

How is female sexuality explored in *Jane Eyre* and *Rebecca*?

In my essay, I will explore the way Charlotte Brontë in *Jane Eyre* (1847) and Daphne du Maurier in *Rebecca* (1938), discuss themes of female sexuality. I will pay particular attention to how both novels explore themes of female pleasure and how it is controlled and framed by patriarchy as female madness and hysteria. Both Brontë and du Maurier use this framing to demonstrate how the patriarchy demonises and represses open expression of female sexuality. Whilst discussions of male sexuality were becoming more open during the Victorian period, female sexuality was considered unimportant and taboo, “If male sexuality is integrally associated with the assertive presence of literary power, female sexuality is associated with the absence of such power...”<sup>1</sup>. By using gothic archetypes and tropes, however, both authors are able to attain this “literary power” and use feminist and queer-coded discourse whilst not alienating their audiences or being subjected to censorship. Through the popularisation of novels, particularly within the gothic genre, Victorian women could fantasise and become more in touch with their sexuality, “Middle-class women, pent up in the Victorian home with few outlets for their energies and perhaps trapped in loveless marriages, dreamed about passionate lovers, capable of arousing their slumbering emotions.”<sup>2</sup> In both novels, the rivalry and contrasts between the protagonists and the “fallen” women shed light on the suffocating ideals of femininity and the dangers of the repression of female sexuality. However, the characters of Bertha Mason and Rebecca deliver a warning to the reader that diverting from traditional gender norms, particularly freely expressing feminine sexuality, is cause to be ultimately extinguished by the patriarchy.

Although both novels fit within the romance genre, they demonstrate how patriarchy controls and represses female sexuality and categories it as deviant behaviour. Both Mr Rochester and Mr de Winter demonstrate the danger of the patriarchy, with them displaying that they are capable of forced entrapment, mistreatment and even the murdering of women if they feel the women have crossed the boundaries of socially acceptable gendered behaviour. The most egregious societal rule that both Bertha and Rebecca break is their strong sexual desire and extramarital sexual relationships. This is the antithesis of the Victorian ideal of “The Angel in the House” a concept popularised by the famous poem by Coventry Patmore that promoted the ideal of female passiveness, piousness and purity within the domestic home, for example, “Her disposition is devout. Her countenance angelical.”<sup>3</sup> Mr Rochester warns Jane of his violent tendency’s to women he believes have deceived him, “To women who please me only

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<sup>1</sup> Gilbert, Sandra M., and Gubar, Susan. *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020.

<sup>2</sup> Schroeder, Natalie. “Feminine Sensationalism, Eroticism, and Self-Assertion: M. E. Braddon and Ouida.” *Tulsa Studies in Women’s Literature* 7, no. 1, 1988.

<sup>3</sup> Coventry Patmore and Derek Patmore. *Selected Poems of Coventry Patmore*. London: Chatto and Windus, 1931.

by their faces, I am the very devil when I figure out they have neither souls nor hearts...”<sup>4</sup> and Mr de Winter’s lack of remorse in his confession over the murder of Rebecca demonstrates the ongoing danger that Mrs de Winter faces in their marriage, “If it had to come all over again I should not do anything different. I’m glad I killed Rebecca. I shall never have any remorse for that, never, never.”<sup>5</sup> Both Maxim and Mr Rochester’s violent behaviour towards women confirms a certain masculine behaviour as acceptable. Additionally, this subversion of the typical romantic hero is representative of how the gothic genre developed to tackle more contemporary and feminist issues, “As the ordinary home replaces the castle as the place of terror, the newer villains are more often lovers and husbands than forbidding fathers.”<sup>6</sup> Their characters send a clear warning to the female characters and the wider female audience of the violent consequences of stepping outside of strict gender norms.

