The Silenced Voice of the Madwoman in the Attic:

An Intertextual Analysis of Daphne du Maurier’s *Rebecca* and Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*.

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Table of Contents

Introduction…………………………………………………………………….. 3

Theory and Method…………………………………………………………….. 4

* Defining Intertextuality………………………………………………… 4
* Intertextuality According to Julia Kristeva…………………………….. 7
* Intertextuality According to Roland Barthes…………………………… 8
* Gérard Genette…………………………………………………………. 11
* Genette´s Five Types of Transtextuality……………………………….. 14
* Method ………………………………………………………………… 20

Mirroring the Story…………………………………………………………….. 21

* Similarietis in Story……………………………………………………. 23
* Differences in Story……………………………………………………. 25
* Hypertextuality or Metatextuality?.......................................................... 31

The Gothic Tradition and Architextuality……………………………………… 31

* The Gothic Tradition as Literary Genre………………………………... 32
* The Male and Female Gothic…………………………………………... 35
* *Rebecca* as a Product of the Female Gothic……………………………. 38
* Discussing Architextuality………………………………………………43

Characters, Gender roles and the Bluebeard Myth……………………………... 44

* The Contrasting Representations of Femininity………………………... 45
* The Male as “Other”……………………………………………………. 50
* The Bluebeard Myth……………………………………………………. 54

The Problematic Feminist Reading of *Jane Eyre*................................................. 56

Conclusion……………………………………………………………………… 62

Introduction

The highly esteemed, classical novel *Jane Eyre* (1847) by Charlotte Brontë has been read and loved for many years, by readers across the world. The novel stirred the literary waters at the time of publication, and has continued to do so ever since, for several reasons. The novel features a prominent representation of a female protagonist, who at the time contrasted the common representations of femininity in literature. A critique of the inequality existing between the sexes, as well as society’s hierarchical division, marked by the treatment of people from the lower social class, by the superior upper class, are featured as central topics in the novel. With *Jane Eyre*, Charlotte Brontë emphasized problematic societal structures in Victorian England, which marginalized certain groups, one of these being children. This was brought to the readers’ attention through Brontë’s use of the child’s point of view, when narrating the first part of the novel, concerning Jane Eyre’s childhood.

The above-mentioned topics are the ones most commonly emphasized in the interpretation of the novel, causing *Jane Eyre* to often be interpreted as a feminist novel. Numerous examples found in the novel support this traditional reading of the work, including Jane’s outspoken and defiant nature as the protagonist. In her characterization of Jane Eyre, Brontë creates a relatable protagonist, rejecting the convention of the beautiful and extraordinary heroine (Brontë, 289). Jane stands up for herself against Mr. Rochester, questioning his right to treat her as his inferior, due to her lack of family, fortune and social status (Brontë, 114). She is not afraid of being alone, if that is what she has to do, in order to be true to her own beliefs of what is morally acceptable. We see that in how she leaves the comforts of Thornfield, after discovering the secret of Mr. Rochester’s past (Brontë, 274). She ultimately returns to Mr. Rochester, but not before the circumstances have changed, due to the death of his first wife. These are a few among many aspects of the novel, which contribute to the portrayal of Jane Eyre as a strong and independent protagonist, advocating for the rights of primarily women, but also children and members of the lower social class of society. Consequently, *Jane Eyre* is traditionally viewed as a feminist work of literature, and has become an architext within feminist literature, as well as the genre of gothic literature.

Daphne du Maurier’s novel *Rebecca* (1938), was originally upon its publication, viewed as merely a product of popular culture, aimed at an audience of female readers. It has since gained the status of quite a modern classic, further growing in popular opinion due to the 1940 Alfred Hitchcock film adaptation of the novel. *Rebecca* has, by many readers, been linked to *Jane Eyre* (Mettinger-Schartmann, 209), due to a significant mirroring of the basic plot elements of *Jane Eyre*, and the affiliation to Gothic literature, which the two novels share.

In the following we will seek to establish the connection between *Jane Eyre* and *Rebecca*, and explore the effect such a comparative reading of the two novels, consequently has on the traditional interpretation of *Jane Eyre*. We will approach the connection between the novels from an intertextual point of view, applying Genette’s theory of what he terms the five categories of transtextuality. Additionally we will explore the genre of Gothic literature, distinguishing between a male and a female Gothic. This will be done in the effort to prove that Daphne du Maurier’s novel *Rebecca* can be read as a feminist critique of Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*.

Theory and Method

Defining Intertextuality

Within the field of literary studies, the term intertextuality has been discussed ever since it emerged in the 1960´s. There have been different views on the concept of intertextuality presented by various literary critics especially theorists within the fields of structuralism and post-structuralism. The term has been universally discussed, and is by now firmly established as well as regularly applied by literary critics. Although the term is widely recognized, and seems to cover the rather simple idea of literary texts existing in relation to one another within the field of literature, the term is not entirely unproblematic in its use. As well as several existing definitions of the term, there are also literary critics, who challenge the validity of the term altogether. Some of the challenges in working with the notion of intertextuality are presented by Graham Allen in his work titled *Intertextuality* (2000):

“Intertextuality, one of the central ideas in contemporary literary theory, is not a transparent term and so, despite its confident utilization by many theorists and critics, cannot be evoked in a uncomplicated manner. Such a term is in danger of meaning nothing more than whatever each particular critic wishes it to mean” (Allen, 2).

According to Allen, variations in the way of perceiving intertextuality, may cause literary critics to apply the term loosely, in whichever way each critic may find relevant for his/her work. This might be caused by the fact that several definitions of the term exist alongside one another; causing literary critics to experience differences of opinion between themselves, as to how the term is perceived and consequently how the term is worked with. Mary Orr, in her work also titled *Intertextuality* (2003), expresses her critical view of the term as follows:

“Intertextuality (as indeed also deconstruction and *différance*) is unequivocally a neologism. This kind of rhetorical coinage serves to fill a specific gap in pre-existing vocabularies, whether a whole concept or a nuance” (Orr, 3).

This statement does not only point out certain challenges posed by the idea of intertextuality itself, but also seems to critique the validity of the term altogether. The point Orr seems to be making, is that intertextuality is in fact not a new concept, but actually only a new term, refering to pre-existing theory or concept. The term intertextuality has been treated differently over the years by different theorists and thus recapitulated differently by Allen, Orr and others seeking to provide an overview of the concept. Intertextuality thus retains an important place in literary studies today, as summarized by Allen Graham:

“However it is used, the term intertextuality promotes a new vision of meaning, and thus of authorship and reading: a vision resistant to ingrained notions of originality, uniqueness, singularity and autonomy” (Allen, 6).

Intertextuality as a term, first surfaced during the 1960´s and Julia Kristeva, the Bulgarian- French literary critic, is commonly credited with coining the term (Edgar, 176). But that is not to say that the theory behind intertextuality did not exist previous to this. Kristeva’s writing draws extensively on the theories of Russian literary theorist Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin (1895-1975), the theories of whom she introduced into the French-speaking world through essays such as “Word, Dialogue and Novel” (1966) and “The Bounded Text” (1966-67), (Allen, 14). Graham Allen provides readers with an account of the origin of intertextuality, starting with the coinage of the term by Kristeva, strongly influenced by Bakhtin, as well as including other theorists who have contributed to the theory of intertextuality such as Roland Barthes, Gérard Genette and Michael Riffaterre. This view of the origin of intertextuality, as outlined by Allen, encompasses the most common view of the origin of intertextuality, as well as establishing which theorists have been most influential throughout this process. It should be noted, though, that the concept of intertextuality has been widely discussed by various literary theorists, within several fields of literary studies. Therefore, the contributors to the theoretic discussion of intertextuality are by no means limited to the ones mentioned here. Thus Mary Orr, as previously mentioned, challenges the traditional view of the origin of intertextuality, by attempting to highlight some of the alternative theoretic views on the topic of intertextuality (Orr, 7). According to Orr the contributions of several literary theorists, who evidently have provided important theoretical groundwork to what later through the writings of Julia Kristeva became known as intertextuality, have been overlooked due largely to the rather simple fact that their work has not been translated into English (Orr, 8). Therefore, Orr in *Intertextuality* sets out to provide “a sharper yet more diverse *theoretical* method and comparative framework than are offered by previous guides which gloss the ‘canonical’ theorists of intertextiality” (Orr, 13). In this statement, as in Orr’s work as a whole, there is an apparent critique of Graham Allen and others in their way of including only canonized theorists in their work on intertextuality. Although recognizing the validity of this argument, we will in the following nonetheless be working with the concept of intertextuality according to the traditional view of the origin of intertextuality. We will therefore study the origin and definition of intertextuality according to Julia Kristeva and Roland Barthes, before exploring Genette´s theory on intertextuality especially focusing on his five types of transtextuality.

Intertextuality According to Julia Kristeva

In seeking to define the theory of intertextuality in her essay “Word, Dialogue, and Novel” (1966), Kristeva introduces the theories of Russian literary theorist Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin. She explains how he questions the structural approach to analysis of narrative, placing him within the contemporary context of literary criticism: “Bakhtin was one of the first to replace the static hewing out of texts with a model where literary structure does not simply *exist* but is generated in relation to *another* structure” (Kristeva, 64). Bakhtin thus emphasized the importance of preexisting structures in connection with the analysis of current structures, which is a main factor, if not the very foundation of the theory of intertextuality. Before arriving at her definition of intertextuality, Kristeva investigates the status of the word. In this endeavor, she begins by defining the three dimensions of textual space as: 1. The writing subject, 2. The addressee and 3. Exterior texts:

“The word’s status is thus defined *horizontally* (the word in the text belongs to both writing subject and addressee) as well as *vertically* (the word in the text is oriented toward an anterior or synchronic literary corpus)” (Kristeva, 66).

We can see how the notion of intertextuality would be a natural extension of the view presented by Kristeva, of the word´s status according to the vertical axis, concerning the word´s connection to the larger literary corpus. Kristeva thus arrives at her definition of intertextuality:

“Any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another. The notion of intertextuality replaces that of intersubjectivity, and poetic language is read as at least double” (Kristeva, 66).

This definition of intertextuality has since been perceived as the first definition of intertextuality. A more correct perception, however, would be that Kristeva gathered an idea, that previously existed theoretically, under a fixed term. The notion of intertextuality rests largely on the preexisting theories of Bachtin and other theorists alongside him. We can therefore not credit Kristeva with singly inventing the theory or concept of intertextuality, but must conclude that she, among others, has contributed to the theory. The coinage of the term itself, however, we can credit to Kristeva.

Intertextuality According to Roland Barthes

Another theorist who has been greatly discussed in relation to intertextuality is Roland Barthes. He deals with intertextuality in his, at the time, somewhat controversial essay “The Death of the Author” (1967). In this essay he seeks to establish a new understanding of the origin of texts, which contrasts the traditional view of the author. The traditional view of the author sees the author as the credited genius behind the production of a given literary text. As a necessary step in order to contradict this view, Barthes starts by defining his view of writing itself:

 “(…) writing is the destruction of every voice, of every point of origin. Writing is that neutral, composite, oblique space where our subject slips away, the negative where all identity is lost, starting with the very identity of the body writing” (Barthes, 142).

In this definition of writing, Barthes presents a view that focuses on the *product* of writing in opposition to the *process* of writing. He sees the product of writing as a space where the identity of the author has no role. Consequently to this definition of writing, *text* and *author* become definitively separated. This view was at the time nontraditional, in fact it was in direct opposition to the way in which literary critics would traditionally seek to establish meaning in texts:

 “The *explanation* of a work is always sought in the man or woman who produced it, as if it were always in the end, through the more or less transparent allegory of the fiction, the voice of a single person, the *author* ‘confiding’ in us” (Barthes, 143).

This way of exploring meaning in literary texts, by using the life or views of the author behind the text to explain it, is the approach to literary criticism that Barthes seeks to oppose. Barthes credits French poet and critic Stéphane Mellarmé, with being the first to point out the importance of separating the author from the text, and substituting the importance of the author with the importance of language itself (Barthes, 143). Thus Barthes attempts to prove how the text should be analyzed as its own separate entity, entirely independent from the author. In this he moves away from the previous conception of the author as enriched with original thought and inspiration in his/her creation of the literary text. As an example of how the role of the author is less important than the role of language itself, he describes the notion of ‘automatic writing’:

 “Surrealism, though unable to accord language a supreme place (…) contributed to the desacrilization of the image of the Author by ceaselessly recommending the abrupt disappointment of expectations of meaning (…), by entrusting the hand with the task of writing as quickly as possible what the head itself is unaware of (automatic writing), by accepting the principle and the experience of several people writing together” (Barthes, 144).

By evoking ‘automatic writing’ as an example of the role of language in writing, Barthes seeks to further diminish the role of the author in the creation of text. By claiming that the hand writes what the head itself is not aware, the role of the author is definitively diminished into purely that of a vessel for language to flow through. After thus proving the separation of text and author, and the importance of language over the importance of the author in creating texts, Barthes goes on to supply critics with a new view of the author of text, to substitute the traditional one. Barthes introduces the ‘modern scriptor’ as a contrast to the traditional author:

“In complete contrast, the modern scriptor is born simultaneously with the text, is in no way equipped with a being preceding or exceeding the writing, is not the subject with the book as predicate; there is no other time than that of the enunciation and every text is eternally written *here and now*” (Barthes, 145).

After establishing the notion of the modern scriptor, Barthes moves on to his view of the text itself:

 “We know now that a text is not a line of words releasing a single ‘theological’ meaning (the ‘message’ of the Author-God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture. (…) the writer can only imitate a gesture that is always anterior, never original. His only power is to mix writings, to counter the ones with the others, in such a way as never to rest on any one of them.” (Barthes, 146).

This view of the text, as described by Barthes, denotes a similar view on texts and their relation to each other within the field of literature, as described by Kristeva in her definition of intertextuality. Thus we see that Barthes presents a similar view, though from a different starting point, the point of the author of the text, and without Kristeva´s term ‘intertextuality’. When viewing the text as a tissue of quotations, Barthes sees no originality in any text produced by any author. In fact, he protests the notion of any original idea occurring to an author stating that what one might think of an ‘original thought’ in the mind of an author, is actually an inner ready-formed dictionary. Barthes thereby further reduces the role of the modern scriptor in the creation of text:

“His only power is to mix writings, to counter the ones with the others, in such a way as never to rest on any one of them. Did he wish to *express himself*, he ought at least to know that the inner ‘thing’ he thinks to ‘translate’ is itself only a ready-formed dictionary, its words only explainable through other words, and so on indefinitely” (Barthes, 146).

Thus Barthes firmly establishes the death of the author, who according to Barthes has no power or original thought. With Roland Barthes’s theory of the death of the author, the contemporary field of literary criticism was challenged. Previous to this, critics used the author to explain the text. But with the separation of text and author, the text must be viewed as an entity on its own, independent from the author. Barthes sees this as setting the text free from the limitations imposed on it, when seen in connection with the author (Barthes, 147). Finally, the death of the author brings another component into play. This component is the reader:

 “(…) a text is made of multiple writings, drawn from many cultures and entering into mutual relations of dialogue, parody, contestation, but there is one place where this multiplicity is focused and that place is the reader, not, as we hitherto said, the author. The reader is the space on which all the quotations that make up a writing are inscribed without any of them being lost; a text’s unity lies not in its origin but in its destination. (…) the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author” (Barthes, 148).

Barthes thus finishes his essay by establishing the importance of the role of the reader. Barthes views literary texts within an intertextual field of literature, where texts always draw on one another, always exist in relation to one another, and are in themselves never original. When seeing literature in this light, the reader becomes the one vital component in realizing these intertextual links and relationships existing between literary texts.

