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Editorial Note

Research is a crucial component in our lives that permeates through the realms of higher education. It aids in the advancement of knowledge, improved pedagogy, the enhancement of institutional reputation, and promotes funding which are crucial to the overall growth of an institution. Within the experience of empirical studies, the researcher, be it student or teacher, finds better scope to hone a wide spectrum of skills. The immense benefits of a consistent and vibrant research environment are the impetus behind the publication of the annual multidisciplinary Dimapur Government College Journal.

Providing a wide platform for the avid scholar, this issue contains twelve papers ranging from topics as diverse as food crops, pre-colonial Naga society, issues of identity, midwives, gender, role of media, different aspects of literature, sexual health of students and the implementation of the NEP 2020 and FYUGP. They have been written by writers across academia. We are confident that readers will find these papers relevant, thought-provoking and practical.

The papers have been thoroughly assessed by qualified reviewers for whose contributions the editorial board remains grateful.

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6. Gothic Echoes in *Rebecca's Tale* and *Wide Sargasso Sea*

Dr. Maongkala Longchar* & Tolino Yeptho**

** Dr. Maongkala Longchar, Associate Professor, Dept of English, DGC*

***Tolino Yeptho, English Major Graduate of DGC (2022-25)*

Abstract

This research paper attempts to present a study on women's interest and influence in Gothic elements mainly focused on British literature. The study of the gothic genre is carried out particularly in Rebecca's *Tale and Wide Sargasso Sea* by Sally Beauman and Jean Rhys respectively. The study analyses how the writers have impacted and contributed to the exploration of the Gothic and how they have supported the Gothic tradition with their unique thematic concerns and narrative ideas and styles. This paper examines how these women writers advocated and challenged contemporary gender norms and socio-economic status of women. It includes a deeper understanding of the role of women in shaping the gothic genre and their contribution to the broader field of gothic studies.

Keywords: Gothic, Female Gothic, Women Writers, Mad woman, Wife.

INTRODUCTION

Gothic literature can be defined as writing that employs dark and picturesque scenery and an overall atmosphere of exoticism, mystery, fear, and dread. Often, a Gothic novel will revolve around an old castle, estate or mansion that conceals a terrible secret. The dark and mysterious setting creates a sense of unease and foreboding. The work is pervaded by a threatening feeling, a fear enhanced by the unknown. A character may have a disturbing dream, vision, or some phenomenon may be seen as a portent of coming events. An omen is often used for foreshadowing. Dramatic, amazing events occur, such as ghosts or giants walking or inanimate objects coming to life. The characters are often overcome by anger, sorrow, surprise, and, especially, terror. They suffer from raw nerves and a feeling of impending doom.

The term "women's gothic" or "female gothic" is widely attributed to Ellen Moers, who introduced it in her seminal 1976 work (90). This subgenre that focuses on female experiences and perspectives, has evolved significantly from its origins in towards the progressiveness of feminist ideals. The Female Gothic utilised the Gothic tradition of highlighting characters' psychological conflicts through metaphors of supernatural events, centred on female protagonists in the contemplation of anxieties of marriage, childbirth, and female autonomy through the lens of supernatural threat. A lonely, pensive and oppressed heroine and her sufferings are the focus of attention. One or more male characters, as king, lord of the manor, father, or guardian, wields all the power.

The constant use of the appropriate vocabulary creates an atmosphere of the Gothic.

Aims and Objectives of the Study

- To explore the use of Gothic themes and symbols in order to critique social norms and gender roles.

- To highlight the portrayal and development of female characters in contemporary women's Gothic fiction.

Literature Review

Marie Mulvey, in her chapter "The Female Gothic Body", states that, in philosophical and psychological traditions, the alignment of the female with the monstrous or animal body has helped degrade the category of woman in social and political hierarchies (125). Within patriarchal ideology, monstrosity has been regarded as quintessential to the construction of femininity. Rachel M. Brownstein argues that the female protagonist searches for an achieved, finished identity, realised in conclusive union with herself as a heroine, which means that the female gothic novel is typically the genre that facilitates the voicing of female experience and female identity (54). Hume, in his work claims that Gothic writing is closely related to the romantic; both are the product of a profound reaction against everyday reality and conventional religious explanations of existence (288). The one attempts to transcend the flux of the purely temporal to find joy and security in a higher beauty; the other is mired in the temporal, and within it can find only

