

# Undesirable Darkness and Frightful Deeds

## Spectacle and Guilt in *Oliver Twist* and *Lady Audley's Secret*

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**Abstract.** This discussion will explore the concepts of spectacle and guilt in Charles Dickens' *Oliver Twist* (1838) and Elizabeth Mary Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret* (1862) and the treatment of the sensational characters in these novels. The aim of this article will be to reveal that the use of sensation is a way to shed light on the unpredictable intricacies of the human mind and the complexity of human experience. Considered as unworthy of literary praise in the period, or even dangerous devices and sources of undesired stimulation, Dickens' and Braddon's novels deserve particular recognition for their contribution to the understanding of the period's controversial conception of criminality and guilt.

**Keywords:** sensation, spectacle, crime, the Newgate novel, guilt, society

The Newgate novel and the Sensation novel respectively were on the edge of what would have been considered 'respectable' literature in the sense that they provoked emotion, suspense and thrill and exposed undesirable aspects of humanity, rather than what the period considered as elevated and literary. They were worrisome texts, especially because

[...] mid-Victorian England was also a place of anxiety and of uncertainty. The anxiety bred the questioning. England worried about its 'condition', for which reason it also worried, at length, about the state of its families and more particularly, the 'question' of its women, what they should be doing, what they might be thinking, and what they seemed to be reading (Ward 3).

The Newgate Calendar was a source of anxiety and fascination simultaneously, providing accounts of crimes and executions, but also potentially acting as cautionary tales. The novel was more threatening, in the sense that it opened a door into the intricacies of the mind and revealed the human behind such inhumane deeds. Indeed, these texts provided a space to explore and unravel the inner workings of crime as it took place in thought, to question one of the most intriguing and ambiguous aspects of any solved or unsolved crime: the concept of guilt, or more disturbingly, the lack thereof. Lisa Rodensky underlines 'the potential disjunctions of and incongruities between who they are and what they do', which is a crucial element to consider when attempting to understand how the Victorians perceived the link between the criminal characters and crime itself (Rodensky 38). In this discussion, I will explore the concept of guilt in relation to these novels' use of spectacle and performativity; the way in which these notions shape these marginalised identities, whether it concerns the depiction of children, women and men in Charles Dickens' *Oliver Twist* (1838) or the depiction of women and concealment in Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret* (1862). Richard D. Altick importantly notes that although Braddon could have

been referred to as the 'reigning monarch of sensation fiction', it is also true that 'Dickens's novels were devoured for their frequent use of melodramatic situations and events' (Altick 146). The use of sensation had a significant influence on the popularity of their novels, but also contributed to a questioning of these texts' literary value.

It is essential to address the key concepts of guilt and spectacle, in order to define their use in this essay. The notion of guilt is crucial in these texts and would be considered a natural human emotion to be associated with the consequences of a criminal act. The presence or absence of guilt, it could be argued, are what differentiate the human from the inhuman, the reasonable from the insane and perhaps is the key component in one's perception of a criminal. The notion of spectacle, on the other hand, is testimony to a sense of theatrical performativity which usually confers emphasis, or at least sheds light on, a particular character's appearance or actions. Interestingly, Dickens and Braddon use both of these devices to subvert and challenge the idea of a seemingly unified or one-sided perception of criminal characters. Despite the vast scope of research which explores these texts, there is a gap in the literature addressing the concepts of guilt in relation to the use of sensation and spectacle in these novels, which this project seeks to address. Informed by an analysis of the way in which the portrayal of guilt influences the description of characters such as Oliver, Nancy, Fagin and Lady Audley, this discussion will unravel the unappreciated complexity that lies behind such novels' characterisation and what this might reveal about the period's anxieties and preconceptions.

