

**Walls of Smoke: Gender, Boundaries, and Tobacco in the Sensation Decade**

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<1> Smoking was big business in the middle of the nineteenth century in Britain. From the wide variety of cigars being imported from various corners of the globe, to exotic and locally produced pipes and smoking paraphernalia, to pamphlets focused on encouraging and facilitating smoking—to be read in the length of time it takes to smoke a pipe—smoking was a powerful economic force at the time. It had progressed, at the mid-century point, from a localized, eccentric activity often associated with the lower classes, to a widely enjoyed leisure pursuit. Widely enjoyed by men, that is. Since smoking habits were often influenced through foreign wars, like the Crimean War mid-century, and these new customs from the farthest reaches of the empire and former colonies often had a revitalizing effect on local custom, the rituals and practices of Victorian smokers broke with tradition as much as they reinforced it. As smoking proliferated, tension heightened between men and women, as smoking began to create a need for new, gender exclusionary spaces. Ostensibly, the smoking lounge, billiard room, and study were dedicated to saving delicate female senses from the horror of tobacco's pollution, but in fact they functioned as loci of power in the gender force field of this turbulent era. Fictional women, such as Thackeray's Becky Sharpe, or, in this case, Bradden's Lady Audley, were marked as conspicuous and over-bold if they had anything to do with tobacco smoke. Literary depictions of exoticized, brazen foreign women like Mérimée's Carmen (1845) and Ouida's Cigarette (from 1867 *Under Two Flags*) created an alternative smoking discourse that often functioned as a cautionary tale. Smoking had positive aspects for men, serving as a way to assert their taste as consumers, and it may have functioned as an affirmation of independence and difference from the hegemonic culture, but most powerfully, smoking signaled a masculine indifference and hostility to women, thinly veiled as patriarchal protectiveness from self-created pollutants.

<2> Like many shifts in customs and social interplay, smoking habits changed rather dramatically in the years leading up to the sensation decade. After the relative disappearance of tobacco in smokeable form between the 1790's and the 1830's, the spaces and situations in which smoking was acceptable became highly contested.<sup>(1)</sup> It was in the early years of the Victorian era that smoking becomes an unquestionably male oriented pursuit, performed in isolation from feminine company. The male smoker, by asserting his power to choose this gender exclusive pursuit of pleasure, carried with him the constant reminder of his right to choose, in the form of his tobacco pouch. Woman's response to man's choice to smoke was limited to her anticipated refusal to remain in his presence. This cultural insistence on smoking as antithetical to femininity is relatively new in the nineteenth century, though records are scarce on women's smoking habits before this time. Evidence suggests that women's smoking was more common before the late

eighteenth century wave of change in tobacco use, in which both genders largely rejected smoking in favor of the more discreet snuff. When smoking returned (largely brought about by the influence of two wars, the Peninsular War early in the century, which re-introduced cigars, and the Crimean War mid-century, introducing the English soldiers to the briefer smoking pleasure of local cigarettes) it is unclear how smoking became what Matthew Hilton refers to as “not only frowned upon but outrightly condemned by mid nineteenth-century respectable society” (*Smoking in British Popular Culture* 140). It is likely that the intervening snuff period, and the association with the masculine enterprise of war have something to do with the change. Regardless of what sparks the change, it is clear that smoking, with its ubiquitously noxious atmosphere, acted as an instant barrier with which to exclude and drive back any woman who sought acknowledged equality, or even sought to effect some change to immediate perception of gender roles. The choice for women as actors in society is thus symbolically enacted in the smoking room. Man acted, woman accepted or refused—only, in this case, the social mores of the day allowed only refusal. Hilton tentatively asserts that there were “many ways women could use their assumed prejudice against tobacco as a means of empowerment, to avoid social situations in which they did not want to be involved” (53), but this implied plan would quickly backfire, as women found themselves conveniently prohibited from taking part in important conversations and events. In short, early Victorian women are ostensibly shielded from the noxious fumes produced by indoor smoking; though there is a fine line between protection and smoking as a screen to shield women from other inappropriate influences.

<3> Even the Queen herself is excluded from this exclusively male ritual, with what Hilton calls “the gradual social acceptance of cigar smoking, helped at the highest level by Prince Albert, an enthusiastic cigar smoker who installed a “smoking haven” at Osborne, “the only room with a solitary ‘a’ instead of an entwined “V and A” over the door” (53). In Stoker’s *Dracula*, Mina Harker’s account supports this double function of smoking.(2) Apperson’s 1918 *Social History of Smoking* gives insight into the shift that occurs in the smoking culture of the day, in this letter from cultural anthropologist Professor von Holtzendorff, during his 1861 visit to Hardwicke Court in Gloucestershire:

Such gentlemen as wished to smoke after the ladies had gone to bed used, as a matter of course, to go either to the servants hall or to the harness room in the stables, where at night some sort of rough preparation was generally made for their accommodation . . . well do I remember the immense care which devotees of tobacco used to take, when sallying forth in the country to enjoy it, not to allow the faintest whiff of smoke to *penetrate* into the hall as they lit their cigars at the door. (*Social History of Smoking*, 160, my emphasis)

The titillating language of this passage heightens the sensory description of the divide between the genders that smoking outlines for this period. Vocabulary such as “rough” and “stables” creates an animalistic, sensual atmosphere of masculine ruggedness and voluntary hardship, strengthening the same-sex bond that separate smokers. Meanwhile, the protective, sheltering behavior comes to the fore with terms like “penetrating,” pointing to the sexualized danger of smoking in the presence of women. The cigar is probably not just a cigar, when it comes to Victorian smokers. The fact that the comfort object of the cigar was something that brought men together in same-sex communion was surely no co-incidence, nor was the undercurrent of

misogyny. Even the protective aspect of smoking etiquette gestures to protecting women as idealized, feminine, unsullied property—for any olfactory discomfort is surely felt by both sexes equally; a nose is a nose, after all. In spite of this seeming imbalance of power, tobacco functioned in a complex web of gendered exchange, where women barter with other cultural capital, often tied to feminine accomplishment.

