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An "[Un]Readiness To Be Touched": The Critique of Sentimentalism in Sensation Fiction

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An “[un]readiness to be touched”: the critique of sentimentalism in sensation fiction

By

Rachel Vernell Wolfe

A Thesis
Submitted to the Faculty of
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for the Degree of Master of Arts
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An “[un]readiness to be touched”: the critique of sentimentalism in sensation fiction

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Existing research on these novels tends to focus on gender and madness, a majority of which focuses specifically on madwomen. Instances of women being driven to madness, however, also coincides with a pattern of sentimental behaviors that male characters share. These overly sentimental characters rarely, if ever, demonstrate rational thinking, and are cast in a negative light. In contrast, the sensation novel casts non-sentimental characters of both genders as skeptics and investigators who generally meet felicitous ends. This thesis will contribute to existing scholarship on sensation fiction by taking into account how these novels treat excessive affect as a sign of generic critique rather than just a biological symptom of a pathologized woman.

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my parents, Theresa and Randy Wolfe, whose sacrifices and support made it possible for me to complete this work. Thanks for always believing in me, for always listening to me ramble about Victorian literature, and for always encouraging me to continue learning.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Over the years, literary scholars have struggled to articulate what it is exactly that makes the sensation genre stand apart from other genres. Despite this, most scholars tend to agree that the genre was introduced in November 1859, when Wilkie Collins's novel *The Woman in White* first appeared in Charles Dickens's serial publication *All the Year Round* (Allan 87). While *The Woman in White* was widely popular among its contemporary audiences, the sensation genre really gained momentum with the publication of Ellen Wood's *East Lynne* in 1861 and Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret* in 1862. As Janice M. Allan notes, scholars have pointed out "the typical features ascribed to the genre – most obviously, its incident-laden plots, emphasis on crime, secrecy, class transgression and aggressive, passionate heroines"; however, "these features were neither new nor unique to the works deemed sensational" (91). Andrew Mangham adds that "the more we look into this genre with an eye to noticing patterns and discernible boundaries, however, the more we notice those patterns and consistencies fade away ("Introduction" 1). Mangham explains this point further, noting that "secondary criticism has shown how...[the sensation genre] was a hybrid of popular forms that had gone before it: melodrama and penny dreadful literature stand out as being two of the most obvious examples" ("Introduction" 2). Furthermore, Laurence Talairach-Vielmas notes that "the new 'spectrality' of sensational characters, moreover, re-adapts gothic conventions to a secular and materialistic modern world, using multiple identities, fake death and science to re-animate the dead" (21). By drawing from multiple forms and genres, Collins, Braddon, and Wood thus contributed to the development of a new genre

which, while not entirely unique in its form, was entirely unique in the effect it had on its audience.

According to Allan, the sensation genre is unique because of its effect on contemporary audiences. This effect is “unlike [the effect of] ‘legitimate’ art that attempts to elevate or ennoble through, for example, instruction or appeals to the sympathetic faculties” (87). Instead, the sensation genre “aimed only to shock and excite: to produce a literal sensation upon the body” (87). As a result, most contemporary criticism was concerned with whether or not the genre was beneficial or detrimental. Some viewed “the public demand for sensation...as a worrying sign of cultural degeneration,” whereas others, such as Margaret Oliphant, viewed sensationalism as “a sign of the times, a reflection of the ‘changed world in which we are now standing’” (87). While contemporary critics were primarily concerned with the emotions that sensation elicited in readers, very little attention has been given to the emotions presented in the sensation novels. Although a few recent scholars have examined emotion in the sensation genre, majority of the recent scholarship tends to focus on: (1) the manner in which the sensation genre subverts gender norms, (2) the manner in which gender roles reveal a lack of agency, and (3) the relationship between the sensation genre and previous genres and literary forms. While much time has been devoted to examining the relationship between sensation fiction and other popular genres/forms (such as the gothic, penny dreadfuls, and melodrama), scholars have not yet considered the relationship between the sensation genre and the sentimental genre.

While *The Woman in White*, *Lady Audley’s Secret*, and *East Lynne* all draw from the gothic, penny dreadfuls, and melodrama, they also feature very distinct elements of

eighteenth-century portrayals of sentiment. Like the sensation genre, the sentimental genre intends to elicit an emotional response, both in the reader and in its characters. However, while the sensation genre aims to elicit shock, the sentimental genre valorizes occasions for fine feeling, which often reveal the emotional and moral capacities of characters. The characters of *The Woman in White*, *Lady Audley's Secret*, and *East Lynne* appear to be either extremely sentimental, or very stoic and apathetic (and, in a few instances, these more stoic characters appear to be completely void of emotion and are even described as automata). The characters who appear to be sentimental, often face distressing situations and their reactions to these situations echo the actions of the protagonists of sentimental novels. For instance, throughout these novels, the sentimental characters all appear to be governed (and in some instances debilitated) by their sentimentality; for the most part, these characters are hindered by their sentimental natures, but a few do learn to regulate their emotions and overcome their sentimentality. On the other hand, the more stoic characters, who are in control of their emotions, are often the sleuths who solve the mystery or right the wrongs that have been committed over the course of the novels. These "sleuth" characters (such as Marian Halcombe, Walter Hartright, and Robert Audley) demonstrate the manner in which the sensation novel does more than merely elicit an emotional response; that is, these characters show that by restoring order and re-establishing bourgeois normality, it is indeed possible to recover from the sensational experiences they face. Thus, by drawing attention to the detrimental potential of the sentimental genre, the sensation novel appears to be calling into question the authenticity of emotional expression. While the sentimental genre and the sensation genre are both emotion-centric, they both have different driving forces.

According to John Mullan, the term “‘sentimental,’ by becoming a word for a type of text, promised an *occasion* for fine feeling. This fine feeling could be experienced by both the characters in a narrative and the reader of that narrative” (238). Just as the sensation genre “aimed only to shock and excite: to produce a literal sensation upon the body,” the sentimental also aimed to elicit an emotional response in its readers (Allan 87). As a result, “sentimental texts appealed to the benevolent instincts of a virtuous reader, who might be expected to suffer with those of whom he or she read” (Mullan 238). While both genres actively strive to elicit an emotional response, I argue that by taking aim at, and critiquing the sentimental, Collins’s *The Woman in White*, Braddon’s *Lady Audley’s Secret*, and Wood’s *East Lynne* all work to distinguish themselves as a unique and new emotion-centric genre in order to stand apart from the sentimental genre of the eighteenth century.

The scholarship focusing on these three novels tends to focus on the manner in which gender-roles are at play within the sensation genre. One group of scholars focus specifically on the ways in which the sensation genre subverts nineteenth-century gender norms. For instance, in his study of *The Woman in White*, Andrew Mangham argues that Collins investigates the cultural belief that women “harboured insanely violent possibilities,” which in turn, reveals the complex problems of masculinity (“Hidden Shadows” 172). Mangham examines instances in the novel where male characters analyze seemingly hidden female improprieties, which consequently reveal “latent horrors of the male psyche” (“Hidden Shadows” 174). Moreover, Herbert G. Klein studies *Lady Audley’s Secret*, focusing primarily on the characters of Sir Michael and Robert Audley in order to demonstrate that these men are presented as being more

feminine than their female counterparts. Klein argues that the novel is “a subversive deconstruction of gender stereotypes, because men are shown to be essentially weak and therefore in need of a strong woman” (162). Additionally, Richard Nemesvari, in his analysis of both *East Lynne* and Mary Elizabeth Braddon’s second sensation novel, *Aurora Floyd*, argues that the two novels “demonstrate how sensationalism’s repeated tropes of extreme affect, and domesticity under threat, reveal flawed discourses of masculinity as significant contributors to the failed household spaces that are so often the sites of its scandalous plots and secrets” (“Manful Sensations” 89). He concludes that the two novels “expose but do not resolve the problematic demands of Victorian masculinity [that their male characters] are all caught up in a disordered confusion of affect and potential class-status deracination that severely undercuts manly autonomy” (113). These examinations of the representation of gender allow for a more in-depth understanding of the cultural anxieties that were surfacing during this time as they provide explanations as to why these sensational plots were able to elicit such emotional responses in contemporary readers.

Another group of scholarship focuses on the manner in which these novels use gender roles to reveal, and even emphasize, the lack of female agency during this time period. For instance, D. A. Miller claims that *The Woman in White* focuses on “enclosing and secluding the woman in ‘male’ bodies;” these “bodies” are things such as madhouses and marriages, in which women are confined with little to no agency, and they are masculine bodies because the women are often under the rule of a man (155). Additionally, Richard Nemesvari studies *Lady Audley’s Secret*, focusing primarily on Robert Audley’s homoerotic behaviors. Nemesvari argues that through her independent

anti-hero, Lady Audley, “Braddon explicitly presents the threat posed by her central female character as a challenge to male homosocial bonds” (“Robert Audley’s Secret” 515). Thus, by showing that female independence is a quality that belongs to a criminal anti-hero, and threatens male bonds, Nemesvari demonstrates that the nineteenth-century society was not yet openly embracing the concept of female autonomy. Furthermore, Jeanne B. Elliot emphasizes the problematic circumstances in which Wood’s anti-hero, Lady Isabel Vane, finds herself. Elliot argues that Lady Isabel “is caught between the demands of her own nature and the rigid standards imposed upon her sex and class,” thereby proving further proving the notion that female agency was lacking as a result of social anxieties regarding women’s roles (292).

While majority of the scholarship focuses on gender roles, some scholars have devoted their attention to examining the relationship between the sensation genre and other literary genres and forms. In an analysis of *Lady Audley’s Secret*, Chiara Briganti notes the Gothic undertones in the setting of Audley court, and draws a comparison between the former nuns of Audley court and Lady Audley; Briganti also examines the representation of female autonomy in the novel and compares it with the female subjectivity frequently portrayed in Gothic fiction. Briganti makes note of the reversal of the tradition of Gothic fiction in *Lady Audley’s Secret*, and argues that “Lady Audley is strangled by her past, which becomes one with the past of women, of her mad, girlish mother, and of the nuns of Gothic fiction, [but in the case of Lady Audley,] female subjectivity is allowed some play” (192). Pamela K. Gilbert also focuses on the genre of *Lady Audley’s Secret*, particularly the manner in which it draws on other literary elements outside of the sensation genre. Gilbert argues that the novel contains two differing

narratives: “the coming-of-age and social integration of Robert Audley, a traditional high-culture theme, and the decline and fall of the scheming adventuress, a popular culture melodrama” (218). Gilbert further argues that “thematically and structurally, [these] two narratives are mediated by male desire to know the Other, an Other which is metaphorically represented throughout the text as a desirable female body which is a threat to the masculine social body” (218). Winifred Hughes and Lyn Pykett, on the other hand, both analyze *East Lynne*, focusing specifically on the manner in which the sentimentality of characters functions as an aspect of melodrama. Hughes argues that *East Lynne* primarily functions as a melodrama rather than a sensation novel, due to its “combination of sin and sentiment, [and] the unrestrained emotional wallowing, [which] ultimately depends on an unquestioning acceptance of conventional morality and conventional standards of behavior” (218). Similarly, Pykett also notes that Wood’s “plot situations, character types and overt moralising more nearly resemble domestic melodrama” (115). While Pykett does acknowledge the sentimental nature of *East Lynne*, she focuses specifically on the manner in which the “popular lower-class form of melodrama subverts, or at least destabilises, the dominant middle-class forms and norms of domestic fiction” (134). Pykett argues that “that particular mixture of sin and sentiment in *East Lynne* serves to expose the contradictions of the proper feminine, even as the novel works to re-establish it” (134). While Hughes and Pykett both note some of the sentimental aspects of *East Lynne*, they both relate it directly to melodrama rather than the sentimental genre of the eighteenth century.

Another group of scholarship focuses on emotion and affect, often attributing it as being symptomatic of a gendered or pathologized body. For instance, in an analysis of

The Woman in White and other popular sensation novels, Jane Wood refers to nineteenth-century psychiatric studies in order to examine the “male nervous invalid,” specifically, the character of Frederick Fairlie (71). She argues that the literary representations of these “nervously ill men” work to “exploit the taint of moral weakness” with which these men are associated (71). Christine Johns also focuses on Frederick Fairlie’s deviation from masculine norms, claiming he defies “normative categorization both domestically and sexually” (3). Two literary scholars, however, break away from this trend of claiming that emotional status is directly related to one’s physical health and/or gender. Heidi Hansson and Caroline Norberg offer a collaborative analysis of *East Lynne* in which they focus on the ways that emotional expressions work to reveal the transitioning patriarchal system. While Hansson and Norberg note that the *East Lynne* “is concerned with the devastating results of uncontrolled emotional reactions,” they are primarily concerned with the manner in which “metaphors are used to express emotion” throughout the novel, with the ultimate goal of “evaluat[ing] how these metaphorical expressions contribute to establishing gender and class differences in the text” (156, 155). Hansson and Norberg conclude that “the ambivalent attitudes to emotional excess” reflect the “transitional phase between a generally accepted patriarchal system and emerging feminist challenges to this model” (168-169). While these scholars are all interested in emotion, they have yet to consider the manner in which the emotional responses and expressions of the characters in early sensation fiction function to contribute to the development of a new emotion-centric genre that stands apart from the sentimental genre while also critiquing it.

