

# Untamed Women and Innocent Girls: How Are Issues of Gender Explored in *The Monk* and *Rebecca*?

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Gothic literature and gender have been historically intertwined since the birth of the genre – from Horace Walpole’s depictions of damsels in distress, and villainous men and chivalrous men alike, in the eighteenth century. The links between Gothic literature and gender are so strongly bonded, that critics have been able to locate subgenres of both Female Gothic and Male Gothic within the literature, and it is from these perspectives that I intend to investigate and compare issues of gender contained within Matthew Lewis’s 1796 novel *The Monk* and Daphne de Maurier’s 1938 novel *Rebecca*. The concept of Female Gothic, Ellen Ledoux argues, is associated with ‘women’s domestic incarceration, sexual violence, economic disenfranchisement and spectral maternity.’<sup>1</sup> Female Gothic ultimately encompasses the feelings of women who feel imprisoned within feudal and patriarchal society that classes them as objects over people. As Anne Williams writes, “the affinity between the gender and the genre expresses the terror and rage that women experience within patriarchal social arrangements, especially marriage.”<sup>2</sup> Under this theory of Female Gothic, I argue that *Rebecca* can be seen as a novel expressing these feelings, through the narrative of the second Mrs de Winter; the glimpses shared the narrator gleams from the character of Rebecca; and the use of terror, themes of desire and female sexuality. On the other end of the spectrum, Male Gothic has a “focus on female suffering, positioning the audience as voyeurs who, though sympathetic, may take pleasure in female victimization.”<sup>3</sup> Male Gothic texts position the woman as an “other” – fuelling Freud’s concept of the uncanny used in many Gothic texts to show women as a danger. These themes, I argue, are evident in Lewis’s *The Monk* through the monstrous and cunning female characters such as Matilda and the

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<sup>1</sup> Ellen Ledoux, “Was There Ever a “Female Gothic”?” *Palgrave Communications*, 3 (June 2017), 2  
<https://doi.org/10.1057/palcomms.2017.42>

<sup>2</sup> Anne Williams, *Art of Darkness a Poetics of Gothic* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 136

<sup>3</sup> Williams, *Art of Darkness*, 104-105

Bleeding Nun, but also within the character of Antonia, whose fate as a victim lies in gendered ideas of sexuality and virginity in a male-lead feudal society. Despite being from separate “spheres” of Gothic genre and almost 150 years apart, I argue that *Rebecca* and the *Monk* share similarities in how their female characters are treated, and how the expression of these characters may point to criticisms of the historical society they are placed in. In this essay, I explore the use of themes of Female Gothic and Male Gothic, and I argue that gender roles and gender expression are both undermined and upheld in Gothic novels either as a form of critique on patriarchal, Catholic, or feudal society; as a form of repression of women who are considered a danger to societal values; or as a form of liberating female expression. To do this, I’ll examine the characters of Rebecca and Matilda, who in their respective novels are often considered the main villainess through themes of deceit, lust and sexual power. Interestingly, both these characters are examples of literary transgendering – in which they are either, at some point, disguised as a male, or thought to be like a male. I will also examine the characters of Antonia and the second Mrs de Winter as victims of gender roles and male characters as well as archetypes of the “submissive woman.” I will also explore the male antagonists – as I argue they are both classed as – of Ambrosio and Maxim, and how their gender roles and power imbalances impact the texts.

In Matthew Lewis’s *The Monk*, we are introduced to the character of Matilda – the seducer of Ambrosio, who influences our antagonist towards acts of lust and violence, revealed at the end of the novel to be a subordinate of Satan Himself. Matilda is aligned with the Gothic trope of the sublime, described by Edmund Burke as “whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain and danger ... whatever is in any sort terrible ... or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the sublime ... the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling.”<sup>4</sup> Sublime imagery in Gothic fiction is often used to create feelings of terror and dread over imagery and experiences that we

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<sup>4</sup> Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*. (Dover Publications, 2012), 49, ProQuest Ebook Central.

consider stronger than us. Matilda serves as this through her role as seductress and subordinate of Satan himself.

