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ZÁSADY PRO VYPRACOVÁNÍ:

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SEZNAM DOPORUČENÉ LITERATURY:

Bade, Patrick. Femme Fatale: Images of Evil and Fascinating Women. New York: Mayflower Books, 1979.
Braddon, Mary Elizabeth. Lady Audley's Secret. London: Tinsley Bros., 1862.
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Introduction

The perception of the femme fatale varies across times and discourses. For this reason, she has been an object of speculation and disagreement. Patrick Bade, the author of *Femme Fatale: Images of Evil and Fascinating Women* (1979), discusses the perception of women across both, the arts and life. They are frequently considered wicked. He states that the false notions that women "are bringers of ill-luck and that they sap men of their virility and creativity, that they are tainted with evil and devious and mischief-making by nature are, in more or less primitive forms, universal. According to Christian and Greek myth, both Eve and Pandora brought evil and death to mankind."[1] These false notions are attributed to man's fear of woman. The fear may be rooted in anxieties connected with castration and prevalent dominance of men over women as the author claims.

There seems to be a necessity to confine the femme fatale to her archetypal role, so that the patriarchal society can be continuously predominant. Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar in their *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (1979) describe a literary tradition which distinguishes two female stereotypes—the stereotype of the angel and the stereotype of the monster. The monster is the figure which deviates from the ideal of purity and innocence represented by the angel: "the monster-woman, threatening to replace her angelic sister, embodies intransigent female autonomy."[2] The femme fatale, in correlation with the monster, is a character who "refuses to stay in her textually ordained "place.""[3] The femme fatale is most unwelcome because she undermines the patriarchal society and male's authority. Consequently, the patriarchal society needs to be restored, so as a result the patriarchal society tends to subjugate this woman who violates its course. My aim is to criticize this stereotypical view, demonstrating that the femme fatales would not have to be fatale were it not for these wrong patriarchal ideals, rules, and conventions. For this reason, I consider the femme fatale a construct of male fears and their impossible ideals.

Mario Praz provides an important overview of the femme fatale. In his *The Romantic Agony* (1933), he defines the femme fatale accordingly: "During the first

[1] Patrick Bade, *Femme Fatale: Images of Evil and Fascinating Women* (New York: Mayflower Books, 1979), 9.
[2] Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 28.
[3] Gilbert, *Madwoman in the Attic*, 28.

stage of Romanticism, up till about the middle of the nineteenth century, we meet with several Fatal Women in literature, but there is no established type of Fatal Woman in the way that there is an established type of Byronic hero."[4] According to him, the established type appears in the late nineteenth century. Rebecca Stott ascribes the established femme fatale to the reconstruction of the mythical femme fatale in the preface of *The Fabrication of the Late-Victorian Femme Fatale: The Kiss of Death* (1992): "She is not unique to the nineteenth century, but she is fabricated, reconstructed in, and apparently necessary to, the cultural expressions of the closing years of the century. She is a powerful and threatening figure, bearing a sexuality that is perceived to be rapacious, or fatal to her male partners."[5]

For the analysis, I have selected Oscar Wilde's *Salomé* (1891) because this femme fatale represents this archetypal reconstruction; therefore, her characteristics resonate with the aspects with which she tends to be associated. For this reason, it is of use to consult Carl Gustav Jung who was an important representative dealing with archetypes and psychology, his contribution to the femme fatal figure, therefore, should not be omitted. It is also convenient to consider the aspects of the femme fatale in *A Handbook of Critical Approaches to Literature* (1966) by Wilfred L. Guerin, et al.

Jennifer Hedgecock, the author of *The Femme Fatale in Victorian Literature: The Danger and the Sexual Threat* (2008), argues that the femme fatale of the early nineteenth century is "more complex than the vampires or she-devils characterized by late-nineteenth century novelists."[6] I do not believe that the difference lies in the complexity of the femme fatales; it is rather the divergence from the archetypal reconstruction. The femme fatales are constructed differently because the social tensions were gradually running high; consequently women's behavior became more uncompromising, self-focused, and independent. This is supported by the social changes that were taking place during these times. Martha Vicinus, the editor of *Suffer and Be Still: Women in the Victorian Age* (1972), names these changes individually:

> The suffrage movement, educational reform, the campaign against the Contagious Diseases Acts and the fight to distribute birth control

[4] Mario Praz, *The Romantic Agony*, trans. Angus Davidson (London: Oxford University Press, 1951), 191.
[5] Rebecca Stott, preface to *The Fabrication of the Late-Victorian Femme Fatale: The Kiss of Death* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1992), viii.
[6] Jennifer Hedgecock, introduction to *The Femme Fatale in Victorian Literature: The Danger and the Sexual Threat* (Amherst: Cambria Press, 2008), 2.

> information all contributed to the downfall of hypocrisy and rigidity. By the 1880's the perfect lady could no longer hold her own unchallenged. Women increasingly demanded and gained constructive and useful roles in society.[7]

The closing years then represented freedom and independence for women of various instances. The Victorian era of women's repression could not last any longer. This fact corresponds with the paradoxes of life—what one attempts to repress grows stronger. The ideal submissive and passive women of the Victorian era began to alter. All this is reflected in the works I have chosen for the analysis, namely it is *Vanity Fair* (1847–1848) by William Thackeray, *Bleak House* (1852–1853) by Charles Dickens, *Lady Audley's Secret* (1862) by Mary Elizabeth Braddon, and *Armadale* (1866) by Wilkie Collins.

These works and Victorian novels show "spirited, even sharp-tongued women who deviated from the narrow definition of femininity endorsed by the etiquette books."[8] These women were the true opposites of the ideal. The focus on women's power is apparent also in the change of the gender in the case of vampire characters because as Stott remarks: "the vampire figure is predominantly female in the latter half of the nineteenth century."[9] They are most powerful and threatening, disguised in the contemporary form.

For the purpose of the analysis, I use the close reading method. After collecting the data from the works, I divide the data into three subchapters with the exception of Oscar Wilde's *Salomé* because this work's context supports the archetypal reading, as it reconstructs the mythical character; therefore, it is approached differently. The rest of the works have their own three subchapters.

The first subchapter is the femme fatale's background and her goals, motivations, or reasons. This subchapter provides the information on the femme fatale's childhood and upbringing. Sigmund Freud highlights the importance of the first six or eight years of childhood in his *Three Contributions to the Sexual Theory* (1905). These years are considered to be most formative on the character: "We really have reason to believe that at no time of life are we more capable of impressions and reproductions

[7] Martha Vicinus, ed., introduction to *Suffer and Be Still: Women in the Victorian Age* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), xiv.
[8] Vicinus, introduction to *Suffer and Be Still*, x.
[9] Stott, preface to *Late Victorian Femme Fatale*, ix.

than during the years of childhood."[10] These years are then crucial for the femme fatale's development, success, and behavior throughout her life. Secondly, this subchapter also considers the femme fatale's social position and occupation which also profoundly affect the quality of her life. Finally, this subchapter also focuses on the behavior of the femme fatale—why she acts the way she does, what she wishes to achieve, what are her motives and reasons.

The second subchapter concerns the femme fatale's appearance and character qualities. Mary Ann Doane, the author of *Femme Fatales: Feminism, Film Theory, Psychoanalysis* (1991), describes the femme fatale as a character who "never really is what she seems to be."[11] I do not, however, believe that this automatically leads to the too overly generalized conclusion drawn by Ana Cabral Martins in "Seduction and Mutually Assured Destruction: The Modern "Femme Fatale" in "Gone Girl"" in *Seduction in Popular Culture, Psychology, and Philosophy* (2017): "The femme fatale cannot be fully understandable or predictable and, therefore, cannot be tamed."[12] Although appearances are deceptive in the femme fatales' cases, under very close and careful inspection, she can be understandable and predictable, for she too has certain motives and goals, as well as reasons for her behavior. These are considered in their own subchapter.

The last, the third subchapter, deals with the femme fatale's relationships and the way she is perceived. This subchapter concerns the relationships and feelings of the femme fatale towards other characters and vice versa. As Stott puts it, the femme fatale "is characterised above all by her *effect upon men: a femme* cannot *be fatale* without a male being present, even where her fatalism is directed towards herself."[13] It can be said that there is a mutual dependence between the femme fatale and the man. This can be playfully put in terms of punctuation. The femme fatale, without her man, is nothing. The reverse is often also true. The femme fatale: without her, man is nothing. The critics who write about femme fatales tend to usually focus solely on the femme fatales. Nevertheless, I think it is important to examine the characters of the men in which the

[10] Sigmund Freud, *Three Contributions to the Sexual Theory*, trans. Abraham Arden Brill (New York: The Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease, 1910), 36.
[11] Mary Ann Doane, introduction to *Femme Fatales: Feminism, Film Theory, Psychoanalysis* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 1.
[12] Ana Cabral Martins, "Seduction and Mutually Assured Destruction: The Modern "Femme Fatale" in "Gone Girl,"" in *Seduction in Popular Culture, Psychology, and Philosophy*, eds. Constantino Martins and Manuel Damásio (Hershey: IGI Global, 2017), 93.
[13] Stott, preface to *Late Victorian Femme Fatale*, viii.

femme fatales are interested because any relationship is about two people who influence each other, and they set boundaries for the relationship. Moreover, there are other characters, apart from the male characters, who can help define her—ranging from jealousy-stricken women over the femme fatale's children to others who may want to unravel the mystery around her, for example.

These subchapters are used for the purpose of attaining some order. I attempt to divide the gathered data accordingly; however, some pieces of information can belong to more than one subchapter, so these pieces of information are placed instinctively to the subchapter in which they seem most fitting. Furthermore, not all the objects of focus of the subchapters mentioned above are dealt with. They may be missing or not that important.

The collected information from all of the works relies on its interpretation on various sources ranging from archetypical sources represented by Carl Gustav Jung to socio-historical and feminist sources to finally psychological sources, exemplified, for instance, by Sigmund Freud.

1. Introduction to the Femme Fatale

The concept of the femme fatale is definitely not brand-new. The oldest representation of the femme fatale dates back to Eve, the first woman. There are plenitudes of forms, shapes, and appearances the concept can take as many scholars generally agree upon. Two of the scholars are, for example, Helen Hanson and Catherine O'Rawe in *The Femme Fatale: Images, Histories, Contexts* (2010). These two proceed to discuss archetypal femme fatales: "Across the field of production of European decadentism and symbolism, in the visual arts and literature representations of fatal women drawing upon the archetypes of religion and myth—Judith, Delilah, Lilith, Salome, Circe, Medusa—proliferated."[14] It can be said that the femme fatale is a woman who will not let anyone sleep lightly. She is the woman about whom men and women alike talk. One would imagine that the femme fatale must be easily defined then, but the reverse is true. She is anything but easily graspable. It is necessary to look for the definitions of the femme fatale in dictionaries to explain why. When examining the definitions, it is important to consider every word.

Oxford Dictionaries Online, describes her as "a very beautiful woman that men find sexually attractive but who brings them trouble or unhappiness."[15] The definition works with the idea that the femme fatale is somehow attractive or beautiful. These defining attributes surely do not contribute to the clear portrayal of what the femme fatal is like. It is because these attributes are often overused and poorly defined. A woman's attractiveness and beauty are based on perception. What may seem attractive and beautiful to one person, does not have to be for someone else and vice versa. Moreover, every woman is unique in her own way. The second part of the definition is concerned with trouble or unhappiness. This definition does not work with a verb which would necessarily and specifically signal the intentional or plotted involvement in the process. Nevertheless, the femme fatale is still the reason of this trouble or unhappiness, be it directly or indirectly. Stating this, I wanted to mention that this definition might point covertly to the external forces—such as the femme fatale's disobedience of the rules of the society and its consequences—which lead to the same result—men being

[14] Helen Hanson and Catherine O'Rawe, eds., introduction to *The Femme Fatale: Images, Histories, Contexts* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 3.
[15] *Oxford Dictionaries Online*, s.v. "femme fatale," accessed November 5, 2017, https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/femme_fatale.

affected by trouble or the feeling of unhappiness.

This definition then may be interpreted as more benevolent towards the characterization of the femme fatale than the definition found in *Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary & Thesaurus Online* where the femme fatale is "a woman who is very attractive in a mysterious way, usually leading men into danger or causing their destruction"[16] or the first part of the definition of the femme fatale in *Merriam-Webster Online* which portrays her as "a seductive woman who lures men into dangerous or compromising situations."[17] These two definitions contain verbs which imply the femme fatale's intention and manipulative steps. *Merriam-Webster Online* states in the second part of the definition that the femme fatale is also "a woman who attracts men by an aura of charm and mystery."[18] Both of the dictionaries then work with the quality of mystery. This mystery may contribute to her attraction, consequently prolonging the men's interest in her person. It can also give her the possibility of pulling strings, unobserved.

Finally, there is a definition of the femme fatale which can be found in *Macmillan Dictionary Online*. The dictionary presents her as "a woman who is sexually attractive but cruel and dangerous to men who have a relationship with her."[19] This approach views her strictly as an evil woman.

Although she remains a mystery with which she is commonly associated, the analysis should shed some light on the femme fatale's nature.

[16] *Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary & Thesaurus Online*, s.v. "femme fatale," accessed November 5, 2017, https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/femme-fatale?fallbackFrom=british-grammar.
[17] *Merriam-Webster Online*, s.v. "femme fatale," accessed November 5, 2017, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/femme%20fatale.
[18] *Merriam-Webster Online*, s.v. "femme fatale."
[19] *Macmillan Dictionary Online*, s.v. "femme fatale," accessed November 5, 2017, https://www.macmillandictionary.com/dictionary/british/femme-fatale.

2. Oscar Wilde's Salomé in *Salomé*

Carl Gustav Jung in his *Man and His Symbols* (1964) connects the femme fatale to the concept of the anima which is the personification of a man's unconscious. The manifestation of a man's particular anima is in the form of his mother. His mother has either a positive or negative influence. The latter is displayed in a man's depressed moods. These "dark moods can even lure a man to suicide, in which case the anima becomes a death demon."[20] In this formulation, the usage of the word lure echoes the definition of the femme fatale in *Merriam-Webster Online*. As it is also obvious from the introduction to the femme fatale, the elusiveness of the concept of the femme fatale comes from the fact that the femme fatales of the early nineteenth century do not reconstruct the femme fatale archetype, therefore, can be read as more human, compassionate, or, simply put, more positive.

Howard Clarke introduces the figure of Salomé in *The Gospel of Matthew and Its Readers: A Historical Introduction to the First Gospel* (2003) as joining "the ranks of the Bible's 'bad women'—Eve, Job's wife, and especially Jezebel."[21] Salomé's story dates back to the book of Matthew: "Matthew's narrative presents her as a young girl manipulated by a vengeful mother, Salomé became a symbol of lust and murder in late-nineteenth-century music and literature."[22] Oscar Wilde's *Salomé* is a retold version of Salomé who dances for Herod's birthday. In exchange for her dancing, he promises to give her anything she pleases. A question arises as to why Wilde chose this particular character. I believe that the answer lies in Salomé's being a character from the Bible. He wanted to fight the censorship because he felt that "no actor is to be permitted to present under artistic conditions, the great and ennobling subjects taken from the Bible."[23] In his letter to Lord Alfred Douglas from June 1897, he writes he hoped to enrich "the characterization of the stage, and enlarging—at any rate in the case of *Salome*—its artistic horizon."[24] He desired complete artistic freedom of expression.

As I mention in the introduction to the femme fatale, in Guerin's handbook the femme fatale is treated as one of the archetypal images, particularly the archetypal woman. Along with "the witch, sorceress, siren, whore, lamia," she is classified as "The

[20] Carl Gustav Jung, *Man and His Symbols* (New York: Anchor Press, 1964), 178.
[21] Howard Clarke, *The Gospel of Matthew and Its Readers: A Historical Introduction to the First Gospel* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), 130.
[22] Clarke, *Gospel of Matthew*, 130.
[23] Oscar Wilde, *Interviews and Recollections*, ed. Edward Halim Mikhail, vol 1. (London: The Macmillan Press, 1979), 187.
[24] Oscar Wilde, *The Letters of Oscar Wilde*, ed. Rupert Hart-Davis (New York: Harcourt, 1962), 588.

Terrible Mother."[25] She is "associated with sensuality, sexual orgies, fear, danger, darkness, dismemberment, emasculatiory death; the unconscious in its terrifying aspects."[26]

The first association is sensuality. The sensuality of Salomé is evident in the way she relies on her sole look and smile to make Narraboth do what she wishes—to raise the cover of the well, so that she can talk to the prophet which is forbidden: "I will look at thee, Narraboth, it may be I will smile at thee. Look at me, Narraboth, look at me. Ah! Thou knowest that thou wilt do what I ask of thee."[27] She is simply pleasing to men's senses because they cannot keep their eyes off her, even though they are advised not to look at her. When she is about to dance for Herod, her stepfather, she is waiting for perfumes to be brought to her and her shoes to be removed from her feet which only contributes to the sensuality of veil dancing itself.

The second association is sexual orgies. Sexual orgies are not mentioned explicitly in connection with Salomé, but Salomé's mother, Herodias, is described by Jokanaan, the prophet, as someone "who gave herself unto the Captains of Assyria" and "who hath given herself to the young men of the Egyptians" and who is supposed to "repent her of her iniquities."[28] Jokanaan considers women evil because he believes that through them evil came into the world. Moreover, Herod thinks of Salomé that she is "her mother's child."[29] Thus, according to him, she is inclined to be the same. Even though she is supposed to be a virgin, she is already desired by the men who look at her, and the prophet calls her "daughter of Sodom" when she wants to touch him and kiss him.[30] Generally, the city of Sodom is associated with sexual crimes against nature; therefore, these could include sexual orgies as well.