We have through selected essays by Julia Kristeva and Roland Barthes explored some of the aspects and views, which have contributed to the forming of the theory of intertextuality. In the following we will explore intertextuality further, looking at some of the more concrete ways in which these intertextual links and relationships might exist between literary texts. In this process we will work with the theory of Gérard Genette, who explores several aspects of intertextuality, distinguishing between as many as five categories of intertextual relationships, which can exist between literary texts.

Gérard Genette

As previously mentioned, Julia Kristeva is often thought of as the ‘mother’ of intertextuality, due to the fact that she is the one credited with coining the term. In her work, she relies heavily on the work of theorists before her, just as theorists after her, likewise, use and expand on her ideas in their work. French literary theorist, Gérard Genette, is thus, heavily influenced by Julia Kristeva, among others, in his work on intertextuality titled *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree* (1982); a work which, by some, is even deemed a rewriting of Kristeva´s theory (Orr, 106). About Genette building his theory upon the work of other theorists, Orr goes on to say:

“His appropriation of Kristeva´s intertextuality in *Palimpsestes* is then not plagiarism or parody, but licensed imitation. This is also not an isolated incident in Genette´s critical evolution, for Louis Marin´s ‘architexte’ had already been borrowed openly in the preceding volume. Genette´s imitative critical indebtedness in fact derives from many critic-compatriots and collaborators since the 1960´s, most notably Tzvetan Todorov” (Orr, 107).

In this statement, as seems to be a main goal in her work *intertextuality,* as a whole, Orr seems occupied with giving credit where credit is due, emphasizing that no theory, nor theorist, stands alone. The theory/theories concerning intertextuality (as with a number of other subjects) develop over time, due to the work of various theorists and literary critics, expanding, critiquing or altering preexisting theories, none of who should alone be credited with this work. This is true for the theories represented in Genette´s *Palimpsests* as well.

 Graham Allen positions Genette within the tradition of structuralist poetics, citing Jonathan Culler, Professor of English at Cornell University, in his view on the study of poetics within the field of structuralism:

 “Structuralism’s particular contribution to this tradition is to refocus attention away from the specificities of individual works to the systems out of which they can be said to have been constructed” (Allen, 94).

This view is present in the work of Genette, who seeks to examine the role of the cultural and literary conventions, which a work of literature writes itself into, whether as a result of a conscious choice on part of the author or not. We will see this further explored in Genette’s work on types of intertextuality (or as Genette calls them, types of *transtextuality*), especially in the category, which he terms *Architextuality.* Graham Allen is referring to Genette’s extensive work on different types of transtextuality, when he credits Genette with pushing the practice of structuralist poetics into an arena, which can be termed intertextual (Allen, 95).

In Genette’s focus on the importance of literary genres, he attempts to clarify certain aspects of genre. He emphasizes the difference between the generic and the thematic as well as the difference between genre and modes:

“Genre, he reminds us are essentially literary categories. Modes on the other hand, are ‘natural forms’, or at least aspects of language itself, and can be divided into ‘narrative’ and ‘discourse’. Narrative here concerns the recounting of facts or events without attention being placed on the person who is doing that recounting. Discourse however places its focus on the person who speaks and the situation from within which that person is speaking” (Allen, 96).

As well as defining genre and modes, Genette here provides a distinction between narrative and discourse. This distinction inevitably evokes Kristeva´s notion of the subject of utterence vs. the subject of enunciation (Kristeva, 75), as established in her essay “Word, Dialogue and Novel”. This shows a certain similarity in the ideas of Genette and Kristeva. Graham Allen recapitulates the aim of Genette´s theory as follows:

 “Genette attempts to save the notion of poetics by moving to a higher field of examination. His resolution of these problems is based on his decision to redescribe the entire field of poetics from a new perspective: that of transtextuality” (Allen, 97).

With his theory on transtextuality, Genette further develops Kristeva and Barthes´s notion of intertextuality, thereby transforming the traditional view of structuralism, and establishing a view, which he refers to as an open structuralism:

“That is, a poetics which gives up on the idea of establishing a stable, ahistorical, irrefutable map or division of literary elements, but which instead studies the relationships (sometimes fluid, never unchanging) which link the text with the architextural network out of which it produces its meaning” (Allen, 97).

In the following we will explore Genette´s work within the field of intertextuality, as relayed in his work *Palimsests: Literature in the Second Degree* (1982), focusing on his five types of transtextuality.

Genette´s Five Types of Transtextuality

In Genette´s work concerning transtextuality, he focuses on the total field of relationships between texts, which contrasts other approaches to intertextuality, of theorists before him. As an example of someone who focused more narrowly on semantic-semiotic microstructures, Genette refers to Michael Riffaterre (Genette, 2). The terminology applied by Genette in his work concerning intertextuality might cause confusion, seeing as he uses the term ‘intertextuality’ differently than what is commonly seen in other works on the subject. Where other theorists, some of whom we have mentioned above, use the term ‘intertextuality’, Genette instead applies the term ‘transtextuality’. Transtextuality is defined as: “all that sets the text in relationship, whether obvious or concealed, with other texts” (Genette, 1). In his theoretic work on the subject of transtextuality, Genette goes on to define five distinct types of transtextuality, one of which he confusingly terms ‘intertextuality’. In the following we will relay Genette´s theory explaining the differences between these five types of transtextuality, while commenting on the aspects of his categorization, which may be conceived as overlapping or otherwise confusing to apply in an actual analysis.

The first type of transtextuality, Genette refers to as *intertextuality*. Intertextuality is, in Genette’s terminology, defined much more restrictively, as compared to Julia Kristeva’s definition of the term. Genette defines intertextuality as “the actual presence of one text within the other” (Genette, 2). This means that according to Genette, *quoting*, *plagiarism* and *allusion* are considered types of intertextuality. Quoting is then intertextuality in the explicit form, while plagiarism is an undeclared type of borrowing, and allusion is the still less explicit type of literary borrowing, all considered literary devices within the category of intertextuality. Genette defines allusion as:

“(…) an enunciation whose full meaning presupposes the perception of a relationship between it and another text, to which it necessarily refers by some inflections that would otherwise remain unintelligible” (Genette, 2).

Thereby Genette emphasizes the need of an actual reader equipped with the necessary literary and cultural knowledge, in order to realize this relationship between the two texts, which is merely alluded to in the text in hand. This definition of the allusion though, can be perceived as contradictory to the definition of the overall category intertextuality, which it is a part of. One might argue that if, in the case of an allusion, the link between the two texts becomes as implicit as it seems to, according to Genette himself, then allusion should perhaps not be considered a type of intertextuality, seeing as it does not convey “the actual presence of one text within the other” as expressed in the definition of the category, but in fact merely alludes to text A in texts B.

Genette’s second type of transtextuality is *paratextuality*. Within the realm of paratextuality we find all types of text (in the broad sense of the word ‘text’) that surround and/or concern the text in hand. These may include:

“a title, a subtitle, intertitles; prefaces, postfaces, notices, forewords, etc.; marginal, infrapaginal, terminal notes; epigraphs; illustrations; blurbs, book covers, dust jackets, and many other kinds of secondary signals” (Genette, 3).

According to Genette, these types of secondary texts affect the way in which the reader experiences the text in hand, as well as possibly the following interpretation of this text. That means, that for instance different editions of the same text, due to differences such as an added foreword or afterword, or even simple changes such as a different book cover, can cause the readers’ perceptions of the literary work to differ. The limits to the paratexts of one specific text can be hard to define; partly because new paratexts can continuously be produced, and partly because one may discuss whether a number of existing texts can be considered paratexts, to the text in hand, without necessarily being able to arrive at a conclusion: “Paratextuality, as one can see, is first and foremost a treasure trove of questions without answers” (Genette, 4).

The third type of transtextuality is *metatextuality*. This type of transtextuality refers to a relationship between two texts, where text B is closely linked to text A, to which it acts as a commentary: “It unites a given text to another, of which it speaks without necessarily citing it (without summoning it), in fact sometimes even without naming it” (Genette, 4). This type of transtextuality is notoriously difficult to tell apart from the following type of transtextuality, which is *hypertextuality*.

Hypertextuality is the fourth type of transtextuality, and is defined by Genette as:

“(…) any relationship uniting a text B (which I shall be calling the hypertext) to an earlier text A (I shall, of course, call it the hypotext), upon which it is grafted in a manner that is not that of commentary” (Genette, 5).

This definition of Genette´s hypertextuality is problematic for a number of reasons. First of all, it is a quite broad definition, which is rather unspecific; secondly, as previously mentioned, it makes it difficult to tell hypertextuality apart from metatextuality. The only “clear” difference between the two types of transtextuality is that one is a relationship between text A and text B, where text B is a commentary on text A (metatextuality); whereas in the case of hypertextuality text B is not a commentary on text A. But this distinction between the two types of transtextuality may well prove to be not so clear after all, seeing as it can be challenging to determine whether or not a text is in fact a commentary on previous text or not. What defines a commentary as opposed to a rewriting? Can a text be both a commentary and a rewriting of a previous text, and in that case can the transtextual relationship between the two texts then be said to be both metatextual and hypertextual? This, then, is another challenge concerning Genette´s types of transtextuality: Metatextuality and hypertextuality are too closely related, or not clearly enough defined in a way that makes it possible to easily distinguish between the two. We will revisit this topic after exploring the fifth and final type of transtextuality, which is *architextuality*.

Architextuality has to do with the literary conventions, which a given work of literature writes itself into. This refers both to genre-specific conventions, and literary conventions having to do with style of writing. Genette refers to this type of transtextuality as the most abstract and implicit type of transtextualiy, seeing that a work of literature rarely declares itself as belonging to a certain genre, leaving it up to the reader or the literary critic to determine to which genre(s) the work lends itself. Even in cases where the literary work does in fact declare itself as belonging to a certain genre, literary critics may choose to reject the status claimed for the text by its paratext (Genette, 4). Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* can be considered an example of this. *Jane Eyre* was originally published under the title *Jane Eyre: An Autobiography*. But despite this declaration of belonging to the genre of autobiographical novels, *Jane* *Eyre* does clearly not depict the actual life of author Charlotte Brontë. From a paratextual point of view, the labeling of the novel as an autobiography has an effect on the reception of the novel. At least we may assume that it had an effect on early readers, whom might well have believed that the novel was is fact autobiographical, if ignoring the fact that the name of the protagonist did not match that of the author, Currer Bell, the pen name under which *Jane Eyre* was originally published. This is an example of a work originally declaring to belong to a genre, which readers and literary critics can agree to reject, seeing that it is easily dismissed. In other cases it may be harder to agree on which genre a specific work of literature belongs to, which may lead to an extensive debate among literary critics.

To sum up, Genette´s five types of transtextuality are as follows:

1. *Intertextuality*: “the actual presence of one text within the other”:
	* Quotation, plagiarism, (allusion).
2. *Paratextuality*: Texts surrounding/concerning the text in hand:
	* Ex: Title, preface, foreword, afterword, dust jacket, etc.
3. *Metatextuality*: A relationship between a text A and a text B, where text B acts as a (critical) commentary on text A.
4. *Hypertextuality*: A relationship between a text A and a text B, where text B is not a commentary on text A.
	* Ex: Parody, travesty, pastiche.
5. *Architextuality*: Concerns literary conventions surrounding a given text.

As previously mentioned, some challenging or problematic issues arise when working with Genette´s five types of transtextuality. One of the main issues we are presented with, is the challenge of distinguishing between the two categories of metatextuality and hypertextuality. The transtextual relationship we will be seeking to explore between Charlotte Brontë´s *Jane Eyre* and Daphne du Maurier´s *Rebecca* is, according to our hypothesis, a primarily hypertextual or metatextual one. In the following we will therefore attempt to explore these two types of transtextuality further, as they have been described, by Genette in *Palimpsests*, in order to understand what Genette was attempting to theorize by presenting these types of transtextuality as two categories, instead of treating them as one.

Hypertextuality is in *Palimpsests* the type of transtextuality that is emphasized the most. This seems to stem from the fact, that in the broadest definition of this category, it can be stretched to cover all transtextual relationships between literary texts:

“What of hypertextuality? It too is obviously to some degree a universal feature of literarity: there is no literary work that does not evoke (to some extent and according to how it is read) some other literary work, and in that sense all works are hypertextual. But (…) some works are more so than others (or more visibly, massively, and explicitly so than others)” (Genette, 9).

This broadness in the definition of the term is also what makes it difficult to tell hypertextuality apart from the other types of transtextuality, primarily metatextuality. In viewing hypertextuality in this broad sense, Genette points to another problem, which is the authority thereby granted to the reader of a text:

“The effect of such an attitude would be to subsume the whole of universal literature under the field of hypertextuality, which would make the study of it somewhat unmanageable; and above all this attitude would invest the hermeneutic activity of the reader – or archireader – with an authority and a significance that I cannot sanction” (Genette, 9).

Genette validates the role of the reader as the component necessary in realizing the transtextuality present in literature in general, while seeking to provide the theoretical framework within which, readers can navigate their analysis of transtextuality between texts. Genette emphasizes the importance of the reader in cases where the hypertextuality of a text is implicit: “The less massive and explicit the hypertextuality of a given work, the more does its analysis depend on constitutive judgement: that is, on the reader´s interpretive decision” (Genette, 9). This emphasis on the role of the reader can be said to be true not only in cases of hypertextuality, but in all examples of texts that are, especially implicitly, transtextual.

In *Palimpsests,* Genette explores the category of hypertextuality extensively, focusing especially on the three main subcategories of hypertextuality: *Parody*, *travesty* and *pastiche*. The definition of metatextuality on the other hand, is merely glossed over and seems to denote a transtextuality, which is far more narrow in definition than that of hypertextuality, yet not very specifically defined. Returning to the definition of metatextuality, Genette states that metatextuality “is the relationship most often labeled ‘commentary’” (Genette, 4). He goes on to provide examples of texts, which are notoriously considered metatexts. These texts share a common characteristic, which is the fact that they act as a critique on their hypotexts. At a later point in *Palimpsests*, Genette refers to criticism more generally speaking, as metatext (Genette, 8), which causes us to infer, that metatextuality can be said to refer specifically to textual relationships where text B acts as a *critical* commentary (as opposed to just plain commentary) on text A. This clarification, although minor, can contribute to distinguishing metatextuality from hypertextuality. Hypertextuality we will then choose to view from what Genette refers to as: “the sunnier side of hypertextuality: that in which the shift from hypotext to hypertext is both massive (an entire work B deriving from an entire work A) and more or less officially stated” (Genette, 9). It should be noted though, that metatextuality and hypertextuality remain closely related.

In understanding Genette´s five types of transtextuality, we have established how we may encounter difficulties in distinguishing between the categories, and thereby being able, through literary analysis, to assign one specific type of transtextual relationship between texts, to an actual case in hand. We see that especially, as previously mentioned, when it comes to defining the specific differences between Genette´s metatextuality and hypertextuality. But when applying Genette´s five types of transtextuality in actual literary analysis, Genette supplies us with, what we might consider, two main guidelines to how we should view and work with his theory, as well as the notion of transtextuality altogether:

“First of all, one must not view the five types of transtextuality as separate and absolute categories without any reciprocal contact or overlapping. On the contrary, their relationships to one another are numerous and often crucial. For example, generic architextuality is, historically, almost always constituted by way of imitation (…), hence by way of hypertextuality” (Genette, 7).