<4> Mary Elizabeth Braddon and Wilkie Collins use cutting-edge smoking technology (like Count Fosco's cigarettes, and Robert Audley's Meerschaum pipes) to demonstrate currency and up to the minute atmosphere of their works. But beneath the display of these developments lies an illustration of implicitly gendered, culturally coded manners. Through smoking behaviors we glimpse what is obscured by the code of socially accepted gendered interactions. From paternalism to misogyny, homosocial bonding to the dangers of solitary indulgences, a seamy underside of smoking habits exposes itself. As well as featuring prominently in the plot, smoking by men in these novels illustrates individuality and uniqueness in their personalization of their habits, as well as class and social situations. There are significant differences between smoking pipes cigars, and cigarettes, and further differences between pipe smokers, often according to class associations: lower class smokers often indulge in free pipes at public houses with assorted company, while among upper class smokers solitary chain smoking and meditation (see Sherlock Holmes) is more common, replete with conspicuous collections of Meerschaums and other smoking paraphernalia to accompany the habit. Cigars, with their larger size requiring a more significant smoking commitment, were much more likely to be found in the upper classes, as a companionable contract to share a pre-determined amount of leisure time in exclusively male company. Cigarettes, when they appeared on the scene, disrupted the patterns of both cigar and pipe smokers, though, with their mass production and temporally more fleeting time lapse.<sup>(3)</sup> The idea of women smoking in the nineteenth century is such anathema that it is extremely difficult to find any first-hand accounts of such an occurrence. Alford's *Tobacco in History* confirms the dearth of smoking evidence for women before the twentieth century.<sup>(4)</sup> It would seem that women's tobacco use was so taboo that it could not be spoken of, which makes the fin-de-siècle phenomenon of the "new woman" and her audacity in daring to smoke even more significant.

<5> To consider the gender implications of smoking as they are shifting at this time, I am considering three sensation novels in which smoking is prominent (since sensation writers, unlike their predecessors, were known for narrowing their focus to the changes in social forces underway in the contemporary moment). In Wilkie Collins *The Woman in White*, Marian Halcolmbe observes with astonishment and disbelief her aunt's choice to sequester herself with the menial task of rolling cigarettes instead of interacting with her nieces:

She begged we would kindly excuse her. "The Count will probably want a fresh supply of cigarettes," she remarked by way of apology, "and nobody can make them to his satisfaction but myself." Her cold blue eyes almost warmed as she spoke the words—she looked actually proud of being the officiating medium through which her lord and master composed himself with tobacco-smoke! (260)

Eleanor Fosco is depicted as a would-be proto-feminist who is laid low by her domineering aristocratic husband; she adapts to her situation by taking advantage of the one way she finds to participate in the power dynamic of smoking by making herself indispensable as Fosco's private cigarette girl. In an act of near enslavement, Eleanor is compelled (perhaps by herself, perhaps by her eerily powerful, charming husband) to devote a great deal of energy and time to rolling his cigarettes. This constant reminder of his power over her keeps his position of privilege and authority ever-present in her mind, and in the action of the story. This reminder of the power dynamic in conjunction with the production of cigarettes and cigars was not new, but it was remarkable for its intimacy between man and wife.

<6> Most first-hand accounts of cigarette production at this time are relayed from a patriarchal, gendered perspective that creates the figure of the happy, submissive female worker. Take, for example, this first-hand account of a foreign cigar factory from 1865: "There was not a male worker to be seen. They were all girls, the majority of them were very young, and every one of them held at that moment a handful of tobacco leaf which she was rolling into a cigar . . . It was a very busy scene. Girls, girls everywhere, all neat and tidy and cheerful, many of them exceedingly pretty. The effect of these four thousand white fingers nimbly plying their task was that of dancing light—like the sunlight glistening through the rustling leaves" ("Cigars," in *All the Year Round*, 13 (4 Feb 1865) 35-8, quoted in Hilton). The focus on the "nimble white finger" and the poetic image of dancing light, parlaying into a strangely out of place comparison to nature, gives the account a politely leering quality, that degenerates into an implication that this type of service, performed by women on the behalf of men, is natural and beautiful. Another contemporary journalistic account of female cigar making in England gives a tantalizing glimpse into the comparatively rare world of domestic tobacco production. The "on site" report focuses on the "all female" employees in a similarly voyeuristic tone:

We stop to watch one of the nimble-fingered workers, who, being perfectly mistress of her subject, is not the least distracted or flurried by the presence of a looker-on. . . She then gathers from a pile of the 'filler' sufficient to form the inside of a cigar, and arranges it in the palm of her hand. She places this on the "bunch wrapper" and rolls it firmly. . . rolls one strip into little convolutions round the inner material just wrapped up, neatly twists and pastes, with a brown paste, the narrow end intended for the lips. (*North Wales Chronicle* September 25, 1858 2).

