**Echoes in Gothic Romance: Stylistic Similarities Between Jane Eyre and Rebecca**

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When Daphne DuMaurier's acclaimed Gothic romance novel Rebecca debuted in 1938, it was devoured by the female readers of its day. Ultimately, however, criticisms of DuMaurier's most famous novel were quick to point out its irrefutable resemblance to another Gothic romance novel written nearly 100 years prior: Charlotte Brontë's Jane Eyre (1847). Whether it was intentional or not, DuMaurier never commented on the novels' similarities, but the evidence speaks for itself, extending far beyond heroines and plotlines.

Today, the two classics are still read and discussed in modern literature classrooms, offering readers many parallels. In capturing the essence of their genre, DuMaurier's and Brontë's classic works provide prime examples of many of the common elements, rhetorical devices, and characterizations of the Gothic romance novel.

**I. The Gothic Romance: Origins & Elements**

Before examining the similarities between Jane Eyre and Rebecca, it is necessary to understand what elements make up the literary genre of Gothic romance. The Gothic genre first came into popularity in the mid-eighteenth century with the publication of The Castle of Otranto by Horace Walpole. Although it has no ties to the Gothic era of history, Gothic fiction did mirror the rise of Gothic architecture at the same time. Many speculate this fact contributed to the name “Gothic fiction,” although The Castle of Otranto was set in Gothic times and may have also given the genre its name.

Described as a blended form of prose fiction, the Gothic aims to combine the narrative, dramatic, and lyric styles of writing into a powerful tale of dark themes, sometimes supernatural elements, and social repression. Common elements of the Gothic novel include: a setting in a castle or mansion, supernatural or inexplicable events, overwrought emotions, one or more women in distress, and a metonymy of gloom and horror (Harris). Sometimes called the literature of nightmare, Gothic fiction includes dream landscapes, figures of the subconscious imagination, and the fears common to all mankind in one powerfully told story, riddled with suspense and drama (MacAndrew).

The ‘true’ Gothic novel maintained its popularity through to the early nineteenth century, “although a small but consistent demand for this form combining romantic fantasy with a mystery and an apparent upsurge of supernatural evil continued well into the twentieth” (Radway). This new blend, known as Gothic romance, evolved over time. In a typical work of this nature, readers will find elements of the Gothic interwoven with those of Romance, particularly a focus on the relationship that develops between the hero and heroine (Russell). In addition, the primary element found in a Gothic romance is a feeling of dread, not the terror associated with pure Gothic fiction. This dread can be physical, psychological, or metaphysical and involve the body, mind, or spirit, but the Gothic romance must create an atmosphere that blends suspense and fear with mystery (Thompson). Finally, one last distinction between the two genres involves the novel’s end: a Gothic hero is ultimately destroyed by his demons, while a Gothic romance hero works through his past evils and the darkness of his own mind to achieve some form of victory (Thompson).

One of the most popular works of Gothic romance, Jane Eyre was written at the beginning of Gothic fiction’s second wave of popularity in the mid-nineteenth century. Known as Victorian Gothic, due to the monarch reigning at the time, Jane Eyre and Brontë’s other works were characterized by a “heroine who acts as a focus for social critique… lost in the world of her tale” (Hogle, 146). Additionally, she must liberate herself from the hold of her past as she is repositioned into a new atmosphere, a new architectural space, and a new political or social climate (Hogle). In her novel Jane Eyre, Brontë demonstrates a range of Gothic influences to form a more complete Gothic structure, one of the first of the truly “Female Gothics.”

As the Gothic romance genre continued to develop and evolve into the twentieth century, writers like Du Maurier led the charge. The Romantic strand of the Gothic got something of a reboot in the 1920s and 1930s, introducing new settings by way of mansions instead of castles and new social struggles, while also staying true to the essence of the genre. In Du Maurier’s novels, especially her most famous work Rebecca, she echoes the drama and suspense found in Brontë’s novels, while also adding her own flair. “It is no exaggeration to say that Du Maurier was the twentieth century’s Charlotte Brontë and Rebecca the twentieth century’s Jane Eyre” (Yardley). Both of these novels demonstrate the common elements of the Gothic romance genre and have become classics in their own right today.