Secondly, Genette goes on to clarify that the whole notion of transtextuality (or intertextuality, as referred to by other literary critics) builds on a view of texts in general which is in fact completely contradictory to any attempt at categorizing texts, with the purpose of telling these apart. Genette refers to the theories of Rifaterre before him, when he argues that one should not view transtextuality as a classification of texts, but rather as an aspect of textuality (Genette, 8). Thus, as we may acknowledge that there are aspects of Genette´s theory concerning the categories of transtextuality, which cause discussion or confusion, we do not find it of crucial importance to be able to definitely perceive these types of transtextuality in strict separation from each other, in order to apply them in the following analysis. Consequently, the attempt of the following analysis, will not be to determine one fixed type of transtextual relationship between Charlotte Brontë´s *Jane Eyre* and Daphne du Maurier´s *Rebecca*, rather Genette’s five types of transtextuality will be viewed and discussed as aspects of textuality itself, as intended by Genette,

Method

We have now established the theoretical framework for the following analysis, and have acknowledged some specific challenging aspects of the framework. In the following we will briefly summarize how we more specifically plan to apply this framework in our analysis of the transtextual relationship between the two literary works, *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Brontë and *Rebecca* by Daphne du Maurier.

The analysis will be divided into four main sections, concerning four chosen topics, viewed as the most important ones, in connection with analyzing the nature of the intertextual link between the two novels. The analysis is therefore, by no means, an analysis comprehending all aspects relevant to an analysis of either *Jane Eyre* or *Rebecca*. There will therefore be elements in both novels, which we will not be able to deal with in the following, and which we consequently limit ourselves from.

The first step of the analysis will be to explore the mirroring of *Jane Eyre*’s story in *Rebecca*, and to establish some of the basic plot similarities of the two novels, as well as some of the notable differences. This will be concluded in a brief discussion of how the mirroring of the story of one work in another can be viewed in connection with two of Genette’s types of transtextuality, namely hypertextuality and metatextuality. Secondly we will seek to place the two novels within the context of the Gothic Tradition as literary genre. In our work concerning the Gothic Tradition, we will distinguish between a Male and a Female tradition within the Gothic genre, as established by Anne Williams in her work: *Art of Darkness: A Poetics of Gothic* (1995). Our analysis concerning genre and the Gothic Tradition will finally be set in relation to Genette’s architextuality.

The third section of the analysis concerns the topic of gender, explored through a comparison of the portrayal of the female and the male respectively, as they are presented in the two novels. In this part of the analysis we will also explore the possible influence of the fairytale “Bluebeard”, as another architext intertwined with the Gothic Tradition. The final section of the analysis concerns the traditional feminist reading of *Jane Eyre*. While acknowledging the feminist aspects of Brontë’s novel, we will examine some of the problematic issues connected with such a reading, and how these become more apparent when read in relation to du Maurier’s *Rebecca*. Our analysis will be followed by a conclusion, in which we will set the results of our analysis in relation to Genette’s five types of transtextuality, and attempt to determine the nature of the intertextual link between the two novels. We will also briefly contrast our comparative analysis of the novels with another reading of the two works by Verena-Susanna Nungesser, found in the work *A Breath of Fresh Eyre: Intertextual and Intermedial Reworkings of Jane Eyre* (2007).

Mirroring the story

As the first necessary step in proving the existence of any type of transtextual relationship between Charlotte Brontë´s *Jane Eyre* and Daphne du Maurier´s *Rebecca*, we need to attempt to prove the connection between the texts. We will begin the process of doing so in the following, by first establishing how *Jane Eyre*’s story is mirrored in *Rebecca*. We will thus examine both similarities in story, as well as less similar aspects, and thereby seek to establish the differences, which then occur in the subtexts of the novels. Finally, we will attempt to contextualize our findings so far, in relation to Genette’s types of transtextuality.

The transtextual relationship claimed to exist between Charlotte Brontë´s *Jane Eyre* and Daphne du Maurier´s *Rebecca,* is a relationship which is not explicitly stated, either in *Rebecca* or by Daphne du Maurier herself. Therefore, it falls on the reader of the text to discover this link, and on literary critics to investigate and prove the existence of this transtextual relationship. The idea that these two novels are somehow linked, has been suggested by others before us, but few have explored the nature of this transtextual relationship further. In the afterword of *Rebecca*, written by Sally Beauman in 2002, appearing in the Virago Modern Classics Designer Edition of *Rebecca*, Beauman links *Rebecca* to *Jane Eyre*:

“(…) examine the subtext of Rebecca and you find a perturbing, darker construct, part Grimm´s fairytale, part Freudian family romance. You also find a very interesting literary mirroring, of course, an early example of intertextuality – and that is rare in a ‘popular’ novel, certainly one this early. *Rebecca* reflects *Jane Eyre*, but the reflection is imperfect, and deliberately so, forcing us to re-examine our assumptions about both novels, and in particular their treatment of insanity in women.

None of these aspects of *Rebecca* was noticed by critics at the time of publication – and few have paused to examine them since. Instead, Charlotte Brontë´s gifts were used as a stick with which to beat an impious, hubristic du Maurier over the head: she was Brontë´s inferior, how could she dare to annex a classic novel?” (du Maurier, 432).

Beauman validates a transtextual relationship between *Rebecca* and *Jane Eyre* which evidently has been both acknowledged as existing, but dismissed as being of relatively little importance, or even as being merely an inferior copying of one of the great works of literature. What Beauman calls the “deliberately imperfect mirroring” of *Jane Eyre*, is what we will seek to explore in the following analysis.

Similarities in Story

In the following, the similarities in story have been outlined, in order to create a brief overview, as well as to show where the novels deal with certain parts of the story differently. This will be done quite sparsely, in order not to lose track of the main objective, which is plainly to prove how the plot of *Jane Eyre* is mirrored in *Rebecca*. Also we want to avoid a long retelling of each novel, and rather delve into some of the more interesting differences after establishing the similarities[[1]](#footnote-1).

Outline of story:

* The protagonists of both novels are orphan girls, who have to work in order to support themselves.
* They share similar occupations as a governess and a paid companion.
* Both protagonists have a “plain Jane” appearance.
	+ But the characters have very different personalities.
* Both characters fall in love with someone from a higher social class, in a superior position to them.
* Both characters experience conflict with the “presence” of the first wife.
	+ *Jane Eyre*: The literal presence of the first wife.
	+ *Rebecca*: The “haunting” presence of the first wife.
* The first wives in both novels have to die in order for the narrators to get their happy ending:
	+ *Jane Eyre*: Bertha Mason must die.
	+ *Rebecca*: Rebecca’s death has already happened, but through the course of the novel Maxim must escape justice for his crime.
* Both protagonists have no sympathy for the first wife. Their sympathy lies strictly with the man they love. They both have a high sense of morality in other things, but this morality and compassion does not extend to the first wives.
* Both men lose their family estates in fires, and in a sense the first wives get their revenge.
	+ *Jane Eyre*: Bertha Mason is the one to set Thornfield on fire, which is her revenge.
	+ *Rebecca*: Probably the housekeeper, Mrs. Danvers, who sets Manderley on fire, also as a kind of revenge on behalf of Rebecca.
* Both male characters are in a sense crippled by the fire:
	+ *Jane Eyre*: Mr. Rochester is physically crippled by the fire.
	+ *Rebecca*: Significant changes in Maxim’s character, indicates emotional/mental distress, from the time of the fire.
* The mostly happy ending of *Jane Eyre* and the not so happy ending of *Rebecca*:
	+ *Jane Eyre*: Mr. Rochester manages to get past losing Thornfield, and seems to worry more about losing Jane than the estate. The two of them manage to achieve some kind of happiness in the end, away from Thornfield.
	+ *Rebecca*: Maxim and Mrs. de Winter live together somewhere abroad. Maxim never recovers from losing Manderley, and consequently Mrs. de Winter lives a life, constantly afraid of triggering Maxim’s memory, of the past.
* Ending: On the surface both narrators get what they want, but in a sense they are the ones who lose.
	+ *Jane Eyre*: Jane is perhaps happy, but she is in the exact situation that Bertha Mason was in, and must walk the thin line of pleasing Mr. Rochester in order to avoid a similar destiny.
	+ *Rebecca*: More explicit in Rebecca, where narrator ends up in a childless, sexless marriage, constantly trying to avoid upsetting Maxim.

We have now established the mirroring of *Jane Eyre* in *Rebecca,* while also pointing out some of the differences. In the following we will explore some of these differences further, in an attempt to uncover what they consequently mean, in terms of how they affect the subtext of the story, and ultimately contribute to altering the way in which we read *Jane Eyre*.

Differences in Story

As seen by the overview of story provided above, there are many ways, in which the mirroring of *Jane Eyre* in *Rebecca* is “intentionally imperfect”, to use the words of Sally Beauman. We cannot comment on all of these differences, but will explore some of them in the following.

One of the main ways in which the novels *Jane Eyre* and *Rebecca* are different from each other, is in the way in which they deal with inequality between the sexes. Jane Eyre is clearly in a vulnerable, inferior position to Mr. Rochester when they meet, seeing as he is the one employing her, and she therefore depends on him for her livelihood. The difference in social status though, is something that is brought to change through the novel. By refusing to become the mistress of Mr. Rochester after discovering that he is in fact already married, Jane Eyre is forced to leave Thornfield. Through a turn in events, she finds herself inheriting a family fortune, while Mr. Rochester on the other hand, loses his estate and is maimed by the fire, rendering him in the position of being dependent on her care. As a result of this, the balance in power is tipped, and Jane Eyre can be considered to become an equal to Mr. Rochester. This story of the superior male who is brought to his knees, while the inferior female, through the course of the novel, is empowered and becomes self-reliant, has been the key element resulting in the common interpretation of *Jane Eyre* as a feminist work of literature. In *Rebecca*, there is a sense of shift in power, although not to the same extent as seen in *Jane Eyre*, nor is the protagonist of *Rebecca* occupied with gaining equality as Jane’s character is. When Mrs. de Winter meets Maxim de Winter, he is not her employer. So unlike Jane Eyre, Mrs. de Winter is not in a dependent relationship with Maxim, previous to their marriage. She is however instead in a work-related, dependent relationship to Mrs. Van Hopper, and by breaking this employment, she transfers this dependence directly onto her relationship with Maxim. The relationship between the two is then, from the very beginning, an unequal one. This is made clear in the way Maxim proposes, which makes the impending marriage seem almost as if Mrs. de Winter is transferring from one place of employment to another:

“’So that’s settled, isn’t it?’ he said, going on with his toast and marmalade; ‘instead of being companion to Mrs Van Hopper you become mine, and your duties will be almost exactly the same. I also like new library books, and flowers in the drawing-room, and bezique after dinner. And someone to pour out my tea” (Du Maurier, 59).

Maxim’s “proposal” is more of a description of his expectations of her, in fulfilling certain duties for him in the household; there is no mention of love. Quite the contrary, in fact when Mrs. de Winter confesses her love for him, Maxim reacts by laughing at her, and acts in a way that is altogether rather condescending, underlining the inequality between them. This causes Mrs. de Winter to react in the following way: “I was ashamed already, and angry at him for laughing. So women did not make those confessions to men. I had a lot to learn” (Du Maurier, 59). Rather than openly questioning the way she is treated by Maxim, she chooses to say nothing at all, and internalizes the blame for his treatment of her, as something *she* should learn from, making a mental note of how she should change the way in which she acts, in accordance with what is expected of her. This is one of several examples in *Rebecca*, of how Mrs. de Winter is expected to live up to certain standards specific to the notion of an ideal femininity, especially within her marriage, but also in how she is perceived in society. Where Jane Eyre attempts to fight these confining norms and gender roles, Mrs. de Winter struggles only with an inner conflict over her failed attempts at being the perfect wife to Maxim; always focusing on trying to live up to the image of Rebecca, which she has created in her mind. Indeed, gender roles and the portrayal of the ideal femininity, is something that is at the core of *Rebecca*, most clearly dealt with in the contrasting characterizations of Mrs. de Winter and Rebecca. We will return to this in a later part of the analysis.

The different ways in which the novels deal with (in)equality between the sexes, leads us to discuss the respective endings of *Jane Eyre* and *Rebecca*. In a sense the two novels are concluded in a similar manner. After the “obstacle”, in shape of the first wife, is eliminated, both protagonists are united with their respective husbands, in what on the surface may be considered marital bliss, but at the expense of losing the family estates, Thornfield and Manderley. We see a similarity between the stories, in that both protagonists are reunited with the men they love, through the death of the first wives. Jane Eyre is reunited with Mr. Rochester in a literal sense, seeing as she had refused him, and was living apart from him at Moor House, until the death his first wife made it possible for her to return. In *Rebecca,* the reunion between Maxim and Mrs. de Winter is emotional rather than literal. After Maxim has confessed his secret of murdering Rebecca to his wife, their relationship ceases to be haunted by her memory and the protagonist’s obsessive need to compare herself with Rebecca. Mrs. de Winter and Maxim unite over this secret and Maxim’s attempt at escaping justice (du Maurier, 300). In both novels the family estate is lost, almost as a price to be paid in exchange for escaping the past. Mr. Rochester is physically crippled by the fire, but cares little for himself, and wants only to be reunited with Jane Eyre. In this sense, the two of them do indeed get their happy ending. Maxim in *Rebecca*, on the other hand, is not physically harmed by the fire, but the loss of Manderley seems to affect him much more emotionally, than the loss of Thornfield ever affects Mr. Rochester. Although Maxim and Mrs. de Winter, on the surface, get to escape justice and the past, and flee to another country to live happily ever after, the past follows them there. One might suggest a reading of Maxim’s character, as having been rendered emotionally - rather than physically - crippled on account of the fire and losing Manderley:

“I can tell by the way he will look lost and puzzled suddenly, all expression dying away from his dear face as though swept clean by an unseen hand, and in its place a mask will form, a sculptured thing, formal and cold, beautiful still but lifeless. He will fall to smoking cigarette after cigarette, not bothering to extinguish them, and the glowing stubs will lie around on the ground like petals. He will talk eagerly about nothing at all, snatching at any subject as a panacea to pain” (Du Maurier, 5).

This description of Maxim, as he appears several years after losing Manderley, completely contrasts the impression we come to have of his character through the story, through flashbacks of how he was in earlier years. This noticeable change in character is what causes us to view him as depressed or even emotionally crippled. Also, the relationship between Maxim and Mrs. de Winter seems to have cooled considerably, since the passionate union over their shared secret. They spend their days together in dingy hotels, Mrs. de Winter reading the most mundane news aloud, in order not to evoke memories of the past, and consequently upsetting Maxim’s rather sensitive moods:

“How strange that an article on wood pigeons, could so recall the past and make me falter as I read aloud. It was the grey look on his face that made me stop abruptly, and turn the pages until I found a paragraph on cricket, very practical and dull – Middlesex batting on a dry wicket at the Oval and piling up interminable dreary runs. How I blessed those solid, flannelled figures, for in a few minutes his face had settled back into repose, the colour had returned, and he was deriding the Surrey bowling in healthy irritation” (Du Maurier, 7).

This existence contrasts the lives of Jane Eyre and Mr. Rochester, who seem to have succeeded in achieving their happy ending, despite Jane Eyre’s somewhat gloomy expectations to married life, which she expressed to Mr. Rochester before they were married:

“For a little while you will perhaps be as you are now, - a very little while; and then you will turn cool; and then you will be capricious; and then you will be stern, and I should have much ado to please you: but when you get well used to me, you will perhaps like me again – *like* me, I say, not *love* me. I suppose your love will effervesce in six months, or less. I have observed in books written by men, that period assigned as the farthest to which a husband’s ardour extends. Yet, after all, as a friend and companion, I hope never to become quite distasteful to my dear master. (Brontë, 221).