Like the factory abroad, the careful ministrations of the cigar girl specifically focuses on the "nimble fingers" in a sensual way, but this observer takes it even further, to the end result—the desired contact with the mouth ("intended for the lips") of the anticipated male smoker. The use of the title "mistress" in conjunction with these workers increases the personalizing effect, and makes the implied female sense of power, as well as pleasure at creating the means for masculine indulgence, more prominent. More than that, it titillates and reminds the male smoker of the sexual undertones present in the cigar, while crossing class barriers as well as violating strict gender constraints. The *North Wales Chronicle* article goes on to defend and even laud the business practice of this cigar factory, for the ameliorating act it performs, stating that it "helps to solve one of the great social problems of the day, the employment of women" (2). By asserting the social benefits of this regulated female manipulation of tobacco for the consumption of men,

the collective conscience of the male smoker is comforted; smoking creates a beneficial relationship between the smoker and these women he will never meet, freeing him to continue the habit that makes him unpleasant to the women immediately surrounding him on a daily basis.

<7> The difference in *Woman in White* that troubles this seemingly natural act of service is the fact that Count Fosco, a secretive “foreign acting” Italian, exerts this blatant power over his English wife—a difference that would not be likely to escape the notice of Collins’s audience. Fosco takes a much more direct approach to over-seeing the production of his tools of smoking pleasure, in employing his wife, who also happens to be an elite member of the upper class by birth:

As Eleanor Fairlie (aged seven-and-thirty), she was always talking pretentious nonsense, and always worrying the unfortunate men with every small exaction which a vain and foolish woman can impose on long-suffering male humanity. As Madame Fosco (aged three-and-forty), she sits for hours together without saying a word, frozen up in the strangest manner in herself . . . . She sits speechless in corners; her dry white hands (so dry that the pores of her skin look chalky) incessantly engaged, either in monotonous embroidery work or in rolling up endless cigarettes for the Count's own particular smoking. (218-219)

Echoing the description of the cigar factory, the focus falls again to the hands of the woman creating the consumable. But this does not paint nearly so pretty a picture as the nimble fingered cigar rollers: these hands are dramatically altered as a result of the act of colonization. The extreme unpleasantness of the description, featuring powerful adjectives like “dry,” “white,” and “chalky” become even more powerful when seen in conjunction with the ominous “endless” nature of her enslavement. Eleanor may believe that she is taking part in this male ritual, with each cigarette acting as a bargaining tool to win favor with her husband, but it is clear that he holds all of the cards. And, like the self-congratulation in the cigar factory article, in which the authors see the “bad habit” turn to good, performing the needed service of “putting women to work,” Fosco’s wife turned cigarette girl is a woman transformed—turned from independent, would-be suffragette to long-suffering servant. But this act of misogynistic forced production of goods is complicated because it threatens more than women alone; it carries with it the threat of foreign domination on English soil.

<8> Smoking in Collins’s *The Woman in White* is very much in keeping with the theme of deception running through the novel, the smoking that occurs acts as a screen, hiding and yet pointing to deception and hidden power dynamics between men and women. Count Fosco and Sir Percival Glyde use smoking to separate themselves from the women of the house; as they remove themselves to the library; Marian spies on them to gather information from a hiding place, and paints the scene: “Sir Percival and the Count sat and smoked to-night, as I had seen them sitting and smoking many nights before, with their chairs close at the open window, and their feet stretched on the zinc garden seats which were placed under the verandah” (325). The implied hardship of depriving themselves of the company of women in order to smoke is conspicuously absent in this idyllic scene. They conspire freely, lounging near an open window, at the edge between the natural world and the man-made interior, and enjoy mastery over all that they survey. Count Fosco, more than Glyde, exploits gender norms for his own purposes—when

he wishes to avoid Sir Percival's company as well, he affects gentlemanly concern to conveniently initiate a ban on smoking in the house, citing Marian's ill-health as the reason: "Let us not smoke indoors, my friend, now Miss Halcombe is ill. You go your way, and I will go mine" (366). Fosco fully recognizes and exploits Victorian ideology of gender norms in a way that prohibits argument, even as he oozes insincerity—for the very reasons he gives are in keeping with the code Glyde himself tacitly supports.

<9> *The Moonstone*, from later in the decade, offers a new perspective on gendered smoking. Here we see two portraits of smoking men, but each smokes independently, for the most part. Our first smoker, Franklin Blake, smokes (or refrains from smoking) in a gesture of seemingly genuine chivalry, while his counterpart, longtime servant Gabriel Betteredge, smokes defensively and as a confirmation of his habitual isolation from the women in his life. Betteridge religiously smokes a pipe while he withdraws from the company of his female employer, Lady Verinder, and later his wife; while he smokes, he reads his sacred text, *Robinson Crusoe*. This quasi-ceremonial ritual is performed regularly, it seems, though it is especially necessary in times of strife. It is a ceremony from which the women in his life (his wife, as well as Lady Verinder and her daughter Rachel) are deliberately excluded—indeed, Betteredge seems to cultivate the habit out of a need for solitude, especially after his late-in-life marriage. Franklin Blake, the young hero, indulges in manly cigar smoking. However, he attempts to alter his smoking habits as a gesture of courtship. His dramatic act of cigar abandonment is no less paternalistic than Fosco's insistence on outdoor smoking, though the sentiment behind it is almost certainly more genuine. Betteridge narrates the circumstances of this gesture:

