in *Lady Audley's Secret*:

...the stagnant well, which, cool and sheltered as all else in the old place, hid itself away in the shrubbery behind the gardens, with an idle handle that was never turned, and a lazy rope so rotten that the pail had broken away it, and had fallen into the water (Braddon, 2).
We later learn that the well does not have water in it, which implies infertility; the handle and pail also provide an abundance of phallic suggestions. Considering the traditional well motif, Braddon's setting signals bad tidings for the people who meet there:

A man who was sitting on the broken woodwork of the well started as the lady's-maid came out of the dim shade of the limes and stood before him amongst the weeds and brushwood (25).

This description details an early rendezvous of the soon-to-be-married Phoebe and Luke. Later, Lady Audley has her major confrontation with George at this same well. Both of these relationships reach bad ends, illustrating Braddon's mastery of motifs. In showing such skill at this micro-level, there is no reason why Braddon couldn't have extended these revisionist techniques to an even larger archetype like that of Odysseus.

As the earlier summaries indicate, in my reading of the *Odyssey* its major components are the Telemachy, the story of Agamemnon's murder, the voyage to the underworld, the test of the bow, the planting of the oar, and Odysseus' scar. I find that these major themes and events are those which Braddon adopts and revises. There are also some very basic connections that Braddon makes to the epic, and these are the connections which originally led me to search further and develop my reading into this thesis. It seems that the connections to be made are endless, and what follows are what presented themselves initially as the most visible similarities.
The novel’s opening chapters clearly indicate that Braddon has the circumstances of the *Odyssey* in mind. Just as Odysseus had left his wife Penelope and son Telemachus behind to seek glory on Troy's battlefields, George Talboys has abandoned his wife Helen and young son George, seeking fortune in the gold-mines of Australia. He finds this fortune successfully when “a monster nugget turned up under my spade, and I came upon a gold deposit of some magnitude” (22). The second chapter specifically introduces George on his return trip after a multi-year absence; he intends to reclaim the household he had left behind. The ship is given the mythological name “The Argus,” which refers significantly to the father of the Argives as well as the hundred-eyed monster. As Odysseus seeks his island of Ithaca, George seeks his island nation of England. When we first meet George he is staring desperately across the waves from the ship’s deck:

He threw the end of his cigar into the water, and leaning his elbows upon the bulwarks, stared meditatively at the waves (13).

This is classic epic scenery, such as when Odysseus is first introduced:

But [Hermes] saw nothing of the great Odysseus, who sat apart, as a thousand times before, and racked his own heart growing, with eyes wet scanning the bare horizon of the sea (Fitzgerald, 83).

This is what associates George Talboys with the *Odyssey*: on the Argus’ deck he is Odysseus returning home to reclaim his kingdom.

It is also on the Argus that Braddon initiates her continuous juxtaposition of gender roles. George Talboys talks with a woman named Mrs. Morely, who left her husband to make money as a governess in Australia. She is returning after a fifteen-year absence, and her outlook on homecoming is far bleaker than
George Talboys'. Braddon shows here how women have to think of themselves as commodities:

The person I go to meet may be changed in his feelings towards me; or he may retain all the old feeling until the moment of seeing me, and then lose it in a breath at sight of my poor wan face, for I was called a pretty girl, Mr. Talboys (16).

What is really at stake here is her emotional security, too dependent on her beauty and attractiveness; this is what women have to think about. Whether or not he looks good is never an issue for Odysseus, especially since Athena can make him "beautiful" at will. While Mrs. Morely questions her circumstances, George Talboys has no doubt that everything will be as he left it. Mrs. Morely's history itself is introduced as a twist on the Odyssey's plot just by having a woman returning from an attempt to make her fortune.

In chapter four, Braddon further indicates her knowledge of the Odyssey and foreshadows her intentions to restructure it:

"I shall take a villa on the banks of the Thames, Bob," he said, "for the little wife and myself; and we'll have a yacht, Bob, old boy, and you shall lie on the deck and smoke while my pretty one plays her guitar and sings songs to us. She's for all the world like one of those what's-its-names, who got poor old [Odysseus] into trouble," added the young man, whose classic lore was not very great (35).

Not only does Braddon reveal her own knowledge of classical lore, but she makes the returning hero ominously, and ignorantly, desiring that his wife be one of the deadly Sirens, who provide a gruesome death for all those they attract. As George Talboys doesn't know the danger of Sirens, he also doesn't know what Braddon has in mind for his homecoming; she reconstructs the myth of Odysseus' return and erodes George's masculinist expectations.
So after George's having left his wife, as Odysseus did, "sleeping peacefully with a baby on her breast" (20), the first step in Braddon's rewriting is to have Helen leave home, refusing to be complacent in waiting as Penelope was. She has rejected the returning husband and his household, herself beginning to assume the characteristics of Odysseus by "venturing out." Considering the patriarchal structure, this is daring writing by Braddon; women were supposed to manage the household while the men provided. To reinforce her point of changing circumstances on the home front, Braddon has the son reject the returning father figure as well:

The little fellow pushed him away, "I don't know you," he said. "I love grandpa and Mrs. Monks, at Southampton" (44).

So as *Lady Audley's Secret* opens, both Penelope and Telemachus have rejected their returning hero.

Braddon goes on to create extensive parallels while working with the classical precedent, even incorporating such archetypes as the faithful dog. When Odysseus returned he found his old dog still longing for his arrival. Argos sees his master one last time and dies—showing the greatest dedication. But what is man's best friend is not that to Lady Audley, the dog in her new home being less than receptive:

The dog, which had never liked my lady, showed his teeth with a suppressed growl.... The brute knows that I am frightened of him, and takes advantage of my terror. And yet they call the creatures generous and noble natured! Bah, Caesar; I hate you and you hate me; if you met me in the dark in some narrow passage you would fly at my throat and strangle me, wouldn't you?" (78-79).
This scene indicates that what honored Odysseus will not provide the same support for Lady Audley, and it is ironic that the dog bears the name of a man most famous for his conquests.

When Odysseus returns from his ten-year absence, he finds his hall besieged by suitors who are eating him out of house and home:

Now came the suitors,
young bloods trooping on to their own seats
on thrones or easy chairs. Attendants poured
water over their fingers, while the maids
piled baskets full of brown loaves near at hand,
and houseboys brimmed the bowls with wine.
Now they laid hands upon the ready feast
and thought of nothing more (Fitzgerald, 6).

Penelope remains true to her patriarch, rejecting the suitors and holding them off until her husband can return to crush them. Braddon presents Lady Audley with suitors of her own, and again she reshapes the circumstances, as seen in Sir Michael Audley’s proposal:

Well, Lucy, I will not ask too much of you. I dare say I am a romantic old fool; but if you do not dislike me, and if you do not love any one else, I see no reason why we should not make a very happy couple. Is it a bargain Lucy? (11).

Bargain is the key word, signaling an exchange of property. In Sir Michael’s courting of Helen, Braddon subtly likens him to Paris, who originally stole Helen from Menelaus and took her off to Troy. Braddon’s twist here is that Sir Michael is Paris caught in a mid-life crisis, longing for the looks he once had:

These cruel fears that his age was an insurmountable barrier to his happiness; this sick hatred of his white beard; this frenzied wish to be young again, with glistening raven hair, and a slim waist, such as he had twenty years before (7).
In a major alteration of the classical myth, Sir Audley is accepted as a romantic suitor.

Phoebe and her husband Luke can be identified as financial suitors in that they are blackmailing Lady Audley throughout the novel. This blackmail results from her supposed murder of George by throwing him down the well:

"Oh yes, you will though," answered Luke, with quiet insolence, that had a hidden meaning. "You'll make it a hundred, my lady" (109).

Well Phoebe told me all about what she see, and she told me as she'd met her lady almost directly afterwards, and somethin' had passed between 'em, not much, but enough to let her missus know that the servant what she looked down upon had found out that as would put her in that servant's power to the last day of her life (430).

And unlike Penelope, Lady Audley gives in to these suitors as well in an effort to preserve her new life, distanced from an undesirable past. She basically "does what she has to do." It will be seen that in Lady Audley's abandoning one social role, that of Penelope, the patriarchy has an alternative waiting for her in the guise of the wicked Clytemnestra.

While the patriarchy expects women to be either Penelope or Clytemnestra, Braddon has her heroine raging to be Odysseus. This is first accomplished by showing Lady Audley's urge for adventure, which has been male by right of archetype:

I am weary of life here, and wish, if I can, to find a new one. I go out into the world, disheveled from every link which binds me to the hateful past, to seek another home and another fortune (250).
This urge for adventure is not supposed to be female, and the first chapter of volume three gives Lady Audley more Odyssean traits, all in relation to her new Odyssey, that of struggling against Robert:

I will wait ten minutes...not a moment beyond, before I enter upon my new peril (314).

No, Mr. Robert Audley...I will not go back. If the struggle between us is to be a duel to the death, you shall not find me drop my weapon (317).

These are very heroic qualities, and she has no choice but to claim them because of limited female mobility. Braddon shows the inequity by turning the myth back against Lady Audley again: George ran off to Russia with Robert in the novel's beginning to get away from despair, but the woman does not have this option. She must stay and fight. While Penelope put off the suitors, Lady Audley is willing to die in an effort to resist the returning husband.

The patriarchy does reestablish itself at the end of *Lady Audley's Secret*, just as it does in the *Odyssey*. Braddon has constructed an Odyssean heroine in order to show society's fear of such a construct. The patriarchy is reasserted in the chapter titled, appropriately enough, "Restored." It is here that the "true" Odysseus myth is reinserted, with the male once again filling the heroic role while the woman is submissive, as seen in Robert's speech to Clara:

And do you think, Clara, that I should think any sacrifice too great an one if it were made for you? Do you think there is any voyage I would refuse to take, if I knew that you would welcome me when I came home, and thank me for having served you faithfully? I will go from one end of the Continent of Australia to the other to look for your brother, if you please, Clara; and will never return alive unless I bring him with me, and will take my chance of what reward you shall give me for my labour (440).
It seems that Robert Audley's maturation is complete: he's matured right into the beliefs of the established patriarchy. What is all this talk of going on quests and having the woman faithfully awaiting the man's return? It is the language and structure of the *Odyssey* with its gender roles finally "realigned." The cycle is now ready for another run.

The end of the Homeric epic involves a final task for Odysseus, that of going inland to plant an oar: one more quest for the hero. Robert is given his "oar" by Clara’s father, Mr. Talboys:

> You are going to look for my son.... Bring me back my boy, and I will freely forgive you of having robbed me of my daughter (441).

One more quest for Robert, with Clara being referred to in language that associates her as a prize, reminiscent of the woman traded back and forth in both Homeric epics. I will later show that the oar is not the search for George at all, but the exile of Lady Audley.

It is in fact unnecessary to look for George, everything is truly "restored" because George has already returned. This is ironic since he was the male figure who was returning home at the novel's beginning: like Odysseus, he has been delayed along the way. Robert marries Clara and the conclusion is a basic patriarchal fantasy with the rejected heroine dying an offstage death reminiscent of Falstaff or King Saul. The question to be asked then must be, "Are the mighty ever going to fall?"

It is after the death of Lady Audley that Braddon reveals the harsh reality of her purpose: when the engine of this tale finally stops running, what are we left with? When a woman rejects traditional cultural assumptions and tries to fill the roles reserved for men, she is seen as dangerous and thus must be
discovered and destroyed. This applies to Lady Audley's act of filling the traditionally male role of Odysseus. The patriarchy must first identify her as dangerous, and it is no accident that this is accomplished by reuniting Lady Audley with the name "Helen." The culture allows the wicked woman motif to win out: Helen, of course, is the "wicked woman" who seized her sexual freedom and desire for pleasure, choosing to run off with Paris. Helen's association with sexual promiscuity and appetite constitutes her negativity. The woman who rejects the traditional role of faithful Penelope must then be Helen or Clytemnestra, and what is to be done with her? What we have is two mythological women being fused in the single category of wickedness. Such women are not glorious but mad, and therefore to be hidden away so society can right itself; thus Lady Audley is allowed to waste away, removed from England, in the interest of patriarchy.

Dying without identity, Lady Audley remains a secret. The headstone at the novel's beginning looms ominously; the name Helen, etched in stone, stands as a permanent condemnation, and warning, for women with ideas of liberation.

It is after Lady Audley's death that George Talboys as Odysseus returns from "the dead" and tells Robert the real story of how he escaped from the well. Even here Braddon continues to make connections. On his death bed, Luke Marks tells how he found George after the rejected husband's escape from the well:

Do you remember my bringin' home a gentlemen after ten o'clock one September night; a gentleman as wet through to the skin, and was covered with mud and slush, and green slime and black muck, from the crown of his head to the sole of his foot, and had his arm broke, and his shoulder swelled up awful; and was such a object that nobody would ha' known him? (419).
But I heard the groan again, and then I began to search amongst the bushes. I found a man lyin' hidden under a lot o' laurels, and I thought at first he was up to no good (422-423).

These descriptions are reminiscent of the description of Odysseus when he washes up on Phaiakian shores:

> Here Odysseus tunneled, and raked together with his hands a wide bed—for a fall of leaves was there, enough to save two men or maybe three on a winter night, a night of bitter cold. Odysseus' heart laughed when he saw his leaf-bed, and down he lay, heaping more leaves above him (Fitzgerald, 95).

In the next book, Nausicca finds him “streaked with brine, and swollen, he terrified them,/ so that they fled, this way and that” (103). What is even more striking is Braddon's blatant comparison of Odysseus' battle against the sea with George's struggle to climb out of the empty well; the irony extends further in that while Odysseus was a great soldier, George Talboys "was a cornet in a cavalry regiment" (18). George has truly developed into a microscopic version of Odysseus.

What follows is the happy ending and continuation of the patriarchal cycle. The following chapters are a more in-depth discussion of the Odyssey's major themes, extending from what has been introduced so far.
PHALLUS ATHENA: THE MATURATION OF ROBERT AUDLEY AND THE PATRIARCHAL IMPLICATIONS OF GROWTH

The first four books of the *Odyssey* are often labeled the Telemachy, in reference to their focus on Odysseus' young son and his coming of age. The inclusion of this maturing process is important for many reasons, a major one being that the insight provided into the epic vision mirrors for us many of the intricacies of a cultural vision.

