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**PATRIARCHAL HAUNTINGS:
RE-READING VILLAINY AND
GENDER IN DAPHNE DU
MAURIER'S *REBECCA***

Auba Llompart Pons

Supervised by Dr Sara Martín Alegre

Departament de Filologia Anglesa i de Germanística

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1. INTRODUCTION

English writer Daphne du Maurier (1907 – 1989), author of novels, plays and short stories, has been described as “an entertainer born of entertainers”¹ (Stockwell, 1955: 214), who appeals to “the average reader looking for a temporary escape from the perils of this mortal life” (Stockwell, 1955: 221). Her best-known novel, *Rebecca*, first published in 1938, and adapted many times for the theatre, the cinema and the television², has proved to be “an enduring classic of popular fiction” (Watson, 2005: 13). The most successful of all the adaptations that have been made until the present day continues to be Alfred Hitchcock’s Academy Award-winning 1940 film *Rebecca*, which in fact outstripped the popularity of the novel itself. On the other hand, du Maurier’s novel has inspired two sequels: Susan Hill’s *Mrs de Winter* (1993) and Sally Beauman’s *Rebecca’s Tale* (2001), as well as Maureen Freely’s contemporary version of the story, set in the 1960s, and entitled *The Other Rebecca* (1996). This recurrence in popular culture has triggered the novel’s transition “from bestseller, to cult novel, to cultural popular classic” (Beauman, 2003: vii).

Described by the author herself as “a sinister tale about a woman who marries a widower [...], psychological and rather macabre” (du Maurier in Beauman, 2003: vi), the main plot in *Rebecca*, concerning a young woman who falls in love with an older man that hides a secret related to his previous wife, echoes that of Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* (1847), which is considered to be “its most important and canonical

¹ Daphne du Maurier was the daughter of the famous actor-manager Gerald du Maurier and the actress Muriel Beaumont, as well as the granddaughter of the writer and *Punch* cartoonist George du Maurier.

² According to Watson (2005: 41), “Du Maurier herself dramatized [*Rebecca*] for the London stage in 1939, and it was also adapted by Orson Welles for radio broadcast. In future years, it would be made into an opera.” Another adaptation of the novel was made in 1997 for the television, directed by Jim O’Brien; and, in 2006, it was made into a German-language musical, written by Michael Kunze (lyrics) and Sylvester Levay (music). The most recent adaptation of du Maurier’s novel is the Bollywood version entitled *Anamika* (2008), written and directed by Anant Mahadevan. (See Internet Movie Data Base: <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0885398/>)

precursor” (Watson, 2005: 13). As in the case of Brontë’s novel, criticism about *Rebecca* is divided mainly between those who read it as a (Gothic) love story, in which a virtuous woman (the second Mrs de Winter) triumphs over an evil one (Rebecca, the first Mrs de Winter) by winning the love of a gentleman (Maxim de Winter); and those who identify the novel as a re-writing of the “Bluebeard” tale, in which the ‘gentleman’ actually turns out to be a villain, who has murdered his previous wife unjustifiably. As regards the former interpretation, this is how the novel was originally advertised and sold. According to Beauman (2003: vii), “*Rebecca* was touted to booksellers as an ‘exquisite love story’ with a ‘brilliantly created atmosphere and suspense’. It was promoted and sold, in short, as a gothic romance.” This traditional reading of du Maurier’s novel as romance³, particularly as a *Gothic* romance⁴, was very much emphasized by Alfred Hitchcock’s adaptation. As Watson (2005: 43) states, “Hitchcock [...] makes the novel more unambiguously romantic.” To achieve this effect, not only did Hitchcock “mak[e] Maxim more important and more sympathetic” by “rewriting [...] Maxim’s murder of Rebecca as an unfortunate and practically self-inflicted accident for which he feels irrationally guilty” (Watson, 2005: 43) , but also introduced the following alterations:

The frame of the husband and wife [...] embracing in front of the flames of Manderley insists that the marriage is made and saved with the final extinction of Rebecca’s double, Mrs Danvers, and with the extinction of Rebecca’s troublesome and wandering sexuality, symbolized by the initials curling into flame on the burning bed. [...] Crucially, there is no suggestion in the film that the couple will be punished by exile and childlessness. (Watson, 2005: 44)

³ Here, ‘romance’ is understood as “the development of a love relationship, usually between a man and a woman” (Cawelti, 1976: 41) which “seduce[s] [its] female readers into ‘good feelings’ about the dominion of men and the primacy of marriage.” (Auerbach, 2002: 102)

⁴ ‘Gothic romance’ is understood here as a genre which “uses mystery as an occasion for bringing two potential lovers together, for placing temporary obstacles in the path of their relationship, and ultimately for making its solution a means of clearing up the separation between the two lovers.” (Cawelti, 1976: 41)

These changes in the film are significant insofar as they have influenced the readers' and the critics' reading of the story. Even recently, some critics, such as Robert J. Yanal, still impose the film's more 'romantic' vision on du Maurier's text. As Yanal (2000: 79) affirms, comparing the beginning and the ending of the story,

[Mrs de Winter] was a servile and reluctant companion to Mrs Van Hopper; she will henceforth be an active and ardent wife to Maxim de Winter. She will perhaps continue in her role as companion, though at least Maxim treats her better than Mrs Van Hopper did. [She] has come to know who she is. [...] When [she] in effect *decides* that she will be Maxim de Winter's faithful wife, she allows his love for her to show itself.

This reading of *Rebecca* as romance, which led some critics to describe du Maurier's novel as escapism, which lacked the "relationship between literature and ideas, between literature and society" (Stockwell, 1955: 221), has been recently revised and rejected by feminist critics, who affirm that "*Rebecca* is only 'romance' if the reader confines him – or herself to the [unreliable] narrator's viewpoint. From her point of view, her story *is* ultimately romance, a love-story, with a reasonably happy ending." (Watson, 2005: 39) On the other hand, if readers question the unreliable judgements of the narrator, then the novel seems to be telling quite a different story: according to feminist criticism, *Rebecca* is a novel about the ill-treatment that women suffer in the hands of men, and Hitchcock's more romantic adaptation is "a masculine re-reading of a woman's novel" (Watson, 2005: 44), whose alteration of the original text "realigns the film from the feminine point of view [...] to something more mainstream and masculine." (Watson, 2005: 44) However, this feminist interpretation of du Maurier's novel has consisted mainly of an inversion of the main characters' roles. If the traditional reading sustained that the dead wife, Rebecca, was the villainess that interfered with the harmony of the primary heterosexual couple, feminist readers claim that Rebecca is a Gothic heroine, and the husband, Maxim, a Bluebeard figure, who not

only murdered his first wife, but also oppresses and alienates the second Mrs de Winter.

Following this line, Nigro (2000: 1), for instance, proposes the following reading:

The common assumption about Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca* figures the first Mrs. de Winter as a secretly conniving manipulator who had convinced the world that she was as morally flawless as she was beautiful. According to the second Mrs. de Winter, the narrator of the novel, Maxim murdered Rebecca justifiably: only he knew the true, corrupt Rebecca. What if, however, Maxim is the one who is lying, and Rebecca was as good as reputation held her, if his jealousy was the true motive for her murder?

Thus, from a feminist perspective, reading Maxim as a Gothic villain implies the emergence of Rebecca's character as a feminist heroine, "a woman whose worst crime [...] was 'simply that she resisted male definition, asserting her right to define herself and her sexual desires.'" (Wood in Nigro, 2000: 1)⁵

I agree with the feminists' idea that *Rebecca* should be read either as a "failed romance"⁶, as Radway (1987: 157) puts it, or not as a romance at all, because "[it] signally fails to deliver happy heterosexual romance with its conventional promise of domesticity and procreation" (Watson, 2005: 44). However, when it comes to analysing villainy in the novel, the reversal of gender roles introduced by feminist critics is, from my point of view, as essentialist as the traditional reading. Furthermore, the revaluation of Rebecca as a heroine who rejects patriarchy is not entirely true to Daphne du Maurier's highly ambiguous text. I find that both previous interpretations encounter some problems when they try to identify the real source of villainy in the novel: it is highly problematic and unconvincing to argue that Maxim murdered his first wife justifiably - as the traditional reading sustains - and that "the novel is predicated on the

⁵ The original quotation can be found in: Robin Wood. *Hitchcock's Films Revisited*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1989.

⁶ Radway distinguishes between 'ideal romances', which end with a promise of patriarchy, and 'failed romances'. As she explains about the latter, "these less than satisfying romances also differ from their more successful counterparts by a surprisingly different internal narrative structure. They begin and end in the same way." (Radway, 1987: 171) Furthermore, these 'failed romances' also deal with the problems of patriarchy. Thus, Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca* could, in a sense, belong to this category.

assumption that Maxim could only have killed a woman like Rebecca” (Meyers, 2001: 38), i.e., a *vicious* woman. On the other hand, it is equally problematic to try to prove that Rebecca heroically challenges her villainous husband and his patriarchal rules, and that her “only real crime was in insisting on her right to individuality” (Nigro, 2000: 7). Du Maurier’s actual text resists both interpretations. Therefore, my main question here regards why criticism of this novel has not considered the possibility that simply *all* the main characters in the novel might be corrupt in some way, and that this corruption may come from a more potent source of evil that affects all of them, turning them into hypocrites, liars, and potential villains. In this dissertation, I want to argue that, rather than any specific character, the ultimate Gothic villain in Daphne du Maurier’s novel is the patriarchal system itself – represented by Maxim’s oppressive mansion, Manderley, and understood as a hierarchical system based on relationships of power which favour the hegemonic group – and that it is both the male and female characters’ inability to fulfil the roles imposed by this system that leads them towards hypocrisy, hysteria, and/or crime.

I want to undertake this revision of the feminist reading of *Rebecca* for two main reasons, which are in fact interrelated: (1) at a textual level, I believe this reading overlooks the ambiguous nature of Daphne du Maurier’s novel, and, from a Gothic Studies perspective, it provides a rather simplified view of villainy; and (2) at an extra-textual level, this reading (not only of du Maurier’s novel but of literature in general) does not break with the assumption that abuses of power are gender-based, which has at least two main consequences, both of them undesirable: it encourages the female perception of man as ‘the Other’ - i.e. the enemy - , a posture which perpetuates inequality; and it also naturalizes women as victims. According to Meyers (2001: 57): “by naturalizing heterosexuality as a Gothic gender system, [...] [the] cultural feminist

discourse potentially leave[s] us suspended in a seemingly permanent state of victimization and paralyzing paranoia.”

