Gendered Cover-ups: Live Burial, Social Death, and Coverture in Mary Braddon’s Fiction

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Over a century before Betty Friedan controversially claimed that gendered discrepancies in personal and social fulfillment were resulting in “the mass burial of American women,” Mary Braddon was using this historically resonant metaphor to critique the legislation and gender politics of the 1860s and 1870s.1 Anticipating the radical rhetoric of second-wave feminism, Braddon’s novels use re-gendered images of (male) premature interment to critique the contemporary female experience of death-in-life. Cognizant of her culture’s specific anxieties about live burial, Braddon plays upon this concern to demonstrate that women in Victorian society were always metaphorically facing live burial: through coverture, when married; through social death, when widowed; and through isolation, when unwilling to fulfill the culture’s rigid gender roles. This polemical image retains its power for authors striving to redress grave imbalances of social power and visibility.2 The deep feminist radicalism of Braddon’s imagery of live burial derives from her skilful drawing together of two powerful anxieties of the 1860s and 1870s: a growing fear of premature interment; and an increasing agitation about marital laws governed by the principle of coverture.

An approach which views Braddon’s feminist politics with “mixed feelings” has become critically popular since Ann Cvetkovich’s 1992 publication, resulting in such conclusions as that offered by Lillian Nayder that Braddon’s “subversive qualities are, at best, heavily qualified and contained.”3 Through an examination of the live burial motif, this essay reasserts the pertinence of feminist approaches to Braddon’s fiction. Positioning Lady Audley’s Secret (1862) and Taken at the Flood (1874) within a broader consideration of the gendered deployment of languages of live burial in Braddon’s fiction of the 1860s and 1870s, I contend that Braddon uses such imagery to challenge social.
legal and literary paradigms of female disempowerment. A rich seam of intertextuality is charted through Braddon’s responses to earlier literary uses of live burial, particularly by those authors whose influence she felt to be particularly important to her own work: Walter Scott, Charlotte Bronte and Wilkie Collins. I argue that Braddon poetically re-genders traditionally inscribed narratives of live burial as punishment for female transgressors, instead using metaphors of live burial to critique a range of specifically female experiences of social death (or death in life) inflicted by her contemporary society. This rhetorical strategy gains impetus from escalating fears of the possibility of live burial during Braddon’s early career.

This period yields a range of testimony to a widespread and increasing horror of premature interment. As the narrator of Edgar Allan Poe’s short story “The Premature Burial” (1839) asserts, “no event is so terribly well adapted to inspire the suprernmes of bodily and of mental distress, as is burial before death.” The over-determined fear of live burial in the decades following the burial reforms of the 1850s is evident in personal records and a wider investment in preventative invention. Numerous wills included instructions to avert this fate. Harriet Martineau left her doctor ten guineas to ensure that her head was amputated. Francis Power Cobbe specified that the arteries in her neck be severed. Edward Bulwer Lytton left his doctor instructions to ‘bend’ his heart and Lady Burton (widow of Sir Richard Burton) “provided that her heart was to be pierced with a needle.” Braddon’s contemporary in the sensation genre, Wilkie Collins, suffered from a similar fear, and at foreign hotels he “always put a note on the bedroom mirror, saying that in the case of his (presumed) death, he should not be buried until a competent English doctor had been consulted.” Importantly, this fear was not restricted to the literati—it was experienced across the social spectrum. Edwin Chadwick’s 1843 report on interment in towns observes that “a large proportion of the population... are deeply impressed with the horror of being buried alive.” Chadwick identifies “the fear of interment before life is extinct” as a major contributor to the popular desire to delay burials, and he suggests that “amongst the working-classes the feeling is sometimes manifested in a dying request that they may not be hurried to their graves.”

Escalating terror at live burial in the mid-nineteenth century is further evidenced by the first calls to implement continental prevention measures in Britain. Following Chadwick’s advocacy of the French
and German use of waiting mortuaries, arguments were advanced in 1848 for the provision of a similar establishment in London, to be called "an asylum for doubtful life." In 1861 the first security coffin was patented in Britain. Whilst on the continent experiments with the design of such life altering coffins had been continuing since the end of the eighteenth century, the range of British patents for similar devices from the 1860s attest the country's increasing concern about live burial. Such fears had a solid practical basis. At the same time as a wide variety of print culture, fictional and non-dilated on the lack of an authoritative test to determine the point of death, public awareness was also raised about experiments to accelerate the disposal of the corpse. Reportage of these two sets of (alarmingly!) contemporaneous experimentation continued to raise premature burial as a disquieting concern. While some scientific thinkers reacted to the need for more conclusive tests of the point of death, others responded to mounting difficulties of disposal in a period of rapid population growth. Those who advocated accelerated decomposition through burial, such as Francis Seymour Haden with his "earth to earth" (wicker coffin) system, had to reassure their public that live interment would not occur. Pro-cremationists took the opposite approach, marketing incineration as a sure way to avoid premature burial. In his arguments for cremation Sir Henry Thompson stressed the lack of proofs for death and the corresponding possibility of live burial, evoking this fear repeatedly as the source of "very painful dread," "severe trial" and "horror... inexpressible." He reassured the public that "with cremation no such catastrophe could ever occur; and the completeness of a properly conducted process would render death instantaneous and painless if by any unhappy chance an individual so circumstanced were submitted to it." Innovators of such new techniques joined the debate on live burial, again bringing this concern into the public domain in a wide range of publications from daily newspapers to the specialist medical press.