The notion of spectacle, as it is revealed through Lady Audley's theatricality and her character's sense of performance, is at the forefront of Braddon's novel as well as of Victorian society. Braddon shows that the power of spectacle seems to lie not only in what it shows of women's influence, but most importantly in what it conceals. It manifests itself in all art forms and explores the duality of the woman, intertwining the appearance on the one hand, which men can still control to a certain extent, and the inner workings of their minds, which remain indecipherable and ultimately uncontrollable. Lady Audley's Secret unveils an aspect of society in which both private and public coincide, shedding light on the use of spectacle as a device which, although externally perceived for all to see, is used to manipulate and deceive. Indeed, Braddon subverts the predictable and assigns the notion of guilt to a woman. Altick rightly underlines that 'By that single stroke, Miss Braddon defied convention, challenging the prevailing estimate of women as angels in the house, almost by definition incapable of crime, and of murder least of all' (Altick 149). Dickens' novel also offers a profoundly insightful analysis of the various ways in which each character is portrayed, questioning the boundary between the criminal act and the representation of internal human feeling. The complex and internally felt emotions, paralleled with physical descriptions, shed light on the elements of sensation and spectacle used in these novels, which complicate the assignation of guilt. Living on the margins of their society, these characters' relationship to crime is far from straightforward and the reader is invited to question the reliability of spectacle and performativity, and perceive what lies within.

In Dickens' *Oliver Twist*, the social implication and interpretation of crime has a primordial effect on how guilt is portrayed. The author and the reader are

no longer simple lookers-on, but become the embodiment of society itself, unconsciously participating in the social judgement of the criminals who appear at the turn of the pages. I will focus my analysis on the characters whom I believe to be the most striking in light of the aforementioned concepts. Firstly, Oliver, the orphan who is lured into London's pickpocketing circles; Nancy, drawn into a criminal world and at the mercy of murderer and thief Bill Sikes; Rose, appearing as Oliver's guardian angel and ultimately revealed as his maternal aunt and finally Fagin, the leader of this group of thieving children, for which I will focus on the ending and execution in particular. Interestingly, the depiction of innocence is as crucially important as the depiction of guilt, as the contrast between them reveals the period's reliance on external physical appearance to determine inward culpability. When Oliver encounters Fagin and the children, Dickens' language brings the reader into Oliver's consciousness, therefore giving the reader this naïve child's perception of the events unravelling before his eyes. To him, the performance of stealing is an innocent spectacle and is seen as a 'very curious and uncommon game' (Dickens 54). The reader witnesses the uncanny way in which crime can be potentially entertaining but most importantly alluring to the eye of the child. As James Buzard points out, Fagin '[...] even gives Oliver a copy of the Newgate Calendar to read as preparation for his first act of house-breaking' (Buzard 1228).

The reader has an insight into the ease with which Oliver could be drawn to becoming a criminal himself, almost unconsciously, and thus indirectly implies that Oliver, as an innocent and naïve child, if taken on this path, should perhaps be forgiven. Indeed, Buzard quotes a passage from *Oliver Twist* (qtd. in Buzard) which is particularly revealing of the sense of morality that the child initially feels:

This inept attempt to get Oliver to engage in a perverse form of moral perfectionism, or the pursuit of moral improvement through the internalization of exemplars, could not be more counterproductive: "In a paroxysm of fear the boy closed the book and thrust it from him. Then, falling upon his knees, he prayed to Heaven to spare him from such deeds, and rather to will that he should die at once, than be reserved for crimes so fearful and appalling" (Buzard 1228).

By giving the reader this special access to the mind, the author exerts his power and influence in determining each character's guilt. Indeed, the reader is not the sole judge of these characters, as the narrator's accounts are often indicative of the author's opinion. There is a problematic component to the construction of opinion and guilt between Dickens' characters themselves. Indeed, Mr Brownlow's first impression of Oliver is based on his apparent criminal act, that of stealing the book, but is then put into question by his physical appearance. He wonders about 'something in the boy's face' that makes him doubt his assumption of guilt, something "that touches and interests" him, automatically followed by the question: "Can he be innocent?" (Dickens 61). There is doubt as to whether this could be solely based on his memory and the coincidence that he recognises this face as familiar, but the contrast with the first impression that Oliver has about Dodger is striking. He 'was one of the queerest-looking boys' that Oliver had ever seen and 'as dirty a juvenile as one would wish to see' (Dickens 46). Indeed, Dickens 'is not a novelist who generally imagines a difference between inner and outer: the characters perform who they are' (Rodensky 38). The fact

that this portrayal implies the child's occupation is troubling, although justified, and contrasts sharply with the innocent and angelic descriptions of Oliver's face. Dodger has 'little, sharp, ugly eyes' and is a 'snub-nosed, flat-browed, common-faced boy enough' (Dickens 46). When Dodger's face condemns him from the start, Oliver's angelic face is the reason his guilt is questioned and his innocence believable whenever he is caught. Nancy, who remains under the dominion of Sike's influence as a character in-between two worlds, acts as an insight into what Oliver could become if he remained under Fagin's influence, as neither one nor the other seem to perform in association with who they are. Bringing Oliver back into the hands of Sike's was an act that went contrary to what she felt inwardly: '[...] and I wish I had been struck dead in the street, or had changed places with we passed so near to-night, before I had lent my hand in bringing him here' (Dickens 104). Nancy and Oliver are equally influenceable and both subvert the idea that all characters are who they appear to be on the surface.