Though one of the most inveterate smokers I ever met with, (Blake) gave up his cigar, because (Miss Rachel) said, one day, she hated the stale smell of it in his clothes. He slept so badly, after this effort of self-denial, for want of the composing effect of the tobacco to which he was used, and came down morning after morning looking so haggard and worn, that Miss Rachel herself begged him to take to his cigars again. No! He would take to nothing again that could cause her a moment's annoyance; he would fight it out resolutely, and get back his sleep, sooner or later, by main force of patience in waiting for it. (*The Moonstone* 112)

Blake's chivalrous act of self re-fashioning in Rachel's honor demonstrates his ability to properly protect her (in this case, from his own darker habits), as well as his willingness to lower himself in order to secure her happiness. The noble vow to "fight it out resolutely" even against his beloved's own protest betrays the paternalism inherent in the gesture. Instead of allowing Rachel a voice in the matter, Franklin overrides her objection, assuming he knows her desires better than she does. The fact that his sacrifice is actually something of a hardship for him may testify to his genuine devotion to the object of his affection. Without the "composing effect" of his cigars he can no longer obscure himself through a layer of smoke, as Betteredge shields himself from the world. However, his failure to yield to Rachel's pleading to return to his habit reveals a stubborn nature beneath the "grand gesture" of quitting for her sake; one gets the sense that all along he acts according to his own desires, and not in response to the pressure of those around him. This points to the thinly veiled true nature of smoking mores of the day—that the protection of women was not for their own sakes as much as it was protection of property, or, at the very least, protection of the feminine ideal. Ironically, it is Blake's stubborn insistence in denying himself

cigars that weakens him to the point of dangerous susceptibility to outside forces, making the fantastic events surrounding the theft of the diamond possible. In *The Moonstone*, as in *Lady Audley's Secret*, the smoking drives the ever thickening plot, and illuminates the cultural connotations associated with the indulgence along the way.

<10> The most obvious anti-female sentiment in these novels comes to us from the elderly servant in *The Moonstone*, Gabriel Betteredge. His narration of events is peppered with unabashed and frequent glimpses into his view of the limited reasoning powers and general uselessness of all women (with the possible exception of his daughter.) His opening introduction reveals his tendency toward isolation from the women in his life along with the place tobacco plays for him, two pursuits that so often go hand in hand:

You are not to take it, if you please, as the saying of an ignorant man, when I express my opinion that such a book as *Robinson Crusoe* never was written, and never will be written again. I have tried that book for years—generally in combination with a pipe of tobacco—and I have found it my friend in need in all the necessities of this mortal life. When my spirits are bad— *Robinson Crusoe*. When I want advice— *Robinson Crusoe*. In past times when my wife plagued me; in present times when I have had a drop too much— *Robinson Crusoe*. (61)

Like Rousseau before him, Betteredge seeks guidance in an almost exclusively male-centered text. This colors his frame of reference, to be sure. But the ritual smoking of his pipe in conjunction with the solitary reading of the sacred text is no coincidence.

<11> Franklin Blake's chivalrous gesture of quitting smoking for the sake of his beloved, on the other hand, may initially set him apart from the group of misogynistic smokers. Then again, maybe not. After he is rejected by his desired female companion, Blake interacts with Betteredge in a rather surprising gesture of masculine smoking solidarity:

Drifting again, out of the morning-room into the hall, (Blake) found his way to the offices next, smelt my pipe, and was instantly reminded that he had been simple enough to give up smoking for Miss Rachel's sake. In the twinkling of an eye, he burst in on me with his cigar-case, and came out strong on the one everlasting subject, in his neat, witty, unbelieving, French way. "Give me a light, Betteredge. Is it conceivable that a man can have smoked as long as I have without discovering that there is a complete system for the treatment of women at the bottom of his cigar-case? Follow me carefully, and I will prove it in two words. You choose a cigar, you try it, and it disappoints you. What do you do upon that? You throw it away and try another. Now observe the application! You choose a woman, you try her, and she breaks your heart. Fool! Take a lesson from your cigar-case. Throw her away, and try another!" (236)

Betteredge replies, unsurprisingly, in similarly objectifying terms: " 'In the time of the late Mrs. Betteredge,' I said, 'I felt pretty often inclined to try your philosophy, Mr. Franklin. But the law insists on your smoking your cigar, sir, when you have once chosen it.' " (236) The comparison of women to cigars is dehumanizing, to say the least. The pronouns utilized by the two men reveal just how far down this road they have progressed. While Blake posits that one should

“throw *her* away,” Betteredge insists that one has no license to do so “when you have once chosen *it*.” In this moment of male bonding, the choice of a shared interest in smoking as a focal point for objectifying women cements the connection between these men.