Cognizant of this widespread anxiety, Braddon recruits resonant images of live burial to explore and realign relations of gender and power in her society. In doing so she draws upon and subverts a long cultural genealogy of live burial narratives in which the victim is invariably gendered female. Both live burial and live burning were seen as punishments for female transgressors, a perception persistently reiterated and explored in nineteenth century literature.
much coverage by those authors of whom Braddon was most fond. Historically, premature interment was reserved as a predominantly female punishment, meted out in Plutarch’s era to Vestal virgins who broke vows of chastity and to nuns in medieval times. This scenario was eagerly explored by early nineteenth century gothic romance writers, and was sufficiently a staple of gothic fiction to appear in Jane Austen’s parodic celebration of the genre, Northanger Abbey (published 1818). Conditioned by her reading of Ann Radcliffe, Austen’s Catherine Morland hopes that the eponymous Abbey, once a “richly endowed convent,” will contain “some traditional legends, some awful memorials of an injured and ill-fated nun.” One of Braddon’s favorite authors, Sir Walter Scott, reserves such a fate for his “perjured nun,” Constance Beverley, in “Marmion” (1808), detailing the monastic punishment of her over-amorous commitment to the poem’s (anti-)hero by consignment to a niche “narrow, dark and tall... Alive, within the tomb.” In The Black Band or The Mysteries of Midnight (1862), written under the pseudonym of Lady Caroline Lascelles, Braddon has her traitorous villainess punished by a distinctly similar explicit live burial; the anti-heroine is executed through being immured in a “niche, or recess, measured about three feet and a half in breadth and six feet in height” purposely cut into “the rock of terror.” Braddon’s Black Band was written and serialized concurrently with Lady Audley’s Secret, appearing in the lower class cheap publication, The Halfpenny Journal: A Magazine for All Who Can Read. In this novel Braddon follows the gendered tradition adhered to by authors such as Scott and Mrs Showes, whose late eighteenth century gothic The Restless Matron (1799), portrays a lady who is deliberately buried alive by her wicked husband. Here Braddon recites the traditional historical and literary paradigm of a passive woman judged guilty by self-appointed male avengers and brutally punished.

In The Doctor’s Wife (1864), however, Braddon parodies exactly this paradigmatic penny dreadful use of live burial narratives through the figure of Sigismund Smith, a commercial cheap fiction writer. Sigismund is often identified as Braddon’s “fictional alter ego,” and has an ambition (parallel to that achieved by Braddon by this point of her career) to graduate from producing low-brow penny fiction and “to write a great novel” (12). The majority of potential penny plots that Sigismund authors include: incidents of live burial. Indeed, he has sound literary antecedents for this theme:
I think that you'd admit that I've very much improved upon Sir Walter Scott—a delightful writer, I allow, but decidedly a failure in penny numbers... [This serial] admits of Aureola's getting buried in the snow, and dug out again by a Mount St Bernard's dog, and then walled up alive by the monks because they suspect her of being friendly to the Lollards; and dug out again by Cesar Borgia, who happens to be travelling that way, and hears Aureola's tambourine behind the stone wall in his bedroom and digs her out and falls in love with her.²³

Here, and in various other extended plot outlines, Sigismund reproduces slight variations on the classic female interment narrative used by Braddon in The Black Band. In a later synopsis Sigismund considers the possibility of a serial to include two brothers who are "both in love with the same woman, and one of them—the darkest twin, with a scar on his forehead—wallowing up the young female in a deserted room, while the more amiable twin without a scar devotes himself to searching for her in foreign climes, accompanied by a detective officer and a bloodhound" (194). This pastiche of sensational convention down to the scarring and swarthy coloring of the villain represents Braddon’s effort to distance herself from the hackneyed use of heroines buried alive. Indeed in The Doctor's Wife Braddon's literary project clearly diverges from Sigismund's, as she makes complex use of a figurative model of live entombment as social critique. Alongside such penny-dreadful plotting Braddon also uses the motif of live burial to critique the emptiness of the heroine's marital future: "I should like to have fancied a brighter fate for her, a life with more colour in it... when I remember what her life is likely to be, I begin to feel sorry for her, just as if she were some young fair nun foredoomed to be buried alive by and by" (83).

In Aurora Floyd (1863) Braddon similarly complicates the consumption of live burial narratives—the heroine listens to Scott's "Marmion" as a diversion when she is ill—by suggesting that Aurora herself may be consumed by the kind of live entombment meted out by her society to its female members.²² She is compared to "some frail young creature abandoned by her sister nuns in a living tomb" (105), and Braddon goes on to play suggestively with the motif, using it to demonstrate the violence inherent in the sudden alteration of female identity required by marriage: "Aurora Floyd was dead and buried and Aurora Mellish" stood in her place (148). Indeed, Braddon's fiction repeatedly portrays marriage as the wife's entry into a premature grave. This sense of a dramatic, irreversible shift echoes conduct book advice offered to intimate female friends on sustaining their relationship after marriage. In A Woman's Thoughts About
Women (1858) Dinah Craik insists that such a bond "must change its character...be buried alive and come to life again in a totally different form." These macabre descriptions elaborate the expectation of a wife's social death implicit in the overlapping language applied to newly married women and corpses. Braddon emphasizes this suggestive homonymy in Lady Audley's Secret through repeated descriptions of Lady Audley as the *late* Miss Lucy Graham. The marriage of Lady Audley's body double and servant Phebe is similarly marked as annihilation: "a superstitious stranger might have mistaken the bride for the ghost of some other bride, dead and buried in the vaults below the church" (114).

Braddon frequently uses imagery of live burial to discuss the obliteration of a new wife's identity. In this, her feminist response to the popular gothic trope is markedly different to that employed in another important earlier example of the live interment device. One more of Braddon's favorite authors, Charlotte Brontë, makes a complex use of the legend of a nun punitively interred alive in her 1853 novel *Villette*. Throughout her career Braddon reflected on the significance of Charlotte Brontë's impact upon her, from her teenage delight at *Jane Eyre* to her more mature deliberation on the influential effects of such an intense reading experience. Like Braddon's Audley Court, the "Pensionnat de Demoiselles" of Brontë's novel has had a past life as a convent, and is to some extent haunted by the trace presences of the nuns who once resided there. Notably, those who look beneath the surface of the school's garden may be rewarded by a "glimpse of a slab, smooth, hard and black. The legend went, unconfirmed and unaccredited, but still propagated, that this was the portal of a vault, emprisoning deep beneath that ground, on whose surface grass grew and flowers bloomed, the bones of a girl whom a monkish claque of the drear middle ages had here buried alive, for some sin against her vow."

Picking up on this motif and a rhetoric popular with second wave feminism, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar devote a chapter of their seminal study, *The Madwoman in the Attic*, to "The Buried Life of Lucy Snowe." In *Villette*, as they convincingly argue, "Bronte explores the mundane effects of homelessness, poverty, physical unattractiveness, and sexual discrimination or stereotyping that impose self-burial on women." While exploring the wider social irrelevance that women experience through a sense of insubstantiality or invisibility, Bronte's novel, as Gilbert and Gubar suggest, focuses on the plight of the
unmarried or "redundant" woman: "As a single woman how can she [Lucy Snowe] escape the nun's fate?"  