The third association is fear. Salomé is the source of fear. Jokanaan prophesizes that "the sun shall become black like sackcloth of hair, and the moon shall become like blood, and the stars of the heaven shall fall upon the earth like unripe figs that fall from the fig-tree, and the kings of the earth shall be afraid."[31] When all this comes true and Salomé gets Jokanaan's head, Herod becomes afraid because he thinks something terrible will happen, so he orders complete darkness: "Put out the torches! Hide the

[25] Wilfred L. Guerin, et al., *A Handbook of Critical Approaches to Literature*, 5th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 187.
[26] Guerin, *Critical Approaches*, 187.
[27] Oscar Wilde, *Salomé* (1891; Boston: Branden, 1996), 8.
[28] Wilde, *Salomé*, 9.
[29] Wilde, *Salomé*, 33.
[30] Wilde, *Salomé*, 10.
[31] Wilde, *Salomé*, 23.

moon! Hide the stars! Let us hide ourselves in our palace, Herodias. I begin to be afraid."[32] Consequently, he orders soldiers to kill Salomé.

The fourth association is danger. The page advises that Salomé should not be looked at because it is dangerous: "You are always looking at her. You look at her too much. It is dangerous to look at people in such fashion. Something terrible may happen."[33] Danger is almost palpable in association with Salomé, and there is growing anticipation that something wrong is going to happen.

The fifth association is darkness. Darkness covers the whole place, as it is mentioned above.

The sixth association is dismemberment. Salomé orders the executioner to bring her Jokanaan's head, and this order is successfully executed—Jokanaan is dismembered.

The seventh association is emasculatiory death. Emasculatiory death can be metaphorically seen in the exchange between Herod's wife and Salomé's mother Herodias about sterility: "I am sterile, I? You say that, you that are ever looking at my daughter, you that would have her dance for your pleasure? You speak as a fool. I have borne a child. You have gotten no child, no, not on one of your slaves. It is you who are sterile, not I."[34] Herodias presents an ample piece of evidence of her fertility in being a mother of Salomé which explains why he is actually the one who is sterile. Not only does this information contribute to his emasculatiory death as such, the fact that this evidence is presented to him by a woman points to his emasculation as well because he, as a man of authority in patriarchal society, fails in the argument even though he attempts to save the situation—employing immature and childish means—he relies on what the prophet says and pursues his so called truth: "Peace, woman! I say that you are sterile. You have borne me no child, and the prophet says that our marriage is not a true marriage."[35] His position and what someone says is what is supposed to be the winning argument. What he says is the truth, and there should be no questioning it. But the evidence is on Herodias side. Moreover, there is nothing he can do about Salomé's wish, as he has to give her what she wishes. The emasculatiory death is also endangering Jokanaan for whom Salomé represents a threat of emasculation because he is afraid of her womanhood and sexuality. The effect of emasculatiory death is

[32] Wilde, *Salomé*, 36.
[33] Wilde, *Salomé*, 2.
[34] Wilde, *Salomé*, 25.
[35] Wilde, *Salomé*, 25.

intensified by the usage of blood, not only in combination with the moon which is embodied by Salomé because the correlation mentioned by Aubrey Beardsley in *Salome and Under the Hill* (1996) "seems to symbolise the breaking of hymens, menstruation, and male castration," but also when Herod slips in the blood of a captain who killed himself because of Salomé.[36]

The last association is the unconscious in its terrifying aspects. The unconscious in its terrifying aspects is to be seen in Salomé's vehement and adamant desire for the head of Jokanaan. Even though she is offered various and more sane compensations for her dancing, she refuses everything altogether. Her desire dominates her.

Although Salomé meets the associations almost impeccably, and therefore should be as close as possible to the worse and most evil embodiments of the femme fatale, she still can be interpreted as a victim. She is forced to dance for Herod, her lascivious stepfather, in exchange for anything she desires. To get her compensation, she asks for the head of Jokanaan who seems to represent misogyny, as he constantly arms himself against Salomé and her mother who can be taken as symbols of fertility, sexuality, and women's superiority. She is granted the wish; however, she cannot be blamed for the decapitation because Herod is the highest and most powerful authority—he ultimately decides what is to be done. He does not have to keep this oath. Moreover, if he had not acted immorally in the first place, he would not have gotten in this situation.

Heather Braun, in her *The Rise and Fall of the Femme Fatale in British Literature, 1790–1910* (2012) complicates the already rather elusive concept of the femme fatale even further: she introduces Wollstonecraft's coquette who "is aligned with the uneducated and self-motivated woman who has little regard for social responsibility."[37] Braun then proceeds to argue that "the femme fatale, unlike the coquette, can be unaware of or reluctant to embrace her powers of seduction and destruction."[38] She aims to support her argument with some evidence: "Such fatal heroines as Wilde's Salomé help to support this idea: at the very moment she becomes conscious of her sensual powers, she is forced to surrender them."[39] Nevertheless, I strongly oppose Heather Braun's view because I do not think that this should happen: I

[36] Aubrey Beardsley, *Salome and Under the Hill* (London: Creation Books, 1996), 6.
[37] Heather Braun, *The Rise and Fall of the Femme Fatale in British Literature, 1790–1910* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press), 5.
[38] Braun, *the Femme Fatale*, 5.
[39] Braun, *the Femme Fatale*, 5.

find her claim incorrect because I believe that the femme fatale is more than aware of her powers and herself in general because these powers are usually her only means of obtaining what she desires which tends to be some kind of freedom because she commonly lives in the society in which she has to fight against the authority of patriarchy and wrong social conventions. Even the example of Salomé which Braun herself provides in particular as a piece of evidence does not support her claim, as it is apparent from my analysis of Oscar Wilde's Salomé, specifically from the part with the first association which considers Salomé's sensuality because in this part, there is a scene with Narraboth whom Salomé forces to do what she pleases, using solely her smile and look. Thus this passage disputes Braun's claim because Salomé is more than aware of her seductive powers already before she dances for Herod at his bidding. Therefore, she is not forced to surrender her powers when she becomes conscious of them. She is killed because she proves to overpower Herod, the greatest authority, which is something intolerable and undesirable.

3. Mary Elizabeth Braddon's Lady Audley in *Lady Audley's Secret*

Mary Elizabeth Braddon was a prolific writer who achieved great renown for her sensation novel *Lady Audley's Secret*. The novel is a daring work, considering the date of its publication because its protagonist, Lady Audley, challenges the image of the angel. Elaine Showalter summarizes Lady Audley in her work *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing* (1977): "Braddon's bigamous heroine deserts her child, pushes husband number one down a well, thinks about poisoning husband number two, and sets fire to a hotel in which her other male acquaintances are residing."[40] Nevertheless, I believe that this summary does not provide the whole picture. The circumstances of Lady Audley's life should be taken into consideration. This is a mere stating of the stark conclusions. I wish to provide a more sympathetic view of her character.

3.1 The Femme Fatale's Background and Her Goals, Motivations, or Reasons

First of all, I need to mention that throughout the novel she bears several names. Her maiden name is Helen Maldon. When she marries her first husband, George Talboys, she becomes Helen Talboys. Because she does not want to remain an abandoned wife and mother destined to a life of poverty, she has to die, at least formally. She fakes her own death and gives life to Lucy Graham who works as a governess. Soon enough she changes her identity again thanks to the second marriage and becomes Lady Audley. Finally, she is known as Madame Taylor. I use Lady Audley as a uniform name, regardless of the stage of her life.

When Lady Audley was little, she was taken care of by a hired woman, so she could have only hoped for some tenderness or affection. In the introduction, I mention Freud and his *Three Contributions to the Sexual Theory*. For the purpose of this subchapter it is also useful to mention that Freud distinguishes three erogenous zones: the oral, the anal, and the genital. These zones are associated with stimulation which leads to pleasure. At the same time, they are connected to the gratification of vital needs which are eating, elimination, and reproduction. In terms of the oral zone, the child is satisfied if it receives food or sucks on its thumb. If its need is not gratified, the child

[40] Elaine Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), 163.

experiences frustration which can affect its development.[41] It can be thus said that Lady Audley's greedy materialism is a substitution for the oral gratification, and this is to be traced to the fact that she was weaned too abruptly. For this reason, she would be called orally fixated.

Moreover, her father is not all that present during her childhood, and he also irregularly pays money to this woman; therefore, she takes her anger out on small Lady Audley. When Lady Audley asks about her mother, the truth is not to be revealed. Finally, her foster-mother tells her in the moment of annoyance that her mother is mad. This brings further agony to her life: "I had exaggerated ideas of the horror of her situation."[42] She imagines her as someone violent who would not hesitate to kill her if she was within her grasp. This dreadful imagination haunts her during days, but also finds its way to her dreams which results in nightmares. She is being constantly reminded of their poverty—when she is to go to school or when her father cannot tend his beloved wife, her mother, because he has to earn money and she has to be attended to by hired nurses. She eventually visits her mother accompanied by her father. She cannot be compared to a character from a horror story. Instead, she is rather carefree, frivolous, and childish, but most importantly she did not recognize them: "Her madness was an hereditary disease transmitted to her from her mother, who had died mad. She, my mother, had been, or had appeared sane up to the hour of my birth, but from that hour her intellect had decayed, and she had become what I saw her."[43] Although her nightmares can cease because her mother is not what she imagines her to be, this seemingly positive event is replaced by the knowledge of what can become of her—hereditary. This is then another burden to bear and remember which is rather harsh for a ten year old girl: "I did remember this; and it was, perhaps, this that made me selfish and heartless, for I suppose I am heartless."[44]

The suffering she feels is indescribable and eats her alive: "However verbose I may be in my description of her feelings, I can never describe a tithe of her thoughts or her sufferings."[45] It also drives her towards the inevitable ending. Robert and Luke add the gasoline to the burning torment. To assuage her anguish means to erase them from the equation. Unfortunately, extinguishing them seems a last resort. They do not give

[41] Freud, *the Sexual Theory*, 40–48.
[42] Mary Elizabeth Braddon, *Lady Audley's Secret*, ed. Natalie M. Houston (1862; Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2003), 357.
[43] Braddon, *Lady Audley's Secret*, 358–59.
[44] Braddon, *Lady Audley's Secret*, 359.
[45] Braddon, *Lady Audley's Secret*, 326.

her any other option for she considered everything, including her another disappearance, but she knows too well that running away again is not an option: "I should have to go back and wear myself out in that long struggle, and die—as my mother died, perhaps!"[46] She would have to return to what she desperately attempts to avoid—poverty, wretchedness, humiliation, and much more. This is something she cannot allow to happen as long as she lives. This is too strong a motivation to succumb: "I will not go back—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."[47] From this moment on, there is no stopping her.

As she soon discovers, Robert survives the fire she set and comes for her. She gives him the conclusion that everything she has done was due to her supposed madness: "You have conquered—a MAD WOMAN!'"[48] She is well informed about her mother's madness, so she knows this is not her case. As Elaine Showalter describes in *The Female Malady: Women, Madness and English Culture 1830–1980* (1985), she only "makes use of the insanity defense popularized in cases of puerperal mania."[49] Lady Audley and her mother both suffered from puerperal mania which is an hereditary disease triggered at the moment of the delivery of the child as is described above. The outcome is different, however. The mother of Lady Audley becomes mad while Lady Audley recovers: "My baby was born, and the crisis which had been fatal to my mother arose for me. I escaped, but I was more irritable perhaps after my recovery, less inclined to fight the hard battle of the world, more disposed to complain of poverty and neglect."[50] The recovery is not whole, however, the stress and fear she felt during puerperium—when she was abandoned by George—are only waiting for the right situation to emerge again. From the moment on, she is accompanied by fits of stress and fear which may result in violence which leads to her worst deeds. These fits arise when her most cherished safety is threatened. These moments are exemplified by George, Robert, and Luke who make threats against her, the former employing also physical force as he grasps her hand. The fact she is not really mad is also confirmed by Dr. Mosgrave:

[46] Braddon, *Lady Audley's Secret*, 328.
[47] Braddon, *Lady Audley's Secret*, 328.
[48] Braddon, *Lady Audley's Secret*, 354.
[49] Elaine Showalter, *The Female Malady: Women, Madness and English Culture 1830–1980* (New York: Penguin Books, 1985), 72.
[50] Braddon, *Lady Audley's Secret*, 361.

> 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 conspiracy which required coolness and deliberation in its execution. There is no madness in that.[51]

Generally put, what makes her dangerous is her cunning, intelligence, agency, and the fact she does not want to yield regardless of the obstacle.

It can be said that after the puerperal mania and everything she has been through, her ego loses the ability to control her id in the moments of stress and fear. In his lecture "The Anatomy of the Mental Personality" published in *New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-analysis* (1933), Freud distinguishes three realms of mental organization, namely these are id, ego, and super-ego. Id is best described as a "chaos, a cauldron of seething excitement."[52] It does not distinguish between good and evil, and it does follow any values or morality: "Naturally, the id knows no values, no good and evil, no morality."[53] Id's function is to gratify the instinctual needs which lead to pleasure. Id wants to avoid displeasure. Its energy is either released if the need is satisfied or it yields to the influence of ego which controls it. In the case of Lady Audley, the moments of stress and fear signal extreme displeasure and that is precisely what the id aims to avoid by removing George, Robert, and Luke who represent the source of displeasure, consequently this points to the momentary victory of the id.

3.2 The Femme Fatale's Appearance and Character Qualities

I want to begin this subchapter considering Lady Audley's vices which may seem odd because my aim is to demonstrate that there is more to her than evilness and manipulation, but it makes sense when all aspects are considered by the end of this subchapter.

Lady Audley's problem is that she becomes ruled by "the three demons of

[51] Braddon, *Lady Audley's Secret*, 383.
[52] Sigmund Freud, "The Anatomy of the Mental Personality," in *New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-analysis* (New York: Carlton House, 1933), 104.
[53] Freud, "Mental Personality," 105.

Vanity, Selfishness, and Ambition."[54] Initially, she remembers causing only petty errors, such as a "triumph over a schoolfellow; a flirtation with the lover of a friend."[55] These were, however, only a step away from more serious crimes when being consumed by stress and fear. While she recollects her younger years, her thoughts reveal she was not a scheming woman: "'I was only thoughtless. I never did any harm—at least, never wilfully.'"[56] She did not want to hurt anyone and thought herself different from the other women who carefully spun their webs. If she caused any wickedness, it was all "the result of wild impulses."[57] Someone who is evil does not think about whether they hurt people in the past, they do not simply care. Moreover, she is capable of being empathic: "I wonder whether they suffered—those women—whether they ever suffered as—"[58] Her thoughts are not finished, but it is likely that the train of thoughts would compare her own suffering to theirs.

She also names the reason for her vanity: "As I grew older I was told that I was pretty—beautiful—lovely—bewitching. I heard all these things at first indifferently, but by-and-by I listened to them greedily, and began to think that in spite of the secret of my life I might be more successful in the world's great lottery than my companions."[59] It is obvious that she is a product of the rotten values of society—the society in which a woman's beauty ranks highest and is a key to an advantageous marriage which was in the nineteenth century the only way for a woman to improve her dismal position.

Kirby-Jane Hallum, the author of *Aestheticism and the Marriage Market in Victorian Popular Fiction* (2015), discusses this social issue in the introduction titled "The Art of Female Beauty in Context" where she mentions the Victorian marriage market which refers to the idea of unmarried women being a commodity whose desirability is based mainly on their beauty: "The valuing of a marriageable woman according to her beauty dates back for centuries, and was also tied to her social class, economic fortune, virginity and virtue, and accomplishments."[60] The covert message is clear—woman's intrinsic qualities are rendered unimportant. Even more so, qualities that were ascribed rather to men, such as boldness and cunning are considered completely wrong because the perfect lady's "education was to bring out her 'natural'

[54] Braddon, *Lady Audley's Secret*, 311.
[55] Braddon, *Lady Audley's Secret*, 311.
[56] Braddon, *Lady Audley's Secret*, 311.
[57] Braddon, *Lady Audley's Secret*, 311.
[58] Braddon, *Lady Audley's Secret*, 311.
[59] Braddon, *Lady Audley's Secret*, 359.
[60] Kirby-Jane Hallum, introduction to *Aestheticism and the Marriage Market in Victorian Popular Fiction* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), 1.

submission to authority and innate maternal instincts."[61] The ideal was thus passivity and submissiveness.

Lady Audley is introduced as Sir Michael's "pretty young wife dawdling by his side."[62] This introductory description gives us two pieces of information. Although it endows her with the quality of beauty which is necessary for the femme fatale, the way she moves about the walk portrays her almost as a piece of decoration, a rather passive figure whose role is to follow her husband, please his eyes and later on his ears when she plays Beethoven and Mendelssohn for him. This picture, then, perfectly conforms to this ideal. This ideal seems to correspond to her visage:

> The innocence and candor of an infant beamed in Lady Audley's fair face, and shone out of her large and liquid blue eyes. The rosy lips, the delicate nose, the profusion of fair ringlets, all contributed to preserve to her beauty the character of extreme youth and freshness. She owned to twenty years of age, but it was hard to believe her more than seventeen.[63]

As if it is not enough, she dresses her fragile figure into clothing which contributes to her girlish appearance. This girlishness of hers is hard to resist. To highlight it even more, she devotes her time to childish amusements, so she cannot be found reading or studying. She prefers socializing. Even her hair suggests an angelic quality of her being, for her curls made "a pale halo round her head when the sunlight shone through them."[64]

Nevertheless, she is a very bold and cunning woman—she has to become such because she has no other choice, she has to rely on herself. Her father seems to be fragile in comparison with her: "My father was utterly dumfounded and helpless. He could only shed childish tears of despair and terror. He was of no use to me in this crisis."[65] Because her father, as a man of authority and the head of the family, is expected to be rational and calm, especially when in escalation of tensions, this portrayal ridicules the way men were traditionally perceived. It is also even more striking when the father is put into comparison with her because she is nothing close to

[61] Vicinus, introduction to *Suffer and Be Still*, x.
[62] Braddon, *Lady Audley's Secret*, 46.
[63] Braddon, *Lady Audley's Secret*, 90.
[64] Braddon, *Lady Audley's Secret*, 49.
[65] Braddon, *Lady Audley's Secret*, 364.

oversensitive and weak. She keeps a cool head. They exchange the stereotypical representations.