It is not only the women that cross the boundaries set by the patriarchy that suffer however, the characters that follow the ridged gender norms also suffer from repression and the stripping of identity. Mrs de Winter is repressed and controlled by Mr de Winter and the strict role of femininity she is expected to perform. Her sexuality is understated and almost asexual and she is often treated like a child by Mr de Winter, with him calling her infantilizing terms of endearment such as “poor lamb.”<sup>7</sup> Du Maurier demonstrates the control Mr de Winter has over the protagonist as her attempts to explore her femininity and sexuality are chastised through the villainising and othering of Rebecca. When Mrs de Winter imagines herself as Rebecca it invokes a confidence and sensuality that she has never felt before, “He looked across at me laughing, and I wondered what he would say if he really knew my thoughts, my heart, and my mind, and that for one second he had been the Maxim or another year, and I had been Rebecca.”<sup>8</sup> When he senses a change in her behaviour, however, he berates her, “I don’t want you to look like you did just now. You had a twist to your mouth and a flash of knowledge in your eyes. Not the right sort of knowledge.”<sup>9</sup> Mr de Winter condemning the knowledge of female sexuality demonstrates his need to control the protagonist’s behaviour. By keeping her unknowledgeable about her sexuality, out of fear that she may begin exploring her sexuality as Rebecca had, he is forcibly moulding Mrs de Winter’s sexuality into something that he finds socially acceptable, “There is a certain type of knowledge I prefer you not have... don’t ask me anymore questions, or I shall put you in the corner.”<sup>10</sup> This is another example of the infantilizing and demeaning way in which Mr de Winter treats the protagonist. Over the course the novel, the sexual repression and strict

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<sup>4</sup> West, Clare., and Charlotte Brontë. *Jane Eyre*. 2nd ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.

<sup>5</sup> Du Maurier, Daphne. *Rebecca*. London: Virago, 2015.

<sup>6</sup> Alexandra Warwick, ‘Gothic 1820-1880’ in *Terror and Wonder: The Gothic Imagination* London: The British Library, 2014.

<sup>7</sup> Du Maurier, Daphne. *Rebecca*. London: Virago, 2015.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> Du Maurier, Daphne. *Rebecca*. London: Virago, 2015.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

gendered norms the protagonist is forced to adhere to become severely damaging to her mental health which leads to her contemplating suicide. This demonstrates that although Mr de Winter is not inflicting physical violence on her, as he did Rebecca, he is inflicting psychological violence. This is an example of the, "...traumatogenic effects of oppression that are not necessarily overtly violent or threatening to bodily well-being at the given moment but that do violence to the soul and the spirit."<sup>11</sup> The protagonist loses all her vitality, "...how white and thin my face looked in the glass, my hair hanging lank and straight..."<sup>12</sup>. This demonstrates that through the patriarchal pressure to conform, she is essentially killing herself, "What the girl has to attempt, and what she must compulsively repeat in the telling of the tale, is a kind of self-murder. It is a violent denial of those other versions of female sexuality which Rebecca has come to represent."<sup>13</sup> By denying herself the freedoms of female sexuality and conforming to patriarchal ideals of femininity, the protagonist becomes a psychological threat to herself. This demonstrates that rather than the ghost of Rebecca being the traditional gothic villain, it is the patriarchy that is the insidious force behind the protagonist's mental decline.

Both novels restore the conventional heterosexual marriage, as to not alienate their audiences, however, significant feminist and queer-coded messaging can be found throughout which is in line with the conventions of the gothic genre, "Literary critics have frequently identified the presence of transgressive sexuality in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Gothic fiction, usually highlighting its trajectory of temporary titillation followed by a comforting restoration of norms and pointing out that, even in its conservative mode, queerness is embedded in Gothic fiction."<sup>14</sup> Recent queer theory has argued that both novels use the gothic genre to explore themes of lesbianism, "...Rebecca is alive with erotic tensions and same-sex-cross class-intimacy, or fantasy of it ...In the novel, Mrs Danvers' portrayal and her relationship to Rebecca and to the unnamed second wife (and hers to the dead Rebecca) is rich in lesbian overtones."<sup>15</sup> In *Rebecca*, the relationship between Mrs Danvers and the late Rebecca is queer-coded with the audience questioning if the intense love Mrs Danvers feels for Rebecca is platonic or romantic. Mrs Danvers goes on to cross boundaries within Mrs and Mr de Winter's marriage by controlling domestic spaces in the home and invading the heterosexual bedroom. Mrs Danvers touches the brushes given by Mr de Winter to Mrs de Winter and brushes Mrs de Winter's hair as she did Rebecca's in their bedroom, "When the patriarchal parameters of desire have been set by the husband in his purchase, they are breached, if only for now, by Mrs Danvers, and in the husband's territory."<sup>16</sup> When Mrs de

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<sup>11</sup> Westengard, Laura. *Gothic Queer Culture: Marginalized Communities and the Ghosts of Insidious Trauma*. Lincoln: Nebraska, 2019.

