Reader, I Married Bluebeard:

How and why do Brontë and du Maurier represent Gothic gender through the perpetuation of Bluebeardian themes in *Jane Eyre* and *Rebecca*?

By Melissa Julianne Severn

Originally informed by Charles Perrault's 1697 folktale *Bluebeard*, Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* has, since 1847, been elevated by readers and critics as an essential feminist fable in its own right. *Jane Eyre*'s fiction rings true in regards to the hindrance-ridden acquisition of women's autonomy; the novel's Gothic subtext is often critically neglected in favour of the heroine's refusal to adhere to a "degenerate"[1] patriarchy. However, the Gothic influence and gender-dictated disparities saturating *Jane Eyre* bleed together when Brontë's protagonist grapples with a "monster bridegroom"[2]. *Jane Eyre*'s narrative exudes Bluebeardian themes, inherently concerning itself with lethal misogyny and influencing Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca* nearly a century later. However, unlike Brontë's heroine, *Rebecca*'s narrator lacks overt feminist scruples; whilst Jane Eyre defies a bigamist stain upon her propriety, *Rebecca*'s narrator willingly assumes the role of her murderous husband's accomplice. Du Maurier's subversive

[1] Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre* (London: Vintage, 2007), 165.
[2] Jessica Campbell, "Bluebeard and the Beast: The Mysterious Realism of Jane Eyre," *Marvels & Tales* 30, no. 2 (Fall 2016): 234.

approach to Gothic gender tropes extends to an all-pervading theme of feminine rivalry between the dead Mrs de Winter and the living Mrs de Winter. Both heroines of the novels, however, are sent by their authors into Bluebeard's "forbidden chamber"[3] by discovering "patriarchy's secret, founding 'truth' about the female: woman as mortal, expendable matter"[4].

Through characterisation and plot, Brontë and du Maurier reimagine Perrault's *Bluebeard* in order to dismantle the effects that a lethal patriarchy has on the Gothic heroine and, ultimately, to empower the Gothic heroine.

Marvels & Tales critic Jessica Campbell asserts that fairy tales such as Perrault's were "ubiquitous"[5] in Victorian England, accessed by authors such as Brontë in the form of "chapbooks"[6]. Campbell supports the argument that *Bluebeard* drives "the characterisation of Edward Fairfax Rochester"[7]. In Perrault's French tale, the antagonist Bluebeard is described first and foremost as a wealthy possessor of not only "embroidered furniture, and coaches gilt all over"[8], but a "fine town and country houses"[9]; the reader understands that his monetary power saturates his locality. Rochester, *Jane Eyre*'s equivalent of this influential landowner, is the master not only of his abode Thornfield Hall but of "The Rochester Arms"[10] inn "two miles… across the fields''[11] from it, as well as his "desolate"[12] manor-house "at Ferndean… on a farm he has"[13] that eventually serves as his hermitage. In a monolithically material sense, both patriarchal representatives penetrate their far-reaching environs, thus making them the prime potential persecutors of those living in their kingdom: "a woman or girl"[14].

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[3] Heta Pyrhonen, "Bluebeard's Accomplice: 'Rebecca' as a Masochistic Fantasy," *Mosaic* 38, no. 3 (September 2005): 153.
[4] Pyrhonen, "Bluebeard's Accomplice," 149.
[5] Campbell, "Mysterious Realism," 234.
[6] Campbell, "Mysterious Realism," 235.
[7] Campbell, "Mysterious Realism," 235.
[8] Charles Perrault, *The Story of Bluebeard* (London: Lawrence and Bullen, 1895), 5.
[9] Perrault, *Bluebeard*, 5.
[10] Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 509.
[11] Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 509.
[12] Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 517.
[13] Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 517.
[14] Perrault, *Bluebeard*, 6.

Physically, Perrault describes Bluebeard as being “ugly”[15] due to his literal blue beard, only successfully acquiring the daughter of “a lady of quality”[16] after showering the former with “parties (and) balls”[17]; the daughter is initially repelled by his appearance. After indulging in the benefits of Bluebeard’s wealth, however, she realises that “the beard of the master of the house was not as blue as it used to be”[18]. Parallels with Brontë’s Rochester are found in the somatic shortcomings of Bluebeard. Rochester himself “frequently characterises his appearance as hideous and fears that Jane will be repulsed by it”[19], despite the fact that Brontë’s heroine displays a disparity from Bluebeard’s object of affection; Jane’s attraction to her master is not deterred by his abnormally large forehead, for instance. Of Rochester, Brontë states from Jane’s perspective: “I am sure most people would have thought him an ugly man; yet there was… such a look of complete indifference to his own external appearance… that in looking at him, one inevitably shared the indifference”[20]. Campbell evidently disagrees with Jane on the point of Rochester’s degree of insecurity regarding his “external” defects, but Brontë’s assertion is that, through learning the psychological merits of her master, Jane does not believe Rochester’s metaphorical beard to be “blue”.