She can play her part of ideal woman almost perfectly—her only and fatal failure is her sentimentality in keeping the evidence of her former life. Otherwise she is very careful, especially when considering what she says to others about herself: "'Miss Graham told me nothing; she was too clever for that. She knows how to keep her own secrets, in spite of her innocent ways and her curly hair.'"[66] She violates the stereotypical ideal only when the situation requires it.

When she sees that Robert Audley is relentless in his pursuit, she knows she has to manipulate Sir Michael, so that she would not lose everything that keeps her alive. When she tells Sir Michael that she thinks Robert is a monomaniac, he does not want to believe it. So when the need to argue her point arises, she transforms herself into an unyielding and competent attorney: "She had been transformed from a frivolous, childish beauty into a woman, strong to argue her own cause and plead her own defense."[67] She can adjust her behavior accordingly to the situation and use the right words which is unexpected for a woman of the nineteenth century. So when she says that Robert thinks George Talboys was murdered at the very place they live, he considers him mad himself. To make it all more believable, not only does she give reasons why and how the disease appears and works, she also uses strong arguments to explain her behavior: "'You saw how frightened I was when I first came in. I should not have been so much agitated if he hadn't said something horrible.'"[68] Sir Michael does not suspect any other reason for her being frightened, but the attentive reader already knows she feels this way because Robert could destroy her life.

Moreover, when Robert Audley confronts her, she is so dauntless as to decide to question Roberts's sanity: "Are you going mad, Mr. Audley, and do you select me as the victim of your monomania? What is George Talboys to me that you should worry me about him?"[69] This accusation is very tactical because Robert questioned himself in the same way before obtaining and connecting all the pieces of evidence: "Why was it that I saw some strange mystery in my friend's disappearance? Was it a monition, or a monomania? What if I am wrong after all? What if this chain of evidence which I have

[66] Braddon, *Lady Audley's Secret*, 255.
[67] Braddon, *Lady Audley's Secret*, 302.
[68] Braddon, *Lady Audley's Secret*, 302.
[69] Braddon, *Lady Audley's Secret*, 282.

constructed link by link, is woven out of my own folly?"[70] Even when he presents her the evidence, she does not yield: "The mask that she wears is not to be plucked away. My uncle would rather think me mad than believe her guilty."[71] She fights as long as she can.

When she is tormented by Luke, her maid's rude and drinking husband, she is not naïve: "'he made you come; and he will make you come whenever he pleases.'"[72] She knows well that this is to continue as long as possible. Nothing can break this cycle of blackmailing, only someone's death or lack of money. She is also aware of what she can expect to happen as soon as there is no money to pay them for Luke's silence: "I suppose when my purse is empty and my credit ruined, you and your husband will turn upon me and sell me to the highest bidder."[73]

In spite of how hard she sometimes acts, there is one very important scene which shows how gentle and human she can actually be: "Some touch of womanly feeling, some sentiment of compassion softened Lady Audley's glance as it fell upon that noble, reposing figure. For a moment the horrible egotism of her own misery yielded to her pitying tenderness for another."[74] Her love for herself is overpowered for a moment. However, the moment disappears as briskly as it appeared. When she thinks of what is to befall Sir Michael when he learns the truth, she sympathizes for him, but her vanity emerges and takes over because she is more than aware of the power of her charm and attractive aspects with which she is endowed: "She thought of all these things with a transient thrill of triumph, which was stronger even than her terror."[75] She acts this way because she knows she has to rely solely on herself.

3.3 The Femme Fatale's Relationships and the Way She Is Perceived

Adriana Craciun, the author of *Fatal Women of Romanticism* (2002), considers Lady Audley a "sexual predator."[76] She also compares Lady Audley to Melusine of Eliza Lynn Linton: "it was in this boudoir that Melusine exchanged sex for money, like the

[70] Braddon, *Lady Audley's Secret*, 271.
[71] Braddon, *Lady Audley's Secret*, 290.
[72] Braddon, *Lady Audley's Secret*, 315–16.
[73] Braddon, *Lady Audley's Secret*, 316.
[74] Braddon, *Lady Audley's Secret*, 321.
[75] Braddon, *Lady Audley's Secret*, 321.
[76] Adriana Craciun, *Fatal Women of Romanticism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 218.

'angry mermaid' Lady Audley in Braddon's novel."[77] I think that this interpretation is rather far-fetched because to me Lady Audley does not exhibit such behavior that would rightfully justify it. It is true that Lady Audley is well aware of her attractive appearance and uses it for her own good, she may be also considered a coquettish woman because she loves socializing, but as far as I am concerned, she does not sleep with other men to obtain money. This is apparent when Lady Audley confesses her real story to Sir Michael: "'I would have been your true and pure wife to the end of time, though I had been surrounded by a legion of tempters.'"[78] This statement suggests that she is faithful and would have retained her faithfulness if the situation had allowed her to remain his wife. She only wants a rich enough husband, so that she does not have to live the way she was forced to live from her very childhood. Furthermore, to consider her a sexual predator, I would expect her to be actively pursuing Sir Michael rather than passively waiting for him to notice her.

3.3.1 Sir Michael Audley and Alicia Audley

Lady Audley's second husband, Sir Audley, is fifty-six years old and is described as "a big man, tall and stout, with a deep, sonorous voice, handsome black eyes, and a white beard—a white beard which made him look venerable against his will, for he was as active as a boy, and one of the hardest riders in the country."[79] As a widower he is regarded as "one of those apparently advantageous matches which are apt to draw upon a woman the envy and hatred of her sex."[80] Except for his rather higher age, he seems to possess everything a young woman of the nineteenth century could ever wish for. Even the doctor's wife speaks of him in superlatives: "Of course it would be a magnificent match; he has a splendid income, and is one of the most generous of men."[81] Consequently, she would also have a very high position which would give her more freedom.

After what Sir Michael has the chance of spending one evening in Lady Audley's presence, he is certain he "had never loved before."[82] His previous marriage

[77] Craciun, *Fatal Women*, 218.
[78] Braddon, *Lady Audley's Secret*, 362.
[79] Braddon, *Lady Audley's Secret*, 46.
[80] Braddon, *Lady Audley's Secret*, 46–47.
[81] Braddon, *Lady Audley's Secret*, 50.
[82] Braddon, *Lady Audley's Secret*, 48.

had been nothing but dullness in comparison to what he feels now, a mixture of anxious desire and enchantment. The narrator wants the reader to consider Lady Audley's motives for wanting him: "I do not think that, throughout his courtship, the baronet once calculated upon his wealth or his position as reasons for his success. If he ever remembered these things, he dismissed the thought of them with a shudder."[83] For Sir Audley there is no questioning her. He sees only what he wants to see, and he wants to be for her "a love which should recall to her the father she had lost."[84] He assumes that her life must have been "one of toil and dependence," and that she, by no means, had any chance to develop feelings or any attachment, him being the first man interested in her.[85] In defense of Sir Audley, Lady Audley showed no behavior that would betray any scheming, and her young looks, unknown age and background in combination with her gentle and merry attitude towards life and people corresponded to the version of her he constructed.

What is important to observe is the change of his beliefs. When he proposes to her, he seems more sober. At first, he does not want her to marry him if she does not love him. He would be rather for her to "reject him, even though she broke his heart by doing so, than that she should accept his offer if she did not love him."[86] For him it would have been a sin: "'If my happiness could be achieved by such an act, which it could not—which it never could,' he repeated, earnestly—'nothing but misery can result from a marriage dictated by any motive but truth and love.'"[87] He cannot help but ask her whether she loves anyone else. When he hears she does not love anyone else and that she does not dislike him, he changes his mind: suddenly he forgets all about his speech about truth and love being the only motive for a marriage without misery. Not only does she not love him, she is not even entirely truthful towards him. Eventually, their selfishness takes over, and it is to some degree understandable. Nothing is either black or white. Sir Audley only wants what practically almost everyone hopes for—to be loved reciprocally, even though it must be admitted that his picture of love towards Lady Audley seems to be unhealthy.

Lady Audley gives him the chance to be the one to decide their fate, and he seals their misery: "'Well, Lucy, I will not ask too much of you. I dare say I am a romantic

[83] Braddon, *Lady Audley's Secret*, 49.
[84] Braddon, *Lady Audley's Secret*, 49.
[85] Braddon, *Lady Audley's Secret*, 49.
[86] Braddon, *Lady Audley's Secret*, 51.
[87] Braddon, *Lady Audley's Secret*, 51.

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?'"[88] Calling the future bond a bargain only emphasizes its unfortunate character, although it should be considered profitable for both sides. When he walks away he feels it is not right, but it does not change his mind. He contents himself with the situation that his money and position is the main motivation for Lucy to marry him. For Lucy the bond with Sir Michael means more than money and position, it is about independence, life without drudgery and humiliations.

She takes care of him as best as she can because she is fond of him and what he gives her—high position, great house, and simply all she can possibly think of. When he is ill, she sits by his bed. In the nineteenth century, it was typical for a woman to spend her time at home with her husband as her role was to take care of him, however, Sir Michael seems to be rather progressive because he gives her freedom to go wherever she needs: "His young wife's presence made the sunshine of his life; and though he could not bear to chain her to his side, it grieved him to think that she could willingly remain unnecessarily absent from him, frittering away her time in some childish talk or frivolous occupation."[89] Nevertheless, it still pains him to find her away from him. Nowadays, this seemingly progressive attitude would be seen as possessive and clingy, simply smothering the woman.

There are only few people who are not enchanted by Lady Audley. One is her step-daughter Alicia. She does not like her for obvious reasons—she is jealous of her. Not only is Lady Audley "better loved and more admired than the baronet's daughter," but she also takes Alicia's place of the mistress of the house, and Robert, Alicia's cousin and the object of her interest, is initially also bewitched by Lady Audley.[90]

Lady Audley is afraid of losing Alicia's father's affection, so she carefully asks Alicia whether she plans to hurt her. To this Alicia replies that if Lucy ever looses this affection, it will be solely due to her own behavior for she does not plan to meddle in their matters. Lucy is well aware of what she implies, so she defends herself: "'I suppose you mean to infer by all that, that I'm deceitful. Why, I can't help smiling at

[88] Braddon, *Lady Audley's Secret*, 52–53.
[89] Braddon, *Lady Audley's Secret*, 295–96.
[90] Braddon, *Lady Audley's Secret*, 90.

people, and speaking prettily to them. I know I'm no *better* than the rest of the world; but I can't help it if I'm *pleasantér*. It's constitutional.'"[91]

Sir Michael is upset Alicia does not like his wife. He considers her sensitive, so Alicia's misconduct towards her is most unwelcome. Alicia thinks she is fooling him: "'You think her sensitive because she has soft little white hands, and big blue eyes with long lashes, and all manner of affected, fantastical ways, which you stupid men call fascinating.'"[92] Alicia is well aware that her father is hopelessly infatuated and does not see her true colors—the whole picture. Her two-sidedness is expressed in the picture of Lady Audley where she is portrayed without frills. This could have been only captured by a painter who "is able to see, through the normal expression of the face, another expression that is equally a part of it, though not to be perceived by common eyes."[93] For this reason, it is not surprising that Lady Audley does not doubt her husband's complete devotion because she is not blind. She knows that his love is abiding and staunch.

3.3.2 George Talboys and George Talboys Junior

George is initially a rich man who marries Lady Audley. When George's father discovers that he marries her, the allowance he is receiving stops and he has only some remaining sum to support them. Lady Audley reproaches George for the poverty that he inflicts upon her when losing his income from his father, and it can be considered rightful because George could have gone to his father to ask him for help. Nevertheless, he refuses to do so: "'It's very hard, perhaps, to be poor, but we will bear it. We won't go with pitiful faces to the stern father, and ask him to give us food and shelter, only to be refused in long, Johnsonian sentences, and made a classical example for the benefit of the neighborhood. No, my pretty one; it is easy to starve, but it is difficult to stoop.'"[94] His ego is more important than the well-being of his family. He does not find her selfish when she blames him for the situation: "If there were any selfish feelings displayed in such speeches as these, George Talboys had never discovered it."[95] He loved and believed in Lady Audley. When they move in to Lady Audley's father house,

[91] Braddon, *Lady Audley's Secret*, 137.
[92] Braddon, *Lady Audley's Secret*, 136.
[93] Braddon, *Lady Audley's Secret*, 108.
[94] Braddon, *Lady Audley's Secret*, 207.
[95] Braddon, *Lady Audley's Secret*, 207.

the father robs them of most of the money.

George uses the remainder to earn fortune in Australia, joining the gold-digging expeditions. On the assumption he is doing the best for his wife and their little child, he leaves her only with a brief note stating that if he succeeds, he will bring home fortune and happiness. Should he fail, he will not return ever again. It takes three years and a half for George to return to England. He naively expects that she would be waiting for his return in admiration, for she is his "gentle, innocent, loving little wife," and he goes on the expedition to give them happy future, as he justifies it.[96] Instead of happy future, he condemns his wife to a life of poverty. He does not even write to her during the three years and a half because he could not let her know about his "fighting hard with despair and death."[97] What he does not realize is that if he does not contact her during such a long time, it either automatically means that he is not being successful, otherwise he would have returned as he had promised in the note or that he is dead, that he forgot about her, or that he deserted her right from the very beginning. The latter two being most probable for a woman who must have felt to be deserted since he did not even talk to her about the expedition beforehand. All she rightfully acknowledges is being abandoned when she needed him the most, being with a little baby—a week or two old, and not provided for.

When George abandons her, it is not surprising that Lady Audley's life of deprivation and poverty from the very young age leads her to want a better life for herself. In the nineteenth century, there was not much women could do for themselves to escape from the clutches of poverty. The woman who lost her husband "after marriage was dismissed with the comment, 'she has failed in business, and no social reform can prevent such failures.'"[98]

As Nicola Diane Thompson claims in her work *Victorian Women Writers and the Woman Question* (1999), the woman could not even get a divorce, there were only exceptions, because after marriage she "ceased to be a person under the law coverture, which stated that the wife's interests were represented by her husband."[99] Fortunately, this changed with the Matrimonial Causes Act of 1857. It is nothing unanticipated then that Lady Audley commits bigamy.

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[96] Braddon, *Lady Audley's Secret*, 59.
[97] Braddon, *Lady Audley's Secret*, 63.
[98] Vicinus, introduction to *Suffer and Be Still*, xii.
[99] Anne Humpherys, "Breaking apart: The Early Victorian Divorce Novel," in *Victorian Women Writers and the Woman Question*, ed. Nicola Diane Thompson (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 43.

Her way of loving both of the men can be compared to the feeling of gratitude: "'I think I loved him as much as it was in my power to love anybody; not more than I have loved you, Sir Michael—not so much, for when you married me you elevated me to a position that he could never have given me.'"[100] For her, poverty is the cause of all the misery, so there is no wonder that the man who saves her from the poverty becomes her knight in a shining armor while the man who throws her back to it becomes the object of hatred: "I looked upon this as a desertion, and I resented it bitterly—resented it by hating the man who had left me with no protector but a weak, tipsy father, and with a child to support. I had to work hard for my living."[101] She claims she does not love the child because it contributes to her miserable situation, but she visits him nevertheless: "'I was anxious to know how the boy was treated.'"[102] This shows she had to care for him at least to some degree.

3.3.3 Robert Audley

Sir Michael's nephew is the only man who can eventually see through her beauty and charm. However, this is only based on the circumstantial evidence he systematically gathers: "What a pleasant picture it might have been, had he been able to look upon it ignorantly, seeing no more than others saw, looking no further than a stranger could look."[103] Otherwise, he would have completely fallen for her.

3.3.4 Minor Characters

Phoebe, her maid, sees her as the centre of attention wherever she goes: "She set everybody mad about her, wherever she went. Her singing, her playing, her painting, her dancing, her beautiful smile, and sunshiny ringlets! She was always the talk of a place, as long as we stayed in it."[104] Simply put, she knows how to capture people's attention. In the subchapter on her appearance, I mention that beauty ranks highest, however, this quote demonstrates that it is not only the beauty that matters. It is rather

[100] Braddon, *Lady Audley's Secret*, 360.
[101] Braddon, *Lady Audley's Secret*, 361.
[102] Braddon, *Lady Audley's Secret*, 364.
[103] Braddon, *Lady Audley's Secret*, 250.
[104] Braddon, *Lady Audley's Secret*, 67.

the whole package. To support this view even more, Lady Audley can be compared to Phoebe considering their appearance—their difference can be seen only in the color of her hair, complexion, and eyebrows. Notwithstanding this similarity of appearance, Phoebe's position is markedly different. She represents a rather passive victim of Luke's physical and psychological tyranny.

When Robert Audley asks Mr. Dawson, Lady Audley's ex-employer, about her, he is unstinting in his praise: "I have always considered your uncle's wife one of the most amiable of women. I cannot bring myself to think her otherwise."[105] He is not the only one, the whole crowd of people who get the chance to meet her find her flawless.

Miss Tonks, a teacher at the school where Lady Audley comes before being employed by Mr. Dawson, is also jealous of Lady Audley, and the reader can easily imagine how poisonous the woman can become when considering Robert's thoughts: "She sniffs the coming trouble to her fellow female creature, and rejoices in it, and would take any pains to help me."[106] She cannot give him the information that would be to Lady Audley's detriment, so she at least more than willingly brings him the box she left there which Roberts adds as a puzzle to the mystery he wants to solve. Generally then, women who do not like her are jealous of her.