<sup>12</sup> Du Maurier, Daphne. *Rebecca*. London: Virago, 2015.

<sup>13</sup> Light, Alison. "'Returning to Manderley': Romance Fiction, Female Sexuality and Class." *Feminist Review*, no. 16, 1984.

<sup>14</sup> Westengard, Laura. 2019. *Gothic Queer Culture: Marginalized Communities and the Ghosts of Insidious Trauma*. Lincoln: Nebraska.

<sup>15</sup> Hallett, Nicky. "Did Mrs Danvers Warm Rebecca's Pearls? Significant Exchanges and the Extension of Lesbian Space and Time in Literature." *Feminist Review* no. 74, 2003.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

Winter explores the late Rebecca's bedroom there is further exploration of the protagonists sexually encoded confusion, "Those were her brushes on the dressing table, that was her dressing-gown and slippers laid out upon the chair... They belonged to someone else. I put out my hand and touched the brushes... The nightdress was inside the case, thin as gossamer, apricot in colour. I touched it, drew it out from the case, put it against my face..."<sup>17</sup>. This demonstrates how Mrs de Winter's fascination and obsession with Rebecca may have developed into sexual attraction, "The space is erotically charged by the lesbian presence, current and past, and by the touching of erogenous objects, previously activated by other women's hands."<sup>18</sup> Mrs de Winter has a greater emotional response to the touching of Rebecca's personal items than she does to her physical relationship with her husband, which is understated and not described in detail in the novel. Mrs de Winter's desire to acquire more knowledge about Rebecca demonstrates a willingness to transgress boundaries and explore her sexuality and potential queerness.

In *Jane Eyre*, Brontë places particular emphasis on the importance of female homosocial relationships such as the friendship between Jane and Helen. This challenges the conventional structure of the Victorian realist novel, where the focus of the female protagonist's development is primarily on the eventual achievement of heterosexual marriage. Compared to other famous novels of the time, emphasis is placed on the importance of building female relationships, both platonic and romantic in nature. Similarly, to *Rebecca*, same-sex attraction and desire is explored in *Jane Eyre*, principally through Jane's expression of art. During her first meeting with Mr Rochester she describes the experience of painting as being, "...one of the keenest pleasures I have ever known."<sup>19</sup> Jane paints a portrait of herself and Blanche Ingram to convince herself that Mr. Rochester could never return her affections. She uses hyperbolic statements, "...fantastic idiot..."<sup>20</sup>, which demonstrates her lack of self-confidence both in her beauty and mind. Later in the novel when Jane paints the portrait of Rosamond Oliver however, it is clear that Jane has gained newfound confidence in herself. Through the painting of women, Jane is able to express herself, "...female art can be read as a product of the whole female being, for it comes both from the mind and the heart."<sup>21</sup> Through this passionate display of "pleasure", Jane steps away from the domestic angel ideals of Victorian female sexuality, "Women are supposed to be very calm generally: but women feel just as men feel."<sup>22</sup> It is St. John's rejection of Rosamond that convinces Jane that she cannot reject Mr Rochester's love as she cannot agree

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<sup>17</sup> Du Maurier, Daphne. *Rebecca*. London: Virago, 2015.

<sup>18</sup> Hallett, Nicky. "Did Mrs Danvers Warm Rebecca's Pearls? Significant Exchanges and the Extension of Lesbian Space and Time in Literature." *Feminist Review* no. 74 (2003): 35-49.

<sup>19</sup> West, Clare., and Charlotte Brontë. *Jane Eyre*. 2nd ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> Ioannou, Maria. "'A Brilliancy of Their Own': Female Art, Beauty and Sexuality in

Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*." *Brontë studies: journal of the Brontë Society* 43, no. 4, 2018.