In contrast to the work of previous literary scholars, this thesis will demonstrate

the manner in which *The Woman in White*, *Lady Audley's Secret*, and *East Lynne* offer negative portrayals of the sentimental genre. According to John Mullan there was a transitioning perspective towards sentimentality near “the end of the eighteenth century [when] the use of the term ‘sentimental’ turned from the approbatory to the pejorative; from ‘exhibiting refined and elevated feelings’ to ‘addicted indulgence in superficial emotion’” (236). This transitioning perspective allows for an examination of the negative aspects of the sentimental genre, which these novels work to emphasize. Sentimental memoirs and tours became popular towards the end of the eighteenth century, and they were advertised as being demonstrative of “the cultivated sensitivity of their authors” by using “meanings of ‘sentimental’ that are strange yet recognizable: a readiness to be touched (particularly by others’ distress), to display tender feelings, to be susceptible to sympathy” (238). These strange aspects of the sentimental genre are very easily identifiable in the characters of these early sensation novels, and they are all presented in a negative manner. For instance, Frederick Fairlie of *The Woman in White*, Robert Audley of *Lady Audley's Secret*, and Lady Isabel of *East Lynne* all exhibit “a readiness to be touched,” which proves to be detrimental for each of these characters. Additionally, Robert Audley and Lady Isabel both demonstrate an affinity for “display[ing] tender feelings” as well as a “susceptib[ility] to sympathy” which only deters them by creating additional problems that they must resolve. In contrast to this, Collins and Braddon present characters that function as emotional counterparts by exhibiting an “[un]readiness to be touched” by the distress of others; these characters—whether they are a sinful anti-hero like Lady Audley, or a moral heroine like Marian Halcombe—demonstrate the manner in which a rejection of sentimentality, as well as a regulation of emotion lead to

success and happiness. Moreover, the most prominently negative aspect of sentimentality that is portrayed in these three novels is the “price that was often to be paid for sentimental susceptibility” which the sentimental novelists also portrayed (249). As Mullan notes, “the pioneers of sentimentalism...showed that the woman of sensibility and the man of feeling were made ill by all that they were able to feel [...] This was a period in which nervous disorders [such as] ‘the English Malady’ [were] established as the malaise of those who were refined and sensitive – an illness that was also a privilege” (249-250). By demonstrating the detrimental effects of these sentimental characteristics in addition to other sentimental traits (such as an affinity for nostalgic memories and a fondness for sentimental objects), Collins, Braddon, and Wood thereby continue the transitioning perspective towards sentimentality and simultaneously emphasize the negative potential of the sentimental genre. Thus, by taking aim at the sentimental genre, Collins, Braddon, and Wood distance themselves from it, which allows them to create their own distinguished and unique emotion-centric genre.

CHAPTER II

MEN OF FEELING: FRAUDULENT AND AUTHENTIC AFFECT IN *THE WOMAN IN WHITE*

Wilkie Collins, the author of the first sensation novel, *The Woman in White*, presents characters with complex sentimental characteristics. Specifically, Mr. Fairlie's and Count Fosco's sentimental qualities complicate their emotional responses throughout the course of the novel. Mr. Fairlie is so emotional that the narrator and other characters describe him as an invalid, whereas Count Fosco labels himself as "a Man of Sentiment" (Collins 623). The narrator presents the emotional qualities of these two men in a manner that reflects the emotional qualities of the protagonists from popular eighteenth-century sentimental novels. Collins presents Fairlie and Fosco as sentimental in order to highlight the negative aspects of the sentimental genre. Previously, literary scholars have analyzed the complex emotional natures of Fairlie and Fosco. These scholars tend to describe Fairlie's emotional nature as being an indicator of his physically weak and feminized form, resulting from his psychological instability. Additionally, they claim that Fosco's emotions function as evidence of a critique of the foreign other and homoeroticism. In fact, these emotional traits are indications of authentic and feigned sentiment, which Collins uses in order to critique the eighteenth-century sentimental genre.

The majority of the critical readings of *The Woman in White* focus on the critique of gender roles as they are presented in characters like Frederick Fairlie, Walter Hartright, and Marian Halcombe. In addition to studying gender roles, a few scholars

have studied affect. The remaining criticism tends to focus on the psychological aspects of the novel, taking a new historicist approach that aligns certain characters with psychological and medical studies from the Victorian era.

Several scholars who focus on gender in *The Woman in White* address the issue of masculine identities. For instance, Rachel Ablow focuses on “male, middle-class identity” in order to argue that Walter gains a form of masculine power from his position as Laura’s husband, which allows him to “attribute meaning to her” (96). Andrew Mangham also studies masculinity; however, he argues that Collins investigates the cultural belief that women “harboured insanely violent possibilities,” which in turn, reveals the complex problems of masculinity (172). Mangham examines instances in the novel where male characters analyze seemingly hidden female improprieties, which consequently reveal “latent horrors of the male psyche” (174). Jane Wood refers to nineteenth-century psychiatric studies in order to examine the “male nervous invalid” in popular sensation novels, including *The Woman in White*. She argues that the literary representations of these “nervously ill men” work to “exploit the taint of moral weakness” with which these men are associated (71). Christine Johns also focuses on Frederick Fairlie’s deviation from masculine norms, claiming he defies “normative categorization both domestically and sexually” (3).

Other critics have studied female characters in Collins’s novel by focusing on women’s roles and female identity. For instance, D. A. Miller claims that the novel focuses on “enclosing and secluding the woman in ‘male’ bodies;” these “bodies” are things such as madhouses and marriages, in which women are confined with little to no agency, and they are masculine bodies because the women are often under the rule of a

man (155). Conversely, Ann Gaylin studies the cultural anxieties surrounding gender roles and identity. Gaylin argues that eavesdropping subverts conventional anxieties about identity, gender, and agency. Sarah Fitzpatrick notes that the fates and behaviors of certain characters, as well as the critical reception of these characters, reveal “both the upholding and subversion of” separate spheres ideology, which in turn, exposes fissures in this ideological construction (1). Grace Beekman and S. Brooke Cameron also analyze gender in *The Woman in White*, but narrow their studies to the issue of the gendered affective structure of the novel. Beekman, for example, does an extensive study in which she maps out every instance of affect throughout the novel. She then analyzes her findings and uses them to demonstrate the manner in which *The Woman in White* relies heavily on female feeling rather than male feeling. Beekman claims that this reliance on female affect is what allows Collins to create, and maintain, readerly empathy and feelings of suspense. Cameron also studies the gendered affective structure of the novel; however, her study aligns *The Woman in White* with eighteenth-century amatory fiction. Specifically, Cameron uses Eliza Haywood’s works of amatory fiction as evidence which she uses to qualify Marian Halcombe as a sentimental heroine who offers a “new representation of feminine affect” (3).

Although most critical readings focus on gender in the novel, a few critics deviate from this trend by using psychological theories to examine the novel. For example, Natalie Huffels argues that the novel exposes contradictions within contemporaneous psychological theories, which in turn dramatize “ideological tensions by embodying incompatible scientific and philosophical discourses within individual characters” (43). Deborah Wynne aligns *The Woman in White* with popular medical and psychological

theories of the nineteenth-century. However, she argues that the novel's focus on health and nerves can be interpreted as a response to medical and psychological theories which claimed the body and mind "suffered from the turbulence and disorder of modern life" (44).

Whether it be a gender studies approach to *The Woman in White*, or a historical analysis of the novel's use of psychological theories, critics tend to posit the characters' emotional responses and expressions as symptomatic of a gendered or pathologized body. These studies, however, do not take into account issues related to genre. Cameron gets very close to addressing genre when she compares the novel to eighteenth-century amatory fiction; however, she only uses this as a means by which to account for Marian's role in the novel. In contrast to Cameron and the other scholars, I posit that two male characters' expressions of affect have a very specific function in relation to genre. By studying the characters of Mr. Fairlie and Count Fosco, I seek to demonstrate how these two men meet the qualifications of an eighteenth-century sentimental protagonist. These men use sentiment in different ways: Fairlie's sentimental nature is authentic, whereas Fosco feigns sentimentality and controls when and how he employs it. Fairlie's position as an invalid throughout the novel functions as a critique of the sentimental genre because he is unable to control feeling; in contrast, Fosco's forced confession and resulting demise function as a critique of sentimentalism as a mode of emotional manipulation.

By the end of the eighteenth century, sentimentality was viewed more negatively than earlier in the century. John Mullen notes that near the turn of the century, sentimentality transitioned from "exhibiting refined and elevated feelings" to an "addicted indulgence in superficial emotion" (236). Based on the descriptions of his

character, Fairlie falls into the latter category of sentimentality. Other characters notice his sentimentality and describe him as a hypochondriac. For instance, Marian notes, “Mr Fairlie is too great an invalid to be a companion for anybody. I don’t know what is the matter with him, and the doctors don’t know what is the matter with him, and he doesn’t know himself what is the matter with him. We all say it’s on the nerves, and we none of us know what we mean when we say it” (34). Marian does not state this in a sympathetic tone, but rather in a tone of annoyance. This is because no one close to Fairlie takes his illness seriously as there is not an identifiable cause. Nevertheless, this constant, mysterious illness is a symptom of Fairlie’s sentimentality, and Marian’s annoyance represents the transitioning perspective on sentimentality. Mullan notes that “the pioneers of sentimentalism...showed that the woman of sensibility and the man of feeling were made ill by all that they were able to feel” (249). Like the man of feeling, Fairlie suffers from every emotional experience and thus describes himself as “nothing but a bundle of nerves dressed up to look like a man” (356). Ann Jessie Van Sant notes that “sensibility, as we can see in Yorick,¹ translates the body into its own most delicate structures, producing for the man of feeling an intensified world” (101). Because Fairlie feels too much, and consequentially suffers from his “nerves,” he takes measures to isolate himself from others. He does this in order to recover from everything he is forced to feel due to his sentimentality, resulting in an isolation that functions to highlight the side effects of sentimental suffering.

While Marian describes Fairlie as a hypochondriac, Walter describes him as having a “habitual want of feeling” (Collins 437). However, this is an inaccurate

¹ Yorick is the sentimental protagonist in Laurence Sterne’s *A Sentimental Journey*.

description as evidenced by the fact that the majority of the descriptions of Fairlie concentrate on his nervousness. For instance, during their first meeting, Fairlie bombards Walter with descriptions of his nervous ailments. Fairlie states, “In the wretched state of my nerves, movement of any kind is exquisitely painful to me. [...] In the wretched state of my nerves, loud sound of any kind is indescribable torture to me. [...] In the wretched state of my nerves, exertion of any kind is unspeakably disagreeable to me” (40-41). Like Fairlie, the sentimental protagonist experiences “the fineness or delicacy of the sensory register [which] magnifies all objects of sensation and renders them gross” (Van Sant 104). Fairlie’s descriptions of his ailments do not demonstrate callousness, or a lack of emotion as Walter suggests; rather, they show that due to his sentimentality he is physically incapable of expressing all of the emotions that he feels – processing environmental stimuli, or sympathizing with the feelings of others – without suffering. Further evidence of this occurs during a conversation between Fairlie and Count Fosco. Fairlie, not yet knowing the reason for Fosco’s visit, automatically assumes the worst in order to brace himself for the inevitable shock to his nerves. Fairlie notes that he “make[s] it a rule, in these distressing cases, always to anticipate the worst. It breaks the blow, by meeting it halfway” (Collins 357). Thus, Fairlie is capable of feeling emotion, even to the point of over-feeling; he simply tries to curtail the side effects of his sentimentality by protecting his fragile nerves.

Another measure Fairlie takes in order to protect his nerves is isolating himself from others. Instances of this isolation occur in his much remarked-upon absence throughout the majority of the novel, as well as during instances where he takes measures to avoid being visited by others. Fairlie repeatedly attempts to avoid the visits of others

because he fears the physical toll of an emotional conversation. For instance, when Fanny, Lady Glyde's maid, visits Fairlie, he tries to avoid the conversation about the state of Laura's marriage. He first tries to delay the conversation by making petty requests before Fanny is allowed to enter his quarters, instructing his servant to ask whether or not his visitor's shoes creak before admitting her. He states, "I was obliged to ask the question. Creaking shoes invariably upset me for the day" (347). Fairlie's question is a desperate attempt to find any reason that will allow him to justify refusing to meet with Fanny.

Fairlie also tries to protect his fragile nerves by avoiding a meeting with Walter. Walter requests a meeting with Fairlie in order to announce his plan to depart from Limmeridge, but Fairlie is too ill to receive him. Walter states, "I was not favored by Mr Fairlie with an interview. He had been, or had fancied himself to be, an invalid for years past; and he was not well enough to receive me" (128). Fairlie comes forward about his nervous illness and uses this as a means by which to avoid meeting with Walter. However, the following day, when Mr. Fairlie considers himself to be well enough for company, he still attempts to avoid entering into the discussion of Walter's personal reasons for leaving Limmeridge by focusing the conversation on himself. Walter notes, "His talk was the same purpose as usual – all about himself and his ailments, his wonderful coins, and his matchless Rembrandt etchings" (129). Walter recalls that, when he had tried to discuss the business of his departure, Fairlie "shut his eyes and said I 'upset' him. I persisted in upsetting him by returning again and again to the subject" (129). This once again demonstrates Fairlie's attempt to protect his fragile nerves while also showing that Fairlie does not enter into serious conversations because it inevitably

becomes a source of feeling. That is, in being repeatedly upset by Walter's returning to the subject of his departure, Fairlie is emotionally affected.