Whilst Bluebeard slathers decadent social occasions upon his prospective bride to impress her, Brontë’s heroine is romantically coerced by Rochester’s “nonsense”[21] conversations that are imbued by his own preoccupation with fairy tales. Brontë’s “scowling Byronic hero”[22] flouts Gothic expectation of a reticent patriarchal antagonist whom communicates through physical force such as Walpole’s Manfred in *The Castle of Otranto*; Rochester “bewilders”[23] Jane with his

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[15] Perrault, *Bluebeard*, 6.
[16] Perrault, *Bluebeard*, 6.
[17] Perrault, *Bluebeard*, 10.
[18] Perrault, *Bluebeard*, 11.
[19] Campbell, “Mysterious Realism,” 242.
[20] Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 160-161.
[21] Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 168.
[22] Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (London: Yale University Press, 2000), 337.
[23] Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 168.

“enigmatical”[24], mythical metaphors for his conscience. Through Rochester’s dialogue, Brontë compares his desire for “fresh, sweet pleasure”[25] to a “messenger from the eternal throne”[26] as he refuses to believe it is, instead, “a fallen seraph of the abyss”[27] sent to corrupt him further. Brontë skilfully weaves not only the themes of a fairy tale - *Bluebeard* - into the novel, but overtly includes fantastical language within the dialogue of her “fallen” patriarchal figure in order to tincture *Jane Eyre* with the indisputability of an already-beloved fable in 1847. By doing so, Brontë seems to seek the mollification of *Jane Eyre*’s explicit “feminist tract”[28] in order to reconcile it with a Victorian audience; “They were disturbed not so much by the proud Byronic sexual energy of Rochester as by the Byronic pride and passion of Jane herself”[29], critics Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar declare. Furthermore, Rochester frequently refers to Jane as a “fairy”[30], labels her “thoughts… elfish”[31] and Brontë blatantly exudes her intentions by having Rochester tell Jane: “... you have rather the look of another world… When you came on me in Hay-Lane last night, I thought unaccountably of fairy tales… you had bewitched my horse”[32]. Thus, by reducing Jane to a mere magical being in the eyes of the patriarchy, Brontë ensures that her heroine ceases to be a real woman of “flesh”[33] and, therefore, cannot offend a Victorian audience with her “refusal to submit to her social destiny”[34].

Alternatively, 1948 critic Richard Chase “believed that the novel’s power arose from its mythologising of Jane’s confrontation with masculine sexuality”[35]. Similarly, Duke University Press critic Peter Grudin, discussing Brontë’s subversion of “the decorum of verisimilitude”[36],

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[24] Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 168.
[25] Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 165.
[26] Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 166.
[27] Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 166.
[28] Gilbert and Gubar, *The Madwoman*, 338.
[29] Gilbert and Gubar, *The Madwoman*, 338.
[30] Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 154.
[31] Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 153.
[32] Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 148.
[33] Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 500.
[34] Gilbert and Gubar, *The Madwoman*, 338.
[35] Gilbert and Gubar, *The Madwoman*, 338.
[36] Peter Grudin, “Jane and the Other Mrs. Rochester: Excess and Restraint in ‘Jane Eyre’,” *NOVEL* 10, no. 2 (Winter 1977): 145.

claims that Gothic “became a privileged form. Since it depicted… the imaginary rather than the real, it was able to articulate themes not to be found in the more realistic novels of its time”[37]. The “themes” to which Grudin alludes are those of eroticism and madness, usually taboo to the Victorian reader and already notoriously explicit in Matthew Lewis’s 1796 novel *The Monk*. Parallels must now be drawn between Brontë’s characterisation of *Jane Eyre*’s women and Perrault’s of *Bluebeard*’s in order to determine the feminist effects of the authors’ representation of Gothic gender.