Her interactions with Ambrosio which directly lead him to “forget his vows, his sanctity, and his fame” lead us to perceive her as possessing the power to ruin man’s devotion to religion and God through desire Ambrosio views with the sublime imagery of a “deep ... precipice before him.”<sup>5</sup> This point is exemplified by Donna Heiland, who argues that “Matilda is aligned with the sublime through powerful female sexuality, and her links with divinity.”<sup>6</sup> Her ability to arouse immense desire which causes man to falter and succumb to sin shows this powerful female sexuality, more powerful than a friar’s dedication to his religion, and therefore creates an image of female sexuality as threatening and dangerous. As previously notes, her links to divinity are integral to this characterisation. Matilda shares the image with the painting of the Madonna which Ambrosio spent years of religious devotion admiring and praying to as a religious icon. This is not accidental, rather an act of cunning in which Matilda purposely places her image before Ambrosio as she recalls “crowds of admirers had persuaded me that I possessed some beauty, and I was anxious to know what effect it would produce upon you.”<sup>7</sup> Despite the act of deception that leads to this association, her shared image with the Virgin Mary produces the image of pure, innocent beauty and angelic, Christian, motherly values. Her complete destruction of this initial image throughout the text as she aligns herself with sexual desire, witchcraft and even Satanism is a form of the sublime and portrays the idea that women with pure outward forms have the capacity for lust and deception. In *Art of Darkness: A Poetics of Gothic*, Anne Williams agrees that this link expresses “patriarchal anxiety about the fundamental danger and duplicity of *anything* female: even the Blessed Virgin, supposedly the one exception to the rule of nature, is also dangerous.”<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Matthew Lewis, *The Monk* (London: Penguin Books, 1998), 71-80

<sup>6</sup> Donna Heiland, *Gothic and Gender: An Introduction* (John Wiley & Sons, 2004), 37

<sup>7</sup> Lewis, *The Monk*, 73-74

<sup>8</sup> Williams, *Art of Darkness*, 195

Additionally, the image of the idol Madonna committing various sins throughout the text has a second layer of revealing sin within the institution of Catholicism and the Church. As Heiland argues, “the aesthetic of the sublime frames Lewis’ vision of a patriarchal society dominated by a Catholic Church so corrupt as to be dehumanising.”<sup>9</sup> Matilda’s powerful female sexuality sets her apart as a seductress and eventually a demon, suggesting that powerful women cannot exist under patriarchal Catholicism without being considered harbingers of sin. In this way, eighteenth century gender roles under patriarchy are upheld in *The Monk*. Anne Williams writes that “during the eighteenth century, through the cracks and fissures in the Law of the Father, this “other” gendered “female” became newly visible, powerful and fascinating.”<sup>10</sup> Lewis explores the idea of this “other” woman who does not succumb to religious and patriarchal ideas of a suppressed, “pure” female sexuality through the character of Matilda. As the text progresses Lewis presents her less as a sympathetic figure and more as a promiscuous demon-type character, as Matilda would be considered under patriarchal ideals. However, the fact that, at the end of the novel, we suspect that Matilda is living a life of eternal bliss due to her cunning schemes and knowledge of witchcraft and is narratively rewarded for her power as a seductress does lead us to ask if Lewis does not denounce Matilda’s power but instead respects them. It is only when Matilda makes a deal with a devil that she escapes societal punishment, creating the impression that women are only free from patriarchy when denouncing Catholicism. In this light, we can consider that Lewis does not necessarily use Matilda’s sexual power as a criticism of sexually powerful women, but as a criticism of the restrictions of the Catholic church.

Lewis’s use of “othered” gender roles to critique Catholicism is most evident in the gendered differences between Matilda and Ambrosio. Matilda’s presentation throughout the novel shifts fluidly between masculine and feminine, her very introduction into the novel being as Rosario, a boy under the same order as Ambrosio. She is first masculinised, disguised as a man, then feminised with her reveal, though as the plot hastens forward, she appears to shift between these two forms of identity.