3. 4 Concluding Words

Lady Audley had a dreadful childhood which affects her further life. Poverty is the cause of her wretched life, and therefore, after considering all of the possibilities, she is forced to show no mercy when she is threatened by the male characters to taste the same misery again. Her character is also corrupted by the people around her who highlight the importance of women's beauty. Nevertheless, she reverses the stereotypical women's attributes when her composed behavior is compared to her father's startled acting. It is her forced dependence on men that causes her problems—she and her child are abandoned by her first husband, assuming a new identity is thus the only possibility of improving her situation. Afterwards, her appearance corresponds to her behavior of the angel when she marries Sir Audley because he gives her what she cannot achieve on her own because of the confinement of women to the house: a decent life. She is widely admired, with the exception of jealous women, and Robert Audley who is fixed in his

[105] Braddon, *Lady Audley's Secret*, 241.
[106] Braddon, *Lady Audley's Secret*, 256.

purpose of uncovering the mystery around his friend and Lady Audley's first husband. Although she does not kill her first husband, she has to be removed from the scene, as she proves to be a threat.

4. William Makepeace Thackeray's Becky Sharp in *Vanity Fair: A Novel without a Hero*

William Makepeace Thackeray became to be known as a talented satirist especially thanks to his vast work *Vanity Fair: A Novel without a Hero*. Becky Sharp, one of the work's protagonists, diverges from the ideal of the angel, as she is outstandingly daring. She is a character who appeals to contemporary attitudes about women's ambition and self-reliance.

4.1 The Femme Fatale's Background and Her Goals, Motivations, or Reasons

In terms of Becky Sharp, it is important to consider the setting of this work because its description contributes to the clarification of her personality and behavior. It is Vanity Fair, "not a moral place certainly; nor a merry one, though very noisy."[107] The reader's expectations of being introduced to a good-natured femme fatale is not very high, it is rather on the contrary. It is a harsh, wicked place full of pretence and falsenesses where it is not easy to live. If one wants to survive in such a place, they have to adapt to the way it works. Becky lives in the world where money and position is the conversation. She experiences the underlying principle of this metaphor from her young age: "Miss Sedley's papa was a merchant in London, and a man of some wealth; whereas Miss Sharp was an articled pupil, for whom Miss Pinkerton had done, as she thought, quite enough, without conferring upon her at parting the high honour of the Dixonary."[108] She is treated unevenly in comparison with Amelia Sedley, and this different treatment is based on the position and wealth of the father. The general advice for women on how to behave in this world seems to be simple:

> Be shy of loving frankly; never tell all you feel, or (a better way still), feel very little. See the consequences of being prematurely honest and confiding, and mistrust yourselves and everybody. Get yourselves married as they do in France, where the lawyers are the bridesmaids and confidantes. At any rate, never have any feelings which may make you uncomfortable, or make any promises which you cannot at any required

[107] William Mackpeace Thackeray, *Vanity Fair: A Novel Without a Hero* (1847; London: Bradbury and Evans, 1853), v.
[108] Thackeray, *Vanity Fair*, 3.

> moment command and withdraw. That is the way to get on, and be respected, and have a virtuous character in Vanity Fair.[109]

Nevertheless, it is almost impossible to follow this advice if one does not want to become crazy, wrecked, or wretched at the same time. If one cannot trust themselves, then they cannot extend the trust on other people. It all begins and ends with the approach of the individual person who is firm in his or her beliefs and acts accordingly, otherwise it is a vicious circle. The narrator claims that she deserves the ill treatment: "All the world used her ill, said this young misanthropist, and we may be pretty certain that persons whom all the world treats ill, deserve entirely the treatment they get."[110] May we be really so certain that she deserves the treatment she gets? According to me, this is unfair, especially considering her childhood and the time spent in the school.

Becky's parents, the closest people, could not affect her in a positive manner because her mother, an opera-woman of a French descent and low morals, died too early, so all that remains for Becky is to vaunt the glories of her mother's supposedly noble past: "And curious it is that as she advanced in life this young lady's ancestors increased in rank and splendour."[111] The older she becomes, the more she realizes the importance of at least faking what she is does not have. It can be considered a defense mechanism. In addition to her absent mother, her father "was an artist, and in that quality had given lessons of drawing at Miss Pinkerton's school. He was a clever man; a pleasant companion; a careless student; with a great propensity for running into debt, and a partiality for the tavern. When he was drunk, he used to beat his wife and daughter."[112] By no means can he be considered a shining example of a father figure, it is rather on the contrary. Because of her father she experiences events which such a young girl should not even know about:

> Many a dun had she talked to, and turned away from her father's door; many a tradesman had she coaxed and wheedled into good-humour, and into the granting of one meal more. She sate commonly with her father, who was very proud of her wit, and heard the talk of many of his wild companions—often but ill-suited for a girl to hear. But she never had

[109] Thackeray, *Vanity Fair*, 143.
[110] Thackeray, *Vanity Fair*, 143.
[111] Thackeray, *Vanity Fair*, 9.
[112] Thackeray, *Vanity Fair*, 8–9.

> been a girl, she said; she had been a woman since she was eight years old. [113]

Thus she does not have much with which she can identify. Knowing and using French thanks to her mother, being able to handle almost anyone thanks to her father, along with her looks and charm are the only helpful inheritance with which she is endowed. If Becky is born into such unpleasant conditions, how is she to grow a sweet and amiable woman? She does not have any positive role model in her life who could provide her with the motivation or reasons to be such. She has to rely solely on herself in this harsh world. Moreover, people who are hurt usually pass the pain that is inflicted upon them by somebody else to other people. Turning in the vicious circle is a never-ending process, unless someone stops it. For Becky, Amelia seems to be the person: "The gentle tender-hearted Amelia Sedley was the only person to whom she could attach herself in the least."[114] Unfortunately, one person cannot change this circular rhythm of the whole world. Therefore, although it is true that "it could not be expected that every one should be of the humble and gentle temper of Miss Amelia Sedley; should take every opportunity to vanquish Rebecca's hard-heartedness and ill-humour; and, by a thousand kind words and office overcome, for once at least, her hostility to her kind," it could be enough to set a good example.[115] A woman does not have to be necessarily of the gentle temper, all that is needed is not to do to others what she does not want them to do to her. It is also important to voice one's opinion and feelings which was not desired during the Victorian era: "Young ladies were trained to have no opinions lest they seem too formed and too definite for a young man's taste, and thereby unmarketable as a commodity."[116] Unfortunately, as it is mentioned at the beginning, this is not the way Vanity Fair works, so the pain continues to be passed on other people who become bitterer.

Becky cherishes freedom above all and knows that money along with a high position are its prerequisites: "She determined at any rate to get free from the prison in which she found herself, and now began to act for herself, and for the first time to make connected plans for the future."[117] When she studies in the school to which she is

[113] Thackeray, *Vanity Fair*, 9–10.
[114] Thackeray, *Vanity Fair*, 11.
[115] Thackeray, *Vanity Fair*, 8.
[116] Vicinus, introduction to *Suffer and Be Still*, x.
[117] Thackeray, *Vanity Fair*, 11.

accepted because it is convenient for the school—she is to teach French—she decides to profit from the school as much as possible. One day she is heard practicing music so well that she is offered to teach children music which would save the school mistress the expenses. Nonetheless, she does not accept the offer and decides to negotiate. Finally, Becky wins the negotiation and is to receive money for her lessons. She refuses to do anything beyond the agreement because she does not want to be misused which shocks the mistress of the school: "'I never have seen the individual who has dared in my own house to question my authority. I have nourished a viper in my bosom.'"[118] Her behavior is something unexpected and outrageous because it defies the ideal of the angel, and she is considered monstrous because she undermines Miss Pinkerton's authority, consequently she is undesirable and must be removed and placed as a governess to Sir Pitt Crawley's family.

4.2 The Femme Fatale's Appearance and Character Qualities

Becky impresses men as irresistible:

> She was small and slight in person; pale, sandy-haired, and with eyes habitually cast down: when they looked up they were very large, odd, and attractive; so attractive that the Reverend Mr. Crisp, fresh from Oxford, and curate to the Vicar of Chiswick, the Reverend Mr. Flowerdew, fell in love with Miss Sharp; being shot dead by a glance of her eyes which was fired all the way across Chiswick Church from the school-pew to the reading-desk.[119]

There is something in her eyes and the way she looks at men that leaves them stricken. Nevertheless, she still looks like a child, regardless of her rough teachers—poverty, a drunk and sometimes abusive father, and the lack of mother. Irrespective of what her father was like, she still prefers his conversation over the talk of women who are in close proximity to her: "The pompous vanity of the old schoolmistress, the foolish good-humour of her sister, the silly chat and scandal of the elder girls, and the frigid

[118] Thackeray, *Vanity Fair*, 11.
[119] Thackeray, *Vanity Fair*, 9.

correctness of the governesses equally annoyed her."[120] She cannot stand arranged regularity, rigid rules and formality, so it is nothing surprising she feels oppressed.

Becky is audacious and not be fooled with because she is not afraid to demonstrate how she feels about Miss Pinkerton and her sister Miss Jemima. When leaving the school, she declines to shake one of the fingers Miss Pinkerton offers to her which is as generous behavior as she can probably exhibit towards Becky. This alarms Miss Jemima. At parting, Amelia is embraced while Becky is ignored: "Nobody cried for leaving *her*."[121] She seems the hardest to love, yet she is the one who needs it the most. There is no wonder she acts the way she does. I think that it is justified to say that nobody would feel like joking and being friendly with others when they are being constantly reminded of their poor position and lack of money. She completes her act of defiance when she very demonstratively rejects the dictionary she obtains from Miss Jemima: "Miss Sharp put her pale face out of the window and actually flung the book back into the garden."[122] The normal procedure is that the dictionary is accompanied by an inscription from Miss Pinkerton; however, this copy is not inscribed because if it depended only on Miss Pinkerton she would not even have given her the dictionary. It is not surprising then that she rejects the gift in this fashion, openly and plainly expressing how much she regards the whole school. When Amelia asks her why she is such she mindfully replies: "'For two years I have only had insults and outrage from her. I have been treated worse than any servant in the kitchen. I have never had a friend or a kind word, except from you. I have been made to tend the little girls in the lower schoolroom, and to talk French to the Misses, until I grew sick of my mother tongue.'"[123] Becky simply repays Miss Pinkerton the favors she gave her. The reader can find Becky in a similar position when she is in possession of horses she can sell to the people with carriages who want to escape. Lady Bareacres, who speaks ill of Becky, is one of these people. Not only does Becky make her come on her own, she proves to completely own the situation: "'Not to be able to get horses!' she said, 'and to have all those diamonds sewed into the carriage cushions! What a prize it will be for the French when they come!—the carriage and the diamonds, I mean; not the lady!'"[124] Regardless of the lady's higher position, Becky returns her the favor of the mistreatment,

[120] Thackeray, *Vanity Fair*, 10.
[121] Thackeray, *Vanity Fair*, 6.
[122] Thackeray, *Vanity Fair*, 6.
[123] Thackeray, *Vanity Fair*, 7–8.
[124] Thackeray, *Vanity Fair*, 262.

completely humiliating her. She also manages to put George into his place when necessary, and she can manipulate him accordingly to the needs of the situation. Therefore, the position and gender do not matter to her when considering revenge.

Although Becky openly and dauntlessly defends herself, she is not presented as a character who is controlled by emotions. The expression of emotions has always been stereotypically the domain of women; therefore, this is rather surprising. Becky's emotions are deliberately described to a minimum. Nevertheless, she is almost in a complete control of them. When spending time at the Sedleys, she learns the ropes: "'O, delightful!' said Rebecca, going to clap her hands; but she recollected herself, and paused, like a modest creature."[125] With experience, she realizes she needs to minimize her true emotions if she wants to maintain some image of her personality. She manages to control her emotions to an almost impeccable degree: "No man in the British army which has marched away, not the great Duke himself, could be more cool or collected in the presence of doubts and difficulties."[126] However, there is one important scene in which she seems to reveal them: "'He will come back, my dear,' said Rebecca, touched in spite of herself."[127] This happens when she wants to comfort Amelia that George is to return from the war. Right after what Amelia accuses her of doing her wrong because Amelia thinks that Rebecca wants George for herself. Furthermore, after this conversation she meets the major's wife who she sends to Amelia, so that she can comfort her because Becky knows she cannot do it herself, so she is capable of empathy.

From her very childhood, she gradually learns all sorts of skills and abilities. As a result, she becomes a versatile person who can adjust her behavior accordingly to the situation. When she is entrusted with the renovation of the Crawley's family house, she proves to be a priceless associate because not only does she oversee the whole renovation of the house, but she also employs her imagination and taste: "Mrs. Rawdon Crawley was general-in-chief over these arrangements, with full orders from Sir Pitt to sell, barter, confiscate, or purchase furniture, and she enjoyed herself not a little in an occupation which gave full scope to her taste and ingenuity."[128] However, this does not earn her the payment it would if it was a paid job which nowadays it is. Nevertheless, she is "acknowledged by the head of the family. If Pitt would not give her anything, he

[125] Thackeray, *Vanity Fair*, 22.
[126] Thackeray, *Vanity Fair*, 244.
[127] Thackeray, *Vanity Fair*, 255.
[128] Thackeray, *Vanity Fair*, 369.

would get something for her some day. If she got no money from her brother-in-law, she got what was as good as money—credit."[129] This leads to her another useful skill—being good at handling finances.

She is also a careful planner who handles money cleverly. After what she decides that she will have her freedom, she pursues her goal very responsibly: "Miss Sharp calculated (for she became, as we shall hear speedily, inducted into most of the secrets of the family) that the mere payment of his creditors cost the honourable Baronet several hundreds yearly."[130] She early discovers the Crawley family's financial situation because for her it is a matter of high importance. When she is married and still not rich, she thinks about other ways of obtaining money: "'Gambling,' she would say, 'dear, is good to help your income, but not as an income itself. Some day people may be tired of play, and then where are we?'"[131] She knows that they need more secure income. She does not find the presents she receives from her suitors enough, and consequently she becomes tired of it: "She felt the frivolity of pleasure and longed for more substantial benefits."[132] These would not make provisions for her life, and that is why she seems to be pulling strings in various places and manners all the time. She also stops her husband from ruining everything with his temper when he discovers his aunt's money is left to Pitt and his wife. She seems to count with Rawdon for the future: "While there is life, there is hope, my dear, and I intend to make a man of you yet. Who sold your horses for you? Who paid your debts for you?' Rawdon was obliged to confess that he owed all these benefits to his wife, and to trust himself to her guidance for the future."[133] To survive, the general rules she observes are following: She uses ready money as less as possible, and she scarcely pays to other people for their services while she coaxes money from some of the people with whom she surrounds herself. Her plans and time pass relatively smoothly, until her image of the future is completely crushed by the unfortunate situation with Lord Steyne. The truth behind this situation remains a mystery because of her ill reputation.

She knows that to have ready money is the ideal situation; however, credit is enough to survive. Although her rhetoric is mostly convincing as I mention in the next paragraph, the fact that largely contributes to her obtaining money are the conjectures of

[129] Thackeray, *Vanity Fair*, 372.
[130] Thackeray, *Vanity Fair*, 67.
[131] Thackeray, *Vanity Fair*, 304.
[132] Thackeray, *Vanity Fair*, 305.
[133] Thackeray, *Vanity Fair*, 312

other characters: "She would not have got credit had they not believed her to be guilty. It was the sight of the Marquis of Steyne's carriage-lamps at her door, contemplated by Raggles, burning in the blackness of midnight, 'that kep him up,' as he afterwards said, that even more than Rebecca's arts and coaxings."[134] It is no surprise then that she seeks the presence of socially important people because they tend to be connected with money. Therefore, connections, especially at least seemingly more intimate, to such people can be considered a blessing because they are considered cash cows who can be milked in the time of need. For this reason, the creditors sense some sort of assurance at these associations, and are more prone to be patient when she attempts to cajole them. All this is possible thanks to her another important characteristic.

She is an eloquent and sociable conversationalist who possesses of general knowledge: "Signs of intelligence seemed to pass between them: and Pitt spoke with her on subjects on which he never thought of discoursing with Lady Jane."[135] This knowledge is important for the communication with different sort of people because she can easily establish and keep contact with them as long as she finds necessary. Moreover, she tends to spice her conversations with compliments and admirations which she mostly does not mean sincerely, as it is evident in various situations, one being, for example, when she needs to get Joseph on her side to have a seat in his carriage if the need arises. Her thoughts by no means correspond to her talk about Joseph's supposed courage: "(I wonder whether he *could* really have been going to the troops, this great lazy gourmand?)"[136] She finds the most fitting words to praise the particular person and then uses the words to have the person twisted round her little finger. If these means are not enough, she does not hesitate and employs mimicking and caricaturing of some of the people who are not present at that moment which relaxes, entertains, and diverts the people with which she communicates. She also endeavors to be helpful in the way that is convenient for the people who may be of any benefit to her—noticeably these tend to be mostly men because they are typically not immune to her charms. Women usually do not possess money and position—if they do they find her a rival, not someone with whom they would feel like sharing and helping, with the exception of the old and rich, consequently extremely favorite, Miss Crawley, who loves Becky as her daughter before she gets married to Miss Crawley's nephew. The

[134] Thackeray, *Vanity Fair*, 374.
[135] Thackeray, *Vanity Fair*, 382.
[136] Thackeray, *Vanity Fair*, 252.

number of other skills she acquires is rather long; therefore, it is enough to mention a few of them which contribute to her amiability: she can play the piano wonderfully which brings women and men alike to emotions and sometimes tears; she can prepare punch which enchants men, Captain Cinqbars, being one of the examples.

