Is the passive woman the ideal woman?

By Deb Daniel

In this article I will explore the question of whether the passive woman is the ideal woman in Ann Radcliffe's Gothic novel *The Castles of Athlin and Dunbayne* (1789, *Castles* henceforth) and Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca* (1938).[1] I will explore the idea of female passivity through two features: youthfulness, and the refusal to succumb to temptation. Donna Heiland argues that women are examined through the 'transgressive acts at the heart of Gothic fiction'; these novels focus on corruption and resistance to patriarchal structures in the country's political and familial spheres.[2] Particularly, Gothic novels are fascinated with the female threat to the male creative power that is countered through the suppression of women.[3] Indeed, the image of the ideal woman was created as a moral figure, morality being a hallmark of eighteenth-century aesthetic judgement.[4] Marlene LeGates explores one such eighteenth-century change: 'The cult of the virtuous woman was not so much a new idea as a new response to an old problem, that of the dangerous sex…The emphasis in eighteenth-century thought on the strength and virtue of the new heroine was a result of, and in turn contributed to, a strengthening of the nuclear family.'[5] LeGates acknowledges a move from hypersexualisation to chastity, women moved from 'unruly' to 'chaste' and docile, to nurture obedience in the female reading public, who must succumb to hegemonic social structures.[6] Thus, Gothic writers like Radcliffe and du Maurier often express how passivity and its attributes form the ideal woman.

Both *Rebecca* by Daphne du Maurier and Castles by Ann Radcliffe investigate the pressure placed on women by society to appear desirable and marriageable through their passivity. However, a rising female readership in the 20th century led to the emergence of less passive women characters in literature, though patriarchal structures remained.[7] Therefore, it is important to consider whether these novels depict the 'ideal' woman according to the contemporary ideals of their periods, or whether they paint a more complex picture.

Gothic literature often deals with extreme emotions: terror, dread, suspense, and danger. By emphasising passivity, the Gothic emphasises female vulnerability in a threatening or unfamiliar setting. As such, it draws attention to tension between gender roles, exploring questions of autonomy and social control within society. As with Mrs de Winter, the ideal woman is likely to be young, inexperienced, and malleable; an unresistant, obedient wife and mother. However, for the genre to excite, the ideal Gothic heroine must also follow Eve, and

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[1] Daphne du Maurier, *Rebecca*, (London: Virago Press, 2003) ; Ann Radcliffe, The Castles of Athlin and Dunbayne, (New York: Clean Bright Classics, 2017)

[2] Donna Heiland, *Gothic & Gender : an Introduction*, (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2004),5.

[3] Heiland, *Gothic & Gender* ,11.

[4] Fred Botting, *Gothic*, (London: Taylor & Francis Group, 1995), 20.

[5] Marlene LeGates, "*The Cult of Womanhood in Eighteenth-Century Thought*," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 10, no. 1 (1976): 26.

[6] Marlene LeGates, "*The Cult of Womanhood in Eighteenth-Century Thought*," *23.*

[7] Cynthia Griffin Wolff, "*The Radcliffean Gothic Model: A Form for Feminine Sexuality*," *Modern Language Studies* 9, no. 3 (1979): 98.

be tempted by natural inclinations to rebel; yet in the novels' conservative endings, she must also be chaste and controlled. The authors craft characters, such as Mary in *Castles* and the new Mrs de Winter in *Rebecca*, to be ideal representations of virtue in a patriarchal society, role-modelling the aspirations of the female readership. Therefore, I will argue that these ultimately conservative novels reinforce female passivity over female autonomy and rebellion. However, as we shall see, the thrill-seeking conventions of rebellion built into the Gothic genre come into tension with this traditional image of ideal femininity.