In many ways Braddon's use of live burial imagery anticipates by over a century Gilbert and Gubar's reading of Bronte, her avowed literary foremother. Importantly, though, Braddon builds upon the foundations of live burial as radical feminist critique that Bronte lays down, adapting this imagery to the more explicit agitations of the 1860s and 1870s over marital legislation. While Bronte is not averse to employing imagery of premature interment to explore the loneliness of a forsaken heroine, Braddon's deployment of this motif is more politically hard edged. Indeed, in Braddon's fiction languages of live burial work more specifically to imaginatively interpret the law of coverture, through which a woman's legal selfhood ceased on her marriage. As William Blackstone (in the dominant law book of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries) famously explained, "the very being or legal existence of the woman is suspended during the marriage, or at least incorporated and consolidated into that of the husband: under whose wing, protection and over she performs everything." This legal fiction of the complete coincidence of interests of man and wife had extreme practical implications for the married woman, who surrendered personal property, income and the ability to sue, be sued, sign contracts alone and make her own will. Even her body, and those of her children, became the husband's exclusive property. As Lee Holcombe has noted, single women in nineteenth-century England had much the same property rights as men: "It was not the fact of being female but the status of wife that entailed severe legal disabilities." Given the close association of property and personal status, the legal annexation of a wife's property had wide-ranging degrading ramifications, which so-called first wave feminists of the 1850s and 60s addressed by setting "as their first priority the reform of the laws relating to the property of married women." Gail Turley Houston has presented a strong case for the critique of coverture in *Lady Audley's Secret*, arguing that "Braddon cross-examines the mystification of women inscribed in the law, and using cultural circumstantial evidence, proves the self-interestedness of the law and male lawmakers." Braddon's insistence on the parity between a woman's marriage and her premature interment strongly contributes to her critique of existing legislation. Through horror-inspiring images of live burial, Braddon rejects the institutionalized expectation that a married woman should suffer the complete obliteration of her individual identity.
A sophisticated exploitation of the trope of live burial is sustained throughout *Lady Audley’s Secret* and *Taken at the Flood*, demonstrating Braddon’s simultaneous resistance to the recurrent spectacle of female victimization presented by popular models of live burial, and her forceful critique of the gendered law of coverture. Whilst special clauses in wills and an increase in the production of security coffins in this period attest to concerns about accidental occurrences of premature interment, such anxieties are perhaps further inflamed by a gothic tradition of malicious live burial, of a kind satirized in *The Doctor’s Wife*. Sigismund’s parodic narratives of female characters “walled up” in male acts of punishment and vengeance operate as one part of Braddon’s response to this hackneyed motif of ultimate female disempowerment. In *Lady Audley’s Secret* Braddon repeatedly exploits contemporary anxieties about corpse treatment and the increasing public fear of premature burial, to give particular resonance to her heroine’s murder methods. Whilst the chapter title “Buried Alive” ostensibly refers to Lady Audley’s final incarceration, this chapter also finally reveals the details of her crime. The chapter oscillates between competing narratives of premature interment, one of which positions Lady Audley as victim and another which figures her efforts to dispose of her first husband as a form of murderous live burial.

Although *Lady Audley’s Secret* has become the best known of Braddon’s novels, the complex vicissitudes of the (anti?) heroine’s identity perhaps merit some rehearsal. At the point of her first husband’s return after an absence of nearly four years, Lady Lucy Audley is still legally Helen Talboys. During George Talboys’s apparent desertion of her, his wife engineers a means of escaping the poverty and seeming helplessness of her position as a young mother in her drunken father’s house by assuming a false identity and beginning life anew. Re-incarnated as governess Lucy Graham, she attracts the socioeconomically desirable attentions of Sir Michael Audley, whose position of financial and social privilege she enables herself to share by marrying him bigamously. Ironically, in his protracted absence George Talboys has effected a similarly dramatic reversal of fortune; having been a dispossessed and impoverished sold-out dragoon, he returns a successful gold-prospector with an independent fortune to share with his wife and son. However, Lady Audley has engineered her own rise in fortunes, and rather than allow her first husband to expose her hard-won high status position, she attempts to murder him by orchestrating his fall into “the black mouth” of a well of “enormous
depth” (386). By withdrawing the spindle on which George Talboys rests, Lady Audley precipitates his fall into “nothing but black emptiness” (386). George’s intimate friend, and self-appointed investigator of his disappearance, Robert Audley, later imagines the body “hidden in the darkness of the old convent well” (388). The conventual/conventional gothicism of this well, a place where “busy nuns ha[d] perhaps drawn the cool water with their own fair hands” (9), associates this site with the monkish punishment vaults of “Marmion,” *Villette* and the wider gothic tradition. Talboys manages to escape this early grave, emerging with a broken arm. Luke Marks, who discovers him, recounts that “he was all over green damp and muck, and his hands was scratched and cut to pieces” (411). Talboys’s physical condition strongly resembles that popularly attributed in live burial narratives to corpses discovered in family vaults and coffins with fingernails ripped off, hands torn and limbs broken having failed to escape their untimely tombs. John Snare’s 1817 *Thesaurus of Horror*, for example, “documented” the case of Mr. Cornish, who was exhumed after sounds of groaning were reported: “The coffin was speedily dug up and opened, and it was seen that the living corpse’s knees and elbows had been beaten raw.” These generic associations, which code Lady Audley in the traditionally masculine role of vengeful perpetrator, deeply exacerbate the subversiveness of her crime.

Braddon equally emphasizes the other most threatening aspects of the site Lady Audley intends as Talboys’s grave. The various descriptions of the well mark the disparity between this “resting place” and more conventional burials with their accompanying palliatives of funerary ritual and gravestone gravitas. Whilst the conventual history of the well activates gothic associations, it also foregrounds the religious setting to emphasize the absence of its consolation. The anxiety expressed in Robert’s repeated imagination of George’s grave as “unhallowed” suggests his accordance with a belief powerfully held by some clergy, “that burial in non-consecrated soil could threaten the salvation of the soul.” Similarly disquieting is the novel’s insistence on the well as a locale of decay: “stagnant” with a “rope so rotten” (8), and “half choked up with the leaves that drifted about it” in “withered heaps” (109). The emphasis on the “mass of slush and mire” (433) at the well’s bottom activates the growing horror of decay and the earth. Cremationists, as well as exploiting widespread anxieties about live burial, played upon antipathy to the process of decomposition to de-naturalize burial in the popular imagination: “Here then, begins
the eternal rest. Rest! No, not for an instant. Never was there greater activity than at this moment exists in that still corpse . . . Forces innumerable have attacked the dead." Braddon's repeated references to rot and mire disrupt the ideal of secure, sleep-like death. By denying her victim a coffin Lady Audley removes the soothing "prospect of rotting safely in [a] secure coffin . . . sealed tight against the soil and dust," which Ruth Richardson suggests was an important motive in the purchase of more expensive solid coffins. Thus, as well as strongly activating the horror of live burial, Lady Audley's crime raises a number of interrelated anxieties about the correct treatment of the corpse.