Unfortunately, women of the nineteenth century did not have the choice of choosing any occupation which they felt like pursuing because "work for pay brought down the judgment of society and testified to the inferior position of both the wage-earner and her family."[137] If women worked, they were automatically of the lowest class. One of the few exceptions was the work of governess because although it was a paid employment, it was within the home. Nowadays she would be able to realize her potential, and would not have to undersell her skills and talent. Consequently, she would not have to hoard money and valuable items to ensure her freedom because she could have earned her own money, choosing from a great variety of occupations, ranging from a bartender, interior decorator, professional piano player, economist or accountant, over a rhetorician and politician, to a CEO.

Although she is superior to other people, considering her intellect and skills, there are two scenes in which she seems to be outsmarted. Firstly, although she is cunning and sees through other people's behavior, she fails to do so with Mrs Bute. Becky notices that Mrs. Bute suddenly becomes friendly with her, but she ascribes this behavior to the wrong reason: "I know what she means. Signor Clementi did not teach us the piano for nothing; at which price Mrs. Bute hopes to get a professor for her children. I can see through her schemes, as though she had told them to me."[138] Becky needs to be congenial, so she teaches the pupils. Nevertheless, Mrs. Bute plans are further-reaching—she wants to unite Becky and Rawdon, and she succeeds.

Secondly, although she knows her husband and his writing style very well, she makes the mistake to dictate him the content of the letter to Miss Crawley. Moreover, she corrects his mistakes. Miss Crawley recognizes all this immediately even though Becky "made the sentences short and brisk on purpose," thinking Miss Crawley would not recognize her style.[139]

[137] M. Jeanne Peterson, "The Victorian Governess: Status Incongruence in Family and Society," in *Suffer and Be Still: Women in the Victorian Age*, ed. Martha Vicinus (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), 5.
[138] Thackeray, *Vanity Fair*, 79.
[139] Thackeray, *Vanity Fair*, 206.

4.3 The Femme Fatale's Relationships and the Way She Is Perceived

4.3.1 Rawdon Crawley

Without a husband Becky cannot get what she desires the most because she cannot act entirely for herself. She needs him formally. Consequently, she marries Rawdon because he has a high enough position which she considers the ticket to her freedom, especially when she sees that Miss Crawley loves him and gives him her money, thus he is her most presumable heir. As he soon discovers, he is not her equal:

> 'Hang it, I ain't clever enough for her—I know it. She won't miss me,' he used to say: and he was right, his wife did not miss him. Rebecca was fond of her husband. She was always perfectly goodhumoured and kind to him. She did not even show her scorn much for him; perhaps she liked him the better for being a fool. He was her upper servant and *maître d'hôtel*.[140]

When Amelia accuses Becky of not loving her husband, she does not deny the particular fact, instead; however, she denies behaving wrongly towards him: "'Amelia, I protest before God, I have done my husband no wrong,' Rebecca said, turning from her."[141] This suggests that she has never cuckolded him, although she is used to flirt with men, it is all done with one simple aim—to obtain money which is also supported by her flirtation with Amelia's husband, George. This is described in more detail in the subchapter concerning Amelia and George.

4.3.2 Rawdon Crawley Junior

Not knowing and experiencing full-fledged parental love, she is damaged and cannot find it in herself to pass it on children: "she had no soft maternal heart, this unlucky girl, otherwise the prattle and talk of the younger children, with whose care she was chiefly intrusted, might have soothed and interested her; but she lived among them two years,

[140] Thackeray, *Vanity Fair*, 318.
[141] Thackeray, *Vanity Fair*, 254.

and not one was sorry that she went away."[142] This also manifests itself in her treatment of her own son. She realizes she would not have been a good mother, so she has not "seen much of the young gentleman since his birth. After the amiable fashion of French mothers, she had placed him out at nurse in a village in the neighbourhood of Paris, where little Rawdon passed the first months of his life, not unhappily, with a numerous family of foster brothers in wooden shoes."[143] Although seemingly a cruel step, it still prevents her from hurting him to the worst degree possible. This way he is at least given enough love from other people and his father who frequently visits him, and later still devotes him his time and love. It is no surprise then that she is unable to provide him with love and care when he is older. They could not have formed the bond from the very beginning of his life, and time cannot certainly help the situation. The only time when she expresses some tenderness towards him is when she kisses him because "tenderness was the fashion."[144] This act utterly surprises him because it indeed does not happen at home when not in the presence of the ladies of fashion. Moreover, she stoops so low as to physically hurt him when she finds him listening to her while she is singing to Lord Steyne: "'It is not because it hurts me,' little Rawdon gasped out—'only— only'—sobs and tears wound up the sentence in a storm. It was the little boy's heart that was bleeding."[145] The situation escalates to such a degree that her "dislike increased to hatred; the consciousness that the child was in the house was a reproach and a pain to her. His very sight annoyed her."[146] Therefore, her lack of maternal feeling seems to be monstrous especially when her husband instead is the one who provides the son with the needed emotional and social comfort and acknowledges his feelings towards him.

Nevertheless, it is important to realize that although she acts this way, she has deeply rooted reasons for it which are painfully hard to fight, as Rachel Harris describes in her foreword to Peg Streep's *Mean Mothers: Overcoming the Legacy of Hurt* (2009): "it is the greatest life task to have the awareness and compassion not to pass on the legacy of familial dysfunction to the next generation."[147] Her situation is worsened by the fact that she does not have any positive role model to follow; there is only her

[142]Thackeray, *Vanity Fair*, 10–11.
[143] Thackeray, *Vanity Fair*, 305.
[144] Thackeray, *Vanity Fair*, 379.
[145] Thackeray, *Vanity Fair*, 373.
[146] Thackeray, *Vanity Fair*, 373.
[147] Peg Streep, foreword to *Mean Mothers: Overcoming the Legacy of Hurt*, by Rachel Harris (Pymble: HarperCollins, 2009), x.

friend, Amelia. Moreover, during the early nineteenth century when psychoanalysis had not been even established yet, she probably does not think about her situation this deeply, and consequently does not have the need to become better. Thus her mistreatment of the child is heavily influenced by her own damaged childhood. The book's greatest achievement is that it reveals more about the reader than the characters themselves because it is up to our judgment only whether we, the readers, completely condemn Rebecca or not. Compassion and understanding is the key to a successful life.

4.3.3 Amelia Sedley and George Osborne

Becky is remarkable for her divergence from the stereotypical ideal of the angel. This is most apparent if she is contrasted with Amelia who Becky accompanies after leaving the school. As the reader discovers soon enough, notwithstanding the obstacles Becky has to face, she retains her always-desired freedom unlike Amelia who is constantly under lock and key. The main difference lies in their upbringing—"shift, self, and poverty" are Becky's ultimate teachers while Amelia follows the rules and conventions that are conveyed to her via her family.[148] Consequently, when she meets the instructors represented by love and life, she is helpless. She falls into a blind devotion, and George Osborne, being the object of this devotion does not find her appealing enough because she is an easy prey for him, and this is also the reason why he desires Becky. She is Amelia's opposite. Nevertheless, George's role is to prove that Becky's intentions regarding all these men are clear—she uses them to fulfill her plans. Therefore, when Amelia thinks that Becky wants George for herself, she is mistaken because although Becky flirts with George several times; she does not want him, she only wants his money: "It is very likely that this worthy couple never absolutely conspired and agreed together in so many words: the one to cajole the young gentleman, whilst the other won his money at cards: but they understood each other perfectly well, and Rawdon let Osborne come and go with entire good humour."[149] Moreover, this is also obvious from the reaction to the note he gives to Becky. He wants Becky to escape the city with him, but she does not accept this proposal.

[148] Thackeray, *Vanity Fair*, 90.
[149] Thackeray, *Vanity Fair*, 235.

Regardless of Becky's and Amelia's completely different characteristics, both of them are the object of gossip and maliciousness—sometimes they are too much, sometimes they are not enough. Although it is hard to get through life without parents' help, having parents who pass the patriarchal conventions on the young woman as the perfect lady's "social and intellectual growth was confined to the family and close friends" can be equally harming.[150] As a result, she is inexperienced and ignorant in many aspects, including her sexuality and social skills which is desirable by patriarchal society, nevertheless it is crippling for a confident and well-balanced character. The right way is neither of these two because the ideal way is to have caring parents who let the young woman explore the world while providing her with what contributes to healthy atmosphere and life—advice, love, and safety—while the woman retains her freedom of decision-making.

4.3.4 Joseph Sedley

Jennifer Phegley in *Courtship and Marriage in Victorian England* (2012) examines various topics concerning marriage and courtship among the working, middle, and upper classes of the nineteenth century, and among many things she mentions an important fact: "Single women had several acceptable ways to contribute to society, but most commentators felt that marriage should be their ultimate goal."[151] To have her freedom, Becky realizes she needs a husband. Marriages are usually arranged by the girl's parents; however, Becky has no parent who would help her with the trouble called husband-hunting. Thus she has to actively pursue this goal on her own, and so she decides to court Amelia's brother, Joseph Sedley. For his unappealing appearance and ridiculous characteristics, he is not exactly a wonderful match; however, he has money and high-enough income, so this match would suffice to ensure Becky's freedom.

She employs clever means to have him twisted round her little finger—she compliments him on his appearance in front of Amelia, anticipating the compliment would reach Joseph's mother or even better, Joseph himself. She also adjusts her behavior accordingly—she listens attentively to him and shows her interest in India where he spent part of his life. Her tactics seems to be working, as he begins to think about her: "How she looked at me when I picked up her handkerchief at dinner! She

[150] Vicinus, introduction to *Suffer and Be Still*, ix.
[151] Jennifer Phegley, *Courtship and Marriage in Victorian England* (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2012), 152.

dropped it twice."[152] She strengthens the pressure using her hand to touch him in assurance. This seemingly innocent touch is described as "an advance, and as such, perhaps, some ladies of indisputable correctness and gentility will condemn the action as immodest."[153] Notwithstanding its formal impropriety, it works. She is basically described as a predator: "And before he had time to ask how, Mr. Joseph Sedley, of the East India Company's service, was actually seated tête-à-tête with a young lady, looking at her with a most killing expression; his arms stretched out before her in an imploring attitude, and his hands bound in a web of green silk, which she was unwinding."[154] In particular, she may be compared to a spider which prepares its caught fly to eat.

Joseph seems wishy-washy and sluggish which is rather ridiculous because men should be the ones actively pursuing women, especially considering the strict morals of the nineteenth century: "And oh, what a mercy it is that these women do not exercise their powers oftener. We can't resist them, if they do. Let them show ever so little inclination, and men go down on their knees at once: old or ugly, it is all the same."[155] This makes the situation even more ridiculous because it results in generalizing men as being completely helpless and unable to control themselves; however, most importantly, it emphasizes the underlying dominance of Becky. When visiting Vauxhall, Becky Sharp has the chance to speak with him alone, and she manages to relax him to such a degree that he overcomes his shyness: "'Did you ever hear anything like your brother's eloquence?' whispered Mr. Osborne to Amelia. 'Why, your friend has worked miracles.'"[156] She might have worked miracles; nonetheless he is all sloth and no action, even though there is nothing else hindering the marriage. It is true that Becky is not considered exactly a worthy match strictly because of her being a daughter of an artist and with no fortune; however, the Sedleys, Joseph's parents, do not object to their union because they can imagine worse women instead of her. All that remains to do is to propose.

On the night of the anticipated proposal, she increases "the tenderness and confidence of that gentleman to such a degree, that he told her several of his favourite

[152] Thackeray, *Vanity Fair*, 19.
[153] Thackeray, *Vanity Fair*, 21.
[154] Thackeray, *Vanity Fair*, 30.
[155] Thackeray, *Vanity Fair*, 21–22.
[156] Thackeray, *Vanity Fair*, 27.

Indian stories over again for, at least, the sixth time."[157] Notwithstanding this surely admirable achievement which gets her to him proposing to her as closely as humanly possible, the hard-earned built up atmosphere and her hopes are dashed with the ring of the bell for the fireworks. The stream of people takes them to their box where a bowl of rack punch expresses its life-changing power. Joseph drinks so much that the proposal is out of question, and the next day George Osborne, the beau of Amelia, decides to interfere, thinking the union with Becky Sharp, who is low in station, would lead to him being a greater fool than he already is. Consequently, Joseph does not come to propose, only sends a telling letter.

4.3.5 William Dobbin

Dobbin is probably the only man who is not interested in Becky. It is mostly because he is in deep love with Amelia his entire life. Nonetheless, he does not find Becky charming because she diverges from the ideal of the angel too strikingly, being the complete opposite. This ideal of the angel is also his ideal, as it is apparent from his love towards Amelia and from the way he refuses Glorvina O'Dowd who blatantly courts him.

What is interesting is that she does not find him unlikeable, even though he is not fond of her, on the contrary, she would have loved him as a husband for herself:
"'What a noble heart that man has,' she thought, 'and how shamefully that woman plays with it!' She admired Dobbin; she bore him no rancour for the part he had taken against her. It was an open move in the game, and played fairly. 'Ah!' she thought, 'if I could have had such a husband as that—a man with a heart and brains too! I would not have minded his large feet."[158] However, the situation being as it is—her already married, and him in love with Amelia. She decides to unite them.

4.3.6 Other Characters

After Becky's secret marriage to Rawdon, she is also proposed to by Sir Pitt Crawley whose wife has just died. She refuses him which utterly shocks Miss Crawley: "'Pray,

[157] Thackeray, *Vanity Fair*, 42.
[158] Thackeray, *Vanity Fair*, 568.

Miss Sharp, are you waiting for the Prince Regent's divorce, that you don't think our family good enough for you?'"[159] Miss Crawley eventually realizes there must be someone else already, because regardless of his age and unappealing characteristics, he is a rich baronet who is not to be rejected if a woman is in her right senses. Nevertheless, Becky regrets losing the opportunity to become Sir Pitt's wife because she loses what she has always desired: "I might have been my lady!"[160] She might have been also a rich one. As she does not want to waste time, she begins to think about the future.

When she is surrounded by her husband's companions who are all charmed with her, she does not seem to cheat on her husband: "Her own circumspection and modesty never forsook her for a moment, and Crawley's reputation as a fire-eating and jealous warrior was a further and complete defence to his little wife."[161] From her very childhood, she is used to male company; therefore, she is well-versed in their behavior, and even when the numbers of the men interested in her increase, it does not seem to change her attitude: "Fifty would-be partners thronged round her at once, and pressed to have the honour to dance with her. But she said she was engaged, and only going to dance very little."[162] She is absorbed by her own interests and her situation.

The general picture is that Becky is desired by vast amount of men while women are consumed by jealousy: "The English men of fashion in Paris courted her, too, to the disgust of the ladies their wives, who could not bear the parvenue."[163] This is only one of the situations; nevertheless it suits the analysis perfectly. Not all women are jealous of her, Miss Crawley is one of the exceptions because she grows to like Becky Sharp for her agreeable and amusing company and wishes to have her close to her side: "'My dear creature, do you suppose I can talk about the nursery with Lady Fuddleston, or discuss justices' business with that goose, old Sir Giles Wapshot? I insist upon Miss Sharp appearing. Let Lady Crawley remain up stairs, if there is no room. But little Miss Sharp! Why, she's the only person fit to talk to in the county!'"[164] This is a great honor for she prefers her over the company of people of a higher station—ladies and sirs. Nevertheless, she is not blind; she knows Becky is sly and clever: "You, my love, are a little paragon—positively a little jewel—You have more brains than half the shire—if

[159] Thackeray, *Vanity Fair*, 118.
[160] Thackeray, *Vanity Fair*, 122.
[161] Thackeray, *Vanity Fair*, 136.
[162] Thackeray, *Vanity Fair*, 236.
[163] Thackeray, *Vanity Fair*, 302.
[164] Thackeray, *Vanity Fair*, 82.

merit had its reward you ought to be a Duchess—no, there ought to be no duchesses at all— but you ought to have no superior, and I consider you, my love, as my equal in every respect."[165] Miss Crawley sees and is not afraid to express that Becky exceeds even her relatives, who are of noble birth, in breeding and intelligence. Consequently, she has Becky run her errands and read her to sleep. Before discovering who the husband is, Miss Crawley "embraced her with an almost maternal kindness, uttered many soothing protests of regard and affection for her, vowed that she loved her as a daughter, and would do everything in her power to serve her."[166] The situation escalates into a promise of eternal love because Miss Crawley finds her very dear and close to her heart. Therefore, Miss Crawley's relationship towards Becky is bathed in sunshine until she marries Rawdon.

Nevertheless, women can be dangerous enemies when they are hurt for some reason—when being used or jealous, for example, which leads to the same conclusion: the word spreads. Even Becky is admired by the ladies for some time: "Her success in Paris was remarkable. All the French ladies voted her charming."[167] However, Miss Crawley interferes, the word spreads quickly, and the situation changes. It happens very often that it does not matter what is true and what is not, there are various versions and the truth is usually unknown. Moreover, she herself complicates the way she is perceived because she is used to fib: "When one fib becomes due as it were, you must forge another to take up the old acceptance; and so the stock of your lies in circulation inevitably multiplies, and the danger of detection increases every day."[168] Thus what she is truly like, she knows only herself.

4.4 Concluding Words

Becky Sharp is a survivor who has to adapt to the vain society she is born to. She learns its ropes soon enough to navigate more or less successfully through her life. She is not afraid to express her opinion which is considered monstrous. When she is ill-treated, she opposes the people equally. She does not consider the differences of the gender, social position, or authority during these retributions of hers. Adding to the list also her control of emotions and her versatile nature and skills commonly associated with men, it can be

[165] Thackeray, *Vanity Fair*, 83.
[166] Thackeray, *Vanity Fair*, 121.
[167] Thackeray, *Vanity Fair*, 289.
[168] Thackeray, *Vanity Fair*, 557–58.

concluded that she completely undermines the ideal of the angel. This is most apparent when she is put into opposition with her only friend, Amelia Sedley, who represents the angel. As a result, for her remarkableness she is desired by a vast amount of men and hated by jealous women. Consequently, she has to live on the outskirts of society. She is a woman ahead of her times. Nowadays she would not have to stoop to not exactly kosher practices, and she would not have to pursue a man to become conveniently married, and, as it was required in the nineteenth century, because she would be able to choose an occupation of her choice which would ensure her desired freedom.