absurdities and unresolvable ambiguities. Selma James argued from a feminist perspective that Rhys's novels are about how women are aliens; how women do not stand a chance because the cards are stacked against them.The heroines have in common "hopelessness, defeat," and "isolation"; each of the heroines is a personification of the "female condition," that is, alas, the perfect victim, unable or unwilling to defend herself (78). Wallace comments that the Gothic works as a "mode of history," for women because its signature components, "the obsession with inheritance, lost heirs, and illegitimate offspring," as well as ghosts, murder, sexual violence, abduction, and dispossession, help articulate women's experiences and their problematic status in both history and historiography (143).

Sally Beauman (1944–2016) was an influential British novelist, journalist, and editor known for her diverse literary contributions spanning journalism, theatre history, and romantic fiction. Born on July 25, 1944, in Totnes, Devon, Beauman studied English at Girton College, Cambridge. Her academic background laid a strong foundation for her later career in writing and journalism.

Beauman's novels often centre on complex, strong female protagonists entangled in love, betrayal, and mystery. Her books are celebrated for their atmospheric settings and psychological depth. *Rebecca's Tale* (2001), a sequel to Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca*, exemplifies her ability to revitalise classic stories with fresh perspectives. The book has been divided into four parts, each narrated by

a different character, highlighting the memories, diaries and imaginations of people that knew Rebecca. Beauman attempts to unveil some of the mysteries which Du Maurier had not in the original classic.

Rebecca's Tale is set twenty years after Rebecca's death and the burning of Manderley. It follows the search of Terence Gray for the real Rebecca and the answer to what really happened to her. Beauman uses several points of view to tell her story, those of Colonel Julyan, Terence Grey, Rebecca herself, and finally Ellie Julyan, the Colonel's daughter. On the twentieth anniversary of the death of Rebecca, Colonel Julyan receives an anonymous parcel. It contains a black notebook with two handwritten words on the title page 'Rebecca's Tale' and two pictures: a photograph of Rebecca as a young child and a postcard of Manderley. Rebecca once asked Julyan to ensure she was buried in the churchyard facing the sea; if she ended up in the de Winter crypt, she warned she would come back to haunt him (56). It seems she has finally kept her promise. Julyan's conscience has never been clear over the official version of Rebecca's death. Was Rebecca the manipulative promiscuous femme fatale her husband claimed or the Gothic heroine of tragic proportions that others had suggested? The official story of the 'truth' had been based on Maxim's version of events in *Rebecca*.

Rebecca's Tale gives us a sympathetic view of Rebecca. She is portrayed as a feminist, who does not settle into a 'wifely' role and feels perfectly entitled to carry on illicit relationships as a deliberate defiance of the confines of traditional marriage. Rebecca in the original

is ambivalent; she is a strong woman yet deceitful and accomplished, yet her likeability is a facade.

Rebecca's Tale both commissioned by the du Maurier estate and making explicit reference to the hypotext in the title, engages with the ending of *Rebecca*. Beauman's work explores many of the themes in *Rebecca*, including jealousy, powerful men and women, as well as identity, obsession, mystery and the relationship between the past and present. Beauman suggests that Rebecca is a modern heroine who has cuckolded her husbandin retaliation to her emotional oppression.

There is a sense of female haunting in *Rebecca* where the titular character pervades the timid narrator's psyche. The narrative clusters around the two female antagonists, the living and obedient second wife, Mrs. de Winter, and the dead, rebellious, and indestructible first wife, Rebecca. The second Mrs. de Winter, modest and insecure struggles to conform to her new upper-class status. Ironically, the more she tries, the more she fails, acting clumsily and speaking nervously. Rebecca's haunting presence is powerfully symbolised by the initial 'R', which dominates the second Mrs. de Winter's identity so thoroughly that her own name is erased. This concealment reflects the narrator's psychological defense against Rebecca's overpowering influence (Robbins 73).