<sup>22</sup> West, Clare., and Charlotte Brontë. *Jane Eyre*. 2nd ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.

with the religious conventions that separate love and sexual pleasure from marriage, “She has learnt to see sexual love as the most important form of love and the central reason for choosing a mate.”<sup>23</sup> Through the admiration of Rosemond’s figure, Jane comes to this conclusion as Rosemond, “...represents sexual love and beauty, and the beauty of sexual love, which neither men nor women must lightly disregard.”<sup>24</sup>

Jane is able to transverse boundaries and explore her sexuality through her role as a governess, “The Victorian governess was at once a domestic and exotic figure. She was a woman of contradiction, a mystery...”<sup>25</sup>. Unlike Mrs de Winter’s apathy towards a sexual desire for her husband, Jane expresses strong physical attraction to Mr Rochester, which develops early in their relationship despite him being regarded as not particularly handsome by his peers and initially by Jane herself, “And was Mr Rochester now ugly in my eyes? No reader: gratitude, and many associations, all pleasurable and genial, made his face the object I best liked to see...”<sup>26</sup>. Jane does not fear or deny her sexuality and even expresses regret that she did not get to experience her wedding night after the aborted wedding, “...Jane Eyre, who had been an ardent, expecting woman- almost a bride, was a cold, solitary girl again.”<sup>27</sup> When Mr Rochester attempts to seduce Jane to get her to stay at Thornfield, Jane is aroused rather than scared by his advances, “He seemed to devour me with his flaming glance: physically I felt, at the moment, powerless as stubble exposed to the draught and glow of a furnace.”<sup>28</sup> It is not the temptation of sexuality that scares Jane away from Rochester but rather her desire for Rochester that cements her decision to leave, demonstrating her strong sense of self and morality.

Jane controls her physical sexual urges which allows her to go unpunished by the patriarchy, “Jane is in control of her life and her sexuality from the beginning of the novel to the end. She is the most empowered person in the novel and this power is derived from the control she has of her sexuality.”<sup>29</sup> After Jane saves Mr Rochester from the fire caused by Bertha at the beginning of the novel, there is an exchange between them that is alive with sexual tension, “I knew,” he continued, ‘you would do me good in some way, at some time; - I saw it in your eyes when I first beheld you; their expression and smile did not (again he stopped)- ‘did not’

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<sup>23</sup> Ioannou, Maria. “‘A Brilliancy of Their Own’: Female Art, Beauty and Sexuality in Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*.” *Brontë studies: journal of the Brontë Society* 43, no. 4, 2018.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> Dau, Duc. “The Governess, Her body, and Thresholds in ‘The Romance of Lust.’” *Victorian Literature and Culture* 42, no 2, 2014.

<sup>26</sup> West, Clare., and Charlotte Brontë. *Jane Eyre*. 2nd ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> Castro-Borrego, Silvia Pilar, and Romero-Ruiz, Maria Isabel, eds. *Identities on the Move : Contemporary Representations of New Sexualities and Gender Identities*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2014.

(he proceeded hastily) ‘strike delight to my very inmost heart so for nothing.’<sup>30</sup> Jane is aroused by Rochester and cannot sleep after the encounter, “I regained my couch, but never thought of sleep. Till morning dawned I was tossed on a buoyant and unquiet sea, where billows of trouble rolled under surges of joy.” Unlike Rebecca, however, who *is* the sea with her powerful sexuality, Jane resists, “Sense would resist delirium: judgement would warn passion.”<sup>31</sup> This demonstrates that moral “sense” can overcome sexual desire and that female character’s like Bertha and Rebecca lack this morality and restraint, which has led to their demise. Only the female characters that repress their sexualities achieve happiness at the end of the novels, with a socially acceptable, heterosexual marriage and a sexual relationship which predominant function is to reproduce. Although the status quo has been threatened or destabilised through the feminist discourse within the novel, by Jane marrying Mr Rochester the heterosexual marriage re-establishes the solidity of the patriarchy. Jane lightly condemns Mr Rochester’s treatment of Bertha, “...you are inexorable for that unfortunate lady...It is cruel- she cannot help being mad.”<sup>32</sup> However, it is Jane’s animalistic and monstrous description of Bertha that commit, “...significantly more violence on the madwoman that Rochester’s complains ever do. Her hypocritical lip service to compassion masks her ruthlessness and Jane’s narration urges us to see her, not Bertha, as a victim of Rochester’s duplicity and the patriarchal power structure of Victorian society.” This ignoring of abuse of women *by women* is also present in *Rebecca*, as in the novel’s climax both Mr and Mrs de Winter grow closer in their marriage when Mr de Winter confesses to the murder of Rebecca and Mrs de Winter becomes complicit in the crime.