The reasons why Rebecca cannot be considered *the* villainess of the novel have already been pointed out by feminist critics (within the field of Gothic Studies), who claim that she is actually a victim of her husband, and that there is no possible justification Maxim’s crime. As a consequence, my starting point here will be Maxim de Winter, the patriarch himself, the character that has emerged as the new villain of *Rebecca*, but has been very much left at the margins of criticism at the same time.

In terms of the politics of gender, the most important legacy of the *Jane Eyre* plot is [...] the structural division of ‘woman’ into the good, passionate, but innocent new girl and the evil, dangerous first wife. The point that needs to be emphasized though is that this splitting of woman means that *it is the man who remains at the narrative centre*. (Chow, 1999/2000: 146)

I intend to analyse the patriarchal figure in *Rebecca* in order to determine in what ways this character *is* indeed evil, and also to what extent patriarchy can be considered the ultimate villain in du Maurier’s novel. As a means to support my thesis, I intend to read the novel from a Gothic Studies perspective, focusing mainly on how villainy is articulated in terms of the relationships between the victimizers and the victims, while taking into account, at the same time, a crucial question in the field of Gender Studies (and, particularly, in Masculinity Studies): the idea that, as Michael Kimmel (2004) argues, being a man is not necessarily the same as being in a powerful position within patriarchy. Whereas in section 2 my main concern will be how Maxim is indeed a re-writing of Bluebeard, in section 3 I will proceed to analyse other aspects of his character, which, in my view, show that he cannot be considered the *only* villain in Daphne du Maurier’s novel. With this, I hope to transmit the idea that villainy in *Rebecca* is not directly related to gender but to the patriarchal abuses of power of those characters who find themselves in powerful positions, in terms not only of gender but also class.

2. REVISITING BLUEBEARD'S CASTLE: MAXIM DE WINTER'S DOUBLE MURDER AND DU MAURIER'S RE-WORKING OF THE FEMICIDAL VILLAIN

This section is meant to analyse those elements in Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca* that characterise Maxim de Winter as a Gothic villain and, particularly, as a re-writing of the folkloric character, Bluebeard. This interpretation, which was undermined by the popularity of Alfred Hitchcock's 1940 film adaptation but stressed by feminist criticism, will constitute the basis on which I intend to further analyse Maxim's character in section 3 with the aim of finding the ultimate source of villainy in du Maurier's novel. Since it is mainly from Maxim's relationship with his two wives that feminist critics and readers have deduced that he is a villain, I will focus on what Beauman calls Maxim's "double murder" (2003: xi): the way in which he psychologically 'murders' his second wife, while hiding the secret of his physical murder of Rebecca.

"Bluebeard", a tale written by Charles Perrault in 1698 about an aristocrat who kills his wives and hides the corpses in a small chamber of his castle, has been re-written numerous times in literature and cinema, and has also been adapted for the stage⁷. As Tatar (2004: 8) points out, "in the 1940s Hollywood witnessed the premieres of over a dozen movies drawing on the Bluebeard story."⁸ Nevertheless, as I have mentioned, Alfred Hitchcock's adaptation of *Rebecca* (1940), in which Maxim (Laurence Olivier) has not murdered his first wife, undermines the "Bluebeard" subtext

⁷ In 1866, *Barbe-bleu*, an Opéra-bouffe was composed by Jacques Offenbach with a libretto by Henri Meilhac and Ludovic Halévy, and in 1911 Béla Bartók composed the opera *Bluebeard's Castle* with a libretto by Béla Balázs.

⁸ Ernst Lubitsch's comedy *Bluebeard's Eighth Wife* (1938), Alfred Hitchcock's *Suspicion* (1941), *Shadow of a Doubt* (1943), *Spellbound* (1945) and *Notorious* (1946), Robert Stevenson's adaptation of *Jane Eyre* (1944), George Cukor's *Gaslight* (1944), Edgar G. Ulmer's *Bluebeard* (1944), and Fritz Lang's *Secret Beyond the Door* (1948), among others, are all re-writings of the "Bluebeard" tale.

of its literary source, and turns the story into a Cinderella tale in which a humble girl, Mrs de Winter (Joan Fontaine) has to overcome the ill-treatment which is inflicted on her by evil women – Mrs Van Hopper (Florence Bates), Mrs Danvers (Judith Anderson) and the memory of Rebecca, the late Mrs de Winter - , who are determined to deprive her of a happy married life. According to Edwards (2006: 43),

The Hays Office forced a crucial change upon the presentation of Maxim de Winter, who, in order for the film to pass production code standards, had to be punished for murdering his wife⁹. SIP [Selznick International Pictures]'s solution was to make the death an apparent accident, thus bypassing the Hays Office's concerns and building the appeal of the character.

On the other hand, in literature, Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847) already offers a revision of Bluebeard in the character of Edward Rochester, whose mad wife Bertha Mason is locked in a secret chamber of his mansion, Thornfield Hall. As Jane herself remarks as she wanders in the third floor, it looks "like a corridor in Bluebeard's castle" (Brontë, 1994: 108). However, a more attentive reading brings Brontë's novel closer to "Beauty and the Beast" than to "Bluebeard". Unlike the situation in *Rebecca*, in *Jane Eyre*, the initial ugliness of Mr Rochester vanishes as Jane acquires a better knowledge of her lover and as she learns to forgive his 'Beastly' past. This process of transformation culminates with marriage and romantic love, whereas *Rebecca*, like "Bluebeard", begins with marriage rather than ending with it. In du Maurier's novel the husband undergoes a process of degradation, which starts with his selfish marriage to the nameless narrator of the novel, becomes more intense with his treatment of the new Mrs de Winter in *Manderley*, and culminates with his confession of Rebecca's murder. As Nungesser (2007: 215) observes, comparing Maxim to his counterpart in Brontë's novel,

⁹ According to Watson (2005: 43), the Motion Picture Code and the Hays Office, "declared that no murderer should go unpunished in a film."

At first sight, the character of Maxim de Winter seems to echo the one of Rochester. A closer look, however, rather reveals a likeness to Bluebeard than to the Beast. From the very beginning, there is something uncanny about the nobleman. Du Maurier – unlike Hitchcock – inverts the romantic idea of true love making a change for good possible by referring much more to the ‘Bluebeard’-tale than to ‘Beauty and the Beast’.

Bluebeard is, therefore, the main folkloric reference to understand Maxim’s character. The first time Maxim is introduced, Mrs de Winter describes him thus: “he belonged to a walled city of the fifteenth century [...]. 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” (15)¹⁰. This first description of Maxim as a medieval-looking man “who, cloaked and secret, walked a corridor by night” (18) already takes us back to his folktale precursor, who is in fact believed to be based on Gilles de Rais, a fifteenth-century Breton nobleman and alleged serial murderer of children¹¹. This analogy between the two characters – Maxim de Winter and Bluebeard - becomes evident when the notion of the forbidden knowledge is introduced and it prepares us for the revelation of the fact that, like Bluebeard, Maxim hides a dark secret. In the next part of this section I intend to focus on how Maxim’s relationship with his second wife echoes the one of Bluebeard and his last wife, and especially on how the prohibition to acquire forbidden knowledge plays a crucial part in alienating the second Mrs de Winter.

¹⁰ Du Maurier, Daphne, *Rebecca*. London: Virago Press, 2003. Subsequent quotations in this dissertation are all from the same edition.

¹¹ Actually, the identification between Gilles de Rais and Bluebeard probably comes from the fact that the former’s two first attempts to get married were frustrated by the death of the intended brides.

2.1. The Identity Crisis of Bluebeard's Second Wife: Psychological Destruction and Alienation in Manderley

Rebecca, like 'Bluebeard', begins with the marriage of a rich aristocrat to a naive, inexperienced, young woman, who in this case is also the unreliable narrator of the story. From the very beginning, the hastiness and the coldness of the gentleman's marriage proposal raise the question of whether it is a marriage for love, as the narrator would have as believe:

'Either you go to America with Mrs Van Hopper or you come home to Manderley with me.'
'Do you mean you want a secretary or something?'
'No, I'm asking you to marry me, you little fool.' (57)

The first answer to this question is provided in the novel by Mrs Van Hopper - the rich American woman for whom the narrator works as a companion at the beginning of the story - when she scornfully says to the new Mrs de Winter: "you know why he is marrying you, don't you? You haven't flattered yourself he's in love with you? The fact is that empty house got on his nerves to such an extent he nearly went off his head. He admitted as much before you came into the room. He just can't go on living there alone..." (67). Mrs Van Hopper fulfils a role which is similar to that of evil stepmothers in folk tales and, like her predecessors, her reaction is, first and foremost, an envious response to Mrs de Winter's apparent luck. Nevertheless, her statement rings true if we take into account that, only some pages before, the narrator considers the following:

He [Maxim] had not said anything yet about being in love. No time perhaps. It was all so hurried at the breakfast table. Marmalade, and coffee, and that tangerine. No time. The tangerine was very bitter. No, he had not said anything about being in love. Just that we would be married. Short and definite, very original. Original proposals were much better. More genuine. Not like other people. Not like younger men who talked nonsense probably, not meaning half they said. (63)

Thus, it is clear in this passage that, even though the unreliable narrator is striving to convince herself and the readers that Maxim's proposal has indeed resulted from his being in love, the possibility of Maxim marrying her simply because "men need wives because they need children and an establishment which provides a pastoral refuge from life's hurly burly" (Miller, 1986: 44) becomes more and more plausible. When Maxim himself suggests to Mrs de Winter that "instead of being companion to Mrs Van Hopper you become mine, and your duties will be almost exactly the same" (59), this suspicion is practically confirmed: what he wants is an angel for his house, and he has been careful enough to choose a woman whose only alternative to marriage is working as a companion for a ghastly employer, and who is "desperate for the validation provided by a man's love – a woman seeking an authoritarian father surrogate, or, as Plath expressed it, a 'man in black with a Meinkampf look'" (Beuman, 2003: xiii). And, as Beuman (2003: xiii) adds, "her search for this man involves both self-effacement and abnegation, as it does for any woman who 'adores a Fascist'". As Tatar (2004: 4) states, "Bluebeard's wife has been reinvented so many times that she has every right to complain of an identity crisis", and this is ironically the case of the nameless narrator of *Rebecca*, whose only identity is that of 'Mrs de Winter', suggesting that she is no one apart from Mr de Winter's wife. As Beuman (2003: xiv) puts it, her identity "is to be determined by her husband".