1. Passivity and Youthfulness

Mary in *Castles* by Ann Radcliffe is presented as the ideal, obedient woman, according to the eighteenth-century values of Radcliffe's era, being passive and youthful in nature. It is important to note that though Radcliffe's novel has a medieval setting, Radcliffe herself was writing in the late eighteenth century, and her readership would have applied an eighteenth-century literary and ethical framework. Radcliffe uses several methods to infantilise her character; she is fragile, dependent on her mother and reliant on male authority: "Her tears, her sighs, and the soft simplicity of her air spoke a yet stronger language than her tongue."[8] Tears are a sign of weakness and distress, being a sign of the youthful inability to communicate; Mary is stifled as the obedient daughter as she is still learning how to express her grave sorrow. Mary's silence is characteristic of a woman who recognises her social place and her field of influence. At moments like this, she becomes a secondary character, pushed to the background to respond wordlessly to the motions of the plot. David A. Copeland indicates that the role of the eighteenth-century woman was to 'make the life of men easier… in a male-dominated culture.'[9] Part of Mary's silence, then, is an act of submission to the 'male-dominated culture' that is prevalent in young women without the authority of age. The young woman is half-child and half-adult, without agency and yet expected to fulfil social expectations. Additionally, Mary's silence means she often operates in the background of the plot; her romantic rebellion is limited to the conventions of romance, used as a plot device, and exists to fit into an eighteenth-century ideal. Mary's silent role as a plot device could cause the contemporary reader to feel disconnected from her, we hear her voice infrequently and it is often only represented through indirect speech. Yet, Marina Warner states 'In wordlessness lies sincerity', so Radcliffe develops Mary's character to be trustworthy according to eighteenth-century standards of female meekness.[10]

Mary's silence also has a fairy-tale aspect. Warner argues 'Ruth Bottigheimer, in her study of the Grimm's fairy tales, *Bad Girls and Bold Boys*, has analysed the speech patterns of female heroines, and found that, as the editing progressed, virtue spoke up less and less, whilst villainy became more loquacious… The equation of silence with virtue, of forbearance with femininity…as transmitted in fairy tales to children.'[11] Warner's silent daughters subvert our expectations as it is the youthful female that conveys greater understanding of her role through her inaction. It is challenging to recognise that these silenced daughters are not as

[8] Radcliffe, *The Castles of Athlin and Dunbayne*, 9.

[9] David A. Copeland, "*Virtuous and Vicious: The Dual Portrayal of Women in Colonial Newspapers.*" *American Periodicals* 5 (1995): 59.

[10] Marina Warner, *From the Beast to the Blonde: on Fairy Tales and Their tellers* (London: Vintage, 1995), 390.

[11] Warner, *From the Beast to the Blonde*, 394.

inexperienced and naive as we would have believed. I would agree with Warner and Bottigheimer that silence becomes associated with femininity and that the fairy-tale sub-genre is essential for establishing the characterisation of the female heroine. This silent struggle is an act of power as it is willed; Mary chooses to be submissive.[12] Therefore, Mary's silence is representative of virtuous femininity, representing emotional power amid speechlessness as Radcliffe crafts Mary to be both controlled and wise. Mary's wisdom is in relation to her discretion as Warner argues, her discretion is representative of valour, which is common in fairy tales. Therefore, the heroine's strongest line of defence becomes her passive, emotionally charged silence.[13]

Contrastingly, the antagonist of *Rebecca*, Rebecca, uses silence not to submit but to manipulate those around her. She does this to appear to be the ideal woman and appear vulnerable like Mary, her true nature hidden, choreographing versions of herself to deceive others. The mature and unchildlike Rebecca functions as a subverted version of the trope of the silent, passive heroine: the absent-presence represented by her silence in the narrative is a shadow cast over the novel and Manderley, a symbol of her assertive control from beyond the grave. Whereas Mary in *Castles* is a trustworthy, virtuous character, who only acts and speaks in accordance with her duty, even when it means great sacrifice to herself. Whilst Mary surrenders her agency through silence, Rebecca gains agency and control by employing silence to control those in her vicinity.

