

The Popularity of the “Feminine Monster”: The Malleability of the Female Gothic in  
Daphne du Maurier’s *Rebecca*, “The Birds” and “Don’t Look Now”

by

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*For my sister, who has always been my inspiration.*

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## Abstract

Prolific author Daphne du Maurier masterfully weaves in elements of the Gothic within her literature to critique the oppressive patriarchy, aristocracy and even materialism in 20<sup>th</sup> century Britain. Du Maurier powerfully subverts archaic gender roles—i.e., the traditional passive housewife against the domineering patriarchal head—by characterizing the female ‘villains’ as unabashedly sexual, outspoken and, in certain stories, violent. Moreover, du Maurier defies expectations of a fairy-like happily-ever-after by destroying domestic spaces, and disallowing male-savior clichés to proceed. Though du Maurier’s work was largely held by the lay audience as escapist romantic fiction, this thesis contextualizes her work within the historical frame of early-to-mid 20<sup>th</sup> century Britain, specifically focusing on the rise of women’s rights, as well as the history of Gothicism, with emphasis on the Female Gothic, to argue that her works uses the Gothic as a tool to metaphorically destroy these aforementioned oppressive institutions. To support this claim, this thesis principally does close reading on a few of du Maurier’s popular short stories and novels: namely, *Rebecca*, “The Birds” and “Don’t Look Now.” The order of the works listed mirrors the sequence of the close-readings in this thesis as well as its chronology. This thesis proves the Female Gothic’s malleability. Despite the differences of the “domestic space” that is characteristic of the Gothic, there is still a call to transition into a more egalitarian society with the destruction of the patriarchy. The female leads in each work are trapped in their role as “wife.” Outside forces, such as Rebecca in *Rebecca*, the birds in “The Birds” and the pixie-hooded woman in “Don’t Look Now” destabilize this gendered stereotype by threatening and/or attacking the male head. In certain works, the “feminine monster” archetype is used. Tracking the evolution of du Maurier’s works from 1938 to 1971, this thesis aims to prove du Maurier’s—and the Female Gothic’s—relevance in contemporary popular culture decades later.

Keywords: short stories, horror, Gothicism, Female Gothic, feminine monster, feminism, Marxism, materialism, 20<sup>th</sup> century British literature, romance, Daphne du Maurier, *Rebecca*, “The Birds,” “Don’t Look Now”





## CONTENTS

Introduction	1
Chapter One: A Gothic Story	6
Chapter Two: Manderley Burns—The Destruction of the Patriarchy	14
Chapter Three: “The Birds” as a Female Monster	30
Chapter Four: The Demise of the Male Savior in “Don’t Look Now”	37
Conclusion: Maintenance of the Gothic	46
Works Consulted	49



## Introduction

Should the Gothic genre be dismissed as merely an escapist thriller or does it offer deeper insights into the political and social atmosphere of the time? In order to understand Gothicism, it is important to examine the writing in critical perspective, taking into consideration the social upheavals surrounding the Gothic genre. Daphne du Maurier's Gothic romance, *Rebecca*, does more than seduce, shock and satisfy its readers. Since its publication in 1938, *Rebecca* has remained a bestseller. By examining *Rebecca* along with du Maurier's shorter Gothic narratives like "Don't Look Now" and "The Birds" through a feminist lens—paying particular attention to the underlying Marxist rhetoric—it is clear that these texts offer a critique directed against the aristocracy and patriarchy. Gothic literature functions to displace tangible fears and anxieties in a fantastical form, as, for example, apocalyptic birds or a sinister home. *Rebecca* was published at a time when the Gothic genre was being shifted to an altogether different breed of horror. Old bloodlines, materials and hedonism decays as does the Gothic home. In what ways does du Maurier's "Don't Look Now" and "The Birds" draw and add on to the scholarly criticism despite its separation from the stock Gothic home? More than that, how can we connect the influential Gothic narratives of the early twentieth century to contemporary Gothic?

I will begin my thesis by exploring the chronology of Gothicism. In order to do a thorough examination of Daphne du Maurier's writings, it is important to understand the history surrounding the inauguration of the "Gothic" genre and its *malleability*. By malleability, I am referencing the Gothic's ability to weave in the anxieties social-cultural atmosphere time. To do so, I will use prominent Gothic critics like Jerrold Hogel and Maggie Kilgour. Before delving into the Marxist and feminist critique embedded in du Maurier's works, I would need to define

Gothic itself. Ultimately, I will constrain the Gothic's broad definition to certain elements. Mainly, I plan to use Jerrold Hogle's definition in *Gothic Fiction*, narrowing the Gothic to its setting as an "antiquated space" (2). After attempting at a comprehensive definition, I want to examine the history surrounding Gothicism, using the historical context of the past as a way to parallel the historical context surrounding du Maurier's short stories and novel. In Noël Carroll's *The Philosophy of Horror* addresses the Gothic's breadth of sub-genres: historical gothic, natural or explained gothic, the supernatural gothic and the equivocal gothic. The historical gothic "represents a tale set in the imagined past without the suggestion of supernatural effects" and is perhaps what is most aptly evoked in Daphne du Maurier's writings. Carroll uses Benjamin Franklin Fisher to eloquently surmise the institution of horror—and the Gothic—as a genre:

There was a shift from physical fright, expressed through numerous outward miseries and villainous actions to psychological fear... The ghost-in-a-bedsheet gave way, as it did literally in Charles Dickens's *A Christmas Carol*, to the haunted psyche, a far more significant force in the "spooking" of hapless victims. (7)

From Fischer's writings, it is the "psychological fear" that is emphasized as a necessity to horror. In my thesis, I want to extrapolate from Carroll's conceptualization of the Gothic, offering a brief overview of the Gothic, and relate it to my question on the significance of the Gothic. Mainly, the ways in which the feminist rhetoric is the point of tangency underlying Daphne du Maurier's Gothic works.

While there is an expansive sub-genre of Gothicism, I want to focus on the Female Gothic in particular. I will tie in notable women's movements with the Female Gothic, emphasizing that the genre itself birthed as a reaction to the fears of women liberation. To do this, I will track the Female Gothic through notable critics like Ellen Moers, Clare Kahane and

Showlater from the 1960s to 1990s. Moreover, I will draw on the influence of psychoanalysis on the Female Gothic in the mid-1980s by applying Barbara Creed's "monstrous feminine" to Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca* and "Don't Look Now." I am interested in interpreting du Maurier's female "monsters" as a product of the patriarchal fears in a time period—early twentieth century—where women increasingly fought for more and more political rights.

In my first chapter on the Gothic, I will touch on its contrasting definition by using Kilgour to address the two opposing criticisms of horror fiction: is it a reactionary genre or progressive? There is evidence to both ideologies. In the case of the reactionary genre or repressive ideology, certain critics assert that the horror genre is xenophobic. Certainly, Maggie Kilgour notes, in general, "the gothic has been associated with a rebellion against a constraining neoclassical aesthetic ideal of order and unity, in order to recover a suppressed primitive and barbaric imaginative freedom" (3).

In my second and third chapters, I want to do a close reading of *Rebecca*, "Don't Look Now" and "The Birds" respectively, taking particular care in addressing the feminist—and in the case of "The Birds" the Marxist—critiques underlying each. It is significant to note the transition away from the domestic sphere—or, the traditional Gothic set up with each subsequent publication. *Rebecca* featured the decrepit manor and the malevolent housekeeper, preoccupied with maintaining the status quo. Gina Wisker, an influential scholar in the horror community, touches on *Rebecca* and its relation to Marxism and feminism. In Wisker's article, "Dangerous Borders: Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca*: Shaking the foundations of the romance of privilege, partying and place" she argues that *Rebecca* and du Maurier's shorter stories feature typically comfortable aristocratic settings of country houses, hotels and other domestic spaces to embody the unease involved in the distribution of power and gender. In *Rebecca*, the characters' lifestyle

is one of indulgent decadence, signaling the culmination of WWII. *Rebecca's* haunting setting subverts that privileged lifestyle of the upper class and the romantic idealism of the dark, brooding hero—thus the aristocracy and the patriarchy. The article discusses how *Rebecca* uses the imagery of the Gothic to depict the loss of romantic dreams and frivolous fantasies. It is not merely read as the loss the romantic couple, Ms. and Mrs. de Winter, but of the bourgeoisie. Because they include terror, unpleasant truths and horrific revelations, du Maurier's works are not simply romances. The creepy rhetorical devices suggest an altogether different interpretation, one that argues against the patriarchal class and comfortable lifestyle of the aristocracy. It is the so-called dream of a happily-ever-after, but a nightmare. It is worthy to note that while the Marxist criticism plays a particularly salient role in *Rebecca*, this thesis is mainly concerned with its feminist implications—the distribution of power via gender instead of class, though both are not mutually exclusive.

The aforementioned themes are prevalent in du Maurier's ensuing short stories, though, to a lesser degree. Terry Thompson reinforces Wisker's interpretation by writing a close analysis of du Maurier's "The Birds," published in 1952. Here, the aristocracy is indeed crumbling. Thompson points out that the "first half of the twentieth century, a turbulent time when millions perished in conflict, and millions more were turned into starving, hollow-eyed refugees." Where the materialist citizens perished, it is the honest yeoman that survives the apocalyptic attacks of the birds. Moreover, the stated social turmoil of the twentieth century can be used as evidence to the change of women's roles. Nat, the typical patriarchal head, fears this change by something as innocuous as birds—a representation of women—and fights to resist the attacks, both literal and metaphorical.

"Don't Look Now," first published in 1971, shifts away from the domestic sphere.

Instead taking place in an expansive manor or a farmer's home, it features a couple on vacation. Still, "Don't Look Now" uses artful horror tactics of horror and suspense to weave a feministic critique. Once again, Gothic literature allows for an investigation of political, psychological and sexual implications of our fears and nightmares and brings it into the forefront of our consciousness. With regard to "Don't Look Now," I will do a close analysis of its elements in suspense and imagery—the little girl in the pixie-hood for example—in relation to the way it subverts gender roles. In the story, it is a woman who commits an act of violence against a man.