Despite these expectations of married life, Jane Eyre and Mr. Rochester live a comfortable, seemingly happy life. They have children and Mr. Rochester even regains his eyesight. This contrasts, as previously mentioned, the ending to *Rebecca*, where Mrs. de Winter and Maxim live a life, where the sense of loss is constantly there, right below the surface: “His premonition of disaster was correct from the beginning; and like a ranting actress in an indifferent play, I might say that we have paid for freedom” (Du Maurier, 6). Although attempting to leave the past behind, this never seems achievable for Maxim and Mrs. de Winter. Jane Eyre and Mr. Rochester, on the other hand, succeed in leaving the past behind, and moving forward, although their happiness is achieved at the expense of the life of Bertha Mason.

In discussing the respective subtexts of the endings of the two novels, we must comment on the narrative of *Rebecca*. As we have established, the ending to Rebecca, can be read as an unhappy one - despite the best of efforts to persuade the reader otherwise, which is where the narrative comes in. This unhappiness between the two, is not immediately accessible, but is found in the subtext of the novel. On the surface Mrs. de Winter is happy with the life she shares with Maxim, away from the constant fear they used to feel, when attempting to escape the consequences of Maxim’s crime:

“Granted that our little hotel is dull, and the food indifferent, and that day after day dawns very much the same, yet we would not have it otherwise. We should meet too many of the people he knows in any of the big hotels. We both appreciate simplicity, and we are sometimes bored – well boredom is a pleasing antidote to fear” (Du Maurier, 6).

But when exploring the account of their new life, especially in chapter two of *Rebecca*, there are several examples of notable contrasting elements in the portrayal of their life. These contrasts even become self-contradictory, to the point where the narrator is perceived as unreliable, as we will see in the following example:

“We have no secrets now from one another. All things are shared” (Du Maurier, 6).

This statement is completely contradicted just a page later:

“We were saved a retreat into the past, and I had learnt my lesson. Read English news, yes, and English sport, politics and pomposity, but in future keep things that hurt to myself alone” (Du Maurier, 7).

This literary device of an unreliable first person narrator creates a text, where one thing is being said on the surface, but is being countered in the subtext. This is what happens in *Rebecca*, where the reader is left to read between the lines, and discover that Mrs. de Winter and Maxim have in fact not escaped the past. This however is not something, which the protagonist is willing to accept. This results in a – on the surface – similar ending to the one of *Jane Eyre*, while something else is going on under the surface. This ending to *Rebecca* then causes us to see the end of *Jane Eyre* in a different light. As previously mentioned, Jane Eyre, a character for whom equality between men and women was of utmost importance, achieves her own happy ending at the expense of another woman’s life. This is a problematic aspect in the traditional feminist reading of the novel. The ending of the novel is portrayed as a happy one; Jane Eyre succeeds in gaining her own sense of equality, which allows her to marry Mr. Rochester, but Bertha Mason has to die in order for this to happen. On the surface these events are mirrored in *Rebecca*, but with the distinct difference that the happy ending is not possible for Mrs. de Winter, at that price.

In *Rebecca* there are numerous examples of elements of *Jane Eyre,* which are depicted in a very different way. Some of the ones, which would probably be considered smaller differences include the role of the housekeepers in the novels. In *Jane Eyre* Mrs. Fairfax is the friendly housekeeper who becomes a companion and an equal to Jane Eyre, through her time at Thornfield. In contrast the housekeeper of Manderley in *Rebecca*, Mrs. Danvers, plays the part of the villain, treating Mrs. de Winter with coldness, comparing her to Rebecca, and finally urging her to jump from the west wing window, in a fit of despair: “’Why don’t you jump?’ Whispered Mrs. Danvers. ‘Why don’t you try?’” (Du Maurier, 276). The stories are similar in the sense that the character of the housekeepers plays a central part in each novel. They are linked with the family estates, which the protagonists arrive to and attempt to make their homes. Jane Eyre is welcomed and well-liked at Thornfield, while Mrs. de Winter receives an icy welcome from Mrs. Danvers and the rest of the staff, and continuously struggles to feel at home at Manderley.

A final example of differences in the two novels has to do with the name of the protagonist in *Rebecca*. A very distinct element of the novel, in relation to the character of the protagonist is that she is never mentioned by name. Her name is alluded to several times throughout the novel, and is referred to as: “a lovely and unusual name” (Du Maurier, 25), but the only name she is ever called by is ‘Mrs. de Winter’. There is an example of something similar in *Jane Eyre* too, although far less noticeably. A married couple is part of the staff at Thornfield in *Jane Eyre*, of which the wife is continuously throughout the novel referred to simply as ‘John’s wife’ (Brontë, 131). But unlike in *Rebecca* her name is revealed just before the end of the novel (Brontë, 368). Du Maurier, thus deploys what is a minor aspect in *Jane Eyre*, on a much larger scale, to the point where it becomes a defining characteristic of the novel. This literary choice thoroughly underlines the focus on loss of female voice and power, which is a key element of both *Rebecca* and *Jane Eyre*.

Hypertextuality or Metatextuality?

We have now established how the mirroring of the plot of *Jane Eyre* is present in *Rebecca*. This mirroring is only part of the transtextual relationship between the novels. The mirroring of the story is what we might consider, with Genette’s terminology, as the hypertextual aspect of the transtextual relationship between the texts. The second aspect of transtextuality arises when we attempt to uncover what this mirroring actually *does* to our perception of *Jane Eyre.* The ‘intentional imperfection’ in the mirroring, is the second aspect of the transtextuality between the works. It is in these differences in stories that the commentary of *Jane Eyre* arises. When the story of *Jane Eyre* is mirrored in *Rebecca*, the things that seemingly do not fit this mirroring are reflected back onto the way in which we read *Jane Eyre*. Thus, the way in which *Rebecca* represents the issue of female inferiority, forces us to reexamine how inequality is dealt with in *Jane Eyre*. This is how *Rebecca* is consequently read as a critical commentary of *Jane Eyre*; and in being read as such, the transtextual relationship between the two works becomes *metatextual*.

The Gothic Tradition and Architextuality

As we have explored how *Rebecca* is hypertextually linked to *Jane Eyre* via the mirroring of *Jane Eyre*’s story, we must naturally address the fact that the shared plot elements are not singularly confined to the realm of these two novels, but are rather part of a larger genre or tradition; this genre, of course, is the Gothic Tradition. In the pursuit of defining the Gothic as literary tradition, there are various differing notions of what the genre entails. We acknowledge these differences, and are less interested in defining the Gothic Tradition, purely for the sake of this definition, but aim to place *Rebecca* within this tradition, so as to explore how much of the mirroring in *Rebecca*’s story is in fact a strict (with the exceptions mentioned) mirroring of *Jane* *Eyre*’s story, and how much could in fact be said to be consistent with the following of certain modes within the Gothic Tradition. In our effort to place *Rebecca* within the Gothic Tradition, we will be looking at Anne Williams’s views on Gothic literature, especially focusing on her division of the gothic into a Male and a Female Gothic, via her work *Art of Darkness: A Poetics of Gothic* (1995). Consequently to viewing *Rebecca* as part of a specific literary tradition, we will conclude this part of the analysis by discussing Genette’s architextuality.

The Gothic Tradition as Literary Genre

Anne Williams begins her work by stating three claims about the Gothic Tradition, which contradict the traditional view of the Gothic as literary genre. These are the claims she seeks to prove in her work *Art of Darkness: A Poetics of Gothic*:

“This book proposes three ideas about the nature of the Gothic. First, Gothic is a poetic tradition. Second, “Gothic” and “Romantic” are not two but one. Third, “Gothic” is not one but two; like the human race, it has a “male” and a “female” genre. These three principles contradict several major premises consciously or unconsciously established since professional criticism of Gothic began about a century ago” (Williams, 1).

It is especially her third and final claim that we are interested in, in relation to exploring the transtextual relationship between *Jane Eyre* and *Rebecca.* But first we will briefly recount some of the defining aspects of the Gothic as literary genre, according to Williams.

In *Art of Darkness* Anne Williams refers to the Gothic Tradition as having often been viewed as the black sheep of the family. Despite this, minds critical of this view have argued the validity of the genre, and attempted to link it to the Romantic, a notion often contested by romanticists:

“(…) although “Gothic” might reasonably claim kin with both the novel and Romanticism, its claims have usually been denied almost before the fact. To preserve the realistic novel as the High Prose Fiction tradition, critics regarded the Gothic as long dead, or else (if alive) as irrational “feminine” popular romance. According to the Romanticist, this dim, shapeless, fiction lacks the unifying clarity of the Romantic Imagination as articulated by several great poets in their greatest poetry”(Williams, 6).

This discussion has been inherently linked to the traditional view of the Gothic, until feminist critics in the 1970’s contributed to the validation of the Gothic tradition as a “female” tradition. This despite the portrayal of women in mass marketed Gothic, in a manner, which might be considered less than flattering, from the point of view of a feminist critic:

“For these stories seemed to affirm – both explicitly and covertly – the patriarchal view that what women want is a good (wealthy) husband, that getting married is the story of a woman’s life, and that women (like Gothic heroines) are essentially passive and prone to hysteria. The 1960’s Gothic formula – admittedly a bit silly and predictable – challenged one’s faith in female taste and intellect. (Surely no intelligent woman would want to read that stuff!) Hence early feminist readings tended to see mass-market Gothic as a sort of mild romantic opiate for the (female) masses (…)” (Williams, 7).

Thus the portrayal of the heroines of the female Gothic, were often those of women willingly complying with the rules governing the patriarchal society, and in that sense not the ideal representation of women, from a feminist point of view. Countering this representation of femininity found in the protagonist of the female Gothic, the “madwoman in the attic” capable of burning the house down, comes to serve well for the feminist narrative of Gothic (Williams, 8).

The Gothic as literary genre, as well as the variety of critical approaches to the Gothic may prove to be complex. There are various sides to, as well as views on the Gothic as literary tradition. One of the common conceptions, concerning the history of Gothic tradition, is the view of Walpole as the author of the first Gothic novel, by which he originated the Gothic as literary genre. Another important factor to consider is the influence of history on the Gothic as literary genre. Williams exemplifies this link between history and literature by comparing the history of Henry VIII to the before-mentioned novel *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) by Horace Walpole, commonly considered the first novel of the gothic tradition. Williams finds several similarities, among these: The sins of the father passed on to the child, the desire to conform to the rules of patriarchy and finally, patriarchy’s unspeakable crime: incest. Based on this comparison Anne Williams suggests that if the patriarchal family provides the organizing “myth” of the literature we now call Gothic, it is equally fundamental in shaping English history, comparing Henry VIII to a public version of Bluebeard: “Henry’s worst fears were realized: a woman inherited the throne of England, and made herself a long-running and popular spectacle of female power” (Williams, 29). In thus using literary categories to frame historical events, Tudor England becomes equivalent of Gothic drama. Williams then addresses the notion of Walpole as the “father” of Gothic, pointing out the debt he owes to Shakespeare, while none the less crediting Walpole as one of the great authors within the gothic tradition as literary genre. Among Shakespeare’s works, *Hamlet* is especially stressed as an example of the Gothic, encompassing all the features we have come to view as inherently Gothic: a “historical” setting, a castle, a ghost, a madwoman, a family secret concerning a murder, violence and incest (Williams, 31).

Thus the Gothic as literary tradition is far from one-sided in nature, as well as far from easily defined, as underlined in this statement by Williams:

“The skeleton, the black sheep, and the madwoman all offer excuses for ignoring various aspects of Gothic. Specialists in the novel or the Romantics need not take the Gothic seriously as a manifestation of their favored genre; feminist critics may ignore the male Gothic author’s contributions to the tradition. Each of these versions of Gothic has a blind spot; none of them offers us a perspective that includes both prose and poetry, canonical as well as popular literature, “male” as well as “female” narratives” (Williams, 10).

The Gothic Tradition is thus inherently multifaceted, in a way that complicates any recapitulation of this genre as a whole. This is a contributing factor in Williams’s decision to treat the Gothic genre as two: The Male and the Female Gothic.

The Male and Female Gothic

In the second part of her book, *Art of Darkness*, Anne Williams explores the Gothic Tradition, as divided into two separate entities, Male and the Female Gothic. The notion of this duality within the Gothic Tradition, is according to Williams, mainly manifested in the plot, through the representation of the patriarchal family:

“(…) since the dynamics of “male” and “female” in all realms of experience were imagined in terms of the patriarchal family, the disorders of the system tend, in literature, to express themselves in familial terms. During the eighteenth century, then, through the cracks and fissures in the Law of the Father, this “other” gendered “female” became newly visible, powerful, and fascinating” (Williams, 99).

Williams refers to Freud as having acknowledged the fact that the female subject and the male subject govern different worlds, and thus have different experiences. Gothic literature serves to somewhat underline these differences, giving voice to the marginalized female:

“Patriarchy assumes that the male self is normative, “universal”, and transcendent – representative of “mankind”. Gothic, however, reveals both the cost such an ideal imposes on the male, and the very different tale the female subject has to tell. Since 1976, feminist critics have recognized that gender is crucial in gothic, for that was when Ellen Moers first used the term “female Gothic” (Williams, 100).

While giving voice to the female perspective, the Gothic Tradition as literary genre acknowledges the challenges facing the male subject in attempting to live up to the specific values and rules of patriarchal society. Anne Williams is then not alone in her definition of a Male and a Female Gothic, although her thesis is, of her own account, a radical one: “I shall argue that the “Male” and “Female” traditions employ two distinct sets of literary conventions” (Williams, 100). *Jane Eyre* and *Rebecca* are both part of what Williams refers to as the Female Gothic, which explains our focusing on this aspect of the Gothic Tradition, more so than the Male Gothic.

According to Williams, the Female Gothic formula is especially present in the 1960´s mass market Gothic, rooting back to the early Gothic novels of the eighteenth century, including *Jane Eyre*. *Rebecca* is mentioned by Williams in connection with *Jane Eyre*, as an example of the use of the same basic formula (Williams, 102). Williams outlines the main features of what she terms the formula of the Female Gothic as follows:

The formula of the Female Gothic:

* The text is told from the point of view of the heroine.
* The heroine is alone in the world and poor.
* She seeks employment in the mansion of a wealthy family, typically as governess.
* The owner of the house is distant, mysterious, frightening yet attractive.
* The heroine is intimidated by his status and forbidding manner, but finds herself drawn to him.
* While in the mansion she becomes aware of apparent supernatural occurrences around her.
* She begins to fear that someone is attempting to kill her, most likely her master.
* She remains at the house out of loyalty to her master, as well as care for the child.
* The threat usually turns out to be related to a female force: the other woman, the sinister housekeeper, the madwoman in the attic or the master’s dead wife.
* This threat is in the end overcome, and the heroine learns that her master is in love with her.
* Her fears are proved to be primarily a result of her own overactive imagination; therein lies a lesson about the nature of reality as well as self-confidence.

(Williams, 101).

This formula of the female Gothic primarily appealed to female readers and is contrasted by another mode of the Gothic Tradition, which Williams refers to as Male. This mode was also represented in best-selling fiction, with examples such as Ira Levin’s *Rosemary’s Baby* (1965), and rooted back to works such as the previously mentioned *Castle of Otranto* by Walpole as well as Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* (1897).

