



## Regulatory Bodies: Dramatic Creativity, Control and the Commodity of Lady Audley's Secret

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Lady Audley's Secret resonates with a sense of theatricality grounded in the eponymous heroine's propensity for visual tactics to attract an audience. Repositioning the dramatic exchange between actress and audience within the domestic sphere sensitised the reader to the question of diagnosing morally degenerative artificiality whilst involving the reader in the complicit act of encouraging Lady Audley's performance through consumer demand. This complex relationship between consumerism, theatre and society saw Lady Audley's figure assume an iconic status, but little has been written on the creative interplay between the novel and the theatre itself. Beginning with the way in which aspiring actresses used Lady Audley as a model to display their histrionic variety, I argue that the theatre used her character to engage with the complex connections between drama and commodity culture. Her autophagy in favour of a false identity provided a model for actresses to visualise self-commodification whilst highlighting the tension between the material practices of the theatre and the materiality of commodity culture. The drive for regulation of the theatrical medium finds its locus in the licensing text/published acting edition of William E. Suter's Lady Audley's Secret (1863). Here I move to show how Suter's adaptation functioned as a site where the state regulation of the theatre was explored and contested. These unauthorised images of Lady Audley's containment came to symbolise not only the regulatory processes of licensing and copyright, but also the creative exploitation of a commodity culture critiqued through the dehumanised form of Braddon's original heroine.

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