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<sup>9</sup> Heiland, *Gothic and Gender*, 37

<sup>10</sup> Williams, *Art of Darkness*, 99

As Heiland suggests, “as she [Matilda] becomes more associated with the supernatural with her witchcraft and links with the demon, her sublime power shifts away from the feminine to the masculine.”<sup>11</sup> This is evidenced in chapter VI where it is described that “she assumed a sort of courage and manliness in her manners and discourse” as she begins to command over Ambrosio, partake in knowledge of witchcraft and drift further away from religion and human empathy.<sup>12</sup> It is at this point in their relationship, it becomes evident that their roles have been switched, and with Matilda holding the dominating power and “manliness” in their dynamic, Ambrosio is much more feminised. While Ambrosio remains disgusted by Matilda and her behaviour, he still unwittingly listens to her and follows her instructions, reevaluating their roles to make Ambrosio the more submissive of the two. William D. Brewer argues that “his fear for his reputation and inexperience contrast sharply with Matilda’s sexual aggressiveness and knowledge of ‘every invention of lust’” which portrays Ambrosio in the ‘innocent virginial wife’ role that religious patriarchy assigns to women.<sup>13</sup> If we are to assume that Lewis’s narrative is against this role reversal, it is possible to identify a critique on the Catholic monastery lifestyle that has caused Ambrosio’s ‘inexperience.’ Kate Ferguson Ellis argues that “if we look at the Gothic novel as an increasingly insistent critique of the ideology of separate spheres, it is clear that the male exile is no more empowered, ultimately, by the division than the female prisoner.”<sup>14</sup> This is evident in *The Monk* as Ambrosio takes this role of male exile, placed into a forced religious isolation, finds himself weak and susceptible to the influences of the atheist and gender-resistant Matilda. It is arguably Ambrosio’s desperate attempts to reverse these roles once again and regain male control that leads to Ambrosio’s worst atrocities in the text. However, I would argue that this criticism does not entirely apply to *The Monk* as other males in the text find themselves in a position of submission from powerful, free willed women. I draw attention to the plot of Raymond

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<sup>11</sup> Heiland, *Gothic and Gender*, 39

<sup>12</sup> Lewis, *The Monk*, 200

<sup>13</sup> William D. Brewer, “Transgendering in Matthew Lewis’s the Monk,” *Gothic Studies* 6, no. 2 (November, 2004), 197

<sup>14</sup> Kate Ferguson Ellis, *The Contested Castle: Gothic Novels and the Subversion of Domestic Ideology*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989), xv

and the Bleeding Nun as an example. In one of the most supernatural elements of the novel, Raymond mistakes a ghost referred to as 'the Bleeding Nun' for his lover Agnes who has agreed to run away with him. The apparition of this ghostly woman leaves Raymond frozen in scenes of abject horror, weakening him both mentally and physically, and keeping him locked in a contract that can be argued to mirror that of a traditional marriage, due to the confession of love that the Bleeding Nun echoes back to Raymond on her visits. As William D. Brewer explores: "the ability of these uncanny female characters to assume masculine attributes and effeminize men who have come under their influence is certainly threatening to Ambrosio and Raymond, who have been shaped, respectively, by the androcentric ideologies of monasticism and chivalry."<sup>15</sup> It can be seen, then, that *The Monk* utilises female characters who act outside traditional eighteenth century ideals of gender roles through cunning acts of deception and untamed feminine desire in order to emulate the sublime, and show dominant women as a threat to patriarchal and Catholic ideals, as an active danger to "heroic" men.

Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca* also utilises a dangerous 'untamed' female figure through the use of the titular character. Rebecca is shown as a strong-willed and cunning character through various descriptions in the novel, particularly from the characters of Mrs Danvers and Maxim de Winter. Maxim describes her as "incapable of love, of tenderness and decency" and states that "she was not even normal" because of this.<sup>16</sup> What du Maurier shares about Rebecca through the unreliable narrator of the new Mrs de Winter is shared exclusively through snippets of other characters' descriptors. We learn late in the novel that she was promiscuous and had many lovers outside of Maxim, a secondary secret life of sexual decadence in London. Mrs Danvers describes her as "clever and full of tricks" and refers to her relations with men as "like a game to her." From these descriptors Rebecca is shown to host a powerful, untameable female sexuality which disgusts and induces fear in Maxim, and delights Mrs Danvers. However, through the societal perception of her that is gleaned

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<sup>15</sup> Brewer, "Transgendering in the Monk," 204

<sup>16</sup> Daphne du Maurier, *Rebecca* (Great Britain: Virago Press, 2003), 304

from Manderley's neighbours and Mrs Van Hopper at the start of the novel, for the majority the narrative paints Rebecca as the 'perfect wife' – lovely and faultless, beautiful and social, a true mistress of the estate. This sense of duality is similar to the characterisation of Matilda in *The Monk*, and shows Rebecca as a woman with the ability to be transgressive, to portray the image of a perfect woman in 20<sup>th</sup> century gender ideals while being in charge of her sexuality, and arguably secretly in charge of her marriage as well. Heta Pyyhonen - in her analysis of Rebecca as a masochistic fantasy – argues that “thanks to her promiscuity, Rebecca, in her capacity as the “angel-wife,” mocks everything traditional marriage represents. The contract invests her with the symbolic power exerted in marriage, reversing the common power dynamic between husband and wife.”<sup>17</sup> Traditional values of marriage under patriarchal order represent the male as the centre of control in their relationship, with women expected to serve their husbands needs and wishes at the point of marriage. Rebecca's promiscuity, then, suggests that she refuses to be constrained by these patriarchal ideals, and will not put herself under the control of a male figure – Maxim. By contrast, then, Maxim is under her control. Rebecca silently forces Maxim to submit to her sexual values and allow her to do as she pleases with other men by putting his androcentric reputation as the man of Manderley at risk. In this way, both novels depict a 'dangerous woman' in control of a male figure – *The Monk's* Ambrosio's reputation as a friar is held in the hands of Matilda who seduces him for his own gain, and *Rebecca's* Maxim is at the will of Rebecca who threatens to ruin the reputation of him and his bourgeois estate.

Auba Llompart Pons writes: “at a symbolic level, Rebecca can be read as a supernatural force that threatens to feminize the estate and the patriarch, by challenging patriarchal order and heterosexuality.”<sup>18</sup> In a similar way that Matilda's power is associated with the sublime and supernatural due to the links between her character and witchcraft and Satan, Rebecca's power also

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<sup>17</sup> Heta Pyyhonen, “Bluebeard's accomplice: Rebecca as a masochistic fantasy,” *Mosaic: A Journal for the Interdisciplinary Study of Literature* 38, no. 3 (2005)

<sup>18</sup> Auba Llompart Pons, “Patriarchal Hauntings: Re-Reading Villainy and Gender in Daphne Du Maurier's 'Rebecca' / Fantasma del Patriarcado: Una Relectura de La Villanía y El Género En 'Rebecca', de Daphne Du Maurier,” *Atlantis* 35, no.1 (2013), 74

has a sublime element. After her death, her character is spectral, appearing only through the imagination of the new Mrs de Winter and through her routine and belongings that remain in Manderley. This is made especially evident in the narrator's fears of: "Rebecca would never grow old. Rebecca would always be the same. And her I could not fight. She was too strong for me."<sup>19</sup> When these female characters who act outside the limitations of patriarchal society and act according to their own desires are associated with the supernatural, it creates the idea that acting outside of societally expected femininity comes with a loss of humanity. By the end of Lewis' *The Monk*, Matilda is no longer considered a free-willed human, but a demon subordinate of Satan, and through the course of *Rebecca*, Rebecca remains as nothing more than a ghostly presence in Manderley. This then portrays a very patriarchal view that positions dominant women as nothing more than monsters, twisting their power to make it feel vindictive and villainous. The threat they pose to patriarchal social order and heterosexuality makes this twist of narrative integral to Male Gothic. Gina Wisker agrees that:

"Du Maurier, in *Rebecca*, undermines the conservative traditions which seem to be upholding and rewarding both in terms of upper middle-class values as embodied in the house, Manderley, and in the forms of romantic fiction which themselves seek to continually play out a version of achieved desire which can only render the sexually active, transgressive, lively minded woman as demon, and exorcised demon at that."<sup>20</sup>

However, it is also important to note that it is these positions of supernatural power that make these women untouchable, as neither Ambrosio nor Maxim can 'defeat' these feminising forces and win their 'happy endings' as the male heroes of these novels. Instead, Ambrosio is beaten and left to perish for his sins while Matilda is granted a life of pleasure, and Maxim loses his estate he killed Rebecca to protect, and we feel the impression that Rebecca 'won' even from beyond the grave.

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<sup>19</sup> Du Maurier, *Rebecca*, 262

<sup>20</sup> Gina Wisker, "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), 95



Du Maurier uses these aspects of Rebecca's sexual freedom and association with the supernatural to demonstrate Rebecca's power as an uncontrollable woman. However, this is not all that Rebecca utilizes to undermine Maxim and patriarchal values. Rebecca is not just fluid in terms of her spectral identity and deceptive duality between the angel wife and promiscuous figure, but even further into the realm of gender and sexuality. Janet Harbord writes that "what characterizes Rebecca is fluidity, the ability to shift between subject positions and across social and cultural spaces, to transform herself. What Rebecca is ultimately condemned for within the text is what also makes her appealing: her transgression of the categories of class, gender and sexuality."<sup>21</sup> Rebecca pushes outside of the gender binary to a point that is almost alarming to Maxim, cutting her hair short and beating men in male dominated activities of horseback and sailing. Mrs Danvers states that "she had all the courage and spirit of a boy ... she ought to have been a boy, I often told her that."<sup>22</sup> It is this push outside of femininity to the point of almost a transgenderising perspective that Rebecca is one step beyond portraying masculine traits within her femininity but has the spirit of a man in the body of a woman, that scares Maxim. It is suggested that Maxim feels feminised by his submission to Rebecca, allowing her to do as she pleases for the sake of his reputation as both a bourgeois individual, and as a man. This perspective is taken up by Auba Llompart Pons, who argues that "Maxim's main problem with Rebecca is not so much the fact that she cut her hair short and enjoyed sailing, but that he felt feminised and 'othered' by her"<sup>23</sup> This is most evident when Maxim describes the lead-up to the murder of Rebecca, and describes her behaviour and appearance with "her hands in the pockets of her trousers" claiming she "looked like a boy in her sailing kit, a boy with a face like a Botticelli angel."<sup>24</sup> The fact that moments before Maxim feels incentivised to murder his wife, she is described to have a masculine (yet still distinctly ethereal) appearance is telling of the fact that he feels threatened by her masculine traits to the point he feels the need to get rid of her. It may also be read

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<sup>21</sup> Janet Harbord, "Between Identification and Desire: Rereading 'Rebecca,'" *Feminist Review*, no. 53 (Summer 1996), 102

