

Lady Audley's Secret

Points to Ponder: Session 1, October 2026

What are your initial impressions of Audley Court and how are they created?

Throughout the text, Braddon looks at alternative meanings and interpretations. What alternative interpretations could be put on the word 'court' and how are they significant?

Why does Braddon mention the court's previous use and the 'quiet nuns'?

How does Mary Braddon portray Lucy Audley?

Why pay so much attention to her physical appearance?

What are your views on Sir Michael's proposal and Lucy's response? What impressions of the two characters do these responses create?

How does Mary Braddon use colour imagery in this text?

What are the Gothic features used in Chapter 8 and why does Braddon use them?

What is the role of the portrait of Lucy Audley?

Yes, the painter must have been a pre-Raphaelite. No one but a pre-Raphaelite would have painted, hair by hair, those feathery masses of ringlets, with every glimmer of gold, and every shadow of pale brown. No one but a pre-Raphaelite would have so exaggerated every attribute of that delicate face as to give a lurid brightness to the blonde complexion, and a strange, sinister light to the deep blue eyes. No one but a pre-Raphaelite could have given to that pretty pouting mouth the hard and almost wicked look it had in the portrait.

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

Her crimson dress, exaggerated like all the rest in this strange picture, hung about her in folds that looked like flames, her fair head peeping out of the lurid mass of color as if out of a raging furnace. Indeed the crimson dress, the sunshine on the face, the red gold gleaming in the yellow hair, the ripe scarlet of the pouting lips, the glowing colors of each accessory of the minutely painted background, all combined to render the first effect of the painting by no means an agreeable one.

But strange as the picture was, it could not have made any great impression on George Talboys, for he sat before it for about a quarter of an hour without uttering a word—only staring blankly at the painted canvas, with the candlestick grasped in his strong right hand, and his left arm hanging loosely by his side. He sat so long in this attitude, that Robert turned round at last.

Sensation Fiction offers criticism of society. What criticisms of Victorian Society can we find in this first part of the novel?

How does Mary Braddon use language to uphold gender stereotypes? What evidence is there here that femininity is artificial and performative?