Rather than simply performing who they are, Dickens' characters complicate the seemingly straightforward binary between innocence and guilt. Like Oliver, Nancy was brought into a world before understanding its implications, but unlike Oliver, whom she could have still saved from this fate, she feels that it is now too late to escape. Indeed, she tells Sikes that these "dirty streets are my home; and you're the wretch that drove me to them long ago; and that'll keep me there, day and night, till I die!" (Dickens 104). This brings into question the implication of appearance in the assessment of guilt, and as Lisa Rodensky argues, 'the potential disjunctions of and incongruities between who they are and what they do' (Rodensky 38). The reader has access to what the court never would: the ability to be the witness and the judge at the same time. Indeed, the fact that the narrator follows Oliver's life and experiences from the beginning enables the reader to form a comprehensive and all-encompassing judgement. This is further emphasised when Oliver is caught and met without any element to justify or prove his innocence. The debate between Mrs Maylie and the surgeon as they observe Oliver sleeping is particularly relevant to this ambiguity. To her, this 'poor child' and 'delicate' boy "can never have been the pupil of robbers!" and the reader is left at a crossroads: he was indeed the pupil of robbers, but the reader is aware of the ambiguity of this sentence in Oliver's case, and knows of his innocence in the matter (Dickens 191). Consequently, the reader is unconsciously brought to agree with this interpretation of Oliver's character, although this view is based only on her first impression of him. The surgeon provides the counter-argument: "Vice [...] takes up her abode in many temples; and who can say that a fair outside shall not enshrine her?" and argues contrary to popular images of guilt that 'the youngest and fairest are too often its chosen victims' (Dickens 191). His opinion, in contrast, is the opposite's extreme, and Rose seems to be in-between the two visions of guilt, as the epitome of compassion. Rose's opinion of Oliver is based on suppositions, yet those suppositions all reveal themselves to be true: "[...] think that he may never have known a mother's love, or the comfort of a home; and that ill-usage and blows, or the want of bread, may have driven him to herd with men who have forced him to guilt" (Dickens 191). This sentence unravels the underlying voice of the author, neither completely forgiving nor completely resolved.

Similarly, in *Lady Audley's Secret*, the novel's use of spectacle lies in the secret of subversion and doubt that runs through the narrative. The atmospheric sense of mystery is driven by the act of 'withholding the information rather than divulging it', whether it concerns the plot or Lady Audley's participation within it (Brantlinger 2). This discussion will focus on the analysis of the main character, Lady Audley. Her personality, the one that hides within and the one that appears before society, is a double-edged performance, a perpetual confrontation of these two extreme selves. Indeed, 'Braddon's novel was threatening because, in the controversial figure of Lady Audley, the Victorian logics of authenticity were pushed to their conceptual and ideological extremes' (Voskuil 613). Contrary to what most would like to believe, fair faces do not presuppose angelic intention. Braddon exhibits that fear through the representation of Lady Audley, who turns out to have been the opposite of what was expected of her. Lady Audley's coloured cheeks and her childish nature are her most convincing elements of performance. It is the most contrasting aspect of her nature in the sense that childlike behaviour presupposes innocence and unrepressed candour. Indeed, this 'childishness had a charm which few could resist' and 'the innocence and candour of an infant beamed in Lady Audley's fair face' (Braddon 58). A performative display of innocence and beauty is at play, most commonly attributed with youth and naivety, when she is in fact a master of manipulation.

The portrayal of the eye alongside extensive emotional descriptions is recurrent in *Lady Audley's Secret*. There is a distinctive moment in which a detail is emphasised: 'her clear blue eyes flashing with indignation' (Braddon 120). There is a sense of superiority and power coming from within. A few lines later she 'looked at the man steadfastly in the face till his determined gaze sank under hers' (Braddon 120). Her inner self shines through, reaffirming her dignity and exerting a power of intimidation. There is another moment a few pages later when her eyes come into focus:

Lady Audley's clear blue eyes dilated as she fixed them suddenly on the young barrister. The winter sunlight, gleaming full upon her face from a side window, lit up the azure of those beautiful eyes, till their colour seemed to flicker and tremble betwixt blue and green, as the opal tints of the sea changes upon a summer's day. The small brush fell from her hand [...] (Braddon 129).