**II. The Female Gothic in Practice**

When discussing these works, it’s important to note that they are both sub-categorized as works of the “Female Gothic,” a term first coined to describe the works of the Brontë sisters and their contemporaries. Inspired by the Gothic works of the late eighteenth century, Charlotte Brontë borrowed many elements from popular authors at the height of the first wave of Gothic fiction. Her characters, often versions of the models from this era, included confined and threatened women, ambivalent and dynamic anti-heroes, and weak, ineffectual heroes (Spooner & McEvoy). Although her works were based around these character archetypes, Brontë’s fiction was much more than a “crude reproduction” (Spooner & McEvoy, 30), however; Brontë’s own contributions to the genre helped to heighten the suspense of her Gothic romance novels by creating claustrophobic and psychological dramas focused around the relationships between men and women . Her characters are always “modern women seeking a place for themselves in a world that is hostile to them” (Spooner & McEvoy, 31), leading to a climate of high drama and social struggles. As a result, the definition of Gothic evolved to include Brontë’s contributions and a new Gothic revival was born in the mid- to late-nineteenth century.

Like Brontë, Daphne Du Maurier employed many of these similar character types and dramatic elements to put her own spin on the Gothic romance when the genre was revived for a second time in the 1930s. With the postmodernist climate of her modern world to draw upon, Du Maurier crafted her own brand of Gothic romance, turning her character’s very anxieties into a form of entertainment for the reader (Spooner & McEvoy). Much of the suspense found in Rebecca is psychological, with a tremendous amount of focus placed on the heroine’s internal feelings and thoughts—a revolutionary way to tell such a story at the time.

In their own ways, Brontë and Du Maurier each advanced and shaped what has come to be known as the Female Gothic: a sub-category of dark romance novels with elements of horror, written exclusively by female authors with females at the center of the drama. In The Routledge Companion to the Gothic, editors Spooner and McEvoy include a careful dissection of the most common elements found in the Female Gothic, which include the explained supernatural, the importance of narrative perception, and the heroine’s connection to the natural world.

**The Explained Supernatural**

In Jane Eyre and Rebecca, the authors employ elements of the supposed supernatural to heighten the tension and suspense of the story. As is common in the Female Gothic, however, these “supernatural” forces are always found to have very natural explanations (Spooner & McEvoy). These explained supernatural elements serve their purpose as a literary device without asking the reader to accept improbabilities and elements of the paranormal, as is seen in strictly Gothic works.

In Jane Eyre, several supernatural events occur, each working to create a more suspenseful atmosphere. On the night before Jane’s wedding, a strange figure appears in her bedroom and destroys her veil. The next morning, she recounts her tale to Rochester:

...A woman, tall and large, with thick and dark hair hanging long down her back… I saw the reflection of the visage and features quite distinctly in the dark oblong glass… Fearful and ghastly to me—oh sir, I never saw a face quite like it! It was a discoloured face—it was a savage face, I wish I could forget the roll of the red eyes and the fearful blackened inflation of the lineaments!... The lips were swelled and dark; the brow furrowed; the black eyebrows wisely raised over the blood-shot eyes (Brontë, 285-6).

Jane goes on to explain that the figure reminded her “of the foul German spectre—the Vampyre” (Brontë, 286), something her would-be husband considers foolish and ridiculous. This event, perhaps Jane’s most terrifying encounter in the entire novel, and several other “supernatural” occurrences wound throughout the story are explained as the doings of Rochester’s first wife Bertha Mason, a so-called madwoman who is kept in the attic at Thornfield Hall.