Telemachus represents the promise of tomorrow, the hero who will emerge fully when Odysseus lives only in stories; and more importantly, he provides us with an illustration of the hero in the making, epic "on-the-job" training. It is Telemachus' travels and experiences which reveal what is expected of one in order to be respected by the culture and its institutions. Mary Elizabeth Braddon recreates this same setting of heroic incubation, giving us Robert Audley, who also must go through growing pains in order to be the "hero."

As expected, Braddon revises the mold from which the hero is cast to show how the expectations of her culture were destructive; she provides a clear view of her male character's patriarchal fantasy and the implications for women who end up being the designated players in its rigid drama.

The most rudimentary connection between Robert Audley and Telemachus is that they both search for a missing figure. While Telemachus quests for his father, Robert searches for both Odysseus figures presented in *Lady Audley's Secret*: George Talboys and Lady Audley. By juxtaposing these Odysseus figures Braddon raises an important question: what happens when it is a woman who disappears instead of a man?
Telemachus launches his search by paying visits to those who fought beside his father at Troy, the battleground itself being a womb for heroes. Books three and four are dedicated to his calling upon the households of Nestor and Menelaus. Telemachus' purpose here is to gather as much information as possible concerning Odysseus' disappearance; he searches for details and asks if anything has been heard about the missing hero. Robert Audley uses the same method, frequently visiting the former associations of Helen Talboys, trying to piece everything together that led up to her supposed death. In the chapter "So Far and No Further," Robert visits Mrs. Vincent, a former employer of Lady Audley. Visits to Helen Talboys' family and the questioning of Mrs. Barkamb are also examples of Robert's method.

It is during these visits that we get our first glimpses of the maturing heroes. Early in her novel, Braddon describes in detail the immaturity of Robert Audley, especially in relation to his profession:

Robert Audley was supposed to be a barrister. As a barrister was his name inscribed in the Law List; as a barrister, he had chambers in Fig-Tree Court, Temple; as a barrister he had eaten the allotted number of dinners, which form the sublime ordeal through which the forensic aspirant wades on to fame and fortune. If these things can make a man a barrister, Robert Audley decidedly was one. But he had never either had a brief, or tried to get a brief, or even wished to have a brief in all those five years, during which his name had been painted upon the doors in Fig Tree Court. He was a handsome, lazy, care for nothing fellow, of about seven-and-twenty (32).

Later, Robert himself admits to having little experience in life and being unprepared for what seem like the smallest tasks. Robert analyzes his own need for maturation by observing:

I have never practiced as a barrister. I have enrolled myself in the ranks of a profession, the members of which hold solemn responsibilities, and
have sacred duties to perform; and I have shrunk from those responsibilities and duties, as I have from all the fatigues of this troublesome life: but we are sometimes forced into the very position we have most avoided, and I have found myself lately compelled to think of these things (119).

This same lack of maturity is illustrated when he is to assume the guardianship of George Jr.:

"It's a great responsibility," exclaimed Robert; "I, guardian to anybody or anything! I, who never in life could take care of myself!" (46).

Braddon is really starting at ground zero with Robert, showing him to be "green" in the institutions of law and guardianship, and from that point on she extensively develops the character. Robert's being unable to take care of himself certainly calls to mind the reader's first vision of a helpless Telemachus, languishing among the suitors that ravage his home:

Long before anyone else, the prince Telemakhos now caught sight of Athena—for he, too, was sitting there unhappy among the suitors, a boy, daydreaming (Fitzgerald, 5).

But each character is depicted in moments of growth in extension from these starting points. When Robert visits both George Talboys' son and father-in-law, he recognizes that the living conditions are not fit for the child. He also shows an ethical awareness of how to go about gaining his information:

"I am not a detective officer, and I do not think that the most accomplished detective would like to get his information from a child" (176).

So in emulating an ideal, Robert takes George Jr. from the home and immediately secures his education by placing him in a school for boys.
Maturation is complete in the *Odyssey* when Telemachus emerges as a key player in his father's restoration; he plays a vital role in trouncing the suitors, and helps the patriarch to reassert his position by the end of book 22. Consistent with her relevant chapter titles, Braddon aptly has one of her final sections called "Restored," and it is here that George Talboys finally returns, ironically right after Lady Audley has been "removed":

> The visitor, whoever he was, sat with his back to the window and his head bent upon his breast. But he started up as Robert Audley entered the room, and the young man uttered a great cry of delight and surprise, and opened his arms to his lost friend, George Talboys (442).

This is very similar to when father and son reunite in book 16 of the *Odyssey*, which is set at the swinehearer Eumaias':

> Then, throwing his arms around this marvel of a father Telemakhos began to weep. Salt tears rose from the wells of longing in both men (296).

Braddon's twist here of course is that George Talboys has not battled anyone to establish any sort of a glorious return. Robert as Telemachus has battled against a female Odysseus, and George's return is really more of an anti-climactic convenience than a triumph.

Essential in securing any hope for triumph, when Telemachus searches for Odysseus he has the constant aid and protection of Athena; the goddess states her intentions early on to Zeus:

> For my part, I shall visit Ithaka to put more courage in the son, and rouse him to call an assembly of the islanders,
Akhaian gentleman with flowing hair.
He must warn off that wolf pack of suitors
who prey upon his flocks and dusky cattle.
I'll send him to the mainland then, to Sparta
by the sand beach of Pylos; let him find
news of his dear father where he may
and win his renown about the world (4).

Braddon gives Robert Audley an Athena of his own in the form of Clara
Talboys, George's sister, who becomes his inspiration when he considers
abandoning his quest:

A quarter of an hour before, he had believed that all was over, and that he
was released from the dreadful duty of discovering the secret of George’s
death. Now this girl, this apparently passionless girl, had found a voice,
and was urging him on towards his fate (199).

Later, Braddon directly identifies Clara with Athena, again showing her
incorporation of the classical text:

‘What am I in her hands?’ he thought. ‘What am I in the hands of this
woman, who has my lost friend’s face and the manner of Pallas Athena?
She reads my pitiful, vacillating soul, and plucks the thoughts out of my
heart with the magic of her solemn brown eyes. How unequal the fight
must be between us, and how can I ever hope to conquer against the
strength of her beauty and her wisdom?’ (258).

In is no mistake that Braddon associates Clara with wisdom, of which Athena is
goddess. The name "Clara" itself implies a clarity and sharpness of vision and
intellect. Here too, Robert admits his inferiority to the idealized Clara, deference
to the gods being the single most essential attribute for the true Greek heroes.
Clara's "magic" brown eyes are also consistent with Athena's celebrated magic
gray eyes that often influenced Telemachus, as in book 2 when, "Telemakhous,
now strong in magic, cried" for planned actions to be set in motion.
Other attributes of Athena are also consistent with the character of Clara. She is associated with light and the sun, which parallels Clara's guiding Robert. Athena is a patron of various arts, especially weaving; when Robert first meets Clara:

This second person was a lady, who sat at the last of a range of four windows, employed with some needlework, the kind which is generally called plain work, and with a large wicker basket, filled with calicoes and flannels standing by her (187).

Athena is also associated with law and civic virtue, being the goddess of the "city's life"; this attribute becomes more important when arriving at the explanation of Clara as the male "ideal."

Clara has another attribute of Athena: she shows up unexpectedly and out of nowhere. This is illustrated just before Robert and Clara's first real conversation. After not saying anything to Robert in her father's presence, Clara suddenly appears when Robert is in his carriage heading away from the Talboys' estate:

He was startled by the appearance of a woman running, almost flying, along the carriage drive by which he had come, and waving a handkerchief in her uplifted hand...."Good heavens!" he exclaimed, "it's Miss Talboys" (196).

This predilection for manifesting herself is seen again when Robert is in a small church gathering his thoughts. Someone begins to play the church organ beautifully. The musician turns out to be Clara, in another association with Athena, patroness of the arts:

Of all people in the world she was the last whom Robert either expected or wished to see. She had told him that she was going to pay a visit to some friend who lived in Essex; but the county is a wide one, and the village of
Audley one of the most obscure and least frequented spots in the whole of its extent (257).

With the association of Clara and Athena, and her knack for appearing from nowhere, Braddon includes the epic tradition of formulaic expression. There are many repeated passages in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, identified as being formulaic for many reasons, one being mnemonic purposes. In the chapter, again aptly titled, "Clara," Robert says:

"A hand that is stronger than my own is beckoning me onward upon the dark road" (199).

And again later, Robert remarks:

"A hand that is stronger than my own is beckoning me onward on the dark road that leads to my lost friend's unknown grave" (257).

This line occurs on numerous occasions in the course of the novel, pages 167 and 172 being two other examples. It is quite crafty that Braddon adopts an epic tradition when parodying an epic relationship between hero and goddess. And like Athena, the spirit of Clara is there when Robert despairs or thinks his task is over. This occurs at a time when Robert feels that he is outmatched by Lady Audley because she knows his intentions while he has no idea of hers. Robert shudders, then:

The face of Clara Talboys—that grave and earnest face so different in its character to my lady's fragile beauty—arose before him. "What a coward I am to think of myself or my own danger," he thought (274).

Braddon's twist here is ironic: Robert is inspired by a woman in his hunt to destroy another woman. The male ideal of a "good" woman is pitted against the nightmare of a "wicked" one. Braddon elevates this tension by merging the ideal
and wicked woman motifs in Lady Audley's character. The struggle is internal and between definitions, of which only one will win out. This is a major contributor to the fact that, as the plot works itself through, social roles are based on inequity.

The dichotomy of wicked and good women represents the patriarchal fantasy; Braddon has spent much time illustrating how this fantasy permeates her text. Robert provides a glimpse of the patriarchal vision early in the novel:

I wish to heaven I could give him back his wife, and send him down to Ventnor to finish his days in peace (86).

In this view, the woman is something to be given, and the fantasy is one of having a wife by the husband's side when he is finally ready to settle down permanently.

Robert's patriarchal vision also includes his future generations:

If I ever marry, and have daughters (which remote contingency may Heaven forfend!), they shall be educated in the paper buildings, take their sole exercise in the Temple Gardens, and they shall never go beyond the gates till they are marriageable, when I will take them straight across Fleet Street to St. Dunstan's Church, and deliver them into the hands of their husbands (116).

Women are here again a commodity, delivered like parcels to the available men.

Male companionship is also a large part of the patriarchal fantasy; there are many instances of this camaraderie's importance throughout Braddon's text. As is the case when influenced by Clara, it is the desire for his bests friend's presence that often drives Robert on. During this search, Robert often indicates his affection for the missing George:

"Who would have thought that I could have grown so fond of the fellow," he muttered, "or feel so lonely without him? I've a comfortable
little fortune in the three per cents.; I'm heir-presumptive to my uncle's title; and I know of a certain dear little girl, who, as I think, would do her best to make me happy; but I declare that I would freely give up all and stand penniless in the world to-morrow, if this mystery could be satisfactorily cleared away, and George Talboys could stand by my side" (161).

As in the epics, it is honor among the male community which takes precedence. In the Lime-walk, Robert expresses the patriarchal vision to Lady Audley herself, when describing for her his lost friend's wishes:

"The thought that was uppermost in his mind was the thought of his wife," he repeated. "His fairest hope in the future was the hope of making her happy, and lavishing upon her the fortune he had won by the force of his own strong arm in the gold-fields of Australia" (266).

The heroic imagery here is prevalent, and again the woman is represented as a object to be acted upon, even when spoken in her presence. This is no different from the plan of Odysseus, who hides a fortune on the shores of Ithaca when he first returns home. Once he restores his rule, he will use it to confirm his status and glory.

The fact that the language so often shows the woman as passive is an important part of Braddon's technique; this is best seen in a passage where George is describing past feelings for Helen:

He had loved and believed in his wife from the first to the last hour of his brief married life....George never forgot the hour in which he had first been bewitched by Lieutenant Maldon's pretty daughter (184). [Italics mine]

In passages like these Lady Audley is never mentioned by name, but rather defined as a possession of various men, thus the appropriate possessive form. And in reference to Clara, the patriarchal fantasy takes its more traditional shape in that a heroic deed will be performed for the woman in an effort to "win" her:
this is the traditional active and passive imagery that is the "white knight" patriarchal archetype.

So what are the implications of all of these connections that Braddon makes? I find that they revolve around the purpose the first four books of the Odyssey serve in defining cultural heroes. The Telemachy asks, "who are the heroes and what steps need to be taken to achieve that honored status?" In both texts the answer is revealed by a process of maturing, yet for Braddon, it results in the exile of the main character.

A hero must also be viewed by the institutions in which success is achieved. Odysseus is so defined in reference to the institutions of king, husband, soldier, and father, all of which are patriarchal. Robert is the same way. He defines himself in terms of family by trying to be a good nephew; he starts to achieve success in the temple and becomes more recognized by his peers, often a topic of conversation among their ranks; and Audley goes on to his greatest professional achievement in "the great breach of promise case of Hobbs v. Nobbs" (445). The institution of law at this time was obviously patriarchal, and Robert's success here is a telling piece in the puzzle of a vision. The puzzle is finally completed at the end of the novel when Robert succeeds in obtaining his prize by marrying Clara, thus adding being a husband to his success.

What is celebrated in the Telemachy? It is the promise of tomorrow, that an established, cultural cycle is being honored: when one "son" sets another rises to bring the light. The cycle is one where youth will aspire, and step into the roles of greatness defined by those before them. Even the heroes in the Homeric epics are constantly telling stories of the great ones who preceded them. In the Odyssey the legacy is one of fathers and sons; in Lady Audley's Secret it has
become the legacy of men in general. Youth must make sure that institutions such as law, marriage, and family are respected as before. Youth is recognized when it matches the great traditions and becomes another story worthy of telling, worthy enough to be used as an example for the culture.

It is this notion of "hereditary patriarchy" that casts a sense of biological doom on the women players in this drama. The hereditary cycles that women are associated with are menstruation and madness—not wars, glory, or fortune. It is the patriarchal vision that guides here, and in that view it is important to see which type of woman helps and which type hurts. (This is the undertext of the *Odyssey* that I'll be detailing further in the next chapter.) That is truly what Robert's maturing process has been all about: he has learned to distinguish between women. He couldn't love his aunt because she was wicked; he couldn't love his cousin because she was simple; but he could love Clara because she was ideal. He made the "right" choice and was "rewarded" at the novel's end. What we have had is the vision of a patriarchal hero in the making, with the unwanted by-product being exiled.