Each story by Daphne du Maurier tracks the major political and social of that period. Certainly, the horror genre is pertinent in our understanding of underlying themes within each text. Horror—typically viewed as a low-brow genre—targets the human adaptive tendency to find pleasure in the make-believe, allowing for a visceral experience in the frame of a safe space. While the stereotypical Gothic novel has largely disappeared, this thesis aims to show that its influence is prevalent in contemporary erotic thrillers. As the horror genre continues to dominate the box-office, mass-market paperbacks and popular threads like r/nosleep, a closer look into *Rebecca* can offers insights into public consciousness.



## Chapter One: A Gothic Story

Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca* opens with "Last night I dreamed I went to Manderley again" (1). It is probably one of the most famous opening lines in fiction and introduces the Gothic space of Manderley. The first-person perspective sets the novel as a *window into the past* and the "dream" gives off a fantastical atmosphere. As if our unnamed narrator is a real-estate agent and, we, the readers, are prospective buyers, our narrator lures us *deeper* into the Gothic dwelling. She continues:

It seemed to me I stood by the iron gate leading to the drive, and for a while I could not enter, for the way was barred to me. There was a padlock and a chain upon the gate. I called in my dream to the lodge keeper, and had no answer, and peering closer through the rusted spokes of the gate I saw that the lodge was uninhabited. (1)

The narrator continues to highlight the Manderley's "emptiness," noting that "no smoke came from the chimney and the little lattice windows gaped forlorn" (1). Furthermore, we discover that the narrator's dream-like state imbues her with "supernatural powers," and, against our own volition (or dare I say morbid curiosity?), we are guided through the "narrow and unkempt" drive until, at last, we reach Manderley (1).

There was Manderley, our Manderley, secretive and silent as it had always been, the gray stone shining in the moonlight of my dream, the mullioned windows reflecting the green lawns and the terrace. Time could not wreck the perfect symmetry of those walls, nor the site itself, a jewel in the hollow of a hand. (1)

Certain elements of the classical Gothic tale are here, including the "antiquated space" and "secrets from the past... that haunt the characters, psychologically, physically, or otherwise at

the main time of the story” (Hogle 2). We are not only forced to confront the narrator’s *personal* past, but the social-cultural past as well. That is, the narrator’s persona is a function of the oppressive patriarchy. Here, I want to delve into Gothic’s origination, touching on the ways that ionic Gothic works like Horace Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto* (1756), Ann Radcliffe’s romances of the 1790s and Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* (1847) influenced Gothic literature thereafter. I want to emphasize the Gothic’s *malleability* and the ways its themes can manifest into Daphne du Maurier’s works—*Rebecca*, “The Birds,” “Don’t Look Now”—nearly two-hundred years after the Walpole’s “first” Gothic novel (1756—1847). Finally, I want to touch on the breadth of sub-genres under Gothicism, paying particular attention to the Female Gothic and its application to Daphne du Maurier’s works.

Gothic fiction is not really “Gothic.” It is a contradiction. While the Gothic at the outset referred to the Germanic tribe, Goths, then stood for “medieval” (Abrams 78), the Gothic *novel* is an “entirely post-medieval and even post-Renaissance phenomenon” (Hogle 1). Interestingly, Horace Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto*—the “first” Gothic story—was published in 1756, centuries after the Middle Ages. Walpole’s novel ballooned in popularity throughout Britain, Europe and even the United States, specifically for the female audience (naturally, critics during that time dismissed *The Castle of Otranto* as sensationalist but when, in history, have critics ever sided with the larger female body?). Its narrative assembles “elements of the supernatural and horrific, and models his ruined castle setting after his real-life residence, Strawberry Hill, a modern version of a medieval castle” (Hogel and Bomarito 2). *The Castle of Otranto* follows Manfred who, after discovering his son, Conrad, successor of the Otranto house, is killed by a giant falling helmet, is set on marrying Conrad’s fiancée, Isabella, in order to maintain his dynasty, but is hindered by a series of supernatural events. Ultimately, the Manfred,

representative of the old powers, abdicates his position and Isabella marries Theodore, who was initially introduced as a peasant. The characters in *The Castle of Otranto* are characteristic of progressive Gothicism as they try to adopt a “forward-thinking” mindset in order to progress in their new and changing world, but a “dark, ancient evil from the distant past dooms them to failure” (Hogel and Bamarito 2). Because Isabella ultimately marries a “peasant,” instead of someone from nobility, the “forward-thinking” mindset prevails.

*The Castle of Otranto*'s blend of romance, mystery and “dark, ancient evil” proved to be an enticing recipe and, quickly, the genre proliferated through the Romantic era (1790s-1830s)—the period of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818)—the Victorian (1837-1901) and into the twentieth century. We have come to recognize Victorian classics like Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847), Robert Louis Stevenson's *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886) and Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897) as quintessential “Gothics,” transitioning from the “dark, ancient evil” of the past and the uncertain future. In the twentieth century, we witness the Gothic distribute its ingredients into a vast array of media: women's romance novels, musicals, movies, television shows and series, video games, music videos and even novels with literary merit. Indeed, novels like Anya Seton's *Dragonwyck* and Shirley Jackson's *The Haunting of Hill House* as well as movies like *Rosemary's Baby* (1968) and *Nosferatu* (1922) are notable examples of its popularity in the twentieth century. In the twentieth century, too, we follow the Gothic's evolution from 1938 to 1971 in du Maurier's works, using *Rebecca*, “The Birds” and “Don't Look Now” as examples.

Even though the Gothic genre is malleable, encompassing expansive sub-genres and emphasizing certain elements within “dynamics of family, the limits of rationality and passion, the definition of statehood citizenship” and “the cultural effects of technology” depending on the

socio-cultural atmosphere of the time, I want to attempt at a comprehensive definition (Hogle 259). Jerrold Hogle defines the Gothic by its constant: the setting.

Though not always as obviously as in *The Castle of Otranto* or *Dracula*, a Gothic tale usually takes place (at least some of the time) in an antiquated or seemingly antiquated space — be it a castle, a foreign palace, an abbey, a vast prison, a subterranean crypt, a graveyard, a primeval frontier or island, a large old house or theatre, an aging city or urban underworld, a decaying storehouse, factory, laboratory, public building, or some new recreation of an older venue... (2).

The main takeaway from Hogle's list is that the "antiquated space" is not as "obvious" as the medieval castles featured in *Dracula* or the *Castle of Otranto*. In my thesis, I want to argue places like a cottage by the seaside or even an Italian city still embody the "antiquated space" archetype. Moreover, the point of the setting is not its aging qualities (though that metaphorically stems from society's 'aging' system), but its effects on the characters. Hogle stresses that "within this space, or a combination of such spaces, are hidden some secrets from the past (sometimes the recent past) that haunt the characters, psychologically, psychically, or otherwise at the main time of the story" (Hogle 2). In each of du Maurier's works that I plan to analyze, the male heroes were "haunted" by anxieties that imagines the dissolution of the aristocracy or the patriarchy.

Other scholars, too, describe the Gothic as a mode to express society's worries, taking either a reactionary or progressive message. In *The Rise of the Gothic Novel*, Maggie Kilgour notes, in general, "the gothic has been associated with a rebellion against a constraining neoclassical aesthetic ideal of order and unity, in order to recover a suppressed primitive and barbaric imaginative freedom" (3). Kilgour's definition predominantly aligns with the Gothic's

regressive angle. When I think of “reactionary” horror for example, I immediately conjure films like *Nosferatu* (1922), *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956) and *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974) that promote conservative ideals. Despite this, the Gothic’s ability to depict fears about “what could go wrong” by “continuing along the path of political, social, and theological change” does not necessarily need to be cast in a negative light (Hogle and Bamarito 2).

Kilgour’s definition of the Gothic attributes “imaginative freedoms” that come with a return to the past. Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* is perhaps *the* example of a “rebellion against ideal of order or unity,” envisioning the consequences of increased technological capabilities. Daphne du Maurier’s “The Birds,” in fact, juggles between the tenuous line of a patriarchal past or materialistic future. There are “reactionary” and “progressive” readings integrated within each of Daphne du Maurier’s works. Their moralistic message, however, differs between each period in which they are written: the 30s, 50s and 70s. It is important, then, to discuss the historical forces that led to the formation (or resurgence) of the Gothic, specifically focusing on the Female Gothic.

There is a breadth of sub-genres under the title “Gothic.” The branching does not stop there. The “Female Gothic,” too, encompasses multifaceted definitions. Here, I want to track the “Female Gothic’s” history, relating some of its tropes to Daphne du Maurier’s works. The “Female Gothic” naturally overlaps with central ideas of “Gothicism.” The conceptualization of the Female Gothic as a genre birthed from the women’s liberation movement of the late 1960s as a genre that “expressed women’s dark protests, fantasies and fear” (Showalter qtd. Hogle 210). Ellen Moers cites one type of the Female Gothic novel from Ann Radcliffe’s *The Mysteries of Udolpho* as a narrative in which a young woman is “simultaneously persecuted victim and the courageous heroine” (Moers qtd. Hogle 210). It is easy to transpose Moer’s mode of the Female

Gothic onto du Maurier's *Rebecca*, specifically with the nameless heroine. The readers cannot help but root for a traditional happily-ever-after (boy and girl meet, get married, have many babies), but it is hard to extricate the heroine's motivations from the stifling patriarchy. By heralding the nameless narrator as "courageous," we are also acknowledging that her desires stem from persecution. Nevertheless, Moer's mode is not perfect—how do we reconcile Rebecca's role as the "courageous heroine" or "heroine" in and of itself?