<12> *Lady Audley's Secret* shows a different picture of sensation decade smoking, one that pushes the envelope on gender roles and exposes weakness within these barriers. From Lady Audley's own failure to follow the mores that forbid smoking in the presence of women, to Robert Audley's hyper-enjoyment of smoking (and masculine smoking company) strangely coupled with his extreme distaste for the remnants of the habit in others—smoking reveals multiple instances of personal discomfort within gender roles for the characters of this novel. Our first glimpse of Sir Michael Audley prominently portrays his class-appropriate cigar, but it reveals even more about his young wife: “Often in the cool of the evening Sir Michael Audley would stroll up and down smoking his cigar, with his dogs at his heels, and his pretty young wife dawdling by his side”(46). This illustration of these characters shows Lady Audley allowing smoking in her presence, which was taboo, as well as “dawdling” in a childlike manner. Her overt yet permissive girlish attitude toward her husband's smoking highlights the performative nature of her femininity. The moral ambiguity she enacts by permitting smoking in her presence is part of what makes Lady Audley so disquieting. Is she the heroine or the villain? Is she the feminine ideal she appears to be, or is she a grotesque collection of artifices and calculated behavior (not unlike the threatening, foreign Count Fosco)? The mystery or secret that surrounds her is largely tied up in gendered expectation, and whether or not she genuinely embodies it, or pretends in order to manipulate her surroundings. The young bride even permits her nephew to smoke in her presence, in her boudoir, no less. He questions this permissiveness in a subtle reminder of the inappropriate nature of her passive appreciation of smoking: “You are sure my cigar does not annoy you, Lady Audley?" "Oh, no indeed; I am quite used to the smell of tobacco. Mr. Dawson, the surgeon, smoked all the evening when I lived in his house” (149). The fact that Lady Audley is subtly called upon to answer for her lack of distaste in the presence of the manly smoking is just one instance of Robert's subtle prodding in order to discover his aunt's character through her habits and tastes, all under the guise of paternalism. Instead of genuine protective instinct, Robert Audley's inquiry ends up as a needling reminder of class distinction (reminding them both of Lady Audley's lower class background as a governess); convenient tobacco consumption once again enables a man to exercise dominance, and use it against a woman. This time, though, it is the hero who deploys paternalism to ferret out the truth, instead of the unsavory foreigner.

<13> Lady Audley's daughter-in law demonstrates her own anxiety about Lady Audley's over-permissiveness in a petulant speech to Robert: “pray amuse yourself in your own way; loll in an easy-chair all day, with those two absurd dogs asleep on your knees; spoil my lady's window-curtains with your cigars and annoy everybody in the house with your stupid, inanimate countenance” (148). The girl, thwarted in her unreturned affection for her cousin, sees Lady Audley as a rival for his attention, and is frustrated by her mother-in-law's failure to play by the “rules” of their society. Alicia's attempt to needle Robert with this reminder of Lady Audley's unconventional (and untrustworthy?) behavior could even be seen as a use of a paternalistic smoking reference by a woman, strangely enough. But again, it is not what it appears to be on the surface; Alicia's concern focuses not on Lady Audley's belongings, but on her lack of propriety, and her cousin's compliance in this breach of manners. Like the above mentioned

smoking examples, the concern for feminine health and the well being of ladies' textiles masks deeper issues.

<14> Robert Audley, like Lady Audley, commits some telling violations of gender norms. For example, in certain curious moments of the novel, Robert Audley appears to encourage his young aunt to break the mold of feminine behavior, in what appears as a bold, conspiratorial, proto-feminist move. As he wields his own cigar with all of the nonchalance of a man accustomed to taking his enjoyment where he finds it, he presents himself to his aunt as an ally in the gender wars:

Robert was tenderly coaxing the crumbled leaf of his cigar with cautious fingers. "My friend at the corner of Chancery Lane has not given me such good Manillas as usual," he murmured. "If ever you smoke, my dear aunt (and I am told that many women take a quiet weed under the rose), be very careful how you choose your cigars." My lady drew a long breath, picked up her brush, and laughed aloud at Robert's advice. (150)

Here the narrative focus once again shifts to the hands of the person manipulating the tobacco, but in this case Audley handles the product, though it is not as part of the labor of producing it, but an evaluative gesture of displeasure at the shoddy workmanship, evinced by the "crumbled leaf." Soft terms such as "tenderly" and "murmured" betray a sort of femininity in Robert's gestures, even as he taunts his aunt with the forbidden fruits that social constraints prohibit her from enjoying. The off-color intimation that Lady Audley might secretly smoke "under the rose" not only questions her honesty, but also puts her femininity into doubt; Robert's own tenuous relationship with gender mores plays an equally significant role in his relationship with his aunt. Robert Audley's particular attitude toward women may, like Lady Audley's failure to protest, reveal more than meets the eye. His virulent diatribes against the opposite sex, which become more bitter as the action progresses, leave him open for inquiry as to what is beneath the surface of this distaste for the female sex. De-humanizing and objectifying women to the extreme, Robert sees the entire sex as something "invented" (not created, mind you, but invented, like automatons) for the "destruction" of "their superiors." This extreme language betrays something more than smug condescension, though. Fear is at the root of this diatribe, fear of women, who spoil the idyllic life that he sees as man's natural state. In the end, this apparently blasé attitude regarding Lady Audley's potential clandestine pursuits is calculated to put her off guard; Robert already suspects his uncle's new bride of involvement with his friend George's disappearance. This man's cigar smoking is no feminist gesture. Instead, it is a powerful reminder of the risk Lady Audley takes in not objecting to his smoking. Using the seemingly friendly cigar as an olive branch, Robert actually performs a highly misogynistic act of smoking: subtly goading his aunt with his knowledge of her unreliable nature.