The reader follows the gaze of a painter as the change in colour and movement of the eye follows the change in her emotions, ending in a display of nervousness in the failing of her hand. The performativity of the representation is enhanced, using the body to translate the mind, making a spectacle out of the small failings of her control. The emotional reaction is slow and subtle, appearing in the metaphor of the changing tints of the sea. It is controlled as it is enacted, resulting in the mere dropping of a brush. The setting of this scene is also poignant as it references a 'Turneresque atmosphere' in the use of light, colour and imagery (Braddon 129). Similarly, the reader comes to see Lady Audley's emotion by reading into the extensive use of colour to describe the face:

Faint shadows of green and crimson fell upon my lady's face from the painted escutcheons in the mullioned window by which she sat; but every trace of the natural colour of that face had faded out, leaving it a ghastly ashen grey (Braddon 132).

At that moment, all colour is drained from her when she realizes that her ‘disguise’ is pierced. The ‘green’ and ‘crimson’ colours are a sharp contrast with her inward appearance, revealing itself as a ‘ghastly ashen grey’ (Braddon 132). These changes seem to appear whenever there is a threat to her power. Colour is constitutive of her mask and disappears as suddenly as her control over the situation. The opposition between what is coloured and colourless also exists in the contrast between the description of Lady Audley and Phoebe Marks. When she first arrives, the main explanation for Phoebe not being qualified as pretty is ‘the absence of colour’ (Braddon 29). Nevertheless, as soon as Lady Audley’s confidence is restored, her ‘disguise’ is stripped back on:

Her great blue eyes [...], in charming unison with the soft pressure of her little hand, and that friendly, though perhaps rather stereotyped speech, in which she told her visitors how she was so sorry to lose them, and how she didn’t know what she would do till they came once more [...] (Braddon 133).

The way she talks, looks around her and uses her hand all take part in the general performance. She stages herself as a living performance for all to see because there is a crucial importance in others witnessing her impeccable hospitality, politeness and overall agreeable impression, for her intentions to remain undetected.

The duality portrayed in Lady Audley differs from the internal sense of duality in Nancy’s character. Nancy’s encounter with Rose in *Oliver Twist* is an encounter with a mirrored self, as she sees in Rose the person she could have been if she had not been entrapped in this world of ‘thieves and ruffians’ (Dickens 270). In opposition to Lady Audley, here, the element of spectacle is the pity found in her honesty, rather than in the performance of innocence, as the narrator delves into her consciousness and provides an insight into her assessment of her own feelings of guilt:

The miserable companion of thieves and ruffians, the fallen outcast of low haunts, the associate of the scourings of the jails and hulks, living within the shadow of the gallows itself, - even this degraded being felt too proud to betray *a feeble gleam* of the womanly feeling which she thought a weakness, but *which alone connected her with that humanity*, of which her wasting life had obliterated so many, many, traces when a very child (Dickens 270).

Dickens’ narrative voice intertwines with her consciousness of the past to reveal this ‘feeble gleam’ of ‘humanity’ as the thin and fragile thread which still ties her to the outside world. Living in ‘the shadow of the gallows’, she has become accustomed to the identity she now embodies, no longer able to retrieve and reassemble the ‘many, many traces’ of who she once was. The passage in which Nancy tells Rose ‘do not speak to me kindly till you know me better’ reveals her own awareness and guilt in relation to her position, as she warns Rose that she is not worthy of her kindness (Dickens 271). She further mentions her life amongst ‘thieves’ and deplores the fact that ‘never from the first moment I can recollect my eyes and senses opening on London streets have known any better life, or kinder words than they have given me’ (Dickens 271). This portrayal of guilt in Dickens goes beyond the factuality of the criminal act and is constructed on the basis of the individual’s past and the path that has led to a criminal life. Indeed, Nancy’s

character shows the complication that follows the assumptions based on appearance.