The third time Fairlie acknowledges the negative side effects of his sentimental nature is when he attempts to protect his nerves by avoiding a meeting with Mr. Gilmore. Mr. Gilmore sends a letter to Fairlie expressing his concern in regard to Laura Fairlie's financial future. Once again, Fairlie responds in a manner that demonstrates his attempt to protect his nerves by avoiding the conversation. He responds to Mr. Gilmore by writing, "Would dear Gilmore be so very obliging as not to worry his friend and client about such a trifle as a remote contingency?" (153). However, Mr. Gilmore does not accept this answer and travels to Limmeridge to visit Fairlie in person. He notes that upon announcing his arrival he is told that Fairlie "would be delighted to see [him] the next morning, but that the sudden news of [his] appearance had prostrated him with palpitations for the rest of the evening" (158). These repetitive attempts at avoiding personal and familial matters demonstrate Fairlie's awareness of the psychological effects of his sentimentality. By going into detail about these repetitive attempts, Collins emphasizes the pathological nature of Fairlie's sentimentality. Thereby offering a critique of excessive sensitivity: because Fairlie has no control over what he feels or does not feel, Fairlie alienates himself from others in order to protect himself from the negative effects of all that he is able to feel. Thus, Collins shows that to be truly governed by sentiment is to be a burden on others.

In addition to intentionally isolating himself, Fairlie also demonstrates his sentimental qualities through his possession of sentimental objects. According to Lynn Festa, "sentimental objects...are supposedly singular, priceless, incommensurable with

other values and forms of valuation” (67). In Fairlie’s narrative, he labels his sentimental objects as his “art treasures” (346). Collectively, these treasures include “the photographs of [his] pictures, and prints, and coins, and so forth” (346). These are his most prized possessions and what appear to be his only sources of happiness during his state of isolation. Festa notes that “by inviting us to have feelings about things – to love them – the sentimental seduces us into taking object for subject; by packaging feelings in a commodity form, the sentimental text replaces subject with object, putting a price on what should not be (cannot be) commoditized” (69). Fairlie demonstrates this commoditized form of sentimentality during his meeting with Fanny when he responds to her outburst of tears. According to Fairlie, tears are acceptable only when they are caused by such sentimental objects: “Except when the refining process of Art judiciously removes from them all resemblance to Nature, I distinctly object to tears” (347). Fairlie further emphasizes this when he states, “tears are scientifically described as a Secretion. I can understand that a secretion may be healthy or unhealthy, but I cannot see the interest of a secretion from a sentimental point of view” (347-48). By expressing his repulsion at Fanny’s tears, Fairlie further qualifies himself as a man of feeling, and also demonstrates his disdain of witnessing the emotional expressions of others. That is, Fairlie’s emotional connection to his “art treasures” further establishes his status as a sentimental man. However, his critique of emotional expression demonstrates his awareness of the fact that his unbridled sentimentality will cause him to suffer from the feelings he will experience in response to seeing Fanny cry. Additionally, by portraying Fairlie’s repulsion to the emotional outbursts of others, Collins emphasizes the pathological nature of Fairlie’s sentimentality. That is, Collins once again demonstrates Fairlie’s awareness of his

inability to control his sentimentality, as well as his awareness of the suffering he will endure from exposure to Fanny's emotional outburst.

Whereas Fairlie's sentimentality is authentic, Fosco feigns sentimentality in order to control others. For instance, when Marian first meets Fosco she describes him in terms of his sentimental nature. She states, "He permitted me, this evening, to make his acquaintance, for the first time, in the character of a Man of Sentiment – of sentiment, as I believe, really felt, not assumed for the occasion" (291). She also states that "his eyes and his voice expressed a restrained sensibility" (291). These descriptions directly allude to Henry Mackenzie's sentimental novel *The Man of Feeling* in which the orphaned protagonist, Harley, obtains from several guardians the advice that he should strive to develop close connections with his older, more distant relatives so that he might gain some inheritance after their passing. However, Harley is unsuccessful in his attempts. Like Harley's guardians, Fosco tries to advise Sir Percival to act calmly and befriend his wife so that she may willingly share her inheritance with him. As in the case of Harley, this advice proves ineffective; in contrast to Harley, Fosco resorts to feigning sentiment in order to manipulate Laura into sharing her inheritance with her husband. This allusion to *The Man of Feeling* demonstrates that like Harley, Fosco feigns sentiment in order to benefit financially. In her description of meeting Fosco for "the first time" Marian notes that his sentimentality is an act, as he is "in the character of a Man of Sentiment" (291). By interpreting "character" as the role that an actor plays it becomes evident that Fosco wears sentiment like a mask during his manipulative performance. However, Fosco does not simply wear sentiment like a mask; Fosco tries to convince Marian, and others, that his "character" – his personality or natural disposition – is that of a man of sentiment.

Through Marian's description Collins reveals Fosco's feigned sentiment, highlighting the fact that his true character is unknown.

As Marian spends more time in Fosco's presence, she continues to describe him in terms of his feigned sentimentality. She notes, "Judging by appearances, the sentimental side of his character was persistently inclined to betray itself still. He was silent and sensitive, and ready to sigh and languish ponderously (as only fat men can sigh and languish) on the smallest provocation" (294). Fosco feigns these sentimental responses to conversation in order to attempt to gain the trust of Marian and Laura so that he can emotionally manipulate them into sharing her allowance with Sir Percival. Marian also notes that Fosco has a way of conducting himself during conversation which demonstrates his readiness to hear and engage in sentimental topics. She states, "He has that quiet deference, that look of pleased, attentive interest, in listening to a woman, and that secret gentleness in his voice, in speaking to a woman" (221). That is, Fosco, the actor playing a sentimental character, knows his audience and strives to make them feel at ease during the conversation so that they feel comfortable enough to discuss sentimental topics in his presence. By using sentimentality in this manner, he tries to manipulate Laura and Marian into trusting him. However, just like Harley from *The Man of Feeling*, Fosco is unable to use his feigned sentimentality to form a truly trusting emotional connection and is therefore incapable of manipulating people into giving away their money. Regardless, the fact that Fosco feigns sentiment for financial gain reveals his sinister nature.

Fosco also feigns sentimentality in order to achieve other goals. For instance, he fraudulently exhibits sympathy for Fairlie in order to convince him to write a letter which

will give him the authority to control Marian and Laura. His ability to sympathize further aligns him as a man of sentiment, as instant empathy is a key trait of sentimentality. Van Sant notes that sentimental protagonists demonstrate sensibility, which “was the basis for an immediate, almost involuntary sympathy” (48). Fosco, a complete stranger to Fairlie, feigns this sympathy, which allows him to immediately win Fairlie’s approval due to his ability to appeal to Fairlie’s sentimental and nervous nature. Festa notes that “sentimentality embroils readers in willful acts of self-manipulation, putting them in emotional leading strings and inviting them to twitch the threads themselves in the puppetlike presence of sentimental figures” (32). However, during this meeting, Fosco is in the same position as the reader of the sentimental novel – he finds himself in the presence of a true man of sentiment: Fairlie. Fosco is able to “self-manipulate” by responding to Fairlie with feigned sentiment. For instance, when Fosco first enters Fairlie’s apartments, he says, “I beg you will not disturb yourself – I beg you will not move [...] I am afraid you are suffering to-day” (355-56). Fosco’s noticing and pretending to sympathize with Fairlie’s nervous ailments immediately work in his favor. However, this sentimentality is feigned: Festa notes, “The structure of sentimentality closely parallels the structure of irony, but whereas irony produces self-conscious knowledge of its own inauthenticity, sentimentality (which must not necessarily understand its own inauthenticity) produces tears” (32). That is, Fosco is conscious of the inauthenticity of his sentimentality as evidenced by the fact that he never suffers from his sentimentality as Fairlie does. Fosco further demonstrates his ability to feign empathy when he states, “Can I enter this room (where you sit a sufferer), and see you surrounded by these admirable objects of Art, without discovering that you are a man whose feelings

are acutely impressionable, whose sympathies are perpetually alive?" (356). Fosco here forms a connection with Fairlie through a recognition of their shared sentimentality by acknowledging Fairlie's sentimentality and demonstrating his own. Fosco uses his knowledge of sentimentality to manipulate Fairlie into writing the letter, giving himself control over Laura so that he can separate her from Marian.

However, Fosco also feigns sympathy in order to control his wife; this form of sentimentality serves no other purpose than to please himself. Fosco's sentimental power is so strong that he is capable of controlling and taming his wife in the same manner in which he tames his pets. Marian notes Fosco's treatment of the Countess: "he kisses her hand, when she gives him his cigarettes; he presents her with sugar-plums, in return, which he puts into her mouth playfully" (224-25). Fosco trains the Countess to complete tasks that satisfy him and rewards her with feigned sentimental affection. Fosco's use of sentiment to control the Countess is further demonstrated when the Countess steps in and defends her husband. That is, during a conversation in which Marian and Laura interrupt Fosco, the Countess intervenes by stating, "Pray allow the Count to proceed... You will find, young ladies, the *he* never speaks without having excellent reasons for all that he says" (238). Once again, Fosco offers the Countess a "bon-bon" as a reward for her good behavior (238). Fosco rewards these behaviors with treats and affection, just as one would reward a dog for obeying commands. Fosco uses treats and feigned sentiment to act as his affection for the Countess, in turn working to manipulate her into acting in ways that benefit and satisfy the Count rather than herself. The manner in which Fosco controls his wife further emphasizes the sinister characteristics which accompany feigned sentimentality.

In addition to manipulating Fairlie and controlling the Countess, Fosco demonstrates his feigned sentimentality through his relationships with his cockatoo, canary birds, and white mice. These pets function as sentimental objects, just like the caged starling in Laurence Sterne's *A Sentimental Journey*. Like the bird in Sterne's sentimental novel, which has been trained to say the words "I can't get out," Fosco's pets have also been trained to behave in performative ways (Sterne 60). Sterne's starling has been taught to say something which invokes empathy and feeling in those who hear it, but Fosco's pets function in a different manner by representing his display of sentimentality in order to gain control. For instance, "The cockatoo, a most vicious and treacherous bird towards everyone else, absolutely seems to love him" (222). Marian describes in great detail the manners in which Fosco's pets are trained and the tricks that they can perform on command. The canary birds "perch fearlessly on his hand, mount his fat outstretched fingers one by one, when he tells them to 'go upstairs,' and sing together as if they would burst their throats with delight, when they get to the top of the finger" (222). Marian also notes that Fosco "has taught the creatures to be surprisingly fond of him, and familiar with him" (222). That is, these pets are not naturally fond of Fosco: He gains the ability to manipulate and control the creatures by teaching them to become fond of him and trust him. Thus, because Fosco has to teach the pets to be fond of him, the fondness that they exhibit is not genuine; rather, it is merely another trick that the creatures have learned. While these pets appear to be fond of Fosco, these "feelings" are only a display of his ability to dominate them. While the starling's training results in evoking sentimental feelings for the pet, Fosco's command of the pets demonstrates his control and evokes pleasure in him via exhibiting his control over a living being. This

lack of true sentimental feeling is demonstrated through Fosco's willingness to abandon his birds when Walter confronts him and demands that he leave the country. Fosco initially feigns sentiment, stating, "My cockatoo, my canaries, and my little mice – who will cherish them, when their good Papa is gone?" (611). However, Fosco quickly provides a plan to part with his birds: "I will offer my canaries and my cockatoo to this vast Metropolis – my agent shall present them, in my name, to the Zoological Gardens of London" (611). Despite readily abandoning his "sentimental" canaries and cockatoo, Fosco is unable to part with all of his pets due to his desire to control other beings. He states, "All human resolution...has its limits. [...] I cannot part with my white mice" (611). Fosco determines to keep his mice not because of his sentimental affection for the creatures, but due to his desire to exhibit control over another living being. Though developed through exhibiting control over other living beings, Fosco's relationship with his pets represents another way in which he acts in the "character" of a man of feeling.

While Wilkie Collins presents Fairlie in a manner that establishes his authentic sentimentality, and Fosco in a manner that demonstrates his feigned sentimentality, he also demonstrates the consequences of these sentimental traits. For instance, Collins presents Fairlie as a man of feeling in order to portray the negative aspects and consequences of uncontrolled sentimentality. The first consequence is that Fairlie is constantly made ill from all that he feels, and as a result he suffers uncontrollably and alienates himself from others. As a consequence of this alienation, however, characters like Walter perceive Fairlie as having a "habitual want of feeling" (Collins 437). That is, his friends and family begin to interpret his avoidance as a sign that he does not care about anyone but himself. Fairlie also suffers the consequences of falling into Fosco's

manipulative scheme. During his meeting with Fosco, Fairlie's desire to be free from the suffering he endures while entertaining company motivates him to submit to Fosco's request without considering Laura's well-being. Fairlie states, "I determined to get rid of the Count's tiresome eloquences, and of Lady Glyde's tiresome troubles, by complying with the odious foreigner's request and writing the letter at once" (362-63). By giving in to Fosco in order to end his nervous suffering, Fairlie unknowingly gives Fosco the ability to separate Laura and Marian. Thus, Collins demonstrates that Fairlie's uncontrolled sentiment results in his putting his own comfort before that of others, resulting in his selfish, yet unintentional, endangerment of his niece.