Once she is married to Maxim, Mrs de Winter's life at Manderley becomes, in a sense, a process of self-development and a quest for knowledge, and "the Bluebeard thread in the fabric of Gothic narratives offers an exceptional opportunity for elaborating on the problematic issues arising as women leave childhood behind and move toward an alliance with adult males" (Tatar, 2004: 69). Nevertheless, as in "Bluebeard", the wife is initially denied access to knowledge or, at least, what Maxim

refers to as “not the right sort of knowledge” (226), an implicit reference to the sort of wisdom and experience that his first wife, Rebecca, possessed, which of course has to do with female sexuality. As Mrs Danvers – the evil but tragic housekeeper, who tortures Mrs de Winter by keeping the memory of Rebecca alive – explains: when Rebecca was a child she “had all the knowledge then of a grown person” (273). In fact, Mrs Danvers’s character functions as the “older woman who plays the role of initiator offering the way to necessary knowledge” (Lovell-Smith, 2002: 203) in folk tales, by showing Mrs de Winter - while Maxim is in London at “a man’s dinner” (168) - the west wing and Rebecca’s bedroom, a highly feminine space, which is kept exactly as it was when she was alive.

Nevertheless, this passage from childhood to maturity is thwarted by the husband, who keeps treating Mrs de Winter like a child, and insisting in an almost Peter Pan-like manner¹² on the fact that “it’s a pity you have to grow up” (59):

‘Listen my sweet. When you were a little girl, were you ever forbidden to read certain books, and did your father put those books under lock and key?’
‘Yes’, I said.
‘Well, then. A husband is not so very different from a father after all. There is a certain type of knowledge I prefer you not to have. It’s better kept under lock and key. So that’s that. And now eat up your peaches, and don’t ask me anymore questions, or I shall put you in the corner’.
‘I wish you would not treat me as if I was six,’ I said.
‘How do you want to be treated?’
‘Like other men treat their wives’.
‘Knock you about, you mean?’
‘Don’t be absurd. Why must you make a joke of everything?’
‘I’m not joking. I’m very serious.’
‘No, you’re not. I can tell by your eyes. You’re playing with me all the time, just as if I was a silly little girl.’
‘Alice-in-Wonderland. That was a good idea of mine.’¹³ Have you bought your sash and your hair-ribbon yet?’

¹² In fact, this connection may not be coincidental, as Daphne du Maurier was the cousin of the Llewelyn-Davies boys, the brothers who would become J.M. Barrie’s inspiration for *Peter Pan* (1904). On the other hand, her father, Gerald du Maurier, used to play the parts of Mr Darling - the paterfamilias - and the evil Captain Hook in Barrie’s play, since it is tradition that these two characters are played by the same actor. (du Maurier, 2007) Curiously, this double role of patriarch and villain that Gerald du Maurier played connects with the main issues of this dissertation: the ambivalence of patriarchy and the duality of the patriarch.

¹³ Earlier on in the novel, Maxim suggests that his wife dresses up as Alice-in-Wonderland for the Manderley fancy dress ball.

'I warn you. You'll get the surprise of your life when you do see me in my fancy dress.'
'I'm sure I shall. Get on with your peach and don't talk with your mouth full. I've got a lot of letters to write after dinner'. (226 – 227)

Maxim's paternalistic – and patronising – attitude towards the young bride makes her assimilate her husband's authority over herself, as well as “women's problematic relationship to knowledge”, which, from the patriarch's point of view, is linked to “the transgressive behaviour that introduces evil into the world” (Tatar, 2004: 3). Maxim imposes these ideas on his young wife by invoking the figure of her admired father and by proposing physical violence as the alternative treatment that she will receive if she refuses to be treated as a little girl, as a means to be kept away from dangerous knowledge. Thus, like “Bluebeard”, *Rebecca* introduces the idea that “the curiosity of women – as we know from the stories of Pandora, Eve, Psyche, and Lot's wife, among others – has given rise to misery, evil, and grief.” (Tatar, 2004: 3)

As a consequence of her husband's patriarchal authority, right from her arrival at Manderley, Mrs de Winter's experience as a wife results in alienation, not only from the upper-class, male-dominated world that Manderley represents, in which she does not fit, but also from the world of adult femininity and sexuality, of which she remains ignorant. This sense of alienation and of Mrs de Winter's disrupted state of mind is conveyed through her descriptions of “nature, wild and untameable”, which is “as much within as without” (Botting, 1996: 12), and of the sublimity of the house:

The first drive was forgotten, the black, herded woods, the glaring rhododendrons, luscious and over-proud. And the vast house too, the silence of that echoing hall, the uneasy stillness of the west wing, wrapped in dust-sheets. There I was an interloper, wandering in rooms that did not know me, sitting at a desk and in a chair that were not mine. (122)

Thus, “the wild natural images, internalised as a sign of tormented consciousness, give force to the sense of individual dislocation” (Botting, 1996: 100), and the domestic

space “becomes a prison rather than a refuge, a restricted space confined by a system of values that privileges the male and active world beyond the family” (Botting, 1996: 58). As Tatar (2004: 69) observes, “the Bluebeard plot confines the scene of action to the domestic arena [...]. It stages an oppressive reign of masculine tyranny and shows how the drive for knowledge can imperil the female protagonist.”

Last but not least, as the victim’s sense of alienation grows acute, “without an adequate social framework to sustain a sense of identity, the wanderer encounters [...] the double or shadow of [herself]”, which “presents a limit that cannot be overcome, the representation of an internal and irreparable division in the individual psyche” (Botting, 1996: 93). And this double is Rebecca’s almost ghostly presence, which represents the beauty, the intelligence and the knowledge that Mrs de Winter would like to possess. Thus, Mrs de Winter finds herself emulating the woman that she hates and admires at the same time: “in that brief moment, [...] I had so identified myself 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” (du Maurier, 2003: 224 – 225). This identification with and emulation of the *alter ego* not only highlight her divided psyche, but also contribute to the annihilation of her identity, for, according to Botting (1996: 131), “the double is also used to present a more terrible possibility as a figure that threatens the loss of identity”.

Thus, so far, the story in *Rebecca* is not so different from what can be found in previous Gothic narratives, in which women “suffer repeated pursuit and incarceration at the hands of malevolent and ambitious aristocrats and monks” (Botting, 1996: 64). Even if in du Maurier’s novel the villainy of the husband is not *consciously* acknowledged by the wife, the reader gets the feeling that Mrs de Winter has been not only imprisoned but also prematurely entombed by her husband, an idea which is

paralleled by the burial of what was mistakenly thought to be Rebecca's body in the de Winters family crypt. This reading of Maxim as Bluebeard is finally confirmed when Mrs de Winter discovers that her husband hides a dark secret: the murder of his first wife, Rebecca. However, it is also at this point that the story moves away from its folkloric source: Mrs de Winter is not going to be rescued from her murderous husband by any other man, but will, instead, voluntarily become Bluebeard's ally, by helping him hide his secret and escape the law, a twist to the story which already suggests that there is more to the presentation of villainy in the novel than meets the eye.

2.2. Unlocking the Door of the Forbidden Cabin: Male Hysteria, Femicide and Maxim de Winter's Fear of the Feminization of the Estate

Whereas in section 2.1. I have provided an analysis of the strategies that Maxim de Winter uses to victimize and 'murder' his second wife psychologically with her own connivance, this section is devoted to the analysis of Maxim's actual, *physical* murder of his first wife Rebecca, and of the confession that he provides to Mrs de Winter and the reader. This aspect of the novel is what has induced feminist critics to regard Maxim as an unquestionably villainous character, who prefers murder to divorce as a solution to his first wife's 'untameable' nature, in order to maintain his reputation and to ensure the continuity of his estate and of patriarchal order. As I have explained in the introductory section, this interpretation has also led to a revision and reevaluation of Rebecca's character, and she has emerged as a feminist heroine "who is dominated by her husband and the 'tyrant custom', whose only real crime was in insisting on her right to individuality." (Nigro, 2000: 7) Whereas I intend to sustain the reading of Maxim's

character as an unjustifiable murderer throughout the whole dissertation, I will *not* treat Rebecca's 'rebellion' as a heroic act, or as a fight for individuality, for reasons I will provide in section 3. Instead, I stick to Horner and Zlosnik's reading of Rebecca as a vamp(ire)¹⁴, because this is how she is perceived (especially by Maxim):

Rebecca is [...] associated throughout the novel with several characteristics which [...] traditionally denote the vampiric body: facial pallor, plentiful hair and voracious sexual appetite [...]. And like the vampire, she has to be 'killed' more than once: the plot's excessive, triple killing of Rebecca (she was shot; she had cancer; she drowned) echoes the folk belief that vampires must be 'killed' three times. Although Rebecca lacks the requisite fangs and only metaphorically sucks men dry, she can none the less be placed within Christopher Frayling's second category of vampires¹⁵, that of the Fatal Woman who, [...] is clearly symptomatic of a cultural anxiety concerning adult female sexuality. (Horner and Zlosnik, 2000: 213)

This "cultural anxiety concerning adult female sexuality" is going to be a central issue in this section, insofar as I intend to treat it as Maxim's main motivation for committing murder.

It is when Maxim confesses his crime and reveals himself as a murderer that the "Bluebeard" subtext culminates, and yet it is also at this point that the story takes a completely different turn. When Rebecca's body is found, "the disturbing return of pasts upon presents" (Botting, 1996: 1), which had been a haunting, ghostly presence so far, suddenly becomes a physical reality: Rebecca is not only a supernatural force or a dark memory of the past that haunts the living, but also an actual, physical, disintegrated corpse, which lies in the cabin of her boat under the sea, and whose 're-emergence' threatens Maxim's reputation, his new marriage and his life. When

¹⁴ As Horner and Zlosnik (2000: 211) explain, "the word 'vamp' [...] does indeed derive from the word 'vampire'. This slippage between the words 'vampire' and 'vamp' is attributed by several critics to a fin-de-siècle anxiety concerning the shifting status of women. [...] The actual threats embodied in real women, then, resulted in the female vampire being culturally transmuted into the vamp; by the early twentieth century the sinister polyvalency of the former had become translated into the sexual threat of the latter."