Mary, like the second Mrs de Winters, is faced with the responsibility of being sensitive to the needs of her family members and recognising her scripted role: the virtuous female. Nelson C. Smith argues 'Like those heroines of the sentimental novels, Mrs Radcliffe's main characters are all young, beautiful, and persecuted sometime-poetesses.'[14] Smith is expressing the idea that Radcliffe's female heroines are objectified, as they are mostly remembered not for their turmoil but for their child-like emotions and beauty. As 'sometime poetesses' their intellect and passion are emphasised through few, but memorable words. Finally, their persecution is exemplified by their limitations as they have no role other than the persecuted heroine; consequently, Radcliffe has established passive characters who have no option of being anything but ideal and what makes them ideal is that they are assembled with sensibility in mind. This sensibility is demonstrated in Mary's responsibility towards others.

Radcliffe herself defines sensibility as "the faculty of receiving impressions from objects" (Radcliffe, On the Supernatural in Poetry, 1826). In other words, sensibility is the ability to respond imaginatively and emotionally to the world around you. This term is often used in contrast to reason, which is seen as the more logical and objective way of understanding the world and is often ascribed to men. One example of Mary's sensibility is when Alleyn describes Dunbayne as a cavern. She is tempted by the tale of adventure and yet feels the need to 'conceal herself' seemingly aware of how it will affect her imagination or sensibilities. Consequently, her cheek grows pale and she relapses into a fainting fit.[15] Mary's effort to hide her feelings for Alleyn causes her much emotional distress, so much so that she

[12] Christy Williams, "*The silent struggle: autonomy for the maiden who seeks her brothers*," *The Comparatist* 30 (2006): 1.

[13] Warner, *From the Beast to the Blonde*, 395.

[14] Nelson C. Smith "*Sense, Sensibility and Ann Radcliffe*" Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900 13, no. 4 (1973): 581.

[15] Radcliffe, *The Castles of Athlin and Dunbayne,* 29.

becomes physically weak. Like other Gothic heroines, Mary's response is to deny any potent feelings to preserve herself.[16] In this way, she passively maintains her persona, whilst exemplifying the physical and emotional vulnerability of the character: her sorrow is on display for all the readership to see and experience.

The rational male and 'sensible' female are key to the presentation of the passive female and form part of a series of differences that exacerbate the Gothic female's situation: another is the notion of class. The passive female is aware of the threat of class difference in her pursuit of a husband. Mary's mental health suffers greatly due to notions of class separating her from Alleyn. Radcliffe uses youthful imagination to flirt with ideas about true love, exploring the systems of power that threaten these aspirations. However, Radcliffe's heroines ultimately adhere to social conventions. Her youth makes it impossible for Mary to challenge societal norms as marital security, amongst many other considerations, was valued above love. As the reader we are reminded that this is a work of fiction with Alleyn's true origins being conveniently revealed as aristocratic; Mary can now marry for love without overstepping societal expectations. While an eighteenth-century reader would likely have been content with this neat and typically romantic ending, a contemporary reader is likely to have questions and reservations about the fact that obedience to social class conventions is necessary for a 'happy ending.' At this point, I would argue that both novels point to female oppression, as every action and outcome relies on rigid social structures within which the idealised, idolised female is trapped.

Importantly, we must consider the situation of the novelist, Radcliffe, who wrote commercial escapist novels. She was completely cognisant that her female readership craved the satisfaction of a 'happy ending.' Thus, Radcliffe subscribed to the emerging conventions of Gothic romance and wrote according to societal expectations. Moreover, Radcliffe was limited by the eighteenth-century perception of female writers; she did not use pseudonyms, unlike the Brontës, for example. She could not write her female characters as bold, open, and free, unlike the founder of the Gothic, Horace Walpole. Radcliffe's female characters would have been viewed as a direct reflection of her position, as an eighteenth-century woman. Therefore, Mary must remain immature, both in the sense of her virginal underdevelopment, and character development in the novel: a one-dimensional archetype.