In Rebecca, Du Maurier also relies on the explained supernatural to build tension within the plot. Although not as overt as a nightmarish encounter, the supernatural elements in Rebecca are often dark feelings or premonitions the narrator experiences as she explores her new home at Manderley. Upon her first visit to Rebecca’s private boat house on the coast, the novel’s nameless protagonist (known to literature experts and critics as simply I) fights against unexplained feelings of dread as she opens a mysterious door: “I went to it, and opened it, a little fearful now, a little afraid, for I had that odd, uneasy feeling that I might come upon something unawares, that I had no wish to see. Something that might harm me, that might be horrible” (Du Maurier, 113). This passage demonstrates how heavy and foreboding the supernatural presence of Rebecca’s ghost seems to I. Of course, the something she “might come upon” is the secret of Rebecca’s death, not her ghost, but the narrator has no inkling of the truth at this point in the story.

Both of the above examples demonstrate how the explained supernatural works to increase tension and suspense within a typical Female Gothic novel. Other similarities exist, specifically that both events are connected to the heroine’s predecessors, another element that Jane Eyre and Rebecca have in common.

**The Importance of Narrative Perception**

Of course, the ability for Brontë and Du Maurier to heighten the reader’s anxiety with supposed supernatural events is closely tied to the importance placed upon narrative perception in the Female Gothic novel. Jane and I each narrate their respective stories in the first person, past tense voice while also revealing their inner thoughts as they occur. Thus, the reader experiences events as they happen to the narrators, along with descriptions of their thoughts and feelings in the moment.

Without using the limited first person narration in both novels, neither author could ask the reader to believe an event to be supernatural and then explain it away as a natural event. Readers learn only what the narrator knows at the time, taking them on a journey right alongside these women, which allows for much more confusion-based suspense. Stressing the nature of perception in the Female Gothic, Brontë and Du Maurier capitalize on the power of free, indirect narration which grants them access to the heroine’s thought processes and also details this unique perspective on events (Spooner & McEvoy). This privileged status is paramount to creating the air of mystery and suspense that is the core of any Gothic novel.

**The Heroine in Nature**

The final element common to works of the Female Gothic is the use of the heroine’s reaction with the natural world as a running theme. Authors of the Female Gothic often demonstrate an interest in the relation of the two, presenting the reader with a series of beautiful vistas through the eyes of the heroine (Spooner & McEvoy). Her reaction to these scenes is what categorizes the scenic descriptions in the Female Gothic style; without the heroine’s introspective on the natural world, the scenes would be only mountains, grand landscapes, and elegant mansions. In Jane Eyre and Rebecca, the heroines’ internal reactions to their beautiful new homes demonstrate the authors’ interest in their relationship to nature.

When the narrator of Rebecca gets her first glimpse of Manderley, a grand mansion she once admired on the front of a postcard, her reactions capture her internal feelings of dread and reluctance:

The gates had shut to a crash behind us, the dusty high-road was out of sight… This drive twisted and turned as a serpent, scarce wider in places than a path, and above our heads was a great colonnade of trees, whose branches nodded and intermingled with one another, making an archway for us, like the roof of a church. Even the midday sun would not penetrate the interlacing of those green leaves, they were too thickly entwined, one with another, and only little flickering patches of warm light would come in intermittent waves to dapple the drive with gold. It was very silent, very still…Even the engine of the car had taken a new note, throbbing low, quieter than before (Du Maurier, 64).

In the above passage, many words are cleverly used by the author to connote a special sense or association. The art of connotation, or using a word to convey a certain overtone, is woven throughout the narrator’s first impressions of Manderley, affecting her perception of both sight and sound (Kolln & Gray). The gates crashing, the twisting serpent-like drive, and the roof of branches impenetrable by even sunlight: all of these images evoke a foreboding sense of dread, of being trapped, and of something evil lurking around the bend. Even as the engine’s rumbles take on a new sound to the narrator, her very feelings are shifting from a state full of hope to one of dread. Almost to the contrary of these feelings, however, is the comparison of the branches intermingled into an archway like the roof of a church. This observation by the narrator suggests something different; perhaps coming to Manderley seems like a kind of sacrament to her, something holy and other-worldly. Manderley, to the narrator and now to the reader, becomes a sacred place shrouded in mystery, like a church with a long history and a certain supernatural mystique. By using connotation within her description of what could have been a picturesque scene, Du Maurier skillfully examines her heroine’s relationship to her natural surroundings.