Similarly, Collins demonstrates the negative consequences of Fosco's feigned sentimentality. Fosco claims that the reason he is caught by Marian and Walter is his uncontrolled sentiment for Marian. He states, "With what inconceivable rapidity I learnt to adore [Marian]. At sixty, I worshipped her with the volcanic ardour of eighteen. [...] What are we (I ask) but puppets in a show-box? Oh, omnipotent Destiny, pull our strings gently! Dance us mercifully off our miserable little stage!" (615). By describing himself as a puppet that is controlled by destiny, Fosco makes it clear that he has no control over his feelings for Marian. As a result, he finds her wit and determination to be charming, and therefore he fails to protect himself from being caught. That is, because he has consistently feigned sentiment, he has no knowledge of how to manage authentic sentiment when he finally experiences it. Due to this ignorance, Fosco suffers the consequence of being outsmarted by a woman he cannot control. He states, "Behold the cause, in my Heart – behold, in the image of Marian Halcombe, the first and last weakness of Fosco's life!" (627). Fosco declares that this will be the only time that he

exhibits this type of weakness, yet he has done nothing to demonstrate that he has changed as a result of being outsmarted by a woman. That is, he shows no signs of attempting to try to change his ways by refraining from feigning sentimentality. For instance, after describing his sentiment for Marian, Fosco labels himself as simultaneously being “a Man of Sentiment and a Man of Business” (623). However, Collins demonstrates the consequences of mixing sentiment with business by portraying the complex web of lies and deceptions which Fosco has to maintain (due to his feigned sentimentality) in order to conduct business successfully and get away with his master plan of taking Laura’s inheritance. By feigning sentiment, Fosco puts on a persona which he uses to control and manipulate others, and the more detailed this persona becomes, the more difficult it becomes for Fosco to put on the persona.

By making direct references to sentimental novels and modeling two of its characters in the sentimental tradition, *The Woman in White* offers a critique of the sentimental genre by emphasizing the impractical nature of living as a man of feeling in nineteenth-century society. Collins uses Fairlie and Fosco to demonstrate both the hindrances of sentimentality and the unrealistic nature of being driven by sentiment. According to John Mullan, the sentimental protagonist exhibits a “readiness to be touched (particularly by others’ distress), to display tender feelings, to be susceptible to sympathy,” while the sentimental genre relies on “the reader’s pity” and “the benevolent instincts of a virtuous reader, who might be expected to suffer with those of whom he or she read” (238). Ultimately, the sentimental novel “promised an occasion for fine feeling” that would be experienced by both the protagonist and the reader (238). While the sensation novel aims to “shock and excite: to produce a literal sensation upon the

body,” it does not depend on reader response like the sentimental novel does (Allan 87). Unlike the sentimental novel, which represents “the consequence of an anxiety about the sociability of individuals,” the sensation novel creates sensational responses by playing on cultural anxieties (Mullan 250). Collins uses Fairlie and Fosco to critique the sentimental dependence on “fine feeling” in order to demonstrate the dangerous susceptibilities surrounding sentimentality. That is, Fairlie demonstrates the danger of indulging in “fine feelings” to the point at which it becomes impossible to control those feelings. Like the sentimental protagonist, Fairlie’s sentimentality results in suffering and illness, but also in the failure “to find a social space in which [his] sympathies can operate” (250). In contrast to the sentimental protagonist, Fosco feigns sentimentality in order to manipulate others. He successfully manipulates Fairlie, demonstrating the tendency for the sentimental figure (Fairlie) to become the subject of manipulative schemes. While Fosco manipulates Fairlie, he is incapable of manipulating characters like Marian, Laura, and Walter due to their rejection of sentimental ideologies; this demonstrates the ineffectiveness of feigning sentimentality. For example, Marian does not sympathize with Fosco’s sentimentality because she feels that it was “not assumed for the occasion,” signifying that sentimentality is not well-suited for nineteenth century society (Collins 291). Thus, Collins illustrates that sentimentality is ineffective because his readers should no longer sympathize with it, and that it is dangerous because it can result in the loss of control. By creating a critique of the sentimental genre, Collins presents a new genre, sensation fiction, in stark opposition to it – which creates emotional response by dramatizing the cultural anxieties and concerns that motivate characters like Marian and Walter to act in a manner that both protects and restores order. That is,

Marian and Walter utilize their emotional responses in order to protect those characters, like Laura, who were endangered over the course of the novel, and to re-establish a sense of bourgeois normality. By utilizing their emotional responses in this manner, Marian and Walter demonstrate another goal of the sensation novel: to successfully navigate sensational circumstances by regulating emotions and rejecting the detrimental aspects of sentimentality.

CHAPTER III

OVERCOMING SENTIMENTAL WEAKNESS: THE FUNCTION OF GENRE IN *LADY AUDLEY'S SECRET*

Mary Elizabeth Braddon's sensation novel *Lady Audley's Secret* demonstrates the dangers of indulging in sentimental behaviors. Braddon alludes to sentimental poems and texts which she then associates with weakness. Braddon's portrayal of sentimentality shows the manner in which sentiment hinders characters from being successful. In addition to qualifying sentimentality as a weakness, Braddon shows that a rejection of sentimental ideologies is necessary to behave rationally and achieve success. Throughout the novel, Lady Audley and Robert Audley learn to control their emotions and reject sentimentality in order to achieve their goals. Existing scholarship on the novel tends to focus on the emotional development of the characters rather than their rejection of sentimentality, focusing instead on Lady Audley's emotional expression as a form of transgression and Robert Audley's emotion as evidence of his homoerotic desire. A few scholars do discuss the genre of *Lady Audley's Secret*; however, they have yet to consider the way in which emotion functions as a critique of generic conventions. In what follows, I argue that Braddon uses the emotional development of her characters in order to critique the sentimental genre, for valorizing unregulated expressions of emotion.

Other literary scholars focus on the emotional expressions of male characters in *Lady Audley's Secret*, which they analyze through a gender studies perspective. For example, Herbert G. Klein focuses primarily on the characters of Sir Michael and Robert

Audley in order to demonstrate that these men are presented as being more feminine than their female counterparts. Klein argues that the novel is “a subversive deconstruction of gender stereotypes, because men are shown to be essentially weak and therefore in need of a strong woman” (162). Rachel Heinrichs, however, argues that “Braddon undermines...self-transformation at every point of progress towards a new masculinity [...] the gentleman of the 1860s [functions] as the model of masculinity that Robert unsuccessfully aspires to realize” (104). Jennifer S. Kushnier combines a gender studies approach with a new historicist approach in order to analyze Robert Audley’s homoerotic behaviors. Kushnier states, “whereas all-male institutions can indeed foster such an environment...Robert’s homosociality at Eton is the result of factors other than the absence of women” (61). Kushnier further claims that Braddon references the notoriously homosexual Eton in order to critique elite public education (62). Similarly, Richard Nemesvari focuses on Robert Audley, and argues that “Braddon explicitly presents the threat posed by her central female character as a challenge to male homosocial bonds” (515). Lynn M. Voskuil combines a gender studies approach with a new historicist approach when she references Victorian texts by George Henry Lewes and Henry Maudsley in order to analyze the conventions of femininity. Voskuil focuses on the authenticity of femininity, and claims that “Braddon’s novel was threatening because, in the controversial figure of Lady Audley, the Victorian logics of authenticity were pushed to their conceptual and ideological extremes – thereby exposing the cruel paradoxes that authorized middle-class constructions of its own superiority” (613).

While some critics do focus on the genre of *Lady Audley’s Secret*, they have yet to analyze the relationship between the sentimental genre and the sensation genre. For

instance, Chiara Briganti focuses on the Gothic setting of Audley court and compares Lady Audley and the former nuns of Audley Court to examine female autonomy in the novel and compare it to female subjectivity in Gothic fiction. Briganti notes that throughout *Lady Audley's Secret* many traditions of gothic fiction are reversed, resulting in the development of the sensation genre. Briganti argues that “Lady Audley is strangled by her past, which becomes one with the past of women, of her mad, girlish mother, and of the nuns of Gothic fiction, [but in the case of Lady Audley,] female subjectivity is allowed some play” (192). While Briganti does focus on genre, her focus is limited to the manner in which this reversal of gothic tradition reveals the dangers of adhering to Victorian ideals of femininity. Pamela K. Gilbert also discusses the genre of *Lady Audley's Secret*, noting that the novel is “often credited with (or accused of) laying the foundation for the sensation novel, [despite the fact that it] contains many elements outside of and even contradicting the sensation genre” (220). Gilbert argues that the novel contains two differing narratives: “the coming-of-age and social integration of Robert Audley, a traditional high-culture theme, and the decline and fall of the scheming adventuress, a popular culture melodrama” (218). Gilbert further argues that “thematically and structurally, [these] two narratives are mediated by male desire to know the Other, an Other which is metaphorically represented throughout the text as a desirable female body which is a threat to the masculine social body” (218). Gilbert’s focus on the differing narratives which co-exist within the novel highlights the manner in which ideal Victorian femininity threatened male social bonds and roles. While Briganti and Gilbert both analyze the function(s) of the sensation genre, their readings focus on genre as a way to better understand female subjectivity. In contrast to Briganti and

Gilbert, I will be focusing on the relationship between generic categories. Specifically, I will study the relationship between to affect-based genres (the sentimental and the sensation genres) in order to determine how the sensation genre distinguishes itself from the sentimental genre.

In contrast to these critics, I posit that *Lady Audley's Secret* uses sentimental expressions as critique of genre. Through the characters of Lady Audley and Robert Audley, Braddon demonstrates the importance of learning to regulate emotions. Lady Audley adamantly rejects sentimentality in order to become a successful upper-class woman. However, Lady Audley experiences a momentary lapse in her sentimental rejection, suffers the consequences, and overcomes this lapse by combating sentiment with rationality. In contrast, Robert Audley initially indulges in sentimentality and is incapable of being a successful investigator until he learns to reject sentimentality. Like Lady Audley, Robert overcomes the hindrances of sentimentality by rejecting sentimentalism and replacing it with rationality, and thereby emerges as a worthy adversary for the diabolical Lady Audley. In this way, Braddon critiques sentimentalism by aligning rationality with success and sentimentality with weakness.

Braddon makes a direct reference to sentimental literature in the title of Volume I, Chapter VI, "Anywhere, Anywhere Out of the World" (42). As noted by the editor, Lyn Pykett, this chapter title is a line from a sentimental poem by Thomas Hood titled "The Bridge of Sighs" (383). This poem reflects the unfortunate circumstances that Lady Audley falls into; however, the reactions to these circumstances differ drastically. The speaker of the poem describes a young woman who has been found dead, and implies that she committed suicide by drowning herself: "In she plunged boldly — / No matter how

coldly / The rough river ran” (Hood 72-74). Hood also implies that the young woman committed suicide because she was exiled from her home and family due to an illegitimate pregnancy: “Near a whole city full / Home she had none” (47-48). Despite this, however, the act of suicide restores her purity and beauty as the speaker describes her as being “Fashion’d so slenderly / Young, and so fair!” (7-8). The speaker also states, “All that remains of her / Now is pure womanly” (19-20). This sentimental poem suggests that when a woman experiences abandonment her only hope is to abandon the world by committing suicide. As a result, women are presented as helpless victims with no agency; that is, this poem implies that women require a patriarchal figure or a husband in order to function in the world. This poem sentimentalizes the suffering of the young protagonist and invokes pity in the reader. Jessie Van Sant refers to Samuel Johnson’s explanation of the process of creating and experiencing pity; Johnson states:

All joy or sorrow for the happiness or calamities of others, is produced by an act of the imagination, that realizes the event however fictitious, or approximates it however remote, by placing us, for a time, in the condition of him whose fortune we contemplate; so that we feel, while the deception lasts, whatever motions would be excited by the same good or evil happening to ourselves (Van Sant 16).

Therefore, by using vivid details of the young protagonist’s death, as well as emphasizing her beauty (which is only noted after her death), Hood invokes pity in the reader, while simultaneously highlighting the fact that the protagonist is robbed of agency. Because this young woman is pregnant with an illegitimate child, she loses her partner, her family, and her home; she has no support system and no means by which to provide for herself or

a newborn, leaving her with only one option: suicide. By emphasizing the protagonist's lack of agency, Hood allows readers to fully comprehend the severity of the protagonist's situation, which in turn, invokes pity in the reader.

Lady Audley's plight is relatable to the one which Hood's protagonist experiences. Both women are described in terms of their beauty and physicality rather than their internal qualities. Additionally, both women are abandoned by their lovers and left to fend for themselves. While the plights faced by Lady Audley and the young woman in "The Bridge of Sighs" are similar, their reactions to their circumstances differ drastically. While Lady Audley also experiences abandonment, she responds in a completely different manner by abandoning her son and her father, faking her death, and creating a new identity. Additionally, while the dead woman in the poem is described in terms of beauty and purity, the response to Lady Audley's death is very different. Braddon's reference to this poem is significant as this chapter describes George Talboys visiting his father-in-law and his son for the first time after Lady Audley's death. While George does express sadness at the loss of his wife and the mother of his child, he does not take responsibility for his son. In fact, he goes so far as to say, "every inch of this accursed ground is hateful to me—I want to run out of it as I would out of a graveyard" (44). Rather than feeling sympathetic towards his deceased wife, whose suffering and death his desertion has caused, George is repulsed by her memory. Braddon strategically alludes to "Anywhere, Anywhere, Out of the World" in order to critique sentimental responses to the dire situations women face. By referencing this poem, Braddon makes it clear that Lady Audley does not literally go "Out of the World" by faking her death and creating a new identity; instead, she rejects the role of sentimental victimhood in order to

escape her unhappy circumstances. Additionally, Braddon emphasizes that Lady Audley's ability to abandon her father and son highlights her lack of familial feeling. By contrasting the sympathetic tone of the poem with the unsympathetic attitude of George, Braddon demonstrates that Lady Audley's actions are completely rational and thereby void of sentiment. Lady Audley rejects sentimentality by refusing to commit suicide like the victim in Hood's poem and, in turn, reacts strategically by "leaving the world" (her home and family) in order to make a better life for herself.