In the 1970s, then, Moer's interpretation was revisited by a few psychoanalytical feminists like that of Clare Kahane who maintains that the "heroine is imprisoned not in a house, but in the female body... The problematics of femininity is thus reduced to the problematics of the female body, perceived as antagonistic to the sense of self, as therefore freakish" (qtd. Hogle 211). In sum, the various psychoanalytic feminists saw the Female Gothic as a conflict with the idea of "mothering" and "reproduction." Indeed, we see the heroine's confrontation with maternity in *Rebecca* with regard to the absent mother, the tense relationship with her mother-in-law, and the pointed note that decades into her marriage with Maxim, they have not had any children despite trying. What implications does this have on the meaning of "femininity?"

The meaning of the Female Gothic was further complicated in the mid-1980s by a group of feminists influenced by poststructuralism and Lacanian psychoanalysis. For them, the Female Gothic aligned with the "feminine, the romantic, the transgressive and the revolutionary" (211). Showalter uses the example of Charlotte Brontë's *Villette* to apply the aforementioned mode, noting that the Female Gothic manifests despite Brontë's aim to "express herself in the bourgeois and patriarchal language of reason" (211). Similarly, the Gothic erupts in du Maurier's works like "Don't Look Now" and "The Birds" as transgressive, featuring the uncanny and an "exotic"

locale for the former. The psychoanalytic perspective, too, is helpful when using the “feminine monster” archetype in du Maurier’s stories.

As with Gothicism in general, it is not out-of-the-scope to conclude that the Female Gothic is malleable, taking on different meanings in relation to its historical context. Showalter remarks that the Female Gothic “borrows many of its conventions from the English and European traditions” thus becoming “the most versatile and powerful genres of American women’s writing, with elements that have changed in relation to changes in women’s roles and American culture” (211). Certainly, the Female Gothic theories of 70s, 80s and 90s can all be applied to some degree in du Maurier’s work.

While concepts like the “motherhood,” the “persecuted heroine,” and the “transgressive” are outlined in Showalter’s trajectory of the Female Gothic, there is not much on female *sexuality*—paramount to my reading of du Maurier’s *Rebecca*. Here, Hogle offers a particularly insightful view of the Female Gothic and “seductive demoness” in his introduction to “Society, Culture and the Gothic:”

In the mid-1800s, women had few rights and were expected to be subservient to men. Not only were women denied the vote, they were denied the right to own property. Cultural expectations required that women refrain from expressing themselves openly in the presence of men. Rather they were expected to be pure, pleasant, and supportive of men at all times. But, as reflected by the controversial Gothic novels, these rigid roles were changing. Feminist critics point out the unusual prevalence of strong female characters in Gothic novels, and the way their independent and often sexual behavior was harshly criticized by contemporaries of the novels. Modern critics also point out the way in which female sexuality was often used to denote strength, rebelliousness, and evil. Appearing as

nefarious seductresses, female characters were often demons or villains who were punished or made to see the error of their ways at the story's end. Feminist critics also claim that while women in earlier novels had been portrayed as victims waiting to be rescued, in Gothic novels the roles were often reversed and the male characters were victimized... (108).

While Hogle specifies that many of the female readership enjoyed Gothic literature to live out their fantasies of independence *in the 1800s*, this concept was still relevant in 1930s-1970s, the period that du Maurier's works were written. Women gained more rights during the twentieth century in Britain, particularly in suffrage and employment, but garnered some backlash. Moreover, *Rebecca* and "The Birds" suggest that there was still this cultural expectation that women should be subservient to men. When the rigid gender roles were subverted in *Rebecca* between Rebecca and Maxim, Rebecca appeared as a "nefarious seductress" who as "punished" by the male character—Maxim—for her highly sexualized persona. In the next section, I will analyze the female characters of *Rebecca*, both the nameless heroine and Rebecca herself. I want to demonstrate that their behaviors built, in part, by the oppressive patriarchy system that they lived under. Moreover, I will apply the broad definitions of the Gothic onto *Rebecca*.



## Chapter Two: Manderly Burns—The Destruction of the Patriarchy in *Rebecca*

Daphne du Maurier's horror is quiet. It is a slow-burn horror, stealthily creeping up on you until you're wondering *what did I just read?* Indeed, Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca* unsettled the conservative readers of the twentieth century, subverting the traditional romance of naive-girl-meets-brooding-hero with the ever-present ghost of the hero's, Maxim, first wife, Rebecca. The narrator and hero's romance story does not end with marriage; it starts with it. Additionally, it is not their happily-ever-after we follow, but a spiral into madness, deceit and murder. The final image that *Rebecca* leaves us with was a sky "shot with crimson, like a splash of blood" (357). It was an image of Manderley on fire. Manderley's destruction as an "antiquated space" is the destruction of class-systems, bloodlines and the patriarchy.

*Rebecca* follows the unnamed narrator as she retrospectively speaks of her impromptu romance and marriage with Maximilian "Maxim" de Winter, president of Manderley. The narrator's story begins in her early 20s while she is working as a companion to a wealthy American woman in Monte Carlo. Bullied and patronized in her lowly position, the narrator looked forward to her brief outings with Maxim. Quickly, she fell in love and accepted his proposal despite their short acquaintance. In her acquiescence, the narrator became the mistress of Manderley. Normally, this would be the fairytale-like ending of a romance-plot, but *Rebecca* is further complicated by the haunting of Maxim's first wife and Mrs. Danvers, the ominous housekeeper, who was (and still is) eerily loyal to Rebecca. Mrs. Danvers psychologically manipulates the narrator, reminding her that she will never be the exemplar that Rebecca was. The narrator's role as mistress of Manderley increasingly deteriorates her mental health, climaxing after the costume ball after Mrs. Danvers convinces the narrator to wear a dress that

Rebecca was remembered for. It was after the ball (where the narrator was met with Maxim's fury) that Mrs. Danvers nearly persuaded the narrator to commit suicide. Fortunately (or not), Mrs. Danvers attempt was thwarted when Rebecca's decomposed body was finally discovered. The latter quarter of the novel progresses quickly as we learn that Rebecca was not the paragon she was made out to be and that her death was not an accident at all. While Maxim and the narrator survive Manderley's destruction, Rebecca's imprint survives along with them.

Gina Wisker, Professor of Contemporary Literature at the University of Brighton with a specialty of Gothic fictions, makes this paramount insight about Daphne du Maurier and the patriarchy:

Daphne du Maurier's work highlights patterns of domination and hierarchy, patriarchy's enforcement of all the tame female values and its rejection of female energies which, unleashed, would trouble the conventional behaviors of male ownership of women's bodies, and of heredity. Taking anything for granted is dangerous. (24)

Using Gina Wisker's article, "The compulsions and revelations of Daphne du Maurier's horror writing" as a model, I plan to trek Rebecca's ghostly-like presence (representing the feminine monster) throughout *Rebecca* as a tool to question women's roles under the patriarchy, arguing that in by allowing Rebecca as the novel's "villain" to successfully haunt Maxim, preconceived ideas of "femininity" should be reevaluated to allow for the acceptance of female sexuality. Throughout the novel, it is clear that the narrator, Maxim and the readers can never escape Rebecca even after he kills her. It is through Rebecca's subtle infiltration into Manderley, culminating until the moment where Mrs. Danvers burns down Manderley, that Daphne du Maurier's critique against the patriarchy is maximized. While there are several moments in *Rebecca* where I can narrow on its feministic message (such as the infamous ball scene), my

section splits between establishing Rebecca's influence as a ghost, particularly on the narrator, and Rebecca as the feminine archetype of Medusa.

Throughout the novel, we are always in the shadow of Rebecca. We never get to see her actions or hear her speak (we don't even get her ghostly manifestations in the traditional horror sense). From a broader perspective, this (absence) is magnified because Rebecca is imprinted in the very walls of Manderley. From a micro point-of-view, however, Rebecca crops up in unexpected spaces. After Maxim proposes to the narrator, she does not feel elation like she had anticipated. She thinks, "I was to marry the man I loved. I was to be Mrs. de Winter. It was foolish to go on having that pain in the pit of my stomach when I was so happy..." (57) The narrator argues with herself, asserting that his proposal, though short, was "genuine" and "original" (57). It does not end there. She thinks that his proposal was "[n]ot like [his] the first time, asking Rebecca..." Interestingly, the narrator thinks her shift to Rebecca was "forbidden, prompted by demon" (57). She implores Satan: "Get thee behind me, Satan" (57). The narrator is unhappy with her prospective marriage to Maxim *because* of his previous marriage with Rebecca.

On one hand, it is the fear of the Other Woman poisoning their nuptials. On the other, the narrator's anxiety stems from her new precarious role as Maxim's new wife. She feels "pain in the pit of her stomach" because Maxim "had not said anything yet about being in love" (57). His proposal, then, was framed with the intention of wanting a new *wife*, a biddable woman to take on the proverbial reigns of the Manderley manor. Maxim did not ask to marry our narrator with a motive of her character in mind. The narrator realizes her position is reduced to her role rather than her personality. She is there to fill in for Rebecca—to slip into the shoes of "Mrs. de Winter." The narrator believes that Rebecca exemplified the ideal wife, unaware the Rebecca's

behaviors did not align with the unobtrusive early twentieth century woman. In fact, Rebecca's behaviors as the seductress paint her as the villain of the narrative, a feminine monster.

With Maxim's proposal, the narrator begins to distance herself from her inexperienced and awkward disposition. The narrator believes that in order to attain Maxim's love, she must dissociate from *herself* (that is, her personality) to mold into her role. Spurred by her insecurity, the demon persuades the narrator to open the book of poems lying by Maxim's bedside. In it, she discovers the first mark of Rebecca on the title-page: "'Max from Rebecca'" (58). The narrator assures herself that "[Rebecca] was dead, and one must not have thoughts about the dead. They slept in peace..." but is captured by the vitality of her inscription:

How alive was her writing though, how full of force. Those curious, sloping letters. The blob of ink. Done yesterday. It was just as if it had been written yesterday. I took my nail scissors from the dressing-case and cut the page, looking over my shoulder like a criminal. (58)

The narrator attempts to excise Rebecca from memory, but she is not successful. Here, the narrator is establishing her dominance over Rebecca, stressing that she is living and Rebecca is not. It is important to recognize that the narrator's animosity is more aligned with the traditional romance-plot. She is jealous of Maxim's past relationship and views Rebecca as an obstacle in obtaining Maxim's affections. It is like the narrator is in a love-triangle, except her opponent is dead.