Williams posits some main differences between the Male and the Female Gothic to be noted. The first difference has to do with narrative technique, specifically point of view of the narrative. The Female Gothic formula, as previously mentioned, is told from the heroine’s limited point of view, which consequently serves to generate suspense. The Male Gothic on the other hand often deploys change in point of view as a narrative technique, resulting in a story told from multiple points of view. The second difference has to do with how the Male and the Female Gothic assume the supernatural. In the Female Gothic the supernatural is explained, whereas the Male Gothic posits the supernatural as “reality”. This difference, according to Williams parallels the two positions of Wordsworth and Coleridge in writing the *Lyrical Ballads*:

“Wordsworth was to portray the natural in such a way as to highlight the seemingly supernatural powers of the human imagination in response to its environment – analogous to the Gothic heroine’s terror of hauntings that arise from her life in the mysterious house. Coleridge, on the other hand, was to tell stories of worlds in which the supernatural is a reality one simply must accept in “that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment that constitutes poetic faith” (Williams, 103).

The third main difference between the Male and the Female Gothic is the difference in plot, especially in relation to the ending of the story. The Female Gothic has a happy ending, whereas the Male Gothic ends tragically. The happy ending of the Female Gothic consists of the marriage between the heroine and the man she loves, marking the beginning of a new life. The tragic ending of the Male Gothic, on the other hand, comes as a result of the hero/villain being punished for his act of hubris (Williams, 103). In dealing with the main differences between Male and Female Gothic, Williams further distinguishes between terror and horror as being linked to the Female and Male Gothic respectively:

“Finally, whereas Female Gothic is organized around the resources of terror, of an imagined threat and the process by which that threat is dispelled, Male Gothic specializes in horror – the bloody shroud, the wormy corpse. It frequently lapses into what Stephen King sometimes calls “revulsion” (and sometimes the “gross-out,” implying that “reality” is nauseating, horrible beyond belief” (Williams, 104).

These are the main differences between the Male and the Female Gothic, which serve as the reason to view the Gothic tradition as not one, but two modes of literary tradition, according to Anne Williams. In the following we will explore how *Rebecca* fits the formula of the female Gothic.

*Rebecca* as a Product of the Female Gothic Tradition

Unsurprisingly we find that both *Jane Eyre* and *Rebecca* could be said to follow the formula of the Female Gothic pretty consistently, from the point of an overall interpretation of the story in each novel. But *Rebecca* is structurally different from *Jane Eyre*, and thus also slightly different from the formula of the Female Gothic. Although the protagonist goes through a similar journey outlined by the formula of the Female Gothic, there are certain differences to be noticed. The change in structure is one of these differences, as well as the marriage of the protagonist to Mr. de Winter, which occurs relatively early in the novel, rather than at the end in accordance with the formula of the Female Gothic.

In *Rebecca*, Manderley assumes the gothic role of the haunted castle. Although not considered a castle but a large house or a mansion, Manderley occupies a central space of the novel in accordance with the formula of the Female Gothic. As in *Jane Eyre*, this family estate is surrounded by mystery, which both attracts and frightens the heroine. After meeting Maxim and learning that he is the owner of Manderley, Mrs. de Winter remembers buying a postcard of Manderley, as a child:

“We ate for a while without talking, and I thought of a picture postcard I had bought once at a village shop, when on holiday as a child in the west country. It was the painting of a house, crudely done of course and highly coloured, but even those faults could not destroy the symmetry of the building, the wide stone steps before the terrace, the green lawns stretching to the sea. I paid twopence for the painting – half my weekly pocket money – and then asked the wrinkled shop woman what it was meant to be. She looked astonished at my ignorance.

‘That’s Manderley,’ she said, and I remember coming out of the shop feeling rebuffed, yet hardly wiser than before” (Du Maurier, 24).

This memory of becoming familiar with Manderley at an early age, thus serves as a premonition in the life of the heroine, of what her future brings. Unlike other girls who might dream of, and picture their future husband, she instead as a child has a (literal) picture of her future home. This serves to place Manderley at the very center of the novel. Manderly becomes the setting of the terror the heroine is faced with. This terror in *Rebecca*, takes a slightly different form than is characterized by the formula of the Female Gothic. Mrs. de Winter is terrorized by two parallel matters. The first aspect of this terror is of course the “presence” of Maxim’s late wife Rebecca, which she is reminded of daily. These reminders occur in various ways, including the way the servants want to keep running the house as Rebecca did, and how the decoration of the morning room seems to convey her personality:

“This was a woman’s room, graceful, fragile, the room of someone who had chosen every article of furniture with great care, so that each chair, each vase, each small, infinitesimal thing should be in harmony with one another, and with her own personality” (Du Maurier, 93).

 The second element of terror exists within the protagonist herself. It is the constant fear she experiences, of not being able to be the wife she thinks she is supposed to be, and of her marriage failing as a result of this (Du Maurier, 260). Both aspects of the terror facing the protagonist are consistently fuelled by the imagination of the protagonist herself, as well as the actions of the calculating housekeeper Mrs. Danvers. The housekeeper, as well as the rest of the staff, keeps Rebecca’s memory alive by consistently referring to how Rebecca used to run the house (Du Maurier, 154). Mrs. Danvers even tells Mrs. de Winter painful details of the relationship between Maxim and Rebecca. These stories of the happy marriage between Maxim and Rebecca are filled with hints of a sexual nature, suggesting that Maxim was happier with Rebecca than he is with Mrs. de Winter. In the following example Mrs. Danvers tells Mrs. de Winter of how Maxim used to brush Rebecca’s hair:

“Mr. de Winter used to brush it for her then. I’ve come into this room time and time again and seen him, in his shirt sleeve, with the two brushes in his hand. “Harder, Max, harder,” she would say, laughing up at him, and he would do as she told him. They would be dressing for dinner, you see, and the house filled with guests. “Here, I shall be late,” he would say, throwing the brushes to me, and laughing back at her. He was always laughing and gay then” (Du Maurier, 190).

By acting in a very cold manner, and continually telling Mrs. de Winter details similar to this, Mrs. Danvers makes life at Manderley uncomfortable for the protagonist. Mrs. de Winter experiences severe anxiety, and obsesses about Rebecca and the failure of her own marriage as a result of this. The terror concerning Rebecca is (somewhat) resolved in the novel, in accordance with the formula of the Female Gothic. Mrs. de Winter learns the truth about Maxim and Rebecca´s unhappy marriage, and that he killed her. This sets her free from her anxiety of comparing herself to Rebecca, and sparks a change in her. She is no longer afraid to take charge of Manderley and assumes the official role of Mrs. de Winter, in accordance with what is expected of her as the wife of Maxim de Winter. This change comes at the price of a certain loss of innocence in her character (Du Maurier, 336). The other aspect of the terror however, remains unresolved at the end of the novel. Mrs. de Winter is still afraid of upsetting the delicate balance in her relationship with Maxim, and thus this issue is never resolved. This supports our claim, that the ending of *Rebecca* can not in fact be considered a happy one, which proves an inconsistency with the formula of the Female Gothic.

Anne Williams mentions incest as a reoccurring theme in Gothic literature. This however, is not part of the formula of the Female Gothic, but rather a part of the Male Gothic. In both *Jane Eyre* and *Rebecca* however, there occurs relationships of a somewhat incestuous nature. In *Jane Eyre*, Jane is pursued by her cousin St. John, who wishes to marry her and take her with him to India. Jane almost yields to his wish, before hearing Mr. Rochester’s voice calling her through the evening air. As a result of this, Jane resists St. John, and this relationship between cousins never becomes a sexual relationship. In *Rebecca* the relationship between cousins is mirrored in the affair between Rebecca and her cousin Jack Favell. The relationship between the two is an ongoing sexual affair. The retelling of Rebecca and Favell’s shared childhood by Mrs. Danvers (Du Maurier, 273), serves to highlight the incestuous nature of a relationship between two characters who are closely blood-related, now as adults in a sexual relationship. These relationships, both in *Jane Eyre* and in *Rebecca,* may not be an example of incest in the crudest way possible, as we might see it in other Gothic works of literature, following the formula of the Male Gothic. A sexual relationship between cousins is in many cultures, as well as historically, not even considered incest, but we cannot help viewing these relationships as something akin to incest, in the light of Williams’s link of the Gothic Tradition to the portrayal of incestuous relationships in literature.

The supernatural, as Gothic element, is presents in *Rebecca*. The mystery surrounding the death of Rebecca is clouded in a veil of fog, mist, dreams and premonitions. The character of Mrs. de Winter dreams vividly several times throughout the novel. She also escapes in daydreams of what her life could be, and of how she imagines Rebecca was. In these daydreams she occasionally loses her sense of reality:

“’What the devil are you thinking about?’ said Maxim.

I started, the colour flooding my face, for in that brief moment, sixty seconds in time perhaps, I had so identified with Rebecca that my own dull self did not exist, had never come to Manderley. I had gone back in thought and in person to the days that were gone.

‘Do you know you were going through the most extraordinary antics instead of eating your fish?’ said Maxim. ‘First you listened, as though you heard the telephone, and then your lips moved, and you threw half a glance at me. And you shook your head and smiled, and shrugged your shoulders. All in about a second. Are you practicing your appearance at the fancy dress ball?’ He looked across at me, laughing, and I wondered what he would say if he really knew my thoughts, my heart, and my mind, and that for one second he had been the Maxim of another year, and I had been Rebecca” (Du Maurier, 225).

This is probably the most severe example of how much Mrs. de Winter obsesses about Rebecca, losing herself in these daydreams, and constantly comparing herself to Rebecca. This reflects on the character of Mrs. de Winter, who as well as being very naïve, and overly eager to please, has an overactive imagination, which consumes her with thoughts and daydreams about things that may have very little basis in reality. This renders her vulnerable to the manipulative ways of Mrs. Danvers, who seeks to play on this imagination. These dreams and daydreams, as well as the very imaginative side of the protagonist’s personality, are all elements that lend themselves to being analyzed via a psychoanalytical approach, which indeed is a popular means of approach of quite a few feminist critics of the female Gothic.

We have now established some of the ways in which *Rebecca* is consistent with the formula of the Female Gothic. These gothic elements of *Rebecca,* serve to increase suspense, and add to the mystery and terror, which are crucial elements in the Gothic tradition. In accordance with the formula of the Female Gothic, the “ghostly lingering” presence of Rebecca is explained by the fact that she was murdered, while the constant need in the character of Mrs. de Winter, of comparing herself to Rebecca as well as daydreaming about her, serves to maintain her “presence”. This aspect of the protagonist also coincides with the formula of the Female Gothic, which states the imagination of the heroine as a factor in explaining the supernatural. In finding that the primary elements inherent in the formula of the Female Gothic, are actually present throughout *Rebecca*, we might be tempted to conclude that *Rebecca* is in fact just another “product” in a sea of mass marketed Gothic literature, subscribing to the same formula as hundreds of other novels. Many would probably argue this point of view, but there is another interpretation of *Rebecca* to be considered. The claim stated here, is that the key elements of the formula of the Female Gothic are deployed in *Rebecca*, in a way that serves to underline the problematic aspects of a feminist reading of *Jane Eyre*.

Discussing Architextuality

Genette’s architextuality comes to mind, when placing *Rebecca* within the context of the Gothic Tradition. Many readers would probably consider *Rebecca* a product of the mass marketed Gothic, and there is indeed, as we have seen, enough consistencies with the formula of the Female Gothic, to support such a reading of *Rebecca*. With this view in mind, we would have to consider the transtextuality of the novel as architextual. The reason for this is that *Rebecca* would then be considered influenced by a specific tradition within literature, which is the defining characteristic of architextuality, according to Genette. But we wish, to argue that *Rebecca* not be dismissed as *only* a product of the female Gothic tradition.

When reading *Rebecca* in connection with the formula of the Female Gothic, there is crucial way in which du Maurier, although strictly speaking follows the formula, takes it one step further in the central plot twist of the novel. This is the key element that sets *Rebecca* apart from the other novels within the genre: In *Rebecca* Maxim is revealed to be a murderer. The danger this entails for the protagonist, all of a sudden becomes very real. In comparison, the “terrors” existing in the imagination of the protagonist, which center around herself as compared to Rebecca, seem quite trivial. These “terrors “of being haunted by her own imaginations of Rebecca, are indeed resolved, in accordance with the formula of the Female gothic. But the larger much more terrifying aspect of living with a confessed murderer is never resolved, but plainly accepted by the protagonist. This is a crucial part of the plot of *Rebecca*. In the subdued accept of Maxim’s murderous actions and the absence of an (expected) horrified reaction, followed by the unquestioning support of him in escaping justice for his crime, this blatantly immoral act is accepted by the protagonist. This allows the rest of the story to play out in accordance with the formula of the Female Gothic, causing a significant amount of readers to regard *Rebecca* as similar to the rest of the mass marketed Gothic literature, without perhaps giving much thought to the problematic aspect, in considering it purely as such. But critical readers will notice this unresolved element of terror, and how it does not fit the formula of the Female Gothic, which becomes apparent in in the unhappy ending of *Rebecca*. The fact that Hitchcock chose to alter this key element of the plot in the movie version of *Rebecca* (1940) shows just how controversial this aspect of the novel really is. In Hitchcock’s *Rebecca*, Maxim kills Rebecca accidentally in an argument, rather then as a coldblooded murder; a very significant change to the plot, which allows all of the terror to be resolved, resulting in the possibility of a true happy ending. With this change in plot, Hitchcock’s *Rebecca* avoids the problematic aspect of the novel, rendering the story of the movie consistent with the formula of the Female Gothic, thereby avoiding the risk of alienating the the audience.

When focusing on this key element of the novel, *Rebecca* can be considered more than just a product of the Female Gothic tradition. It falls in the genre due to the obvious similarities, but when considering what the novel *does*, in relation to this tradition, it would be too simplified to consider it one among the many within the genre. By making the center of the terrors a real and horrifying crime, and not only an imagined threat – although this element is also present in the novel - and more importantly, by having a protagonist who accepts and defends murder, du Maurier challenges the boundaries of the popular formula, as well as its readers. This reading of *Rebecca*, draws critical attention to a vital aspect of the Female Gothic: The female heroine, forced to abide by the rules of patriarchal society.

By simultaneously being a part of a specific literary genre while being read as a critique of the very formula of this genre, *Rebecca* can be hard to place, in terms of determining the nature of its transtextuality. But seeing that the formula of the Female Gothic is unquestionably present in the novel, we cannot ignore a certain element of architextuality connected with *Rebecca*.

Characters, Gender and the Bluebeard Myth

 In the following we will take a closer look at some of the defining features of the primary characters of *Rebecca*. Our examination of the characters will be marked by the focus on gender representations. We will compare the primary characters of *Rebecca* to those of *Jane Eyre*, within the context of the Female Gothic. Finally, we will comment on the Bluebeard Myth, which is inherently intertwined with the formula of the Female Gothic, and highly relevant to an analysis of both *Rebecca* and *Jane Eyre*, from an intertextual point of view.

The Contrasting Representation of Femininity

Gender roles and the relationship existing between male and female characters, is a main theme of the novel *Rebecca*, consistent with the formula of the Female Gothic. The primary way, in which the topic of gender is dealt with in *Rebecca*, is through the contrasting representations of femininity, which are central to the novel. We see these contrasting representations in the characters of Mrs. de Winter and the deceased Rebecca respectively. In the following we compare these female representations and discuss which effect this specific element of *Rebecca* has on the reader’s impression of the novel as a whole. We will also seek to compare this to the representation of femininity found in *Jane Eyre*.