During Lady Audley's confession, Braddon further emphasizes Lady Audley's rational rejection of sentimentalism. For instance, while describing her unhappy childhood, Lady Audley explains the moment she fully understood the negative impact that poverty would have on her life. She states, "I felt the bitterness of poverty, and ran the risk of growing up an ignorant creature amongst coarse rustic children, because my father was poor" (297). Despite this realization, Lady Audley refused to accept this fate by taking measures to avoid a lifetime of poverty. She recalls that as a school girl she "learned the [her] ultimate fate in life depended upon [her] marriage, and [she] concluded that if [she] was indeed prettier than [her] schoolfellows, [she] ought to marry better than any of them" (298). Thus, Lady Audley once again rejects the sentimental notion of feminine helplessness and victimization by developing a rational plan to escape her unhappy childhood through marriage. Furthermore, when George abandons Lady Audley and she finds herself facing poverty and unhappiness, she once again refuses to accept the role of victim. Instead, she decides to escape her unhappy circumstances: "these fits of desperation resolved themselves into a desperate purpose. I determined to run away from this wretched home which my slavery supported. I determined to desert this father who

had more fear of me than love for me” (301). Lady Audley’s determination to escape her unhappy circumstances functions as a rejection of sentimentality because she is actively refusing to remain in an environment that creates unpleasant feelings; she recognizes that *she* is in control of her life and makes a plan to escape this negative environment and settle down in a new, happier environment in which she will be financially secure. By rejecting sentimentality and refusing to fall helplessly into the role of victim when faced with hardships, Lady Audley demonstrates rational thinking which allows her to marry upwards, thereby achieving financial security and happiness.

Moreover, a conversation between Robert Audley and Dr. Mosgrave, regarding Lady Audley’s sanity, further demonstrates Lady Audley’s sanity. Dr. Mosgrave notes that he does not believe Lady Audley to be mad because “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” (321). Dr. Mosgrave determines that Lady Audley reacted calmly and reasonably while stuck in a “desperate position,” and it is her ability to control her emotional reactions which allows her to concoct her plan of action by using “intelligent means.” Lady Audley does not respond to her circumstances emotionally, and as a result she maintains her ability to reason. Unlike the woman in “The Bridge of Sighs,” Lady Audley refuses to be controlled by sentimentality and as a result she does not find herself overcome with emotion to the point that she contemplates suicide. Rather, when faced with hardships, Lady Audley repeatedly assess her situation and uses reason to develop and enact a plan to escape those hardships. Thus, through Lady Audley’s repeated rejection of sentimentality, Braddon demonstrates the manner in which sentiment

functions as a weakness and rationality functions as a strength.

While Lady Audley demonstrates the benefits of rejecting sentimentality, she also functions to demonstrate the consequences of indulging in sentimentality: Lady Audley's possession of sentimental objects represents a lapse in her rational thinking. As discussed in the preceding chapter, such objects are "supposedly singular, priceless, incommensurable with other values and other forms of valuation" (Festa 67). At the beginning of the novel, Phoebe, Lady Audley's lady-maid, is convinced by her significant other, Luke, to rummage through Lady Audley's dressing room. There, the couple discovers a secret drawer in Lady Audley's jewelry box; the drawer contains "a baby's worsted shoe rolled up in a piece of paper, and a tiny lock of pale and silky yellow hair, evidently taken from a baby's head" (32). This secret drawer contains the only items that Lucy Audley possesses from her previous life as Helen Talboys—the only physical reminder she has of her abandoned child and her role as mother. However, Braddon demonstrates, through these objects, the negative qualities of sentimentalism. As Festa notes, "by inviting us to have feelings about things—to love them—the sentimental seduces us into taking object for subject; by packaging feelings in a commodity form, the sentimental text replaces subject with object, putting a price on what should not be (cannot be) commoditized" (69). Phoebe immediately recognizes the objects as a commodity when she tells Luke, "I'd rather have this than the diamond bracelet you would have liked to take" (32). Phoebe understands that these objects are sentimental, and due to their discreet hiding place, they are obviously intended to be kept secret. Phoebe perceives these sentimental objects in their commoditized form, understanding them to be more valuable than jewelry. This perception becomes evident later in the

novel when Phoebe uses the sentimental objects to blackmail Lady Audley into giving Luke enough money to buy a public-house and pay their rent when they are short on money. Lady Audley also sees these objects as commodities, as she gives in to the blackmailing in order to protect her secret and maintain her sentimental objects. Once these sentimental objects become commoditized, they become a tool with which Phoebe and Luke can exploit Lady Audley. Therefore, through the discovery of Lady Audley's sentimental objects—and thereby, the discovery of Lady Audley's secret past—Braddon demonstrates the manner in which possessing sentimental objects creates vulnerability and weakness.

Lady Audley also has a sentimental lapse when she experiences feelings of pity. The narrator notes that Lady Audley experiences “some touch of womanly feeling, some sentiment of compassion” when she thinks about Sir Michael learning her secret. The narrator continues, “For a moment the horrible egotism of her own misery yielded to her pitying tenderness for another. It was perhaps only a semi-selfish tenderness after all, in which pity for herself was as powerful as pity for her husband” (263). According to Jessie Van Sant, “Insensibility is another word for psychological impenetrability in the face of misery that ought to produce pity. [...] The lack of [sensibility] equates with hard-heartedness” (48). By yielding to pity, both for herself and for Sir Michael, Lady Audley demonstrates a lapse in sentimental control. This lapse demonstrates that Lady Audley is not a cold, calculating automaton, but rather a woman who achieves her goals by maintaining control of her sentimentality. However, because of this lapse in sentimental control, Lady Audley becomes vulnerable and gives into Robert's demands for a confession, which consequentially results in the loss of her success and happiness.

In contrast to Lady Audley, Braddon presents Robert Audley as a character in which early sentimentality functions as a weakness. One sentimental weakness that Robert demonstrates is his tendency to take in stray dogs. The narrator notes: “[Robert’s] chambers were converted into a perfect dog-kennel by his habit of bringing home stray and benighted curs, who were attracted by his looks in the street, and follow him with abject fondness” (33). While the narrator remains objective, Robert’s cousin, Alicia Audley, gives a very negative description of Robert’s fondness for stray dogs. Alicia criticizes Robert for being “selfish,” stating, “You take home half-starved dogs, because you like half-starved dogs. You stoop down and pat the head of every good-for-nothing cur in the village street. You notice little children, and give them half-pence, because it pleases you to do so” (103). Jessie Van Sant notes that eighteenth century novels often feature scenes that prove that the “evidence of physical sensibility is to gaze on suffering” (52). In addition, “the provocation of a sensibility, caused by misfortune, evil agents, an author, or a scientist, can invite either objective scrutiny or sympathetic identification” (53). Robert is incapable of seeing the starving, suffering dogs without responding through expressions of sympathy, which persists to the point that Robert resolves to bring the strays home. Alicia’s criticism of Robert’s reaction to seeing stray dogs highlights the manner in which sentimentality is presented as a weakness. Robert’s relationship with the dogs invites “objective scrutiny” from Alicia, as she recognizes that his affection for the starving dogs does not stem from feelings of genuine sympathy. That is, by pointing out that Robert is “selfish” because he “like[s] half-starved dogs,” Alicia reveals that Robert’s relationship with the dogs is merely a form of self-indulgence. Robert enjoys seeing the starving dogs and the poor children because he enjoys the feelings of pity that

they invoke. Therefore, Robert helps the dogs and the children in order to mask his self-indulgences as acts of kindness.

Robert's fondness for nostalgic memories also demonstrates the manner in which sentimentality functions as a weakness. By continuously having nostalgic thoughts about George, Robert is initially ineffective as an investigator. This is demonstrated immediately during his reunion with George: directly after greeting him, Robert states his eagerness to "[start] off immediately for the Crown and Sceptre, or the Castle, Richmond, where they could have a bit of dinner, and talk over those good old times when they were together at Eton" (35). Robert's urgent desire to discuss old memories causes him to overlook George's needs, and in turn, demonstrates Robert's "addicted indulgence in superficial emotion" (Mullan 236). Robert's sentimental nature continues even after George's disappearance, when the narrator describes Robert's mind as being "full of George Talboys" (77). Robert's constant concern for George's wellbeing demonstrates more sentimental traits: "a readiness to be touched, particularly by others' distress, to display tender feelings, [and] to be susceptible to sympathy" (Mullan 238). These sentimental thoughts occur so frequently that Robert cannot carry out a conversation with Lady Audley without his "thoughts wander[ing], in spite of himself, to George Talboys" (79). Once again, Alicia criticizes Robert's sentimental traits by stating, "Pythias, in the person of Mr Robert Audley, cannot exist for half an hour without Damon, commonly known as George Talboys" (77). According to Greek legend, "Damon stood bail for his friend Pythias" (who was busy arranging his affairs before his execution); however, Pythias arrived at the last minute, saving "Damon from having to die in his place," which impressed the emperor, Dionysius, so much that he pardoned Pythias (384-385n77). By

alluding to a classic male friendship from Greek mythology, Alicia emphasizes the inseparable bond that Robert feels for George. By comparing Robert to Pythias and George to Damon, Alicia makes it clear that Robert depends on George's friendship so much that he is lost and unable to function without him. As will be shown, Robert cannot function as an investigator of George's disappearance because he is constantly burdened with nostalgic and worrisome thoughts of George. By describing Robert's sentimentality as something that causes helplessness and renders Robert an ineffective detective, Alicia demonstrates the manner in which sentimentality causes weakness.

Another critique of sentiment as a weakness is demonstrated in the descriptions of Robert's work ethic. The narrator calls Robert Audley someone who "was supposed to be a barrister," and describes him in terms of his lazy, ineffective nature (32). The narrator states, "he was a handsome, lazy, care-for-nothing fellow" who sometimes "exhausted himself with the exertion of smoking his German pipe, and reading French novels" (32, 33). In addition to this demonstrative image of Robert's lazy nature, the narrator also describes him as a man with a "lymphatic nature" (34). This lethargic nature further prevents Robert from being an effective detective. Van Sant notes that "in the man-of-feeling narrative, plot is displaced because all external action is subordinated to the responses created in a psychologically imagined interior landscape" (118). This laziness, along with his constant thoughts of George, impede the plot of the novel as Robert finds himself trapped in his George-Talboys themed "interior landscape." In order to escape his constant thoughts of George, become a successful barrister and investigator, and move the plot of the novel forward, Robert must reject his sentimentality and overcome his laziness; doing so allows Robert to embrace the "external action" of solving the mystery

of his friend's disappearance, rather than remaining in his "interior landscape."

Over the course of the novel, Robert becomes aware of the fact that his sentimentality is a weakness he must correct. The narrator describes the moment when this awareness first occurs:

The one purpose which had slowly grown up in his careless nature until it had become powerful enough to work a change in that very nature, made him what he had never been before – a Christian; conscious of his own weakness; anxious to keep to the strict line of duty; fearful to swerve from the conscientious discharge of the strange task that had been forced upon him; and reliant on a stronger hand than his own to point the way which he was to go. (135)

The "weakness" that Robert becomes "conscious of" is the sentimental weakness that renders him ineffective as a detective. Robert's newfound Christianity makes him "anxious to keep to the strict line of duty" and seek justice for his friend by focusing on solving the mystery of George's disappearance rather than wallowing in nostalgic thoughts. Christianity helps Robert develop a sense of purpose and duty, which gives him the motivation needed to move forward with the investigation. Additionally, Robert's newfound Christianity instills a sense of fear in him which makes him more hesitant to be distracted from the task at hand, as doing so would mean to go against God's will by disobeying the "stronger hand" that "point[s] the way which he [should] go" (135).

Robert is fully aware that he is an ineffective detective at the same time he feels a desire to solve the mystery surrounding George's disappearance. Thus, in order to become a good detective, Robert must steel himself emotionally – which he is only capable of

doing after he realizes that nostalgia is the source of his unpleasant feelings. Van Sant notes that “someone powerfully affected by surrounding objects and passing events is easily stimulated, excited, or irritated” (58). To avoid the weakening effects of excitement and irritation Robert must learn to regulate and control his sentimental nature.

Robert further realizes that he must regulate his sentimentality when he contemplates the unpleasant feelings that are caused by nostalgic memories of George. For example, Robert’s mind wanders to George during a conversation with Lady Audley when he begins by dwelling on happy memories of George. The narrator states, “He thought of [George] hurrying down to Southampton by the mail train to see his boy. He thought of him as he had often seen him, spelling over the shipping advertisements in the *Times*, looking for a vessel to take him back to Australia” (79). Yet, these happy memories quickly lead to dark thoughts, as the narrator notes: “[Robert] thought of [George] with a shudder, lying cold and stiff at the bottom of some shallow stream, with his dead face turned towards the darkening sky” (79). These unpleasant thoughts continue until Robert tires of his sentimental musings and desires to escape the mystery surrounding George’s death. He states, “If I *could* let the matter rest; if—if I could leave England forever, and purposely fly from the possibility of ever coming across another clue to the secret, I would do it—I would gladly, thankfully do it—but I *cannot!*” (148). According to Robert, he is incapable of escaping the mystery because “a hand which is stronger than [his] own beckons [him] on” (148). Robert is driven by a higher power and his Christian sense of duty. This desire to embrace duty demonstrates Robert’s self-awareness of his emotional weaknesses. As a result, Robert’s Christian sense of duty drives him to steel himself emotionally and regulate his sentimentality, in order to seek

justice for George.