The nameless narrator would have us accept *Rebecca* as a convention ridden love story, in which the good woman triumphs over the bad by winning a man's love. She views Rebecca as a rival although both women have actually suffered very similar fates. Both wives are brought to live

within the confines of Manderley, symbolically a male domain. The difference lies in how they respond. The second wife quietly submits, letting her husband shape her identity; Rebecca refuses to follow the rules. She is seen as immoral for her infidelity and, for threatening the tradition of bloodline and male inheritance, she pays dearly.

Beauman's novel repeats the famous opening lines: "Last night I dreamt I went to Manderley again" (3) but it is now attributed to another character. Manderley lies in ruins and there are alleged sightings of the deceased Rebecca or other supernatural sightings that permeate the narrative. The title leads the reader to expect Rebecca to give her own version of events, but the use of the word "tale" suggests we take the narrative with a pinch of salt. Nevertheless, the novel empowersthe forever silenced Rebecca to express her point of view in the manner of Jean Rhys giving a voice to the madwoman in the attic.

The novel picks up threads of the story twenty years after Rebecca's death, giving a follow-up to what happened to some of the characters. While revisiting events, the characters present varied perspectives that complicate the original narrative. The reimagined journeys encourage readers to reconsider their understanding of the source text.

Beauman employs numerous Gothic elements to evoke a haunting atmosphere and deepen the psychological complexity of her characters. It is predominantly through the character of Rebecca that the idea of the Female Gothic is realised though characters like Mrs.

Danvers with *vampiric* peculiarities (342) add to the mix. From the outset, the symbolic resonance of Rebecca's boat, *Je Reviens* (21), foreshadows her spectral presence throughout the narrative. The boat's name suggests not only her literal return in memory and investigation but also the thematic return of the repressed, a trademark of the Gothic genre. This idea is reinforced by repeated mentions of ghostly manifestations within Manderley which now lies in ruins (5). Key characters associated with Manderley and those close to them are now dead or in altered circumstances touching neighbouring Kerrith precincts such as The Pines, where Arthur Julyan notes "there were ghosts in the corners of rooms" (27) rendering the narrative a repository of unresolved trauma. His admission that the dead often talk to him including his grandfather (35) blurs the boundaries between the living and the dead, in keeping with Gothic tradition.

The haunting atmosphere within the novel is thus not only external but also psychological. The characters are haunted not merely by Rebecca's presence but by the unresolved emotions, secrets, and irreverence and fearless power she embodied. Manderley itself, the grand yet oppressive estate, becomes a Gothic character, its corridors echoing with silences, secrets, and supernatural impressions. It holds secrets of incest, adultery, murder, terrible and forbidden, yet which inevitably tumble out within the pages of the narrative.

The psychological undercurrents intensify with Maxim's gaze at an unidentified object or person during Rebecca's hurried burial hinting at his suppressed guilt, a moment

not lost on the ever-observant Colonel Julyan, who notes "I was looking directly at damnation" (36). Maxim's death at the Four Turnings at the entrance to the Manderley estate then embodies Gothic notions of fate (27). Had Rebecca's Devlin father curse fallen on him finally, not unlike the French boy who dies in the fishing accident? The heirless Maxim's demise at this symbolic threshold not only highlights the doomed legacy of Manderley but it also reinforces Terence Grey's superstitious observation that "men associated with Rebecca seem to suffer fatalities with astonishing regularity" (528). Rebecca's unconventional power, both seductive and destructive, becomes a metaphor for female reaction to the constraints of patriarchal structures. Her ghostly presence signifies unresolved tensions around gender, control, and rebellion, making her an archetype of the Female Gothic.

Isolda dares to defy patriarchal convention, but her rebellion comes at a cost. Forced to survive on her own in Brittany, she ultimately returns to England out of financial necessity. There, she is compelled to do the unthinkable for a woman of her class: to eke out a living as an actress. Cast in the role of Desdemona, Isolda somewhat resists her murder, but is advised not to fight back and play the passive and submissive victim of Othello's insecurities. Rebecca, in contrast, is portrayed as a Machiavellian figure, likened both to Richard III and Iago, masterful in deceit, manipulation, and performance (405). She defies patriarchal conventions and strictures, paying with her life for daring to break the mould of a subservient wife. With a clairvoyant eye, Rebecca recognises a new

ghost at Manderley, a pale reflection of herself, someone who will occupy Manderley yet never possess it. From Rebecca's perspective, the second wife is a phantom even while alive: timid, voiceless, and unsure. Far from being a replacement, the second wife seems a veritable ghost, even by Ellie's estimates, destined to be haunted by her predecessor'smeticulously crafted legacy. Yet Rebecca is both incensed and haunted by the awareness that this was Maxim de Winter's choice, the "ideal wife, the woman of eternal subservience" (442). It is a bitter confrontation with the truth of women's position within patriarchal structures, where women remain systematically suppressed.