Even though Clara as a woman has guided Robert, she is really nothing more than an ideal, and Braddon presents no insight into her character other than Robert's impressions. She implores him to seek her brother, and is a symbol of what men feel their women should be: Clara is a construction, not a character—a construction of the "city's life." Clara juxtaposed with Lady Audley reveals some interesting textual themes: Clara is tradition and Audley is the "present"; Clara is the patriarchal ideal while Lady Audley is pragmatic, trying to survive in a real world. The classic image from John Donne's "A Valediction: Forbidden Mourning" is very relevant here: Lady Audley is no longer the fixed
compass point that the male extension will eventually return to; she has actually ventured out herself as the "drawing" end, trying to be the architect of her own security. It is this venturing out that challenges all tradition.

What is challenged is a male, juvenile fantasy that there is an immobile, beautiful woman who needs to be rescued and will love the hero for it. Fairy tales have shown again and again that like Lady Audley, women are expected to have a "fixed" position: Cinderella is trapped in the wicked step-mother's house, the princess trapped in the tower is saved by Rapunzel, and Snow White is revived from her coma in a glass casket. It is this type of tradition that the Derridian notion of structure attacks.

The metaphor often used for Derrida's anti-structural sentiment is that a circle is a structure and its center is an imaginary ideal; it doesn't really exist because to be in the structure you must be a point on the circle itself:

This center is, in effect, a transcendental point of absolute presence. So long as we believe in a transcendental signified--a point of absolute meaning outside and above the world of discourse that gives significance to the whole--the center holds. But once we cease to have God and have only god-terms...then the very notion of a center must be challenged" (Richter 946).

In Braddon's case, a religious structure is not being challenged, but the patriarchal one; in reference to the above quotation, Clara is the transcendental ideal to which women fit "best" in the cultural structure. And following the passage through, once we cease to have Clara we only have "Clara-terms" or "woman-terms," and Lady Audley is fighting those terms. She is trying to live in reality, as a point on the circle, and because of this is hunted and rejected. That is the difference of what happens when men and women disappear.
Clara as Pallas Athena is more like Phallus Athena, to borrow the Lacanian term. Lacan presents the view that patriarchy is biological, our roles in the world of symbols being determined before we are even two years old, by the now cliché oedipal drama, castration fear, and other nonsense such as penis envy. Lacan goes on to say about the Phallus that not only is it the language that is patriarchal, but all of our societal institutions. This is exactly what Braddon is representing in her novel: Clara is a guiding principle, a hand stronger than the character's own, which is the Phallus. All institutions described remain honored and intact, a status achieved after Lady Audley is denied her own maturity.
"The day of faithful wives is gone forever": THE MISOGYNISTIC SUB-TEXT OF WICKED WOMEN, TRICKERY, AND ITS RELATION TO LADY AUDLEY'S SECRET

1. Robert Audley's misogyny and the wicked woman sub-text

Throughout *Lady Audley's Secret* Robert Audley reveals himself as a misogynist, his language supporting the "wicked-woman" archetype that seems to have originated when stories first started being told. Robert's misogyny and his hunt for the wicked woman are parallel to the *Odyssey*’s subtext: that of Agamemnon's murder by his wife Clytemnestra and her lover on the king's return from Troy. This story raises many issues in the classical text and its Victorian revision—wickedness, revolution, and adultery being a few.

In the Homeric text, the Clytemnestra sub-plot serves purposes vital to the story's development. This sub-plot's greatest contribution is as a juxtaposition for Odysseus' and Penelope's marital relationship. Penelope's faithfulness is a crucial portion of her husband's greatness, and the only attribute of her own when viewed through "traditional" eyes. The patriarchal take on this might be, "whichever husband is worth waiting for must be the greater hero."

The sub-plot is also essential in establishing Telemachus' glory. It is the son of Agamemnon, Orestes, that avenges his murdered father, thus establishing the importance of "leaving a son behind" to care of the unprotected house; the wicked woman is an instrument here that gives the son an opportunity to prove himself a hero. The question in the *Odyssey* is what the son left behind will do about the suitors ravaging his home.

Clytemnestra's story also provides one grounding point for the two types of women representing the patriarchal dichotomy: the wicked and the virtuous.
Penelope is clearly needed to provide the other half of this "simple" feminine equation. Clytemnestra is said to have been seduced by Aegisthus when Agamemnon was at Troy; they plot his murder and upon the return of the king slaughter him in the banquet hall. This attack against the king, husband, and father figure is a total surprise, which corresponds with the suitors' experience when Odysseus reveals himself and rains doom upon them in the form of his arrows.

This sub-text involving the house of Atreus announces itself as one of the Odyssey's crucial components when it is introduced in book one by Zeus, leader of the gods:

> In the bright hall of Zeus upon Olympus
> the other gods were all at home, and Zeus,
> the father of gods and men, made conversation.
> For he had meditated on Aigisthos, dead
> by the hand of Agamemnon's son, Orestes,
> and spoke his thought aloud before them all:

> "My word, how mortals take the gods to task!
> All their afflictions come from us, we hear.
> And what of their own failings? Greed and folly
double the suffering in the lot of man.
See how Aigisthos, for his double portion,
stole Agamemnon's wife and killed the soldier
on his homecoming day" (2).

This plotline is introduced immediately after a description of Odysseus on Calypso's island. Also occurring at this moment is Penelope pining away for her lost husband. She has not yet taken a suitor, has spent much time trying to stall their marital advances, and is not remotely close to planning any sort of ambush. This portrait of virtue is presented immediately after one of deception and violence.
Lady Audley's assuming the role of heroine is so problematic because Braddon inserts her right in the middle of this patriarchal dichotomy. She had left her husband before his return and married another man, yet at the same time there is no wickedness in her present situation with Sir Michael, who is certainly not a figure to be compared with Aegisthus. Before George's return the scene is, at least in some respects, one of comfort and not treachery. While Clytemnestra was a queen who lived in luxury, Lady Audley is trying to secure for herself "no more dependence, no more drudgery, no more humiliations" (12). In faking her death, Lady Audley is not out to attack George, but only to deceive him, which is half of what Clytemnestra and Aegisthus' agenda was.

The story of Clytemnestra does not disappear after Zeus' mulling over the events. Not only is it vital that the audience know about it, but that this knowledge extend to the Odyssey's key players, including Telemachus. He is told this story not once, but twice, the first time on his visit to Nestor:

While we were hard-pressed in the war at Troy
[Aigisthos] stayed safe inland in the grazing country,
making light talk to win Agamemnon's queen.
But the Lady Klytaimnestra, in the first days,
rebuffed him, being faithful still;
then, too, she had at her hand as her companion
a minstrel Agamemnon left attending her,
charged with her care, when he took ship for Troy.
Then came the fated hour when she gave in.
Her lover tricked the poet and marooned him
on a bare island for the seabirds' picking,
and took her home, as he and she desired (43).

Important here is that Clytemnestra was once faithful and later "converted" to wickedness. This type of description enhances the possibilities for Penelope's character who is still in the "faithful" stage—the apparent cocoon known as
"waiting." The reality here is disturbing: whether Clytemnestra is faithful or adulterous has nothing to her with her character—everything depends on isolating her from protectors. A woman's faithfulness seems to be measured not by personal volition, but by the strength of those in her company, thus the growing importance of Telemachus.

The only people left in Lady Audley's company when George Talboys went to Australia were his newborn child and a drunken father. Braddon develops this situation so that it reflects poorly on George and not on the wife who was left; while Robert's hunt for Lady Audley revolves around her leaving George, there is no doubt that Talboys is a weak character, by no means "heroic." His weakness is illustrated by the fact that his acquired fortune is the result of pure luck in finding a nugget rather than perseverance and accomplishment. He doesn't assume the care of his own son upon return, but thrusts him into the care of Robert, and after doing this, George again runs off for a hunting vacation in Russia. Maybe it is on this hunting trip that George will acquire the scar which is the first kernel of Odysseus' fame, because through the early portions of *Lady Audley's Secret* he is clearly a weak and undependable figure.

Menelaus also comments on the betrayal of his brother Agamemnon when Telemachus comes to visit:

[Agisthus] led him in to banquet, all serene, and killed him, like an ox felled at the trough; and not a man of either company survived that ambush in Aigisthos' house (68).

This story is very relevant for Menelaus in that he is married to Helen, who is the "wicked" reason the Greeks went to Troy in the first place; the story of Clytemnestra is told in her presence, and maybe for good reason in the eyes of
Menelaus. What is ironic about this whole sub-plot is that Clytemnestra seems to play a very passive role: she was seduced and is not the one who actually kills her husband, yet she is assigned the greatest evil—identified as most at fault when this story is told and re-told. It is this public transmission of wickedness that Robert Audley tries to prevent in exiling Lady Audley; he tries to restore honor to the Audley house in the best way he can, the methods of Orestes not being a realistic option in Braddon's setting.

It is when Odysseus ventures to the underworld that he is finally told this story, being the one person to whom the contents are most relevant. He hears the story right from the mouth of Agamemnon; what is so important about this telling is that it is here the story finally develops into full-blown misogynist doctrine. I quote this at length because I feel it is the most important document the wicked-woman sub-text:

"In my extremity I heard Kassandra, Priam's daughter, piteously crying as the traitress Klytaimnестra made to kill her along with me. I heaved up from the ground and got my hands around the blade, but she eluded me that whore. Nor would she close my two eyes as my soul swam to the underworld or shut my lips. There is no being more fell, more bestial than a wife in such an action, and what an action that one planned! The murder of her husband and her lord. Great god, I thought my children and my slaves at least would give me welcome. But that woman, plotting a thing so low, defiled herself and all her sex, all women yet to come, even those few who may be virtuous."

He paused then, and [Odysseus] answered:

"Foul and dreadful. That was the way that Zeus who views the wide world
vented his hatred on the sons of Atreus—intrigues of women, even from the start. Myriads
died by Helen's fault, and Klytaimnestra plotted against you half the world away."

And at once he said:

"Let it be a warning even to you. Indulge a woman never, and never tell her all you know. Some things a man may tell, some he should cover up" (199).

This discussion goes on further and concludes with the strongest statement of all: "The day of faithful wives is gone forever" (200). The constant recognition and retelling of the wicked woman is crucial because the stories are always flowing from the mouths of the culture's greatest heroes. Agamemnon's story, when told to Odysseus, has a stronger edge for good reason, murder being the greatest incursion on epic hospitality (where one can eat for days before having to reveal his name!), but it is the move to condemn all women that is the threatening advance of misogyny. Agamemnon's comments are similar to the common condemnations of Eve for plucking the forbidden fruit. Eve's punishment was hereditary pain in childbirth, and Agamemnon's judgment is also hereditary: The character of "all women yet to come" now includes, among other things, wickedness and madness (which are often the same symptom). The epics are about heroes, which means their discussion of women joins the list of things to be emulated.

Braddon takes this misogynistic voice and puts it in the mouth of her most visible character: Robert Audley. Robert Audley is at times made out by Braddon to be comic and misguided, yet when sifting through what is presented
as lighthearted, Robert is clearly a misogynist, disliking any woman who steps outside the parameters of the patriarchal ideal:

"I hate women," he thought savagely. "They're bold, brazen, abominable creatures, invented for the annoyance and destruction of their superiors. Look at this business of poor George's! It's all woman's work from one end to the other. He marries a woman, and his father casts him off, penniless and professionless. He hears of the woman's death and he breaks his heart—his good, honest, manly heart, worth a million of the treacherous lumps of self-interest and mercenary calculation which beat in women's breasts. He goes to a woman's house and he is never seen alive again (207-208).

Later Robert seems to refer directly to Agamemnon's fate by saying, "George Talboys had been cruelly and treacherously murdered by the wife he had loved and mourned" (397). The above block quotation is similar to the voice of Agamemnon, where a particular instance is extended to engulf all members of the gender. And even the incident itself is misread by Robert, since all the trouble comes from the father's "casting him off" rather than from Lady Audley. Robert is on a witch-hunt and has clearly expressed how he feels about women.

As in the Odyssey, the misogynist stance is not presented in isolation, but is pervasive throughout Lady Audley's Secret and applied in a multitude of situations. When Robert visits Mrs. Vincent, the former employer of Lady Audley, it is shown that she was very fond of her while another employee, Miss Tonks, was not, apparently being jealous of her. This leads Robert to again analyze a situation and generalize about the feminine gender:

"How pitiless these women are to each other," he thought, while the teacher was absent. "This one knows intuitively that there is some danger to the other lurking beneath my questions. She sniffs the coming trouble to her fellow female creature, and rejoices in it, and would take any pains to help me. What a world it is, and how these women take life out of
men's] hands. Helen Maldon, Lady Audley, Clara Talboys, and now Miss Tonks—all womankind from beginning to end" (237).

The sentiment here is that socially, a woman is a purely instinctual animal; it is Darwinian in that there is a ruthless instinct of "every woman for herself."

Robert's vision of men honors the epic glorification of male companionship; it is their ability to interact in society that has brought them fame. It is the ability to recognize each other's greatness and tell stories about one's great friends that helps to secure heroic status and give credit to the teller. So again we have the dichotomy of men being civilized and women being dangerous, always potentially savage. It is this type of meditation by Robert that leads him to say things (with a pun on "which") such as "If that which I have found to-day is no evidence for a jury...it is surely enough to convince my uncle that he has married a designing and infamous woman" (239). Lady Audley is seen as treacherous even though Sir Michael has expressed again and again that he is one of the happiest men in the world.

Robert expresses his view of the wicked woman directly to the heroine when he confronts Lady Audley in the lime-walk:

"A bold woman, my lady, who thought to play her comedy out to the end without fear of detection; a wicked woman, who did not care what misery she might inflict upon the honest heart of the man she betrayed; but a foolish woman, who looked at life as a game of chance, in which the best player was likely to hold the winning cards, forgetting that there is Providence among the pitiful spectators, and that wicked secrets are never permitted to remain long hidden. If this woman of whom I speak had never been guilty of any blacker sin than the publication of that lying announcement in the Times newspaper, I should still hold her as the most detestable and despicable of her sex—the most pitiless and calculating of human creatures. That cruel lie was a base and cowardly blow in the dark; it was the treacherous dagger thrust of an infamous assassin" (268).
What is Braddon referring to here other than the Clytemnestra sub-text? The Times announcement was the first thing George Talboys was greeted with when he returned home, and Braddon ingeniously casts this in violent language which includes daggers, infamous assassins, and evil plans in general, just as when Agamemnon first arrived home. As Agamemnon was killed soon after arrival, so was Lady Audley’s marriage to George Talboys. She heard that he was coming home and enacted the plot of faking her death.