From this point on, Robert begins to regulate his sentimentality. The narrator describes the moment when Robert first demonstrates this ability—specifically while describing “the strongest sentiment of Robert’s heart [...] his love for the grey-bearded baronet” (182). The narrator notes that this “grateful affection” for Sir Michael “seldom found an outlet in words; and a stranger would never have fathomed the strength of feeling which lay, a deep and powerful current, beneath the stagnant surface of the barrister’s character” (182). Robert demonstrates an ability to control his sentimentality by regulating his expressions of emotion. His ability to express his familial feelings of his own free will proves that he is no longer governed by sentimentality, marking a significant change in Robert’s ability as an investigator. For instance, while working to get a confession out of Lady Audley, Robert states that her confession “will be a most cruel surprise, a most bitter grief. But it is necessary for [Sir Michael’s] present honour, and for [his] future peace, that [he] should hear it” (295). Robert demonstrates a regulation of the pity he feels for his uncle by making the moral choice to tell Sir Michael the truth, get a confession out of Lady Audley, and solve the mystery of George’s disappearance. According to Van Sant, “contemplation of the fortunes of others, with the actual eye or the mind’s eye, allows an imaginative exchange of place that ‘makes real’ and ‘brings near’ experience not one’s own. Pity—and all other feeling that arises from a sympathetic exchange of place – is evidence that some degree of interiority has been attributed to the person observed” (16-17). Although he still feels pity, he is no longer ruled by it; instead, Robert steels himself emotionally in order to reveal a painful truth to his uncle, move the investigation forward, and become a successful detective. By doing

so Robert demonstrates his newfound ability to subordinate his immediate emotional state to the demands of moral action.

Robert also demonstrates his ability to regulate his sentimentality when he ignores the pitiful pleas of Lady Audley. For example, Robert maintains emotional control when he speaks to Lady Audley about George's disappearance "with a far more solemn meaning than any sentimental one" (122). This approach causes Lady Audley to "[cry] passionately" and question, "What have I done to you, Robert Audley... what have I done to you, that you should hate me so?" (123). Despite her pleas, Robert feels no pity and continues the interrogation. In addition, the narrator describes Lady Audley as looking like "a childish, helpless, babyfied little creature" that "Robert watched... with some touch of pity in his eyes" (121). Although Robert experiences pity for Lady Audley, he still maintains control of his sentiment, as evidenced by the fact that he continues his interrogation regardless of her appearance or pleas. It is important to note that while Robert does still feel pity for Lady Audley, these feelings are modified: he only feels "some touch" – a vestigial trace of "pity" – which he does not allow to cloud his judgement or hinder his investigation. Robert's sentimental control is further demonstrated when he interrogates Lady Audley. Robert tells Lady Audley, "The day is past for tenderness and mercy. For you I can no longer know pity or compunction" (293). Refraining from indulging in feelings of pity, Robert completely rejects sentimentality towards his aunt. Thus, because of his sentimental control, Robert can refrain from feeling pity for Lady Audley, and conduct a successful interrogation by getting a full confession from Lady Audley. In control of his sentiment, and driven by his sense of Christian duty, Robert uses rationality to reveal the truth behind George's disappearance.

Therefore, through Robert's transition from lazy, nostalgic barrister to active, emotionally steeled detective, Braddon critiques sentimental weakness while exhibiting the manner in which the rejection of sentiment, along with the ability to develop and enact a rational plan, can lead to success.

Throughout the course of the novel Braddon ascribes certain characteristics to Lady Audley and Robert Audley in order to critique sentimentality while also contributing to the development of the sensation genre. For instance, Lady Audley's rejection of the sentimental (which she achieves by responding to her circumstances with reason and logic rather than emotion), critiques the tendency for characters' reactions to be based on emotional instinct within the sentimental genre. While Robert demonstrates the ways in which sentimentality hinders success, he also proves that it is possible to learn to regulate sentimentality and become successful. Braddon's incorporation of these negative sentimental qualities highlights the multifunctional nature of the sensation genre. The first function of the genre is made evident by its very name, as "the term 'sensational' was employed, not to refer to some common formal property intrinsic to each of its various manifestations but, rather, to their perceived effect on the audience" (Allen 87). In addition to "aim[ing] to shock and excite: to produce a literal sensation upon the body," Braddon employs elements of the eighteenth-century sentimental genre within her sensational narrative in order to highlight and critique the weakness that comes with unregulated sentimentality while promoting a different kind of affective state in readers (87). By critiquing the sentimental genre and emphasizing the manner in which it hinders success, Braddon creates a clear distinction between the two emotion-riddled genres. Braddon's sensational plot shows that emotions, when regulated, can be

beneficial. For example, Lady Audley, by regulating her emotions, is able to concoct and enact a plan which will change her life by freeing her from her unhappy circumstances; thus, Lady Audley's emotional regulation and rejection of sentimentality enables her to restore order after her husband's abandonment, and thereby achieve bourgeois normality. Additionally, when Robert Audley learns to regulate his emotions, he becomes a successful detective and finds a sense of purpose which transforms him from a lazy barrister to a hard-working, driven detective. Robert also achieves his own version of bourgeois normality when he solves the mystery of George's disappearance and then finally settles down and marries Clara Talboys. While Braddon does critique the manner in which the sentimental hinders success, she also demonstrates the importance of emotional awareness and regulation. Thus, Braddon distances herself from the emotional wallowing found in the sensation genre, by demonstrating the manner in which emotional awareness and regulation can lead to success and happiness. As a result, Braddon contributes to the emotionally-charged sensation genre with a novel that emphasizes the importance of emotional awareness and regulation, while simultaneously eliciting an emotional reaction in readers with its scandalous, daring anti-hero and plot.

CHAPTER IV

“IT ALL CAME BACK TO HER WITH A HEART-SICKNESS”: SENTIMENTAL SUFFERING IN *EAST LYNNE*

In her sensation novel *East Lynne*, Ellen Wood uses the character of Lady Isabel Vane to demonstrate the consequences of being motivated by sentimentality rather than logic and reason. Lady Isabel’s emotional indulgences result in her being forced to endure the punishment of sentimental suffering until she dies. As this chapter will show, *East Lynne* functions as a cautionary tale that highlights the negative potential of the sentimental tradition of eighteenth-century literature. Wood’s sensation novel, like the sensation novels analyzed in the previous chapters, demonstrates the manner in which unregulated sentimentality hinders success. Existing scholarship has yet to focus on the manner in which *East Lynne* functions to critique the sentimental genre, focusing instead on gender roles within the novel – particularly the complex roles in which women are positioned. In contrast, I argue that Wood emphasizes the negative potential of the sentimental genre by highlighting the dangers of unregulated emotions and punishing emotional indulgences.

Several critics studying *East Lynne* analyze the novel using a gender-studies lens. For instance, Gail Walker argues that *East Lynne* “[sheds light] on the ambiguities and ambivalences of the Victorian attitude toward female sexuality” (299). Walker refers to several nineteenth-century critiques of female sexuality and the idealization of “proper” female conduct in order to demonstrate that Isabel Vane “[suffers] not only for her

violation of the letter of the ideal [Victorian woman], but for her failure to adhere to its spirit,” thereby qualifying her seduction as the punishment for her previous behavior (302). Jeanne B. Elliot also focuses on gender roles; however, she argues that Lady Isabel “is caught between the demands of her own nature and the rigid standards imposed upon her sex and class” (292). Additionally, Richard Nemesvari, in his analysis of both *East Lynne* and Mary Elizabeth Braddon’s *Aurora Floyd*, argues that the two novels “demonstrate how sensationalism’s repeated tropes of extreme affect, and domesticity under threat, reveal flawed discourses of masculinity as significant contributors to the failed household spaces that are so often the sites of its scandalous plots and secrets” (89). He concludes that the two novels “expose but do not resolve the problematic demands of Victorian masculinity [that their male characters] are all caught up in a disordered confusion of affect and potential class-status deracination that severely undercuts manly autonomy” (113).

While the majority of the scholarship is centered around gender roles, a few critics have studied the function of emotion in *East Lynne*. For instance, Heidi Hansson and Catherine Norberg note that the *East Lynne* “is concerned with the devastating results of uncontrolled emotional reactions” (156)². Hansson and Norberg are primarily concerned with the manner in which “metaphors are used to express emotion” throughout the novel, with the ultimate goal of “evaluat[ing] how these metaphorical expressions

² While my research also recognizes the consequences of unregulated expressions of emotion, I am more concerned with the manner in which emotional expressions in *East Lynne* function to highlight the negative potential of the sentimental genre, in order to examine how Wood contributes to the development of the sensation genre (a genre intended to create emotional reactions) while also distancing her novel from the previous emotion-riddled genre, the sentimental genre.

contribute to establishing gender and class differences in the text” (155). Hansson and Norberg argue that “the ambivalent attitudes to emotional excess” reflect the “transitional phase between a generally accepted patriarchal system and emerging feminist challenges to this model” (168-169).

Two critics who have noted the sentimental aspects of the novel, Winifred Hughes and Lyn Pykett, focus on sentimentality as an aspect of melodrama. Hughes argues that *East Lynne* primarily functions as a melodrama rather than a sensation novel, due to its “combination of sin and sentiment, [and] the unrestrained emotional wallowing, [which] ultimately depends on an unquestioning acceptance of conventional morality and conventional standards of behavior” (218). Hughes adds that “the narrator’s sympathy, as in stage melodrama, is contingent upon the heroine’s remorse, upon the heroine’s own total acceptance of the law that she has transgressed” (218). Hughes also argues that *East Lynne*’s “narrow focus on emotional states...deprives [it] of much of the violence and excitement that enliven more typical sensation novels” (219). Similarly, Pykett also notes that Wood’s “plot situations, character types and overt moralising more nearly resemble domestic melodrama” (115). While Pykett does acknowledge the sentimental nature of *East Lynne*, she focuses specifically on the manner in which the “popular lower-class form of melodrama subverts, or at least destabilises, the dominant middle-class forms and norms of domestic fiction” (134). Pykett argues that “that particular mixture of sin and sentiment in *East Lynne* serves to expose the contradictions of the proper feminine, even as the novel works to re-establish it” (134).

In contrast to the previously mentioned critics, I argue that Wood contributes to the development of the sensation novel by distancing herself from the sentimental genre

(which celebrates and valorizes emotions) by demonstrating the potential dangers of unregulated emotions and punishing excessive emotional indulgences. Wood demonstrates the detrimental effects of emotional indulgence through the actions and behaviors of Lady Isabel, whose attraction to Captain Levison during her marriage to Mr. Carlyle, in addition to her jealousy of Barbara Hare, motivate her to desert her husband and children. In the second half of the novel, Lady Isabel suffers the consequences of her actions by being forced to endure sentimental suffering until her death. This sentimental suffering highlights the manner in which sentimentality functions as a weakness, as it prevents Lady Isabel from maintaining happiness and good health.

Throughout the first portion of the novel, Lady Isabel is governed by unregulated emotional indulgence which leads to her downfall. One instance occurs when Lady Isabel develops romantic feelings for Captain Levison even though she is already married to Mr. Carlyle. Upon their arrival in Boulogne, Lady Isabel and Mr. Carlyle run into Levison; the narrator describes the moment Lady Isabel first sees Levison: “Her eyes fell upon him; and—what was it that caused every nerve in her frame to vibrate, every pulse to quicken? *Whose* form was it that was thus advancing, and changing the monotony of her mind into a tumult?” (205). The vibrating nerves and quickened pulse are evidence of a physical attraction to Levison which is further evidenced in a later meeting with him when Lady Isabel is described as having a “brilliant flush of emotion...on her cheeks” (205). Simply seeing Captain Levison results in feelings of attraction which Lady Isabel never felt for Mr. Carlyle. Rather than ending her correspondence with Levison, Lady Isabel continues to be in his presence and indulge in the feelings of attraction.

As Lady Isabel's encounters with Levison continue, this physical attraction transitions into more serious romantic feelings. For instance, the narrator notes, "[Isabel] was aware that a sensation all too warm, a feeling of attraction towards Francis Levison, was working within her; not a voluntary one; she could no more repress it than she could repress her own sense of being" (211-212). Lady Isabel's attraction to Levison becomes so heightened that she is incapable of controlling it. As this involuntary feeling manifests itself, Lady Isabel becomes anxious about the inevitable outcome. The narrator states that Lady Isabel fears "that further companionship, especially lonely companionship, with Francis Levison might augment the sentiments she entertained for him to a height, that her life, for perhaps years to come, would be one of unhappiness and concealment: more than all, she shrank from the consciousness of the bitter wrong that these sentiments cast upon her husband" (212). Lady Isabel's inability to refrain from "lonely companionship" with Levison results in her further developing feelings for a man who is not her husband. This passage highlights Lady Isabel's awareness that her feelings have the potential to overpower her and lead her to dishonor her husband. At the same time, this passage foreshadows the punishment of "unhappiness and concealment" that Lady Isabel will endure after her downfall.