Jane Eyre, upon arriving at Thornfield Hall, experiences many similar feelings towards her new environment. She arrives in the dark of night, the manor gates crashed closed behind her, and the road winds on and on before her. Her description of her drive to Thornfield reveals her trepidations about her new residence and occupation. As it is night, Jane is unable to view the exterior of Thornfield Hall right away and instead recounts her first impressions of its interior. This inability to view her new environment as an exterior is the perfect illustration of her situation; Jane is thrown straight into life at Thornfield without a full understanding of what it will entail or “look like.” Brontë uses Jane’s limited scope of her environment as a metaphor for her heroine’s limited perspective at this point in the story.

Many of descriptions of the landscapes surrounding I and Jane, strewn throughout their respective novels, help to illustrate the heroine’s feelings as the stories progress. By using imagery, connotation, and metaphors to deepen the reader’s understanding of the heroine, Du Maurier and Brontë both demonstrate a mastery of tying the heroine intricately to the natural world that surrounds her.

**III. Surface Similarities in Plot & Characterization**

When studied alongside one another, the popular Gothic romance novels Jane Eyre and Rebecca bear striking similarities. While Du Maurier admitted to admiring Brontë’s work, she never made any public mention of an intention to transform the classic novel in a modern context (Bertrandias). Still, perceptive readers and harsh critics alike have noted the number of connections between the two works. In many ways, Rebecca captures the true essence and Gothic romantic style of Jane Eyre, something countless imitations of the classic had previously failed to achieve (Bertrandias). As examples of the Female Gothic romance, Jane Eyre and Rebecca offer similar heroines, heroes, and assorted plot devices.

**Jane & I: The Perfect Gothic romance Heroines**

As the narrator and central focus of the plot, Jane Eyre and I each offer ideal characterizations of the Gothic romance heroine. In her article “The Utopian Impulse in Popular Literature: Gothic romances and ‘Feminist’ Protest,” Janice Radway offers a thorough analysis of the typical heroine in a Gothic romance novel: “she…is obsessed with her unexceptional appearance… sexually innocent and highly romantic… [and] marked by [a] self-deprecatory tendency.” These traits combine in a perfect recipe for a woman in distress, controlled by her environment, and suffering from a near-constant state of anxiety.

Rebecca’s narrator I fits this description perfectly, especially considering that she doesn’t even think to give the reader her own name! These anxieties prompt her to make outlandish statements about her wishes to change. On one drive through Monte Carlo with her new friend Maxim de Winter, she declares boldly: “I wish I were a woman of 36, dressed in black satin with a string of pearls” (Du Maurier, 37). Her story is riddled with such self-deprecatory comments and her relationship with Maxim is marked by her feelings of inferiority. She is baffled by Maxim’s attention, believing he spends time with her to be polite. Once they are married and arrive at Manderley, I’s feeling of inadequacy is only exacerbated by the constant comparisons by those around her to the previous Mrs. de Winter, the book’s eponymous Rebecca. Living under the shadow of Rebecca, the narrator struggles against her own anxieties and doubts, as well as an unfriendly staff, to find a way to survive in the chilled atmosphere at Manderley with a man she believes does not and cannot love her.

In her own story, Jane Eyre struggles with many of the same insecurities about her appearance, moral character, and deservedness of affection. Because Brontë begins her story much earlier in the life of her heroine than does Du Maurier, readers get to experience many of the events that shape Jane’s self-doubts, including living with an abusive aunt and attending a horrific boarding school. The effect is the same, however, leaving Jane feeling unloved and unworthy enough to be suspicious of any expression of affection. In fact, when Rochester finally reveals his feelings and asks for Jane’s hand in marriage, she scoffs and assumes he is joking. She asks him to face her so she can “read [his] countenance” (Brontë, 257). Once Rochester has convinced her of his honesty and Jane accepts the proposal, her self-image shifts abruptly:

I looked at my face in the glass, and felt it was no longer plain: there was hope in its aspect, and life in its colour: and my eyes seemed as if they had beheld the fount of fruition, and borrowed beams from the lustrous ripple. I had often been unwilling to look at my master, because I feared he could not be pleased at my look; but I was sure I might lift my face to his now, and not cool his affection by its expression (Brontë, 259).