There are powerful links and contrasts in the presentation of the passive, youthful female in du Maurier's *Rebecca*, helping to clarify the elements of continuity and change in what it means to be the ideal woman. In *Rebecca,* the constant infantilisation imagery associated with the new Mrs de Winter is poignant, particularly before Maxim's revelation surrounding the circumstances of Rebecca's death. Maxim wishes for his wife to remain ignorant: 'You had a twist to your mouth in a flash of knowledge in your eyes. Not the right sort of knowledge.'[17] This desire for a lack of knowledge demonstrates Maxim's obsession with innocence. 'The twist' in her mouth suggests a crooked and unnatural quality, and thus lends an eerie tone: from this one can infer Maxim's belief that certain knowledge is damaging, unnecessary and 'ugly' on a woman. This state of ugliness is significant as it directs our attention to the inherent rebelliousness of Eve, the potential for the narrator to fall from innocence. And with the concept of innocence, in Radcliffe's novel, fairy tales are important here: Auba Llompart Pons describes Maxim as 'a Bluebeard figure who not only

[16] Wolff, "The Radcliffean Gothic Model," 99.

[17] du Maurier, Rebecca, 226.

murdered his first wife but also oppresses and alienates the second Mrs de Winter.'[18] Llompart Pons' suggestion is persuasive, as, like Bluebeard, who forbids his wife from entering a room in his castle before murdering her for doing so, Maxim certainly exhibits paternalistic control over the narrator. Maxim deliberately withholds information and issues edicts to his wife: a sinister figure who curbs his wife's emotional and psychological growth. Indeed, his name is appropriate: he is preoccupied with rules and principles (Maxim means 'rule of law', OED). Du Maurier employs the Gothic trope of secrets and lies to expose the menacing nature of the Bluebeard figure, abusing his authoritative position as a husband, and manipulating the vulnerable and passive wife. The sinister nature of this dynamic reveals deep ambivalence about the 'ideal' gender dynamic in the novel's central relationship, despite the novel's apparent condemnation of Rebecca as the alternative for female behaviour. In this respect, du Maurier may be drawing on aspects of her own life and her difficult relationship with her father. There has been considerable speculation about du Maurier's own, potentially incestuous relationship with her father (whom she idolised), while, as stated by Richard Tillinghast, du Maurier's father 'held his daughters to old-fashioned standards of propriety.'[19] So, while the text (and du Maurier) seem to advocate for one kind of conventional, conservative romantic relationship, with an in-built power differential, the reader may have a more ambivalent reaction to this particular example of the 'ideal woman' when we consider the unconventional life of the author and certainly makes the reader consider the cruelty of Maxim in his behaviour towards his wife . Here du Maurier differs from Radcliffe, as she establishes how women like the passive Mrs de Winter are ruined by their insecurities, forced upon them by the men in their life. Du Maurier uses animalistic imagery to represent Mrs de Winter's passivity, insignificance, and acceptance of her position: 'I was Jasper again.'[20] Like a pet dog, belonging, but inferior when compared to others: silent, submissive, with no significant purpose or role. Equally, the animal metaphor highlights the imposter status the narrator feels as she takes the form of the new Mrs de Winter, embarking on her journey as the mistress of Manderley. Unable to step into the role of the previous wife due to her increased ignorance and inability to assert herself, she allows Rebecca's ghostly presence to possess every corner of Manderley. She remains innocent, inexperienced, and submissive: the distressed, but passive ideal.

Significantly, du Maurier extends her character examination and development to the milieu of the sexual and according to Martyn Shallcross, the novel was seen 'as a study of Daphne's own personality and repressed sexuality.'[21] Therefore, du Maurier uses 'Rebecca' to present the ideal woman as passive and challenged by the promiscuous, powerful, and mature matriarch. By contrast, Mrs de Winter possesses many of the qualities that had been considered 'ideal' in patriarchal society from the eighteenth century onwards. Mary Wollstonecraft, in *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792), explains that "Women are told from their infancy, and taught by the example of their mothers …justly termed cunning, softness of temper, outward obedience…will obtain for them the protection of man; and

[18] Auba Llompart Pons, "Patriarchal Hauntings: Re-Reading Villainy and Gender in Daphne Du Maurier's 'Rebecca'," *Atlantis* 35, no. 1 (2013): 70.