<15> Beyond its employment as a screen of convenient impropriety, from behind which Audley may act with impunity to needle his unfortunately tolerant aunt, smoking is a bonding ritual between Robert Audley and George Talboys, which enables them to deepen the relationship that will end up being Robert's "saving grace." At the village near Audley Court, the two young men enjoy the ease of each other's familiar companionship:

Under these circumstances of course it was no use going to the Court, so the two young men strolled through the village and looked at the old church, and then went and reconnoitered the streams in which they were to fish the next day, and by such means beguiled the time until after seven o'clock. At about a quarter past that hour they returned to the inn, and seating themselves in the open window, lit their cigars and looked out at the peaceful prospect. (91)

This smoking scene, occurring as the final gesture that ties together the various parts of the idyllic day these two share, takes place before they come into contact with the unwholesome influence of Lady Audley; it is a positively Edenic, pastoral portrait. Like Fosco and Glyde, the men sit perched at an open window, at the edge of the natural world and the man-made interior, masters of all they survey. Verbs like “stroll” and “beguile” bring the pacing of the scene to a sleepy crawl. Fosco and Glyde’s garden verandah and Audley and Talboys’s “peaceful prospect” both present an image of masculine innocent pleasure. The martial verb “reconnoiter” playfully evokes masculine wartime pursuits, highlighting the security in the domain of privilege in which they comfortably rest. The peaceful repose that these two enjoy in each other’s company may be reminiscent of a same-sex Adam and Eve, but the tobacco they share is not their forbidden fruit. Instead it serves as the glue that bonds them together, the ephemeral lingering aroma evoking the scent memory of happier days.

<16> Smoking also allows men such as these an excuse for spending time alone together—at least the length of time it takes to smoke a cigar, which would have been a rather long interval—and gives them a shared set of values and class-identifiers. As well as embodying something about which they can commiserate, their shared (and expensive) taste in cigars allows them a variety of inside jokes at the expense of the landlord's cheap German cigars. Audley playfully counsels his friend: “ ‘You want change of air, my dear boy; you want the refreshing breezes of Figtree Court, and the soothing air of Fleet street. Or, stay,’ he added, suddenly, ‘I have it! You’ve been smoking our friend the landlord's cigars; that accounts for everything’” (99-100). Not only does their shared affinity for expensive cigars cement their bond, it also affirms that they have the same taste and social aspirations, creating a body of inside jokes and commiseration, and giving them something to do together to justify being “alone” together. The cigar acts as a talisman of sorts, allowing the men to perpetuate the single sex environment of their school days together at Eton (nudge nudge, wink wink). In revealing the barely hidden secret agenda of smoking (a ruse to allow men to entertain other men in seclusion) these portraits of companionship put the spotlight on another tenuous gender norm within these pages: Victorian homo-social masculinity. Sedgwick’s *Between Men* addresses this phenomenon of male homo-social relationships, both clandestine and open. In this vein of thinking, smoking creates walls of protection, but also creates a community in which men can unabashedly share each other’s exclusive company. Likewise, J. M. Barrie’s *My Lady Nicotine* presents a slightly later portrait of this sort of communal bond, over shared “good taste” and expensive indulgence.<sup>(5)</sup> Smoking, in these literary examples, does more than merely providing an excuse; it creates a same-sex community for those who seek it.

<17> The community created by shared smoking is as fragile as the ephemeral smoke rings that are its product. Robert Audley insists upon leaving the environs of Audley Court early when his tobacco runs out; the relationship these men share cannot be supported without it. Even when

Robert is away from George, we see another indicator of the importance of smoking in creating male community: his thoughts dwell upon George and his cigars in curious conjunction more often than not, and at rather interesting moments. Before realizing that something has happened to George, Robert sits with his aunt, musing contemplatively “in the deep embrasure of a mullioned window, talking to my lady, his mind wandering away to shady Figtree Court, and he thought of poor George Talboys smoking his solitary cigar in the room with the birds and canaries” (121). Robert Audley, surrounded by all of the feminine accoutrements of Lady Audley’s space (in this case, the drawing room), has eyes for his absent friend only. The memory of unspoiled companionship in pre-lapsarian “Figtree Court” harkens back to the union between the two men, which Audley clearly prefers. A little while later, when he discovers his friend to be missing, Audley reflects upon another memory of shared smoking melancholically: “(he) felt very low-spirited as he walked slowly home between the shadowy meadows; more low-spirited still when he re-entered the sitting room at Sun Inn, where he and George had lounged together, staring out of the window and smoking their cigar: . “ ‘To think,’ he said, meditatively, ‘that it is possible to care so much for a fellow! But come what may, I’ll go up to town after him the first thing to-morrow morning; and, sooner than be balked in finding him, I’ll go to the very end of the world’ ” (123). The meadow, once a virtual garden of Eden, has turned “shadowy” and inhospitable. But the wistful image of the place where they shared their last cigar is the most evocative for Robert, and the one that spurs him to take up his quest.

<18> Robert unconsciously invests smoking with heavy importance, but his discomfort with the evidence of other men’s smoking is a telling indicator of his state of denial of the hidden depths of meaning that this shared smoking holds. While the novel reveals smoking acting as a screen, staking out a site for male same-sex intimacy that is beyond the view of general society, it also reveals masculine uneasiness at the physical traces of smoking, and all that it entails. Both times that Robert visits Lady Audley/ Helen Talboys' father, Captain Maldon, he inwardly feels distaste for the other man’s failure to properly dispose of the evidence of his smoking:

Robert strode into the parlor. The furniture was shabby and dingy, and *the place reeked with the smell of stale tobacco* and brandy-and-water. The boy's broken playthings, and the old man's broken clay pipes and torn, brandy-and-water-stained newspapers were scattered upon the dirty carpet. (125, my emphasis)