This passage demonstrates just how delicate Jane’s self-perception is, that it may be shifted so drastically as soon as she accepts Rochester’s opinion of her to be true. Her very self-image is determined by those around her, revealing that Jane, although a survivor in the face of the bitterest adversity, has very little confidence and is run by her own self-deprecation.

With these basic traits in common, Jane and I are the perfect Gothic heroines for their novels. As such, they are primed for two similar story lines riddled with drama and anxiety and the brooding, troubled men that will serve as their Gothic heroes.

**Rochester & de Winter: Ideal Byronic Heroes**

Like the heroines of Jane Eyre and Rebecca, the novels’ heroes provide something of a mirror-image of one another. While some similarities could be seen as duplications by Du Maurier of Brontë’s work, much of their shared traits are the result of hero archetypes common to the genre. Gothic heroes, such as Edward Rochester and Maxim de Winter, are typically characterized as “Byronic,” a reference to the semi-autobiographical heroes of Romantic poet Lord Byron, famously described by Lady Caroline Lamb as “mad, bad and dangerous to know” (Russell).

As Byronic heroes, Rochester and de Winter are rarely understood, seem dark and rebellious at times, and often act in ways that baffle their heroines (Thompson). Likewise, the heroes’ motivations and circumstances are very similar. Karen McCullough and the Gothic Writers Chapter of Romance Writers of America offer a comprehensive list of these factors, still common to modern Gothic romance works today: The hero’s first wife has died or disappeared mysteriously; he has become a loner because of previous failed relationships or losses of those close to him; he believes he is to blame for some tragic act because the person who did do it has made it seem as though he was responsible; and mysterious incidents occur around him, sometimes seeming supernatural, and effect those he cares about.

Finally, Rochester and de Winter also each own a grand, country mansion that serves as the setting of the novel. Perhaps the most famous of all Gothic devices, these mansions (sometimes castles) serve as both a setting and the identity of their owners (MacAndrew). The dark, imposing atmospheres of Thornfield Hall and Manderley are metaphors for their owners’ own dark pasts and secrets. The walls offer an environment where the hero himself hides, while the heroine may feel trapped or imprisoned either emotionally or mentally (MacAndrew). In both novels, these mansions eventually burn to the ground, symbolically liberating the hero and his heroine from the dark, tumultuous past (Yardley). Once freed from their physical environments, Rochester and de Winter are also free to connect to their heroines on a more equal playing field.

**Similarities in Plot & Structure**

Many of the basic plot points of Rebecca have been sighted as uncannily similar to those of Jane Eyre. Other literary critics argue, however, that the similarities exist purely because of the novels’ shared genre and its tropes. Gothic heroines, for example, are nearly always orphans who must find a way to care for themselves without money or status, seeking “only the opportunity to survive” (Radway). Both are orphaned before the stories begin: Jane as a young child and I as a teenage girl. At the beginning of their respective novels, Jane Eyre and I must each work for their own survival in subservient roles to those in higher socioeconomic standing: Jane as a governess to a wealthy girl and I as a companion to a wealthy woman (Yardley).

Eventually, both women stumble upon their heroes, Edward Fairfax Rochester and Maxim de Winter, respectively, whom they ultimately fall in love with (Yardley). These relationships offer another parallel: both women are young (Jane is 19, I a mere 21) and find themselves captivated by older, once-married men in their forties. These men both harbor dark secrets about their previous wives, which Jane and I must come to learn and then accept. While Jane and I must each forge her own path from ignorance to knowledge, her respective hero works in opposition to her efforts, idealizing his love interest as “a figure of innocence and purity in which [he is] determined to keep her enclosed” (Bertrandias). The failure to accept Jane and I as autonomous human beings ultimately drives both Rochester and de Winter to withhold their secrets for too long out of overprotective urges, straining their relationships and adding to the heroines’ internal anxieties (Bertrandias).