[19] Richard Tillinghast, "Daphne Du Maurier: Back to Manderley Again," *The Hudson Review* 71, no. 2 (2018): 257.

[20] du Maurier, Rebecca, 132

[21] Martyn Shallcross, The Private World of Daphne du Maurier (London: Robson Books, 1993), 60.

should they be beautiful, everything else is needless, for at least twenty years of their lives."[22] This means that women are groomed from a young age to exhibit childlike, passive behaviours: the fragility of women in society is celebrated. Wollstonecraft is suggesting here that this makes women duplicitous as they are crafted. In essence, women are presented in opposition to active, dominant men moving from submissive daughters to submissive wives. And yet, as we have seen, in the context of du Maurier's 1930s novel, this adherence to childlike passivity leads to the heroine's oppression and misery, though she may well be the 'ideal' patriarchal wife. Thus, what makes Mary and Mrs de Winter ideal is that they are as emotionally underdeveloped as they are underdeveloped as characters. Mrs de Winter differs slightly as she learns and grows but ultimately chooses to be her husband's passive companion and supporter. Her passive youthfulness is what makes her actions comprehensible given the context of social mores and the literary context of the Gothic genre.

2. Passivity and Temptation

The ideal woman is representative of the conservative values of these novels, overcoming temptation and repressing her sexuality. Rebecca is demonised and punished for threatening the hegemony within marriage. This warning within the novel is also Gothic as it produces terror: the terror of failing like Rebecca; the terror of the past. Additionally, Rebecca is a threat as she challenges the restrictive ideals of womanhood, becoming poisoned by knowledge and power as she submits to temptation. The novel becomes didactic, serving as a warning to women who defy patriarchal conventions. Hence, salvation for women is dependent on their willingness to bend to the will of their male counterparts. Du Maurier's use of fairy-tales and terror does not just represent femininity or silence but highlights the importance of the message for the young, female readership. Similarly, the title of '*The Castles of Athlin and Dunbayne: a highland story*' provokes the reader to acknowledge that the novel is to emulate historic myths and legends, provoking the imagination to go to fantastic settings, where challenges to modes and mores take place. When combined with the fairy tale genre, typically associated with the education of the young, the novel's message takes on its didactic element. However, it must be noted that the ideal woman is not only passive because of societal structures but was actively sought by a female readership. Thus, the temptation of the passively virginal heroine is a consistent trope across Gothic novels. Unsurprisingly, both heroines experience challenges to their virtue, teaching readers that value is found in their ability to maintain chastity and integrity.

Both Mary in *Castles* and Mrs de Winter in *Rebecca* have had to overcome sexual temptation. For Mary, there is the triple sexual threat: the Baron and the Count (her suitors), and Alleyn, the lover she desires. Mary's refusal to marry the Count demonstrates active rejection of the duty she owes to her family and willingness to strive for her true self. Mary tells us "never will I give my hand where my heart does not accompany it."[23] The negative language used is representative of Mary's growing power and awareness of self. Courtney Laurey Davids argues that 'In all of Radcliffe's novels, the heroines are subjected to the

[22] Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, with Strictures on Political and Moral Subjects (Philadelphia: Cengage Gale, 1794), 31-32.

[23] Radcliffe, The Castles of Athlin and Dunbayne, 92.

tyranny of male antagonists who thwart their desire to love and marry whom they choose.'[24] Davids is saying that Radcliffe's female characters share an internal conflict, at odds with passivity, but significant in its magnitude when one considers the consequences for our Gothic heroine. However, Mary's 'temptations' never lead her to contemplate extramarital sex and demonstrate how she is 'passive', as a character to the conventions of the Gothic genre, remaining forever the passive, virginal maiden: attentive to the wishes of a patriarchal culture. Even in proto-feminist writing emerging contemporaneously with and shortly after Radcliffe's novel, women are presented as constantly bending to men. Nina Auerbach writes about the metaphor of the woman as a tree in John Stuart Mill's 'The Subjection of Woman', 'as a metaphor of womanhood, it appears malleable, grotesquely shapeable.'[25] The malleable woman must be passive to men's changes to their character, crucially giving in to their husbands but never to adultery. However, there is no denying that the ideal woman must be tested and tried.