The protagonist of *Rebecca*, has a very quiet, nervous and compliant personality, and is therefore very unlike the common heroine of literature, and especially that of Female Gothic literature. The character Jane Eyre, in comparison to Mrs. de Winter, is the ideal female gothic heroine. Jane Eyre is strong-willed in her attempt to be independent, and is not afraid to stand up to herself. This is evident already from an early age in her life, when she stands up to her aunt at Gateshead (Brontë, 22). Mrs. de Winter on the other hand, seems to have few opinions of her own, and the ones she has, she tends to keep to herself. She is often willing to adopt the opinions of Maxim, the most prominent example of course being her unquestioning support and apparent understanding of Maxim’s reasons for killing his wife (Du Maurier, 306). Her willingness to adopt his opinions is also evident in far smaller matters:

“‘The rest of the tangerine is sour, I shouldn’t eat it’ he said, and I stared at him, the words going slowly to my head, then looked down at the fruit on my plate. The quarter was hard and pale. He was right. The tangerine was very sour. I had a sharp, bitter taste in my mouth, and I had only just notices it” (Du Maurier, 60).

Mrs. de Winter’s character cannot deal with confrontation, which causes her to have Maxim speak for her on several occasions. An example of this is seen in how Maxim is the one to deal with the confrontation of Mrs. Van Hopper, when Mrs. de Winter wishes to terminate her employment and follow Maxim to Manderley instead of going to New York with Mrs. Van Hopper. While Maxim has this conversation with Mrs. Van Hopper, Mrs. de Winter waits in the bedroom, much like a child (Du Maurier, 61). In fact, Mrs. de Winter behaves like a child for a large part of the novel, and is continuously compared to a child, including Maxim referring to her as “My child” (Du Maurier, 160). Maxim even takes on the role of a father in his relationship to her, declaring that husbands are not much different from fathers (Du Maurier, 226). He resents the fact that she has to grow up, and seems to relish the childish aspect of her character, which distinguishes her from Rebecca who embodied the role of the strong, confident, sexual woman. Mrs. de Winter’s inferiority in her relationship to Maxim is further emphasized in the way his treatment of her is compared to that of a dog: “The smile was my reward. Like a pat on the head to Jasper. Good dog then, lie down, don’t worry me anymore” (Du Maurier, 132).

Finding out about Rebecca’s murder turns out to be the event, which sparks a change in the character of Mrs. de Winter, forcing her to grow up. She thereby regains some power in the relationship, and at this point in the novel the relationship between the male and the female is the closest to being equal. The power balance may even be considered to be reversed, when Mrs. de Winter comforts Maxim, who is then the one to be compared to a child as well as the dog:

“(…) Maxim came over to me where I was standing by the fireplace. I held out my arms to him and he came to me like a child. I put my arms around him and held him. We did not say anything for a long time. I held him and comforted him as though he were Jasper” (Du Maurier, 396).

The shift in power between the sexes is an element of importance in the novel, as well as being a characteristic element shared with *Jane Eyre*.

The other, contrasting female representation we find in the character Rebecca. Rebecca’s character, being deceased, cannot speak for herself, and we must therefore rely on what other characters tell us about her. Several characters provide their descriptions of her throughout the novel, and we must piece together some kind of characterization of her, through these. According to Mrs. Danvers, Rebecca was headstrong, independent and comparable to a boy:

 “He knows she sees him, he knows she comes by night and watches him. And she doesn’t come kindly, not she, not my lady. She was never one to stand mute and still and be wronged. (…) She had all the courage and spirit of a boy, had my Mrs. de Winter. She ought to have been born a boy, I often told her that” (Du Maurier, 272).

Claiming that she should have been born a boy indicates that Rebecca possessed traits that were irreconcilable with the notion of the ideal femininity. This view of the ideal femininity is evidently shared by other characters in the novel: Colonel Julyan has a daughter who plays golf, and a son who writes poetry, both of whom are therefore respectively seen as unfit representations of their sex (Du Maurier, 330). Rebecca’s character thus represents the less than desirable female characteristics, and Maxim absent the possibility of declaring her mad and locking her up, as in the Victorian society, is left with the unthinkable option of divorce, or the apparently less unthinkable option: Murder.

“I hated her, I tell you. Our marriage was a farce from the very first. She was vicious, damnable, rotten through and through. We never loved each other, never had one moment of happiness together. Rebecca was incapable of love, of tenderness, of decency. She was not even normal’ (Du Maurier, 304).

Clearly Maxim hates Rebecca with a passion, which is obvious through his action of killing her, but he never validates this feeling with a really strong argument against her character. He seems evasive about doing so, stating that Rebecca told him things about herself, which he would – conveniently – never repeat to anyone (Du Maurier, 305). We know for a fact though, that Rebecca was unfaithful and had several lovers. However, there is the issue of unreliability to consider; all the information given, is second hand information and Rebecca is not there to defend herself. We are thus represented with one side of the story, Maxim’s side. Representing Rebecca’s side is Mrs. Danvers. And even she could be biased in her view of Rebecca, seeing that she practically raised Rebecca and resents Maxim. The one character, who has no interest of his own vested in the issue, whose opinion we could be inclined to trust, is Ben who compares Rebecca to a snake (Du Maurier, 174). This would leave the reader inclined to believe the negative portrayal of Rebecca, but then it is important to keep in mind that in the end, all of the information which we are given, is filtered through the point of view of the narrator, Mrs. de Winter, who we already have established to be unreliable. So there is unquestionably an element of unreliability connected with the portrayal of Rebecca. All the information, however reliable, conveniently adds up to make Rebecca seem like a terrible character, thereby validating Maxim’s reasons for killing her, at least from the point of view of the protagonist and narrator.

In this respect, the novel deals with the notion of the ideal femininity: The character of Mrs. de Winter encompasses this ideal femininity, which is contrasted by Rebecca’s independent, sexually liberated and defiant nature. Rebecca is seen as “abnormal”, unattractive and boy-like; and consequently she must die for this breach of the feminine ideal. In her afterword to *Rebecca*, Sally Beauman comments on the contrast in representation of the female between the two characters:

“The first wife, Rebecca, is vivid and vengeful and, though dead, indestructible: her name lives on in the book’s title. The second wife, the drab shadowy creature who narrates this story, remains nameless. We learn that she has a ‘lovely and unusual name’, and it was her father who gave it her. The only other identity she has, was also bestowed by a man – she is a *wife*, she is Mrs de Winter” (Du Maurier, 433).

Although attempting to destruct Rebecca and what her character represents, her strength is apparent throughout the novel. She is the character who stands out when comparing these two representations of the female. By refusing to submit to the male dominance in her marriage she remains free, but must ultimately pay for this freedom with her life.

The contrast between two representations of femininity is also something we see in the novel *Jane Eyre*. But seeing as the first wife of *Jane Eyre*, is given even less of a voice than Rebecca, we must rely on another supporting character for this contrast. The strong-willed personality of Jane’s character is contrasted by the gentle Helen Burns, who Jane meets at school. Helen is of a quieter and more subdued nature, and idealized by the younger Jane. During their shared time at Lowood, Helen advises Jane to learn to endure being mistreated:

“‘It is far better to endure patiently a smart which nobody feels but yourself, than to commit a hasty action whose evil consequences will extend to all connected with you; (…) It is weak and silly to say you cannot bear what it is your fate to be required to bear’” (Brontë, 47).

Helen represents the ideal Victorian woman, who is contrasted by the portrayal of the strong and independent Jane Eyre, and her quest for equality. But for Jane this quest is not always clear, she experiences an inner struggle between her urge to speak up, demanding to be treated well, and her wish to be as “good”, as she perceives Helen to be. This struggle continues throughout the novel, and the following is how Jane reflects on it in a later part of the novel:

“I know no medium: I never in my life have known any medium in my dealings with positive, hard characters, antagonistic to my own, between absolute submission and determined revolt” (Brontë, 341).

This theme concerning the two contrasting representations of the female is thus present in both novels, although treated differently. In *Jane Eyre* the protagonist experiences an inner struggle, as well as personal growth through reflecting on her life experiences. When reading *Jane Eyre* the reader is left with the sense of vindication on part of the independent woman, supporting a feminist reading of the novel. In *Rebecca* the role of the submissive female is assigned to the protagonist herself, which might cause a different reading of the novel, in terms of the ideal femininity: Although Mrs. de Winter reflects on her situation and wishes she could change her personality to be more like that of Rebecca, this wish only lasts until she is confronted with the “real” version of Rebecca’s personality – as pieced together by the other characters, primarily Maxim. Through this revelation, her own submissive character is confirmed as being the desired representation of femininity, and the reader is thus - unlike in the case of *Jane Eyre* - left with the understanding that the independent woman is eviscerated, in favor of the submissive heroine.

The Male as “Other”

Mr. Rochester and Maxim de Winter are both characters that are consistent with the formula of the Female Gothic. Mr. Rochester is a traditional primary example of the Byronic hero, and Maxim de Winter is a character constructed in his image. They both encompass the main characteristics of the Byronic hero, which has been historically affiliated with the Female Gothic (Williams, 141). They are rich, mysterious and older than the heroine. They appear somewhat frightening to the heroine, are not considered handsome in the traditional sense of the word and appear to be tortured by a secret. Jane Eyre and Mrs. de Winter’s first impressions of Mr. Rochester and Maxim de Winter respectively, are, although described differently, significant places within each novel. In consistency with the formula of the Female Gothic, the reader is immediately able to identify the future husband of each heroine (Williams, 141):

Mrs. de Winter’s first impression of Maxim in *Rebecca*:

“His face was arresting, sensitive, medieval in some strange inexplicable way, and I was reminded of a portrait seen in a gallery, I had forgotten where, of a certain Gentleman Unknown. Could one but rob him of his English tweeds, and put him in black, with lace at his throat and wrists, he would stare down at us in our new world from a long-distant past” (Du Maurier, 15)

Jane Eyre’s first impression of Mr. Rochester in *Jane Eyre*:

“His figure was enveloped in a riding cloak, fur collared, and steel clasped; its details were not apparent, but I traced the general points of middle height, and considerable breadth of chest. He had a dark face, with stern features and a heavy brow; his eyes and gathered eyebrows looked ireful and thwarted just now; he was past youth, but had not reached middle age; perhaps he might be thirty-five. I felt no fear of him, and but little shyness. He had been a handsome, heroic-looking young gentleman” (Brontë, 97)

In a narrative of the Female Gothic, the heroine is at the center of the story, and thus the male counterpart, however essential to the story, becomes the “other”:

“A narrative organized around the female perspective, Female Gothic necessarily views the male as “other”. This innovation is genuinely novel; moreover, as we shall see, the typical characters of the female narrative do not merely mirror or reverse those of the male tradition” (Williams, 141).

While it is true, in the case of *Jane Eyre*, that the characters of the Male Gothic are not merely mirrored in the female-centered narrative, one might argue another view in the case of *Rebecca*. The heroine of *Rebecca* can be said to share more characteristics with the archetypical female character found within the Male Gothic, than the heroine of the Female Gothic. Mrs. de Winter’s child-like and submissive nature viewed in contrast with the defiant Jane Eyre would support such a claim.

The narrative being told from the female point of view necessarily puts the male character in the role as “other”. In *Rebecca*, although being the “other”, there is an extremely strong presence of the male. The male agenda, in a sense, dominates the female, shown by how Maxim de Winter heavily influences the choices of the female protagonist. The most extreme example of this dominance, is of course seen in how the protagonist defends his actions of killing his wife, a choice she makes in response to his confession to murder, as well as his following challenge:

“‘I killed her. I shot Rebecca in the cottage in the cove. I carried her body to the cabin, and took the boat out that night and sunk it there, where they found it today. It’s Rebecca who’s lying dead there on the cabin floor. Will you look into my eyes and tell me that you love me now?’” (Du Maurier, 298).

This causes us to discuss the male dominance in *Rebecca*. One might argue that Mrs. de Winter has her own agenda of having a successful marriage, and by defending Maxim she is following her own agenda, rather than being dominated by the male one, but it is definitely possible to argue that the female agenda is being inadvertently manipulated by a male agenda. Maxim’s agenda has been apparent throughout the narrative, and existed even before he met Mrs. de Winter. To Maxim, Manderley is the most important thing. Secondly he wants a wife, whose primary task is to run Manderley, while behaving in the appropriate manner required, in accordance with the rules of society. Rebecca failed to fill this role satisfactorily; she ran Manderley perfectly, but her defiant nature did not coincide with the values of the ideal femininity. This caused Maxim and Rebecca to lead separate lives within the marriage, culminating in Rebecca’s final threat to Maxim:

“‘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. And when you died Manderley would be his’” (Du Maurier, 313).

The threat of losing Manderley becomes the final straw and Maxim shoots Rebecca following this provocation – which incidentally turns out to have been Rebecca’s plan all along. Maxim has no guilt over this crime. The thing keeping him up at night is not remorse or any moral scruples connected to his crime; his only fear is getting caught. In Mrs. de Winter he finds the perfect submissive opposite to Rebecca, whom he hopes can fill the role of wife, in the way he sees fit. Mrs. de Winter struggles to fill the role of the perfect wife in different ways than Rebecca. Her personality is preferable, in the eyes of Maxim, to that of Rebecca’s, but her shyness gets in the way of her running Manderley and taking control of the staff. Maxim’s annoyance over her shyness is apparent (Du Maurier, 160), and is felt by Mrs. de Winter, which causes her anxiety over whether or not she will ever be able to satisfy him, in the way she wrongly assumes Rebecca did.

Following this reasoning, it is not impossible that Maxim uses his “love” as a bargaining tool in felicitating his personal agenda. The reader will notice how Maxim never professes his love for the protagonist, until immediately after his confession. Through courting her, proposing to her and even marrying her, Maxim never tells Mrs. de Winter that he loves her. She, on the other hand, professes her love on several occasions (Du Maurier, 163), and longs for him to reciprocate this gesture. But Maxim’s proclamation of love does not come until after he has confessed to murder:

“Then he began to kiss me. He had not kissed me like this before. I put my hands behind his head and shut my eyes.

 ‘I love you so much,’ he whispered. ‘So much.’

This is what I have wanted him to say every day and every night, I thought, and now he is saying it at last” (Du Maurier, 300).

When Maxim finally does confess his love, the timing is quite convenient - from his point of view- making his gesture of love seem more like a manipulative, strategic choice, designed to influence his wife to give him what he wants: her support in escaping justice for his crime, linking her forever to him in the process, by making herself an accessory to murder. The suspicion of Maxim using his love in order to get what he wants is further strengthened by the cooling in his affections towards Mrs. de Winter, following the loss of Manderley. By a reader, inclined towards a more romantic interpretation, Maxim’s character would not be vilified to this extend, and the cooling of his affections would be read as a result of immense grief over losing Manderley.

The more vilified view of Maxim de Winter separates him, in a sense, from how we would typically view Mr. Rochester in *Jane Eyre*. Both characters encompass the traditional traits of the Byronic hero. But the deconstruction of the motives of Maxim de Winter facilitates a dehumanized impression of him, in comparison to the impression we would tend to have of Mr. Rochester. Mr. Rochester’s intentions are – on the surface at least – more honorable. His love for Jane Eyre could be considered a sincere love, proved by how the loss of Thornfield fades in comparison to the loss of her, unlike how Maxim’s life is overshadowed by the loss of Manderley.

 The way in which the heroine of the Female Gothic is ultimately rescued by the male, or in the case of *Rebecca* ends up being the component who realizes the male agenda, can be viewed as a problematic element in the traditional feminist reading of the Female Gothic:

 “The Female Gothic heroine is also invariably rescued from mortal danger (usually by her future husband), thus also appearing to show that these narratives confirm “female helplessness” (Williams, 148).

According to Anne Williams, the counterargument to this view would be that the female heroine actually sets out on her own quest for love and marriage in which she succeeds. This success could then be viewed as the element supporting a feminist reading of the Female Gothic. Despite this argument, there are several other problematic aspects to notice in connection with a feminist reading of the Female Gothic, an issue which we will revisit.