The confrontation in the lime-walk also serves to unite the issues of wickedness and madness, with Lady Audley accusing Robert of being insane and thus initiating the test of the bow (see my fifth chapter). After Robert reflects that Lady Audley could use her influence to have him sent to a mad-house, Braddon writes:

I do not say that Robert Audley was a coward, but I will admit that a shiver of horror, something akin to fear, chilled him to the heart, as he remembered the horrible things that have been done by women, since that day upon which Eve was created to be Adam’s companion and help-meet in the garden of Eden (273-274).

Madness and wickedness are fused together through the bond of heredity. Braddon points right to the Hebrew Bible, indicting the first woman and the wickedness that she supposedly willed to women.

What is truly generational for women here is the "hereditary guilty conscience." The history of wicked women is supposed to serve as not only a lighthouse for the patriarchs, but one for women as well—an "anti-conduct book" of sorts. The wicked woman tradition is a patriarchal insurance policy: the effort is to show women what is wrong and hope they will live by the lessons. A guilty conscience results when identity is continually under siege, when one is unable
to define her own life and is instead defined by the patriarchal vision. It is this negative effect of the vision which leads Lady Audley to question herself, almost as if she were a stranger. Robert is trying to enforce the patriarchal assumptions with his generalizations; this contrasts with Lady Audley's feminine individuality and desires:

"I was not wicked when I was young," she thought, as she stared gloomily at the fire, "I was only thoughtless. I never did any harm—at least, never willfully. Have I ever been really wicked I wonder?" she mused. "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. I wonder whether they suffered—those women—whether they ever suffered as—...." (297).

Lady Audley is asking a real face to be given the body of a generalizing archetype. As flesh and blood she suffers while the characters in myths don't. The myths themselves are wicked when held up as models, when readers look at the generalization and try to find that wicked face in their own lives, hence the potential "double edge" of tradition. When Lady Audley questions herself as to whether or not she is wicked, the patriarchal vision is fighting to assert itself in her consciousness; it denies her the opportunity for self-responsibility, thus calling for the comment on Robert after Lady Audley's eventual confession and surrender to the patriarchy: "He sat alone, trying to think what he ought to do, and with the awful responsibility of a wicked woman's fate upon his shoulders" (367). Again in the patriarchal vision, responsibility is where it should be, with a broad-shouldered Atlas, where things are supposedly safe and there is less chance of the world "falling off" its foundation.
2. When Trickster and Wicked Woman are Synonymous

One of the defining characteristics of the wicked woman in *Lady Audley’s Secret* is "what an actress this woman is. What an arch trickster--what an all-accomplished deceiver" (256). Being able to play tricks and deceive is the one quality that makes Odysseus the most famous. Nestor tells Telemachus of Odysseus' unmatched cunning:

Think: we were there nine years, and we tried everything, all stratagems against them, up to the bitter end that Zeus begrudged us. And as to stratagems, no man would claim Odysseus' gift for those. He had no rivals, your father, at the tricks of war (Fitzgerald, 38).

These tricks extend far beyond the battlefield and throughout the *Odyssey’s* pages; Braddon transplants this ability into her heroine, Lady Audley, to show that what a man receives credit for is evidence against a woman, lining her up as a cultural suspect.

Odysseus' greatest tool in deception is the capacity he has for disguising himself. Odysseus does this at length when he returns to Ithaca incognito as a beggar up until the massacre in the great hall. In book 4, Helen gives a detailed description of some of Odysseus' methods:

He had, first, given himself an outrageous beating and thrown some rags on--like a household slave--then slipped into that city of wide lanes among his enemies. So changed he looked as never before upon the Akhaian beachhead, but like a beggar, merged in the townspeople; and no one there remarked him (60).
And like her husband, Penelope is involved in deception, this of course being the famous incident where she unravels the funeral shroud she was weaving for Laertes. It is ironic that when this is first introduced, it is as an example of wickedness produced by the suitors:

Here is an instance of her trickery:
she had her great loom standing in the hall
and the fine warp of some vast fabric on it;
we were attending her, and she said to us:
'Young men, my suitors, now my lord is dead,
let me finish my weaving before I marry....
So every day she wove on the great loom--
but every night by torchlight she unwove it;
and so for three years she deceived the Akhaians (22).

What makes Penelope's trickery permissible, different from that of Clytemnestra, is the relation the actions have to the husband who has not yet returned: Penelope's is in honor of Odysseus.

Lady Audley will use deceit much in the way that Odysseus and Penelope do, and it is predictably not a credit to her status as a hero. The greatest instance of trickery used by Lady Audley is also that of disguise; she fakes her death, forsaking her identity of Helen Talboys and disguising herself as Lucy Graham (who happens to be very poor). It is also revealing that while Penelope kept unraveling the funeral shroud in an effort to bide time, Lady Audley does the exact opposite, actually weaving her own shroud, not wasting any time and marrying a suitor in Sir Michael soon after.

Lady Audley, when realizing that suspicion has been aroused, often involves herself in deception to throw Robert off her trail. Even when Lady Audley learns that by some dark coincidence George Talboys is friends with Robert, and will be visiting her home, she constantly comes up with one crafty
excuse or another to prevent her and George from ever being in one another's presence (51). It is not until the breaching of Lady Audley's chamber that her identity is discovered. The result of all these tricks is Robert's references to her as "wicked" or a "trickster," as described earlier. Lady Audley is forced into a role that does not involve the praise she would have received as Odysseus.

What much of this "trickery" revolves around is the issue of adultery; again this proves to be a gender-specific situation. Odysseus sleeps with three different women on his way home from Troy, and when involved with Circe, glorious deception and adultery are synonymous. Circe has turned Odysseus' men into pigs, and he must avoid the same fate in order to get his men back. Hermes gives Odysseus instructions in how to deceive Circe:

Take with you to her bower
as amulet, this plant I know--
it will defeat her horrid show....

Your cup with numbing drops of night
and evil, stilled of all remorse,
she will infuse to charm your sight;
but this great herb with holy force
will keep your mind and senses clear:
when she turns cruel, coming near
with her long stick to whip you out of doors,
then let your cutting blade appear,

Let instant death upon it shine,
and she will cower and yield her bed--
a pleasure you must not decline,
so may her lust and fear bestead
you and your friends, and break her spell (174).

So Odysseus must trick Circe and then have sexual relations with her in order to get his men back. This story contributes to the fame of Odysseus just like any
other, and the fact that he sleeps with Circe is a credit. What becomes apparent in both the Homeric and Braddon texts is that it is permissible for a man to commit adultery, but not for a woman; this isn't because adultery reveals anything about a woman's moral character, but because the woman committing adultery shames the respected male figure.

The above fact is no better represented than in book 8 of the *Odyssey*, where the Harper retells the tale of Hephaistus catching his wife, Aphrodite, in bed with Ares. Hephaistus knew what was going on and built a golden net which was so fine that the adulterers wouldn't be able to see it. Hephaistus lets his wife and Ares think they will be alone and subsequently catches the lovers in the net, holding them in it in an effort to humiliate them. What happens is quite different. The male gods crowd around the scene, while of course "the goddesses stayed home for shame." The gods break out into laughter and the comment "no dash in adultery now" is made. What is crucial here is when Apollo leans over to Hermes and asks:

"Son of Zeus, beneficent Wayfinder, would you accept a coverlet of chain, if only you lay by Aphrodite's golden side?"

To this the Wayfinder replied, shining:

"Would I not though, Apollo of distances! Wrap me in chains three times the weight of these, come goddesses and gods to see the fun; only let me lie beside the pale-golden one!" (135).

It is not Aphrodite or Ares that this scene reflects poorly upon, but the husband Hephaistus. In catching his wife in adultery, Hephaistus has shamed himself, and has others hoping for a similar chance at public bondage.
This shaming of the husband is consistent in *Lady Audley's Secret*, with Lady Audley's exile being an effort to save Sir Michael from humiliation. This is seen in Robert's conversation with Dr. Mosgrave, who is largely responsible for the cover-up of Lady Audley's situation:

"I will trust you, Dr. Mosgrave," he said; "I will confide entirely in your honor and goodness. I do not ask you to do any wrong to society; but I ask you to save our stainless name from degradation and shame" (378).

Is the identity of Aphrodite yet another social construct that Lady Audley must resist? She is often described as being beautiful to excess, with her idealized golden curls and blue eyes. And Robert acknowledges adultery as an issue, knowing that if Lady Audley is Helen, then she is a bigamist who is living "in sin." Once Lady Audley is caught in the golden net by Robert (who has himself had to fight the feeling of falling in love with his aunt), the issue is how to prevent Sir Michael from being humiliated, an acknowledged concern of Robert's.

Braddon even puts a blacksmith, Hephaestus being the god of the forge, into her text in the chapter titled "The Blacksmith's Mistake." Of course Braddon puts a spin on the blacksmith's role, not having him catch anybody in "the act," but being caught himself. Lady Audley hires the Blacksmith to break into Robert's apartment and steal her old love letters to George from a trunk located there. So the blacksmith here helps prevent the supposed "adulterous" woman from being caught. Robert hears of the blacksmith being in his apartment and heads over to his shop in an effort to discover the reason for his presence. The blacksmith is himself "caught" in mid-sentence as Robert enters the room (they are ironically in the middle of celebrating with wine):
"And with that," he said, "she walked off, as graceful as you please."
The whole party was thrown into confusion by the appearance of Mr. Audley; but it was to be observed that the locksmith was more embarrassed than his companions. He set down his glass so hurriedly, that he spilt his wine, and wiped his mouth nervously with the back of his dirty hand (149).

Robert asks him some questions after this, and the scene is not one of a party as after Aphrodite had been caught, but a solemn one, and he determines that it was Lady Audley who hired the man. Braddon's twist is that it is the blacksmith who makes the "mistake," and that instead of trying to "show" a wicked wife, the plot has become one which attempts to efface a husband. All of this will come back to haunt Lady Audley in her eventually being caught. Trickery again works against the heroine.

One of the most celebrated incidents of trickery in the Odyssey, and in literature for that matter, is Odysseus' duping of Polyphemus. Odysseus and his men stop on Polyphemus' island, make their way into the Cyclopes' cave, and help themselves to his stores while he is not there, expecting that they would receive the hospitality that they are so used to giving. The giant Polyphemus returns, and what results is the famous and gruesome hostage situation which involves the cannibalism of some of Odysseus' men. The trick revolves around Odysseus telling the giant that his name is "Nobody."

Odysseus knows that if they just attack and kill Polyphemus, they will be trapped forever because of the huge boulder that had been rolled in front of the cave's mouth. The plan is then to get Polyphemus drunk, which they achieve successfully, and then make a "spike" which they plan to blind him with:

Now I
chopped out a six foot section of this pole
and set it down before my men, who scraped it;
and when they had it smooth, I hewed again
to make a stake with pointed end. I held this
in the fire's heart and turned it, toughening it,
then hid it, well back in the cavern, under
one of the dung piles in profusion there (154).

Odysseus does blind Polyphemus, and the men escape by attaching themselves to
the bottom of Polyphemus' giant flock of rams and sheep. When other Cyclopes
ask why he is screaming, the trick reaches fruition with his cry of, "Nobody,
Nobody's tricked me, Nobody's ruined me!" (157). And while it is this incident
that incurs Poseidon's rage for Odysseus' attack upon the god's son, it is the trials
provided by Poseidon that win Odysseus his greatest fame. Again, deception
when used by the male hero is a benefit, not a hindrance.

Braddon has her own Polyphemus in the form of Luke Marks, who is
physically and mentally similar to Poseidon's son; she ingeniously presents him
as "stripping the bark from a black-thorn stake" when first introduced in the text
(25). Braddon's description of Luke is revealing:

The man was a big, broad-shouldered, stupid looking clodhopper of about
twenty-three years of age. His dark red hair grew low upon his forehead,
and his bushy brows met over a pair of greenish gray eyes; his nose was
coarse in form and animal in expression. Rosy-cheeked, red-haired, and
bull necked, he was not unlike one of the stout oxen grazing in the
meadows round about the court (26).

Braddon wisely holds back from giving Luke one eye, so she provides him with
the comical equivalent single eyebrow. Luke harks back to Polyphemus who is
described in the epic as "a brute so huge, he seemed no man at all of those/ who
eat god wheaten bead; but he seemed rather/ a shaggy mountain reared in
solitude" (150).
As Polyphemus to Odysseus, Luke proves to be more than a nuisance for Lady Audley. He blackmails her when he discovers her supposed murder of George. He is milking her steadily for money, much like Polyphemus milked his ewes, but this is no loving relationship. With the money extorted, Luke takes over a dilapidated inn located on "the mount." This inn is similar to the cave of Polyphemus in that they are both on hills and are representations of "primitive" or "simple" living arrangements. But while Odysseus just wanted to secure his escape, Lady Audley goes one step further and burns the inn down in an effort to rid herself of Robert (who was staying there for the night) and her major extortionist, whom she had already deemed unfit to marry Phoebe anyway.

The scenes have many parallels, the first being that Luke was greatly intoxicated as the events unfolded:

He spoke in a thick and drunken voice, and was by no means too intelligible. He was steeped to the very lips in alcohol. His eyes were dim and watery; his hands were unsteady; his voice was choked and muffled with drink. A brute, even when most sober; a brute, even when on his best behavior; he was ten times more brutal in his drunkenness, when the few restraints which held his ignorant, every-day brutality in check were flung aside in the insolent recklessness of intoxication (319).

And as Polyphemus began to eat the men of Odysseus, which are his resource in many ways, Luke has been tapping and ravaging the resources of Lady Audley, continually asking her for money to support the inn.

What results is an attack by similar means. Odysseus tempered his spike once again in the flame before attacking Polyphemus, and:

So with our brand we bored that great eye socket while blood ran out around the red hot bar. Eyelid and lash were seared; the pierced ball
hissed boiling, and the roots popped. In a smithy
one sees a white-hot axehead or an adze
plunged and wrung in a cold tub, screeching steam--
the way they make soft iron hale and hard--:
just so that eyeball hissed around the spike (156).

Lady Audley also attacks her enemies by fire, and instead of Robert, Luke ends up
being the primary victim, as told by Robert when he confronts Lady Audley:

It was I who discovered the breaking out of the fire in time to give alarm
and to save the servant girl and the poor drunken wretch, who was very
much burnt in spite of my efforts, and who now lies in a precarious state
at his mother's cottage (344).