In addition to her attraction to Levison, Lady Isabel also nurses her jealousy of Barbara Hare. According to Markman Ellis, the sentimental is "defined negatively, as the space between more extreme constructions, as a variety of weak thought that will not bear analysis, that escapes or evades discussion, that is not to be analysed by reason or rational debate" (7). This irrational aspect of sentimentality appears as Lady Isabel's jealousy blossoms. For instance, when Mr. Carlyle is unable to accompany Lady Isabel to

dinner at the Jeaffersons, Lady Isabel is overcome with jealous thoughts: “Was he making this excuse to spend the hours of her absence with Barbara Hare? The idea that it was so took firm possession of her mind, and remained there. Her face expressed a variety of feelings, the most prominent that of resentment” (264). As Lady Isabel experiences jealousy, she loses her ability to think rationally. After seeing Mr. Carlyle and Barbara Hare together on the night of the dinner at the Jeaffersons, the narrator notes that “[Lady Isabel] was most assuredly out of her senses that night” (271). Additionally, the narrator notes that “a jealous woman is mad; an outraged woman is doubly mad; and the ill-fated Lady Isabel truly believed that every sacred feeling which ought to exist between man and wife, was betrayed by Mr Carlyle” (271). Lady Isabel indulges in her feelings of jealousy until they become severe enough that she is “outraged,” which leads her to make decisions based on her current emotional status.

As a result of her uncontrollable feelings of attraction towards Levison and feelings of jealousy towards Barbara Hare, Lady Isabel takes “a blind leap in a moment of wild passion” and abandons her husband, her children, and her home (283). This results in Lady Isabel’s downfall, which Wood casts as being due to her jealousy and sexual attraction. Consequently, Lady Isabel suffers a punishment which becomes the main focus of the second half of the novel. According to Winifred Hughes, “in *East Lynne*...the emphasis actually does fall on the punishment, on the exquisite agony of the penitent adulteress, rather than on the original temptation” (218). Additionally, Gail Walker notes that “the fate of Lady Isabel exemplifies the Victorian obsession with female sexual purity through the extreme severity with which her misconduct is punished” (299). Both Hughes and Walker, however, fail to notice the manner in which

Lady is punished – namely, through sentimental suffering which functions to emphasize the dangers of being governed by feelings rather than reason.

Lady Isabel's negative sentimental experience is the punishment for her failure to control her emotions; this sentimental punishment frequently takes the form of painful nostalgic memories. Early on in the novel, before Lady Isabel even commits adultery, nostalgia is coded negatively through the discussion of Lady Isabel's sentimental jewelry. As mentioned in previous chapters, Lynn Festa explains that "to sentimentalize an object is to bestow upon it the kind of singularity that defies the commodity form. [...] By inviting us to have feelings about things—to love them—the sentimental seduces us into taking object for subject" (69). In *East Lynne*, Lady Isabel wears a set of pearl bracelets and "a golden cross, set with seven emeralds" of which she states: "It was given to me by my dear mamma just before she died. [...] I only wear it upon great occasions" (15). Mrs. Vane criticizes Lady Isabel's sentimentality, stating: "You old-fashioned child! Because your mamma wore those bracelets, years ago, is that a reason for you doing so?" (15). Mrs. Vane's criticism continues after the cross is accidentally dropped and broken by Levison, causing an emotional reaction from Lady Isabel. Mrs. Vane states, "Why! you are never crying over a stupid bauble of a cross!" (16). While Mrs. Vane criticizes Lady Isabel's sentimental attachment to these pieces of jewelry, Lady Isabel tries to justify her sentiment by arguing that the broken cross "must be an evil omen" (17). This passage highlights the narrative's negative perspective on the sentimental genre, as Mrs. Vane's criticism points out that Lady Isabel is overvaluing an object by taking it for the subject (her mother). When Lady Isabel tries to justify her emotional attachment by claiming that the broken necklace "must be an evil omen," Mrs. Vane responds with more criticism: "I

declare...you are crying again!...if you can't put a stop to this, I shall order the carriage home, and go [to the Duchess of Dartford's] alone" (17). Mrs. Vane criticizes Lady Isabel for this emotional suffering—a suffering that is self-inflicted as a result of converting the sentimental object into something that will also cause future suffering (as an evil omen).

The sentimental genre is further coded negatively throughout the second half of the novel when it takes the form of punishment, typically in the form of painful, nostalgic memories. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, nostalgia is the “sentimental longing for or regretful memory of a period of the past,” especially within “an individual's own lifetime” (“nostalgia, n.”). Throughout the second half of the novel, Lady Isabel finds herself plagued with nostalgic memories of her past life at East Lynne; the narrator notes, “sharp lances perpetually thrust upon her memory – the Lady Isabel’s memory – from all sides, were full of cruel stings, unintentionally though they were hurled” (591). A portion of these painful memories that attack Lady Isabel’s mind occur as a result of being in her former home. For instance, when Lady Isabel returns to East Lynne disguised as Madame Vine, she is overcome with memories of the home that once belonged to her, as well as a longing for her previous life. The narrator describes the moment when Lady Isabel is being guided through her former home: “The doors of her old bed and dressing-rooms stood open, and she glanced in with a yearning look. No, never more, never more could they be hers: she had put them from her by her own free act and deed. [...] No: these rooms were not for her now” (401). The narrator emphasizes the fact that this tour of her former home is a punishment by making it clear that no matter how badly she longs for her former life it will never be hers again as she willingly

gave it up as a result of her emotional indulgences. The repetitive use of negatives (“No, never more, never more,” “no”) throughout the description of this tour emphasizes the severity of this punishment by underscoring the fact that Lady Isabel can enter her former home, but she will never experience her home as she previously did, as a wife and mother. Additionally, the “yearning look” demonstrates Lady Isabel’s sentimental longing for her previous life; however, this sentimental longing is immediately interrupted by the narrator’s reminder that Lady Isabel willingly gave up her previous life and is now enduring the sentimental suffering as punishment. The painful reminder that she is being punished continues as she enters the drawing room and the narrator notes: “The old familiar drawing-room; its large, handsome proportions, its well-arranged furniture, its bright chandelier! It all came back to her with a heart-sickness. No longer *her* drawing-room, that she should take pride in it: she had flung it away from her when she flung away the rest” (404). Once again, the narrator emphasizes that the “heart-sickness” Lady Isabel feels is all a punishment for her actions. This description of the drawing room begins with positive adjectives – “familiar,” “large, handsome,” “well-arranged,” and “bright” – revealing that the drawing-room remains exactly as Lady Isabel remembers it and in excellent condition (404). Lady Isabel’s memories of her past life, however, intrude on her present life. The narrator shifts to her present “heart-sickness” which is the side-effect of this past memory infecting her present experience (404). As the passage continues the narrator further emphasizes the fact that this “heart-sickness” is self-inflicted by restating the fact that “she...flung [the drawing-room] away” just as she flung away her role as wife and mother (404). This sentimental longing for her former

life at East Lynne functions as a small portion of the sentimental suffering that Lady Isabel endures as punishment for her actions.

Lady Isabel's sentimental punishment continues when she returns to church. Just like when she enters her former home, Lady Isabel is flooded with nostalgic feelings as soon as she enters her former church. The narrator notes:

Sunday came, and that was the worst of all. In the old East Lynne pew at St Jude's, so conspicuous to the congregation, sat she, as in former times...It was the first time she had entered an English Protestant church, since she had last sat in it, there, with Mr Carlyle. That fact alone, with all the terrible remembrances it brought in its train, was sufficient to overwhelm her with emotion (433).

This passage emphasizes the fact that Lady Isabel has avoided attending church during her time away from East Lynne due to all of the painful memories it would provoke.

Among these is her memory of her time as Mr. Carlyle's wife. This proves to be especially painful because it is one that she cannot re-experience. That is, Lady Isabel can relive the experience of attending church, but never as Mr. Carlyle's wife. As a result, attending church proves to be a constant reminder of the life she willingly gave up and the sins she committed by doing so. Moreover, as Lady Isabel is leaving church, she is struck with another wave of nostalgia as she sees her father's tomb. The narrator notes, "She glanced aside at the tomb in the church-yard's corner, where mouldered the remains of her father; and a yearning cry went forth from the very depth of her soul" (433). Thus, in addition to the memories of attending church, Lady Isabel is struck with memories of her deceased father. The sight of her father's tomb serves as a reminder that while she is

in the disguise of Madame Vine, Lady Isabel cannot visit her father's tomb without raising suspicion. While these memories resurface, they remind Lady Isabel of the life she once had before she left East Lynne. These memories function as a punishment because they remind her of a past life that she is incredibly close to but that she can never truly revisit in the way she wants to.

Lady Isabel also experiences nostalgic memories of her former role as a wife, as well as the early days of her courtship with Mr. Carlyle, which emphasize the fact that she has been replaced. For instance, when Mr. Carlyle gives Madame Vine a guinea to cover William's doctor visit, Lady Isabel recalls a similar moment of Mr. Carlyle's generosity after the death of her father. The narrator notes, "Poor, unhappy Lady Isabel! A recollection flashed over her of that morning, years ago, when Lord Mount Severn had handed out to her some gold, three sovereigns: and of the hundred-pound note so generously left in her hands afterwards by another [Mr. Carlyle]. *Then she was his chosen love...Now?* – A pang, as of death, shot through her bitter heart" (473-474). This simple act brings up a once pleasant memory of a time when she was loved by Mr. Carlyle. However, through the use of italics, Wood also emphasizes the fact that this memory is especially painful as it highlights the fact that she is no longer, and never again will be, Mr. Carlyle's wife. This painful memory functions as a punishment as it reminds Lady Isabel of the positive aspects of Mr. Carlyle that she did not properly appreciate in the past. Lady Isabel's sentimental punishment continues when Barbara Carlyle plans a trip to the sea-side to recover from an illness, bringing up yet another nostalgic memory for Lady Isabel. The narrator explains:

Her thoughts went back to the time when *she* had been ordered to the sea-side after an illness. [...] She remembered how her husband had urged the change upon her: how he had taken her, travelling carefully; how tenderly anxious he had been in the arrangements for her comfort, when settling her in the lodgings; how, when he came again to see her, he had met her in his passionate fondness, thanking God for the visible improvement in her looks (594).

Once again, Wood's use of italics functions to emphasize the fact that Lady Isabel is no longer in the role of wife because she has been replaced by Barbara. Along with the painful reminder of the role which she used to fill, this nostalgic memory serves to remind Lady Isabel of the caring, nurturing, and loving man who she willingly abandoned due to her emotional indulgences. Like Lady Isabel's other nostalgic memories, this memory of her time as Mr. Carlyle's wife functions as a punishment by reminding her of the role she willingly gave up when she left East Lynne.

In addition to experiencing painful memories of her former home, her former church, and her former role as wife, Lady Isabel also experiences nostalgia for her role as a mother. When Lady Isabel watches Barbara Carlyle hold her newborn she is overcome with memories of her time as a mother. The narrator states, "*She* had once sat in that very chair, with a baby as fair upon her knee: but, all that was past and gone. She leaned her hot head upon her hand, and a rebellious sigh of envy went forth from her aching heart" (409). Simply watching the new Mrs. Carlyle holding her baby causes Lady Isabel to experience memories of when she held her own babies as Mrs. Carlyle. The use of italics emphasizes the fact that Lady Isabel is no longer mother because she has been replaced;

however, it also functions as a painful reminder that her time as mother is permanently over; even though her children are still living, she is no longer considered their mother, and cannot regain the lost time when she was with Levison rather than them.

Additionally, Lady Isabel's role as governess evokes the sentimental longing for her previous life that is associated with her nostalgic memories. The narrator describes this sentimental longing: "Never had Lady Isabel felt her position more keenly; never had it so galled and fretted her spirit...A hundred times that day did she yearn to hold the children to her heart, and a hundred times she had to repress the longing" (418). The repetition of the word "never" emphasizes the fact that this feeling of longing for her children is a new one – one much worse than anything she has experienced thus far. The narrator emphasizes the severity of Lady Isabel's suffering by using highly charged emotional language to describe the tender feelings she experiences in the presence of her children; this, in turn, demonstrates how Lady Isabel's position as governess leads to sentimental suffering so severe that it "galled and fretted her spirit" because she is in close proximity to them, but she cannot relate to them in a motherly way (418). The narrator emphasizes Lady Isabel's struggle by highlighting the "yearn[ing]" and the "longing" that Lady Isabel feels for her children "a hundred times" throughout the day, while also highlighting the fact that she has to actively work to "repress" these feelings of maternal desire "a hundred times" (418). Thus, Lady Isabel's position as governess, while it allows her to be in the presence of her children, proves to be painful as she can never be in the presence of her children in the role of mother. Therefore, working as governess produces a constant longing for her role as mother while simultaneously serving as a reminder that she will never be a mother again.

While a large part of Lady Isabel's sentimental suffering takes the form of nostalgic longing, she also endures sentimental suffering through her sensitivity to aesthetic experiences. For instance, Lady Isabel witnesses Barbara singing a song to Mr. Carlyle that she used to sing to him before she left East Lynne. As the narrator describes the scene: "Barbara was seated at the piano, and Mr Carlyle stood by her, his arm on her chair, and bending his face on a level with hers, possibly to look at the music. So, once had stolen, so, once had peeped the unhappy Barbara, to hear this self-same song. *She* had been his wife then; she had received his kisses when it was over. Their positions were reversed" (431). On one level this passage demonstrates yet another instance of a painful nostalgic memory which Lady Isabel experiences, as it serves as a reminder of the role she once held as Mr. Carlyle's wife. This memory also serves as a painful reminder of the fact that she has been replaced by Barbara. However, on another level this passage demonstrates Lady Isabel's sensitivity to a song—the same song she once sang to Mr. Carlyle. The song Barbara sings contains the following lyrics:

When other lips and other hearts
Their tales of love shall tell,
In language whose excess imparts
The power they feel so well.
There may perhaps in such a scene
Some recollection be,
Of days that have as happy been –
And you'll remember me (432).