I cut the page right out of the book. I left no jagged edges, and the book looked white and clean when the page was gone... I tore the page up in many fragments and threw them into the waste-paper basket. Then I went and sat on the window seat again. But I kept thinking of the torn scraps in the basket, and after a moment I had to get up and look in

the basket once more. Even now the ink stood up on the fragments thick and black, the writing was not destroyed. I took a box of matches and set fire to the fragments. The flame had a lovely light, staining the paper... The letter R was the last to go... (58)

After the narrator accepts Maxim's proposal, she sets herself as Rebecca's rival. With that, she never develops her own identity, but exits as *not* Rebecca—her replacement.

It is important to understand the contrast between the narrator and Rebecca and its implications to the larger critique of the patriarchy. Rebecca is the antithesis of a demure, subservient woman. She enjoys sex (engaging in coitus with multiple men even within the borders of her marriage) and unabashedly flaunts it in front of her husband:

'If I had a child, Max,' she said, 'neither you, nor anyone in the world, would ever prove that it was not yours. It would grow up here in Manderley, bearing your name. There would be nothing you could do.' (263)

She recognizes the shame that Maxim would feel if she exposes her adulterous acts and, thus, lords it over him (the power, then, is with her *not* the traditional male head). Wisker eloquently sums up Rebecca's characterization as the representation of "male terrors of vulnerability where it most hurts" (30). Unlike Rebecca, the narrator is passive. She is willing to submit to Maxim, shedding her *self* in the process, in order to attain his love. She displaces her anxieties of the imbalanced novel relationship, in class, age and gender, onto Maxim's first wife. If she is erased, then the narrator would be able to develop her own identity. The narrator's aim to burn the inscription is her first (of many) attempts to cut Rebecca from the household. Before the narrator officially becomes the woman of the manor, she does not *want* to be Rebecca's substitute. Even in death, however, Rebecca exudes power and will not be "destroyed" (58). Rebecca's aura, like her writing, is "thick and black" (58). She is the first person that comes to mind when people

hear “Manderley.” And, for Ms. Danvers, she is the only “Mrs. de Winter.” Rebecca’s haunting starts small, but like fire, it engulfs the entirety of Manderley. She reminds the readers, and the other characters, that she is here to stay.

The book of poems is a representation of Rebecca *moving outside the space* of the home. The book of poems is an artifact of Manderley that followed Maxim. She haunts his conscience: Rebecca, Rebecca, Rebecca. Still, the *outside* offers a brief respite from the site of Rebecca’s haunting. The place that she was murdered: Manderley. It is there that the narrator feels overwhelmed by the ghost of Rebecca. Her fortitude is tested, and, unlike her surprising act of agency when she burned the inscription, she begins to mentally unravel. The narrator realizes that she can never be Mrs. de Winter because she is not *the* Mrs. de Winter. She is the unsophisticated second wife and from the servants of Manderley, to the bed that she sleeps all belong to Rebecca. When the narrator first nestles in Manderley as Mrs. de Winter, she feels as if she is an outsider looking in. She cannot build her marriage with Maxim because it is only a novel experience to *her*. The narrator thinks, “This is [Maxim’s] routine... this is what he always does, this had been his custom for years” (77). Instead of carving a routine for herself, she tries to file herself into Maxim’s established regime. In doing so, she makes herself invisible.

And as I sat there, brooding, my chin in my hands, fondling the soft ears of one of the spaniels, it came to me that I was not the first one to lounge there in possession of the chair, someone had been before me, had surely left an imprint of her person on the cushions, and on the arm where her hand had rested. Another one had poured the coffee from the same silver coffee pot, had placed the cup to her lips, had bent down to the dog, even as I was doing. (77)

It is not as if it was not just Rebecca that evoked a ghostly presence *but the entire home itself*. It is stuck in the past, already accompanied with its own rules and regulations. It is like the narrator stepped foot into a painting, stopped in time. The only thing that is out-of-place within this painting (as a metaphor of the house) is the narrator herself. Rebecca's subtle infiltration into Manderley was played out in the narrator's thoughts. It starting slow with musings, "*someone... had surely left an imprint on this cushions...*" (77). There is not power to Rebecca at this moment because we have not verbalized verified that it was her. Following the narrator's slow recognition, she finally admits that it is Rebecca's chair:

Unconsciously I shivered, as though someone had opened the door behind me, and let a draught into the room. I was sitting in **Rebecca's** chair, I was leaning against **Rebecca's** cushion, and the dog had come to me and laid his head upon my knee because that had been his custom, and he remembered, in the past, she had given sugar to him there. (77)

It is Rebecca's dog that she is feeding and it is Rebecca's chair that she is sitting in and it is Rebecca's husband that she is sleeping with. Daphne du Maurier uses a psychological kind of horror in *Rebecca*. Rebecca's ghost begins to figuratively inhabit the narrator's mind. The narrator does not assert her own identity, but wholeheartedly yields to Rebecca's ghost. As the second-wife, she sees Maxim as the patriarchal "master of his house" (77). Because the narrator views Maxim as a "master," she unwittingly becomes subservient to him. Rebecca's ghost is a rejection of the narrator's attitude. Rebecca's all-encompassing presence reminds the readers that the true "master" of the house is not Maxim, but her. Rebecca disrupts the patriarchy.

As the novel progresses, the seeds of inferiority planted in the narrator's mind flourish. Helpless, she concedes: "Rebecca was still mistress of Manderley. Rebecca was still Mrs. de

Winter” (220). While it seems like the narrator’s character development is static, she actually starts to devolve. Before, the narrator felt that she had the liberty to fight against Rebecca, burning the page of her inscription. When interacting with her mother-in-law, however, she sees that Rebecca exists outside of material things. Her ghost is not just intertwined with the objects that she has touched, or the place she has dined, but the very people she had interacted with. It is as if the nameless (a fact aptly highlighted when she admits that “Rebecca was still Mrs. de Winter”) narrator is the phantom and Rebecca is the one that’s here and alive.

**Rebecca**, always **Rebecca**. Whenever I walked in Manderley, wherever I sat, even in my thoughts and in my dreams, I met Rebecca. (220)

The narrator is aware that Rebecca is sinking her claws into her mind. Even in death, Rebecca is able to manipulate the narrator, demonstrating that she cannot be “tamed.”

I knew her figure now, the long slim legs, the small and narrow feet. Her shoulders, broader than mine, the capable clever hands. Hands that could steer a boat, could hold a horse. Hands... that wrote “Max from **Rebecca**” on the fly-leaf of a book. I knew her face too, small and oval, the clear white skin, the cloud of dark hair. I knew the scent she wore, I could guess her laughter and her smile...

**Rebecca**, always **Rebecca**. I should never be rid of **Rebecca** (220).

Here, it is important to take into account Rebecca’s masculinization. Because Rebecca’s persona does not parallel the feminine ideals of the early twentieth century, her physique, too, mirrors her disposition. She has broad shoulders and hands that “could steer a boat” and hands that “could hold a horse” (220). She is not only powerful in her writing, but physically too. Time and again, we return to Rebecca’s conceptualization as a boy. Recognizing that she can never be as



physically powerful as Rebecca as even the narrator has described herself as “raw ex-schoolgirl, red-elbowed and lanky-haired” nor influentially, the narrator gives up on trying to fight her (20).

Valiantly, the narrator, like a schoolgirl hoping her crush returns her affections, wonders if she “haunted” Rebecca like she has “haunted” her (220). She lists Rebecca’s imprints on Manderley as evidence: the “mackintosh [the narrator] wore, that handkerchief that [the narrator] used. They were [Rebecca’s].” At last, the narrator relents. In a moment of victory for Rebecca and involuntary dread for the conservative reader, the narrator thinks, “I could fight the living but I could not fight the dead” (220). The narrator adds, “Rebecca would always be the same. And her I could not fight. She was too strong for me” (221). What is the significance that the Other Woman wins? How does that play into du Maurier’s criticism of the patriarchy? It is because the narrator embodies the passive archetype of the twentieth century woman that her failure to defeat the sexually liberated first wife echoes the failures that male fantasy of the demure, subservient woman to progress past the war. It is a terrifying concept that a wife could not only be the husband’s equal, resisting the image of the male as the “master of the house,” but have the power in the relationship instead. Even though Maxim kills Rebecca, believing he destroyed the outspoken dominant woman, it is futile. Rebecca’s memory lives on, and, her behaviors will begin to manifest themselves in Maxim’s new wife. Because the narrator cannot “never be rid of Rebecca,” she must bow down to her, and, with that, she dismisses the patriarchy.

Before I delve deeper into the idea that Rebecca functions to undermine the patriarchy (or bring its hypocrisy to the surface), I want to point out the conceptualization the readers have of who Rebecca is versus the narrator—or, for a better word, the dramatic irony. It is clear that

Rebecca *is not at all what she seems* but the narrator still upholds her as the paradigm of Manderley. Indeed, the narrator may be unwittingly stepping into the shoes of Rebecca, but she is doing so without knowing Maxim's true perception of Rebecca. Once the narrator discovers that Maxim murdered Rebecca because she was "vicious, damnable, rotten through and through" and "incapable of love, of tenderness, of decency," she resists her (255). Indeed, the narrator thinks "I too had killed Rebecca" and "I knew I was no longer afraid of Rebecca... She could no longer hurt me" after Maxim's admission (268). Despite Maxim's cruel transgression, the narrator feels "light and free" after his confession (268). She does not need to compete with Rebecca anymore. As a consequence, she can assert her mastery in the Manderley household.