Jean Rhys (1890–1979) was a Dominican-born British writer best known for her modernist works that delve into themes of displacement, identity, and the struggles of women within restrictive social roles. Rhys was of mixed Creole and Welsh descent, a background that significantly influenced her work, especially in her portrayal of the Caribbean and the experience of outsiders in Europe.

Rhys's characters are typically marginalised women, often impoverished and rejected by society, or who have experiences of isolation and vulnerability. Rhys's most acclaimed work, *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966), serves as a prequel to Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, exploring the backstory of Bertha Mason, Mr. Rochester's 'mad' wife, and offering a postcolonial and feminist critique of the Victorian novel.

Jean Rhys rewrites the story of the first Mrs. Rochester, focusing on her early life in the West Indies. Mrs.

Rochester, whom one knows only by Rochester's biased description of her, is given a voice, a departure from her portrayal in Brontë's iteration. Her'voice' in *Jane Eyre* is reduced to roars, grunt, and maniacal laughter. *Wide Sargasso Sea* is haunted, possessed by the narrative of an already dead protagonist, whose destiny has been locked within the "cardboard" (Rhys 118) world of *Jane Eyre*.

The novel is primarily narrated by Antoinette Cosway and her husband, characters who correspond to Bertha Mason and Rochester in *Jane Eyre*. Rhys's novel has been called a prequel to *Jane Eyre* but there are discrepancies particularly in chronology. *Jane Eyre* is set in the early nineteenth century, while *Wide Sargasso Sea* begins just after the abolition of slavery. Beauman's novel dissects the problem of individuals who feel trapped between two cultures and are unable to identify fully with anyone. Rhys challenges Brontë's classic; in a world of Gothic imagination, Bertha emerges from "the other side" (15) to tell her own story as Antoinette Cosway, highlighting the tension between the submissive "angel in the house" (Woolf 236) and the madwoman, essential figures that define female identity within a patriarchal system.

Antoinette's loss of identity begins with her mother's rejection in childhood. Annette shows little affection or communication, favouring her son Pierre over Antoinette. Despite this strained bond, Antoinette ironically mirrors her mother's fate, marrying an Englishman, leaving the island, and descending into madness. When her mother becomes ill, Antoinette goes to see her and is, once again, pushed away. Antoinette feels that her mother is ashamed

of her for her assimilation into the black Caribbean society despite being considered "white cockroaches" (9). Having failed with her mother, she tries to forge a bond with Tia but even here, she is cruelly rejected and emerges bleeding. The island people show hatred toward the family for their slave-trading past and subsequent prosperity. Mr. Mason, Annette's new husband, rescues the family from poverty but cannot save them from the blacks' hatred. His patronising racism is clear in his underestimation of the potential violence of the island people. He refuses Annette's pleas to leave Coulibri: "They are children; they wouldn't hurt a fly"(18). As white Creoles, Annette her mother can gauge the reality and threat.

Annette is despised by the island people for being a Creole and a former slave-owner's wife. She witnesses the burning of her estate by the blacks, and she loses hope when her only son dies in the fire. This drives Annette beyond sense, and Mr. Mason leaves her in the hands of caretakers who abuse her. Christophine explains: "They drive her to it. … They tell her she is mad; they act like she is mad" (101). Likewise, Antoinette does become mad only when Rochester mistreats her and shuts her up in the attic after realising how different and non-English she is. Early in the relationship, Antoinette experiences a deep sense of foreboding that her brief happiness with Rochester will not last as she echoes Othello's line: "If I could die now, I would be happy" (57), revealing her awareness that joy is fleeting and doom inevitable. The marriage takes the expected turn and Rochester renames her Bertha in an attempt to make her submit to his ideals.