Campbell describes Brontë’s protagonist as “the heroine of a bildungsroman, which means that she is by definition still in development and thus at risk of falling into the same trap as the women before her”[38]. The same definition can be applied to Perrault’s young, female protagonist as she undergoes an agonising transition from naivety to maturity at the hands of Bluebeard. Perrault specifically describes Bluebeard’s new wife as “the youngest daughter”[39], indicating that the reader should expect her to be malleable and ignorant of “the predator”[40] manifested in Bluebeard. She is imbued with superfluous vulnerability by Perrault; she is not even the elder of the two sisters. Manipulated by the “merry games and gambols”[41] Bluebeard provides for her - overtly childish bribes - the daughter deems him “a very worthy man”[42], marrying him with no lingering qualms. *Women Who Run With The Wolves* author Clarissa Pinkola Estes asserts that “the younger sister represents… exuberant and fissioning life. But there is a detour as she agrees to become the prize of a vicious man because her instincts to notice and do otherwise are not intact”[43]; Brontë’s heroine, barely eighteen and a “neophyte”[44] of life’s experiences due to her eight-year stint within the confines of Lowood, revels

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[37] Grudin, “Excess and Restraint,” 145.
[38] Campbell, “Mysterious Realism,” 242.
[39] Perrault, *Bluebeard*, 10.
[40] Clarissa Pinkola Estes, *Women Who Run With The Wolves: Contacting The Power Of The Wild Woman* (London: Rider, 2008), 45.
[41] Perrault, *Bluebeard*, 10.
[42] Perrault, *Bluebeard*, 11.
[43] Estes, *Women Who Run With The Wolves*, 43.
[44] Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 165.

ingenuously in the animated conversation that Rochester engages her in. He ungenerously defines her as a "little girl"[45] and condemns her piano-playing as that of "any other English school-girl"[46]. However, Brontë characterises her heroine as being unaffected by these patronising locutions; is Jane's indifference to Rochester's underhand persecution a result of her robust pride, instilled in her by the brutal Lowood punishments she endured, or her inexperience? Brontë, by adhering to the *Bluebeard* blueprint here, suggests the latter is to blame; Jane does not know to be offended by Rochester's patriarchal condescension due to being an "anlagen"[47], or "the part of a cell characterised as 'that which will become'"[48]. Brontë's heroine possesses the "potential at the centre of the (anlage) cell"[49] and Estes declares that "the Bluebeard tale speaks to the awakening and education of this psychic center, this glowing cell"[50]. Jane has left Lowood and penetrated the threshold of adulthood in encountering Rochester, but there remains life-saving lessons she must learn in loving him.

Establishing her heroine initially as an ingénue is vital to Brontë's feminist depiction of Jane's psychological development throughout the novel. Plagued by an internal struggle between passion and doctrine, Brontë's protagonist first earns the approval of a constrained Victorian audience by overcoming her "eddying darkness"[51] and leaving Rochester, just as Bluebeard's young wife exercises her agency in discovering that her own marriage is "illusory"[52]. In *The Brontë Sisters: Critical Assessments*, Ruth Yeazell discerns that "Victorian sexual morality and Christian dogma certainly influence the terms in which Jane defines her conflict"[53]; it is only by proving herself worthy in their eyes, by becoming an independent school-mistress and entrusting her own spiritual tutelage to the pious St John Rivers, that the Victorian reader can

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[45] Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 164.
[46] Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 150.
[47] Estes, *Women Who Run With The Wolves*, 43.
[48] Estes, *Women Who Run With The Wolves*, 43.
[49] Estes, *Women Who Run With The Wolves*, 43.
[50] Estes, *Women Who Run With The Wolves*, 43.
[51] Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 357.
[52] Ruth Bernard Yeazell, "More True than Real: Jane Eyre's 'Mysterious Summons'," in *The Brontë Sisters: Critical Assessments*, ed. Eleanor McNees (Bodmin: Helm Information, 1996), 248.
[53] Yeazell, "More True than Real," 248.

forgive Brontë's heroine - and even rejoice - in the fact that she interprets her "time to assume ascendancy"[54] as returning to Rochester. By depicting Jane's gradual harnessing of her own "powers… in force"[55], Brontë crafts a novel teeming with defiance of Gothic patriarchy and, thus, feminist arguments to slyly impress upon the unelightened Victorian reader; Jane flees like Isabella from the threat of Manfred's rape in *Otranto* due to her principles, yet she - Jane - undergoes a psychic transition from girlhood to a fully-fledged woman beforehand that the staple Gothic heroine does not. Brontë's Jane transcends what is expected of her, fictionally by St John and in reality by the Victorian reader, because she is, perhaps, the Gothic genre's trailblazing feminist heroine; "at the deepest level, Jane struggles to preserve the integrity and independence of the self…"[56], Yeazell concludes. Brontë emphasises through her characterisation of Jane's "unfurled… psyche"[57] that the heroine values her agency above any external expectation, judgement or potential horror: as of 1847, feminism infiltrates Gothic literature forever.