5. Wilkie Collins's Lydia Gwilt in *Armadale*

Wilkie Collins established his reputation during the sixties when he published his four major works, namely—*The Woman in White* (1860), *No Name* (1862), *Armadale*, a sensation novel and precursor of the detective novel, represented by the fourth novel *The Moonstone* (1868). Lydia is an exemplary instance of a woman who struggles to navigate through her life against all odds.

5.1 The Femme Fatale's Background and Her Goals, Motivations, or Reasons

When the reader is introduced to Lydia Gwilt, she is described as "'an instrument . . . an orphan girl of barely twelve years old, a marvel of precocious ability.'"[169] These few words reveal about her a great deal of important information. First of all, she is a young girl who does not have parents. The reader does not know under which circumstances she lost her parents, nevertheless, this information points to a troubled childhood which is most crucial for the development of her character, as it is mentioned in the introduction. Secondly, what she had been through during these years is a mystery; however, the reader may imagine that it certainly was not roses all the way, as she had to develop prematurely—live and learn. Thirdly, it is apparent that she does not have many positive examples to follow; it is rather on the contrary. The only person who becomes a sort of a friend to her during her childhood is Jane Blanchard who befriends her and brings her from England to train her as her maid.

When she is at the estate of Jane's father; however, she is misused by Fergus Ingleby in his fraud to imitate Matthew Wrentmore's mother's writing. Her dexterity enables the success of this fraud which damages many lives, including hers. Matthew Wrentmore, being negatively affected in the perception of her by the role she plays in the fraud thus does not describe her objectively, as it is apparent from his depiction of her: "'I saw the girl afterward—and my blood curdled at the sight of her. If she is alive now, woe to the people who trust her! No creature more innately deceitful and more innately pitiless ever walked this earth.'"[170] He simply loathes her because he does not seem to consider her past—it is hardly probable that her intentions were to hurt someone in the first place—she only provides her ability for the people for whom she

[169] Wilkie Collins, *Armadale*, (1866; New York: Harper and Brothers, 1874), 37.
[170] Collins, *Armadale*, 37.

works which is natural. When Mr. Brock, a friend of Jane Blanchard, asks Jane about Lydia's friends, Jane mentions that she knows only some low people who assumed the position of Lydia's uncle and aunt when she was a child—these two seem to be of a dubious character because they left her at the school on Jane's father's estate. These two characters then certainly do not contribute positively to Lydia's chance of growing up well. In the course of the reading, the reader discovers thanks to a thorough account of Lydia's life that these people are the Oldershaws.

Mrs. Oldershaw is the one who significantly and negatively affects Lydia's character and life because she is profoundly involved not only in her childhood but also in her adulthood. In particular, from the letters Lydia receives from Mrs. Oldershaw, it is apparent that Mrs. Oldershaw is the one pulling Lydia's strings. She gives Lydia advice on how she should feel about Jane Blanchard: "'You had privately helped her in playing a trick on her own father; you had been ungratefully dismissed, at a pitiably tender age, as soon as you had served her purpose.'"[171] This comes as rather ridiculous because she is the last person who should have the right to express her opinion on this matter, as she has been misusing Lydia herself. She is also the one who gives Lydia the idea of using her beauty and quick wits to marry young Allan Armadale, a son of Jane Blanchard: "'In two words, Lydia, take the bull by the horns—and marry him!'"[172] She does this because she cares only about profit which would be entitled to her then, should Lydia have succeeded.

To intensify her influence over Lydia, Mrs. Oldershaw plays on Lydia's feelings: "'If you feel your present forlorn position, as I believe you do.'"[173] The choice of these particular words corresponds to her overall manipulative treatment of Lydia. Mrs. Oldershaw reminds Lydia of her unfortunate situation and suicidal drowning attempt by reason as the author, Margaret Higonnet, puts it in "Speaking Silences: Women's Suicide" in *The Female Body in Western Culture: Contemporary Perspectives* (1986): "In what we may call a development of the Ophelia complex, the suicidal solution is linked to dissolution of the self, fragmentation to flow. The abandoned woman drowns, as it were, in her own emotions."[174] Mrs. Oldershaw seems to realize it more than well because she writes that Lydia surely "will want no further

[171] Collins, *Armadale*, 158–59.
[172] Collins, *Armadale*, 159.
[173] Collins, *Armadale*, 160.
[174] Margaret Higonnet, "Speaking Silences: Women's Suicide" in *The Female Body in Western Culture: Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. Susan Rubin Suleiman (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986), 71.

persuasion."[175] It is precisely because Mrs. Oldershaw knows the role of feelings—they can cloud people's mind—that she pushes Lydia to the state of mind in which she needs Lydia, so that she can hand the solution to her situation on a silver plate, as to manipulate Lydia to her benefit—to assure herself of the success of her investment in Lydia. She basically does not give Lydia any chance to choose. What is impressive is that regardless of this manipulative and emotional pressure, Lydia keeps a cool head. She does not want to immediately decide whether to accept the plan or not because she is aware of Mrs. Oldershaw's intentions: "I won't say Yes or No till I have had a long, long look at my glass first. If you had any real regard for anybody but your wicked old self, you would know that the bare idea of marrying again (after what I have gone through) is an idea that makes my flesh creep."[176] Although she eventually accepts the plan, at first she requires more information.

Nevertheless, Lydia's life may be traced to a period before the Oldershaws. During this time "she was beaten and half starved, somewhere in the country, by a woman who took in children at nurse."[177] Her real parents are not known; therefore, her pedigree is not known either. When the allowance for taking care of her stops, the woman leaves her to the Oldershaws who forward her to the Blanchards. Subsequently, wherever she goes, she is unwanted or exploited: "the mistress at the school declined to take her back as teacher, on the ground that she was too nice-looking for the place; the priest considered her to be possessed by the devil."[178] This does not even change with age, as Mrs. Milroy becomes instantly jealous of her when she starts working as a governess for her daughter.

Consequently, Lydia can be said to demonstrate a hostile treatment of the mother figure. Because her real mother is not known, Mrs. Oldershaw, as the closest female figure, takes the role of her surrogate mother. Lydia cannot find the love she seeks in her, so when Jane Blanchard comes into her life, the role of the surrogate mother is transferred to her because she befriends her and takes her with her. Nevertheless, when she thinks she finds the love she seeks in Jane Blanchard, she abandons her. Not being loved by anyone, not even by Manuel she believes in, she throws herself to the river as a result. The river is a form of water and as such, as Guerin concludes, is "generally interpreted by the psychoanalysts as a female symbol, more specifically as a maternal

[175] Collins, *Armadale*, 160.
[176] Collins, *Armadale*, 161.
[177] Collins, *Armadale*, 515.
[178] Collins, *Armadale*, 517.

symbol."[179] Therefore, she seems to hope that she finds her symbolic mother there—that she returns to the symbolic womb, the desired place. In his "Beyond the Pleasure Principle" (1920), Freud writes about this "effort to reduce, to keep constant, or to remove internal tension due to stimuli (the 'Nirvana-principle', to borrow a term from Barbara Low [1920, 73])—a tendency which finds expression in the pleasure principle."[180] She thus feels the need to remove these tensions of her life. Nonetheless, she is deprived of this possibility because she is pulled from the river by Arthur Blanchard. Having no other option, the situation leads Lydia to return to her previous choice of the surrogate mother, Mrs. Oldershaw. Repeatedly, she realizes Mrs. Oldershaw cannot meet the requirements of the surrogate mother. Moreover, she refuses the company of any woman who could have provided this role: "The landlady would keep me company, too, if I would only let her. I hate women."[181] Therefore, Mrs. Oldershaw can be said to represent social morality at its negative side—Lydia's superego—because Mrs. Oldershaw bestows on herself the power over Lydia. Lydia rebels against her and rejects her wrong authority. The true sense of relief comes only when Lydia dies, as her past life is too heart-shattering.

5.2 The Femme Fatale's Appearance and Character Qualities

Although Mr. Brock does not see her unveiled, he notices her graceful moves and beautiful figure. Nevertheless, it is not only her beautiful figure, but also the way she moves, looks, and sounds along with her lady-like manner that contributes to the overall image: "Perfectly modest in her manner, possessed to perfection of the graceful restraints and refinements of a lady, she had all the allurements that feast the eye, all the siren invitations that seduce the sense—a subtle suggestiveness in her silence, and a sexual sorcery in her smile."[182] Simply put, her charm is a result of interplay between various aspects.

Moreover, she looks younger than thirty five: "'I have had twenty years' experience among our charming sex in making up battered old faces and wornout old

[179] Guerin, *Critical Approaches*, 165.
[180] Sigmund Freud, "Beyond the Pleasure Principle," trans. James Strachey (New York: W. W. Norton, 1961), 49–50.
[181] Collins, *Armadale*, 161.
[182] Collins, *Armadale*, 377.

figures to look like new, and I say positively you don't look a day over thirty, if as much.'"[183] For Mrs. Oldershaw, she is a means of obtaining money, and that is why Mrs. Oldershaw also wants to advice her further about dressing and applications because it is an important investment if she wants to be able to use Lydia's charming services in the future. The circumstances of her young life force her to adapt to this harsh world: "'A devilish clever woman, who hasn't been knocked about in the world, and seen the ups and downs of life abroad and at home, for nothing.'"[184] As a result, she develops into a strong-willed character. Mrs. Oldershaw's highlighting of the importance of good looks and Lydia's excessive devotion to her looks lead to Lydia's vanity: "'Shall I jump out? No; it disfigures one so, and the coroner's inquest lets so many people see it.'"[185] Her vanity is also the reason why she enjoys controlling Mr. Bashwood because his undying devotion flatters her.

Unfortunately, this is not the only way Mrs. Oldershaw damages Lydia's character. Mrs. Oldershaw also teaches her that she can control people using pretence which Mrs. Oldershaw has practiced her entire life: "'If these proceedings don't persuade the parson that the house-maid's face is your face, and if they don't make him readier to believe in your reformed character than he was when I spoke to him, I have lived sixty years, my love, in this vale of tears to mighty little purpose.'"[186] This is obvious, for example, from the way Lydia manipulates Allan Armadale: "'Ah, *she* can express herself—with the tears in her eyes, my dear fellow, with the tears in her eyes! '"[187] She uses the same tactics to make him change the unwanted subject of their conversation. Consequently, she is a convincing actor: "The woman who had tyrannized over Mr. Bashwood was gone, and the woman who had tossed the spy's hat into the pool was gone. A timid, shrinking, interesting creature filled the fair skin and trembled on the symmetrical limbs of Miss Gwilt."[188] She changes her roles according to the requirements of the situations.

When Allan Armadale shows Mr. Pedgift the letter composed by Lydia, he is in awe: The face of Mr. Pedgift the elder expressed but one feeling when he had read the letter in his turn and had handed it back—a feeling of profound admiration. "'What a lawyer she would have made,' he exclaimed, fervently, 'if she had only been a man!

[183] Collins, *Armadale*, 160.
[184] Collins, *Armadale*, 516.
[185] Collins, *Armadale*, 425.
[186] Collins, *Armadale*, 217.
[187] Collins, *Armadale*, 299.
[188] Collins, *Armadale*, 376.

’’’[189] He bases his argument on her great written communication skill; however, this not the only skill that would make her a competent lawyer. She is also a good listener who can be very persuasive. She displays a great deal of creativity when solving a problem. Moreover, she is perseverant enough to drive her scheme to an almost successful finish. Unfortunately, this job position goes against the confined angel of the house, and is thus restricted.

She is also hateful and revengeful, but the reader should realize that these characteristics are the result of her ill-treatment because she directs her hatred and revenge selectively—when she has some reason for it:

> ‘Shall I remember my own youth and spare her? No! She has deprived me of the one chance I had of breaking the chain that binds me to a past life too horrible to be thought of. I am thrown back into a position, compared to which the position of an outcast who walks the streets is endurable and enviable. No, Miss Milroy—no, Mr. Armadale; I will spare neither of you.’[190]

In the best case scenario, she would have risen above the situation; however, she is too deeply hurt to be capable of it. Nevertheless, her effort for empathy should be taken into account, especially when she becomes selfless when the life of her last husband, Ozias Midwinter is considered.

5.3 The Femme Fatale’s Relationships and the Way She Is Perceived

Not experiencing genuine and healthy love, it does not come as a surprise that the men who surround her when she supports herself by playing the piano “found her insensible as adamant.”[191] When she finally allows herself some feelings towards Manuel—she is exploited once more. Thus her further steps and behavior can be understandable to some degree.

The behavior of the men who are bewitched by her is startling in the least. One is even tempted to question their competence. There is a very minor character, a middle-

[189] Collins, *Armadale*, 358.
[190] Collins, *Armadale*, 425.
[191] Collins, *Armadale*, 518.

aged music-master, with a wife and family, who falls in love with Lydia's beauty. She is only seventeen when she meets him. This happens when she attends the French school. This character feels so hopeless about the situation that he resorts to suicide: "he took a pistol, and, rashly assuming that he had brains in his head, tried to blow them out. The doctor saved his life, but not his reason; he ended, where he had better have begun, in an asylum."[192] This man is not the only one who cannot use his reason to control his base drives.

After her hard childhood and premature adulthood, she enters her married life which does not change much as to the quality of the character of the person closest to her. Mr. Waldron, her first husband, is "an ill-tempered man; he was discontented with himself; and of course made his wife feel it. Having begun by quarreling with her, he got on to suspecting, and became savagely jealous of every male creature who entered the house."[193] On the journey back to England, she meets Manuel. Mr. Waldron forces her to live with him in a remote house to avoid meeting other people. It is obvious that Mr. Waldron is the problem: his discontent with himself is not only harmful to himself—it deepens his misery and makes him obnoxious—but it also further affects Lydia.

Hedgecock asserts that Lydia's "struggles have no effect on patriarchy or the marginalization of women determined by her family situation, her class, her occupation, and most significantly, her gender."[194] However, I cannot agree with this statement because according to me Lydia's struggles actually have that effect. For example, Mr. Waldron attempts to avoid marrying her; nevertheless she shrewdly manages to maneuver him to the marriage:

> 'To Mr. Waldron's astonishment, she told him that she could face the prospect of being thrown on the world; and that he must address her honorably or leave her forever. The end of it was what the end always is, where the man is infatuated and the woman is determined. To the disgust of his family and friends, Mr. Waldron made a virtue of necessity, and married her.'[195]

[192] Collins, *Armadale*, 516.
[193] Collins, *Armadale*, 519.
[194] Hedgecock, *The Femme Fatale*, 164.
[195] Collins, *Armadale*, 519.

She is the symbolic means of overthrowing the dominance of men over women and the importance of social position. Although Lydia still cannot divorce Mr. Waldron when the marriage to him proves to be unfortunate because of his behavior, the boldness and discontent of women like Lydia with the patriarchal tradition and wrong social conventions eventually led to their empowerment and more freedom. Thus in Lydia's case, the social position stops to seem to be crucial because she has means to compensate for this lack: "A woman, my dear Lydia, with your appearance, your manners, your abilities, and your education, can make almost any excursions into society that she pleases if she only has money in her pocket and a respectable reference to appeal to in cases of emergency."[196] Passivity and the tolerance of some of the men's crudity certainly was not the key, on the contrary. To voice one's discontent was what counted.

Consequently, during her first marriage to Mr. Waldron, Lydia grows desperate, and she and Manuel correspond together secretly. Meanwhile the tempers of Mr. Waldron fray to such a degree that he hits her with a whip when she opposes him. This act eventually leads to his feeling ill, and in two days he dies. Lydia is on the charge of poisoning her husband. Although Manual is not officially involved in the case, as there is no direct evidence against him, all the letters being burnt, he must have provided Lydia with the poison. Manuel, being short of money, seems to be interested in Lydia twice as much because of her husband's will which is changed before Waldron's death to a smaller sum, unfortunately for him. In the end, Lydia is pardoned for the murder but serves two years in prison for the theft instead because she takes some of his jewelry.

Lydia exchanges one bad marriage for another, even though this marriage is not lawful because Manuel had been already married. Nevertheless, he spends all of her money and deserts her in London. She does not want to acknowledge this painful truth for some time: "'I dare say she waited for months together before she gave up the last hope of ever seeing him again.'"[197] She waits to hear from him because she believes in him, but when she realizes her miserable situation—not being loved and left robbed, consequently not provided for—she attempts suicide.

The second example proving that Lydia's struggle does have some effect, contrary to what Hedgecock claims, is when Lydia meets Manuel again after some time. At this

[196] Collins, *Armadale*, 165.
[197] Collins, *Armadale*, 529.

time, she can compare him to Ozias Midwinter which makes her realize for the first time that what she experiences in Manuel's presence is "what a woman feels when every atom of respect for herself has left her."[198] Although she feels the wrongs of the past spent with Manuel, his disrespect, and him having her at his mercy, it makes her stronger because in the end of the conversation she manages to overpower him with her boldness: "'The sense that I was making the villain an instrument in my hands, and forcing him to help my purpose blindly, while he was helping his own, roused my spirits, and made me feel like myself again.'"[199] She forces him to disappear from her life for good and to finally respect her in some way: "'Strong language, on certain occasions, is a lady's privilege.'"[200] Therefore, she frees herself from his control, and establishes a stronger position.