How can the readers empathize with Rebecca if even the narrator wholeheartedly casts her in the role of the villain? Do we dismiss the narrator altogether and (unfairly) demean her as a weak, feeble-minded heroine? Here, I want to argue that even though the narrator becomes the antithesis of Rebecca or *anti-Rebecca*, both the narrator and Rebecca are constrained in their roles within the domestic space (that is, their characterizations are byproducts of the oppressive patriarchy). In fact, Rebecca never escapes. Despite the breath of her personality (spatially and temporally), Rebecca's power is equivalent to (now) the narrator's—Manderley.

After Maxim's revelation, moreover, Rebecca's one-dimensional characterization as a perfect model of femininity is tainted in the narrator's (and the readers') world. As Rebecca was Maxim's victim (both in his derision and in his crime), the narrator halts her envy of Rebecca. Because Rebecca's role as the narrator's *rival* is obliterated, the readers are able to sympathize with Rebecca undermining the narrator's identity. Therefore, I want to pivot from a focus on the narrator's relationship with Rebecca to Rebecca herself, specifically in the ways that she feeds into the "monstrous feminine" as the Medusa archetype. Rebecca reminds Maxim de Winter that

she will torment him in death. Rebecca's ghostly powers comes to fruition when Ms. Danvers, functioning as Rebecca's proxy, burns Manderley to the ground.

Now, let us return to the moment where Maxim de Winter confesses his crime to his second-wife. His secret does not come during a time of vulnerability and trust, but because he has no *choice*. Rebecca's body has resurfaced. *She was in the boathouse this entire time*. Before Mr. de Winter discloses his secret, he asks the narrator: "How much do you love me?" Mr. de Winter effectively nudges the narrator into a certain kind of thinking that favors him (250). Up until this point, Mr. de Winter has not confessed his love to the narrator. The following admission, subsequently, has a veil of deceit:

"We are not meant for happiness, you and I...' He put his hands over mine and looking into my face. 'Rebecca has won,' he said.

I stared at him, my heart beating strangely, my hands suddenly cold beneath his hands.

"Her shadow between us all the time," he said. "Her damned shadow keeping us from one another... I remembered her eyes as she looked at me before she died. I remembered that slow treacherous smile. She knew this would happen even then. She knew she would win in the end" (250).

It is interesting that despite the fact that Mr. de Winter is describing his *murder* (literally looking into the eyes of his victim as she fades from life) it is as if Rebecca was the villain all along with "her slow treacherous smile" (250). Max de Winter's interaction with the narrator illuminates a few things: firstly, it undermines his love confession to the narrator (and subsequently the romance plot) because it is told in conjunction with the Rebecca revelation (Rebecca, once again, polluting their love); secondly, Max de Winter's dialogue reveals the preoccupation with

Rebecca's physical appearance, "eyes" and "smile." He never explicitly says *what she does wrong*. Rebecca is limited by her gender, or the expectations of femininity. Why is she the "monster?" Is Rebecca truly winning or is she getting the justice she rightly deserves?

Ultimately, is not Rebecca's "crime" her just chafing against the constraints of her gender-role?

The narrator, in simultaneous horror and relief at Maxim's confession, expresses her anxieties at being compared to Rebecca: "Whenever you touched me I thought you were comparing me to Rebecca... Whenever you spoke to me or looked at me, walked with me to the garden, sat down to dinner, I felt you were saying to yourself, 'This I did with Rebecca, and this, and this'" (255). Maxim follows by explaining to the narrator that she is the *opposite* of Rebecca. Where Rebecca lashed against her gender, the narrator remains docile. Maxim forcefully says that Rebecca was "not normal" and that she was "damnably **clever**" implying that the narrator is not that (255-256). Before Max was aware of her true antics, he was informed "'[Rebecca] got the three things that matter in a wife... breeding, brains and beauty'" (256). Rebecca, in a span of a sentence, was reduced to *wife*. Her personality/her very identity is what made her unattractive/villainous to Maxim. Rebecca personifies the character of "wife" to outsiders of Manderley, being "so lovely, so accomplished, so amusing," but when she takes off that mask and acts like a "boy" she is "rotten through and through" (256).

Besides subverting the role of "wife," I want to focus on how Rebecca represents Barbara Creed's key monstrous figure: Medusa. Creed writes in "Horror and the Monstrous Feminine: An Imaginary Abjection" that "[a]ll human societies have a conception of the monstrous-feminine, of what it is about a woman that is shocking, terrifying, horrific, abject" (251) Medusa is a classic example of the monstrous-feminine, a figure "with her 'evil eye,' head of writhing serpents and lolling tongue'" that's intimately linked to sexual difference and castration (252).

Indeed, Freud argued that the Perseus myth is a narrative that's founded on female sexuality as monstrous, invoking fear of castration to the male viewer. We see a similar castration anxiety in Maxim in *Rebecca*. In Maxim's aforementioned descriptions, there is a particular emphasis applied to Rebecca's eyes. Maxim admits that he "had a seed of doubt" when he married Rebecca because "there was something about her eyes..." (256). Again, Maxim refers to Rebecca's "eyes" as she is dying (250). Her gaze reminds Maxim of her female sexuality because it echoes their subverted gender roles. Instead of being the one that is looked at, she is doing the looking. Moreover, she is not passive when it comes to sex, unabashedly enjoying it as a reactionary act than procreative as evidenced by her relationship with Jack and Giles. By looking directly into the gaze of Maxim, she is exerting her dominance over him. While Rebecca won't necessarily turn Maxim into stone, her comparable 'evil eye' threatens *castrate* or usurp his patriarchal dominance. By killing her, Maxim was hoping to eliminate that threat (and end the rise of female power).

Rebecca's Medusa-like qualities aren't restricted to her 'evil-eye,' but include her hair too which summons "writhing serpent" (and thus phallic) imagery. During Maxim's confession, he tells the narrator that he "found [Rebecca] out at once" when he saw her "laughing, her black hair blowing in the wind; she told me about herself, told me things I shall never repeat to a living soul" (256). Rebecca's unspeakable acts are paired alongside "her black hair blowing in the wind," consequently connecting her physical Medusa-like qualities with her sexuality. Moreover, the "wild" hair pushes the narrative that Rebecca is not someone that can be "tamed" or domesticated to the British standards of "house-wife." In Maxim's description, he impresses an idea of Rebecca as someone who is larger-than-life, someone who has the power to usurp his seat as the patriarchal head. Again, we see the tie between Rebecca and "snake," but it is her

*character* that the narrator analogizes to instead of her hair. When the narrator pieces together the “true” Rebecca, she pictures “someone who walked through the woods at night, someone tall and slim. She gave you the feeling of a **snake...**” (256). There is a horrific quality to the image that the narrator conjures—a shadowy figure in the woods. Even the physical characteristics that the narrator decides to settle on snake-like: “tall and slim.” The “tall” referring to the length of a snake and “slim” its size. Still, the “tall and slim” also feeds into the idea that Rebecca is a seductress. Without explicitly verbalizing it, Rebecca as a dominant sexual force channels through. This moment, bracketed between Maxim’s revelation, reinforces that monstrous-feminine connection.

Gina Wisker, too, touches on Rebecca’s hair and its distinction as snake-like. Wisker cites the narrator’s dream as Manderley burns:

I got up and went to the looking glass. A face stared back at me that was not my own... and then I saw that she was sitting on a chair before the dressing table in her bedroom, and Maxim was brushing her hair. He held her hair in his hands, and as he brushed it he wound it slowly into a thick rope. It twisted like a snake, and he took hold of it with both hands and smiled at Rebecca and put it round his neck. (356 qtd. Wisker 31)

Wisker connects Rebecca’s Medusa-like characteristics as “indicative of her castrating power” that inevitably led to her murder. The narrator, in her dream, unconsciously recognizes the subversion of the power dynamics between Maxim and Rebecca. It is a scene of Maxim serving Rebecca, holding on to the “thick rope” of her hair. The “thick rope,” moreover, is a phallic symbol and it is *Rebecca*, the female, who wields it. The moment is maximized in the final line where Maxim takes her snake-like hair and “puts it round his neck,” suggesting that Rebecca

triumphs (396). Wisker, moreover, connects the horror elements of *Rebecca* to Rebecca's "liberating possibilities" and her "drive to repress questionings of patriarchy's powers" (31).

Rebecca, in fact, does repress the patriarchy. In the final scene of *Rebecca*, the readers are left with this:

The road to Manderley lay ahead. There was no moon. The sky above our heads was inky black. But the sky on the horizon was not dark at all. It was shot with crimson, like a splash of blood. And the ashes blew towards us with the salt wind from the sea. (357)

It is important to recognize that du Maurier revises *Rebecca* with the destruction of Manderley as the *ending* as opposed to the original ending (that is now chapter 2) where the narrator reflects on her and Maxim's past. Du Maurier breaks from the traditional romance-plot of the hero and heroine living happily-ever-after by moving it to the beginning and, thus, Rebecca stands triumphant as the official end. If we accept the interpretation that Rebecca's servant, Ms. Danvers, serves as a proxy/extension of Rebecca herself, then it is Rebecca's ghostly-like presence as someone who defies the subservient wife that demolishes an "archaic" space—that is, the patriarchy. Moreover, the narrator does not escape unscathed from her experience in Manderley. She admits, "I am very different from the self who drove to Manderley the first time, hopeful and eager, handicapped by a rather desperate gaucherie and filled with an intense desire to please" (14). The narrator has irrevocably changed from having a naïve outlook—Rebecca left an imprint on her. Because the end is not one that buys into the happily-ever-after, it stands to reason that Rebecca as the embodiment of feminine liberation and sexuality surges against the patriarchy. Maxim, too, as a symbol of the traditional patriarchy head "loses," haunted by his

transgressions. And, Manderely, a representation of the “archaic” domestic space burns to the ground: “We can never go back” (10).