Referred to fittingly by Gilbert and Gubar as "*Rebecca*'s aunt"[58], *Jane Eyre*'s heroine seems to have inspired du Maurier's reinvention of Perrault's. Undeveloped "alarm systems"[59] due to youth are subverted by du Maurier regarding the protagonist of *Rebecca*. Du Maurier's heroine - unnamed, similarly to Perrault's who is "the youngest daughter" and then Bluebeard's "wife"[60], as if an insentient possession passed from father to husband - is so alert to the covert dangers surrounding her that her obsession with threat verges on "paranoia"[61]. Therefore, the second Mrs de Winter diverges from Brontë's Jane for, whilst Jane coaches herself to tame "the fire of (her) nature"[62], du Maurier's protagonist allows her interior fantasies, borne of personal

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[54] Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 506.
[55] Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 506.
[56] Yeazell, "More True than Real," 248.
[57] Estes, *Women Who Run With The Wolves*, 43.
[58] Gilbert and Gubar, *The Madwoman*, 337.
[59] Estes, *Women Who Run With The Wolves*, 43.
[60] Perrault, *Bluebeard*, 13.
[61] Pyrhonen, "Bluebeard's Accomplice," 151.
[62] Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 491.

insecurity about her “gauche”[63] personality and “mousy”[64] appearance, to run rampant. These fantasies are tortuous to the second Mrs de Winter because they “pivot on what she would like to be socially and sexually”[65], idealised goals that are unattainable: she pines to be Rebecca. By severing the first and second Mrs de Winter by the latter’s “envy”[66] for the former, du Maurier shifts the role of Bluebeard from the obvious male antagonist to his murdered wife: *Mosaic* critic Heta Pyrhonen asserts that the protagonist “feels persecuted by the first wife”[67], due to the impossibility of becoming her. *Rebecca*’s reader must question why du Maurier absolves her patriarchal representative - Maxim de Winter - of blame and instead criminalises one of the “dead bodies”[68] in Perrault’s Bluebeardian closet. *Atlantis* critic Auba Llompart Pons examines du Maurier’s gender-subversion: “...villainy in this novel is not exclusively linked to gender and, therefore, the victim and abuser statuses cannot be equated to femininity and masculinity, respectively”[69]. It would seem that du Maurier is preoccupied, in an acutely feminist vein, with shifting the status of power from the Gothic male to the Gothic female. Therefore, the author must impose denouncing, Bluebeardian characteristics upon Rebecca in order to grant her powerful control over the patriarchal Maxim; “villainy in the novel is inextricably connected to being in a powerful position within patriarchy”[70], Pons continues. Du Maurier sacrifices the feminal, “virtuous”[71] Gothic trope regarding the Bluebeardian dead wife in order to bestow upon Rebecca the dominance usually exercised ruthlessly by the patriarchy. Similarly to Brontë, du Maurier is quite the cunning feminist.

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[63] Daphne du Maurier, *Rebecca* (London: Virago Press, 2003), 37.
[64] Du Maurier, *Rebecca*, 237.
[65] Pyrhonen, “Bluebeard’s Accomplice,” 151.
[66] Pyrhonen, “Bluebeard’s Accomplice,” 151.
[67] Pyrhonen, “Bluebeard’s Accomplice,” 151.
[68] Perrault, *Bluebeard*, 30.
[69] Auba Llompart Pons, “Patriarchal Hauntings: Re-reading Villainy and Gender in Daphne du Maurier’s ‘Rebecca’,” *Atlantis* 35, no. 1 (June 2013): 69.
[70] Pons, “Patriarchal Hauntings,” 69.
[71] Pons, “Patriarchal Hauntings,” 70.

Regarding the all-important secret that grants du Maurier's heroine knowledge and, thus, the power to assume her "ideal ego"[72], if Rebecca is Bluebeard then symmetry dictates that the secret must belong to her. This is an argument fuelled by the heroine's disinterested attitude towards the revelation that Maxim murdered Rebecca: "None of the things that he had told me mattered at all"[73], du Maurier writes from her heroine's perspective, "I clung to one thing only… Maxim did not love Rebecca. He had never loved her, never, never"[74]. Du Maurier wields Maxim as a weapon with which to, symbolically, shoot holes in her heroine's "fantasized"[75] version of Rebecca. Hence, the power-shifting secret ceases to be the Bluebeardian slaughtering of a past wife and, instead, becomes the epiphany that the past wife was not "the kindest, most generous, most gifted person in the world"[76]. Du Maurier deploys Maxim's infuriated soliloquy to damn Rebecca, believed to be an "angel-wife"[77] heretofore by the heroine, as "vicious… rotten through and through"[78] due to her promiscuity and bigamy. Although nearly a century on, *Rebecca*'s 1930s readership are likely to have cosseted sexual principles not drastically evolved from those of *Jane Eyre*'s Victorian audience; bigamy would have been as horrific to their straitened sensibilities as it is to du Maurier's heroine. As a result, the reader is encouraged to doubt whether Maxim is "a villain who unjustifably murdered his first wife"[79]; surely Rebecca, hero-"worshipped"[80] in a perverse, envious manner by du Maurier's heroine whose obsessive thoughts the reader has been privy to for three-hundred pages, is instead "the devil"[81] for enacting and hiding her appalling secret in Bluebeard's closet.