5.3.1 Felix Bashwood

Mr. Bashwood, another admirer of Lydia and Allan Armadale's steward, also experiences the edge of reason when he meets her. Lydia, being negatively influenced by the miserable marriages, enjoys now her changed position because when she is done with him for the time being she walks away from him "as a cat goes on her way when she has exhausted the enjoyment of frightening a mouse."[201] She is no longer the exploited; she is the one in control: "'Did you ever see the boa constrictor fed at the Zoological Gardens? They put a live rabbit into his cage, and there is a moment when the two creatures look at each other. I declare Mr. Bashwood reminded me of the rabbit.'"[202] He is both fascinated by her and afraid of her at the same time. Comparing herself to a predator, she asserts her dominance over him. He is genuinely entranced with her: "'I wish I was the ground she treads on! I wish I was the glove she's got on her hand!'"[203] Regardless of his older age, there is no obstacle he would not surmount for her. For him, her word becomes law. Consequently, she uses him as an informant for her purposes. Simply put, he becomes her devoted slave, having no sense of reason, self-love, and self-respect which leads to, as surprising as it may sound, detrimental

[198] Collins, *Armadale*, 555.
[199] Collins, *Armadale*, 558.
[200] Collins, *Armadale*, 558.
[201] Collins, *Armadale*, 373.
[202] Collins, *Armadale*, 289.
[203] Collins, *Armadale*, 371.

consequences for Lydia. It is his lack of self-appreciation that incites Lydia to his mistreatment—he does not defy her, as he does not object to her misbehavior towards him, so it can be said that it is his fault that Lydia behaves this ill way. He does not teach Lydia what is all right and what is not anymore: she has almost no negative feedback from him, and that is why she has no reason to improve herself. In general, it is about the boundaries people do not allow the others to cross—when their self-value would be degraded.

5.3.2 Allan Armadale

Within a rather short time after Allan meets Lydia, she has him twisted around her finger: "'I can't be happy—I can't live without her. Upon my soul, I worship the very ground she treads on!'"[204] His feelings change as quickly as Romeo's when he beholds his Julia. Allan Armadale is as foolish as Mr. Bashwood, only younger. He would not mind marrying Lydia at the spot, without the knowledge of her character and life. Even though Allan is generally considered a hit in the jackpot for his inheritance and young age, Lydia would not attempt to marry him, were it not for his money because she claims she dislikes him as such, let alone for his reminding her of his mother, Miss Blanchard, and thus her wretched past life. Ironically, he is both the only living reminder of her terrible past life and the person whose money can be the very means of breaking the chains of this life:

> 'The only difficulty with him is the difficulty of concealing my own feelings, especially when he turns my dislike of him into downright hatred by sometimes reminding me of his mother. I really never saw a man whom I could use so ill, if I had the opportunity. He will give me the opportunity, I believe, if no accident happens, sooner than we calculated on.'[205]

Considering all the information above, it supports the claim that it is the fault of the men that they further corrupt Lydia's character, as they provide her with the opportunity, and opportunity makes the thief, especially when one does not have imprinted right values

[204] Collins, *Armadale*, 296.
[205] Collins, *Armadale*, 285.

in themselves from their childhood. Fortunately for Allan, he manages to escape her influence unharmed.

5.3.3 Ozias Midwinter

He is a mystery to Lydia: "'Yes; I am positively certain Mr. Midwinter has done something or suffered something in his past life, young as he is; and I would give I don't know what to get at it.'"[206] As a result, she is genuinely interested in him which she justifies as a need to be in his favor because he has influence over Allan. Gradually, she begins to feel again even though she fights against it: "'Horrible recollections came back to me of other times, and made me shudder as I touched him. And yet I did it. What fools women are!'"[207] He forces into her thoughts the image of the ideal world which she would have been able to have with him, were it not for her past wretched life and the way the world works: "'I might be going to bed now with nothing heavier on my mind than a visit on tiptoe to the nursery, and a last look at night to see if my children were sleeping quietly in their cribs. I wonder whether I should have loved my children if I had ever had any? Perhaps, yes—perhaps, no. It doesn't matter.'"[208] She cannot yield to this image because the burden of her past is too hard to bear. Nevertheless, he rouses her conscience and makes her question everything. Before she meets her death, she recapitulates her life with a deal of self-examination:

> 'I am worse than the worst you can think of me . . . I had some innocent moments, and then I loved you dearly. Forget me, my darling, in the love of a better woman than I am. I might, perhaps, have been that better woman myself, if I had not lived a miserable life before you met with me. It matters little now. The one atonement I can make for all the wrong I have done you is the atonement of my death. It is not hard for me to die, now I know you will live. Even my wickedness has one merit—it has not prospered. I have never been a happy woman.'[209]

[206] Collins, *Armadale*, 287.
[207] Collins, *Armadale*, 411.
[208] Collins, *Armadale*, 418.
[209] Collins, *Armadale*, 649.

She judges herself most harshly because she is well-aware of her wrong behavior; nevertheless she also ponders upon the fact that she might have been better under different life circumstances which seems to be a correct estimation because her love for him changes her—he makes her selfless. This covertly emphasizes the importance of the influence of the closest people on one's character. The power of this influence seems to be immense.

5.4 Concluding Words

Lydia is used to being misused from her very childhood. She becomes people's instrument—the closest people to her which could be considered mother figures are Mrs. Oldershaw who uses her as an investment to the future and Mrs. Blanchard who consents to use her dexterity when Fergus Ingleby needs a forged signature which seals everyone's misery. She possesses skills worthy of a great lawyer; however, she cannot pursue this career because this job position is only open to male employees. Nevertheless, these skills eventually allow her to emancipate herself from the binding passivity and helplessness of the ideal of the angel, as she manages to articulate her defiance of Manuel, her second, even though illegal, husband. Thus, she is also means of improving women's position. She successfully stands her ground when rich Mr. Waldron avoids marrying her and gives him no other option. Their marriage proves the importance of women also being able to file for divorce, had she this option initially, she would not have to have been driven to her desperate situation. Mr. Bashwood's role is to serve as the proof that balance of male and female position is the key while Ozias Midwinter is there to demonstrate how happy she might have been, were she to have a better life before they met.

6. Charles Dickens's Lady Dedlock in *Bleak House*

Charles Dickens became one of the most famous writers of the Victorian era. He enjoyed this popularity during his lifetime, and he remains appreciated for his social criticism to these days. His social criticism is also apparent in *Bleak House*. Lady Dedlock is an unfortunate woman who conceived a child prior to her marriage to Sir Dedlock which was considered shameful. When this deed against conventions is about to be revealed to her husband, she does not wait for the consequences of the revelation and chooses suicide as the only solution and remedy.

6.1 The Femme Fatale's Background and Her Goals, Motivations, or Reasons

The reader is not provided with much information on Lady Dedlock's childhood—it is only known that she has a sister, Miss Barbary. The reader does not know anything about their parents; nevertheless, it is her sister who influences her life immensely. She conceals that Lady Dedlock's illegitimate child survives which brings her sorrow.
Although she conceives the child prior to the marriage to Sir Leicester, in the nineteenth century it was considered shameful to have a child out of wedlock; therefore she must hide the truth before her husband and the whole society as not to hurt him and his image in general. Elaine Chase, Robert Walker, and Sohail Anwar Choudhry discuss this theme in *Poverty and Shame: Global Experiences* (2015): "A recurrent theme equally pertinent in contemporary British film as it is in Victorian literature, is the dishonour of pregnancy outside of marriage and its coincidence with poverty."[210] People, herself included, find it such a disgrace that she decides to die in the streets all wet and cold. Such overwhelming feelings of shame, remorse, and misery are expected to be associated with more severe crimes than this unfortunate situation.

Nevertheless, officially, she does not have any children, and it is this lack that also renders her a bit less excellent than she could have been in the eyes of Victorian people: "A whisper still goes about that she had not even family."[211] In the nineteenth century, the ideal woman was not only a wife, but also a mother as Deborah Gorham, the author of *The Victorian Girl and the Feminine Ideal* (1982), highlights: "The

[210] Elaine Chase, Robert Walker, and Sohail Anwar Choudhry, "Poverty and Shame: Seeking Cultural Cues within British Literature and Film," in *Poverty and Shame: Global Experiences*, eds. Elaine Chase and Grace Bantebya-Kyomuhendo (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 79.
[211] Charles Dickens, *Bleak House* (London: Bradbury and Evans, 1853), 7.

idealised Victorian home; however, did not consist of husband and wife alone, but of husband, wife and children."[212] Children, regardless of their gender, were thus also important family entities.

6.2 The Femme Fatale's Appearance and Character Qualities

Lady Dedlock possesses everything a lady could ever wish for she has "beauty, pride, ambition, insolent resolve, and sense enough to portion out a legion of fine ladies."[213] Nevertheless, as it is nothing uncommon, she would not be considered lady-like enough, if she had not had also wealth and station: "Wealth and station, added to these, soon floated her upward, and for years now my Lady Dedlock has been at the centre of the fashionable intelligence and at the top of the fashionable tree."[214] These two are irreplaceable components of successful and honorable social life of the Victorian era. Lady Dedlock is a woman "whom the whole world admires; but if my Lady would only be 'a little more free,' not quite so cold and distant, Mrs. Rouncewell thinks she would be more affable."[215] It is her coldness and inapproachability that people do not know how to handle because these characteristics are not common for the angel of the house. Therefore, every characteristic not corresponding to this concept is undesirable.

When she wears this mask of inscrutability, she is acting bored. Nevertheless, she cannot maintain this facade all the time because she is not emotionless. She removes the mask in several instances. For example, she laments the recognition that her daughter, Ester, is alive: "'O, my child, my child! Not dead in the first hours of her life, as my cruel sister told me, but sternly nurtured by her, after she had renounced me and my name! O my child, O my child!'"[216] Her haughty self-restraint is also gone when she finally sees and speaks to the daughter. She also feels for Rosa, a young maid in training in her service, as if she were her daughter: "'Confide in me, my child. Don't fear me. I wish you to be happy, and will make you so—if I can make anybody happy on this earth.'"[217] Therefore, in these instances she expresses her feelings and proves that underneath her cold exterior, she can be loving and caring.

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[212] Deborah Gorham, *The Victorian Girl and the Feminine Ideal* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), 5.
[213] Dickens, *Bleak House*, 7.
[214] Dickens, *Bleak House*, 7.
[215] Dickens, *Bleak House*, 110.
[216] Dickens, *Bleak House*, 288.
[217] Dickens, *Bleak House*, 281.

She is observant because she does not want her secret to be revealed, so that her husband is not injured: "'You see everything,' says Sir Leicester with admiration."[218] This is apparent when she sees something unusual happening, as it is the case with the correspondence from Mr Tulkinghorn. She is as bold as to overpower her husband with her words in the time of need which is also rather uncommon as the husband is considered the authority: "Mr Tulkinghorn re-asserts it by another inclination of his head. 'Whether by his own hand—' 'Upon my honour!' cries Sir Leicester. 'Really!' 'Do let me hear the story!' says my Lady. 'Whatever you desire, my dear. But, I must say—''No, you mustn't say! Go on, Mr Tulkinghorn.'"[219] Nonetheless, it is for the purpose of obtaining important information.

6.3 The Femme Fatale's Relationships and the Way She Is Perceived

6.3.1 Sir Leicester

Sir Dedlock, Lady Dedlock's husband, comes from a prominent family: "His family is as old as the hills, and infinitely more respectable."[220] Therefore, his family is considered exclusive. It is exclusive to such a degree as to have their own family disease—the gout and their own ghost because "a family of such antiquity and importance has a right to a ghost."[221] According to Mrs. Rouncewell, their old housekeeper, it is a privilege of the upper classes. It is obvious that these characteristics are supposed to make the upper classes sound ridiculous. Generally, it is the critique of the class system. Nevertheless, he is an exemplary husband despite of his older age. He holds his wife in highest estimation and is most polite and gallant towards her because he married her for love which has been reciprocal as "one can see at a glance that they love each other."[222] Their relationship is thus generally admired. When her name is supposed to be spoken in not exactly flattering terms, he defends her: "'I would greatly prefer, officer,' Sir Leicester returns stiffly, 'my Lady's name being entirely omitted from this discussion.'"[223] This defense only contributes to the ideal relationship they

[218] Dickens, *Bleak House*, 108.
[219] Dickens, *Bleak House*, 116.
[220] Dickens, *Bleak House*, 6–7.
[221] Dickens, *Bleak House*, 63.
[222] Dickens, *Bleak House*, 109.
[223] Dickens, *Bleak House*, 515.

seem to have.

When he discovers the truth about her past and the illegitimate child, he has a fit of apoplexy; however, his feelings remain unchanged: "'Therefore I desire to say, and to call you all to witness—beginning, Volumnia, with yourself, most solemnly—that I am on unaltered terms with Lady Dedlock. That I assert no cause whatever of complaint against her. That I have ever had the strongest affection for her, and that I retain it undiminished.'"[224] His approach and support was crucial for the change of the then society because it was also thanks to men like him who supported feminism that women could escape these confinements, restrictions, and conventions in the upcoming years during which there was "a confrontation with male society that elevated Victorian sexual stereotypes into a cult. The feminists challenged many of the restrictions on women's self-expression, denounced the gospel of self-sacrifice, attacked patriarchal religion, and constructed a theoretical model of female oppression."[225] This is to be seen in the feminist phase between 1880 and 1920 recognized by Elaine Showalter.

6.3.2 Ester

> Miss Barbary tells Ester that she should feel miserable about her mother, Lady Dedlock: "'Your mother, Esther, is your disgrace, and you were hers.'"[226] Ester refuses to feel it this way. Instead, she shows her mother love and forgives her instantly if there is anything to be forgiven. Unfortunately, Lady Dedlock thinks that she does not deserve affection and help: "Whether she preserved her secret until death or it came to be discovered and she brought dishonour and disgrace upon the name she had taken, it was her solitary struggle always; and no affection could come near her, and no human creature could render her any aid."[227] She is bound to suffer for her crime because of the biding conventions. Without these binding conventions, she could have been a happy and accomplished woman. This points to the importance of feminine freedom in general.

[224] Dickens, *Bleak House*, 563.
[225] Showalter, *Literature of Their Own*, 29.
[226] Dickens, *Bleak House*, 168.
[227] Dickens, *Bleak House*, 358–59.

6.3.3 Mr. Tulkinghorn

Being almost perfect is not always a triumph because if there ever comes a point of some doubt concerning one's faultless character, people will do everything within their power to expose what is wrong with it. This can be precisely seen in the case of Lady Dedlock: "It may be that her beauty and all the state and brilliancy surrounding her only gives him the greater zest for what he is set upon and makes him the more inflexible in it."[228] Mr. Tulkinghorn, Sir Leicester's legal advisor, pursues her pitilessly and relentlessly to reveal what she hides.

6.3.4 Hortense

The only woman who actually hates her is her former maid, Hortense. She thinks her false, treacherous, and cursed because she is dismissed from her service. This leads to her attempt to direct the blame for the murder of Mr Tulkinghorn to Lady Dedlock which is nicely summarized by the detective officer, Mr Bucket: "'Your sex have such a surprising animosity against one another when you do differ.'"[229] Hortense's grudge is so deep that it overshadows her anger towards the officer who exposes her as a real murderer.

6.4 Concluding Words

Lady Dedlock is generally admired and loved with the exception of Hortense who is fired for which she wants her revenge and Mr. Tulkinghorn who is coldly obstinate in pursuit of the revelation of Lady Dedlock's past. Lady Dedlock has only one fault: she breaches one of the rules of the ideal of the angel when she sexually engages with a man before marriage which results in the conception of a child. Only this one act categorizes her immediately as a monster which is to be exposed. She has to wear a mask to hide her past as if she were a dangerous criminal. In the twenty first century, it is not a crime against conventions anymore as it happens rather frequently. Nevertheless, in the nineteenth century it was judged mercilessly and considered a great shame, not only towards Lady Dedlock, but also her husband which is why she decides to hide it for as

[228] Dickens, *Bleak House*, 283.
[229] Dickens, *Bleak House*, 526.

long as she can. Her husband's reaction would have possibly saved her, were she knew his stance on the situation. He embodies one of the means of overthrowing these binding ideals because he is not scandalized by her past, and nothing changes for him in terms of his feelings towards his wife after the revelation.

Conclusion

The femme fatales are marked by continuous change. They appeared as prominent in the nineteenth century because it was the period of the crucial changes to the women's position which escalated with time. The later in the nineteenth century, the darker and less sympathetic her portrayal seems to be which corresponds to the changes that were taking place during these times. In the Victorian era, the femme fatale was considered a deviating character who was supposed to be punished for the divergence from the ideal of the subjugated angel. At present, women stylize themselves in the role of the femme fatale. She is a character to be admired because she is independent, mysterious, and desirable. Through the observation of the representation of the femme fatales, it is possible to come to know and understand more about women in real life.

The thesis attempted to demonstrate that the femme fatales in British prose of the nineteenth century were misunderstood women ahead of their times. It was the violation of their rights and freedom which went hand in hand with the subjugation of their character as if they were the monster Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar depict in their *The Madwoman in the Attic*. It was the desire of the patriarchal society to force them into the subordinate and subservient position which caused their fatality. The femme fatales found themselves under the pressure of desperate times. As a consequence, desperate times lead to desperate deeds. The five analyzed femme fatales served as its proof.

First of all, it was Oscar Wilde's Salomé, the representational sample of the archetypal femme fatale. Herod was the real cause of Jokanaan's death because he was the authority who possessed the power to decide on upcoming events—he was the one who gave the final and lethal orders. Moreover, he was the one who created the unfortunate situation. He made Salomé, his stepdaughter, dance for him and offered her in return to choose whatever she wished. It was no surprise that she asked for Jokanaan's head because he vilified Salomé and her mother. Therefore, although she was connected to a murder and eventually killed, she was a victim of the patriarchal society represented by Herod and Jokanaan.