Many other characters display their own interpretation of guilt based solely on Oliver's demeanour, or on suppositions about his past. The physical characteristics are instantly recognizable but are insufficient to determine guilt, whereas the knowledge of a character's past is difficult to decipher but would be decisive in determining one's culpability. The complexity of the process of assignation of guilt is the fact that the writer of crime fiction is the only one who can assuredly possess both unequivocal access to the past and the mind of each character and completely control his or her appearance. The judicial system would not be omniscient and all-knowing. These specific instances reveal society's perception and portrayal of guilt but allows an insight into the supposed criminal's past history. Lyn Pykett argues that Dickens' position is excessively sympathetic towards its characters and was 'accused of representing criminals too sympathetically' (Pykett 28). This becomes more interesting and relevant when the character is an actual criminal who has consciously and intentionally committed a crime. The portrayal of Fagin and trial scene at the end of the novel in particular are crucial to the interpretation of his character's guilt. Dickens' ability to delve into the depths of his mind in such a singularly complex moment in the narrative and the act of writing about it in itself reveals a certain understanding or at least a certain amount of compassion towards Fagin's situation, if not as a criminal, at least as a human being. There is a sense of guilt in the lack of compassion itself. As Fagin looks around the court room just as he is about to hear his sentence, he looks for compassion in the faces he sees and particularly in the women. The narrator is clearly not impartial: 'in no one face—not even among the women, of whom there were many there—could he read the faintest sympathy with himself, or any feeling but one of all-absorbing interest that he should be condemned' (Dickens 358).

It seems that the author is condemning the readers and society as a whole, denouncing the lack of empathy and pity, but most of all, the disturbing interest in another person's death. The word 'absorbing' is as negative as it sounds, suggesting that something is omitted, something is dismissed by this audience who have their eyes set on the outcome and fail to recognise their inhumanity. Fagin's thoughts wander from the cost of the judge's dress to the counting of 'the iron spikes before him' from one paragraph to the other, but the narrator carefully reminds the reader that his mind was never 'for an instant, free from one oppressive overwhelming sense of the grave that opened at his feet, it was ever present to him' (Dickens 359). The reader's eye aligns with Fagin's as it pauses on the ephemeral materiality of his surroundings, but neither of them are given the opportunity to forget the outcome of this chapter, which reveals itself in its last word: 'death' (Dickens 364). The 'fragments' of the judge's words are disassociated in Fagin's mind, as he fails to assemble the pieces and make sense of the overwhelming situation. But these fragments of words 'gradually fell into their proper places, and by degrees suggested more: so that in the little time he had the whole, almost as it was delivered' (Dickens 360). The pace of this section is purposely slow, enticing the reader to read through the coming together of Fagin's realisation. What is underlined here is not the act, but the universal and humane process of thought which is associated with this situation. The reader is

detached from the character's intention to focus rather on the daunting and slow advancement of time as the awareness of death approaches. The emphasis is on simplicity, repetition and slowness. In the prison cell, simple words describe the reality of what is about to happen to him. After the trial, they led him to one of the condemned cells, and left him there—alone' (Dickens 360). Indeed, this paragraph ends with the following repetition of the sentence which he has finally reassembled and understood: 'To be hanged by the neck, till he was dead—that was the end. To be hanged by the neck till he was dead' (Dickens 360). The repetition is uncanny, as it mirrors the time needed for Fagin to realise the weight of this sentence and its significance, echoing in his mind.

For Fagin, the tension of this chapter culminates at the end, on 'the night of this last awful day' (Dickens 361). Fagin's state of mind is that of careless resignation, he has no explicit display of any feeling of guilt. It is Dickens' narrative voice which gives the reader the tone and his opinion of the inhuman conditions of such a death, that of being hanged. There is a poignant sense of sympathy with the character, who is about to die:

It was not until the night of this last awful day, that a withering sense of his helpless, desperate state came in its full intensity upon his blighted soul; not that he had ever held any defined or positive hope of mercy, but that he had never been able to consider more than the dim probability of dying so soon (Dickens 361).

Indeed, the probability of dying is universal to all, and had seemed distant to Fagin until his 'desperate state came in its full intensity upon his blighted soul' and the proximity of death made its reality inevitable and vivid. The reader suddenly witnesses the criminal 'in such paroxysm and fear', as the criminal finds himself trapped in the prison of his own mind (Dickens 361). His compassion does not lie in the character of Fagin as an individual, as his criminal life and selfish nature are described with pity, but with the human behind the acts. Indeed, 'Dickens had a peculiar identification with the social outsider and especially with the dark obsessions of the murderer and the thief' (Pykett 28). His own interpretation of crime is inevitably influenced by his own childhood experience and possibly lies at the heart of his compassion for Oliver as a character. The possibility of taking the wrong path in life could potentially have been one of Dickens' thoughts for himself as he looked back on his own experience.