<sup>22</sup> Du Maurier, *Rebecca*, 272

<sup>23</sup> Llompart Pons, "Patriarchal Hauntings," 77

<sup>24</sup> Du Maurier, *Rebecca*, 312

that Maxim describes her with these masculine features to separate her from femininity and alleviate the guilt of murdering a woman. Harbold's claims that Rebecca also transgressed boundaries of sexuality are shown through speculations between the relationship between her and Mrs Danvers. Mrs Danvers' obsession with Rebecca may come as awe over Rebecca's ability for duplicity, cunning, and treatment of her life and sexual ventures as a game – however, some critics read into these behaviours as lesbian desire. In chapter 14 in which Mrs Danvers shows the new Mrs de Winter around Rebecca's previous room, a certain level of intimacy is felt in how Danvers treats Rebecca's private belongings. Susan White claims this is most evident in the 1940 Hitchcock film adaptation of the same name, writing that "Rebecca's ghostly bisexuality ... electrifies the characters and radiates from the screen when Mrs. Danvers shows off Rebecca's room, with its monogrammed sheets and undergarments, caressed by women's hands."<sup>25</sup> This idea of Rebecca being imbued with a certain 'ghostly bisexuality' serves to stigmatise her character even more underneath early twentieth century cultural norms. While lesbian relationships were not illegal, they certainly were considered taboo. If we consider the character of Rebecca as someone who can transgress gender and sexuality, her character is able to undermine concepts of both androcentric views on masculinity, as well as heterosexuality under patriarchy.

Gothic literature often uses themes of binary opposition in order to create emphasis and create the gothic sense of the 'other.' Du Maurier does this in *Rebecca* through positioning Maxim's new wife, the unnamed narrator as the binary opposite to Rebecca. Alison Light writes that Rebecca and the narrator portray two different female archetypes within Manderley, even with the use of associated imagery: "virginal Lily and sensuous dark-haired Rose; the girl occupies the East wing overlooking the domesticated flower garden whilst the West wing, Rebecca's is dominated by the sight and sound of the sea, restless and disturbing."<sup>26</sup> Du Maurier positions these two characters

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<sup>25</sup> Susan White, "Alfred Hitchcock and Feminist Film Theory (Yet Again)," in *The Cambridge Companion to Alfred Hitchcock*, ed. Johnathan Freedman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 120

<sup>26</sup> Alison Light, "'Returning to Manderley': Romance Fiction, Female Sexuality and Class," *Feminist Review*, no.16 (1984), 11 <https://doi.org/10.2307/1394954>

against each other to emphasize the difference between women who submit to patriarchal order, and those who do not. The narrator is described often as young and naïve, the very picture of virginal innocence rescued from an unmarried life in the south of France. Maxim often comments on how he prefers the narrator's state of naïve youth – when she wishes she were “a woman of about thirty-six, dressed in black satin with a string of pearls” (an image, also, reminiscent of the bourgeois wife Rebecca), Maxim remarks “you would not be in this car with me if you were.”<sup>27</sup> It can be read that Maxim prefers the narrator's innocent youth as she does not have the capability to act as bold and promiscuous as Rebecca did when she were alive. The narrator embodies everything that Rebecca does not, lacking the sexual freedom and transgression of gender roles that Rebecca is symbolic of. The most crucial part of the binary opposition between the two is that “once at Manderley, the new wife unsuccessfully attempts to achieve marital happiness through submission,” Rebecca is then presented as the ‘better’ of the two.<sup>28</sup> Submitting to patriarchal roles within Manderley leaves the narrator upset and confused for a large amount of the text, leading to a sense of madness as she envies everything Rebecca embodies to the point of imagining herself in her place. At one point, the narrator's envy of Rebecca causes her to act outside of her pre-scripted virginal lily role, as she states, “I had so identified myself with Rebecca that my own dull self did not exist, has never come to Manderley.”<sup>29</sup> This sense of immense longing sets Rebecca as an ideal, even as gaps in her façade as the perfect bourgeois wife are made more evident. She is the one of the two of them who were happy in marriage and in Manderley, and she is the one who does not submit to traditional patriarchal marriage ideals. In comparison, “bourgeois companionship now seems mere paternalism on his part, doglike devotion on hers.”<sup>30</sup> This is to the point that the narrator compares herself to Maxim's spaniel, Jasper, in the way that Maxim treats her and how she responds to his affection, writing “he pats me now and again, when he remembers, and I'm pleased, I get closer to him for a

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<sup>27</sup> Du Maurier, *Rebecca*, 40