Secondly, I analyzed Mary Elizabeth Braddon's Lady Audley. Lady Audley was a victim of the legal and social discriminations of her times. She and her child were abandoned by her first husband without being properly provided for—as a woman of the nineteenth century she was a dependent entity on her husband—and she was not

even informed in advance. Moreover, the husband did not write her for years. She did not know the state of his being, and she could not divorce him. As a consequence, she lived in poverty which was something she desperately wanted to avoid because poverty was the cause of her miserable childhood and life in general. She was deprived of her parents' time and love because her father was the only one who could earn some money and her mother was in an asylum. She resorted to committing crimes when she faced the risk of losing her safety and hard-won life. Robert, George, and Luke with their threats re-unleashed her fits of stress and fear that initially accompanied her puerperal mania. What also corrupted her character were the wrong ideals of the society—the emphasis and importance of beauty in a woman. To complete the list, it was also her second husband who sealed her miserable life because he married her against his beliefs—despite the fact that she did not love him and that he felt it was not right.

Thirdly, there was William Makepeace Thackeray's Becky Sharp. She was also a victim and product of the vain and hypocritical society. She lived and learnt from the corruptive and mean behavior of others. She was a survivor who had to adapt. Having no parents to help her, she had to manage on her own—this was most painfully evident when she attended the school or when marriage matters were in question. The patriarchal society ordered her the necessity of having a husband, and that was why she had to employ various means in his pursuit. She could not earn her own living properly even though she was versatile and could find employment in various fields and positions. Consequently, she had to stoop to unfair practices. When she gave birth to her son, her lack of parents' love and care negatively influenced her behavior towards the child. Although it is generally true that people are responsible for their own deeds, if a matter of survival is in question, people's behavior can be unfortunately altered.

Fourthly, I examined Wilkie Collins's Lydia Gwilt. She was an instrument of capitalism and revenge. She was used to obtain money for Mrs. Oldershaw who was also unfortunately one of the closest people in her life from her very childhood because she did not have parents who would take care of her, and thus she spoiled her character profoundly. Moreover, she was beaten as a young child and her life is full of wretchedness. When she got into the Blanchard's family, she was misused for a fraud which consequently ruined many lives, including hers. Her first marriage was also a disaster. Mr. Waldron did not want to marry her at first, nevertheless, she gave him no other choice, and thus she succeeded—he married her regardless of the disapproval of his family, the disapproval being affected solely by her social position and lack of

wealth. During the course of the marriage, Mr. Waldron proved to have mental problems. He was not content with himself which reflected in their relationship—he suspected her, he was jealous of her, he quarreled with her—which resulted in his striking her. As she could not divorce him or sue him, she and her lover Manuel resorted to the usage of poison. Manuel was not; however, her salvation because he took all of her money and disappeared to his first wife, only to resurface later again to blackmail her. Nevertheless, Lydia managed to release herself from his chains. Overpowering these men is a symbolic step towards women's future freedom. What further corrupted her character was surprisingly the behavior of the men who fell in love with her too devotedly because they lost themselves in the process—their competence became questionable. This was the case of Mr. Bashwood who allowed her to control him and thus humiliate him. It was his lack of self-appreciation which enabled her wrong behavior—the fact that he did not stop her. A bit of love was what she was missing her whole life, so when she felt it to be genuine, she became selfless, unfortunately it was too late for her. These situations only lead to the crucial conclusion—the importance of female and male equality was the key. People have to be whole and content with themselves because they work as mirrors for other people. People teach each other what is right and what is not anymore.

Lastly, Charles Dickens's Lady Dedlock was probably the most pitiable femme fatale of this thesis. Her worst crime seemed to be her former relationship which was not secured by marriage and lead to a pregnancy. What was most tristful was that she was considered shameful by the patriarchal society and should be repudiated. Consequently, she had to wear a mask. She could not be herself and suffered. When her husband was acquainted with the facts, he acted in an exemplary fashion. His love towards her remained unaltered—were she not already gone to punish herself, he would have shielded and protected her from the unfair treatment of the world. Her death was on no account commensurate with the seriousness of the offence. It was this tragic outcome and the crucial reaction of the husband that must have also contributed to the change of the then society.

All of these femme fatales were the constructs of the patriarchal society, male fears, or incompetence. The femme fatales were suppressed which led to their desperate behavior. Therefore, they are important indications of a societal misbalance.

Resumé

Cílem této magisterské práce je kritizovat stereotypní pohled literární tradice, kterou popisují Sandra Gilbertová a Susan Gubarová ve společném díle *Šílená žena v podkroví* (1979). Tato tradice duálně rozlišuje ženské literární postavy na anděly, nebo šílené ženy. Andělé jsou ideálem neposkvrněnosti a nevinnosti. Šílené ženy vybočují z tohoto ideálu, a jsou tudíž hrozbou andělským postavám, jelikož ztělesňují nekompromisní ženskou samostatnost. Femme fatale se tak řadí do kategorie šílených žen, protože je nežádoucí pro patriarchální společnost. Ta má potřebu si ji podrobit, jelikož podrývá mužskou autoritu a nadřazenost. Záměrem této práce je tedy také ukázat, že fatalita femme fatale se skrývá ve vynucené podřízenosti patriarchálním ideálům, pravidlům, a zvykům.

Tato práce se skládá z šesti kapitol. První kapitola je úvodní a představuje postavu femme fatale. Opírá se o definice femme fatale, které lze nalézt ve slovnících. Fakt ten, že tyto definice nejsou v kompletním souladu, je v pořádku. Poukazuje a potvrzuje totiž neustále se měnící povahu femme fatale.

Druhá kapitola se již soustředí na rozbor Salomé Oscara Wilda. Salomé je příkladem femme fatale pozdního devatenáctého století, která se liší od femme fatale raného devatenáctého století v tom, že je přetvořením mytické femme fatale, a tudíž je vhodná pro archetypální rozbor. Carl Gustav Jung nachází spojitost mezi negativním vlivem matky a femme fatale. Jeho pohled na femme fatale je proto nelichotivý. Guerin dále spojuje femme fatale se smyslností, sexuálními orgiemi, strachem, nebezpečím, temnotou, rozčtvrcením, emaskulační smrtí, anebo také nevědomím v jeho hrůzostrašném podání. Všechny tyto asociace se vztahují k Salomé. Femme fatale raného devatenáctého století vybočuje z daného modelu, a z tohoto důvodu pro zbytek femme fatale volím jiný, individuální přístup. Dále analyzované femme fatale jsou děleny do podkapitol. Tyto podkapitoly berou v potaz rozlišnou škálu informací – od jejich původu, dětství, záměrů, přes jejich vzhled, vlastnosti, až po jejich vztahy, a způsob, kterým jsou vnímány.

Třetí kapitola pojednává o Lady Audley Mary Elizabeth Braddonové. Freud rozlišuje tři erotogenní zóny: orální, anální, a genitální. Lady Audley se zdá být orálně fixovaná, jelikož je u ní velice pravděpodobné předčasně ukončené kojení z důvodu psychických problémů její matky. Náhradou za předčasně ukončené kojení se pro Lady Audley stává lačnost po materialistických požitcích. Chudoba je pro Lady Audley

nesnesitelným společníkem od narození a také důvodem, proč se její otec nemůže postarat o matku. Lady Audley je vychovávána placenou pečovatelkou, která si na ní vybíjí zlost, jelikož jí otec Lady Audley nepravidelně vyplácí almužnu. Pečovatelčina podrážděnost vyúsťuje v nával vzteku, při kterém vyzrazuje Lady Audley, že je její matka šílená. Lady Audley si ji představuje jako velice nebezpečnou a děsivou ženu. Přestože jsou její představy vyvráceny návštěvou matky v léčebně, Lady Audley se musí popasovat s možností, že se nemoc dědičně může projevit i u ní. Její celkové trápení se tak zdá být neúnosné. Situace se nadále ještě zhoršuje výhrůžkami Roberta a Luka. Lady Audley zvažuje veškeré své možnosti, než dospěje k závěrečnému rozhodnutí. Za žádných okolností nechce dovolit, aby zemřela jako vlastní matka nebo opětovně skončila v chudobě a bídě, kterým se svůj celý život zoufale snaží vyhýbat, proto se rozhoduje pro odstranění Roberta a Luka při nejbližší možné příležitosti. Její následnou obhajobou je její šílenství. Čtenář ovšem vím, že doopravdy šílená není, trpěla pouze puerperální mánií stejně jako její matka, která se následně zbláznila. Lady Audley využívá šílenství jako prostředek obhajoby ke své ochraně. Ačkoliv se z puerperální mánie zotavila, při kombinaci extrémního stresu a strachu se uchyluje k násilí a nejhorším činům. Její id, v touze zbavit se nespokojenosti, v těchto momentech přestane být kontrolováno egem. V jádru duše není zlá a v minulosti nikdy nikomu nechtěla ublížit, pouze byla negativně ovlivněná společností, která jí dávala jasně najevo, že její krása je tím nejcennějším. V době viktoriánské byla vnější krása rozhodujícím faktorem k výhodnému sňatku. V období spokojenosti po boku druhého manžela její nevinný vzhled a chování odpovídají ideálům anděla. Avšak v momentech, kdy musí či může být svá, naprosto narušuje stereotypní pohled na ženy, jelikož na rozdíl od svého otce, hlavní autority, dokáže plánovat a udržet si chladnou hlavu. V době viktoriánské, ženy přestaly být po svatbě brány jako samostatná jednotka, a tudíž se nemohly dát rozvést. Tato nepravomoc hraje zásadní roli v utrpení Lady Audley.

Čtvrtá kapitola je věnována Becky Sharpové Williama Makepeace Thackerayeho. U postavy Becky Sharpové je nutné brát v potaz společnost, do které se narodila. Od malička jí je vštěpována důležitost peněz a postavení. Peníze vládnou světu a jejich nedostatek Becky pociťuje již na škole. Od malička tak musí předstírat, že je něčím, čím není. Její matka neměla ušlechtilý původ, to však nebrání Becky tvrdit opak, a pyšní se svými francouzskými kořeny. Otec Becky byl alkoholik, jenž obě mlátil. Kvůli otci také zažívá hrubé situace, kvůli kterým je nucena předčasně dospět.

Stává se tak naprosto soběstačnou ženou, protože nemá jiné východisko. Becky se nezdráhá vyjádřit svůj názor, a naprosto se tak vymyká ideálu anděla, jelikož je nebývale smělá, a navíc dokáže bravurně ovládat své emoce. Není proto divu, že pohoršuje zkostnatělé ženy viktoriánské doby a zároveň však přitahuje muže této éry. Přesto je schopná empatie, která se projeví, když se snaží konejšit svou jedinou přítelkyni, Amélii. Amélie je ztělesněním anděla, tudíž ideálem, avšak autor se k ní staví krajně posměšně, jelikož je naprosto života neznalá. Čtenář si tak může vyvodit závěr, ze kterého plyne, že skutečným ideálem se stává žena, jež má milující rodinu, která ji nesvazuje, dovoluje jí poznávat svět a nabývat životní zkušenosti. Již na škole se rozhoduje vyprostit z vězení, ve kterém se cítí být polapena a začíná spřádat plány do budoucna. V průběhu let rozšiřuje své znalosti a schopnosti na tolik, že předčí veškerou šlechtu široko daleko. I přestože by jí její znalosti a schopnosti dovolily v dnešní době dosahovat nejvyšších pracovních pozic, se Becky bohužel nemůže uplatnit v žádné pořádné pracovní sféře, protože ženská práce byla považována za degradující, s výjimkou práce vychovatelky. Nezbývá jí nic jiného, než se dobře provdat. Ve viktoriánské době byla svatba hlavním cílem každé ženy. Becky se seznámí s bratrem Amelie. Ten je ovšem natolik nesmělý, že se ho musí snažit dobýt zcela sama, což je naprosto nevídané a pobuřující v době viktoriánské. Nakonec se provdá za Rawdona, který má přislíbeno dědictví. Avšak to je mu razantně sníženo na směšnou částku. Po svatbě a nedostatku peněz se tak posléze musí uchýlit k pochybným praktikám vedoucím k zisku. Nepočítaje ostatní nepotvrzené činy, nejhorším proviněním Becky se zdá být její místy až kruté chování vůči malému Rawdonovi. Nedokáže mu projevit rodičovskou lásku, jelikož ji pořádně sama nepoznala a přenáší tak tento dysfunkční přístup na další generace. Becky je ženou, která přebíhá svou dobu a odmítá být svazována zvyklostmi patriarchální společnosti.

Pátá kapitola je zaměřena na Lydiu Gwiltovou Wilkieho Collinse. Lydia Gwiltová je již od raného dětství předána do péče ženy, která ji bije a nedává pořádně najíst. Když přestane dostávat finanční příspěvek na její péči, mile ráda ji přenechává paní Oldershaw. Paní Oldershaw v ní vidí zdroj zisku, jelikož je velice krásná, avšak i paní Oldershaw se s ní prozatímně loučí. Lydia následně začíná žít v rodině slečny Blanchardové. Zde ji také nepotkává nic pěkného, protože je využita k podvodu, který zkomplikuje život velké většině postav, včetně Lydie samotné. Lydia se snaží tyto ženy brát jako náhradní matky a ztotožnit se s nimi. Pokusy o ztotožnění ovšem selhávají. Jelikož není nikým milovaná, dokonce ani Manuelem, do kterého vložila největší

důvěru, rozhodne se ukončit svůj život skokem do řeky. Řeka je formou vody, která jako taková, dle Guerina, bývá obecně brána psychoanalytiky jako mateřský symbol. Řeka je také tedy místem naplnění její tužby po lásce, a také místem, kde se má nacházet její symbolická matka. Tento sebevražedný pokus je brán Freudem jako pokus o návrat do symbolického lůna. Posléze se Lydia vrací k původnímu výběru náhradní matky ve formě paní Oldershaw, která je stále nevyhovující. Paní Oldershaw tak představuje negativní morální vliv ve formě nad-já, které se snaží Lydiu ovládat. Lydia se však postaví paní Oldershaw a odmítá její autoritu. Skutečný pocit přichází až se smrtí Lydie. Lydia, jako všechny femme fatale, ztělesňuje dle výše zmíněné a kritizované tradice šílenou ženu, jelikož markantně vybočuje z ideálu anděla svou soběstačností a schopnostmi kvalitního právníka. Díky těmto schopnostem se jí podaří postavit Manuelovi, což je krokem k její emancipaci. Za úspěch vedoucí k pozdějšímu zrovnoprávnění žen lze určitě počítat i pasáž, ve které čtenář zjistí, že se jí podařilo vmanévrovat pana Waldrona do svatby. Úspěch je to proto, že se svatbě obloukem vyhýbal. Jeho rodina by preferovala ženu s lepším postavením a financemi. Lydia je tak nadějí a jednou z prvních vlaštovek vedoucích k zrovnoprávnění žen a mužů. Pan Bashwood slouží jako doplňující postava, která je protipólem pana Waldrona a Manuela, jelikož se stává jejím bezmezně oddaným služebníkem. Jeho podružnost má negativní vliv na charakter Lydie, protože si ho Lydie nemůže vážit a má sklony ho ponižovat. Román tak poukazuje na důležitost rovnoprávnosti a rovnocennosti obou pohlaví.

Poslední, šestá kapitola, náleží Lady Dedlock Charlese Dickense. Nejhorším proviněním Lady Dedlockové se zdá být početí nemanželského dítě. Nemanželské dítě a sexuální nezdrženlivost před svatbou byly ve viktoriánské době obrovskou hanbou. Zneuctění, které tyto činy provází, je opakující se námět ve viktoriánské literatuře. Není tedy divu, že Lady Dedlocková nosí masku vyrovnané a znuděné ženy, aby nikdo neodhalil její nechvalnou minulost. Kvůli těmto nesmyslným ideálům nemůže být šťastnou ženou, ačkoliv je jinak bezchybnou ženou pro svého manžela. Když je její tajemství vyzrazeno, tak nečeká na to, co se bude dít a volí svou vlastní smrt jako jedinou možnou nápravu a omluvu svému manželovi a dceři, která, jak později zjistí, porod přežila. Ačkoliv ji manžel již nestihne zachránit, jeho přístup k tomuto odhalení je velice důležitý. Na jeho lásce a postoji k Lady Dedlockové se nic nemění. Tento přístup byl velice důležitý pro změnu viktoriánské společnosti. Díky mužům s podobným přístupem, se ženy mohly dostat ze spárů všech patriarchálních omezení,

pravidel, a zvyků, o kterých píše Elaine Showalterová.

Analýza těchto femme fatale v patřičných kapitolách umožňuje potvrdit úvodní hypotézu. Patriarchální podrobování žen a důraz na nepatřičné zvyklosti, pravidla, a ideály vedou tyto ženy k nešťastným činům. Práce prokazuje, jak zásadní je svoboda a rovnocenný přístup pro život žen. Následně tato fakta slouží jako kritika výše zmíněného stereotypního vnímání žen.

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Anotace

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Klíčová slova: femme fatale; patriarchální společnost; zvyklosti, pravidla, ideály; viktoriánská doba; próza

Tato práce se zabývá femme fatale v anglické próze devatenáctého století. Kritizuje stereotypní přístup k femme fatale. Femme fatale je považována za monstrum nebo šílenou ženu, jelikož podrývá patriarchální společnost, její zvyklosti, pravidla, a ideály. První kapitola představuje pojem femme fatale. Zbylých pět kapitol analyzují femme fatale prostřednictvím individuálních přístupů.

Annotation

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This thesis deals with the femme fatale in English prose of the nineteenth century.
It criticizes the stereotypical approach to the femme fatale. She is considered a monster or a mad woman as she undermines the patriarchal society, its conventions, rules, and ideals. The first chapter introduces the concept of the femme fatale. The next five chapters analyze the femme fatales via individual approaches.