¹⁵ In Christopher Frayling, *Vampyres: Lord Byron to Count Dracula*, London: Faber and Faber, 1992.

Rebecca's boat – prophetically named *Je Reviens* – is found, Maxim is aware that his secret will come out, and confesses his crime to Mrs de Winter:

The woman buried in the crypt is not Rebecca [...]. It's the body of some unknown woman, unclaimed, belonging nowhere. There never was an accident. Rebecca was not drowned at all. 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. (298)

After this passage, Maxim provides a series of reasons for his crime, and explains to Mrs de Winter that he hated Rebecca and that “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.” (304)

As many critics have noted, Maxim's repulsion towards Rebecca has to do with the fact that she possessed all the characteristics of ‘the Other’ - she was promiscuous, rebellious, adulterous, lesbian, and possibly Jewish¹⁶ - , and presented, in Maxim's view, a threat against his patriarchal rules. As Maxim himself puts it, “she was not even normal” (304). According to Mrs Danvers: “a man had only to look at her once and be mad about her. I've seen them here, staying in the house, men she'd meet up in London and bring for the week-ends. [...] They made love to her of course; who would not?” (275). However, it is important to point out that, as it is implied by both Mrs Danvers's and Mrs de Winter's fascination, Rebecca's sexual power also had an effect on women. As Maxim explains, “I found her out at once, [...] five days after we were married. [...] She told me about herself, told me things I shall never repeat to a living soul. I knew then what I had done, what I had married” (305). Whereas Maxim does mention other

¹⁶ According to Horner and Zlosnik (2000: 214), “du Maurier's presentation of Maxim's first wife as a dangerous and beautiful dark-haired woman with an Hebraic name might well have been unconsciously influenced by the air of anti-semitism prevalent in Europe during the 1930s.” Furthermore, “the nineteenth-century vampire was often portrayed as having Jewish characteristics – the physical appearance, the often perverse desires and the unrooted, wandering nature of ‘the Jew’ (as then constructed) all being projected onto the vampire” (Horner and Zlosnik, 214).

aspects about Rebecca's sexuality, such as adultery and promiscuity, the fact that there are 'things' he does not dare to mention suggests that there is something else, something even more repellent for a patriarch, and this unspeakable quality seems to point to Rebecca's implicit lesbianism. As Berenstein (1995: 246) remarks,

That the mystique surrounding Rebecca's sexuality is characterised as unutterable reinforces its correspondence with late nineteenth and early twentieth-century treatments of homosexuality. Homosexuality was represented through the enforcement of a discourse of silence – it was that which is not, should not, and could not be spoken.

According to Horner and Zlosnik (2000: 210 – 211), “[Rebecca's] sexual identity is ambiguous; the text makes it clear that she has committed adultery but also hints that she and Mrs Danvers have been lesbian lovers. More broadly, she destabilises current notions of gender: seen through Mrs Danvers's eyes, Rebecca signifies both femininity and masculinity.” As Mrs Danvers describes her: “she had all the courage and spirit of a boy, had my Mrs de Winter. She ought to have been a boy, I often told her that.” (272) Finally, apart from Rebecca's boyishness and her sexual effect on women, “a stereotypical characterization of lesbians is invoked: Rebecca was a man hater” (Berenstein, 1995: 246). As Mrs Danvers reveals: “she despised all men.” (382)

Thus, Rebecca can be read as a supernatural force that threatens to feminize the estate and the patriarch, by challenging patriarchal order and heterosexuality. From the patriarch's point of view, “feminization means emasculation; a culture feminized is thus a culture in demise, weakened in comparison with its previous tough – that is, manly – state” (Douglas in Chow, 1999/2000: 140) It is interesting, at this point, to go back to Horner and Zlosnik's reading of Rebecca as a vampiric figure, representative of “a particularly modern sexual threat to cultural mores and taboos” (Botting, 1996: 148), and relate it to Berenstein's interpretation of Rebecca as “a figure of lesbian desire who haunts the mansion in which she lived” (Berenstein, 1998: 16). According to Warwick,

“the changing representation of the female vampire in late nineteenth-century texts reflected a growing anxiety about the ‘masculinisation’ of women in their transition from angels of the hearth to ‘wandering’ New Women” (Warwick in Horner and Zlosnik, 2000: 211)¹⁷, and the figure of Rebecca clearly represents a blurring of the boundary between the traditional conceptions of masculinity and femininity and “between the two stereotypes – that of the asexual virgin-mother and that of the prostitute-vamp” (Horner and Zlosnik, 2000: 219). As Maxim notes, “she looked like a boy in her sailing kit, a boy with a face like a Botticelli angel” (312). Thus, Rebecca’s ambiguous gender identity and her “lesbian desire [challenge] conventional patriarchal institutions such as motherhood, ideals of femininity, and heterosexuality” (Berenstein, 1998: 30). As Berenstein (1995: 241) explains, in relation to Hitchcock’s film, “[Rebecca] mediates, and in certain instances obstructs, the film’s primary heterosexual couple”, by awakening Mrs de Winter’s repulsion, jealousy and fascination, in such a way that her relationship with her husband will not be possible until her fear of and admiration for Rebecca fade away. As Maxim puts it, Rebecca is a haunting presence, a “damned shadow keeping us from one another” (297). Therefore, lesbianism is presented in *Rebecca* as “a spectral and unspeakable threat” (Berenstein, 1998: 27), which, apart from being a ghostly presence most of the time, also becomes physical under the figure of Mrs Danvers. As Berenstein (1995: 252) puts it in reference to Hitchcock’s adaptation, “in addition to her extreme attachment and likeness to Rebecca, Mrs Danvers serves as another type of threat: the queer who lures unsuspecting victims into her state of perversion, the homo that recruits”. And, as Berenstein (1995: 255) adds, “the scene in Rebecca’s bedroom” - in which Mrs Danvers forces Mrs de Winter

¹⁷ The original quotation can be found in: Alexandra Warwick, “Vampire and the Empire: Fears and Fictions of the 1890s” (1995) in S. Ledger and S. McCracken (eds), *Cultural Politics at the Fin de Siècle*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

to feel Rebecca's clothes - "puts into play the threats [...]: the sexualization of female couplings, the subversion of heterosexuality, and the elimination of the male".

Finally, after transgressing all the boundaries regarding conventional notions of gender and normative sexuality, "[Rebecca's] ultimate sin is to threaten the system of primogeniture. That sin, undermining the entire patriarchal edifice that is Manderley, cannot be forgiven – and Rebecca dies for it" (Beauman, 2002: xiv). As Maxim recalls, for Mrs de Winter to understand the depth of her rival's evil nature, Rebecca made her threat explicit:

'If I had a child, Max,' [Rebecca] 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. You could not prevent it. The property's entailed. You would like an heir, wouldn't you, for your beloved Manderley? [...] It would give you the biggest thrill of your life, wouldn't it, Max, to watch my son grow bigger day by day, and to know that when you died, all this would be his? [...] Well, you heard me say I was going to turn over a new leaf, didn't you? Now you know the reason. They'll be happy, won't they, all these smug locals, all your blasted tenants? [...] I'll be the perfect mother, Max, like I've been the perfect wife. And none of them will ever guess, none of them will ever know.' (313)

Therefore, as feminist critics have noted, Maxim's murder of Rebecca is an unjustifiable misogynistic and homophobic femicide, a result of male hysteria motivated by Rebecca's breaking of "every male-determined rule" (Beauman, 2002: xiv). As Botting (1996: 152) states, "male hysteria is a sign of the breakdown and longing for proper social bonds" and Rebecca is, from Maxim's point of view, "the threatening object [that] can be cast out or away from the domain of rationality and domesticity and, as a result of this expulsion or externalisation, proper order can be reaffirmed" (Botting, 1996: 75). What is more, if Rebecca is read as a vampire, Maxim becomes not only a re-writing of Bluebeard, but also a vampire-killer, who attempts to restore patriarchy through the imposition of 'phallic law'. According to Botting (1996: 151), "the ritualised killing of vampires reconstitutes properly patriarchal order and

fixes cultural and symbolic meanings. The vampire is constructed as absolute object, the complete antithesis of subjectivity, agency and authority.” Even though Rebecca is not stabbed with a stake but shot to death, Maxim’s gun can also be interpreted as a phallic symbol. On the other hand, although Maxim’s crime clearly presents misogynistic elements, I would also like to emphasize Maxim’s homophobic dimension, which will be important in the following section, by pointing out that the first time that he thought about murdering Rebecca was when he found out about her ‘unspeakable trait’ five days after their marriage: “I nearly killed her then [...]. It would have been so easy. One false step, one slip. You remember the precipice. I frightened you, didn’t I? You thought I was mad. Perhaps I was. Perhaps I am. It doesn’t make for sanity, does it, living with the devil” (305). This last statement in which Maxim blames Rebecca for his hysteria introduces the idea that women actually *create* their own Gothic experiences (Meyers, 2001), and this leads me to discuss the manipulative dimension of Maxim’s confession and the way in which he tricks Mrs de Winter (and the reader) into believing that he is the victim and Rebecca the victimizer.