Luke will eventually die from his wounds. This incident becomes the only real
crime that Lady Audley can be held accountable for, and thus results in the
acceleration of her confession and exile. Where the punishment for Odysseus'
wounding of Polyphemus contributes to timeless glory, Lady Audley as a heroine
must suffer exile and infamy, her deception making her nothing but "wicked."
Trickery as the trait of a hero is again reserved for males only, and a wily woman
is out of place in the patriarchal vision. Only the male heroes can play with fire
and not get burned.

3. The Sub-text of Lady Audley's Secret

With the themes of wicked women and deception in the air, it is crucial
that Lady Audley refer to the "women I have read of," because this introduces
texts and writing as prominent issues. What is a sub-text in the Odyssey is not a
sub-text in Lady Audley's Secret at all--it is the primary text: a woman's
"character" has been central for the entire novel, unlike the Homeric epic. That is Braddon's twist on the epic sub-text: that it is the primary text in her character's, and her own, existence. Yet while misogyny is elevated to primary text, there remains a sub-text in *Lady Audley's Secret*: the indictment of a woman via the written word.

The trail that Robert Audley follows to arrive at his "conviction" of Lady Audley continually involves the written word, whether it be letters, death notices, or tombstones. As with the *Odyssey*, Braddon's new sub-text, while revealing social inequity, does not prove kind to the women in the text.

This issue of written text is first broached by Lady Audley, when she places the notice in the *Times* that is instrumental in her faking death. It reads, "On the 24th inst., at Ventnor, Isle of Wight, Helen Talboys, aged twenty-two" (36). Since Lady Audley initiates deception through the written word, it is as if the patriarchy must set out to punish her offense, to show that that institution is also the domain of men. It is an ominous foreshadowing that the first instance of writing should be on a tombstone—written in stone. Like one of the Hebrew commandments, the patriarchy will hold Lady Audley to what is etched in stone—her married name, and do anything to prove that she has dishonored George rather than honored Sir Michael and herself.

Robert Audley sees a sample of Lady Audley's handwriting and seeks desperately to find the letters that she, as Helen, had written to George, in an effort prove that they are the same person: he seeks conviction through handwriting. Unable to do so, he uses another sample of writing to indict her. When he flips through an annual for the year 1845, he finds three different
paragraphs on a page that was supposed to be concealed by being glued to another:

The third paragraph was dated September, 1853, and was in the hand of Helen Maldon, who gave the annual to George Talboys; and it was the sight of this third paragraph that Mr. Robert Audley's face changed from its natural hue to a sickly, leaden pallor (159).

It is through this first sample of handwriting that Robert sets out to further pursue his quest, moving to remove George's son from the home of Captain Maldon.

With a letter written by George he begins to establish the connection of physical appearance between Helen and Lady Audley:

The letter written almost immediately after George's marriage contained a full description of his wife—such a description as a man could only write within three weeks of a love-match—a description in which every feature was minutely catalogued, every grace of form or beauty of expression fondly dwelt upon, every charm of manner lovingly depicted (209).

It is fitting that this letter is delivered to Robert inside of a letter from Clara, who sent them in an effort to aid him—contained in a package sent from the idealized woman is an idealized description of a man's wife. The letter is a description, written by a man, that Lady Audley will again be expected to honor: that of being the perfect wife of George Talboys.

When Robert visits with Miss Vincent and Miss Tonks another indictment by writing occurs. The women are in possession of a hatbox that had once belonged to Lady Audley (when she was Lucy Graham) and they give it to Robert for inspection. There is a label that says "Miss Graham" on it, but "looking very closely at the label, Mr. Audley discovered that it had pasted over another" (238). It is with the removal of this label that Robert, although this is
not made explicit in the text, discovers the name of Helen Talboys. By analyzing the hatbox, Robert is showing that a woman cannot even safely write down her name without it possibly coming back to haunt her.

Robert, while on one of his questioning trips, interviews Mrs. Barkamb, who knew the Maldon family. Mrs. Barkamb produces a letter for Robert that was written by Helen:

I am weary of my life here, and wish, if I can, to find a new one. I go out into the world, dissevered from every link which binds me to the hateful past, to seek another home and another fortune. Forgive me if I have been fretful, capricious, changeable. You should forgive me, for you know why I have been so. You know the secret which is the key to my life.

Helen Talboys (250).

This letter allows Robert to connect Lady Audley with Helen, and then it also gives Robert a reason to push even further, for he ponders immediately, "What was the meaning of those last two sentences" (250). Putting something down in writing threatens any possibility for secrets, anything that is individually owned.

Clara, as the feminine ideal, also becomes suspicious of Lady Audley through writing. When talking to her friend Fanny, Fanny reveals a description of Sir Michael's "pretty young wife." It after this description that Clara:

...was thinking of a passage in that letter which George had written to her during his honeymoon—a passage in which he said:—"My childish little wife is watching me as I write this. Ah! how I wish you could see her, Clara! Her eyes are as blue and as clear as the skies on a bright summer's day, and her hair falls about her face like the pale golden halo you see round the head of a Madonna in an Italian picture" (Braddon, 261).

Again we have another written, idealized description of Lady Audley, this time being heard by the referent of such descriptions. Not only her writing, but Lady Audley's beauty is indicting as well.
Robert finally confronts Lady Audley with all of this information. He is pitting an ideal representation of what she was against all notions of the present and what she is. The indictment by written word will win out. It accomplishes everything other than exposing the "fact" that Lady Audley is mad. Braddon is primed to show that admission as something someone is "convinced" of, rather than as proven by the written word. It is a final step that the person must take by themselves, and Lady Audley, in questioning whether or not she is really wicked, has lost that battle.

What is wanted here is defiance, defiance of the written word and the endless stories of wicked women that Lady Audley claims to have read. And these are real stories, present in everything from the epics, the Bible, and Chaucer, where the library on wicked women seemed full by the time he had written the *Wife of Bath's Tale*. It seems that the dichotomy called to mind by the sub-text of the *Odyssey* is one that largely had been holding for literature in general.

As Lady Audley was indicted by writing, she will die by writing, as this is the way that her death is discovered:

It is more than a year since a black-edged letter, written upon foreign paper, came to Robert Audley, to announce the death of a certain Madame Taylor, who had expired peacefully at Villebrumeuse, dying after a long illness, which Monsieur Val describes as a *Maladie de langueur* (446).

The chapter is titled "At Peace," and Lady Audley dies an off-stage death known only through print. The letter is symbolically "black-edged" and raises a disturbing question: who is meant to be at peace in this final chapter? Is it the participants in the fairy-tale ending who are peaceful, or is it that a woman denied the right to venture out in the world, like Odysseus, can find peace only
in death? The latter would be consistent with what often seems to be a feminist "death wish," where suicide and the end of life in general are seen as bringing great calm.

In death, Lady Audley surrenders to the text—herself becoming a sub-text, buried by misogyny. One can only wonder what her ghost would have to say if allowed to sip blood in the underworld.
"You shall hear prophecy from the rapt shade of blind Tiresias": WHAT EXACTLY DID TIRESIAS LEARN AS A WOMAN?

Book 11 of the *Odyssey*, with the hero's journey to the underworld, is one of its most famous and has been celebrated throughout literary history. It is by means of this fantastic voyage that Odysseus receives the prophecy of "blind Teiresias of Thebes, forever/ charged with reason even among the dead;/ to him alone, of all the flitting ghosts,/ Persephone has given a mind undarkened" (180). Mary Elizabeth Braddon explores this major event and its implications in her epic revision, found in the chapter aptly titled, "Before the Storm." In this chapter Robert Audley and George Talboys make their journey into the locked chamber of Lady Audley where they, like Odysseus, encounter a ghost.

The first similarity Braddon establishes with the *Odyssey* is in the difficult and detailed measures which must be taken in reaching the underworld. Circe, in book 10, details for Odysseus the route to be taken:

Son of Laertes and the gods of old,
Odysseus, master of land ways and sea ways,
feel no dismay because you lack a pilot;
only set up your mast and haul your canvas
to the fresh blowing North; sit down and steer,
and hold that wind, even to the bourne of Ocean,
Persephone's deserted strand and grove,
dusky with poplars and the dropping willow.
Run through the tide-rip, bring your ship to shore,
and there, find the crumbling homes of death (559-578).

These directions are followed by even more complex instructions pertaining to libations, sacrifice, and other rituals which must be observed in order to conjure the dead, the prophet Tiresias among them.
Braddon gives the role of Circe to the young Alicia, who tells Robert and George of the secret entrance into Lady Audley's locked bedroom:

"Now listen to me," said Alicia. You must let yourself down by your hands into the passage, which is about four feet high; stoop your head, and walk straight along it till you come to a sharp turn which will take you to the left, and at the extreme end of it you will find a short ladder below a trap-door like this, which you will have to unbolt; that door opens into the flooring of my lady's dressing room, which is only covered with a square Persian carpet that you can easily manage to raise. You understand me?" (68).

In both cases the directions are followed, and realms meant to be inaccessible are breached. What is also striking in Lady Audley's case is the similarity in which the trespassing corresponds with female anatomy. It is here that the invasion is a complete one. Lady Audley's chamber is a body—a womb—meant to be private, yet it soon gives birth to the novel's unfortunate events, since it is here that Lady Audley's identity as "Helen" is discovered.

Circe explains that once Odysseus reaches the underworld there will be many ghosts present. This is also true of Lady Audley's home and chamber. The portraits which Braddon hangs throughout the Audley estate are a successful equivalent to Homer's "shades," being portraits of relatives long dead:

[Alicia] shook her head, and conducted them into a corridor where there were some family portraits. She showed them a tapestried chamber, the large figures upon the faded canvas looking threatening in the dusky light. "That fellow with the battle-axe looks as if he wanted to split George's head open," said Mr. Audley, pointing to a fierce warrior whose uplifted arm appeared above George Talboys' dark hair (67).

Braddon is effective in having the portrait described as one of a soldier, since there are plenty of ghosts of the same profession populating Hades.

The truly important ghost here is the one of Helen Talboys, which Lady Audley thought was buried—ideally never to be disturbed. It is when George
Talboys looks at her portrait in the chamber that the ghost is truly resurrected; I will quote the section at length since its particular language is essential in appreciating the connection which Braddon is trying to establish:

It was so like and yet so unlike; it was as if you had *burned strange-coloured fires* before my lady's face, and by the influence brought out new lines and new expressions never seen in it before. The perfection of feature, the brilliancy of colouring, were there; but I suppose the painter had copied quaint monstrosities until his brain had grown bewildered, for my lady, in his portrait of her, had something of the aspect of a *beautiful fiend*.

Her *crimson dress...hung* about her in folds that looked like *flames*, her fair head peeping out of the mass of color, as if out of a *raging furnace*. Indeed, the *crimson dress*, the sunshine on her face, the red gold gleaming in the yellow hair, the *ripe scarlet* of the pouting lips, the glowing colours of each accessory of the minutely-painted background, all combined to render the first effect of the painting by no means an agreeable one (71). [Italics mine]

With stacked images of blood, fire, and red, one cannot help but see the ghost of Helen Talboys posed in the setting of hell. As Odysseus conjured spirits, George Talboys has done the same with the wife he thought dead. An important note is that the ghosts, in order to speak, must drink the blood which Odysseus had poured into his constructed well. While in the Homeric text many ghosts, male and female, obtain their voice by drinking, Lady Audley as a portrait (a man's rendition of her) is denied the opportunity for voice, for explanations and questioning.

Lady Audley's metaphoric resurrection has other implications. With George resurrecting "Helen," the wicked woman motif is resurrected also: the perception moves from Lady to that of adulteress; soon after this Robert Audley will start his pursuit of the wicked woman.
Book 11 of the *Odyssey* and "Before the Storm" also serve as engines which set the rest of their dramas in motion. What makes these chapters catalysts is the presence of portents and prophecy. Tiresias has these words for Odysseus:

Great captain,
a fair wind and the honey lights of home
are all you seek. But anguish lies ahead;
the god who thunders on the land prepares it,
not to be shaken from your track, implacable,
in rancor for the son whose eye you blinded.
One narrow straight may take you through his blows:
denial of yourself, restraint of shipmates (Fitzgerald, 188).

The self-denial here involves the cattle of Helios and the command not to slaughter them for food; but in Lady Audley's case, the prophecy is a damning one from the start. If self-denial is her only clear path to "the honey lights of home and all you seek" then she is already behind the game. How can she practice self-denial and restraint when her entire enterprise is one based on self-assertion with few limits? (This is detailed further in my seventh chapter.)

The prophecy of Tiresias continues in that if self-restraint cannot be achieved, a great storm will come, one that puts Odysseus to his greatest test. And indeed this comes to pass: Odysseus is shipwrecked and floats in a violent ocean for days. For Lady Audley, the storm brings bad tidings as well, aptly conveyed in the chapter title and the one which follows: "Before the Storm" and "After the Storm." It is here that she is confronted by the storm of George Talboys: two Odysseuses battling for the eventual rewards of the same prophecy. The confrontation leads her to take the action she does, action which leads to her permanent shipwreck in an insane asylum.
The prophecy of storm given by Tiresias serves to blow things in these dramas off course, and the rest of Braddon's novel is a contest to see which hero can recover. This is ironic in its own because Tiresias is mentally androgynous, once being allowed to be female, leading to his description as having complete knowledge. Braddon once again divides the mind of Tiresias, putting genders into competition in the context of prophecy.

When discussing the trip to the underworld in the Odyssey, it is again important to comment on the conversation with Agamemnon and its misogynistic content. The former general does show up and talk with Odysseus, telling the story of his death and condemning all women as evil and traitorous. This again puts a wicked woman in the same context as Penelope and once more we are presented with options of gender representation that are quite contrary. The only question is how the drama will unfold, and Braddon's connections here serve as bad omens for the heroine.