The Romantic piece of the plot pushes this relationship out of the realm of strictly Gothic fiction, however, which would show one partner clearly dominated by another. In Rebecca and Jane Eyre, the Gothic romance storyline instead winds its way to a point of “symmetrical internal development that establishes the mutual dependency of hero and heroine and witnesses their parallel expressions of affection” (Radway). Together with their heroes, these typical Gothic romance heroines ultimately find a way to accept themselves, create a bond based on equality with their partners, and survive in the face of dramatic and unfortunate events. In these ways, the basic plot structures and hero/heroine characterizations drive many critics to see Rebecca as a modernized version of the classic Jane Eyre.

**IV. Microelements of Gothic romance**

While many of the aforementioned similarities between Jane Eyre and Rebecca demonstrate each novel’s categorization as Gothic romance, many other elements of the genre are also seem throughout the texts. Smaller, less obvious similarities, such as the tropes of Gothic romance and common rhetorical devices like metaphor and metonymy, are all at play within these novels.

**Other Gothic Tropes**

Defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as “a significant or recurrent theme; a motif,” a trope is something often easy to identify in genre works like those of Gothic romance. As previously discussed, the heroines and heroes of Jane Eyre and Rebecca exhibit many traits typical to the archetypes of their genre. Likewise, the plot lines and settings also include similar thematic elements, identified as tropes by literary critics.

Gothic romance novels also offer additional tropes, many of which appear in Jane Eyre and Rebecca. Firstly, a victim, helpless against her torturer, is at the center of the story (ScepticThomas). The victimizers in these scenarios are often associated with evil and may even have supernatural powers (ScepticThomas). Jane Eyre finds herself helpless to many torturers: her cruel aunt Mrs. Reed, Lowood School’s headmaster Mr. Brocklehurst, and eventually the crazed first wife of Rochester, Bertha Mason. At Thornfield, Mason’s crazed psychological torture seems supernatural because it originates from a source unknown to Jane for much of the novel. In Rebecca, the narrator’s real helplessness comes in the form of psychological torture. Rebecca’s spirit haunts her every thought and action, while Rebecca’s favorite servant Mrs. Danvers exerts her own brand of passive aggressive torture on I.

The setting of a Gothic romance also serves to heighten the victim’s feelings of hopeless isolation (ScepticThomas). The central Gothic image of a castle or mansion may be breathtaking to look upon but offers little comfort to the heroine who resides within it. As described in their initial impressions of Thornfield and Manderley, both Jane and I are simultaneously in awe and at odds with their new homes. Beyond the walls of the mansions, these parallel Gothic romance settings also include other symbols: forbidding cliffs, stormy seas, menacing rain and weather (MacAndrew). As the literature of nightmare, Gothic writers, even those of Gothic romance, have been known to use their work as a vehicle for notions of psychological evil (MacAndrew). Through the narrative of a Gothic novel, authors can make the entire world of the story seem strange and foreign, focusing on the evil that warps the mind of man instead of some external force that threatens him (MacAndrew). From within the mansion walls to the boundaries of the surrounding grounds, the setting of a Gothic romance novel like Rebecca and Jane Eyre is a common device used to create the atmosphere of mystery so essential to the genre.

**Rhetorical Devices: Metaphor & Metonymy**

In literature, rhetorical devices are tools used by authors to “achieve eloquence of expression or ensure the greatest possible effect on the reader” (OED). The rhetorical devices most used by authors of Gothic romance are metaphor and metonymy. While similar in nature, the two can have distinctly different effects on the reader: a metaphor is used to describe “something that it resembles in some way” while a metonymy is “applied to an event or object with which [the object] is associated” (Clark, 84).