The Bluebeard Myth

We can hardly discuss intertextuality in connection with *Rebecca* and *Jane Eyre* without mentioning the fairytale *Bluebeard*. Both novels share significant similarities with the folkloric folktale about Bluebeard and his young wife. In her work *Secrets Behind the Door: The story of Bluebeard and his Wives* (2004), Maria Tatar outlines the significant influence of this fairy tale, on a vast amount of literary texts. The story of Bluebeard has become an architext, which has inspired numerous rewritings centering on the same basic plot, of the young wife discovering a horrific secret about her new husband’s past. *Jane Eyre* and *Rebecca* both share some of the basic *Bluebeard* plot elements, as well as drawing on other fairytale plots, such as those of *Cinderella* and *Beauty and the Beast*. Written from the point of view of the second wife wandering the mansion in search of the truth about her husband, both *Jane Eyre* and *Rebecca* evoke connotations to the Bluebeard narrative. But the two novels portray the story differently; in *Jane* *Eyre* we find in Jane’s character, what we might consider a resistance to discover the truth, a sort of willingness to remain blind to the truth (Tatar, 72). The protagonist of *Rebecca*, on the other hand, seems more interested in discovering the truth about Rebecca and Maxim’s past. Any blindness against the truth, which Mrs. de Winter might suffer from, stems from a basic naiveté in her character, rather than a wish to remain oblivious to the truth (Du Maurier, 174). Unlike Jane Eyre, Mrs. de Winter is drawn to the west wing of Manderley as well as the cottage on the beach, both of which are places that used to be frequented by Rebecca. As a true wife of Bluebeard, Mrs. de Winter disregards Maxim’s biddings, as much as her submissive nature allows, and wanders the corridors of Manderley seeking the truth about Rebecca. But her curiosity seems more like that of a child disobeying her father than that of an independent woman. In this specific example she follows Jasper, the dog, down onto the beach to Rebecca’s cottage, which incidentally turns out to have been the very place where the murder took place:

“I began to scramble up the slippery rocks in the direction of the bark.

‘Come back,’ said Maxim sharply; ‘we don’t want to go that way. The fool of a dog must look after himself.’

(…)

I pretended not to hear, and began scrambling over the rocks towards Jasper” (Du Maurier, 123).

 This happens during Maxim and Mrs. de Winter’s first walk around the grounds of Manderley, and Mrs. de Winter disobeying Maxim leads to their first argument, for which Mrs. de Winter takes the blame (Du Maurier, 129). Their conflict within the marriage is consistent with that of the Bluebeard Myth, although rarely surfacing as an actual fight, due to Mrs. de Winter keeping many of her thoughts to herself:

“Pitting wife against husband, the Bluebeard plot confines the scene of action to the domestic arena and “enables us to see that the home *is* a prison, in which the helpless female is at the mercy of ominous patriarchal authorities”. It stages an oppressive reign of masculine tyranny and shows how the drive for knowledge can imperil the female protagonist, but ultimately proves liberating for her” (Tatar, 69).

Mrs. de Winter’s curiosity, aided by the resurfacing of Rebecca’s body, finally leads to Maxim’s confession and thus her knowledge of the secret. Both Jane Eyre and Mrs. de Winter deviate from the Bluebeard narrative in the way they react once the truth is unveiled. Bluebeard’s wife was aided by her brothers, who killed her murderous husband, thereby setting her free from his tyranny, and the possibility of being his next victim. In this respect, *Jane Eyre* comes closest to following the Bluebeard narrative. Jane’s character is morally shocked by finding out about Mr. Rochester’s wife in the attic, and she consequently removes herself from Thornfield. It should be noted though, that she is more embarrassed than offended, and her moral qualms center on the idea of bigamy rather than the moral issue of Mr. Rochester keeping his wife prisoner (Brontë, 270). Once Bertha Mason dies and is definitively out of the picture, Jane willingly returns and essentially puts herself in the exact position of Bertha Mason before her. Similarly, Mrs. de Winter joins forces with her husband, rather than fleeing from him, despite the despicable nature of his secret.

Maxim essentially shares the same secret as Bluebeard, although while Bluebeard murdered several wives, Maxim murdered one. In comparison, Mr. Rochester’s secret is less gruesome, although shocking nonetheless. Mr. Rochester’s character also shows signs of a more compassionate nature, than Maxim de Winter. When Bertha Mason sets Thornfield on fire, Mr. Rochester actually attempts to save her, despite the fact that her existence is the only obstacle in the way of his marriage to Jane Eyre, critically injuring himself in the process (Brontë, 365). Maxim, on the other hand, is the one to pull the trigger and murder Rebecca, when she becomes a threat to his happiness.

Essentially both heroines, although initially empowered by this knowledge, join forces with their husbands, thereby criminalizing themselves – at least in the case of Mrs. de Winter – and joining their fates to that of their husbands. Whereas the truth empowers Bluebeards wife, and leads to her ultimate liberation from him, Mrs. de Winter and Jane Eyre willingly exchange their newfound power for a chance at a romantic reunion with their husbands. Consequently, in doing so they put themselves in exactly the same position of the wives before them. This interpretation, inevitably contrasts the popular feminist reading of *Jane Eyre*.

The Problematic Feminist Reading of *Jane Eyre*

Traditionally *Jane Eyre* is read as a feminist novel, and equality between men and women is indeed a prominent topic of the novel. The female point of view, through the character of Jane Eyre, gives voice to the importance of equality, as well as the struggles facing a woman living in a patriarchal society. There is a complexity to Jane’s character, which possesses a rich inner life, and the reader is drawn into her inner struggles and quiet contemplations concerning her life and future, often centering on the topic of the life of women in a male dominated world:

“Women are supposed to be very calm generally: but women feel just as men feel; they need exercise for their faculties and a field for their efforts as much as their brothers do; they suffer from too rigid a restraint, too absolute a stagnation, precisely as men would suffer; and it is narrow-minded in their more privileged fellow-creatures to say that they ought to confine themselves to making puddings and knitting stockings, to playing the piano and embroidering bags. It is thoughtless to condemn them, or laugh at them, if they seek to do more or learn more than custom has pronounced necessary for their sex” (Brontë, 93).

The critique of the oppressed life of women is blatant in this quote from *Jane Eyre*. The issue of inequality is voiced in a reflected manner, critiquing not only the life and position of Victorian women, but addressing this critique directly to the men who hold these limiting views of a woman’s purpose in life, and who by laughing at the mere thought of another life for women, are reinforcing their superiority over women. Similar views are expressed in another often-quoted passage of *Jane Eyre*:

“I am no bird; and no net ensnares me: I am a free human being with an independent will; which I now exert to leave you” (Brontë, 216).

This quote articulates the essential spirit of Jane’s character; demanding to be treated as a free human being, Jane not only emphasizes equality between the sexes, but individuality as well, as an equally important core value. She speaks these words directly to Mr. Rochester, when she believes him to be engaged to Blanche Ingram. This statement made by Jane Eyre, is followed by a proposal from Mr. Rochester, as well as the revelation that he in fact is not, nor ever was, engaged to Miss Ingram. The emphasis on equality for women is voiced via the outspoken and defiant nature of Jane’s character. By her very nature, Jane Eyre is a character that contrasts other submissive female representations. This view of Jane Eyre the character, as well as *Jane Eyre* the novel, is what facilitates the traditional feminist interpretation of the novel. But there is, as previously mentioned, some problematic aspects connected with this reading.

The primary element problematizing a feminist reading of *Jane Eyre* is the representation of Bertha Mason. The first wife of Mr. Rochester is the victimized woman, who is essentially viewed simply as an obstacle in the way of Jane and Mr. Rochester’s happiness. Bertha’s character is robbed of a voice, and is defined purely through the opinions of other characters, primarily that of Mr. Rochester. He, aided by the diagnosis of a doctor, has deemed her a “mad woman” and consequently imprisoned her at Thornfield (Brontë, 261). Mr. Rochester explains his unfortunate circumstances to Jane, and gains her sympathy. The effect of granting Mr. Rochester the power of narrating his version of their unhappy marriage, is that of reinforcing the oppression of Bertha Mason, and through this reinforcing the superiority of men over women. Elke Mettinger-Schartmann deals with this aspect of the novel, in her work *A Breath of Fresh Eyre: Intertextual and Intermedial Reworkings of Jane Eyre* (2007):

“Without the freedom to tell their own stories, the oppressed become the easy prey of the oppressor who fills the silence where the words of the victimized should be heard with distorted stories that must function in untruths and generalities” (Mettinger-Shartmann, 40).

By being imprisoned by her own husband, Bertha is thus denied any shred of the very freedom, which Jane so enthusiastically advocates. Jane Eyre is portrayed as morally grounded as well as an empathetic character, but a noticeable inconsistency, or even a character flaw, is revealed in Jane’s character, in connection with Bertha Mason and the role she is forced to play in facilitating Jane’s own happiness. Jane seems to have little or no sympathy with Bertha, living the sad life of a confined prisoner, at the hands of the very man whom Jane loves. This failure to show sympathy towards Bertha becomes ever more clear when reading *Jane Eyre* in comparison with *Rebecca*, where the lack of compassion towards Rebecca, is overtly present. But disregarding *Rebecca* for a moment, there is a significant event occurring in Jane’s childhood, with no equivalent event in *Rebecca*, which it is necessary to comment on in connection with Jane’s lack of sympathy with Bertha.

Within the first few chapters of *Jane Eyre*, the reader will remember how Jane herself had the experience of being imprisoned, when she was locked in the red room at Gateshead as a child (Brontë, 9). In that situation Jane had a very strong reaction to being confined and having her freedom taken away. The doctor had to be called for, and this event ultimately lead to her leaving Gateshead and taking up residency at the Lowood School. The experience of having been locked in the red room for a night deeply impacted Jane, and even became a somewhat traumatic event in her life. The memories of the night she spent in the red room, haunt her on several occasions either as nightmares or as a reoccurring memory (Brontë, 272). When viewing Bertha’s ten years of confinement in comparison to Jane’s single night of terror, which nonetheless deeply impacted her, the reader cannot help but wonder at Jane’s evident lack of empathy towards Bertha, as well as her lack of even considering her own experience of confinement in relation to Bertha’s.

 In both *Jane Eyre* as well as *Rebecca*, the fundamental lack of compassion and empathy of one woman towards another is evident, problematizing the feminist reading of *Jane Eyre.* Jane exhibits a seeming willingness to be deceived, when it comes to her view of Mr. Rochester. Although Jane is more critical in her view of Mr. Rochester than Mrs. de Winter is of Maxim, and challenges Mr. Rochester by provoking him in the conversations they have, she exhibits an uncharacteristic lack of critical thinking, when it comes to considering what imprisoning his own wife, ultimately driving her to suicide says about Mr. Rochester’s character. When explaining himself, Mr. Rochester attempts to humanize his actions by claiming that he could have done worse, which he considered when contemplating housing her at his other estate, Ferndean Manor:

“Probably those damp walls would soon have eased me of her charge: but to each villain his own vice; and mine is not a tendency to indirect assassination, even of what I most hate” (Brontë, 256).

Indeed Mr. Rochester could have done worse, we see that exemplified in the actions of Maxim de Winter, who took it one step further in eliminating the “threat” of his first wife. But Mr. Rochester’s actions ultimately had the same outcome: The death of his first wife, leaving him free to begin a new marriage. In connection with Bertha’s suicide, we can hardly find Mr. Rochester without fault. But Jane seems oblivious to this fault in Mr. Rochester’s character, although she does at one point reproach him for speaking badly about Bertha:

“‘Sir,’ I interrupted him, ‘you are inexorable for that unfortunate lady: you speak of her with hate – with vindictive antipathy. It is cruel – she cannot help being mad” (Brontë, 257).

The reader will notice that this reproach only regards Mr. Rochester’s way of speaking about Bertha, but not his actions of imprisoning her. This is the prominent blind spot, which Jane exhibits towards Mr. Rochester; a characteristic shared by the protagonist of *Rebecca*. Mrs. de Winter furthermore neglects to reflect on the despicable nature of Maxim’s crime, or to put her husband’s horrific actions into any sort of context that would ultimately reveal him as the villain he is. Just as Mrs. de Winter uncritically believes Maxim’s portrayal of Rebecca, Jane unquestionably accepts the description of Bertha as “mad”. Jane’s lack of a reaction to Mr. Rochester’s choice of imprisoning Bertha, leads us to infer that she apparently views the questionable diagnosis of Bertha’s mental health as an acceptable reason for his imprisonment of her; never considering whether Bertha’s behavior of biting, setting beds on fire etc. could in fact be reactions to her imprisoned existence, rather than symptoms of her apparent madness. This blindness or naiveté, while being uncharacteristic in Jane’s character, is not surprising to encounter in the character of Mrs. de Winter. As previously mentioned Mrs. de Winter’s character is very different from the character of Jane in this respect. Mrs. de Winter acts comparable to a child, attempting to obey her “father”, without upsetting him. Although the revelation of Rebecca’s murder forces her to mature, at least to some extent, she remains in the role of the submissive female, unquestionably supporting any actions of her husband, the superior male figure in her life. Mrs. de Winter never, at least not overtly so, considers the possibility that Maxim, if he somehow grew tired of her, would kill her too, as he has proved himself capable of once already. The only aspect of the novel that could possibly be interpreted as Mrs. de Winter having some kind of fear of Maxim, concerns the efforts she makes, not to upset him (Du Maurier, 7). But these efforts seem born of consideration for his wellbeing, more than a fear or contemplation of what he might do to her, if he was to become upset. Instead she comforts him, as if he were the victim in his relationship with Rebecca, even offering him a very morbid sort of reassurance of his capabilities in sinking the boat with Rebecca’s body inside:

“‘She sank too close in,’ said Maxim. ‘I meant to take her right out in the bay. They would never have found her there. She was too close in.’

‘It was the ship,’ I said; ‘it would not have happened but for the ship. No one would have known’” (Du Maurier, 316).

Similarly to Mrs. de Winter, Jane finds herself in the situation of second wife, hardly considering the implications the actions of her future husband against his first wife, might have on her own life, should he decide that he saw some sign of madness in her character as well. Unlike Mrs. de Winter, Jane is offered some kind of reassurance by Mr. Rochester that he would not in fact treat her in the manner that he treated Bertha:

“Every atom of your flesh is as dear to me as my own: in pain and sickness it would still be dear. Your mind is my treasure, and if it were broken, it would be my treasure still: if you raved, my arms should confine you, and not a strait waistcoat – your grasp, even in fury, would have a charm for me: if you flew at me as wildly as that woman did this morning, I should receive you in an embrace at least as fond as it would be restrictive. I should not shrink from you with disgust as I did from her (…)” (Brontë, 257)

Although this statement was addressed to Jane, as a reassurance that he would never imprison her as he did Bertha, it simultaneously undermines his own argument of imprisoning Bertha in the first place. He claims that he imprisoned her, due to her alleged “madness”; nevertheless he assures Jane that the same characteristics in her would never cause him to treat her in a similar manner. That argument seems to unveil the fact that Mr. Rochester’s treatment of Bertha, which ultimately caused her to commit suicide, was a result of his apparent personal dislike of her, rather than being a result of any medical diagnosis, however valid. But this thought does not occur to Jane. Both Jane Eyre and Mrs. de Winter view their relationships to their respective husbands completely separately from their husbands’ previous marriages. They show a noticeable lack of sympathy towards the first wives, as well as exhibiting no moral scruples over the way tin which their own happiness was facilitated via the deaths of these women. Through their lack of outrage, Jane Eyre and Mrs. de Winter excuse the past behavior of their husbands’, embracing another woman’s Bluebeard as their own Byronic hero.