While a feminist reading of *Rebecca* suggests the progressive nature of the Gothic, what are the ways that the Gothic can be used as a cautionary tale against the future? In the next section, I will oscillate between the backlash against technological innovations and the further advocacy to break down restrictive gender roles in du Maurier’s “The Birds.”



### Chapter Three: “The Birds” as a Female Monster

I remember some time ago trekking back to my dorm in the dead winter night on the Hill, slushes of snow squelching beneath my boots and the cold exhale of my breath coinciding with each step like a metronome. It was a solitary walk. The trees were bare—save for one. At first, I thought they were leaves and I marveled at this tree’s ability to weather the bone-chilling Ann Arbor winter. Then I noticed the feathers and the piercing black eyes and protruding beaks. I was wrong. The tree was dead. I realized, with horror, that the leaves were actually crows.

I can understand why birds hold a certain kind of menacing aura. While the birds can congregate in flocks comprised of several hundreds, they represent one terrifying entity. It is easy to see the ways that these innocuous creatures, unfairly overlooked by the masses culture, can signal the apocalypse.

In 1952, Daphne du Maurier, already an established author with popular novels like *Rebecca* (1938) and *Jamacia Inn* (1936) that inspired prolific films, wrote the short story “The Birds.” Written in light of World War II, The Blitz and the threatening Cold War (with particularly consideration to the USSR-United States arms race), “The Birds” imagines the humanity’s destruction with a dramatic assault by deceptively harmless birds. It is important to take pay considerable attention to the time that “The Birds” is written compared to *Rebecca* and “Don’t Look Now.” In the 1950s, Daphne du Maurier begins to move away from the traditional Gothic home and its allegory as the unjust British hierarchy into a criticism centered around the patriarchal household. Unlike “Don’t Look Now”—published in 1971—there are still elements of the Gothic home, and class, in “The Birds.” “The Birds” centers around a nuclear family—Nat, the patriarchal head, his wife and his daughter and son, John and Jill. Nat is a wartime vet of “solitary disposition” (1). He finds that his best days are spent “when he was given a bank to

build up or a gate to mend at the far end of the peninsula” (1). Because of his preoccupation with nature, he was one of the first to notice the peculiarity of the birds. See, Nat is obsessed with routine—he eats all his meals at a particular time during the day and in a particular way. Nat understands the importance of tradition, and, not surprisingly, is not too elated at the prospective change that the birds signify. As the fear in this small British town mounts, “The Birds” ends on an unresolved note. The readers do not know if Nat’s family survives the birds’ siege on their little cottage by the seaside or if they succumb to a gory death like the other townspeople.

In this chapter, I will argue that Daphne du Maurier uses the monstrous swarm of birds as a tool to move the Gothic elements of the short to the forefront. The Gothic, with its concentration to the uncanny, allows Maurier to explore the darker underbelly of British society under the safety of the supernatural, bringing to light the implicit patriarchal and social structure within “The Birds” without disrupting the status quo. While I will touch on a few of the Marxist implications within “The Birds,” I am mainly concerned with the underlying feminist rhetoric. I will argue that the monstrous swarm of birds are akin to the rising threat of women liberation. As women increasingly gain more rights, Nat’s role as the “breadwinner” in nuclear family is threatened. I will end my argument by pointing out that unlike in *Rebecca*, the archaic space is not undeniably destroyed in “The Birds.” The rise in women power clashes with the movement toward a materialistic society which du Maurier resists.

Before I probe the feminist and Marxist critiques in “The Birds,” however, I want to establish it as a Gothic tale even with its uncharacteristic qualities. “The Birds” adopts some defining Gothic characteristics we have witnessed already in *Rebecca*, stretches the boundaries of the “antiquated space” with Nat’s seaside cottage on a hill. In fact, it is worth paying particular attention to the domestic space in “The Birds” as a site of “haunting.” Here, Nat

struggles with the figurative and literal consequences of an avian siege. Yes, despite its undistinguished features, Nat's cottage home still manifests as the Gothic "haunted" house trope with its isolated location at the edge of the cliff and the sea. The cottage's familiarity lures Nat and his family into its depth, but certain characteristic qualities allude the opposite—the cottage is deceptive. At the onset of "The Birds," Nat remarks on the "restless" atmosphere (1). Prematurely, Nat returns to the safe space of his house. Daphne du Maurier foreshadows the cottage's fraudulency by continually referencing the chimney and windows. In just thirty pages, the chimney is mentioned in twelve. During Nat's hike back home, Nat informs another farmer that the "birds are restless" (2). So far, the "restless" undercurrent is outside the domestic space. Nat is uncomfortable by the burgeoning change, repeatedly proclaiming that "winter is coming" (1). He yearns to return his "calm," familiar home (3). Indeed, Nat escapes the unsettling outdoors, but only moves into the open system of his home. While the cottage has the appearance of being a protective barrier, structures like the chimney allow the outside to come in. Later that night, in bed, he hears the hollow sound of the "wind in the chimney" and the "tapping on the window" (2). The chimney and window motifs imply that there is no loophole to protect against the demonic birds. Nat's cottage—a representation of the patriarchal household—will face the birds' wrath like everyone else within the same system.

The cottage is an uncharacteristic "archaic space" in the sense that it represents the working class (contrasting to the aged British aristocracy in *Rebecca*), but it also celebrates the patriarchal family structure. Nestled outside the hub of the town, the cottage in "The Birds" is unlike Daphne du Maurier's previous Gothic narratives insofar that it casts an unostentatious home as its focus. Interestingly, the "new council houses" face the brute of the birds' attack, not Nat's "old cottage, with small windows, stout walls" (23). Instead of reveling in the decay of the

British aristocracy like Daphne du Maurier's manor in *Rebecca* suggests, "The Birds," with Nat's mediation, at once condemns the rise of consumer culture and celebrates the honest yeoman. Still, the humble seaside cottage indulges in its traditions, clashing against the change that the birds' mark. Time and again, the birds' do not seize their attack on the "antiquated space." When the birds first infiltrate the cottage, they *first* hit the "ceilings and walls" (3). The birds' are not just bringing doomsday on the townspeople, but the entire British social hierarchal structure through the allegorical home. The birds' themselves allow du Maurier to explore that tenuous relationship between the past and future within the fantastical realm. The birds embody the uncanny or "grotesque" of the Gothic genre. There is an interesting juxtaposition at play between the normalness of the quaint, British town that watches BBC news before bed and the apocalyptic avian siege. It returns to the very Romantic ideal that nature is man's ultimate Achilles' heel. Without explicitly outlining the faults in the British social stratum, the birds' imagine humanity's downfall because of the continued disproportionate social structure.

In contrast to the birds' criticism, Nat finds comfort in his home. The "sight of the kitchen reassured him. The cups and saucers, neatly stacked upon the dresser, the table and chairs, his wife's roll of knitting on her basket chair, the children's toys in a corner of the cupboard" (4). Nat clings to the traditional patriarchal household. The birds' present a terrifying future: one where the wife moves outside the domestic sphere and into the workforce. Nat fears the disappearance of the "neatly stacked" cups and saucers. The cottage serves to function as a midpoint between a materialistic future and a reactionary past. Hordes of birds, from gulls to finches and larks, bombard the sea-side cottage, but with no resolution. If the cottage prevails, then it validates the patriarchy. If the cottage perishes alongside the "council homes," then it lumps the contentious citizen alongside the inattentive consumer.

The Gothic genre further functions to delineate the cottage as the “antiquated space” of the patriarchy. After Nat notes the depleting supply of food in the house, he reflects that “we’d be better off in the old days... when the women backed twice a week, and had pilchards salted, and there was food for a family to last a siege, if need be” (11). Embedded in his statement are two meanings, the first, is a call against the rise of consumer culture—buying items at the marketplace instead of being self-reliant. The second, is a return to strict gender roles: the breadwinner father and the mother as the homemaker. The dual implications place the cottage at the focal point of “The Birds,” divided between a reactionary past and a despondent future.

Terry Thompson is predominately concerned with the Marxist rhetoric in “The Birds.” He touches on the differences between Nat’s lifestyle in his small Cornish town versus the collective unconscious of the other townsfolk. Nat has “only one concession to modernity in his home: a battery-operated radio” that is used for “practicality” and not entertainment like his neighbor, Mrs. Trigg (67). The birds present the stereotypical Gothic villain as one massive entity. Unlike du Maurier’s *Rebecca* which uses a very present, vengeful housekeeper as the primary antagonist, the birds offer liberties that a human cannot. A fantastical avian assault distracts from the sub-textual critique of Britain’s social system. After the birds first attack Nat’s house, Nat gazed on their “little” corpses “shocked and horrified” (3). He describes the bloody scene: “They were all small birds, none of any size, there must have been fifty of them lying there upon the floor” (3). Later, Nat comments that it was “queer” and “unnatural” that these “small” birds were bringing destruction to a wealthy and powerful nation (8). Nat’s wife even asks, “why don’t the authorities do something? Why don’t they get the Army, get machine guns anything? (17). The fact that the British government—a strong nation—returns to the critique of an imperfect social system. In the end, a peculiar bird attack violently cuts humanity’s trajectory

from an aristocracy and into a culture preoccupied with materials instead the “rhythm and ritual” of farm (1).

While the birds can act as a distracting mechanism to the sub-textual critique of Britain’s social system, the birds *themselves* can present a terrifying attack as an entity that is systemically overlooked. Just as curious, this wealthy British town can be assaulted by vampire bats—a more conceivable horror—but why birds? If we believe that the birds represent a feminist movement, then the birds are not bringing destruction to *just* a wealthy and powerful nation, but to the patriarchy. Nat’s comments suggest some feminine qualities applied to the birds, namely that the birds are “small” (8). He does not limit his observations to their physical size, but also wondered about their “little brains” (30). Women, too, are generally physically smaller than their male counterparts, enhancing the metaphor of birds as women. Nat’s repeated awe that a creature so “small” and “little” can destroy their city speaks to an insurmountable change that a feminist movement can cause to the status quo.