When Antoinette confronts him: "My name is not Bertha is not my name; why do you call me Bertha?" Rochester simply responds, "It is a name I'm particularly fond of. I think of you as Bertha" (86); he visualises her as a stereotypical Victorian wife but cannot come to terms with her "otherness". She becomes his "Marionette," complete with doll's look and voice, establishing himself as her "puppet master" and "practitioner of colonial obeah" (Smith xii). Unable to conform to his expectations and definitions of her as a woman and wife, she descends into madness.

In the loss of her identity as Antoinette, she becomes Rochester's 'mad' possession to be locked away in the attic and devoid of free will. He further asserts authority over her by taking her away from the Caribbean, uprooting her from the only place she ever loves. He taints the purity of Granbois by indulging in a sexual relationship with Amélie, deliberately within his wife's hearing, intensifying Antoinette's rootlessness and feelings of betrayal and alienation. She is taken to a bleak, unfamiliar England, Rochester's cold world, far from her warm Caribbean roots. By removing her from her homeland, he strips her of any chance at selfhood. She is confined to Thornfield's attic, silenced and forgotten.

Antoinette has another dream in which she sets fire to her husband's house. As in *Jane Eyre*, she steals Grace Poole's (her guardian in Thornfield Hall), keys as she falls asleep in order to roam the house, but she is frightened to encounter "the ghost of a woman who they say haunts this place" (122) not realising that the ghost is herself.

She prepares to be biblically sound, "wise as serpents, harmless as doves" (116) but rescue never comes, neither from her husband nor from her brother. Rhys moves much deeper into the unstable mental world of her character to transform the conventions of the Gothic into powerful tools for exploring the turbid depths of the feminine spirit. Locked in a space without mirrors or windows, Antoinette loses her innate identity. The only way out to break free of the shackles of patriarchy and a madly possessive husband is for her to jump into the welcoming pool at Coulibri.

Both *Rebecca's Tale* and *Wide Sargasso Sea* represent quintessential examples of the female Gothic novel, weaving narratives that explore themes of identity, agency, and power within patriarchal structures. These texts delve into the psychological and societal constraints placed upon women, using Gothic tropes to illuminate the fears and desires of their female protagonists. *Rebecca's Tale* complements *Wide Sargasso Sea* as another example of a revisionist Gothic novel that seeks to amplify marginalised female voices. While Rhys's work reclaims the silenced voice of Bertha Mason, Beauman's narrative explores Rebecca as a complex figure, moving beyond her portrayal as either victim or villain in du Maurier's original text, challenging the patriarchal narratives that have defined her legacy. Both novels interrogate issues of gender, identity, and autonomy. They transform Gothic conventions into tools for feminist critique, emphasising the ways in which women's voices have historically been suppressed or distorted. Both works use Gothic conventions as feminist tools to interrogate identity,

gender, and autonomy. More than reinterpretations, they are acts of reclamation, reshaping the genre to centre complex, marginalised women.

This research has highlighted the significant role women writers have played in shaping the Gothic tradition, particularly through the lens of gendered experience and critique. Sally Beauman's *Rebecca's Tale* and Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* exemplify the Female Gothic by reimagining and revisiting canonical texts from the perspective of silenced or marginalised female voices. Through themes of madness, confinement, identity, and resistance, both authors not only reinforce traditional Gothic conventions but also subvert them to expose the psychological and societal constraints placed upon women. Their protagonists inhabit Gothic spaces, including mansions, estates, and isolated locales, that become symbolic of the internal and external circumscriptions imposed on women. These texts showcase the Gothic not merely as a genre of terror and suspense but as a means of interrogating patriarchal norms and expressing repressed female subjectivity.

The study affirms that Beauman and Rhys contribute to a broader feminist discourse within Gothic studies by embedding socio-political concerns within their narrative and stylistic choices. The madwoman, the woman who resists conventional definitions, the fatally disempowered wife who defies patriarchal standards, become more than mere Gothic tropes; they stand as powerful metaphors of female resistance and critique. Their reworking of established narratives challenges the

patriarchal structures of authority, control, and morality, creating space for alternative female narratives to emerge. In doing so, these writers not only preserve the Gothic tradition but also reshape it, demonstrating how women's voices have redefined the genre to reflect their own fears, desires, and struggles. Their work remains central to the ongoing evolution of the Gothic as both a literary and ideological form.

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