I read Maxim’s melodramatic confession as a reinforcement of what I have argued in section 2.1., i.e., as another strategy to keep his second wife under his power. Not only does he start positioning himself as victim by stating that “Rebecca has won” (297), but also what is peculiar about his confession of murder is that it is followed by his first declaration of love to his second wife, and his first display of sexual passion for her, after three months of marriage. As Mrs de Winter recalls,

Then he began to kiss me. He had not kissed me like this before. [...] ‘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. This is what I imagined in Monte Carlo, in Italy, here in Manderley. He is saying it now. [...] He went on kissing me, hungry, desperate, murmuring my name. ‘How calm I am’, I thought. ‘How cool. [...] Maxim is kissing me. For the first time he is telling me he loves me.’ (300)

Despite the unreliable narrator's interpretation of the situation, I maintain my claim that Maxim never loved her, and that this outburst of sexual appetite after his confession of murder has to do with a sudden urge to produce an heir for Manderley, as a result of his knowing that he will be sentenced to death if his crime is discovered. This reading is plausible because, once he escapes justice and Manderley is burnt down, his marriage to Mrs de Winter becomes as sexless as it was before.¹⁸

However, Maxim's confession works perfectly as his last strategy to control his young wife. As Russ (1995: 109) explains, in Gothic novels, "the Heroine [...] knows even more than the mere fact that danger exists; she knows that it *has all happened before*". Yet Mrs de Winter does not perceive this danger, or see that Rebecca's murder should be taken as a warning rather than a relief. Instead, after hearing about the murder, she affirms that "none of the things that he had told me mattered to me at all. I clung to one thing only, and repeated it to myself, over and over again. Maxim did not love Rebecca. He had never loved her, never, never." (306) She does not understand that "men who are dangerous to active, rebellious women are dangerous to all women" (Meyers, 2001: 20). As Meyers (2001: 37) claims, comparing *Rebecca* to *Jane Eyre*,

Significantly, [in *Jane Eyre*] when Bertha's existence is exposed, that knowledge separates Jane and Rochester, albeit temporarily. However, the revelation that Maxim is a murderer brings him and the narrator closer together. The insuperable impediment between them was the fact that there was a secret; the content of the mystery matters little to the second Mrs de Winter. In fact, Maxim's assertion that he hated and killed Rebecca makes him less of a villain and more of a hero in her eyes.

Now that she knows her husband's secret, Mrs de Winter finally feels that she will be able to enjoy a happy married life with him. As she states, "it would not be I, I, I any

¹⁸ In *Mrs de Winter* (1993), Susan Hill supports this idea that Maxim's need for sexuality and reproduction is only linked to the continuity of his estate, by having Mrs de Winter's narrative voice say: "We never spoke, now, about our having children. It had been different then, with [...] Manderley for them to inherit. I was not even sure that Maxim would want any children now, there did not seem to be any place for them in our exile." (Hill, 1999: 40)

longer; it would be we, it would be us” (320). However, as Meyers (2001: 37 – 38) affirms,

In order to sustain ‘we’, the narrator must become Maxim’s accomplice. [...] Given the fact that the securing of her identity as Mrs de Winter and Maxim’s confession are coterminous, the narrator can only vindicate his crime and protect him from Rebecca, who has become not a rival but a common enemy. By constituting the sexual, rebellious, ‘abnormal’ Rebecca as an alien Other, Maxim and his second wife seem finally joined in holy matrimony.

Nevertheless, even if the narrator feels that her identity as ‘Mrs de Winter’ is finally reasserted, I stick to what I have argued in section 2.1.: in order to become Maxim’s wife, Mrs de Winter has to renounce her own individual identity, which remains unknown to the reader. At this point of the story, it is already clear that Mrs de Winter is just another woman that Maxim uses for his own purposes. She is just like the corpse of the “unknown woman, unclaimed, belonging nowhere” (298), buried in the crypt, pretending to be Rebecca, and used by Maxim to hide his secret and escape justice. On the other hand, Maxim’s reputation as a Gothic villain, who keeps using women (Rebecca, the unknown woman’s corpse, and Mrs de Winter) for his own purposes, is definitely confirmed not only by his “overwhelming desire to control what [he] can and to destroy what [he] cannot” (Nigro 2000: 7), but also by his psychopathic revelation that “if I had to come all over again I should not do anything different. I’m glad I killed Rebecca. I shall never have any remorse for that, never, never.” (336)

Last but not least, there is one point about Maxim’s confession which I have not touched upon yet, and which deserves attention, insofar as it completes the definition of Maxim’s character as a villainous, hypocritical aristocrat: the fact that he would never go through a divorce, and prefers to murder Rebecca, and lead a life of deceit instead.

As Maxim explains:

[Rebecca] knew I would sacrifice pride, honour, personal feelings, every damned quality on earth, rather than stand before our little world after a week

of marriage and have them know the things about her that she had told me. She knew I would never stand in a divorce court and give her away, have fingers pointing at us, mud flung at us in the newspapers, all the people who belong down here whispering when my name was mentioned, all the trippers from Kerrith trooping to the lodge gates, peering into the grounds and saying, 'That's where he lives, in there. That's Manderley. That's the place that belongs to the chap who had that divorce case we read about. Do you remember what the judge said about his wife...?' (306)

As this passage shows, Maxim's main preoccupation is to maintain his domestic sphere intact; as he says, "I thought about Manderley too much [...]. I put Manderley first, before anything else." (306) Nigro (2000: 5), as well as other feminist critics, argues that Maxim's murder of Rebecca reveals "his anger toward Rebecca's demands to express her own sexuality." Although I agree that Maxim is repelled by Rebecca's sexuality, I believe that, as the above-quoted passages of the novel show, Maxim's main concern is not so much Rebecca's sexuality *per se*, but the effect that it can have on his patriarchal estate and on his reputation, which reinforces the hypocritical dimension of his type of villainy. As he remarks: "what she did in London did not touch me – because it did not hurt Manderley" (308). This finally introduces the central issue in this dissertation, which I am going to deal with in the following section: the fact that unjustifiable as Maxim's villainy is, there is something else behind; there is another source of villainy which is much more potent and enslaves the patriarch as well. And the key to find this ultimate source of villainy in du Maurier's novel lies in Maxim's statement: "I accepted everything – because of *Manderley*" (308 - my emphasis).

3. FROM BLUEBEARD TO 'GENTLEMAN UNKNOWN': THE VICTIMIZATION OF MAXIM DE WINTER AND THE VILLAINY OF PATRIARCHY

After devoting section 2 to the analysis of the patriarchal figure in *Rebecca* as a 'Bluebeard' kind of villain, in this section I would like to add another dimension to this reading in order to complete my analysis of villainy in du Maurier's novel. As I have already stated, I support the feminist interpretation of Maxim de Winter as a Gothic villain, but there are some aspects of this reading which I intend to revise. On the one hand, for most critics, interpreting Maxim as the femicidal villain of the novel automatically implies extolling Rebecca as a feminist heroine, who defies the patriarchal system and dies in the attempt. As Nigro puts it: "[an] examination of Maxim as an Othello figure reveals Rebecca as a Gothic heroine, who is dominated by her husband and the 'tyrant custom', whose only real crime was in insisting on her right to individuality." (Nigro, 2000: 7) However, I consider this a one-dimensional reading of the novel, in the same way that the traditional reading of *Rebecca* as a 'Cinderella' story was. What feminist critics, such as Nigro, do is to introduce a mere reversal of the main characters' roles: if Maxim de Winter was initially read as a Gothic hero, and this automatically turned Rebecca into a villainess; now, reading the husband as villain turns Rebecca into a Gothic heroine. Although the reader may indeed be tempted to admire Rebecca, du Maurier's actual text complicates this reading. Thus, in this section I want to deny the fact that reading Maxim as villain turns *Rebecca* into a "script of male vice and female virtue" (Meyers, 2001: 16), which "constitut[es] maleness and masculinity [...] as the Other" (Meyers, 2001: 9). Instead, I want to argue that *all* the characters without exception (and regardless of their gender) are corrupt, due to their

participation in patriarchy, a system based on power and oppression, and that, in *Rebecca*, there is no such thing as a real threat to the patriarchal system, not even on Rebecca's part, but a constant preoccupation about *its perpetuation*. This reading turns Maxim de Winter into a more complex kind of Bluebeard, and suggests that his crime not only is the result of misogynistic anger towards a woman's "right to individuality", as Nigro (2000: 7) states, but also stems from another source of villainy to which he and all the other characters are subjected.

Before dealing with Maxim's relationships with the other characters in the novel, I would like to relate him again to his literary predecessor, Charlotte Brontë's Mr Rochester, in order to incorporate Maxim into a tradition which starts to present the patriarch as an ambivalent figure, and 'complicates' the Bluebeard character:

Just as Brontë enriches and emboldens the Gothic heroine, so does she merge the Gothic villain and the Gothic hero in the figure of Rochester. [...] Rochester's recognition of plain Jane's value establishes him as her Gothic hero. However, the sadism he evinces by letting Jane think he is marrying Blanche Ingram, his attempts to turn her into an *objet d'art* before their marriage, and his willingness to transgress the laws of man by committing bigamy align him with villainous predecessors. (Meyers, 2001: 32 – 33)

As in the case of Mr Rochester, the Gothic villain and the Gothic hero are also merged in the figure of Maxim de Winter: Maxim *is* a Gothic villain, as I have argued in section 2, but, in the eyes of the unreliable Mrs de Winter, he is a Gothic hero, a protector, and a father figure. On the other hand, Maxim - like Edward Rochester - is also "the powerful man who perceives himself as a victim" (Chow, 1999/2000: 145). As Chow (1999/2000: 145) explains, "even though the man is wealthy and often has dark moods, he is presented [...] as a kind of victim who has been wronged and oppressed". Maxim and Rochester are, therefore, complex versions of Bluebeard, insofar as their characterizations are based on an interplay of perceptions – the perception of the reader, the perceptions of the narrator and the other characters, and

their own perceptions of themselves. However, Maxim de Winter presents a crucial difference regarding Edward Rochester: whereas Brontë's character is endowed with plenty of appeal, and ends up being transformed into an equal partner for Jane¹⁹, du Maurier's Maxim is characterized as a rather weak patriarch beyond redemption: a patriarch who is incapable not only of successfully fulfilling the role that has been imposed on him, but also of finding a satisfying alternative to this imposition.

Reading Daphne du Maurier's Maxim de Winter as a Bluebeard kind of villain incorporates the novel into a tradition in which "the threat of violence always issues from the male partner, producing a plot that presents the institution of marriage as 'haunted by murder' (to use the words of the film critic Mary Anne Doane)" (Tatar, 2004: 69). However, I suggest that reading Maxim *simply* as Bluebeard undermines not only other aspects of his character, but also other forces of villainy that are highly present in the story. Consequently, I am going to read Maxim's 'Bluebeardishness' only as the culmination of a process of degradation that the character undergoes, and not as his ultimate personality. Thus, in the following pages I intend to analyze the other concealed aspects of Maxim's character and the secret fears that trigger his 'transformation' into a Gothic villain, as well as the way in which the Bluebeard figure is problematised in du Maurier's novel through the different ambivalent ways in which he is perceived, and explain, at the same time, how these different ways of perceiving and relating to the patriarch contribute to the perpetuation of the patriarchal system.