The representation of the well powerfully subverts the cross-class contemporary expectation that an individual's status should be reflected by the position and type of their grave. In particular, the description of the well as a "black pit" (433) firmly associates it with socially ignominious burial sites. When the mid-Victorian working class saved for a "respectable burial" they referred to interment in an individual grave, rather than in unmarked, overfilled pauper graves commonly referred to in contemporary sources as "pits." George's son also links his father's fate to that of the economic underclass in his macabre speculation: "Poor person! Will he go to the pit-hole? . . . I should like to see him put in the pit-hole" (176). This link to pauper burial is strengthened further by Talboys's recollection of the well: "I felt that the atmosphere I breathed was deadly" (434). Talboys's feeling speaks to the contemporary belief in fatal miasmas, which were thought to emanate from overcrowded burial places and formed a significant factor in burial reform arguments.

The firm association of Talboys's intended grave with pauper pits signals Lady Audley's absolute disruption of social hierarchies. The wealthy gentleman's son, now of independent fortune, is accorded the poorest burial with its corresponding social ignominy. In the pit imagery and the removal of the individual's choice of grave location, the body acquires the financial and class based stigma associated with "poorer families, including those dependent on parish charity, [who] may not have been able to choose the[ir] burial place." Appropriately, given Talboys's abandonment of his family, Vanessa Harding demonstrates that burial in marginal locations could signify marginality within the household and local community. Unmarked and un-consecrated burial spaces were also firmly associated with what were deemed the worst crimes, perpetuating criminals' "lasting
status as outlaws." In her effort to dispose of George Talboys in this way, Lady Audley offers an extreme personal denouncement of the conduct of a husband whose familial neglect would be left unpunished by society.

Braddon's exploitation of fears of socially unacceptable disposal of the dead to render her heroine's crimes more threatening is extended in Lady Audley's use of cremation to destroy both life and evidence. Lady Audley subversively selects live burning as the "strange calamity" calculated to "silence . . . [those men with knowledge of her misdeeds] forever" (306). She decides to burn Robert Audley, who has become inconveniently effective in his detective role, in his bed at the Mount Stanning Inn. This murder method is marked as particularly deviant through descriptions of her compulsion "by some horrible demonic force which knew no abatement" (320). The danger of Lady Audley's agency is demonstrated by her visual absorption of the qualities of life-threatening fire, "unnatural colour still burnt like a flame in her cheeks" (306), whilst hair "surrounded her forehead like a yellow flame" (316). This constant association with hellishness anticipates the religious objections to cremation, which became most forcefully articulated from the 1870s in response to Thompson's pro-cremation publication: "Cremation itself was condemned as a practice which, being of pagan origin, was incompatible with the Christian faith . . . Cremation, moreover, was seen as mitigating against a belief in the resurrection." Lady Audley's specific exploitation of cremation to destroy evidence also neatly anticipates what became recognized by pro-cremationists as the strongest argument against their cause: "What guarantee is there against poisoning if the remains are burned, and it is no longer possible, as after burial to reproduce the body for the purpose of examination[?]" In its activation of religious and social taboos, Lady Audley's use of cremation to kill functions similarly to the location of Talboys's body in an un-consecrated and unmarked grave. Both disposal methods were thought to risk the salvation of the soul, and the historical use of both cremation and live burial as forms of execution lends the bodies of Robert Audley and Luke Marks (the innkeeper, whom Lady Audley also intends to incinerate) the same outlaw status as that accorded to George Talboys.

Braddon provides various testimonies to the extent of the terror inspired by such murder techniques in Lady Audley's Secret. Robert Audley is "ghost haunted" by the improper treatment of his friend's
corpse, demonstrating the emotional need for the observance of appropriate death ritual as a safeguard for both dead and living. De- vested of the cathartic benefits of culturally shared mourning rituals, Robert is terrified both by the possibility of being "haunted by the phantom of murdered George Talboys" (394) and by the prospect of his own absolute loss of self-control: "I must give my lost friend decent burial" Robert thought... "I must do it; or I shall die of some panic like this which has seized upon me...I must do it; at any peril; at any cost" (398). Luke Marks, who has knowledge of Talboys’s escape from the well and is himself almost burnt alive in Lady Audley’s second murder attempt, pictures these two crimes endlessly in a delirium that expresses the perpetrator’s demonic force:

Luke had described himself as being dragged through miles of blazing brick and mortar, and flung down wells, and dragged out of deep pits by the hair of his head; and suspended in the air by giant hands that came out of the clouds to pluck him from the solid earth and hurl him into chaos. (403)

Like premature burial, live cremation had a gendered punitive history; it was used in Britain for heretics and regicides of both sexes, but was employed for female traitors exclusively (male traitors were beheaded), and was particularly associated with the execution of witches. Braddon figures the female victims of such horrific execution methods repeatedly throughout her fiction. Lady Audley reminds readers of both witch burning and the live cremation of criminals in her extended retelling of the story of a woman "condemned to be burned alive" for "some crime" who "went to the stake, followed only by a few ignorant country people, who forgot all her bounties, and hooted at her for a wicked sorceress" (109-110). In *Taken at the Flood* Sylvia Perriam is identified as "just the kind of young woman who in a more Conservative age would have been burned as a witch" (27). In this later novel, Sylvia Perriam also refers to the practice of Suttee, foregrounding the cultural and religious imperatives for female self-immolation: "I suppose if widow burning were the fashion in this country you would come and ask me to be burnt alive rather than outrage society" (364). Thus, Lady Audley’s attempted use of live burning to dispatch her male adversaries, reinforces the re-gendering inherent in the figuration of Talboys’s consignment to the well as a premature burial. Both of these murder attempts reverse the traditional, gendered positions of male judges and powerless female victims.