The physical, if ghostly, reminder of the act of smoking in this instance acts as a trigger for Robert, bringing back his smoking experiences with George Tallboys, and the feelings associated with them, even as he is attempting to confront those who would conspire against his friend. Audley expresses distaste, saying to himself, when left alone, that “the place smells of stale tobacco like a tap-room” (128), but he also uses it as justification for lighting up a cigar himself —perhaps one last commemorating smoke with George, who had been in this room with him recently. This act, though, is performed alone, almost furtively, and needs justification. The fact that this odor signals this stinging association, and evokes Robert’s revulsion, may be a sign that he is hiding something in his relationship with George Talboys. It is also worth noting that he smokes a cigar in this situation; not a pipe. Cigars were the more social form of tobacco at this time: requiring leisure and a considerable investment of time to complete, and inducing long, intimate conversations between men. Robert also smokes pipes at other points in the story, but

not socially, only when he is alone—a pipe does not take as long, and can be put down and picked up more easily, if distractions present themselves. The fact that Robert smokes a cigar instead is odd, in this case: perhaps he wants to remind himself of his superior class-standing, but this choice is more likely related to his desire to commemorate his time with George. As Engen argues in *Solitary Pleasures*, “Odor is integrated into the mental representation of an experience; it has no identifiable attributes of its own but as an inherent part of a unitary, holistic, perceptual event. . . odor memory has the power to retrieve the allied sensations that were originally associated with it, reproducing imaginarily the whole multi-modal sense-perceptual event” (164-165). If that is the case here, the event that Robert Audley associates with the “reek of stale tobacco” does not turn out to be one he is comfortable confronting in the public eye. While Robert’s smoking pushes at the edges of gender norms, his smoking, and discomfort seen here, reveals smoking as a private display of homo-social masculinity about which he seems almost ashamed—this performance of an alternate interpretation of gender must be hidden from view.

<19> The growing dis-equilibrium of gender relations pervades these texts as much as the physicality of tobacco. Smoke demarcates spaces negatively, as exclusive masculine territories in the Victorian-era feminine domain of the home, but also creates a space in which men may positively interact with other men—the shared vice facilitates relationships, linking men together who might not otherwise have much in common—the fact that it is considered a weakness makes them co-conspirators in protecting their vice. The power of smoke is a pernicious one, for it can act far beyond the intention of the smoker, who sets its power in motion. As Robert Audley’s discomfort at encountering stale tobacco testifies, odors and the memories they evoke are often inescapable. The male characters in these novels act within the constraints of their cultural surroundings, but they often chafe against the implied authority associated with smoking as well. Undoubtedly, smoking men did not always wield the cigar or cigarette consciously as a weapon or tool against those with less advantageous bad habits, like Count Fosco appears to do. But the consequences of smoking proliferation become visible in these examples, which depict a situation that must necessarily intensify to the breaking point in the years to follow. The physicality of tobacco as smoke markedly displays its pervasive influence, not unlike its ability to fill and pervade all of the space in its environs with oppressive efficiency. Smoke creates a physical bond between smokers, as well as a shared storehouse of knowledge, in the study of tobacco ingesting implements and types of smoke-able goods. But smoking is more than a common hobby or shared area of expertise, which makes it all the more powerful. In order to finish an entire cigar, the smoker must dedicate a significant portion of time to the activity—an activity that is in fact inactive, demanding relative stillness and often resulting in quiet reflection. Robert Audley and George Talboys provide a perfect example of this leisure pursuit—the pursuit of a self-created atmosphere of masculine calm. Smoking acts on all of the senses, from the obvious taste of the cigar, to the feel of it on one’s lips, fingers, and tongue, to the visual cloud of enveloping atmosphere and the sound of quiet puffing, and the scratching strike of the match.

<20> But the most notable, and certainly most cited noxious and annoying sensory element of smoking, is the smell. This element likely comes to the forefront of the smoking battle due to the lingering effects. Smoke in the carpets, rugs, and drapes of a room lingers on as a signature of sorts, an unavoidable reminder of the man long after he is no longer physically present. This reminder effectively acts as a constant assertion of the gender oppression that smoking implies—

lasting long after the act is over, a silent, lingering after-presence of the men it represents, maintaining dominance over their territory. Smoke's appeal to the sense of smell is tied to innate sense memory, which gives it an invisible but considerable potential. Instinctual, primitive memory associated with the sense of smell is a funny thing, in its ability to act involuntarily. In Robert Audley's case, the scent could be the lingering testament to male abuse of power, or it could be the sad reminder of lost smoking companionship—perhaps both.

<21> The final scene in the novel wraps up the importance of smoking in the story, re-shaping the habits of the two men in a more proscribed, socially beneficial way:

There is a pretty rustic smoking-room over the Swiss boat-house, in which the gentlemen sit and smoke in the summer evenings, and whence they are summoned by Clara and Alicia to drink tea, and eat strawberries and cream upon the lawn. . .The meerschaum and the French novels have been presented to a young Templar with whom Robert Audley had been friendly in his bachelor days; and Mrs. Maloney has a little pension, paid her quarterly, for her care of the canaries and geraniums. (445)

Robert gives up his pipes, along with (presumably) his solitary habits—replacing it instead with rare seasonal cigars in a location that is less private than accessible, from which the gentlemen allow their wives to summon them at will. The abandonment of the pipes indicates Robert's move away from the collection of pipes marks his transition from the isolated figure of detective in the shadows of society, scorning traditional male-female relations, into the hetero-normative married man, who no longer orients his life around exclusive male pursuits, be they solitary or the intimate bonding rituals of early in the novel. This rejection of pipe smoking is one way that Robert demonstrates his willingness to give up his aberrant, distinctively different lifestyle—as Hilton notes, men's participation in commodity fetishism in the form of collecting tobacco accoutrement “might seem irrational and unimportant to the smoker's identity, but together they built up a distinctive picture of the smoker as different from everybody else” (35). Bradden's novel relates Robert's journey from aberrant social deviant to ideal husband, all the while pointing out the problematic nature of outward signs that can be used to construct gender, and what they relate about the society in which they circulate.