Metaphors abound in Gothic romance, with the best example being that of the hero’s mansion representing the hidden secret from his past. As discussed, the destruction of the mansion serves as a metaphor for the hero’s freedom. In Jane Eyre, after Jane has discovered the existence of Rochester’s first wife in the attic and run off, she hears the story of Thornfield’s demise from a stranger who does not recognize her. He tells her that Bertha Mason set first to the house, beginning with Jane’s former bed, and then jumped to her death from the roof. Rochester, fighting to rescue the servants from Thornfield, is blinded and crippled by the incident. Thornfield Hall, Jane learns, “was burnt to the ground: there are only some bits of walls standing now” (Brontë, 431). Not only has the fire destroyed Rochester’s physical home, but it has also served to expunge the impediment to marrying Jane: his first wife, Bertha. Although he is not without his scars, Rochester survives the actual and metaphorical fire to be united with Jane once and for all.

In Rebecca, many metaphors present themselves to the narrator as she navigates the halls of Manderley for the first time. Everywhere she looks, she is met with Rebecca’s signature, embroidered initials, her friends and servants, and her possessions. I does her best to rail against the constant shadow of Rebecca, surrounding her in a sea of metaphors, but even when she finally tries to differentiate herself as an individual, Rebecca still haunts her. In a climactic scene, I has taken inspiration from one of the gallery’s portraits for her costume at Manderley’s annual masquerade ball. Keeping her costume a secret, she is giddy and gleeful about revealing her dress to her husband and their guests. When she does arrive at the party, however, she is shocked by the angry reaction of Maxim and the appalled looks of her friends. After the tragic unveiling, I retreats to her bedroom to change out of the gown, not knowing why it has caused offense. Maxim’s sister Beatrice explains: “The picture you copied of the girl in the gallery. It was what Rebecca did at the last fancy dress ball at Manderley. Identical. The same picture, the same dress. You stood there on the stairs, and for one ghastly moment I thought…You poor child, how wretchedly unfortunate, how were you to know?” (Du Maurier, 216). This symbolic moment and poorly chosen costume turn I herself into a metaphor with disastrous results.

The metonymy of Gothic romance is another key element used to set tone and mood, while also conveying hidden connotation to the reader. In this subtype of metaphor, one word is used to stand for something else, such as rain symbolizing sorrow (Harris). Many of the common metonymy used in these novels can be spotted throughout both Jane Eyre and Rebecca. These include image-evoking phrases like howling wind, grating door hinges, approaching footsteps, building ruins, blowing winds, disembodied sighing and moaning, slamming doors, and even crazed laughter (Harris). At key moments throughout Jane Eyre, disembodied voices and crazed laughter are both used to create supernatural undertones and imply some unknown and impending doom. One of Jane’s first strange experiences at Thornfield is the strange laughter of Bertha drifting through the house: “It was a curious laugh: distinct, formal, mirthless…It began again, louder: for at first, though distinct it was very low. It passed off in a clamorous peal that seemed to wake an echo in every lonely chamber: though it originated but in one” (Brontë, 110). The laughter itself is a metonymy for the mysterious atmosphere of Thornfield, but Jane’s word choices, including clamorous and echo, suggest an unsettling and sinister quality to the laugh itself.

In Rebecca, the features of the weather are most often used to imply the character’s feelings or the mood in the air. In the midst of the inquest into Rebecca’s death, as she waits for Maxim to return from an errand, I observes the grounds outside of Manderley: “There was a foggy dew upon the grass like frost, and the trees were shrouded in a white mist. There was a chill in the air and a little, fresh wind, and the cold, quiet smell of autumn…the flowers themselves drooped upon their stalks, the petals brown and dragging” (Du Maurier, 356).

Even the grounds of Maxim’s home seem to be frozen in wait, struggling for life at their master’s possible imprisonment and murder conviction. The narrator sees these natural elements through her own sense of dread, giving the reader many examples of metonymy such as frost, white mist, and drooping flowers to illustrate it.

When the rhetorical devices and tropes of Gothic romance are considered in conjunction with the similarities of plot structures and characterizations, it is clear that Rebecca is much more than a mindless copy of Jane Eyre. Indeed, Brontë’s and Du Maurier’s works stand today as classic examples of the Gothic romantic tradition that has evolved over the course of three centuries, still luring readers into their dramatic, suspenseful, and mysterious worlds.

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