¹⁹ As Meyers (2001: 33) argues, "while [Rochester] was previously the hero-villain, circumstances have forced him to eschew both roles. As Jane puts it, 'I love you better now, when I can really be useful to you, than I did in your state of proud independence, when you disdained every part but that of the *giver and protector*' (570 – my emphasis). Rochester has not been transformed from a villain to a hero but rather to a partner."

3.1. “We Are All Children in Some Ways”: *Vatersehnsucht*, Brotherhood and the Crisis of Masculine Identity

As I have mentioned, what makes the villain in *Rebecca* complex are the different ways in which he is perceived. In order to find out the causes of his ‘transformation’ into Bluebeard, I would like to start by analysing the idea of the patriarch as a father figure, a protector who has to be protected, and a myth that has to be preserved. The characters in the novel who express this need for a paternal figure are, mainly, the servants and workers at Manderley, the locals of Kerrith, and, first and foremost, the second Mrs de Winter. Therefore, I am going to focus on these characters’ perceptions and, especially, the way they behave around Maxim after Rebecca’s body is found, and how they try to protect the villain, despite their knowing or suspecting that he is indeed guilty of murder. Unlike the “Bluebeard” tale, then, in *Rebecca* it is not the young, innocent woman that has to be rescued in the end, but Bluebeard himself; and this difference between du Maurier’s novel and its folkloric precedent is crucial insofar as the characters’ response is closely linked to an urge to preserve an ideal that was dying out after the First World War, as I will argue in the following pages.

Before Rebecca’s boat is found, it is already clear that, for the people working and living near Manderley, Maxim represents - or should represent - an ideal: a paternal figure and a model of patriarchal masculinity. For example, when Maxim helps with a shipwreck, Frank Crawley – the Manderley estate manager and Maxim’s closest friend – remarks that

‘Maxim is splendid at anything like this. [...] He always gives a hand if he can. You’ll find he will invite the whole crew back to Manderley, and feed them, and give them beds into the bargain.’
‘That’s right,’ said the coast-guard. ‘He’d give the coat off his back for any of his own people, I know that. I wish there was more like him in the county.’
(285)

Maxim is expected to provide protection not only for the people around him, as it is expressed in this passage, but also for the conventions and ideals regarding gender and family that were increasingly under threat at the beginning of the twentieth century. As the last sentence of the passage (“I wish there was more like him”) suggests, the masculine model that the people at Manderley celebrate, and want Maxim to embody is the hegemonic model of masculinity which is fast disappearing. In order to determine what exactly is meant by ‘hegemonic masculinity’ as opposed to undesirable - and, therefore, marginalized - masculinity, Kane (1999: 11) proposes the following “set of oppositions: good, light, unity, male, limit, mind, spirit, culture, high, ‘fit’” versus “bad, darkness, plurality, female, unlimited, body, matter, nature, low, ‘degenerate’”. The patriarch, in this case Maxim de Winter, is expected to fulfil the former set of requirements, as a means to emerge as the ‘fittest’ and distinguish himself from the ‘degenerate’, which, from Maxim’s point of view, is the vampiric Rebecca. According to Kane (1999: 12), “these ideologies of the ‘survival of the fittest’, and of ‘manliness’ were adopted most enthusiastically by those men for whom life was no longer by any means a struggle for ‘survival’ and whose bourgeois and upper-class urban existence did not have much to do with traditional notions of rural, rugged masculinity”. As Mrs de Winter points out,

‘You are easy, very easy. Much easier than I thought you would be. I used to think it would be dreadful to be married, that one’s husband would drink, or use awful language, or grumble if the toast was soft at breakfast, and be rather unattractive altogether, smell possibly. You don’t do any of those things’
‘Good God, I hope not,’ said Maxim. (164)

Thus, Maxim’s ‘manliness’ is - apparently - clearly differentiated from its ‘degenerate’ counter-part. However, Rebecca’s ‘return’ complicates drastically the preservation of this ideal, and the plot becomes a struggle between those who desperately try to

maintain Maxim's 'disguise' as an 'ideal patriarch', and those who desperately try to expose him publicly. At this point, it is already clear – not only for the readers but also for the characters in the novel - that there is a discrepancy between, on the one hand, what Maxim pretends to be and is expected to be, and, on the other hand, what he really is. He pretends to be a father figure but he is a villain, and yet, those characters who know - like Mrs de Winter or Frank Crawley – , or who suspect – like Colonel Julyan, the magistrate – that Maxim is guilty of murder, insist on sustaining Maxim's 'disguise' by trying to prove that Rebecca was not murdered but committed suicide.

This “‘Vatersehnsucht’ (desire for the father)” (Kane, 1999: 214), as Freud called it, reflects an anxiety about the post-war crisis of masculine identity and the fear that “it really is winter, the season of death, for the maxims of patriarchal rule.” (Meyers, 2001: 37) According to Kane (1999: 5), “in the 1880s [there] was a realization that patriarchy itself and male patriarchal identity were in crisis”. In literature, “the appearance of the ‘double’ is indicative of [this] crisis of identity of the white upper-class male” and it tends to be presented as linked to “male fantasies of giving birth, narcissism and homosexuality” (Kane, 1999: 3 – 4). This concern about the fragmentation of the masculine identity led to “a response in the wake of the war to a deep structural crisis over what masculinity and femininity might be” (Light, 1991: 176). And, as Kane (1999: 218) suggests, “one wonders to what extent the appeal of actual Fascism in the Twenties and Thirties was derived from this constellation of desire for a ‘new bond between men’, for brotherhood and for a father figure”. In fact, going back to *Rebecca*, there is indeed a sense of brotherhood among those characters who seek to protect Maxim. As Jack Favell – Rebecca's cousin who is eager to expose Maxim – points out: “You're like a little trade union here at Manderley, aren't you? [...] no one going to give anyone else away. Even the local magistrate is on the same racket.” (375)

In protecting Maxim, these characters are not just protecting a person but *an ideal*, which would crumble and fall if it was acknowledged that even the masculinity of the owner of Manderley is in crisis.

In du Maurier's novel, this anxiety about the transgression of the boundary between masculinity and femininity is reflected in the characters' perception of Rebecca as having vampiric energy, as I have already argued in section 2.2., and is practically made explicit in this conversation among the members of 'the Manderley brotherhood', after the inquest:

'You don't play golf, do you, Mrs de Winter?' said Colonel Julyan.
'No, I'm afraid I don't,' I said.
'You ought to take it up,' he said. 'My eldest girl is very keen, and she can't find young people to play with her. I gave her a small car for her birthday, and she drives herself over to the north coast nearly every day. It gives her something to do.'
'How nice,' I said.
'She ought to have been the boy,' he said. 'My lad is different altogether. No earthly use at games. Always writing poetry. I suppose he'll grow out of it.'
'Oh, rather,' said Frank. 'I used to write poetry myself when I was his age. Awful nonsense too. I never write any now.'
'Good heavens, I should hope not,' said Maxim. (331)

The anxiety that is reflected here is not so much about women becoming boyish, but about *men being feminized*. Colonel Julyan's anxiety has to do with the fact that his son prefers poetry over games, which are activities that tend to encourage comradeship between men. According to Light (1991: 200), "it may be that what helped to create a modern femininity was in part this impersonation of boyishness [...] which was not just a matter of taking over short hair and flat chests, but, for the more conservatively-minded, of sustaining too that romantic image of boyish adventurism which had gone to its grave in the trenches" of First World War. In the same way, Maxim's main problem with Rebecca is not so much the fact that she cut her hair short and enjoyed sailing, but that he felt 'feminized' and 'otherized' by her.

At this point, it is important to go back to the idea that Maxim perceives himself as a victim. He feels that he has been victimized by Rebecca, yet the anxiety he shows towards her ‘feminizing force’, as well as the way in which he emphasizes, in the above-quoted passage, that he disapproves of men who prefer poetry over games, show that he is actually the victim of a crisis of masculine identity. As Light (1991: 165) notes, “the manliness of [Daphne du Maurier’s] heroes is often as doubtful as the docility of her heroines” and, in her novels, we find representations of “a modern masculinity no longer entirely at ease with itself” (Light, 1991: 169). In du Maurier’s novels, “a psychologising of sexuality [...] makes the idea of an untrammelled, undivided individual, and with it the notion of the English male as gloriously unselfconscious and at ease with his masculinity, impossible to sustain.” Instead, du Maurier’s male characters are “full of self-doubt, nervy (‘neurasthenic’ even), and tortured about their own desires, dependent upon their own fantasies of an older, stronger man.” (Light, 1991: 170) This is applicable to Maxim, whose fear of the feminization of his estate reveals his own insecurity as patriarch and the fact that he is aware of his incompetence and his incapability of living up to this ideal of “an older, stronger man” (Light, 1991: 170). On the one hand, Maxim’s anxiety about Rebecca’s ‘unspeakable’ sexuality, and the repulsion he feels against it suggest that he may not be so different from Rebecca after all. As Brinks (2003: 13) points out, “through the gothic, heterosexual culture would cast off its own homoerotic yearnings, representing them in supernatural guise as ‘other’, where the struggle to deny or normalize shapes the narrative dynamic.” Although there is no explicit evidence about Maxim being homosexual, he clearly does not manifest any kind of sexual interest towards women, he is closer to Frank than to his wife, and he never produces an heir, which puts an end to the de Winter patriarchal line. As his own name suggests, ‘Maxim de Winter’ is “the

maximum or worst of winter, a cryptonym of coldness, desolation, and ultimately death.” (Lloyd Smith, 1992: 304) On the other hand, Sally Beauman in *Rebecca’s Tale* (2001) – a sequel to du Maurier’s novel – proposes that “[his] unusual name was a corruption from Norman-French, and was possibly derived from the word ‘*ventre*’, meaning stomach, or womb” (Beauman, 2002: 44), again, implying that there is something ‘feminine’ about the character. Even though Maxim’s possible homosexuality can only be deduced from his lack of sexual interest in women and the repulsion he feels towards Rebecca’s lesbianism, I would still like to support this idea by arguing that patriarchy *is* in fact based on men’s homoerotic love for each other:

If the patriarchy itself was a marvellous expression of male narcissism, it also not only promoted but institutionalized the notion that men should primarily love not only themselves but masculinity itself – and other men. Whether this love was to be expressed emotionally, physically, sexually or purely symbolically, and how, depended [...] on local cultural conditions. [...] Thus, far from being pure of any ‘taint of homosexuality’, patriarchal thinking is so saturated with it that it institutionalizes the love of men for men, the admiration of the male body and the masculine intellect and loves nothing more than to express this either sexually or symbolically or both. One might further argue that the oppressive power of the institution of patriarchy is increased the more the sexual element is repressed and the symbolic is emphasized [...]. One should therefore not be surprised if a crisis of that patriarchal culture should bring to light not only male fantasies of giving birth but also suggestions of male narcissism and homosexuality for, as the foregoing suggests, such ideas were always situated at the *core* of patriarchal thinking, loath though it might have been at times to admit this to itself. (Kane, 1999: 5 – 6)

Reading Maxim de Winter as a representation of the early twentieth-century crisis of masculine identity implies that, although he affirms (in reference to the Manderley fancy dress ball) that “I never dress up” (219), “perhaps [...] this refusal implies that he is already in costume” (Nigro, 2000: 1). As Nigro (2000: 1) states, “Maxim de Winter might be [...] masking his true personality with his ‘double’ as a gentried landowner.” Although it is obvious that Maxim is wearing a mask of respectability, as a means to fulfil the model of patriarchal masculinity that is imposed

on him, and to hide his crime, I would like to add a third dimension to Maxim's character and suggest that he is actually hiding something else. As Light (1991: 171) affirms,

[Daphne du Maurier's] men are not latter-day knights, their masculinity is detached from the idea of nationhood or empire which made the historical settings of the stories so often the romantic place where manhood was to be proven. Rather history has become a kind of Never Never Land in which men are still boys who never grow up and where any skirmishing is on the frontiers of sexual relationships with women who question their mode of being.

Light's general description of du Maurier's heroes applies to Maxim de Winter in *Rebecca* and, what is more, the text does not offer any kind of resistance to a reading of Maxim as a boy who has never grown up. When Maxim's 'patriarchal disguise' starts to collapse when Rebecca's boat is found, plenty of emphasis is put on the fact that Maxim becomes a child and Mrs de Winter the mother figure who has to protect him: "He stared at me at first like a puzzled child, and then he held out his arms." (402) As Light (1991: 171) puts it, du Maurier's heroines are "finally older and wiser than their men and come in the end to mother them". Although Mrs de Winter's maturity and wisdom are questionable, she willingly becomes Maxim's 'mother' in the end, providing thus a three-fold protection: she protects Maxim's paternal surface, she protects his secret, and she also protects his hidden infantile and vulnerable nature.

Therefore, I suggest that Maxim is, underneath the surface, an immature, incompetent 'boy', who is forced by the system to become a father figure to protect his estate and those around him. The tensions created by his incapability both to manage his estate and to fulfil the patriarchal system's highly demanding model of masculinity lead him to become a villain who has to conceal both his crime and his underlying immaturity under an external image of 'ideal patriarch', which eventually collapses revealing his true 'imperfect' and 'unmanly' nature. To put it in a more illustrative way,

Maxim de Winter's plight is that he is actually a Peter Pan figure - immature, 'feminized' and sexually ambiguous²⁰ - who is asked to be Jane Austen's Mr Darcy (to mention a literary example of 'ideal patriarch'), and the obvious impossibility of fulfilling this demand triggers his 'Bluebeard reaction', finally turning him again into a frustrated Peter Pan, who has lost his Never Land (i.e., Manderley), and realized that he really cannot do without his mother. As they say in the novel itself: "'It's a universal instinct of the human species, isn't it, that desire to dress up in some sort of disguise?' said Frank. [...] 'It's natural, I suppose,' said Colonel Julyan, 'for all of us to wish to look different. We are all *children* in some ways.'" (330 – my emphasis)

Thus, as Kimmel (2004: 233) puts it, "by continuing to follow the dictates of separate spheres, we may be creating manly men, but we are also crippling men emotionally and creating husbands and fathers who are destined to be outsiders or despots in their own families." This leads me to conclude that the patriarchal system, which creates these "dictates of separate spheres", is what is behind Maxim's villainy, and that du Maurier's novel offers an example of men's problem of having to live up to the extremely demanding expectations of patriarchy, as a means of not being marginalized from the system (Martín, 2007). Furthermore, "when individuals who regard themselves as 'superior beings' are challenged in some way, they may respond with physical violence" (Kimmel, 2004: 201), as it is the case in *Rebecca*. According to Kimmel (2004) himself, men's violent responses against those who are considered weaker are not due to their powerful position inside patriarchy but rather to their frustration when they realize that masculinity per se does not endow them with innate

²⁰ Although I am not suggesting that *Rebecca* is in any way directly influenced by J.M. Barrie's *Peter Pan*, I do think it is possible to establish this comparison between Peter Pan's character and the hidden childish personality of Maxim de Winter. Just like Maxim, Peter Pan is an immature figure, who pretends to be in control but is highly influenced by a supernatural feminizing force – the jealous and manipulative Tinker Bell – and whose masculinity seems to be questioned by having a girl play his character on stage.

power, as they had been led to believe. Thus, the slightest form of resistance triggers their use of violence in order to reassert their ‘patriarchal rights’, and this, I suggest, applies to Maxim de Winter.

3.2. “Last Night I Dreamt I Went to Manderley Again”: The Patriarchal Estate as the Ultimate Haunting Presence in *Rebecca*

Assuming that patriarchy oppresses not only women but also those masculine identities that do not conform to hegemonic masculinity, and seeing how this applies to du Maurier’s novel, complicates those feminist readings of *Rebecca* which have tried to constitute the male character as ‘the Other’, as a response to the traditional interpretation. In this last section, Maxim de Winter’s character is not going to be my main focus. Instead, I intend to conclude my reading of villainy in *Rebecca* by analysing how patriarchy is the ultimate corruptive force which negatively affects all the other characters in the novel.

At this point I would like to go back to some of the characters’ insistence on protecting patriarchal ideals, focusing particularly on the peculiar case of Mrs de Winter. I say ‘peculiar case’ because she is probably the most misleading character: whereas readers (and critics) have been led to believe throughout the whole novel that Mrs de Winter is a good woman (as opposed to Rebecca, her vicious counter-part), faithful to her husband and unconditionally in love with him, towards the end of the story she undergoes an important change which reveals that this might not be the case. My reading of Mrs de Winter is that she is a selfish and hypocritical individual, who does not actually love her husband – I would even dare to say that she actually despises him

unconsciously - , and who tries to restore patriarchy and protect the patriarch for her own benefits: she needs patriarchy because it is what secures her one and only identity; being 'Mrs de Winter' is what has worried her all along, as the obsessive repetition of the statement "I am going to be Mrs de Winter. I am going to live at Manderley" (61) suggests. In the same way, when Maxim confesses his crime, the only thing that matters to her is the fact that she feels that she has triumphed over Rebecca and this allows her to reassert her identity as mistress of Manderley: "I did not care about his shame. None of the things that he had told me mattered to me at all. I clung to one thing only, and repeated it to myself, over and over again. Maxim did not love Rebecca. He had never loved her, never, never." (306). According to Chow (1999/2000, 159):

In the course of the second wife's progress, she gradually moves from being a powerless outsider, rejected by her society, to being an insider firmly rooted in the patriarchal order, its angel of the house. Her power as woman, notably, is achieved through the removal and exclusion of others, especially other women, from her arena. Instead of her, it is these other women who must now remain forever on the outside.

Once her identity and her power have been reasserted through this 'triumph' over other women – basically Rebecca and Mrs Danvers – Mrs de Winter's docile character fades away and she enjoys exercising her new power on those she now considers to be below in terms of class:

I rang the bell, and Maud, the under-housemaid, came into the room.
'This room has not been touched this morning,' I said, 'even the windows were shut. And the flowers are dead. Will you please take them away?'
She looked nervous and apologetic. 'I'm very sorry, Madam,' she said. She went to the mantelpiece and took the vases.
'Don't let it happen again,' I said.
'No, Madam,' she said. She went out of the room, taking the flowers with her. I had not thought it would be so easy to be severe. I wondered why it had seemed hard for me before. (324 – 325)

Now, Mrs de Winter is no longer the shy girl who treated servants as equals and who felt like a servant herself. She even confronts Mrs Danvers, who is the character that has

made her feel insecure about her identity as 'Mrs de Winter', by stressing Rebecca's superiority as mistress of Manderley.

'I'm not used to having messages sent to me by Robert,' [Mrs Danvers] said. 'If Mrs de Winter wanted anything changed she would ring me personally on the house telephone.'
'I'm afraid it does not concern me very much what Mrs de Winter used to do,' I said. 'I am Mrs de Winter now, you know. And if I choose to send a message by Robert I shall do so.' (326)

However, for her to sustain her new power and her identity, she has to be dependent on a man and she has to be part of the corrupt and decadent patriarchal system. And this is why she has to become Bluebeard's ally and protect him. As Jack Favell remarks to Maxim: "I don't suppose your wife wants to be pointed out as Mrs de Winter, the widow of a murderer, of a fellow who was hanged" (367). As Allen claims - comparing *Rebecca* to Alfred Hitchcock's *Stage Fright* (1950) - , "in *Rebecca*, the ostensible narrative is that of one woman trying to prove the guilt of another in a manner that restores patriarchy" (2004: 9), and this restoration of patriarchy has to do with her own selfish need for self-definition. As regards her 'love' for her husband, a passage such as the following indicates that it is more than questionable:

I thought with a tired bitter feeling of despair that I would be content to live in one corner of Manderley and Maxim in the other so long as the outside world should never know. If he had no more tenderness for me, never kissed me again, did not speak to me except on matters of necessity, I believed I could bear it if I were certain that nobody knew of this but our two selves. If we could bribe the servants not to tell, play our part before relations, [...] and then when we were alone sit apart in our separate rooms, leading our separate lives. (260)

Thus, what Mrs de Winter does – or would like to do - is not so different from what Rebecca did: she needs Maxim only because she needs to be part of and benefit from the patriarchal order.