The female characters that don’t conform to societal gendered norms, in particular Bertha and Rebecca, have their open expression of sexuality linked to being mad and hysterical. Both novels provide commentary on how historically women and madness are linked, “The theme of madness in literature is intrinsically gendered. At the most basic level, it is often females who are called and males who called them so.”<sup>33</sup> Descriptions of Bertha and Rebecca centre mainly around their physical appearance, cementing them as purely physical beings incapable of psychological control over their bodies. This links to the Victorian belief that, “...women are entities defined by and entrapped within their bodies in contrast to the man, who is governed by rationality and capable of transcending the fact of his embodiment.”<sup>34</sup> Jane’s description of Bertha is impacted by the fact she is a Creole woman, “What it was, whether beast or human being, one could not, at first sight, tell: it snatched and growled like some strange wild animal...grizzled hair, wild as a mane, hid its head and face.”<sup>35</sup> Through the

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<sup>30</sup> West, Clare., and Charlotte Brontë. *Jane Eyre*. 2nd ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> Parkinson, Kirsten L. “Mrs. Rochester’s Story: Franco Zeffirelli’s Adaptation of ‘Jane Eyre.’” *Literature/Film Quarterly* 43, no. 1, 2015.

<sup>33</sup> Goodman, Lizbeth. *Literature and Gender*. London: Routledge, 1996.

<sup>34</sup> Hurley, Kelly. *The Gothic Body: Sexuality, Materialism, and Degeneration at the Fin de Siècle*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

<sup>35</sup> West, Clare., and Charlotte Brontë. *Jane Eyre*. 2nd ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.

racial othering of Bertha, Jane demonstrates a colonialist sentiment of white superiority and purity, “The primitive woman was rarely a murderess; but she was always a prostitute, and such she remained until semi-civilized epochs.”<sup>36</sup> Bertha is therefore animalistic in her sexuality and is unable to repress it as Jane, whose civility is shaped by her English upbringing. Bertha’s laugh is described as “demonic”<sup>37</sup> and “goblin”<sup>38</sup> in nature, aligning her with supernatural and evil spirits. When Richard Mason is attacked by Bertha he describes how Bertha, “She bit me...She worried me like a tigress, when Rochester got the knife from her...She sucked the blood: She said she’d drain my heart.”<sup>39</sup> This construction of feminine sexuality as monstrous allows for the persecution of women and the glorification of enforced marriage to tame them, “Defined as other to man, women are subordinated to a regime of ideas, values and practices (patriarchy) in which their position is demarcated and authorised by ‘nature’ as different from and less than males in terms of rational powers, moral character...”<sup>40</sup>. Therefore *Jane Eyre* and *Rebecca* act as “both a critique of romantic fiction and of the casting of woman and her sexual energies as monstrous.”<sup>41</sup> Maxim’s justification for his murdering of Rebecca, “It doesn’t make for sanity, does it, living with the devil...”<sup>42</sup> again displays the dehumanisation and demonisation of women. This demonstrates the patriarchal belief that both Maxim and Rochester share that, “...women actually *create* their own gothic experiences...”<sup>43</sup> and are therefore responsible and to blame for their abuse and murder, “...thus Maxim demonises Rebecca and blames *her* for *his* crime.”<sup>44</sup>

However, unlike Bertha who is characterised as animalistic in her madness, Rebecca can maintain a image in public that she is an upstanding woman and adoring wife, “Her strength, sense of liberation and sexual furiosity make her monstrous...However, what is worse is the way she performs perfectly in the idealised role of woman (as wife, hostess, beauty)...she treats social forms and rules as nothing but a masquerade...”<sup>45</sup> Rebecca’s sexual freedom is

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<sup>36</sup> Tillinghast, Richard. “Daphne Du Maurier: Back to Manderley Again.” *The Hudson Review* 71, no. 2, 2018.