Lillian Nayder has offered an opposing reading of the power dichotomy dramatized at the well in Audley Court, arguing that this
scene demonstrates Braddon’s ultimate conservatism on issues of
gender. Nayder uses Braddon’s various references to the Indian Mu-
tiny to position this site as a version of the familiar imperial image of
the well at Cawnpore: “As Lady Audley forces George Talboys down
the well, the rebellious sepoy of Mutiny fame is transformed into
the treacherous wife, and the martyred Englishwomen of Cawnpore
into her victimised husband.” The gendered inversion of persistently
reiterated models of female victimization that Nayder acknowledges
here thus far supports my argument that such murder methods over-
turn culturally inscribed structures of power. However, Nayder’s use
of this most explicit scene of female rebellion to insist on Braddon’s
conservatism is less convincing. She relies on an under-explicated
positioning of Lady Audley as simultaneously an embodiment of the
rebellious sepoy and metonymic of British marriage reformists:

By means of this racial and sexual inversion, Braddon suggests that the real threat
posed to the British empire in the 1860s does not come from unruly natives in the
colonies but from Englishwomen agitating for their rights, and empowered to divorce
their husbands and reclaim their property rights. Defusing this threat at the conclu-
sion of the novel, Braddon stages the ‘conquest’ of the independent Englishwomen
who figure in it by the newly strengthened male characters.27

This argument gains its impetus from recourse to a plot driven analy-
sis, in which the eventual incarceration of Lady Audley is perceived
as Braddon’s simple recapitulation to acceptable social structures,
with which she is assumed to uncritically collude. I wish to move away
from the linear narrative charting of Lady Audley’s demise to exam-
ine Braddon’s ongoing social critique, which is sustained until, and
even beyond (as I will suggest in my reading of *Taken at the Flood*), the
novel’s close through the interplay between her literal and figurative
uses of the live burial motif.

Lady Audley is eventually entombed in the virtual grave of a mad-
house “of a dismal and cellarlike darkness... with a certain funereal
splendour” (381). Robert Audley’s selection of this particular pun-
ishment for his criminal aunt is further testimony to the horror of
her exploitation of live burial as a murder method; no retribution is
dire enough to balance her crime except a similar interment. Lady
Audley’s outcry, “you have brought me to my grave Mr Audley... you
have used your power basely and cruelly and brought me to a living
grave” (384), is proved only too accurate by the presence of a quasi
shroud. Her apartment contains “a bed so wondrously made, as to
appear to have no opening whatever in its coverings unless the coun-
terpane had been split asunder with a penknife” (381). In a twisted
re-enactment of the marriage ceremony, the name and identity that Lady Audley has fought to maintain control over is finally wrested from her, as Robert provides the carers/keepers that constitute her only society with a false name and history for their "patient." This absolute isolation from her previous self and complete exclusion from the community complete the parallel social death and live burial of the character once known as Lady Audley. Indeed the doctor guarantees Lady Audley's social death in the maison de santé. "Her life, so far as life is made up of action and variety, will be finished ... If you were to dig a grave in the nearest churchyard and bury her alive in it, you could not more safely shut her from the world and all worldly associations" (373).

Braddon's figurative use of the buried alive motif here reflects her appreciation of the experience of being dead in life or existing in a "living grave" (384), a concept which was medically labeled almost a century later as social death, "the phenomenon of being regarded as dead by society, regardless of one's actual state of life."** In their study of social death, Michael Mulkay and John Ernst demonstrate that such alienation from the community would have been a familiar experience for most middle-class Victorian women, who were expected to mourn relations by blood and by marriage through "a kind of surrogate death of [their] own." This withdrawal from social life was particularly expected following the death of a husband, as codes of respectability demanded that widows undertook no social activity outside the home for the first year of bereavement. As Mulkay and Ernst put it, a widow "was required to enter a formal social death sequence; that is the range of her conduct was drastically curtailed, she was excluded from many of her normal social activities, and indeed she continued to exist only in the most distant fashion for many of the people in her customary social world."** Braddon's fiction abounds with female characters who reject the personal restrictions inherent in this process, often assisting or faking their husbands' deaths rather than grieving for them. Instead of endorsing the contemporary ideal of women's voluntary social death, Braddon pioneers a very different use of the concept of female social death through the metaphor of live burial. Whilst her heroines flout mourning conventions, resisting the surrogate death prescribed for them, Braddon uses her female characters more radically to explore the extent to which marriage itself entailed a social death process for women in her contemporary society.
The chapter "Buried Alive" strategically juxtaposes the burial of Lady Audley's self-selected identity against her murderous effort to prevent exactly such a removal of the selfhood she aspired to and achieved. Lady Audley's attempted interment of George Talboys is the culmination of a variety of burials that she effects in order to maintain the identity that she prefers. She has previously literally buried a redundant self, body-swapping with the physically similar Matilda Plowson who occupies the grave marked "Helen Talboys." Through this physical substitution Helen Talboys is entombed by surrogate. Lady Audley's recruitment of burial to maintain selfhood is further emphasized by Braddon's careful use of the language and imagery of funerary goods in the aptly titled chapter "Hidden Relics." Here Phoebe and Luke discover evidence of Lady Audley's former self in "a baby's little 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" (33), secreted in a "massive walnut-wood and brass inlaid casket" (32). This synecdoche for coffin is repeated four times in this short scene, emphasizing Lady Audley's literal burial of her previous identity. The reiteration of this term perhaps also obliquely acknowledges Braddon's debt to Brontë, echoing the title of *Villette* 's chapter twelve, "The Casket," which opens with the legend of the nun buried alive. The figuring of Lady Audley's effort to murder George Talboys as live burial places this act within a sequence of her efforts to maintain control over selfhood in defiance of a society that sanctions the obliteration of female identity.