These examples, which problematize a feminist reading, are thus present in both novels. But unlike *Jane Eyre*, *Rebecca* lays no “claim” to being a feminist novel, nor is it commonly read as such. Rather it is created in close relation to the formula of the Female Gothic, enlarging several of the basic plot- elements, in a way that emphasizes some of the problematic issues connected with the Female Gothic. Firstly, in *Rebecca,* the silencing of the first wife is brought about in the ultimate way, by death. Secondly, the Byronic hero is transformed into a murderer, challenging the romantic reader’s willingness to excuse the actions of the “hero”, thus straddling the fence between the representation of the male as Byronic hero and as Bluebeard. Finally, the actions of the protagonist, in willingly condoning the sacrifice of another woman’s life, and siding with the oppressor and murderer, in favor of her own vain attempt at a romantic union, underlines the problematic aspects of the Female Gothic.

The way these elements are portrayed in *Rebecca*, may or may not be the result of an intentional agenda on part of Du Maurier, but in either case the mirroring of the story of *Jane Eyre*, together with the emphasis and enlargement of the problematic elements of the novel, cause the reader to reevaluate the interpretation of *Jane Eyre,* especially concerning the traditional feminist reading of the work. Reading *Rebecca* as encouraging, deliberately or not, a critical reexamination of the interpretation of *Jane Eyre*, allows us to view *Rebecca* as a critical commentary of *Jane Eyre*. In doing so, the nature of the transtextual relationship existing between the two novels, must according to the terminology of Genette, be considered metatextual.

Conclusion

There seems to be an inherent contrast within the Female Gothic, which has been commented on by feminist critics. In the Female Gothic we find on the one hand, the expression of “the terror and rage that women experience within patriarchal social arrangements, especially marriage” (Williams, 136). On the other hand, these are the constraints the heroine of the female Gothic ends up living under through the marriage she enters in the “happy” ending. This contrast can puzzle the reader seeing as literary works following the formula of the Female Gothic, seem to both criticize the confinement of the wife within the marriage, while portraying marriage as the primary goal of the female protagonist. Marriage is thus, in these novels, portrayed as both an imprisonment to the heroine, while providing safety to her. This contrasting portrayal of women and marriage is present both in *Jane Eyre* and in *Rebecca.* In *Jane Eyre* the critique of male dominated social conventions is explicitly verbally stated by the protagonist, as well as being a primary topic in a larger part of the novel; but this critique seems to be contradicted in the later part of the novel, as well as by the way in which the novel ends. Early on in the novel Jane advocates for a fuller life for women, similar to the life of men (Brontë, 93), yet this is contrasted in the later part of the novel, where she experiences guilt over her own ambitions in life (Brontë, 304). Her cousin, St. John, challenges her to do more with her life, than what he calls “maid’s work” (Brontë, 334). Jane is upset by St. John’s lack of appreciation for the housework she has done at Moor House, not realizing that he sees a potential in her, for more than being a housewife. As St. John’s encouragement grows more incessant, he reveals a more possessive side to his character, and Jane rejects him in accordance with her beliefs, of not wanting to be treated as an object to be attained by a man (Brontë, 346). But it seems nevertheless contradictory, that Jane rejects a life with a man who supports her ambition and potential, in favor of a life as a housewife and nurse. This aspect of Jane’s character is often overlooked, in a feminist interpretation of the novel.

In *Rebecca*, unlike in *Jane Eyre*, marriage is not portrayed as the climactic, primary goal of the heroine, facilitating a “happily ever after”. Instead marriage occurs in the beginning of the novel, and the ceremony itself is spoken of as more of a practicality than a romantic union (Du Maurier, 61). Hereafter the fears and anxieties, which the protagonist experiences throughout the novel, occur *during* her marriage, conveying a portrayal of marriage that is less than perfect, complete with worries and disagreements between husband and wife. *Rebecca* thus deviates from the formula of the female Gothic, as well as the fairytale narrative, and does not provide the traditional happy ending. Furthermore, in *Rebecca* the fight for equality for women is not a prominent topic, as it is in *Jane Eyre*. Perhaps the closest we get to discussing the topic, is Mrs. de Winter asking to be treated as a wife instead of a child (Du Maurier, 227). Consequently, in *Rebecca*, we do not to the same extent have the contrasting portrayal of marriage as both a prison and a prize. Rather, the marriage is, although perhaps not solely a prison, at least a disappointment to the protagonist already from the start, despite her attempts to convince herself, as well as the reader, otherwise. We see this in how she talks herself into thinking Maxim’s proposal was romantic, (Du Maurier, 63), and how she feels guilty about being happy by herself at Manderley, when Maxim is away (Du Maurier, 169). This strengthens the impression of the narrator as unreliable, and this unreliability when viewed as a trait in Mrs. de Winter’s character, where she tries to convince herself of her own happiness, makes her seem all the more unhappy in her marriage, towards the end of the novel. The woman’s role within the confinements of marriage is thus, in *Rebecca*, not verbalized as in *Jane Eyre*, but rather shown during the course of the novel, especially through the unreliable narrating voice of Mrs. de Winter.

Most readings of *Jane Eyre* tend to focus on the equality, which is gained between Jane Eyre and Mr. Rochester, before entering into the marriage; this element serving to support a strictly feminist reading of the novel. But we might question this: is it truly equality that Jane gains, or is it merely a false sense of equality, which can easily be stripped away within the confinement of marriage? Jane achieves equality in the sense that she is able to bring her own money to the marriage, and that Mr. Rochester ends up relying on her to take care of him. But as a result of marrying him, she actually put herself in the exact same position as that of his first wife. Bertha Mason also had her own money before she was married to Mr. Rochester; in fact, we are told that this money was the main reason for Mr. Rochester to marry her in the first place (Brontë, 260). But her money, in the end, only turned out to benefit Mr. Rochester, while she suffered a terrible fate. Consequently, we argue that although the power balance might be tipped in her favor, Jane does in fact not become an equal to Mr. Rochester. He regains his eyesight (Brontë, 384), his blindness, usually interpreted as a contributing factor in facilitating the sense of equality between the two, is thus revoked. Ultimately, seeing that in the male dominated structures of Victorian England, the husband would have the power over his wife, Jane Eyre willingly gives up whatever equality she had gained, when entering into the marriage. Her fate is consequently, in the end, determinable by the whims of her husband, as was the case of Bertha Mason. In actuality, despite the happy ending of *Jane Eyre*, this leaves Jane in the same position as Bertha Mason, as is the case of Mrs. de Winter in regard to Rebecca before her.

In thus pointing out the aspects of *Jane Eyre*, which render a feminist reading problematic, we are contesting the widely agreed upon interpretation of the novel. In this regard, it is important to keep in mind that we do in fact acknowledge the feminist agenda present in the novel, as well as join in the applaud of *Jane Eyre* as an iconic classical architext within feminist literature. What we have referred to as the problematic aspects of a feminist reading of *Jane Eyre*, surface especially when read in connection with *Rebecca*, though not all literary critics would agree with us. The work *A Breath of Fresh Eyre: Intertextual and Intermedial Reworkings of Jane Eyre* edited by Margarete Rubic Elke Mettinger-Schartmann, features an essay by Verena-Susanna Nungesser titled “From Thornfield Hall to Manderley and Beyond: *Jane Eyre* and *Rebecca* as Transformations of the Fairy Tale, the Novel of Development and the Gothic Novel”. The essay provides a comparative reading of the two novels, in which Nungesser references Angela Carter for having deemed *Rebecca* a shameless reduplication of *Jane Eyre*’s plot (Mettinger-Schartmann, 209). Nungesser reaffirms this view in her essay, not commenting on the similarities of Jane and Bertha’s situation, although comparing the description of Jane to that of Bertha:

 “Jane, who does not know about Rochester’s first marriage, is portrayed similarly to Bertha. Characterized as animal-like, mythologized, and demonized, she embodies an early version of Bertha” (Mettinger-Schartmann, 210).

The similarities of the situations of the two female characters seem to be overlooked due to the problematic effect this has on the feminist reading of *Jane Eyre*. Furthermore, the contrasting portrayals of femininity are described as follows:

“Both Bertha and Rebecca embody sexuality and represent the dark double of the young protagonists, who are still in search of their identities. And both have to pay for their rebellion against the conventions of their time: Bertha has become mad and is imprisoned; Rebecca suffers from abdominal cancer and is killed by her husband, who could no longer tolerate her numerous affairs and the defamation of Manderley and the de Winter family” (Mettinger-Schartmann, 209).

Although Nungesser acknowledges the characters of Rebecca and Bertha as representing the sexually liberated side of Jane and Mrs. de Winter’s characters, she does not comment on the death of the characters as colliding with the feminist reading of *Jane Eyre*.

In addition, the silenced voice of the first wives, as an important element to notice, is simply overlooked in this reading. Instead Nungesser places faith in the factuality of Mr. Rochester and Maxim’s descriptions of these women, ignoring the issue of reliability inherently connected with the characterizations of the first wives as narrated by the oppressors themselves (Mettinger-Schartmann, 211). Furthermore, the analysis by Nungesser affirms the characterization of Mrs. de Winter as the ideal representation of femininity, declaring in her description of both Jane Eyre and Mrs. de Winter: “Their true beauty lies within and shines through as soon as it is discovered”, reinforcing the negative characterizations of Rebecca and Bertha, by stating that “Bertha’s animal-like physicality and uncontrollable madness is even surpassed by Rebecca’s nymphomania” (Mettinger-Schartmann, 211). Consequently, Nungesser’s essay seems to affirm the view of *Rebecca* as a reduplication of *Jane* *Eyre*, without commenting on a possible effect of the reading of *Rebecca* on that of *Jane Eyre* or vice versa.

 “This simple pattern, which can be traced back to earlier literary texts, is re-set in two comparable but nevertheless different ways demonstrating that the similarities of *Jane Eyre* and *Rebecca* go beyond the plot and its constitutive elements. Brontë and du Maurier consciously incorporate elements of fairy tale, Gothic fiction, and the novel of development in their novels” (Mettinger-Schartmann, 212).

Nungesser’s comparative reading of *Jane Eyre* and *Rebecca* seems to be largely representative of the existing connected readings of the works. These readings tend to center on discussing whether or not the plot similarities are strong enough to consider *Rebecca* a copying of *Jane Eyre,* but lack a consideration of the possible effects that a comparative reading of the novels could have on the interpretations of each novel respectively. Thus these readings establish the existence of an intertextual link between the novels, but fail to discuss the nature of this intertextuality.

As seen in our previous analysis, we have ventured to argue a possible effect of a comparative reading of the two novels; aware that the effect of this reading finds fault in a *strictly* feminist reading of *Jane Eyre*, and thus is somewhat in opposition to the traditional interpretation of the novel. When considering the traditional interpretation of *Jane Eyre* as a feminist work of literature, we acknowledge this interpretation as highly valid in many regards, especially considering the time of publication, and the impact this classical work of literature consequently had, in paving the way for women writers following in Brontë’s footsteps. However, our reading of *Rebecca*, and the consequent comparing of the novels, points to aspects of *Jane Eyre*, which are problematic in a strictly feminist interpretation. The primary element, here referred to, is the silenced voice of the first wife, whose death facilitates the happy ending for Jane Eyre. In a feminist reading this element of the novel is often overlooked, in favor of interpreting Jane as gaining equality with Mr. Rochester, before marrying him. As a counterargument to this popular view, we have established that Jane’s gained equality can be considered a false sense of equality, which she actually forfeits in entering into the marriage. Furthermore, in comparing *Jane Eyre* and *Rebecca* we found that the young protagonists showed a noticeable lack of sympathy for the first wives, acting in a way that condoned the oppressive actions of their husbands against their first wives. These elements, which are present in both novels, are the primary elements, which problematize the feminist reading of *Jane Eyre*.

In determining the nature of the intertextual link – or transtextual link, using Genette’s term -, which exists between the novels, we have explored several topics of importance, concerning the novels. In exploring the plot similarities and the mirroring of the story, we established how the transtextuality of the two novels could be viewed as hypertextual, viewing *Jane Eyre* as hypotext, and *Rebecca* as hypertext. Furthermore, by placing the novels within the genre-specific context of gothic literature, we established that the nature of the transtextual link between the novels could be viewed as architextual. In this process we also uncovered the transtextual influence of fairytales, especially of the fairytale *Bluebeard*, as an architext, on both *Jane Eyre* and *Rebecca*. Finally, we argued how some of the plot elements of *Jane* *Eyre* have been enlarged or enhanced in *Rebecca*, in a way that renders a strictly feminist reading of *Jane Eyre* problematic. In this respect, we determined that the transtextual relationship between the novels could be considered metatextual. We can thus not assign the transtextuality between the two novels to only one of Genette’s categories of transtextuality. Rather we conclude that the transtextuality can be viewed as being hypertextual, architextual and metatextual, and in doing so show that *Rebecca* can be read as a feminist critique of *Jane Eyre*.

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Summary

This master’s thesis investigates the nature of the intertextual relationship, existing between Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* (1847) and the novel *Rebecca* (1938) by Daphne du Maurier. The theoretic framework for this work centers on Genette’s five types of transtextuality: intertextuality, paratextuality, metatextuality, hypertextuality and architextuality. The analysis concentrates on exploring four main topics of relevance, in the attempt to show that *Rebecca* can be read as a feminist critique of *Jane Eyre*.

Firstly, we have established how the basic plot of *Jane Eyre* has been mirrored in *Rebecca*, whilst also discussing the differences between the two novels. This incomplete mirroring is discussed within the context of Genette’s hypertextuality and metatextuality. Secondly, we have explored the Gothic Tradition as literary genre, especially focusing on the division of the Gothic into a Male and a Female Gothic. Reading *Rebecca* as a product of the formula of the Female Gothic, we discuss Genette’s architextuality. In the third section of our analysis, we have discussed the male and female representations in *Jane Eyre* and *Rebecca*, especially focusing on the contrasting portrayals of femininity, as well as the male as “other” in the Female Gothic. Within this section we also discuss the influence of the fairytale genre on both novels, especially emphasizing the fairytale *Bluebeard* in this regard. In the final section of the analysis, we have discussed the problematic aspects of a purely feminist reading of *Jane Eyre*, pointing out how certain elements present in the novel counter such a reading, and how these have been emphasized or enlarged in *Rebecca*, which validates a reading of *Rebecca* as a feminist critique of *Jane Eyre.*

In the conclusion we briefly discuss the ambivalent portrayal of women and marriage in the Female Gothic. We also contrast our reading of the intertextual relationship between *Jane Eyre* and *Rebecca*, with that of the essay “From Thornfield Hall to Manderley and Beyond: *Jane Eyre* and *Rebecca* as Transformations of the Fairy Tale, the Novel of Development and the Gothic Novel” by Verena-Susanna Nungesser. Furthermore, we finally conclude by determining that the intertextual link existing between *Jane Eyre* and *Rebecca* cannot be described purely as belonging to one of Genette’s categories of intertextuality, but rather encompass features inherent in at least three of his categories. We conclude by determining that we have shown how *Rebecca* can be read as a feminist critique of *Jane Eyre*, while acknowledging the validity of a feminist reading of *Jane Eyre*, when seen in connection with the time of publication, and validating the importance of the novel for women writers following in the footsteps of Charlotte Brontë.

1. In the following analysis, the protagonist of *Rebecca* will be referred to as ‘Mrs. de Winter’, seeing that her name is never mentioned in the novel, and once she is married to Maxim, she is continuously referred to strictly as Mrs. de Winter. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)