Indeed, this idea leads us to examine some of the paradoxes of passivity in the Gothic novel. The ideal woman in the Gothic genre resists temptation and yet experiences dangers, forever the 'damsel in distress'. Consequently, proximity to danger in the shape of power and constraint is common in the Gothic plot of the late eighteenth century. Radcliffe accelerates the plot of her novel with the kidnapping of Mary, and her readers have the opportunity to escape vicariously. 'Almost fainting, she flew on the wings of terror; but all her efforts were in vain; the villains came up; one seized her horse…in the meantime, Mary had fainted in the arms of the villain who seized her."[26] Mary's kidnapping is a rite of passage, which tests her virtue and exposes her to sexual danger. Her fragility is romantically emphasised when compared to the threatening power of the perpetrators to whom she falls victim. Her passivity becomes the reader's concern, as they imagine the dangerous possibilities the heroine may encounter. Losing consciousness, or 'swooning' renders her incapable of resisting the male desires. Without forfeiting any of the honour of the 'ideal' eighteenth-century woman by giving in to sexual temptation, Mary provides a channel for the reader's contact with dangerously glamorous male sexuality. We might almost say: the ideal woman in Gothic literature is passive, allowing a readership to fulfil the fantasies of an 'unideal' woman who experiences forbidden and 'sinful' sexuality. By living out vicarious desires in the safe world of literature the readers suppress their sensual desires, projecting their feelings into the characters of the novels they read. This paradox, or hypocrisy, is at the heart of the presentation of women in the Gothic genre - and it is a trend we will see continued and developed in *Rebecca*.

Mrs de Winter similarly experiences temptation; her dreams are indicative of sexual repression. The very first line of the novel is a reference to a dream: 'Last night I dreamt I went to Manderley again.'[27] The line is simple with a powerful iambic metre that is commonly found in the works of the Romantic poets, produces excitement as du Maurier plays with reality and the subconscious. In *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1899), Sigmund Freud identifies the dreaming subconscious as a key site of the return of the repressed.[28] In

[24] Courtney Laurey Davids, "Female identity and landscape in Ann Radcliffe's Gothic novels" (Ma Diss., University of Western Cape, 2008), 37.

[25] Nina Auerbach, Woman and the demon: the life of a Victorian myth, (London: Harvard University Press, 1982), 57.

[26] Radcliffe, *The Castles of Athlin and Dunbayne*, 18.

[27] du Maurier, Rebecca, 1.

[28] Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999)*

the narrator's dream, 'Nature had come into her own again and, little by little, in her stealthy, insidious way had encroached upon the drive with long, tenacious fingers.'[29] Mrs de Winter's subconscious is represented as a wild garden, a territory associated with female sexuality from the biblical story of Eve. Nature is personified as feminine here ('her own'), a dangerous and grasping force, waiting for the opportunity to break free from society's constraints represented by the mansion. Again, we are in the territory of thrilling, escapist Gothic desire. Nevertheless, given the paradoxical code that governs female behaviour in Gothic literature, the thrilling landscape also functions as a warning against dangerous, 'insidious' desires. The ominous 'again' works as a warning: du Maurier establishes her novel to be didactic, rather than just appealing to the longings of her female readers.

Thus, a moral lesson is being taught through the themes of order and disorder, particularly when dealing with the passive Mrs de Winter compared to the rebellious sexuality of adulterous Rebecca. Mrs de Winter suffers recurring dreams of Manderley, a place of temptation and transgression. And yet, the genres of adventure and risk are established: the connection to the endangering of Mary in Radcliffe's *Castles* is evident. However, critics can argue that the dream sequence could represent an element of the narrator's paranoia, which increases due to her youthful naivety and innocence and her obsession with the past. Therefore, the ideal woman struggles to reconcile her natural passions with her duty and position. These moral examples of the ideal woman demonstrate the struggle of remaining virtuous in distress, as Mary, like the reader, negotiates dangerous temptation, often at the price of compromise and risk.[30] Yet female characters often seem unlikely to fulfil their unmet desires within marriage. The future Mrs de Winter is warned : 'You haven't flattered yourself, he's in love with you? The fact is that the empty house got on his nerves to such an extent he nearly went off his head…He just can't go on living there alone.'[31] Therefore, Mrs de Winter's role is not to be the passionate lover she wishes to be but a dutiful wife, to fill the 'empty house' and give Maxim a second chance at socially conventional marriage.