The lyrics directly parallel the current situation in which Lady Isabel finds herself. This song describes the romantic connection between “other lips and other hearts,” which is exactly what Lady Isabel witnesses transpiring between Barbara and Mr. Carlyle (432). These “tales of love” are told in a specific language, one elevated enough to convey the gravity of the love they feel for one another. Additionally, the song refers to the possible “recollection...of days that have as happy been” (432). This line not only causes Lady Isabel to remember the times when she sang for her former husband, but it also causes her to realize that she will never be in Barbara’s position – in a position where she is free to use elevated, artistic language to convey her feelings of love and affection for Mr. Carlyle. By witnessing Barbara play piano and sing to Mr. Carlyle, Lady Isabel experiences nostalgic memories of her past life with Mr. Carlyle. However, Lady Isabel also experiences a painful reminder of the fact that she will never again fulfill the role of wife, while also realizing that she will never experience the pleasantries of the music she once played without being reminded of these changes.

Lady Isabel’s sentimental punishment continues as she watches her son William suffer and die from an illness. According to John Mullan, the sentimental genre demonstrates “a readiness to be touched (particularly by others’ distress), to display tender feelings, [and] to be susceptible to sympathy” (238). Lady Isabel embodies these sentimental traits when she sees her son suffering, but is unable to act in the role of his mother. The narrator notes, “William was seized with a fit of coughing. It was long and violent. Lady Isabel left her seat: she had drawn him to her, and was hanging over him with unguarded tenderness” (419). Lady Isabel’s feelings of tenderness and sympathy towards William are so intense that she forgets about her disguise and role as governess

in order to comfort her son. These feelings continue as the narrator notes: “Lady Isabel gazed down at William, as if she would have devoured him, a yearning, famished sort of expression upon her features. He was white as death. [...] From passive security she had jumped to the other extreme” (440). Lady Isabel watches as though she “would have devoured” William, engulfing him in love and affection while also consuming his illness and taking it on as her own in order to relieve his suffering. The narrator notes the “yearning, famished” way in which Lady Isabel watches her son, pointing out that she is “famished” for the visceral experience of her child. Lady Isabel’s feelings of tenderness and sympathy cause her to long for her son, and worry about his wellbeing, more intensely than she previously did when she abandoned her children. Lady Isabel’s tenderness for her son is evident when he expresses his fear of dying. The narrator states, “William was in a fit of loud, sobbing tears. [...] She hung over him; she clasped her arms round him; her tears, her sobs, mingled with his. She whispered to him sweet and soothing words; she placed him so that he might sob out his grief upon her bosom” (489). Lady Isabel’s tears and comforting words demonstrate her sympathy—a desire to bear his grief and share his pain. This scene functions as a form of sentimental punishment because in the disguise of Madame Vine she cannot fully express her maternal grief without seeming suspicious. Therefore, her becomes a doubly painful experience as Lady Isabel is forced to silently endure the painful emotions associated with watching her son die, without the support of anyone around her, or the freedom to fully express her pain.

While Lady Isabel’s other children are perfectly healthy, she still experiences sentimental suffering by being in their presence. This is made apparent through Lady Isabel’s expression of tenderness towards her children. For instance, when Lady Isabel

sees her son Archibald for the first time since returning to East Lynne, she experiences “an impulse of unrestrainable tenderness” which causes her to “[seize] the child as he was galloping past her, and [carry] him into her room, [...] [sit] upon a low chair, [with] the child held upon her lap, [and kiss] him passionately, [with] tears raining from her eyes” (414). This “unrestrainable tenderness” overpowers Lady Isabel, causing her to react in a manner which is rather awkward for a governess who is meeting her pupil for the first time. That is, Lady Isabel acts with a maternal tenderness which she immediately realizes that she should not be expressing in her position; this is demonstrated when the narrator states, “A sick feeling came over Lady Isabel: she felt as if she had betrayed herself” (414). Lady Isabel’s punishment is that she can no longer freely express the maternal tenderness which she feels for her children. Because she has to repress and control these feelings of tenderness, Lady Isabel’s longing for her children intensifies. The narrator notes: “A hundred times that day did she yearn to hold the children to her heart, and a hundred times she had to repress the longing” (418). While Lady Isabel experiences feelings of tenderness toward her children, these feelings of tenderness alone are not a punishment. Rather, the punishment follows from the fact that these feelings cannot be expressed, and because they intensify her longing for her children and create sentimental suffering as Lady Isabel has to endure the bottling up of emotions which she desperately desires to display.

As a result of her repressed sentimental suffering, Lady Isabel develops a severe illness which leads to her death. According to John Mullan, “Many sentimental novels themselves worried about where the capacities for sympathy and for strong feeling could lead” (249). Mullan also notes that “time and again the protagonists of sentimental fiction

fail to find a social space in which their sympathies can operate. They fall ill because their feelings are turned inwards” (250). For Lady Isabel, the “inward turn” of her sentimental suffering is actively enforced by her situation and the fact that it must be kept secret. Lady Isabel’s illness begins at the same time her punishment begins: upon her return to East Lynne. The sentimental memories of her previous life, as well as her longing for her children, take a toll on her well-being. The narrator states, “of late, the longing had become intense. It was indeed a very fever; and a fever of the worst kind, for it attacked both the mind and the body. Her pale lips were constantly parched: her throat had that malady in it, which those, who have suffered from some hideous burden know only too well” (390). The burden of silently enduring her sentimental punishment causes Lady Isabel to internalize her suffering, which leads to mental and physical illness. These illnesses are further exacerbated as her sentimental punishment continues. For example, as Lady Isabel continues to spend time with her dying son, her condition worsens: she “walked on with a shivering frame, and a heart sick unto death” (523). The narrator also notes that “she began to sink with alarming rapidity. There appeared to be no ostensible disease, but she was wasting away day by day...her fading was observed by none” (562). None of the other characters know the true cause of Lady Isabel’s condition as she has kept it a secret in order to maintain her disguise as Madame Vine. As a result, Lady Isabel continues to experience emotional and physical suffering in secrecy. By presenting sentimentality as a punishment, and by highlighting the physical and mental effects of sentimentality, Wood emphasizes the potential negative outcome of sentimental experience.

In the sensation novels discussed in the previous two chapters, sentimentality has been presented negatively through characters who are overly sentimental and therefore unsuccessful. However, in *East Lynne* sentiment is used differently, as it is a punishment for earlier unregulated emotional indulgences. Because the sentimental genre is presented in this manner throughout the novel, other characters are unaware of the punishment which Lady Isabel endures. According to Benedict, “the first eighteenth-century fictions of literary sentimentalism were brief vignettes depicting characters expending violent emotions, perceived by the sympathetic but secret, or hidden, observer – the narrator” (20). Similarly, in *East Lynne*, the narrator is the only one aware of, and sympathetic to, Lady Isabel’s sentimental punishment. By constantly reiterating the suffering which Lady Isabel endures, the narrator creates an atmosphere of sympathy for Lady Isabel. Through this sympathy, however, the reader is also invited to feel the suffering of Lady Isabel as something deserved. She is punished for her unregulated emotions of jealousy and passion with even stronger emotions that cause unthinkable pain. That is, by making her main character relatable and punishing her with sentiment, Wood is able to emphasize the importance of emotional control. *East Lynne* breaks away from the trend set by Wilkie Collins and Mary Elizabeth Braddon of presenting characters who are already sentimental in a negative light. Instead, Wood weaponizes sentimentality in order to use it as a tool of regulation. Like Collins and Braddon, Wood contributes to the development of the sensation genre while simultaneously demonstrating the negative potential of the sentimental genre. Whereas the central characters of *The Woman in White* and *Lady Audley’s Secret* recover from the sensational events that transpired by restoring order and establishing a sense of bourgeois normality, Lady Isabel does not recover from her

sensational experiences or her sentimental punishment. Despite this, however, Wood still maintains the goal of the restoring order, which she achieves through the death of her main character. Lady Isabel's death frees Mr. Carlyle and Barbara from the sensational events that resulted from Lady Isabel's presence in East Lynne, thereby allowing the couple to strive for a sense of normality. Wood, like her contemporaries, creates a clear distinction between the two emotion-riddled genres. In her contribution to the development of the sensation genre – a genre similarly intended to create emotional reactions – Wood does not celebrate or valorize sentiment, but rather uses it to punish a character for improper emotions. For Wood, sentiment is a threat, delivered as a consequence for unregulated emotional expression, and thereby highlighting the negative potential of the sentimental experience.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

As Collins, Braddon, and Wood work to contribute to the development of a new literary genre, they work also to portray the negative aspects of the eighteenth-century sentimental genre. The previous chapters demonstrate the manner in which each novelist moves away from the sentimental tradition presented in eighteenth-century literature. Collins critiques the inauthenticity of emotional expressions, using Frederick Fairlie and Count Fosco as examples of inauthentic sentimentality, which proves to be detrimental for both characters, as Fairlie succumbs to the physical strain of his incessant, pointless expressions of sentimentality, and Fosco's attempt to feign sentimentality in order to manipulate others proves to be detrimental. Furthermore, Braddon distances her work from the sentimental genre by emphasizing the success and happiness that Lady Audley achieves as a result of her emotional regulation and rejection of sentimentality, while also showing the injurious effects of a momentary lapse in this emotional control; Robert Audley also represents the manner in which sentimentality renders one ineffective and hinders success, yet over the course of the novel he learns to regulate his emotions, thereby successfully solving the mystery of George Talboys's disappearance. Wood, on the other hand, does not critique sentimentality; rather, for Wood, sentimentality functions as a punishment which Lady Isabel is forced to endure due to her inability to regulate her emotions. These three negative representations of the sentimental genre work to emphasize the transitioning perspectives towards sentimentality that began near the

end of the eighteenth century (as noted by John Mullan) and clearly continued well into the Victorian era.

The scandalous content and sensational plots of these three novels are intended to elicit an emotional response of shock and excitement (Allan 87). However, like all emotions, good or bad, when left unchecked these emotional responses lead to problematic developments. In an answer to the problem of unregulated sentimentality, these novelists emphasize the importance of emotional control. Emotional regulation allows for the experiencing and processing of emotions in a manner that proves to be safe and effective; for example, the characters who practice, or eventually learn to practice this regulation, experience happiness and success rather than sentimental suffering. By presenting sentimentality in this manner, Collins, Braddon, and Wood thereby contribute to the development of an emotion-centric genre by presenting nineteenth-century readers with their scandal-riddled narratives while simultaneously distancing themselves from the previous emotion-centric genre of the eighteenth century. By creating this distance between their sensation novels and the sentimental genre, these novelists are able to emphasize the distinguishing factors of the two genres. Their novels emphasize the detrimental nature of the sentimental genre, which encourages wallowing in emotions, thus hindering progression and growth; additionally, their novels emphasize the progressive aspects of emotional awareness, thereby suggesting that emotions should be the motivating force driving personal growth.

As the previous chapters of this thesis work to demonstrate, by refusing to accept and mimic the emotional tropes which appear in the preceding emotion-centric genre, Collins, Braddon, and Wood contribute to a new emotion-centric genre. Instead of

continuing in the sentimental literary tradition, they criticize it, ascribe negative qualities to it, and emphasize the risk of indulging sentimental behaviors in an uninhibited manner. By analyzing the manner in which these novels create a new emotion-centric genre while simultaneously distancing themselves from the sentimental genre, it becomes clear that critics like Janice Allan—who contend with the notion that sensation novels do not qualify as “‘legitimate’ art”—have not yet addressed the extent to which an affective analysis of these novels reveals new levels of meaning that reach farther than attempts to elicit emotional responses from their audiences (87). Such an affective analysis, like the one presented in the previous chapters of this thesis, makes it evident that eliciting an emotional reaction in their audiences (while doing so does work to heighten the entertainment value of these novels) is not the only function of these novels. That is, while striving to elicit an emotional reaction, these novels also highlight the fact that wallowing in emotions (which is frequently valorized in the sentimental literary tradition) is detrimental in that it hinders success and happiness, resulting in a novel form that is exciting and entertaining—as well as educational. Additionally, by distancing and distinguishing their novels from the works of the sentimental genre, Collins, Braddon, and Wood demonstrate the benefits that emotional regulation and awareness have on achieving success and happiness; characters in these novels (Marian Halcombe, Lady Audley, and, eventually, Robert Audley) demonstrate that by actively regulating emotions rather than stagnantly wallowing in them, emotions become productive experiences. These emotions are productive because they benefit these characters by fueling their drives to achieve their goals, thereby making success and happiness a possible reality. For instance, in *Lady Audley’s Secret*, when Lady Audley finds herself

abandoned by her husband, soon-to-be penniless, and working relentlessly to maintain the ideal domestic environment for her child and father, she recognizes that her unhappy circumstances are escapable; as a result, she concocts and enacts a plan to start a new life and ensure a happy, secure, financially steady future for herself. By demonstrating the importance of emotional awareness and regulation, as well as its potential benefits, Collins, Braddon, and Wood develop a truly unique emotion-centric genre that does much more than strive to elicit an emotional response from an audience.

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