It is when confronted by George that Lady Audley casts him down the well, apparently to a broken neck and death. Through the rest of the novel, Robert obsesses over his friend's death and makes a desperate search for the body in an effort to at least give him a decent burial. Here Braddon makes an important connection to Elpenor, a member of Odysseus' crew who slipped of Circe's roof and broke his neck. One of Odysseus' last tasks is to give Elpenor the proper burial he deserves; Braddon has put an interesting twist on this plot element:

"I must give my lost friend decent burial," Robert thought, as a chill wind swept across the frozen landscape, and struck him with such frozen breath as might have emanated from the lips of the dead. "I must do it; or I shall die of some panic like this which has seized upon me to-night. I must do it; at any peril; at any cost" (405).
Braddon is doing her best to rupture the classic text; by making an Elpenor out of George it is Lady Audley who will sail from the underworld. This will be only temporary in that the allusion to Elpenor foreshadows something else, revealed by his ghost to Odysseus:

But fire my corpse, and all the gear I had,
and build a cairn for me above the breakers—
an unknown sailor's mark for men to come (Fitzgerald, 187).

George Talboys will serve as this mark, one which will often guide Robert in his pursuit of Lady Audley.

Tiresias' prophecy also raises the issue of fate and predestination. This is of course nothing new to the Odyssey, which makes clear right from the start how the story ends.

Braddon has shown that she is working with the concepts of predestination, often referring to "a hand stronger than my own"; Robert comments on this in relation to his "manhunt:"

Why do I go on with this," he said, "when I know that it is leading me, step by step, day by day, hour by hour, nearer to that conclusion which of all others I should avoid? Am I tied to a wheel, and must I go with its every revolution, let it take me where it will?" (157).

This passage is one of many, for Robert reflects on his "destiny" continually. And it is not really his destiny that is important: it is the prophecy of patriarchy and its relation to Lady Audley. When madness and wickedness are associated with genetics, biological predestination, and cycles, an enduring institution is the
result. As seen in the next chapter, and the end of the novel for that matter, this equation adds to doom.

Braddon's connection of Odysseus' voyage to Hades with *Lady Audley's Secret* is important for many reasons beyond those described. Not only does she show continually that she has the epic in her thoughts, but she puts the concepts of prophecy and predestination within the frame of her story. If Tiresias is the deliverer of prophecy, his blindness assumes great significance for Braddon in that misogyny and social inequities will continue to be overlooked.
"Step up, my lords, contend now for your prize": THE TEST OF THE BOW AND ITS RELATION TO MADNESS

Before Odysseus slaughters the host of suitors in book 22 of the Odyssey, the test of the bow initiates the great battle and its gory conclusion. Braddon implements a test of her own in Lady Audley's Secret, one which also involves the dramatic showdown and climax of an adventure. The test Braddon creates revolves around the issue of insanity; the competitors in the contest are Lady Audley and Robert Audley, each trying to prove that the other is mentally unbalanced.

Odysseus' bow is a massive weapon, and only the might of the hero himself is great enough to string it for battle. It is with this knowledge that Penelope proposes the test for the suitors:

My lords, hear me:
suitors indeed, you commandeered this house
to feast and drink in, day and night, my husband being long gone, long out of mind. You found no justification for yourselves—none except your lust to marry me. Stand up, then:
we now declare a contest for that prize.
Here is my lord Odysseus' hunting bow.
Bend and string it if you can. Who sends an arrow through iron axe-helve sockets, twelve in line?
I join my life with his, and leave this place, my home, my rich and beautiful bridal house, forever to be remembered, though I dream it only (393).

The test serves a very pragmatic purpose, because if Odysseus has indeed returned, he will be the one to string the bow, thus placing a much needed weapon into his hands for the ensuing battle.

What is at stake for Odysseus and Penelope is also at stake for Lady Audley: if the test is won by an adversary she will lose the wealth of her home
and marriage, which she will regret desperately. It is also ironic that Odysseus' bow is for hunting, because when the test is viewed as between Lady Audley and Robert, it has been a battle that involves a novel-long hunt, one that has been as suspenseful as it is vicious.

Braddon establishes insanity as an issue in her novel; one of the early, most important points that she makes is that the line between sanity and insanity is a thin and precarious one:

Mad-houses are large and only too numerous; yet surely it is strange that they are not larger, when we think of how many helpless wretches must beat their brains against this hopeless persistency of the orderly outward world, as compared with the storm and tempest, the riot and confusion within:—when we remember how many minds must tremble upon the narrow boundary between reason and unreason, mad to-day and sane to-morrow, mad yesterday and sane to-day (205).

It is the "narrow boundary" that the test revolves around, the image eerily calling to mind the phrase "hanging by a string," in this case the string of the bow. Whoever strings the bow first, Robert or Lady Audley, wins. This is also consistent with Homer's text because the stringing of the bow allows for the removal of enemies, which is exactly what Robert and Lady Audley seek to accomplish.

Braddon first introduces her version of the test of the bow in the chapter titled "In the Lime-Walk." In this chapter Robert Audley, alone with Lady Audley in the lime-walk, details for her his suspicions and the suspected events of her life leading to her current situation. Lady Audley refers to insanity, responding:

You are mad, Mr. Audley!" cried my lady. "You are mad, and my husband shall protect me from your insolence (271).
She adds later:

I tell you that you are mad! If you please to say that Helen Talboys is not dead, and that I am Helen Talboys, you may do so. If you choose to go wandering about to the places in which I have lived, and to the places in which this Mrs. Talboys has lived, you must follow the bent of your own inclination; but I warn you that such fancies have sometimes conducted people, as apparently sane as yourself, to the life-long imprisonment of a private lunatic asylum (273). [Italics mine]

It is here that the test is initiated; Robert Audley recognizes this by adding:

She would be capable of any new crime to shield her from the consequences of the old one....She would be capable of using her influence with my uncle to place me in a mad-house (273).

It is important that this type of reflection takes place with much of the novel remaining; what is referred to here is exactly what will come to pass: after the final conflict where Lady Audley confesses, she is put away in a private asylum. What Braddon has done is taken the test from the Odyssey, which revolves around nothing but brute strength, and made the qualities in contest those of intellect and influence, with Robert verbally recognizing the drama:

"It is to be a duel to the death, then, my lady," said Robert Audley solemnly. "You refuse to accept my warning. You refuse to run away and repent of your wickedness in some foreign place, far from the generous gentleman you have deceived and fooled by your false witcheries. You choose to remain here and defy me."

"I do," answered Lady Audley, lifting her head, and looking full at the young barrister. "It is no fault of mine if my husband's nephew goes mad, and chooses me for the victim of his monomania" (275).

It is important that Robert refers to a warning in this case, especially in light that throughout the Odyssey, the suitors were warned that the hero would return and slaughter them.
After the talk in the lime-walk Lady Audley starts her effort to complete the "test," to show that her bow, or mind, is strung while Robert's is not functioning. What bow can function without its string? The effort begins with the questioning of family history, as Lady Audley asks Alicia if she finds Robert at all "odd" or "eccentric," then uses the same line of questioning when inquiring about Robert's mother and father. The reason for such inquiries becomes apparent when Alicia admits that Robert's father was a little strange, and Lady Audley says:

"Ah," said my lady gravely, "I thought as much. Do you know, Alicia, that madness is more often transmitted from father to son than from father to daughter, and from mother to daughter than from mother to son? Your cousin Robert Audley is a very handsome young man, and I believe a very good hearted young man; but he must be watched, Alicia, for he is mad!" (278).

After this Lady Audley sets out to convince her husband of Robert's madness, feeling that her influence over him is great enough at least to make him suspicious of any future accusations that come to light. And it takes a reference made in jest by Sir Michael to get things moving, Lady Audley seizing the opportunity:

"Why should he not be mad?" resumed my lady. "People are insane for years and years before their insanity is found out. They know that they are mad, but they know how to keep their secret; and, perhaps they may sometimes keep it till they die....Robert Audley is mad," she said decisively. "What is one of the strongest diagnostics of madness--what is the first appalling sign of mental aberration? The mind becomes stationary; the brain stagnates; the even current of the mind is interrupted" (287).

What follows is Lady Audley's diagnosis of Robert Audley as insane, finally declaring him a monomaniac. The plot moves on from here, with the
inevitable result that Lady Audley loses the contest and fails the test of the bow.

As the showdown in the *Odyssey*, Braddon also locates the climax, the confession of Lady Audley, in a great hall: it occurs at the Audley estate. What had been an effort to convince the family that Robert was insane turns out to be a confession of her own madness:

"You have conquered, Mr. Robert Audley. It is a great triumph, is it not? A wonderful victory! You have used your cool, calculating, frigid, luminous intellect to a noble purpose. You have conquered--a MADWOMAN!" (345).

This admission is supposed to be the moment of climax in the text, equivalent to when Odysseus strings his bow and "then Zeus thundered/ overhead, one loud crack for a sign" (Fitzgerald, 404). The thunderbolt spells doom for the suitors just as the madwoman in capital letters thunders, signaling Lady Audley's "unstringing" and that Robert has "won" the contest. It is logical that Braddon's next chapter be titled "The Hush that Succeeds the Tempest" because that is exactly what the slaughter in the great hall was.

After failing the test and admitting madness, Lady Audley confesses her actions and history to everyone. It is consistent that when confessing her madness she would refer to Robert's intellect, since the test has revolved around the ability of the mind. The bow indeed is a good metaphor for the mind in this drama: it is a weapon used for hunting or fighting (both tantamount to survival), successful use relies on speed, and the user must be sharp and accurate and have no slack in the string. Both have been apt competitors, but Lady Audley reveals that it is her bow which is not "strung."

The reasons are laid out in the confession of her mother's madness and the hereditary implications that go with it, bringing to mind the plot of *Jane Eyre*. 
Lady Audley describes how her mother resided in an asylum and was once unable to recognize her own daughter upon a visit. The hereditary curse, predestination, once again unjustly runs its course as Lady Audley is placed in the asylum. The hereditary transfer of traits also plays a role in the Odyssey's bow test: it is Telemachus who is about to string the bow when Odysseus checks him, showing how strength has been sent from father to son. What is hereditary is tragic for Lady Audley, especially given that she persuades herself to madness because of her mother's memory. Again it seems that the woman is predestined for failure.

The slaughter in the great hall is Lady Audley's confession, and only the patriarchs experience any glory or shame. But Braddon of course calls this whole matter into question, best seen in the dual nature of Dr. Mosgrave's diagnosis. The following is the diagnosis before meeting Lady Audley, just going by the story Robert has told him:

"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 in the hope of finding a better. There is no madness in that. She committed the crime of bigamy, because by that crime she obtained fortune and position. There is no madness there. When she found herself in a desperate position, she did not grow desperate. She employed intelligent means, and she carried out a cool conspiracy which required coolness and deliberation in its execution. There is no madness in that" (377).

Odysseus would be proud of the description given Lady Audley here. He left home to find his fortune, is famous for being cool in desperate situations, extremely intelligent, and involved in one of the most famous conspiracies of all time. Everything described above contributes to the beauty and glory of the
Odyssey. But as we of Odysseus, Dr. Mosgrave has only heard the stories; after actually visiting Lady Audley he says:

"I have talked to the lady....She has the cunning of madness, with the prudence of intelligence. I will tell you what she is Mr. Audley. She is dangerous!" (379).

Could anyone determine of Odysseus that he is not a dangerous person? What is glorious for males is dangerous when gender roles are switched: this is how the archetype works against women.

After Lady Audley has been committed, she challenges the established notion of "who is mad," by referring to Robert's condition after learning of George's apparent tumble to death:

"Do not laugh at poor Robert because he grew hypochondriachal, after hearing the horrible story of his friend's death. There is nothing so delicate, so fragile, as that invisible balance upon which the mind is always trembling. Mad to-day and sane to-morrow" (403).

So, who is mad? In reality, the test of the bow revolves around the concept of identity. When Odysseus strings his bow, he reaffirms his place in his household once more as Odysseus the king and warrior. When Lady Audley loses the contest to Robert, she assumes her former identity of Helen Talboys, and eventually the meaningless name of Madame Taylor. When Robert proves that he has strung the bow, his identity parallels the success of Odysseus, for he suddenly becomes more recognized in the inner temple and this includes professional achievement. Like Odysseus, Robert immediately moves to restore the dignity of a household, scrubbing the hall after the slaughter.

Once the test has played itself out, Braddon points to the Odyssey in many ways, one being by referring to the events as a game:
The game had been played and lost. I do not think that my lady had thrown away a card, or missed the making of a trick which she might by any possibility have made: but her opponent's hand had been too powerful for her, and he had won (372).

Braddon supplies a metaphor, but the important reference here is that of a stronger hand, which is exactly what Odysseus' had to possess to ready his weapon.

Braddon also discusses the aftermath of "the test" in language it is most appropriately cast in— that of war; the following is one of Braddon's most direct connections to the test of the bow:

He knew enough to know that Sir Michael Audley went away with the barbed arrow, which his nephew's hand had sent home to its aim, rankling his tortured heart (359.)

The reference here is to Robert winning the test and firing his arrows. And the war imagery continues after this:

"No," thought Robert Audley, "I will not intrude upon the anguish of this wounded heart. There is humiliation mingled with this bitter grief. It is better he should fight the battle alone. I have done what I believe to have been my solemn duty, yet I should scarcely wonder if I had rendered myself forever hateful to him. It is better he should fight the battle alone. I can do nothing to make the strife less terrible. Better that it should be fought alone" (360).

In winning the test of the bow, the contest of insanity against Lady Audley, what Robert has essentially done is line up the twelve axe-heads and shoot his arrow through. The skill there is one of patriarchal aim and vision, and what does Robert see through the holes of the lined-up axe-heads other than Lady Audley as Helen Talboys, the wicked woman? So Robert, after living up to his
aim, has the same luxury Odysseus did in saying, "My hand and eye are sound,/ not so contemptible as the young men say" (Fitzgerald, 405).
"What winnowing fan is that upon your shoulder?": PHALLIC RITUALS AND WHY WOMEN NEVER GET TO PLANT THE OAR

In the prophecy of Tiresias, the last task he describes for Odysseus is one of great significance when realized in *Lady Audley’s Secret*. This task is of course the planting of the oar:

But after you have dealt out death—in open combat or by stealth—to all suitors, go overland on foot, and take an oar, until one day you come where men have lived with meat unsalted, never known the sea, nor seen seagoing ships, with crimson bows and oars that fledge light hulls for dipping flight. The spot will soon be plain to you, and I can tell you how: some passerby will say, "What winnowing fan is that upon your shoulder?" Halt, and implant your smooth oar in the turf and make fair sacrifice to Lord Poseidon (Fitzgerald, 189).