Typically viewed as an escapist thrill, Gothicism enables a socially acceptable fate of mankind’s demise. “The Birds” projects the disturbing reality of a growing supply of nuclear weapons, unjust social institution and a willing ignorance onto an “uncanny” apocalyptic bird attack. One of the defining features of the Gothic is the “antiquated space” as the center of the psychological foray into the character’s minds. Through the small cottage, we understand Nat’s fascination with conventions. He does not want to deviate from routine and that, in and of itself, is a double-edged sword. On one hand, the future promises a kind of collective unconscious. On the other, he is celebrating a conservative past—one that does not want to subvert traditional gender roles. At the end, Nat reflects on the birds with “those little brains, stabbing beaks, and piercing eyes, now giving them this instinct to destroy mankind with all the deft precision of

machines” (31). “The Birds” ends on an ambiguous note. These “queer” creatures managed to destroy the urban city dwellers, but are at a standstill with Nat and his modest cottage. Once the cottage is destroyed—through windows and chimneys—that patriarchal vision falls with it too. These theme is much more emphasized in du Maurier’s subsequent work, “Don’t Look Now,” which I will address in the next section.

In “Don’t Look Now” the house is eliminated altogether. Instead we have a couple residing in a hotel in an “exotic” locale, Venice. Venice, then, is cast as the Gothic home, but the destruction of the patriarchy is much more actualized in the male lead, John. It is important to recognize, too, that “Don’t Look Now” was published in 1971, a period when the UK Women’s Liberation movement surged.

#### **Chapter Four: The Demise of the Male Savior in “Don’t Look Now”**

I look forward to long vacations with my family as if the “exotic” beaches in Cancún or the quiet cabin in Black Hills, South Dakota holds more familiarity to me than my permanent home in Nebraska. It is true that the escape from the constancy of my house and into the unknown (as much as frequented tourist sites can be dubbed as unknown) allows for a kind of intimacy with my family that the sequestered spaces in my house restricts. When I’m bracketed between my mom and my sister on a bed in our cozy hotel room, I’m forced to confront the domestic tensions that haunts my psyche. Displaced from the setting where I can enact my routines, I am like John in Daphne du Maurier’s “Don’t Look Now.” When, in the “welcoming, comforting air” of my hotel there is an “atmosphere of strangeness, of excitement, that only a holiday bedroom brings,” I feel that I “bring it to life” (23). And, when I’m gone, the moment “no longer exists, it fades into anonymity” (23). Indeed, there is an idea of the uncanny cast in faraway locales that masks the horrific realities back home. During a vacation, I exist in a interstitial state where my responsibilities are momentarily suspended. Yet, this belief is only an echo of the clichéd idea that “not everything is at it seems.” For John, the past inevitably comes brandished with a scythe outside his hotel bedroom’s door.

“Don’t Look Now” opens up with a conversation between John and his wife, Laura, who decided to embark on a short vacation in Venice in order to distance themselves from the traumatic death of their youngest child, Christine. There, John and Laura meet two uncanny, elderly Scottish twins: one, a doctor, the other, a blind psychic. When Laura follows the elderly sisters into the restroom, the psychic informs her that her daughter “is not dead, she is still with [them]” (17). Immediately, John is skeptical. He thinks that the twins are imposters and he worries that their vacation will be ruined. John attempts to replace the memory of the twins by



suggesting dinner at a lovely Italian restaurant. Unsurprisingly, he cannot escape them, catching sight of the twins at the restaurant too. Seemingly by coincidence, the twins follow the couple wherever they go. John and Laura's vacation ends prematurely when they receive a telegram that their son has appendicitis. Laura, in panic, catches the first flight back home to Britain.

According to their plan, John was supposed to follow his wife by boat the next day. In a strange moment, however, John sees his wife—after she had supposedly left—in Venice travelling onto a vaporetto with the ominous twins. Convinced that his wife had been kidnapped by these women, he reports this incident to the police. After the two women were arrested, John, with a phone call, discovers that his wife successfully made it safe and sound back home. Sheepishly, John updates the police on this new revelation, profusely apologizing to the twins for his mistake. Thinking that all is well, John returns from the police station to his hotel. It is at the end of the narrative that the climactic scene unfolds. In the Venice's dark labyrinthine streets, a "little girl with a pixie-hood" runs "as if her life depended on it" (65). Convinced that the little girl is in danger, John follows her. In a dramatic twist, the child is really a "thick-set woman dwarf" who draws a knife on him (67). The story ends with John recognizing that the vision of Laura and the twins was "not today, not tomorrow, but the day after" (67). They were going to his funeral.

Like in "The Birds" section, I will first establish "Don't Look Now" as a Gothic novel, enhancing my argument that the Gothic is malleable over time and offer a brief overview of the contemporary Gothic—its similarities and differences to Gothic and how that can substantiate our reading of "Don't Look Now." I will touch on the historical forces of Britain in the 1960s and 70s to contextualize my feminist reading. Following that, I will look at "Don't Look Now" as a progressive Gothic tale, pushing a feminist narrative of dismantling the patriarchy. I will

break down the way that temporality, the uncanny in the “woman dwarf” as a “feminine monster,” and John’s stubborn masculine ideology pushes for the destruction of the patriarchy.

So what is the contemporary Gothic? As a reminder, since the inception of Horace Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto* in 1764, the Gothic has “always played with chronology, looking back to moments in an imaginary history, pining for social stability that never existed, mourning a chivalry that belonged more to the fairy tale than to reality” (Hogle 259). One defining characteristic of the Gothic is that it is set in “an antiquated or seemingly antiquated space” and, within this space, are “secrets from the past that haunt characters” physically and even psychologically (Hogle 2). The contemporary Gothic does not deviate from these conventions: published in 1971, “Don’t Look Now” weaves in and out of John’s and society’s despotic past, setting the story in Venice, a city that is “slowly dying” (33). As we will see, the primary motives of Walpole’s classic Gothic and du Maurier’s contemporary Gothic are not unlike. Both examine the “dynamics of family” and the “limits of rationality and passion” (Hogle 259). What, then, sets *contemporary* Gothic apart? Here, we can look at history’s influence. The Gothic behaves like a Pacific Tree Frog. In the way that the Pacific Tree Frog changes its color to adapt to its surroundings, the Gothic gauges’ social anxieties in a particular moment in history and manifests them into something more salient: the grotesque or uncanny. In the 1940s and the 1950s, the Second World War, the Cold War and the space race fostered specific kinds of horror like “fear of foreign otherness” and “monstrous invasions” (Hogle 260). In the 1970s, the rise of feminism, gay liberation and anti-fascist movements attacked the traditional ideology where the figure-head of the white male controls the public sphere (Hogle). I want to pay considerable attention to the rise of second-wave feminism in Britain in the 70s. During this time, contraception became free in 1974 and the Sex Discrimination Act in 1975

allowed women to work in a number of industries without fear of discrimination (Bovett). The vision of the ubiquitous patriarchy is dismantled in Daphne du Maurier's "Don't Look Now" when John succumbs to a brutal death at the hands of a female castrator.

Before I analyze the uncanny features of "Don't Look Now," I want to first establish Venice as representative of the Gothic's "antiquated space" despite not playing into the classical idea of a haunted manor like that of Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca*. For John, the "familiar holiday game" temporarily laid the "ghost" (19). Here, the "ghost" can mean two things: the first, the psychic twins that Laura had met that threatened to disrupt their vacation or the second, the ghost of Christine's death. It is important to note that John describes the holiday as "familiar." Like the seaside cottage home in Daphne du Maurier's "The Birds" and Manderley in *Rebecca*, Venice represents normality. In John's eyes, Venice is "clear beauty" that relieves some of his troubles (29). John and Laura "made their way from the restaurant across the open piazza, where stalls had been set up with scarves and trinkets and postcards, and so along the path to the cathedral" and Laura had asked for her guidebook "as had always been her custom in happier days" (28-9). Even in the midst of this beauty, there is a creepy undercurrent that is conventional with classic Gothic tales. The "antiquated space" is deceptively inviting. While John and Laura are in a cathedral, he noted that the "long, sad face of the Virgin [looked] infinitely remote" and, in apathy, John thought, "'this is the end, there is no escape, no future'" (30). Despite John's plan to escape his haunted psyche, the "exotic, sinister, and the transgressive" Venetian city forced John to confront his traumas in the most horrific ways (Horner 220). When John and Laura return to their hotel by the Grand Canal, John comments on its "welcoming, comforting air," pointing out that the "bedroom was familiar, like home" (35). Time and again, John attests to Venice's familiar and comforting aura. If John's hotel bedroom

was “like home,” then it is only natural that the hauntings from the past—and everything that it entails—would meet its judgement.

Like John’s psyche, Venice is a city founded in the past. While Venice had the appearance of “warmth” in the daytime, the glamour disappears by night (38).

The canal was narrow, the houses on either side seemed to close in upon it, and in the daytime, with the sun's reflection on the water and the windows of the houses open, bedding upon the balconies, a canary singing in a cage, there had been an impression of warmth, of secluded shelter. Now, almost in darkness, the windows of the houses shuttered, the water dank, the scene appeared altogether different, neglected, poor, and the long narrow boats moored to the slippery steps of cellar entrances looked like coffins. (38)

Venice is an illusion. It is “neglected and poor” and built on death, destruction and decay. Venice embodies an archaic history that must die in a similar fate as John (who represents the patriarchy). The parallel between John and the city is further solidified when John himself thinks: “Venice is sinking. The whole city is slowly dying” (51). At the time, society is being swept by anxieties regarding second-wave feminism. Venice functions as the Gothic home, and, in the ways that *Rebecca’s* Mandery place was burnt to the ground and the final avian siege “The Birds” seaside cottage, Venice will sink. Its pillars and columns, mosaics, canals and cathedrals are routed in the reactionary past. To progress forward, the city must become a “lost underworld of stone” (52).