<sup>28</sup> Pyrhonen, “Bluebeards Accomplice”

<sup>29</sup> Du Maurier, *Rebecca*, 224-225

<sup>30</sup> Light, “Returning to Manderley,” 12

moment. He likes me in the way I like Jasper.”<sup>31</sup> For this reason, their marriage reads as quite pathetic, suggesting that submitting to patriarchal values in heterosexual marriage as unequal is intrinsically unsatisfying, and thus increases the feminine desire to break away from trying to please the male patriarch and behave according to her own wants, much like Rebecca. Alison Light explores this desire, stating that the narrator refuses to see Rebecca as deviant and taboo until the very end of the novel due to how she idealises and envies her feminine power. She writes that “the girl’s inability to see Rebecca as deviant slowly becomes a *refusal* to do so, so caught up is she in the development of her own fantasy of a powerfully sexual and autonomous female subjectivity.”<sup>32</sup> This development of the narrator functions under the narrative of Female Gothic, as she feels trapped in domestic incarceration with her unsatisfying marriage with Maxim in the patriarchal estate of Manderley. Positioning herself against the sexually free image of Rebecca, she intends to find her own autonomy in her marriage. The conclusion to draw, then, is that [the](#) submissive femininity which androcentric societies and patriarchal institutions value is problematic for women, leading to dissatisfaction and occasionally madness. The behaviours of Rebecca, though positioned in the light of twentieth century taboo, is still considered an ideal due to her freedom and equality, or domination of her relationship with Maxim.

Matthew Lewis’ *The Monk* also features use of binary opposition in positions of femininity. With Matilda as our archetype of the untamed, demonic woman, we view the victim of Ambrosio and Matilda – Antonia – as the innocent, angelic woman in the novel. As Kate Ferguson Ellis writes:

“The women in *The Monk* can be ranged on a scale according to the degrees of agency they exercise in their lives. At one end is Antonia, whose excessive innocence prevents her from having control over anything. At the other end is Matilda, the demonic seducer of Ambrosio, who tries to know all and control all.”<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Du Maurier, *Rebecca*, 114

<sup>32</sup> Light, “Returning to Manderley,” 13

<sup>33</sup> Ellis, *The Contested Castle*, 136

Antonia through the course of *The Monk* is symbolic of feminine delicacy and innocence to a fault. She is described in her earliest appearance as not knowing what “consists the difference of man and woman.”<sup>34</sup> Antonia embodies a virginal image so innocent as to be completely ignorant towards sexual difference. This sense of Christian innocence is what puts Antonia most at risk to Ambrosio, as she remains completely unaware of lust and sin due to the protection of a mother attempting to keep her safe. As Ellis writes, “the culture of separate spheres urges the man to heights of sadism, the woman into complementary victimization.”<sup>35</sup> Elvira’s attempts to keep Antonia sheltered from sinful subjects is well-meaning but it is her ignorance that allows her to assume that Ambrosio is well meaning and pushes her into Ambrosio’s arms when she can no longer rely on her mother after her death. From this we can deduce that the societal blocks from information in place to keep women ‘pure’ in line with patriarchal ideals of women’s sexuality are in fact harmful, as it is Matilda, with her knowledge of deception and witchcraft that allows her to prosper in the end of the novel, while Antonia is left to become a victim of rape and murder. Antonia’s tragic fate is a distinct feature of *The Monk* as a Male Gothic novel, using explicit female suffering for its “delight in sexual frankness and perversity, its proximity to the “pornographic””<sup>36</sup> The rape of Antonia is written for the shock of audiences to take pleasure in the victimisation and suffering of women, while still critiquing the way Antonia was raised. The critique is limited, however, because Antonia remains an innocent victim in this novel, her only crime was to be a woman under Catholic patriarchy.

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<sup>34</sup> Lewis, *The Monk*, 19

<sup>35</sup> Ellis, *The Contested Castle*, xiii

<sup>36</sup> Williams, *Art of Darkness*, 104-105

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