This interpretation of Mrs de Winter's character supports the idea that *Rebecca* cannot be read as "a script of male vice and female virtue" insofar as Mrs de Winter is, like Maxim, selfish and hypocritical, and what allows her to be 'someone' is being mistress of an estate. As Light (1991: 188) affirms,

It is not just that places, and especially houses, are for du Maurier the repositories of the past, where we can best find and read the accumulation of marks of change, but that they house 'us': who we are, and what we imagine ourselves to be [...]. 'We' are best discovered in some place to which we belong and our connection with others depends on this sense of identity, a private, individual place, somewhere deep inside, which is then the true subject of history.

And as Light (1991: 188) adds, this message "can be a source of consolation or of terror, for if identity is attached to places and places are vulnerable locations in time, identity itself is potentially unstable, always in danger of being uprooted and of needing to be rehoused." Thus, when Manderley is burnt down at the end of the novel and Mr and Mrs de Winter are forced to go into exile, they become ghostly figures; when Maxim loses his patriarchal estate, he becomes the 'gentleman unknown'²¹ that he really is.

Last but not least, I want to end this section by dealing with the questions of why I do not read *Rebecca* as a Gothic heroine even though she threatened the villain, and why her rebellion cannot really be considered a threat to the patriarchal system. As Maxim explains to Mrs de Winter when he confesses his murder, his marriage to Rebecca was a farce:

She made a bargain with me up there, on the side of the precipice [...]. 'I'll run your house for you,' she told me, 'I'll look after you precious Manderley for you, make it the most famous show-place in all the country, if you like. And people will visit us, and envy us, and talk about us; they'll say we are the luckiest, happiest, handsomest couple in all England. What a leg-pull, Max!' she said, 'what a God-damn triumph!' (305)

²¹ As I have pointed out in section 2, Mrs de Winter first describes Maxim as reminiscent of the portrait of a medieval man, entitled "Gentleman Unknown".

In return for this, Maxim was supposed to allow her to do whatever she wanted and not give her away as adulterous and promiscuous. This bargain shows that Rebecca never really broke away from patriarchy. On the contrary, she was glad to be part of the system and to live among the luxuries of Manderley, and used her identity as mistress of Manderley to hide the promiscuous life that she led in London. As Maxim said to her: “‘What you do in London does not concern me. You can live with Favell there, or with anyone you like. But not here. Not at Manderley.’ She said nothing for a moment. She stared at me, and then she smiled. ‘Suppose it suits me better to live here, what then?’ she said.” (311) As she herself declared, then, it actually *suit*ed her to live at Manderley, because she needed it for her own purposes. Furthermore, “even her ‘challenge to patriarchal laws of succession’ is a lie: she is not pregnant, she has cancer.” (Yanal, 2000: 79) This double life suggests that Rebecca’s character is not as sexually liberated and autonomous as she appears to be. If it is said that Mrs de Winter, as a result of her identification with and emulation of Rebecca, is an insecure woman who would like to be “one whose sexual autonomy would not bring about her social disgrace” (Light, 1991: 178), *so is Rebecca*. Rebecca’s problem is also “how to find sexual pleasure without going beyond the pale – how to be like, and yet not like, those ‘other women.’” (Light, 1991: 177) On the other hand, it is also important to point out that what Mrs Danvers, who also seems to be against patriarchy but is not, truly admired about Rebecca was her capability to run the estate and to be the perfect housewife; she admired her *as mistress of Manderley*, and this is why she hates the new, inexperienced Mrs de Winter: “‘What do you think it meant to me to hear Frith and Robert and the rest of the servants talking about you as ‘Mrs de Winter’? [...] And all the while my Mrs de Winter, my lady with her smile and her lovely face and brave ways, the real Mrs de Winter, lying dead and cold and forgotten in the church crypt.’” (272)

Thus, just as Maxim admits that “I accepted everything – because of Manderley” (308), all the other characters in *Rebecca* are also concerned about the perpetuation of the patriarchal estate and they cling to it for protection: Mrs de Winter needs patriarchy to protect her identity, and Rebecca needs it to protect and conceal her unaccepted sexual behaviour under the image of a perfect wife. The preservation of Manderley and everything it represents in terms of class and patriarchal power is, therefore, the biggest preoccupation in du Maurier’s novel, and, therefore, it is also the most prominent source of evil and suffering. As Bernhard (2005: 239) affirms, “the chief preoccupation of the leading characters is again with Manderley: its glamour, which must be maintained; its rituals, which must be obeyed; and its honour, which must be preserved at all costs.” Moreover, according to Brinks (2003: 13), “castles [and big houses] figure as material emblems of an enduring patriarchal line. [...] such estates assume great symbolic weight in the transmission of cultural ideologies, felt as burdens placed upon their inhabitants.” Even if Manderley *is* a burden for the characters, they are nevertheless desperately concerned about its preservation, because otherwise they will have to face “the crucial question [...] of how to live after the end of patriarchy.” (Kane, 1999: 212) And this is actually what happens in the end when the house is burnt down. According to Light (1991: 182):

Daphne du Maurier is obsessed in her fiction with the passing of time. It is not just ‘the past’ as a discoverable and knowable location, a ‘setting’, with its implications of time and place fixed together [...], but an intense preoccupation with the idea of time passing, with the temporary, because temporal, nature of things, and with a transience that suffuses every moment with immanent (and imminent) loss. It is that sense of an ending which overshadows all her most popular works – *Rebecca*, *Frenchman’s Creek*, *The King’s General* and *My Cousin Rachel* – and which contradicts a more romantic view of the past as an idealised place to which we can simply escape in memory and in fiction. [...] What gives these novels their pathos is that they evoke failed utopias as well as lost pasts. In a world of perpetual change, futurity is also in doubt, and time, like the hotel existence where the de Winters in *Rebecca* are doomed to stretch out their days, can offer only temporary accommodation.

Thus, in *Rebecca*, the destruction of Manderley is not “a destruction of what has been haunting him [Maxim] and thus a brand new beginning” (Chow, 1999/2000: 148), as in *Jane Eyre*, where the burning of Thornfield is a liberation for both Jane and Rochester. Instead, the ending of *Rebecca* “poses a [...] question of social reproduction and continuance” (Chow, 1999/2000: 152), and the ruined estate, Manderley, becomes the most prominent haunting presence in the minds of Maxim and Mrs de Winter in their exile.

4. CONCLUSIONS

As Alfred Hitchcock very well observed, “*Rebecca* is the story of two women, a man, and a house. Of the four, [...] the house, Manderley, is the dominant presence.” (Beauman, 2003: vii) And, as I have attempted to demonstrate throughout this dissertation, Manderley is also the presence that represents what I regard as the main villain in du Maurier’s novel: patriarchy and the rigidity of traditional patriarchal rules regarding the socially imposed boundary between femininity and masculinity. By imposing “the belief that hierarchy and authority were ‘fit’ and egalitarianism was degenerate” (Kane, 1999: 12), the patriarchal system corrupts all the characters in *Rebecca*, and turns them into potential villains that oppress each other, and abuse their power whenever they can.

However, as I have tried to reflect, in du Maurier’s novel there are several desperate attempts to perpetuate this system, a strong sense of nostalgia for the values of the past that are under threat, and a great anxiety about the end of patriarchy, “the problem of the connection between aristocracy and immortality” (Punter, 1996: 17), and the fact that “all these big estates will be chopped up in time and bungalows built.”²² (287) As Light (1991: 183) argues,

In *Rebecca*, it is the desire to go back, to live earlier times again in the imagination, which forms the mainspring of the plot. ‘Last night I dreamt I went to Manderley again’, that resonant opening line, gives us the novel in miniature, as Manderley is revisited by an older and sadder narrator, remembering, looking back.

As Light (1991: 184) adds, “at the beginning of the girl’s story in *Rebecca* nostalgia for the past is the root of all evil: going back to Manderley with her new husband sets in motion an unstoppable train of memories, real and imagined, which poison their life

together and make the loss of their home inevitable.” This nostalgia is also created by patriarchy, and it shows the subtly manipulative nature of this system: even if the characters are oppressed by its demands, they cannot break away from it, they depend on it. This is why, when Manderley is destroyed, Mr and Mrs de Winter do not feel liberated, but dislocated: despite the repression that patriarchy inflicts on its subjects, it also prevents them from finding another satisfying way of defining themselves.

Furthermore, this idea of manipulation is crucial regarding the vision of patriarchy which is articulated in *Rebecca*, both at a textual and at an extra-textual level. At a textual level, the novel is in fact a story about patriarchal manipulation: whereas patriarchy manipulates the patriarch by making him believe that he possesses innate authority, the patriarch manipulates his wife to make her believe that he is the father figure that the system requires him to be, and the wife – the narrator – in turn manipulates the reader and tries to trick him/her into believing that her story is an ‘ideal romance’ - to use Radway’s words – which promises patriarchy, stability and continuity.

Finally, I want to suggest that, at an extra-textual level, it is patriarchy itself that has triggered the re-writings of *Rebecca* as a romance. The evil force that makes the characters’ in the novel justify and protect the patriarchal figure is, in my view, the same villain that made Hitchcock (and also Jim O’Brien in the 1997 television adaptation²³) re-write Maxim’s character to make him more sympathetic for the audiences. After all, as Angela Carter puts it, in *Fireworks: Nine Profane Pieces* (1979), “we live in Gothic times. Now, to understand and interpret is the main thing”. (Carter in Meyers, 2001: 24)

²² In the novel, this statement is uttered by an anonymous character, a woman who lives near Manderley, and very little importance is attached to it. However, I read it as an important piece of information, disguised as a trivial remark.

²³ In the 1997 version, the ending of *Rebecca* is modified so that it resembles the ending of *Jane Eyre*. In this adaptation, Maxim (Charles Dance) is eventually redeemed by making him save Mrs Danvers (Diana Rigg) from the fire, a heroic act which leaves him physically disabled.

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