[72] Pyrhonen, "Bluebeard's Accomplice," 153.
[73] Du Maurier, *Rebecca*, 306.
[74] Du Maurier, *Rebecca*, 306.
[75] Pyrhonen, "Bluebeard's Accomplice," 158.
[76] Du Maurier, *Rebecca*, 304.
[77] Du Maurier, *Rebecca*, 309.
[78] Du Maurier, *Rebecca*, 304.
[79] Pons, "Patriarchal Hauntings," 70.
[80] Du Maurier, *Rebecca*, 304.
[81] Du Maurier, *Rebecca*, 305.

As aforementioned, the “young and unformed”[82] second Mrs de Winter spends the majority of the novel in a “delusion”[83], influenced by her social and sexual innocence; du Maurier is preparing an assertion of a mutant type of feminism in the Gothic genre. The second Mrs de Winter exercises her agency by colluding with the patriarchal representative, Maxim de Winter, in order to escape the same fate of his dead wife, whereas Perrault’s original heroine reduces herself to a “poor distressed creature”[84] with “streaming eyes”[85], reliant on her brothers to save her life. By believing Rebecca to be the monstrous Bluebeard, du Maurier’s protagonist excuses herself from the guilt of still desiring the murderous Maxim. Du Maurier goes to extremes with her protagonist’s allegiance to Maxim as the former declares, whilst listening to his confession, “... part of me went with him like a shadow in his tracks. I too had killed Rebecca, I too had sunk the boat there in the bay… All this I had suffered with him”[86]. The effect of the protagonist’s psychological merge with Maxim’s crime is that the reader, too, is immersed in the act of Rebecca’s murder, in the “destructive image”[87] of a deadly patriarchy, and thus shares culpability alongside the heroine and Maxim himself. Why would du Maurier wish the reader to conspire with them? We should not feel too rueful, remember, for Rebecca assumes the role of Bluebeard and therefore deserves our “swords through (her) body”[88]. The author is attempting to, as Brontë did with Jane and the Victorian reader, reconcile her twentieth-century audience with the actions and choices of her heroine who, although unlike Jane in her moral dubiousness, is adamant about her wish to survive. Du Maurier is granting power to the second Mrs de Winter as well as the first; for the heroine to identify herself with Rebecca’s death, with the “clotted blood”[89] of Bluebeard’s forbidden closet, would be to relinquish herself to murder.

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[82] Pyrhonen, “Bluebeard’s Accomplice,” 151.
[83] Pyrhonen, “Bluebeard’s Accomplice,” 151.
[84] Perrault, *Bluebeard*, 44.
[85] Perrault, *Bluebeard*, 51.
[86] Du Maurier, *Rebecca*, 319.
[87] Estes, *Women Who Run With The Wolves*, 41.
[88] Perrault, *Bluebeard*, 56.
[89] Perrault, *Bluebeard*, 29.

Pons agrees that the second Mrs de Winter is acting in her own best interest (thus demonstrating feminist resolve) as “her decision to become Maxim’s faithful wife improves her situation in the end, overlooking the fact that this means being married to a murderer”[90]. Upon hearing Maxim’s confession, du Maurier’s heroine declares that there is no Gothic “horror”[91] in her “heart”[92]; despite the protagonist’s aversion to recognising herself in Rebecca or feeling sympathy for her, she - the protagonist - is presented to reader as, albeit perverted, a feminist in her uncompromising attitude towards Maxim. He is what she wants and her heart is “light like a feather”[93] because Rebecca’s “power”[94] has “dissolved”[95] in the discovery of her - Rebecca’s - imperfections. Therefore, the situation of du Maurier’s heroine is indeed improved from the “trembling”[96] beginnings that are usually inescapable for a Gothic heroine; as was her aim, she has become “the real Mrs de Winter”[97].