What will eventually be accomplished in this act is the spreading of Odysseus' fabulous history and fame. Also spread is a religious institution in the form of the Greek gods: the name of Poseidon, as god of the sea, will be invoked with any discussion of Odysseus and the oar. This imagery also has relevant phallic implications: Odysseus will take the phallic oar and plant it in unfamiliar ground, hence fertile for the propagation of his name. This ground will become impregnated with his myth and basically give birth again and again to his legend and authority as a hero. This is wonderfully accomplished every time that the *Odyssey* is read.

How does the task of the oar relate to our rival Odysseuses, Robert and Lady Audley? I find the connection to be strong in that she is the oar; it is Lady Audley who must be planted. Robert must find somewhere to put her, thus
saving the family and the patriarchy from shame, and that place is an insane asylum:

[Robert] wrote a few lines to my lady, telling her that he was going to carry her away from Audley Court to a place from which she was not likely to return, and requesting her to lose no time in preparing for the journey (382). [Italics mine]

From this point on striking comparisons again are established by Braddon in an effort to illustrate prejudice rooted in gender.

The first striking similarity is that the test involves travel to a remote area. Odysseus must go overland until "one day," which sounds ambiguously distant, he will meet a "passerby." Lady Audley's situation also involves moving to a remote location:

Robert had consulted a volume of Bradshaw, and had discovered that Villerbruse lay out of the track of all railway traffic, and was only approachable by diligence from Brussels (383).

Involved with the remote location is the sense of an underdeveloped culture. Tiresias describes people who don't know what boats are, people who don't salt their meat. This same sense of being "savage" or "backward" is presented by Braddon:

The twinkling lamps, lighted early, and glimmering feebly, long distances apart, made the place seem darker rather than lighter....The remote Belgian city was a forgotten, old world place, and bore the dreary evidence of decay upon every facade in the narrow streets, on every dilapidated roof, and feeble pile of chimneys. It was difficult to imagine for what reason the opposite rows of houses had been built so close together as to cause the lumbering diligence to brush the foot passengers off the wretched trottoir (384).
This description goes on much further and maintains the same type of critical tone.

What is crucial for Odysseus is the meeting with the passerby who misidentifies the oar, thereby expressing the ultimate distance between two cultures. Braddon creates a similar clash of custom as she presents the chattering porters who in asking for Robert Audley's luggage ask for his "baggages." Baggages is put in quotes by Braddon, meant to stand out as an unfamiliar and awkward usage. It is no mistake that this occurs in reference to what Robert is carrying, and immediately outside the gates of the asylum.

After the spot for the oar is found, Odysseus must go through the extensive rituals of sacrifice, this time to Poseidon:

...a ram, a bull, a great buck boar; turn back, and carry out pure hekatombs at home to all wide heaven's lords the undying gods, to each in order (Fitzgerald, 189).

Robert Audley must also follow certain rituals that are described as being extensive and particular:

There was official business to be gone through before Sir Michael's wife could be quietly put away in the place suggested by Dr. Mosgrave. Robert had to see all manner of important personages; and to take numerous oaths; and to exhibit the English physician's letter; and to go through much ceremony of signing and countersigning (385). [Italics mine]

As is the pattern with Braddon, connections are built up and established only to then work against the classic text. Again, one must look no further than the chapter title to see what Braddon is up to: in this case it is "Buried Alive." While Odysseus plants the oar in a far off land, it's Lady Audley who is to be buried or planted on shores that are not English. She is "buried alive" by being
hidden away, and the definition of buried soon translates as literal when she dies in humiliation--then being buried for real. Lady Audley is thus denied the happy future which Odysseus is promised. As a woman she is denied access to the phallic ritual which is the last stage in approaching the promised pastoral repose. In not having a penis, Lady Audley is perceived as biologically exempt and can never meet the obligations of Tiresias' prophecy, or in this case English patriarchy.

What Odysseus is promised is a happy ending to his tumultuous and adventurous life:

Then a seaborne death
soft as this hand of mist will come upon you
when you are wearied out with rich old age,
your country folk in blessed peace around you.
And all this shall be just as I foretell (Fitzgerald, 189).

Of course it is not Lady Audley who will find her way to this pastoral promised land, it is Robert Audley and George Talboys in the novel's ultimate reassertion of patriarchy:

Two years have passed since the May twilight in which Robert found his old friend; and Mr. Audley's dream of a fairy cottage had been realised between Teddington Lock and Hampton Bridge, where, amid a little forest of foliage, there is a fantastical dwelling place of rustic woodwork, whose latticed windows look out upon the river (444).

And of course Braddon spares no expense, titling the final chapter in which this occurs "At Peace," referring to the "blessed peace" Tiresias promised to the classical hero.

The implications of Braddon's plot and its course are not good for a heroine. Where Odysseus' fame was spread in planting the oar, Lady Audley's
infamy is to be contained. Again the sexual imagery here is prevalent in that Odysseus as a male is very potent, while Lady Audley is sentenced to be barren. This is no better seen than in the presentation of one of the *Odyssey’s* key images as Lady Audley is being taken through the asylum to her room:

...and a bed-chamber, containing a bed so wondrously made, as to appear to have no opening whatever in its coverings, unless the counterpane had been split asunder with a penknife (389).

It is the wondrously made bed of Odysseus that is the center of his home: his residence is anchored around his bedpost, which is the trunk of an olive tree. For Lady Audley, the bed presents itself differently. First, it is neither her bed, nor in her room, and it is described as having no openings, which indicates that Lady Audley will have no access to it. Braddon is showing how all control is lost to Lady Audley, including her sexuality: she will not be allowed to marry or reproduce. She is barren and barred from the bed—her womb will also have "no opening whatever." This is another tragic twist in Lady Audley being re-recognized as Helen Talboys; for when Helen of Troy was finally returned to Menelaus, her punishment from the gods for causing great strife was also the closing of her womb:

For the gods had never after granted Helen
a child to bring into the sunlit world
after the first, rose-lipped Hermoine,
a girl like the pale-gold goddess Aphrodite (Fitzgerald, 53).

So it is through the ritual of the oar that Braddon’s heroine is taken out of sight so as to not embarrass the patriarchy. Images of fertility are transferred to those which are fallow, and rituals meant to secure freedom now translate into confinement. As was the oar for Odysseus, Lady Audley is the final "test" for the
patriarchy, and if she is not in possession of a penis the obligations for her
version of happiness cannot be met. She is actually converted into the phallic
symbol itself and planted abroad. Public fame has been converted to hushed
shame, country life has become no life. After the patriarchy has eliminated its
major threat in someone pretending to be able to carry the oar, the male hero
returns in the form of George Talboys, conveniently stepping on stage once Lady
Audley is off.

If listeners or readers of the *Odyssey* ever thought that the hero never
planted his oar, the epic would have been unsatisfying and tragic. It is "clear"
that as a woman, Lady Audley cannot carry what she does not anatomically
possess. She must be relegated to a lesser role where women ask the heroic
males, "What winnowing fan is that upon your shoulder?" Once that question
is asked, one is put in the position of receiving the words of history, not
delivering them.
"She must not handle his scarred thigh, or the game was up": THE ODYSSEAN SCAR AND ITS PRODUCTION OF IDENTITY AND OBLIVION

One of the Odyssey's most memorable passages is Eurykleia's recognition of her king's scar and the subsequent relation of its origin. Odysseus' scar is a symbol of his identity; a brilliant investigation of this fact can be found in G. E. Dimock Jr.'s article "The Name of Odysseus" (1956). I find much of Dimock's discussion about identity exceptionally interesting, not only on its own merits, but even more so when applied to Braddon's heroine and her struggle for individuality. This application shows not only that Braddon was aware of the issue of identity, but also her assertion that women are denied access to it and to the possibility of glory.

A brief summary of "The Name of Odysseus" is as follows. In his article, Dimock translates literally the names of the Odyssey's major players and uses these translations as the foundation for his reading. "There is no human identity in other terms than pain" is a statement crucial to Dimock's thesis. He sees Odysseus as both the giver and receiver of pain; this type of existence produces Odysseus' wide recognition and glory. Odysseus is described as being involved with "three modes of pain:" its administration; the "pain of the resisted impulse"; and introducing "the idea of trouble to those who...are not sufficiently aware of it." (Dimock, 113). The subsequent discussion focuses on how Odysseus achieves success in all of these "modes" and how it results in his securing the glory worthy of a timeless hero: "he is to win his psyche, which means loosely his life, and more properly the image of life after the liver is gone" (105).
Dimock writes that Odysseus' name translates as "hateful" and "worthy of hate." It is his uncle, Autolycus, who gives the hero this name and provides the reasoning behind it:

My son-in-law, my daughter, call the boy
by the name I tell you. Well you know, my hand
has been against the world of men and women;
odium and distrust I've won. Odysseus
should be his given name (Fitzgerald, 366).

It is "odium and distrust" from which the name originates, and as Dimock says of Odysseus, "to establish his identity Odysseus must live up to his name" (103).

The story of the scar provides the first opportunity for Odysseus' meeting this challenge, with Autolycus conveniently being present:

An old wound
a boar's white tusk inflicted, on Parnassos
years ago. He had gone hunting there
in company with his uncles and Autolykos,
his mother's father--a great thief and swindler (Fitzgerald, 366).

What Dimock is at pains to point out here is that Odysseus is always simultaneously the giver and receiver of pain: "As causer of pain he kills the boar; as sufferer he is slashed by it, thus acquiring the scar important in identifying him later" (105).

It is the scar that Odysseus' parents want to hear about; by making its way into the Odyssey, the story has obviously served its purpose. In giving and receiving hurt, Odysseus becomes more "famous"; this is how his name develops, as Dimock points out when he writes, "the suffering results from the doing, and is inseparable from it in the recognition and satisfaction produced by
the exploit. Not simply 'how he killed the boar' but 'how he got his scar,' is for Odysseus' parents the measure of their son" (105).

The scar also establishes Odysseus' identity when he returns to his household on Ithaca; the old wound is recognized by Eurykleia:

> But Lord Odysseus
> whirled suddenly from the fire to face the dark.
> The scar: he had forgotten that, she must not handle his scarred thigh, or the game was up.
> But when she bared her lord's leg, bending near,
> she knew the groove at once (Fitzgerald, 365).

Braddon, again blurring the line between consistency and revision of the epic, gives Lady Audley a scar of her own. The scar in this case is also an indication of identity, and one which Lady Audley, like Odysseus, tries to prevent from being discovered. Robert notices the bruise that Lady Audley has attempted to cover with a bracelet; she fabricates a story of its origin which is not believed, and Robert finally discovers:

> It was not one bruise, but four slender, purple marks such as might have been made by the four fingers of a powerful hand that had grasped the delicate wrist a shade too roughly. A narrow ribbon, bound tightly, might have left some such marks, it is true, and my lady protested once more that, to the best of her recollection, that must have been how they were made.

> Across one of the faint purple marks there was a darker tinge, as if a ring worn on one of these strong and cruel fingers had been ground into the tender flesh (88).

> It is masterful that Braddon changes the scar's agent from boar to husband, which may be read as one in the same in this case. It was George Talboys who produced the bruise in a physical confrontation with Lady Audley at the well. The darker portion of the bruise caused by the wedding ring acts as the boar's
tusk, inflicting symbolic damage and the identity of patriarchy upon Lady Audley. The tusk is phallic and serves to "brand" a woman as property; switching the setting from hunting to marriage is a striking transition. Dimock writes that "the scar which the boar gave him is in particular the mark of Odysseus as trouble" (115). This is also true for Lady Audley, marriage being her particular mark of trouble. Being the recipient of pain helps develop the glory of Lady Audley's name, but this is unfortunately as a "wicked woman" who has tried to murder her first husband by tossing him down the empty well—metaphorically tossing him into the structure that is usually "grounding" and "stationary" for women only.

The greatest difference between Lady Audley and Odysseus is that the heroine does not receive the following type of praise for her scar:

So well they soon could send him,  
with grandfather Autolykos' magnificent gifts,  
rejoicing, over sea to Ithaka.  
His father and the Lady Antikleia  
welcomed him, and wanted all the news  
of how he got his wound; so he spun out  
his tale, recalling how the boar's white tusk  
caught him when he was hunting on Parnassos (Fitzgerald, 368).

In Braddon's case, she cleverly plays with the issues of glory and recognition, shifting the focus from the woman to the male figure of Robert; this is admitted by Lady Audley herself:

You saw the bruises that his fingers made upon my wrist and noticed them, and did not believe the account I gave of them. I could see that, Mr. Robert Audley, and I saw that you were a person I should have to fear (393).
It is also revealing that Lady Audley addresses Robert by his full name, with "Mr." attached, in a scene where naming and identity are symbolically involved. Formal names are used throughout the passage. Braddon then shows how as the plot unfolds, what has traditionally been the source of glory for men is eventually turned against women. Robert becomes the one defined as having power, the one to be feared. Again traditional roles are unjust: a single name meaning "hateful" has different denotations depending on the possessor's gender. As a giver of pain, Lady Audley will not receive recognition, and this is a preventive measure in the achievement of identity.

The second type of pain that Dimock associates with Odysseus is that of self-denial, which Tiresias presents as a condition for returning home. Dimock explains how Tiresias' name translates as "weariness of rowing"; so he has experience with the advice he prescribes. Odysseus' self-denial is seen, among other places, in his and his crew's encounter with the cattle of Helios.

This type of pain takes on an interesting and tragic twist when applied to Lady Audley. For Lady Audley realistically to deny herself she must have been previously allowed self-expression, but this has obviously not been the case. Lady Audley's experience has not been one of establishing identity, but of continuously changing identity in an effort to secure her life, and even that effort is prevented. How can Lady Audley practice and realize the benefits of what has been the sole and overwhelming condition of her existence? Denial is the life of the Victorian woman, not a lesson to be learned on the epic path to heroism. While Odysseus eventually passes the tests of self-restraint, Braddon presents women as always having been the masters of this pain, so skilled because they have no access to the other two modes. Women master self-denial because in
the setting of *Lady Audley's Secret* it is synonymous with their lives. This is seen with all the female characters: even when Robert visits George's father Harcourt, and Clara is there, she will not speak to Robert until having to run outside and catch him—she practiced "restraint" in the presence of the father, who is presented as a stern and decisive Zeus figure.

Odysseus' third relation to pain is not pursued by Dimock, but he identifies it as the spreading of "pain's" definition to people who don't know the legends; this is to be accomplished through the test of the oar.