<sup>37</sup> West, Clare., and Charlotte Brontë. *Jane Eyre*. 2nd ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> West, Clare., and Charlotte Brontë. *Jane Eyre*. 2nd ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.

<sup>40</sup> Fred Botting. *Gothic*. Taylor and Francis, 2005.

<sup>41</sup> Wisker, Gina. “Dangerous Borders: Daphne Du Maurier’s Rebecca: Shaking the Foundations of the Romance of Privilege, Partying and Place.” *Journal of gender studies* 12, no. 2, 2003.

<sup>42</sup> Nigro, Kathleen Butterly. “Rebecca as Desdemona: ‘A Maid That Paragons Description and Wild Fame.’” *College Literature* 27, no. 3, 2000.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> Nigro, Kathleen Butterly. “Rebecca as Desdemona: ‘A Maid That Paragons Description and Wild Fame.’” *College Literature* 27, no. 3, 2000.

<sup>45</sup> Fred Botting. *Gothic*. Taylor and Francis, 2005.

inherently linked to her class, which allows her to be promiscuous whilst maintaining an image, “From the outset, the novel acknowledges that the regulation of female sexuality finds its weapon in the expression of class difference.”<sup>46</sup> This is a sexual freedom and romantic ideal that Mrs de Winter cannot achieve due to her self-conscious, middle class upbringing. However, by the end of the novel Rebecca’s sexuality is condemned, “No longer the perfect wife, hostess and love, she is to be branded by the end of the novel as lesbian and whore.”<sup>47</sup> Rebecca’s act of being the perfect wife and upstanding woman in the community demonstrates how performative femininity is within the constraints of the patriarchy. Mrs de Winter desperately tries to fill the void of Rebecca and perfectly perform all the duties she carried out, which undermines the concept of innate femininity, “If the heroine mirrors Rebecca at all in terms of femininity and its doubles, it is as a image of the disturbing emptiness of social forms that Rebecca’s masquerade reveals: she has been reduced to a ghostly state signifying that she has almost no substance or identity of her own.”<sup>48</sup> Therefore femininity is an empty act that needs to be performed according to strict gender norms rather than an intrinsic state of being for women.

Du Maurier’s own relationship with her gender expression and sexuality influenced the characterisation of Rebecca, “Du Maurier’s entire body of work may be read as an extended critique of masculinity. Her own makeup has a significant masculine component, and she often wishes she had been born a boy.”<sup>49</sup> In a letter to her friend, Ellen Doubleday, whom she had romantic feelings for, du Maurier writes, “the boy realises he had to grow up and not be a boy any longer, so he turned into a girl...”<sup>50</sup> However, after living alone, she was able to explore her gender, “She opened up the box sometimes and let the phantom who was neither girl nor boy but disembodied spirit dance in the evening when there was no one there to see.”<sup>51</sup> This representation of gender is mirrored in the character of Rebecca who, “ought to have been a boy”<sup>52</sup> and even Mrs de Winter who describes her nails as, “...they are scrubby, like a schoolboy’s nails.”<sup>53</sup> Despite having physical relationships with women, however, du Maurier was repulsed by the idea of lesbians, “If anyone should call that sort of love by that unattractive word that begins with ‘L’, I’d tear their guts out.”<sup>54</sup> Du Maurier’s shame in her sexuality is reflected in the character of Rebecca, as her open display of sexual attraction for both genders is ultimately punished through Rebecca’s death. Rebecca having cancer of the

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<sup>46</sup> Light, Alison. “‘Returning to Manderley’: Romance Fiction, Female Sexuality and Class.” *Feminist Review*, no. 16, 1984.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> Fred Botting. *Gothic*. Taylor and Francis, 2005.