Similarly to Brontë’s heroine, du Maurier’s is preoccupied with the acquisition of control over her own fate, whereas Perrault’s resigns herself to the mercy of an absent fraternity. Thus, *Rebecca* too defies Gothic expectation of a desperate, fleeing female; du Maurier’s heroine remains “sat there on the carpet, unmoved and detached”[98] in the face of chilling danger because she has chosen, as is her independent right, to stay with the murderer she adores, the murderer she remains “fascinated”[99] by. Du Maurier seeks to communicate a new facet of Gothic feminism as valid; a heroine does not have to admit to “assimilation”[100] with the heroines victimised before her to establish herself as their noble equal. One does not have to be slaughtered by the

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[90] Pons, “Patriarchal Hauntings,” 70.
[91] Du Maurier, *Rebecca*, 299.
[92] Du Maurier, *Rebecca*, 299.
[93] Du Maurier, *Rebecca*, 307.
[94] Du Maurier, *Rebecca*, 320.
[95] Du Maurier, *Rebecca*, 320.
[96] Gilbert and Gubar, *The Madwoman*, 337.
[97] Pyrhonen, “Bluebeard’s Accomplice,” 157.
[98] Du Maurier, *Rebecca*, 319.
[99] Pyrhonen, “Bluebeard’s Accomplice,” 151.
[100] Campbell, “Mysterious Realism,” 240.

patriarchy to be a heroine and, overall, it is well within a heroine's power to "assume ascendancy" within the patriarchy altogether.

Du Maurier's heroine seems justified in her fascination with Maxim de Winter; to the reader, this representative of the patriarchy serves as a complex and idiosyncratic antagonist indeed. Maxim de Winter has, heretofore, been dismissed from comparison with the role of Bluebeard as he is not, ironically, as interchangeable with the folktale's murderer as Brontë's Rochester and du Maurier's Rebecca. Du Maurier employs Maxim de Winter as a Bluebeardian plot device instead; "... an older man brings a young wife into his family mansion"[101], Pyrhonen summarises, "the imposing house contains a terrible secret, but the wife must promise not to explore it… she, however, acts according the husband's covert script, for he never intended the requirement of obedience to be fulfilled"[102]. Calling his new wife "my sweet child"[103], du Maurier's patriarchal representative echoes Brontë's, though Maxim's dialogue expresses clues of a Bluebeardian plot rather than a portrayal of the "femicidal villain"[104]. As the second Mrs de Winter sits opposite him at the dining table, she imagines herself as her dead rival of "beauty"[105] and "charm"[106]: "I… so identified myself with Rebecca that my own dull self did not exist… I had gone back in thought and in person to the days that were gone"[107]. At this mid-point in the novel, the second Mrs de Winter cannot yet fathom the violent truth of "the days that were gone", romanticising them with juvenile unconsciousness. It is at this key moment of her heroine's pliability that du Maurier uses Maxim to instigate her - the heroine's - Bluebeardian rousing of consciousness; "You did not look a bit like yourself just now…"[108] he comments, "...You had a twist to your mouth and a flash of knowledge in your eyes. Not the right sort of

[101] Pyrhonen, "Bluebeard's Accomplice," 149.
[102] Pyrhonen, "Bluebeard's Accomplice," 149.
[103] Du Maurier, *Rebecca*, 225.
[104] Pons, "Patriarchal Hauntings," 72.
[105] Du Maurier, *Rebecca*, 224.
[106] Du Maurier, *Rebecca*, 224.
[107] Du Maurier, *Rebecca*, 224-225.
[108] Du Maurier, *Rebecca*, 225.

knowledge”.[109] Du Maurier utilises Maxim’s dialogue here as a vehicle of Bluebeardian insinuation; the patriarchal representative hints to the inexperienced female that there is, indeed, a secret and that he finds it “unpleasant”[110] that she should entertain the idea of uncovering it. However, as Pyrhonen argues, Maxim is exercising duplicity when he tells du Maurier’s heroine “I don’t want you to look like you did just now”[111], as it is a demonstration of his “covert script”. Du Maurier’s patriarchal representative’s “goal”[112] is actually to stimulate the heroine’s “anlage” into discovering his blood-stained secret, so that she learns her oppressed role and submits herself to it; Maxim wants “to make her realise the extent of his wealth and power and to see her (reflected) place in it”[113]. Little does he know, du Maurier’s heroine will not even deem his secret worthy of her “horror”; it is the discovery of Rebecca’s flaws that she finds life-changing.