It would not be fair to discuss the ways that “Don’t Look Now” offers a *progressive* reading without discussing its interesting relation to time. Temporality is pivotal within “Don’t Look Now.” It is implicit in the ways that Venice is a city rooted in the past—which is made

clear by John's observation that it is "slowly dying" (43). In fact, when touring Venice, it is as if John and Laura's are not seeing the present, but the *past*. John thinks, "This is what the inhabitants who live here see... This is the true life. Empty streets by night, the dank stillness of a stagnant canal beneath shuttered houses" (43). The undeniably "stillness" underlying John's introspection speaks to Venice's dead air. Without the bustling streets and colorful scenery, it is like someone hit the "pause" button on Venice—a city frozen in time. Throughout the short story, the parallels between Venice as the "antiquated space" of patriarchal ideals and its death manifest time and again. After all, it is in this city that police champion John's misogynistic justification after John shares his concerns regarding the elderly, female twins. The officer speculates that "it could well be that your wife had a sudden attack of amnesia, and meeting the two ladies served as a link, she clung to them for support" (68). By claiming that it is John's *wife* that is at fault—this so-called "sudden attack of amnesia," they dismiss the possibility that John, a man, could have made the mistake. Ultimately, it is the woman that is prone to hysterics and the man that ascribes to masculine behaviors like logic and reason. I want to use the principle of temporality as a point of tangency between the city and John's visions as both hold echoes of the reactionary past.

Even though John has glimpses of the future, he is unwilling to accept it. John's masculine identity is core to his rejection of his psychic premonitions. Following a phone-call from his wife, John absolves the twins of their supposed kidnapping scheme—during which, the twins reveal that his vision was not from the present, but the *future*. The sister "turned her sightless eyes to John" and, softly, says "you saw us... and your wife too. But not today. You saw us in the future" (81). Here, the particular word choice is interesting. Instead of the "blind" sister, it is the "sightless" sister. By using "sightless," its root is emphasized: sight. The twin's

physical blindness is juxtaposed against John's willful blindness. John is able to see and *see the future*. However, John—as a symbol of the 1970s male prototype—does not want to welcome a future where women's rights are brought to the forefront. He responds to the blind sister's with "I don't follow" (81). John is "bewildered" by a concept such as telepathy that is so ingrained with intuition—a feministic quality (81). For him, it is easier to stick with tradition—that is, trite and true masculine ideals. In doing that, John hammers the nail into his coffin. If he had heeded the psychics warnings, then he might have been more cautious with his actions. Indeed, at the end, John plays into the masculine fantasy of the male hero, resulting in his death. Interlaced with this concept of time is death—or, the destruction of archaic systems and beliefs. John dies in the "antiquated space"—Venice. And, Venice, too, will be "engulfed" (70). The present, past and future exist in one space, but the foreshadowed destruction of Venice and the literal death of John speaks to a larger discourse surrounding the dissolution of the patriarchy.

While the setting establishes "Don't Look Now" as a true Gothic tale, the uncanny reveals its feminist critiques. John and Laura's stark reactions to the psychic sister's premonitions offers the readers a glimpse into the gendered world of 1970s Britain. John dismisses the psychic, claiming that "'she is phoney... she is not blind at all. They're both of them frauds, and they could be males in drag after all... they're after Laura" (46). John's beliefs expose his misogynist character. Firstly, John dismissal of telepathy is routed in ideas of logic and reason—a masculine convection. Secondly, John cannot entertain the possibility that females are "after" his wife. Instead, John imagines that they are "males in drag," a strange conclusion of the sisters. There is an interesting rhetorical play being made with the "blind" psychic, when, in actuality, John is blind to the true horrors right in front of him. We return to John's "denial of his psychic powers" as a "rejection to his feminine side, his intuition" when he thinks he sees his

wife and the old women in the vaporetto (Wisker 28). John could have followed the psychic's warnings to leave Venice "as soon as possible," but he decides to stay. John trusts in his infallible masculine ideals. He mocks the psychic's visions, believing her to be a "false old bitch" and his own sight (44). Because John failed to listen to the women in the plot, he is killed in the dank streets of Venice. John, in his final moments, goes against his "instinct" to "run himself, now, at once, back along the alley the way he had come," and follows the little girl into an isolated room (88). John behaves as if he is a male-savior. Again, he cannot fathom the little girl as being the perpetrator. Rather, John is certain that she is being pursued by another male. John's standard "patriarchal paternalistic fantasy" is ultimately turned on its head (Wisker 29). The girl in the "pixie-hood" was "not a child" at all. In incredulity and horror, John describes the monstrous unveiling.

It was not a child at all but a little thick-set woman dwarf, about three feet high, with a great square adult head too big for her body, grey locks hanging shoulder-length, and she was not sobbing any more, she was grinning at him, nodding her head up and down. (90)

The "little girl" did not need male protection at all. Like the "warmth" of the Venice city in the daytime, it was an illusion. By allowing a woman to kill John, Daphne du Maurier butchers the patriarchal fairytale.

Daphne du Maurier uses "Don't Look Now" to push a feminist narrative to the forefront of the public sphere. As we already saw in *Rebecca* and "The Birds," the Gothic agenda mirrors the political and social anxieties of its time. Moving forward, the contemporary Gothic continues to manifest in popular culture, dominating shelves and ticket sales. How does du Maurier's influence modern horror? Why do we *need* the Gothic?





### Maintenance of the Gothic

My thesis aims to capitalize on the Gothic's malleability by tracking it in a few of Daphne du Maurier's works starting from the late 1930s with *Rebecca* to the early 1970s with "Don't Look Now." In fact, my close readings of the *feminist* rhetoric underlying du Maurier's works shows the persistence and prevalence of discomfort in female sexuality. That is, as women continue to struggle to be recognized and legitimized—whether that's in the #MeToo Movement or Women's March—they experience a "backlash" that's actualized not only in politics (as I am typing this, the Supreme Court weighs on a Louisiana abortion case that could overturn *Roe v. Wade*) but manifest in the Gothic too. We need look no further than Robert Egger's *The Witch* (2015), *Us* (2019), *Doctor Sleep* (2019) and numerous other works to see the ways that the "feminine monster" that was present in *Rebecca* finds its way as the "witch" archetype nearly eight decades later (Higgins). This thesis offers a "progressive" reading of Daphne du Maurier's works, particularly in *Rebecca* and "Don't Look Now." By allowing the "villainous" female to "win," I am arguing that the patriarchal power would inevitably weaken.

Rebecca, the swarm of birds and the pixie-hooded woman are unconventional characters that pose a threat to the male lead. Despite their outward differences, they exert their dominance in similar situations. Rebecca stands as a ghostly presence throughout *Rebecca*, reminding the Maxim that he will forever be haunted for his crime in murdering her. Indeed, Maxim does not ever find peace with his second wife and witnesses his manor—the metaphorical "archaic" patriarchal space—burn. Rebecca disturbed the traditional patriarchal conceptualization of family that the narrator and Maxim were moving toward: the woman, constrained to the domestic space, and the man as the distant financial provider. The siege of birds, likewise, attacked Nat's nuclear family structure. Written post-WWII, Nat was the "breadwinner" of the

family, toiling all day out in his farm. Meanwhile, Nat's wife, acts as a stereotypical "homemaker," managing their daughters and the house. This thesis offers an uncharacteristic reading of the birds as a swarm of women, moving to destroy this patriarchal nuclear family. "Don't Look Now," provides the strongest case for a psychoanalytic feminist reading. John, time and again, dismisses his wife's concerns, relying on rational "male" logic. In his stubborn resolve, he ultimately perishes at the hands of a *woman* who he was attempting to save. "Don't Look Now" subverts the fairytale patriarchal trope with the "feminine monster" figure of a female castrator. Once again, we have the reoccurrence of husband-and-wife relationship that try to fit into strict gender-role binary, but are ultimately thwarted by a "villainous" female figure. The three Daphne du Maurier stories prove that the social anxieties of a powerful female figure remain *despite* changes in time and place. Moreover, the feminine Gothic itself is a very flexible subgenre, weaving in popular historical trends like the aristocratic manor in *Rebecca* and the "nuclear" family post-WWII in "The Birds."

In whatever medium, it cannot be disputed that the Gothic has been a consistently popular genre. We only need to look at movies like *Insidious* (2010) and its progeny—*Insidious 2* (2013), *Insidious 3* (2015), *The Conjuring* (2013)—*Crimson Peak* (2015), *We Have Always Lived in The Castle* (2019); TV series like "The Haunting of Hill House" (2018); and novels like Carlos Ruiz Zafrón *The Labyrinth of Spirits* and Anne Rice's *The Vampire Chronicles* series to see its conspicuous influence. We are perpetually seeking to enact our social anxieties by consuming media that distort and disrupt our fears into a form that's within our normative construct of "horror"—i.e., a "haunted" house or ghosts. As we continue to fear change (whether said fear is reactionary or progressive), Gothic horror will continue to exist.

With that in mind, the aim of this project is to offer a different lens in reading Daphne du

Maurier's works, more than the romantic-suspense that they are typically categorized under. In many ways, *Rebecca* introduces common romantic tropes only to subvert them. These distorted outcomes have immense implications in our understanding of du Maurier's literature and contemporary erotic-thrillers in general. I want to end with a claim I made in my introduction. Despite being seen as a low-brow genre; the Gothic allows for a visceral experience in the frame of a safe space. It cannot be denied that decades later, through a technological revolution, 14 different presidencies and several other changes, women still represent a reactionary or progressive reimagining fear of the "other."

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