

Voskuil, Lynn M. "Acts of Madness: Lady Audley & the Meanings of Victorian Femininity."

Feminist Studies 27 (2001): 611-639. Voskuil's article begins by offering an anecdote about a trip Ellen Terry, a British actor, took to an insane asylum in 1878. She wanted to study madwomen in order to prepare to play Ophelia in a production of *Hamlet*. At first she did not find what she desired, remarking "there was no beauty, no nature, no pity in most of the lunatics" (611). Her search for an "authentic" Ophelia in the asylum lead her to a woman who suddenly threw her hands up and ran across her room, which Terry perceived as being an "authentic" act of madness. Voskuil also offers a good list of recent scholars in Victorian history and literature (612). According to Voskuil, Braddon's novel was threatening to Victorian society because "the controversial figure of Lady Audley, the Victorian logics of authenticity were pushed to their conceptual and ideological extremes-thereby exposing the cruel **paradoxes** (important word for my paper remember this!) that authorized middle-class constructions of its own superiority" (613). Lady Audley "looked the part' of Victorian woman and wife but refused to be 'it' inside" (613). She looks like an authentic, devoted, wife. Voskuil continues to discuss paradoxes by noting "feminine roles that require women to behave "naturally" even if they are playing parts (example of disguise of feminine dress and behavior as "natural) (615). Margaret Oliphant, a reviewer (footnote her review) finds Lady Audley to be a "mismatch of 'conventional coverings'" (615). Lady Audley wears the disguise of perfect wife but is materialistic and murderous...for herself, not for husband (see Ruskin). Voskuil makes a good point that the role of "wife" is a "woman's role" but is also "a cultural part to be played that is wholly conventional and never natural" (616). Voskuil also have a few good referential footnotes.