<sup>49</sup> Tillinghast, Richard. “Daphne Du Maurier: Back to Manderley Again.” *The Hudson Review* 71, no. 2, 2018.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> Du Maurier, Daphne. *Rebecca*. London: Virago, 2015.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> Tillinghast, Richard. “Daphne Du Maurier: Back to Manderley Again.” *The Hudson Review* 71, no. 2, 2018.



womb also demonstrates how her sexuality is unnatural and needs to be punished to restore the socially acceptable heterosexual marriage, “Lesbian Gothic as a genre evinces little interest in normalizing lesbian relations but highlight their socially disruptive aspect and foregrounds lesbian difference.”<sup>55</sup> Rebecca’s transgressions need to be punished either by nature or God for order to be reimposed.

Both novels have had and continue to have great success in the entertainment industry, with there being numerous film and television adaptations. The first 1940 film adaptation of *Rebecca* centred mainly on the romance plot of the novel, which attracted a large, majority female audience. Critics have found that film adaptations that centre on romance influence the audience’s perception of the novel. This makes readers “...project the films more romantic vision on du Maurier’s text...”<sup>56</sup> making them believe that, “...Mr’s de Winter’s decision to become Maxim’s faithful wife improves her situation in the end, overlooking the fact that this means being married to a murderer.”<sup>57</sup> Likewise in *Jane Eyre*, adaptations often overlook the feminist messaging in favour of traditional heterosexual romance, “...engagement with the novels’ feminism has not always been a part of the adaption process... Depending on the period in which the films were made, they will undo, overlook, or transcend the early feminist nuances that characterise the novel.”<sup>58</sup> However, recent adaptations vary in their depiction of the novel’s genre with directors taking new approaches that take into account feminist, queer and colonial discourse. Director Franco Zeffirelli’s 1996 adaptation of *Jane Eyre*, takes the narrative away from Jane and places greater emphasis on Bertha, which allowed her to emerge as a more complex and nuanced character, “...viewers see Bertha not as the savage double of Bronte’s book; rather, she emerges as a complicated and more rational character.”<sup>59</sup> Without Bertha’s hyperbolic animalistic behaviour and monstrous appearance, audiences were less likely to see her as the villain of the story but rather the victim, shedding a villainous light on Rochester and Jane.

In conclusion, both novels use the gothic and romance genre to challenge patriarchal ideas of femininity by exploring themes of female sexuality and queerness. *Jane Eyre* demonstrates the crossing of boundaries through her role as a governess, her leaving Thornfield and her exploration and discussion of female pleasure. Likewise, *Rebecca* explores female queerness by allowing the reader to, “...have the pleasure of finding Rebecca desirable whilst condemning her in advance.”<sup>60</sup> However, the characterisation of Bertha and Rebecca convey a warning to the reader about what happens to women that act on their sexual desires rather

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<sup>55</sup> Anolik, Ruth Bienstock, ed. *Horriifying Sex: Essays on Sexual Difference in Gothic Literature*. Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Incorporated Publishers, 2007.

<sup>56</sup> Nigro, Kathleen Butterly. “Rebecca as Desdemona: ‘A Maid That Paragons Description and Wild Fame.’” *College Literature* 27, no. 3, 2000.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> Fanning, Sarah E. “The Many Faces of Jane Eyre: Film Cultures and the Frontiers of Feminist Representation.” *Brontë studies: journal of the Brontë Society* 43, no. 1, 2018.

<sup>59</sup> Parkinson, Kirsten L. “Mrs. Rochester’s Story: Franco Zeffirelli’s Adaptation of ‘Jane Eyre.’” *Literature/Film Quarterly* 43, no. 1, 2015.

<sup>60</sup> Light, A. Returning to Manderly. Romance Fiction, Female Sexuality and Class. *Feminist Review*, No 16, 1984.

than repressing them. Jane is allowed to explore her sexual desires, but only within the confines of the heterosexual marriage as she has an, "...awareness that in order to succeed she must follow patriarchal rules; uncured sexuality in women leads to lunacy and imprisonment..."<sup>61</sup>. This saves Jane from suffering at the hands of men, as Bertha and Rebecca have, although becoming a married woman provides her with new constraints. Mrs de Winter's fate is not so assured as the novel ends with her married to a murderer, suggesting that the real villain in the gothic novel is the patriarchy.

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<sup>61</sup> Castro-Borrego, Silvia Pilar, and Romero-Ruiz, Maria Isabel, eds. *Identities on the Move: Contemporary Representations of New Sexualities and Gender Identities*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2014.

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