Whilst Lady Audley fails in her attempt to physically murder her first husband, she succeeds in killing him socially until almost the end of the novel. She refuses to remain "covered" as Mrs. Talboys, reclaiming her identity at the literal expense of covering that of her legal husband. Though he emerges from the well, he survives in body only, forced to assume a false name. He is socially dead, a "covered" man, as Luke Marks's account of a nameless, fugitive stranger "covered with mud and slush" makes clear (411). Talboys leaves Lady Audley the following parting words declaring his social death: "You shall never hear of me again; to you and to the world, I shall henceforth be that which you wished me today... I leave England never to return" (413). In forcing George to "seek some corner of the earth in which... [to] live and die unknown and forgotten," Lady Audley condemns him to the kind of absolute transformation of identity demanded of all women who wished to marry.
Taken at the Flood presents a close reworking of Lady Audley's consignment of her husband to social death as a means of simultaneously safeguarding autonomy and infiltrating the aristocratic family. Indeed, the substantial overlaps in plot and characterization suggest that Taken at the Flood offers a commercially savvy reworking of the popular success of the previous decade. Published by William Tillotson, the thirty-four weekly installments appeared in various Tillotson concerns, including the Bolton Weekly Journal. As Robert Lee Wolff has observed "Taken at the Flood, the Tillotson novel for 1874, gave the old Lady Audley plot a new twist: this time, the worldly young wife wants to rid herself of her rich elderly baronet, not to keep him." Class and character structures are maintained from the earlier narrative as the (anti?) heroine, Sylvia (a schoolmaster's daughter), flees from relative poverty and a distasteful family life through marriage to a wealthy land-owner, Sir Aubrey Perriam. Both Lady Audley and Sylvia Perriam are primarily impelled to bigamy and (virtual) murder by a craving for socioeconomic privilege. Whilst Lady Audley gains her title of choice bigamously, Lady Perriam takes the simpler route of marrying money first and then fulfilling romantic inclination through a disposal of her inconvenient husband. In a typically complex sensational plot line, Sylvia attempts to rid herself of her aged husband without resorting to actual murder by publicly declaring his death, having simulated it by the substitution of his physically similar brother who died of natural causes. To keep Sir Aubrey from being recognized Sylvia adopts the power of incarceration (predominantly a male tool in Braddon's social and literary culture), first keeping him prisoner within the home and then placing him in a private lunatic asylum under his dead younger brother's name.

Braddon's polemical exploitation of a system of gendered concepts of live burial is sustained throughout Taken at the Flood. As in Lady Audley's Secret, overlapping languages of live burial relate the heroine's crimes to the socially entombing circumstances that motivate them. Importantly the same metaphor that structures descriptions of Sir Aubrey's incarceration is also used to explore the narrowness of the heroine's life. As her father's drudge, Sylvia believes that "one might as well be in that ivy-grown old tomb of the de Bossiney's yonder, and one's life over and done with" (10). Observing Sylvia in the severely limited existence that she endures at home, Sir Aubrey comments on "what a hard thing it seemed that she should be buried alive in such a place" (76). Sylvia accepts Sir Aubrey's subsequent of-
In Sylvia's present-day marriage, now that her disinheritance has been reversed and she has married Edmund Standen, explicitly because she believes wealth to be the only factor which will allow her to escape her virtual entombment: "Do you suppose I mean to be buried alive when I am Lady Perriam? It would be much better for me to marry Edmund if there were any chance of that" (174). Inevitably, Sylvia discovers her error, recognizing the transfer of male domination in the familiar trajectory from father to husband: "She knew that in Sir Aubrey she had found a new master. It was more exalted bondage than her servitude to her father, but it was bondage all the same" (205).

Rather than "releasing" Sylvia, her marriage to Sir Aubrey is depicted as a more advanced form of social death. Covered by her husband in name and law, Sylvia's remaining sense of self is further stilled by his insistence on her complete isolation from her original society. On discovering the pleasure his wife takes in her dressmaker and previous close friend's discussion of people she "used to see before [she] was married," Sir Aubrey insists on the milliner's dismissal, telling Sylvia that such former acquaintances are utterly incompatible with her new role as titled wife: "My love, to let a person of that kind tattle is to be familiar with her. It presupposes an interest in her conversation which it ought to be impossible for you to feel... [and in people] with whom you have nothing more to do, and in whom your interest ought to have ceased with your marriage" (209). Recognizing her absolute isolation from those social networks in which she previously existed, Sylvia acknowledges her coverture as the premature interment of social death: "It is hard to have wealth, and jewels, and a title, and youth, and good looks, and yet to be buried alive at Perriam Place" (216). Sylvia Perriam's criminal double burial of her husband (burying a corpse under his name, and inflicting on him a living death of dis-identity) is represented as her attempt to gain full access to those social networks denied her by marriage; an effort to regain social life and escape her sense of being buried alive. In a concession to more conventional moral codes, Sylvia (like Lady Audley) suffers a sufficiently unpleasant demise, dying abroad of an illness contracted in her getaway to the continent. The finality of this ostensible "comeuppance," however, would be questionable for a loyal Braddon audience already alert to the possibilities of heroine reincarnation in the author's work.

For regular readers of Braddon's fiction, who would recognize the reprise of Lady Audley in Sylvia Perriam, the critique of institution-
alized female disempowerment does not even end with the close of *Lady Audley's Secret*. Such continuations may have been even more apparent to contemporary readers attuned to serial production, and trained in the persistent suspension of reading and interpretation between installments. Various recent critics have expressed dissatisfaction with the “closure” of the earlier novel. Indeed the hurried and somewhat trite nature of *Lady Audley's Secret*’s “comic” ending can be read as Braddon’s strategic signaling of her own distaste for this conclusion. Chiara Briganti has drawn attention to Braddon’s defensive addition to the 1887 American edition of the novel, in which she included the closing caveat: “I hope no one will take objection to my story because the end of it leaves the good people all happy and at peace.” As Briganti suggests “this last paragraph...operates as an extra padlock on a door that we had been asked to view as already firmly secured and thus shakes our faith in the efficacy of the original lock.” In the reworking offered by *Taken at the Flood* this door is blown completely off its hinges. Through extensive overlaps of plot and character, and through the continuation of a polemical rhetoric of live burial, Braddon expands her gendered critique by enabling the (anti) heroine who buries men alive to rise again in a new form. Her serial repetitions subversively suggest that the would-be murderesses plot is not as entirely shut down at the close of the earlier novel as conservative readings would have it.

As many commentators have convincingly argued, and as Braddon herself suggested, *Lady Audley's Secret* owes a debt to Wilkie Collins’s *The Woman in White* (1860). *Taken at the Flood*, in its close reworking of key elements of both these novels, deepens this relationship of intertextuality. In Selvia Perriam Braddon reincarnates a Lady-Audleyish character, willing to subvert the social structures that make death palatable for personal empowerment, and whose efforts to obscure her husband are similarly figured as forms of live burial. At the same time, Braddon’s portrayal of Selvia’s treatment of Sir Aubrey reworks and pointedly re-genders the central plot of Collins’s 1860 novel, in which “Sir” Percival Glyde, through a similarly complicated substitution of family members, succeeds in declaring his wife Laura dead, while actually having committed her to an asylum under the name of her cousin Anne, to whom she bears a strong resemblance. In a striking effort to detail the forms of annihilation imposed upon Laura, Collins describes her husband’s plot as rendering her “socially, morally, legally—dead.” As her self-appointed savior and suitor Walter
Hartright (whose actions towards Laura follow the conventional coincidence of rescue and romance satirized in some of Sigismund's penny plots) puts it:

Torn in her own lifetime from the list of the living, the daughter of Philip Fardie and the wife of Percival Glyde might still exist for her sister, might still exist for me, but to all the world besides she was dead. Dead to her uncle who had renounced her; dead to the servants of the house, who had failed to recognize her; dead to the persons in authority who had transmitted her fortune to her husband and her aunt; dead.44

Walter's strenuous efforts to designate Laura's identity in terms of her male relations points to the everyday tenousness of female selfhood so defined, even without the perils of designing husbands and villainous erasures.