What Dimock is approaching with Odysseus and pain is that there is "a case of deliberate self-exposure for the purpose of being somebody rather than nobody" (106). Again, this isn't a possibility for women (and I borrow the terminology from Nancy K. Miller's *Feminist Occasions* here) in light of what it has traditionally meant for a woman to expose, or "make a spectacle" of herself. Odysseus exposes himself to danger again and again to win recognition, that is the *Odyssey*. When examining the chances that Lady Audley takes, the tragedy revealed is that exposing herself to danger involves just wanting to live a happy and satisfying life. While Odysseus fights in the most fabled war of all time, beds goddesses, resists cannibals, and prevails over gruesome monsters, Lady Audley has to resist basic existence as she knows it. The scary thing about this *Odyssey* is that the setting is marriage and rural, pastoral life. Lady Audley is "exposing herself" to the choosing of what is best for her life. Dimock writes that Odysseus fighting the sea does not make his identity meaningless because "he makes sense, and the elements do not" (106). Braddon reverses this observation and
Robert hunts down the wicked woman for that precise reason: she does "not make sense" in the system that is patriarchy.

In relation to Robert's hunt, Dimock states early on that to "Odysseus" somebody is to "be wroth against" them, and this description is one that perfectly fits the character of Robert Audley. As has been illustrated by his chronic misogyny, he is wroth against Lady Audley and seeks to "Odysseus" her. Lady Audley seeks to "Odysseus" her Odysseus in George, which is the paradox she is trapped in. You can't Odysseus one whose nature is to do precisely that. While you may have that skill, there is only one master, being again in this case the patriarchal institutions that are wroth against women who expose themselves and try to achieve individual identity. Lady Audley cannot even be a giver of pain because she is forbidden to be active, forever trying to escape censure and prohibition by standing still--another paradox. What pain she does give results in punishment unattached to glory. What ends up being Lady Audley's great moment of self-exposure is when she declares herself a madwoman. And again she is not rewarded for this type of risk as Odysseus would be; rather, she is sent to an asylum that is thematically similar to the island of Calypso where Odysseus is first introduced, pining away.

Dimock translates Calypso's name as implying "oblivion," "cover and concealment." This is exactly what happens to Lady Audley, developing into an "anti-Odysseus." Odysseus flees the comfortable oblivion that he would have had while Lady Audley is sent to oblivion. Oblivion indicates no identity, and that is the oblivion realized in Lady Audley's exile as Madame Taylor.

The above situation is even more disturbing when looking at Dimock's claim that "trouble is difficult and dangerous, but it can lead to identity. Security,
on the other hand, is inevitable oblivion" (107). What does this say about Lady Audley? Her trouble leads to oblivion, as would have her security. That is what Robert has been expressing all along with his descriptions of George just wanting to "lavish his fortune" upon his wife. Robert is saying that a man has the natural right to provide "security" for his wife, which according to Dimock is synonymous with oblivion. Either way Lady Audley is a loser. Certainly she chose financial security in marrying Sir Michael, but it was a security that involved risk and deception for success, which is what made Odysseus a hero by the end of the Odyssey. If anything is a myth for Braddon and Lady Audley, it is that a patriarchal society provides security for women, because as the epic shows, there is no security without risk and exposing yourself to the elements.

Victorian women were sheltered, never leaving the "womb" in a sense, and Dimock points out what Polyphemus says to Odysseus in the cave in order to express the oblivion of not having an identity—the necessity of leaving the shelter of the womb:

> We are born for trouble, the adventure of the Cyclops implies, yet to stay in the womb is to remain nobody. There is security of a sort in being nobody, but as the Cyclops promises, Nobody will be devoured in the end, though last of all (Dimock, 107).

This is how Braddon interprets the existence of Victorian women: sheltered by the patriarchy and its institutions. This shelter denies growth and individuality, resulting in being devoured by life's given roles. The irony here is also one that brings back the issue of what is hereditary. While Odysseus' mother tells him in the underworld that she died because of her worry for him, Braddon twists even this around: it is Lady Audley who has been "doomed" by her mother, suffering the sentence of oblivion in exile. Again the fact that Lady Audley is symbolically
"barren" at the novel's end is relevant: not only is she exiled to being "nobody," but there no possibility for "somebodies" in the form of children. Her only child is aptly named George Jr., identity in this case indicating male possession.

What all of this amounts to is how one establishes identity; and while Dimock does a masterful job of explaining how Odysseus does this, and any reader could make general observations as to what makes Odysseus great, his name is his "end." But is this the case for Lady Audley? Absolutely not. How can she "live up to her name" when she never has a single name long enough? Look at the various names she has held in the text: Helen Maldon, Helen Talboys, Lucy Graham, Lady Audley, back to Helen Talboys, and finally Madame Taylor. All of these names are determined in one way or another by men, whether it is by the father's or husband's lineage.

One of the great things about Dimock's article is that he translates the names of the various characters, and synthesizes his reading of the text using that as a point of stability. He reads Odysseus as "trouble"; Autolycus as "lone wolf"; Polyphemus as "much fame" and so on. In using this as the base of his essay, one can see the trouble that arises in the discussion of identity in Lady Audley's Secret. She never has a name long enough to achieve identity; her identity is continually changing—running from itself. While Odysseus' scar provides solid ground for building an understanding of his name, Lady Audley's scar is a loose end that unravels any identity that she hoped to achieve. So what does this make her?

Lady Audley, in never achieving identity, surrendering to the mythical construction of madness confirmed by Doctor Mosgrave's diagnosis, is in the "end" not Odysseus, Penelope, Clytemnestra, Helen of Troy, or Aphrodite; she
reveals herself finally as Proteus. This is what the struggle between Robert and Lady Audley finally amounts to, a retelling of Menelaus' capture of Proteus:

First he took on a whiskered lion's shape,
a serpent then; a leopard; a great boar;
then soosing water; then a tall green tree.
Still we hung on, by hook or crook, through everything,
until the ancient saw defeat (Fitzgerald, 66).

And what is the result of this for Menelaus? He learns of a mistake which prevents him from returning home and what he has to do to rectify this and live a happy life. This is exactly what is at stake for Robert. As Menelaus held on until seeing Proteus in his true form, Robert's quest has also been to get to "the bottom of things," to see Lady Audley in her "true" form as the wife of George Talboys: that is the identity her scar reveals.

It is after winning the battle that Robert gets what Menelaus did, a happy ending with his idealized wife. It is fitting that he see Lady Audley as Protean, deceptive, changing identity constantly in an effort to elude him. But as with Menelaus, perseverance "paid off." Lady Audley's final name is a true patriarchal construction, an invention of Robert to prevent anyone knowing who she is. The Odyssey is the ultimate achievement of a name, and Braddon has done the opposite and "unspun" a tale in Lady Audley's Secret: one which frays until we have the destruction of an identity.
"Sing in me, Muse, and through me tell the story": VISIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Epics have long been defined as the most glorious of cultural statements. As an artist, Mary Elizabeth Braddon disagreed with the woman's place in the established tradition, and had no intentions of starting "small" in her effort to revise. With women being simultaneously defined and ignored by the canon, Braddon had to restructure a revered male archetype in order to expose what for her was the contemporary inequity of its expression. Turning tradition against itself, Braddon has renovated the traditional schema to present her own sample of "author-response" criticism, and has done so with nothing less than brilliance. The only way heroines were ever to be admired by future readers was for the authors themselves to respond and create them. By rewriting the Odysseus myth and then allowing the patriarchy to establish itself once again, Braddon reflects on, and beckons for the change of, women's limited place in her Victorian English society. Her "false" happy ending reveals the true secret of her novel. It has nothing to do with insanity or "being" Helen Talboys: Lady Audley's secret is that she is the novel's hero.

In her construction of Lady Audley as hero (and I use "hero" intentionally here), Braddon recognizes the potential dangers involved with the idol worship that is inherent in "tradition." Braddon's awareness is still very much relevant. In a society that prides itself on its heroes, danger is found in that a "role model" is something people aspire to be. This is true in history, in literature, and in the occurrences that are our everyday lives. When the definition of a hero is an idealized goal, the implications for women have always been negative. Even if Penelope is a figure to be respected, her life is one of passivity, waiting, isolation,
and marital admiration. If anybody feels that someone similar to Penelope is the "reward" attached to heroism, there is danger. It is this immature vision of roles, presented as an ancient dichotomy of men in agile existences paired with grounded women, that is still persistent in literature and popular culture.

It was over a hundred and thirty-five years ago that Braddon "dove into the wreck" with Lady Audley's Secret, possessing the simple, but often overlooked, knowledge that the only way to nurture outdated examples was to set new ones for them to interact with, to provide a new place for vision to fixate. Braddon has proved that she could recognize previous examples, and shown that she hoped to take the process further. It was about twenty years before her that Emily Bronte's Wuthering Heights presented the barbaric Hareton being re-educated by the younger Catherine. He is taught how to read by a woman and this mysteriously produces a change in temperament, from aggression to calmness.

I believe that it is looking solely to myths, instead of simultaneously at the context of "real life," that Braddon feels is the most cruel injustice. Myths obviously arise from a societal need, but somewhere along the way the old myths were enough, and the production of new accommodating stories ceased. Braddon associates this type of action with brutality and violence, a metaphorical monster that shows its face only briefly in Lady Audley's Secret:

Foul deeds have been done under the most hospitable roofs, terrible crimes have been committed amid the fairest scenes, and have left no trace upon the spot where they were done. I do not believe in mandrake, or blood-stains that no time can efface. I believe rather that we may walk unconsciously in an atmosphere of crime, and breathe none the less freely. I believe that we may look into the smiling face of a murderer, and admire its tranquil beauty (141.)
This scene has a cold reality and horror to it, and is metaphoric for the crimes and injustices that women experience everyday on the most "mundane" levels. The "blood-stained" halls are indeed washed, and Odysseus proves this:

These dead must be disposed of first of all.
Direct the women. Tables and chairs will be scrubbed with sponges, rinsed and rinsed again.
When our great room is fresh and put in order, take them outside, these women, between the roundhouse and the palisade, and hack them with your swordblades till you cut the life out of them (423).

Odysseus is referring here to the maids that slept with the suitors. But for Braddon's purposes the hall is washed and immediately another violence follows, as does another cleaning. It is this that was symbolic of the everyday life of the "sheltered" Victorian woman, as seen in Lady Audley and for Braddon as an artist. This theme is still contemporary—Raymond Carver expresses it wonderfully in a story like "So much water, so close to home." This ultimate violence is a metaphor for something as easily recognizable, yet ignored, as the double standard. The term "double standard" is unfortunately approaching cliché, but if anything, that is what Braddon has been trying expose: double standards in the way we live and tell stories.

The type of revision which Braddon undertakes, one which seeks to dismantle literary vision as a first step to better things, is still discussed today. I find the greatest example to be Adrienne Rich's "Diving into the Wreck." In this poem Rich creates a persona to rage against the sea, much like Odysseus, writing "the sea is another story/ the sea is not a question of power/ I have to learn alone/ to turn my body without force/ in the deep element" (Rich 23). Rich, like Braddon, wants women to be unimpeded, to have the capacity for mobility, and
not be restricted by the sea, which Dimock associated with oblivion. It is after reading the "book of myths" of established tradition that Rich "loaded the camera," wanting somehow to develop proof of the need for change, to expose it to those who need to see it. Rich also deals with the themes of male companionship versus female isolation: "I am having to do this/ not like Cousteau with his/ assiduous team/ aboard the sun-flooded schooner/ but here alone" (22). Because women are described as traveling through life with their names changing in relation to the men they are involved with, the trip must be taken alone. And while "the words are purposes/ the words are maps," these are not ignored, but used to get to the root of the problem, the site of the wreck. It is when arriving at the wreck that Rich expresses another sentiment consistent with Braddon: "the wreck and not the story of the wreck/ the thing itself and not the myth" (23). This is the desire for reality, not mythologized versions of it. Again, the old stories that have their blind spots must be overcome in order to approach reality.

It is the inability to be real, to make your name as an individual, that results in drowning, a surrender to the sea that Odysseus conquered: "the drowned face always staring/ toward the sun/ the evidence of damage/ worn by salt and sway into this threadbare beauty" (24). Once again, is another traditional female archetype conjured in the form of Ophelia? Women here are described as having drowned in the tradition. Like Braddon, Rich wants in this case an equality of vision, the elimination of the double standard, seen in the blending of gender: "I am she: I am he." It is through this ordeal, an Odyssey in its own, that treasures will be found: "whose silver, copper, vermeil cargo lies/ obscurely inside barrels/ half-wedged and left to rot." There are treasures there, always
have been, but action must be taken soon to salvage them, actions must be taken to inspire female creativity and develop their symbols in literature. *Lady Audley’s Secret* is all about diving into the wreck, to get to the bottom of the "book" and surface with a new, more informed vision.

While Braddon’s restructuring of the Odyssey is extremely complex, and in my opinion clearly intended, she is also working on other levels that need investigation—Biblical aspects being just one example. While some may be hesitant to give her credit as being able to achieve all of this in a "sensational" novel, that judgment produces another double standard. Poets like T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound are given great credit as intellectuals for being able to manipulate tradition, making complicated allusions that propel their work forward gracefully. Braddon deserves that same type of credit, having the ability to be a great reader and a great writer simultaneously.

One of the most important points that I must make is that while I am giving Mary Elizabeth Braddon enormous credit for her revision, I am in no way suggesting that the *Odyssey* be put aside. I love the text dearly and never hesitate in revisiting its tale. What myself, and Braddon, are often discussing here is the reception and not the production of works. Braddon clearly loves the Homeric epic, as is shown by her exceptional knowledge of its story. "The words are purposes /the words are maps" is crucial to understanding the revisionist enterprise: what is being attempted is a merging of worlds, not the disregarding of one. So in translating the greatness of Homer for today's readers it is the actions, not the gender of the heroes that matters—the danger is in forgetting that the actions still matter; Braddon hasn't forgotten. If she is raging against
components of the *Odyssey* and the huge boulders it throws from the past, Braddon knows that the waves made are fruitful and must be honored.

Braddon displays an incredible genius that she has not been given credit for. One can only hope that her work attracts more attention, and achieves greater credibility in the near future. In a time when universities talk so much about diversity and the canon, Braddon provides a text-centered example, where the literature is hand-in-hand with social issues. Where students are encouraged to broaden their horizons, Braddon says, "I dove into the wreck a long time ago."
WORKS CITED