<22> The male characters in these novels act within the constraints of their cultural surroundings, but they often chafe against the implied authority associated with smoking as well. Men did not smoke solely to exclude women—for one thing, smoking was a way to differentiate oneself with regards to class standing, a way to identify as someone with leisure time, with expendable cash, and not averse to frivolous, unproductive spending. In this light, smoking culture is something of a counter-culture to the Victorian norm, going against the hegemonic expectation of utility, efficiency, and the masculine sacrifice of going out into the public sphere only in order to reap the reward of domestic tranquility, in the idealized feminine company of women. But the toxic undercurrent of ill-will toward women and male same-sex pleasure seeking, in the form of the growing cloud of smoke that surrounds the obscured dealings between men, becomes visible in the consideration of these examples of Sensation Fiction. Like the imprint of smoke that remains after the physical presence is no more, these works of fiction bear an obscured but still visible impression of the habits and customs of their time.

<23> The question remains, is there an analogue for women of the time, and activity that acts in a similar way to masculine smoking? Music-making is a focal point in the changing dynamics of power and control at this time, but ultimately, it is not on the same scale as smoking is for men. Music is not a safe haven like smoking is, it is more aptly a way of throwing oneself to the wolves—or, at least, tacitly exhibiting one's marriageability. And it is not a social cement or opportunity for bonding between women—one need only look at Lady Ashton in Anne Brontë's *Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, or Blanche Ingram in *Jane Eyre* to see fictional accounts to confirm what is already known—accomplished women typically do not rise to their level of musical proficiency to entertain or better enjoy the company of other women. Lysack's *Come Buy, Come Buy* creates a compelling case for the new Victorian use of shopping as a feminine discourse, but in a markedly different way: "Rather than being subjected to the prescriptions of consumer capitalism, women's uses of consumption (including such practices as window-shopping, shoplifting, or even setting up shop themselves) became the basis for their formation as active and resisting subjects within the Victorian marketplace" (8). This empowering comparison loses some ground, though, when she considers the accounts that circulated comparing men's consumption to women's. We need only reflect back to the celebration of the cigar factory girls and their poetically "nimble fingers," and juxtapose it with Ruskin's factory tour in "The Nature of the Gothic:" "Glass beads are utterly unnecessary, and there is no design or thought employed in their manufacture . . . The men who chop up the rods sit at their work all day, their hands vibrating with a perpetual and exquisitely timed palsy . . . Every young lady, therefore, who buys glass beads is engaged in the slave-trade" (Quoted in Lysack, 3). The now-ubiquitous focus on the fingers of the producer of consumer goods turns dark indeed in this graphic account of men's disease inducing "slavery." Women's pursuits offer little in the way of analogous outlets, it seems. Perhaps one could consider women sewing together, applying make-up, or tea drinking, as an equivalent to male indulgence, but it would be small consolation. None of these behaviors are able to repel a man against his will. In these several instances of detailed depiction of tobacco use, giving minute detail surrounding smoking men and the women who interact with them, the rising tide of gender disequilibrium intensifies to the breaking point that will come in the years immediately following the initial publication of these revealing novels.

#### Endnotes

(1)As Matthew Hilton's *Smoking in British Popular Culture* reports, "As the habit spread, so too did the number of spaces deemed acceptable for gentlemanly smoking, it becoming common from the 1820's and 1830's for women to leave the table after dinner while the men remained behind to smoke their cigars. Such a trend towards the acceptance of smoking did not go unchallenged. One writer has suggested that smoking was not tolerated on the street, in the railway carriage or after dinner at any time before the Crimean War in the 1850's, and there is certainly evidence to confirm such an opinion as notices were put up in public parks asking smokers to take heed of ladies complaints against the cigar" (Hilton, 52).(^)

(2)"(the men) were out till dinner time, and they all came in tired. I did what I could to brighten them up, and I suppose that the effort did me good, for I forgot how tired I was. After dinner they

sent me to bed, and all went off to smoke together, as they said, but I knew that they wanted to tell each other of what had occurred to each during the day” (Dracula, 160).(^)

(3)As Hilton notes, “cigars and pipes formed retreats from the reality of the world, but the problem of the cigarette was that it was very much tied to the problems of speed and pressure of the late nineteenth-century modern city life (Hilton, 28).(^)

(4)“The picture for the nineteenth century is blurred, but there is enough indirect evidence to suggest that . . . in the nineteenth century the pipe, cigar and chewing tobacco had an increasingly masculine image. Other than these general observations there is little hard information on the degree or extent of tobacco consumption by gender in the nineteenth century. However, there is scattered evidence in the early part of the twentieth century that might confirm the low incidence of smoking among women” (340) He goes on to add that recent studies for the early twentieth century, which are the closest analogue that could be reasonably ascertained, “estimates that women’s consumption of tobacco for (the 1920’s) was no more than 1.9 per cent of the national total.” (Alford, 340)(^)

(5)“Before I discovered the Arcadia, and communicated it to the other five—including Pettigrew—we had all distinct individualities, but now, except in appearance—and the Arcadia even tells on that—we are as like as holly-leaves. We have the same habits, the same ways of looking at things, *the same satisfaction in each other*” (18, my emphasis).(^)

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