Taken at the Flood refuses to perpetuate these two interlinked traditions of female disempowerment: incarceration and live burial. Sylvia Perriam's treatment of her husband methodically re-genders both experiences: she deposits Sir Aubrey under a false name in a remote asylum where he helplessly awaits a return "back to life" (382). Rather than critiquing Taken at the Flood as a derivative novel, Braddon's feminist reworking of Collins's plot line can be seen to deepen the radical agenda first set out in Lady Audley's Secret. Like George Talboys, Aubrey Perriam is subjected to a form of live burial, entombed in what is figured as the living grave of the asylum, until his land-steward finally arrives to "unearth" him (370). Talboys and Sir Aubrey experience similar forms of social death, as their wives' acts entirely dislocate them from the communities in which they were previously recognized and active. In a reiteration of Lady Audley's inversion of the law of coverture, Sylvia illegally covers her husband's existence by exploiting her firsthand knowledge of the horrifying isolation engendered by a termination of social networks. Sir Aubrey's private asylum experience simultaneously offers a deft reworking of that suffered by Collins's Laura, whose "identity with Anne Catherick [had been] systematically asserted, and her sanity, from first to last, practically denied."45

"I'm . . . come to fetch you out of this wretched hole—come to take you back to life."

"Yes to life . . . they made me believe I was dead; they told me to my face that I was not Aubrey but Murdred." (382)

As in Lady Audley's Secret, the socially transgressive status accorded to Sylvia's act by a repeated use of tropes associated with live burial, is extended by her subversion of the structures that Peter Jupp suggests
are used by "all societies [to] perpetuate their social boundaries after death." Sir Aubrey is deeply sensitive to the disparity of position between himself and his younger untitled and dependent brother. He exploits the financially loaded term "poor" to express a combination of sympathy and contempt for his socially inferior sibling: "Mordred is a poor creature; my brother, but a poor creature. I will never submit to be called Mr Perriam" (402). However, in his mislabeled burial Mordred acquires both the title and corresponding hereditary privilege accorded to and jealously guarded by the older landowner:

Sir Aubrey, whose name had been inscribed on one of the massive oak coffins in the family Perriam vault, whose pompous Latin epitaph, with an error in an ablative case—when was there a Latin epitaph without an erroneous termination of substantive or adjective, according to some learned caviller?—adorned the chapel wall.

The apparently flippant reference to the inaccurate Latin inscription draws attention to the highly significant labeling error here—the commemorative inscription advertising Sir Aubrey's "erroneous termination." Significantly, the "ablative case" indicates an agent, instrument or location, offering a further coded reference to the manner in which Sylvia's misplacing of Mordred's body subverts the palliative process of reaffirming status through commemorative inscriptions. Sylvia Perriam's recasting of her husband's identity removes the comforting security of willed inheritance, as she infiltrates (like a female "Sir" Percival Glyde) the aristocratic transfer of power and wealth along the patrilineal line, manipulating an otherwise exclusively male exchange to benefit herself. Like Lady Audley, Sylvia Perriam's social subversion emerges from her successful appropriation of this power by removing both social and psychological measures to safeguard against death.

Both Sylvia and Lady Audley criminally recruit and re-gender the social death process in their attempts to widen their own spaces for living; they transgress social structures for death and disposal in sensational resistances to an order that institutionally divests women of selfhood. Braddon's figuration of these crimes as forms of live burial reverses a long literary tradition of the passive heroine interred alive, whilst tapping into a particularly deep contemporary fear. Her use of this disquieting rhetorical strategy exposes the various forms of living death imposed upon women in her society, and adds a unique and radically rich seam to wider contemporary feminist resistance to the endemic coverture of mid-Victorian women.

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NOTES

This essay offers a fuller exploration of ideas presented in a paper given at the fourth Annual Conference of the British Association for Victorian Studies (BAVS), University of Wales, Aberystwyth, September 2003. I am grateful to conference participants for their generous suggestions and to staff at the Wellcome library for directing me to a fascinating range of materials on live burial. My thanks are also due to Sally Ledger, Anne Schwan, and Robert Maidens for their useful comments on earlier drafts of this article.


2 It has, for example, been mobilized effectively to unearth culturally covered experiences of black lesbianism, by writers such as Barbara Christian, "No More Buried Lives: The Theme of Lesbianism in Audreys Lorde's Zami; Gloria Naylor's The Women of Brewster Place, Ntozake Shange's Sassafras, Cypress and Indigo and Alice Walker's The Color Purple," chap. 15 of her Black Feminist Criticism: Prospectives on Black Women Writers (New York: Pergamon Press, 1985).


4 Edgar Allan Poe, "The Premature Burial" in Tales of Mystery and Imagination (Ware: Wordsworth Classics, 1995), 278.


6 Bondeson, 223. Hans Christian Anderson apparently employed a similar tactic, placing a cardboard message in his bed which read "Do not bury me. I am not really dead." He also kept a rope-ladder handy due to his concurrent fear of being buried alive. Measures to prevent live burial were considered on the VICTORIA Discussion List in May 2002. See especially posts from Sally Mitchel and Brigitta Bergland.

7 Edwin Chadwick, A Supplementary Report on the Results of a Special Enquiry into the Practice of Interment in Tores (London: Cotes, 1843), 89.

8 Chadwick, 84, 89. Recent cholera epidemics certainly contributed to such concern, as burials were performed much more hastily during outbreaks of the disease to minimize contagion.

9 This was proposed by Robert Brandon in Medical Times 16 (1847): 574.
10. H. Lecanud, patent number 2164, filed on 30 August 1861.