For Lady Audley, on the other hand, the resolution unfolds when her portrait is discovered, the description of this penultimate moment of spectacle is revealing of the dual performance of masked innocence and hidden culpability. The painting is described using comparisons and imagery, making a connection with the natural. The dress itself is defined with 'flames', her hair like a 'mass of colour, as if out of a raging furnace' and there is the 'sunshine' of the face (Braddon 77). The 'lightness', the fire-like colour of her hair, the 'glowing colours' and the 'exaggerated' attributes are all part of the spectacle (Braddon 77). Most importantly, the 'strange, sinister light to the deep blue eyes' convey the underlying secret of the plot (Braddon 77). Referring to her as 'a beautiful fiend' and 'the hard and almost wicked look' of her 'pretty pouting mouth', show clues to her inner nature appearing outwardly (Braddon 77). It is suggested that women, then, are dangerous because of the very fact that they can use their outward beauty to convey inner innocence.

More than a concern for the truth and the detection of guilt or innocence, the authors discussed in this article have written about the human, regardless of how flawed or tortured they were, behind the crime. Indeed, it could even be argued that there exists a certain aspect of guilt in the reader of these books, who acts as both the active judge and the passive human at the same time. There are two particular instances in these texts that reveal a deeper sense of belonging to humanity as a whole, and the potential sense of guilt that comes with it. There is a sense of cruelty about condemnation itself in Dickens' novel, by showing the crowd's frantic determination and urge to condemn this little boy, Oliver, revealing a 'passion for hunting something' that is inhuman and criminal in itself. In the pursuit of Sikes, the crowd transforms itself into a raging monster, an impersonal mob:

Some called for ladders, some for sledge-hammers; some ran with torches to and fro as if to seek them, and still came back and roared again; some spent their breath in impotent curses and execrations; some pressed forward with the ecstasy of madmen, and thus impeded the progress of those below; some among the boldest attempted to climb up by the water-spout and crevices in the wall; and all waved to and fro, in the darkness beneath, like a field of corn moved by an angry wind: and joined from time to time in one loud furious roar (Dickens 343).

The length of this sentence, along with the lexical field of fury such as 'furious', 'angry', 'roared', 'roar', 'curses', 'execrations' and 'madmen' have a particularly dehumanizing effect on the crowd and its representation of society in relation to crime. Society as it is represented in this group, here, is condemned by the author for its avid desire and propensity to condemn and the troubling pleasure it seems to procure. The individual who is running away from the crowd has as personal identity and history, whereas the 'furious' crowd follow general assumption and precocious condemnation. The problematic question here lies in determining the divide between a general ugliness of human nature or individual evil as an abnormality. Sikes, just before his death, is faced with his consuming guilt: "The eyes again!" he cried, in an unearthly screech' (Dickens 347). Nancy's eyes tell the tale of the crime he committed, the witness to his guilt that survived in his mind. In a different way in Braddon's novel, Lady Audley deceives using the power she knows is the most effective, which is her physical appearance. Lady Audley is not only the object of Robert's gaze, as he scrutinizes and investigates her past, but also of 'the reader's rapt gaze' (Pykett 98). This 'intense focus on their physical appearance' emphasises the aspect of spectacle, which, imitating the blazon form, allows her flaming hair to almost become an extension of her personality. Indeed, Lady Audley uses both her body and mind as a means to acquire power, making the physical display a mirrored curiosity for an unattainable interior.

These novels attempt to uncover the remaining pieces of humanity within the apparent horror, to provide deeper layers to the criminals and crime itself, hence rejecting the idea of an irrevocably criminal mind. Dickens blurs the lines between innocence and guilt by rejecting the over-simplified binary and revealing the complexity of human experience. Braddon, on the other hand, reveals the complex layers of female power and the fears that are associated with it, in a changing society. Both of these novels invite the reader to question society's

perception of guilt by exploring the depths of the human mind, shedding light on the period's anxieties surrounding the concepts of crime and criminality.

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