In Perrault’s *Bluebeard*, the male antagonist’s handing over of his bloody closet’s key to the heroine is the equivalent of Maxim’s curiosity-stirring dialogue at the dinner table in *Rebecca*. “As for this little key, it is that of the closet… Open everything, and go in everywhere except into that little closet, which I forbid you to enter,”[114] Perrault’s Bluebeard instructs his wife; likewise, du Maurier has Maxim instruct her heroine, “there is a certain type of knowledge I prefer you not to have. It’s better kept under lock and key”[115]. Although du Maurier describes the second Mrs de Winter as feeling “excited”[116] by Maxim’s subtle invitation into secrecy, it can be argued that she does not physically take the initiative that he offers her; whilst Perrault’s heroine deliberately defies “her husband’s prohibition”[117] and unlocks the door, it is Maxim’s confession that makes du Maurier’s heroine knowledgeable. Again, Maxim is implemented as a Bluebeardian plot

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[109] Du Maurier, *Rebecca*, 226.
[110] Du Maurier, *Rebecca*, 226.
[111] Du Maurier, *Rebecca*, 226.
[112] Pyrhonen, “Bluebeard’s Accomplice,” 149.
[113] Pyrhonen, “Bluebeard’s Accomplice,” 149.
[114] Perrault, *Bluebeard*, 16.
[115] Du Maurier, *Rebecca*, 227.
[116] Du Maurier, *Rebecca*, 226.
[117] Perrault, *Bluebeard*, 27.

stimulus in opening the closet's door for the heroine, disempowering the second Mrs de Winter's "transformation"[118] from a girl to a woman. As Alison Light articulates in the Introduction of 2004's *The Rebecca Notebook*, a "sex war, a battle for power or dominance"[119] is thus initiated. In response to the robbery of her opportunity to "disobey… the predator's order"[120], du Maurier's heroine resolves to make the most of this patriarchal theft; by taking control and assuming the role of Maxim's reassuring accomplice, du Maurier's heroine acts as though she has indeed "open(ed) the door to the ghastly secret room"[121] herself. Estes determines that, therefore, "she chooses life"[122].

Du Maurier's patriarchal representative ceases to instigate the Bluebeardian plot development when the heroine discovers that Rebecca was not an "angel-wife" and, less interestingly, that Maxim murdered her; his contributions are no longer necessary to "the real Mrs de Winter"'s acquisition of power. In Virago's 2003 *Rebecca*, Sally Beauman points out in the Introduction that "the plot hinges upon secrets; the novel's milieu is that of an era and social class that, in the name of good manners, rarely allowed the truth to be expressed"[123]. Horrified by the prospect of public humiliation, du Maurier's patriarchal representative is reduced to less than a plot device, for the "secrets" of which he was the spokesperson have all been spent; du Maurier, constantly articulating her heroine's new acquisition of power within the patriarchy, in turn diminishes Maxim into a submissive "child who would gain confidence"[124]. Of course, du Maurier never allows Maxim to gain confidence again for, in order to establish her heroine as the dominating force in the inherited, misogyny-infused Manderley as Rebecca was, Maxim's power must shrink to provide a successful balance. Du Maurier champions her "criminal"[125] heroine, for she

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[118] Estes, *Women Who Run With The Wolves*, 48.
[119] Daphne du Maurier, *The Rebecca Notebook & Other Memories* (London: Virago Press, 2004), 8.
[120] Estes, *Women Who Run With The Wolves*, 48.
[121] Estes, *Women Who Run With The Wolves*, 47.
[122] Estes, *Women Who Run With The Wolves*, 47.
[123] Du Maurier, *Rebecca*, 8.
[124] Du Maurier, *Rebecca*, 302.
[125] Du Maurier, *Rebecca*, 225.

again abuses the dialogue of Maxim to emphasise that, now possessing knowledge in her artillery, the real Mrs de Winter's "naive nature begins to mature"[126]: Maxim regretfully discerns that she is "so much older"[127]. In losing her "funny, young, lost look that (Maxim) loved"[128], du Maurier's heroine has achieved her own "goal": "I am Mrs de Winter now"[129], she announces, a triumphant, if not morally corrupt, feminist.

Alternatively, Brontë adheres more faithfully to Perrault's Bluebeardian reveal of the secret. It is the "mere existence"[130] of Bertha Mason, Rochester's concealed wife in the "third-story"[131] of Thornfield Hall, that serves as the discovery which delegates patriarchal power upon the Gothic tale's heroine. As a result, Jane's commitment to Christian orthodoxy subordinates her passion for Rochester in light of his attempted bigamy. Control is transferred to Brontë's protagonist as Rochester begs her to stay with him despite the figurative "cut… throat"[132] of Bertha, decrying marriage as "mere human law"[133] and thus, the reader can infer, "fallible"[134] like himself. Despite the fact that Rochester is forced to reveal Bertha to Jane due to Richard Mason's intrusion at the altar, it can be argued that Brontë lures her heroine to the physical vicinity of Bertha - the secret - subconsciously and thus, similarly to Perrault's heroine, Jane is responsible for acquiring the knowledge herself. In Chapter Seven, long before Rochester's bloody secret is uncovered, Brontë's heroine spatially gravitates towards Bertha's third-story: "I climbed the three staircases, raised the trap-door of the attic… restlessness was in my nature… my sole relief was to walk along the corridor of the third story… to let my heart be heaved by the exultant movement which, while it swelled it with trouble, expanded it with life"[135]. In this passage, Brontë