12. Throughout the nineteenth century various prizes were offered in France for best work on identifying the signs of death and preventing premature burial. These contests attracted British curators and were fully reviewed in the British medical press, for example the London Medical Record, 8 April 1874, 299-7, 299-25. An 1869 article reports on a new method of establishing whether life was present by measuring the effect of atropine on the pupil. The article concludes that "such a system would silence the apprehensions of the most infat. Fears—natural enough—would disappear, and the world would be shocked by no fresh cases of premature burial." ("Apparent Death," All the Year Round [5 July 1869]: 113). The enthusiasm of the point of death also received various fictional treatments at the time; notable examples include George Eliot's The Lifted Veil (written 1859, first published 1878) and Poe's gothic tale of 1845 "The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar."

13. Francis Seymour Haden, Earth to Earth (London, 1875), collected from his letters to the Times earlier that year, with editorial responses.


15. See Iserson, 35, and Davies, 108.


17. Walter Scott, "Marmion" in The Lord of the Isles, Marmion and the Lay of the Last Minstrel (Bryce and Son: Glasgow, 1885). Canto Two, 177. Braden was an avid reader of Scott, frequently quoting him in her notebooks, and issuing a penny edition of hiscondensed novels in 1884. As a child she spoke of the author as a "magician [who] had woven his spell around her." See Dobbs, Notebooks and Literary Manuscripts of Mary Elizabeth Braden, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas, Austin, 10 reels, esp. reel 4. Robert Lee Wolff, Sensational Victorian: The Life and Fiction of Mary Elizabeth Braddon (New York: Garland, 1979), 490-36.


21. Mary Elizabeth Braden, The Doctor's Wife (Oxford U. Press, 1998), 46. Further references to this, and to Braden's other novels, will be given in parentheses.


25 There is a complete gendered divergence between the polemical feminist strategy Braddon structures around this motif, and the few instances in which the same image is subversively applied to male characters, Braddon's male figures are described as dead in life when physically incapacitated by accident or illness, or when they are otherwise cut off from society. See, for example, the description of Edward Audley's recovery from a near fatal railway accident in *John Marchmont's Letter* (1855), 1:214, before he newly risen from a grave in which I have lain for more than three months, as dead to the world, and to every creature I have ever loved or hated, as if the funeral service had been read over my coffin" (Mary Elizabeth Braddon, *John Marchmont's Letter* [Oxford U. Press, 1999], 245). This use of the buried alive metaphor for extreme mental or physical illness is very similar to the current medical use of the term "social death" to refer to those who still live biologically but have little or no role in social networks. Braddon's male characters are sometimes also figured in this way during self-appointed or enforced exile. Robert Audley, for example, accuses George Talboys of burying himself in Fig Tree Court when Talboys attempts to avoid society after his wife's death and apparent death (55), and the protagonist of *The Doctor's Wife* is horrified by her father's visit on jail leave as "she had regarded Mr Stratford's dismal habitation as a kind of tomb in which he was to be buried alive for the full term of his imprisonment" (366).

26 Jennifer Garth points out Braddon's teenage excitement at reading *Jane Eyre* and her later reflections on the influence of Bronte on her early work, which she described as the "sentimental period, in which my unfinished novels assuaged more ambitious form, and were modelled chiefly upon *Jane Eyre*" (The Literary Lives of Mary Elizabeth Braddon: A Study of her Life and Work [Hastings: Sensation Press, 2000], 90). Braddon's preoccupation with the body reading of Charlotte Bronte, and her pilgrimage to Haworth: M. E. Braddon, "At the Shrine of Jane Eyre" *Pall Mall Magazine* 57 (1906): 174.

27 Charlotte Bronte, *Violet* (London: Penguin, 1985), 172. In both *Violet* and *Marion* the conventional representation of the burial also contributes to an anti-Catholic rhetoric which does not figure in Braddon's specific use of the motif for gender critique.


29 The buried alive motif predominates in Lucy Snowe's poignant identification with the man and in the consignment of her beloved letters from Dr John to a "grave" beside the vault attributed to this unfortunate novice (381). A similar use of the self-burial motif is made in Bronte's early poem, "Frances" which explores the psychological pain of romantic rejection: "Unloved—I love: unloved I weep... Life I must bound, existence sum/In the strict limits of one mind/ That mind my own. Oh! Narrow cell! Dark—as imageless—a living tomb! / There must I sleep, there wake and dwell / Content, with pale pain and gloom" ("Frances" in Poems of Charlotte and Branwell Bronte, ed. T.J. Wiseman and Alexander Synnigtong [Oxford: Shakespeare Head, 1984], 22).


33 Holcombe, 4.

34 Cail Turley Houston, "Mary Braddon’s Commentaries on the Trials and Legal Secrets of Audley Court" in *Beyond Sensation*, 18.

35 Given the potentially confusing complex shifts of identity employed by this character (who appears under four different names in the novel), she will be designated as Lady Audley throughout this article.

36 Bondeson, 12. Davies, 117–19; also offers a grisly catalogue of sources documenting injuries sustained in efforts to escape a live burial.


38 Thompson, 1. In both the pre-cremation debates and sensation novels of the latter half of the nineteenth century, treatment of the fear of live interment were intricately linked with a horrific leashing for the earth. Another explicit example is offered in Marie Corelli’s (1886 novel) *Windleasers Or the Story of One Forgotton* (London: Methuen, 1962), which she initially titled "Buried Alive": "If I were buried in the ground...of what use to break open the coffin and let in the mould, the damp wormy mould, rich with the bones of the dead—the penetrating mould that would choke up my mouth and eyes, and seal me into silence for ever!" (21).


40 The churchward described in *Taken at the Flood* is representative of Braddon’s relentless positioning of an appropriately positioned and marked grave as metonymic for the wider social recognition accorded to the deceased: “[In the shady old churchyard...generations of departed Stanleys had recorded their respectability in substantial middle-class headstones]” *Taken at the Flood* (London: Maxwell, 1885), 44, emphasis added.


42 Harding, 58–59.

44 Jennifer Leanne, “Ashes to Ashes: Cremation and the Celebration of Death in Nineteenth-Century Britain,” in Death, Ritual and Bereavement, 118–133, 124.

45 Thompson, 48.

46 Davies, 159.

47 Nayder, 39.


50 Wolff, 240.

51 Whilst the motif is also applied to Sylvia’s father’s self-imposed exile to conceal his fraudulent past (62) and used medically for the decline of Sir Aubrey’s health (241, 243), a sustained use of the live burial metaphor structures references to the barreness of Sylvia’s life throughout the novel.


54 Collins, 421.

55 Collins, 436.

56 Jupp, 3.