Du Maurier, like Radcliffe, directs the readers' imagination towards the unspoken danger of Mrs de Winter's position. The narrator is haunted by Rebecca's dangerous liberation and sophistication, constantly comparing herself to her glamorous counterpart. More importantly, Mrs de Winter is haunted by herself, her individuality working against her martial duties. Significantly, du Maurier explores the idea that conventional marriages act as a betrayal to the self, she was reported as saying: 'women ought to be soft and gentle and dependent. Disembodied spirits like myself are all wrong.'[32] She felt conflicted and separated her impulses from her duty as a wife and mother. We know that du Maurier saw herself as a conflicted Mrs de Winter figure, keen to tame her Rebecca-like traits for conventional marriage.[33] In du Maurier's words on how a woman 'ought' to be, we find yet another example of the 'ideal' woman – passive and 'soft' – in tension with the actual woman and her

[29] du Maurier, Rebecca, 1.

[30] Mary Anne Schofield, "The awakening of the eighteenth-century heroine: Eliza Haywood's New women," CEA Critic 43, no.3 (March 1981), 10.

[31] Du Maurier, Rebecca, 67.

[32] Avril Horner and Sue Zlosnik, Daphne Du Maurier: Writing, Identity and the Gothic Imagination (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998), 5.

[33] Shallcross, The Private World of Daphne du Maurier, 62; Avril Horner and Sue Zlosnik, Daphne Du Maurier, 6.

more complex desires (which are 'all wrong'), connecting intriguingly with the conflict experienced by Mrs de Winter in *Rebecca*.

In review, both Mary and Mrs de Winter resist continual temptation, and are not convinced to revolt against repressive societal systems but instead surrender to their gendered roles, consequently behaving passively to serve as the ideal woman around whom readers might construct and examine their own identities and roles. Accordingly, the ideal woman is expressed as the passive woman in these novels. The ideal woman is youthful; lacking maturity, she can be moulded. Most importantly, she is eager to please her superior: her husband. This woman is tempted by her natural inclinations, but the warnings of the plight of the 'unruly' are enough to keep her from acting upon these impulses. However, with the Gothic focus on the sexuality of the pure, innocent woman, who is often near danger, readers can feel excitement and explore themselves and understand the world and their place in it. The Gothic genre provides a channel for the woman to explore her forbidden desires, paradoxically through the fantasy figure of the 'ideal' woman. In *Rebecca,* the significantly later novel, du Maurier suggests that the ideal woman is devoted to her marriage: the repressive norms of matrimony do hint at a cause for rebellion but in the novel's ultimate condemnation of Rebecca, in favour of the wifely obedience of Mrs de Winter, this ambivalence is left unresolved. Instead, both writers, limited by their standing as women in patriarchal societies, wish to maintain their commercial position by entertaining their readership: the Gothic genre is used as a tool to distract from the mundane. Yet, the tensions between the ideal and the real in these novels force us to reconsider the terms of our question. From the fantasy ending of *Castles*, with only the revelation of Alleyn's aristocratic heritage enabling Mary's desires to be fulfilled, to the oppressive dynamic between Maxim and Mrs de Winter, these novels reveal the reality of the idea of the ideal woman. Both novels expose – sometimes self-consciously, sometimes unselfconsciously – the unreality of the ideal woman, despite depicting passivity as one of her theoretical traits. The passive woman may be ideal, but she will not be happy. Thus, both writers consider the cost taken by the ideal woman through her persistence to her duty and passivity.

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