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[126] Estes, *Women Who Run With The Wolves*, 49.
[127] Du Maurier, *Rebecca*, 336.
[128] Du Maurier, *Rebecca*, 336.
[129] Du Maurier, *Rebecca*, 326.
[130] Grudin, "Excess and Restraint," 147.
[131] Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 132.
[132] Perrault, *Bluebeard*, 30.
[133] Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 380.
[134] Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 167.
[135] Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 132.

emphasises that Jane's yearning for "incident, life, fire, feeling"[136] causes her to reject the "tranquillity"[137] of Thornfield; by having her heroine's "discontented" subconscious lead her to the attic, where Bertha is hidden, the author infers that the secret of the first wife's existence is the key that will unchain Jane from the "still…doom"[138] that she detests.

Brontë's preparation for Jane's assumption of powerful knowledge has a twofold feminist effect: faculty is also bestowed upon Bertha. Bertha is "something more complex and significant than a narrative convenience"[139], as Grudin asserts, for the madwoman's "hunger, rebellion and rage"[140] characterise her as Jane's "own secret self"[141]. Residing in the attic, a topographic symbol for the mind, Bertha represents the psychological ferociousness that Jane must "confront"[142] in herself by literally confronting Bertha; Bertha, "as a projection of Jane's own dark potentials"[143] must merge with Jane's naive stagnancy in order to germinate the knowledge that will save her - Jane - from Bluebeard. By recognising her potential fate in Bertha's imprisonment, Jane assumes the agency to stimulate her own liberation; thus, by characterising Bertha as her heroine's "mysterious"[144] alter-ego, Brontë accentuates the feminist concept that it is she - Bertha - who helps to hand the empowering knowledge to Jane, not Rochester. Similarly to du Maurier, Brontë therefore succeeds in granting power within the patriarchy to Bluebeard's past wife as well as his present, despite the fact that the former is irretrievably doomed. Taking the authors' expressed "disenchantment"[145] of the patriarchy and the subsequent "ascendancy" of feminal dominance into consideration, surely it is justified to

[136] Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 132.
[137] Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 132.
[138] Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 132.
[139] Grudin, "Excess and Restraint," 147.
[140] Gilbert and Gubar, *The Madwoman*, 339.
[141] Gilbert and Gubar, *The Madwoman*, 348.
[142] Gilbert and Gubar, *The Madwoman*, 339.
[143] Grudin, "Excess and Restraint," 145.
[144] Grudin, "Excess and Restraint," 147.
[145] Du Maurier, *The Rebecca Notebook*, 5.

consider both *Jane Eyre* and *Rebecca* as revolutionary feminist novels within their Gothic sphere.

Peter Grudin believes that *Jane Eyre* and *Rebecca* are “didactic”[146] novels, designed to educate the inexperienced female reader that acquiring painful knowledge is a fundamental stimulus of maturity. Brontë and du Maurier expand this pedagogic endeavour by perpetuating Perrault’s Bluebeardian lesson: the acquisition of this knowledge grants a young woman the power to elevate her position within the patriarchy to that of dominance. In the poetic epilogue of *Bluebeard*, Perrault asserts a feminist concept that is surprisingly premature for 1697; “Provided one has common sense, and of the world but knows the ways,”[147] he writes, referring to the acquired knowledge of the previously naive heroine, “this story bears the evidence of being one of bygone days… And of (a husband’s) beard, whate’er the hue, his spouse need fear no such disaster; indeed, ‘twould often puzzle you to say which of the twain is master”[148]. Perrault declares here that a wise woman can interchangeably assume the role of “master” alongside her husband.

Perrault’s early suggestion of equality was considered an unravelled ancestral idea by Sally Beauman in 2002, as far as *Rebecca* is concerned; “*Rebecca* raises questions about women’s acquiescence to male values that are… pertinent today,”[149] she argues, “... our enfranchisement is scarcely complete”[150]. Although Brontë and du Maurier distinctly sought to both preserve and modernise Perrault’s empowerment of his heroine in their own fiction several centuries later, it is only the centuries ahead that can irrevocably cement the Gothic heroine as “master” of the “mansion” that is her autonomy.

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[146] Grudin, “Excess and Restraint,” 145.
[147] Perrault, *Bluebeard*, 60.
[148] Perrault, *Bluebeard*, 60-61.
[149] Du Maurier, *Rebecca*, 17.
[150] Du Maurier, *Rebecca*, 17.

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