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The Murderer Next Door: Male Heroes as Possible Killers in *Jane Eyre* and *Rebecca*

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ABSTRACT

This evolutionary psychology study analyzes Edward Rochester in Charlotte Brontë's Jane Eyre and Maxim de Winter in Daphne du Maurier's Rebecca. This article uses The Murderer Next Door: Why the Mind Is Designed to Kill's evolutionary theory to examine how both works' male characters exhibit masculine issues like infidelity, jealousy, and reputation loss, which may lead male protagonists to commit murder. The imprisonment of Bertha by Rochester and Rebecca's murder by her husband are seen as evolutionary manifestations of deep-rooted desires to manipulate women, maintain male dominance, and impose their social hierarchy. Instead of romantic heroes, patriarchal authority, survival instincts, and aggression are fostered by giving these people lethal attributes, according to the report. The examination shows how Brontë and du Maurier challenge the Gothic hero stereotype by exploring the psychological and evolutionary causes of his protective behavior.

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Keywords: David Buss; domestic violence; evolutionary psychology; Gothic protagonist; homicide; madness; patriarchy

القاتل في الجوار: الأبطال الذكور بوصفهم قتلة محتملين في روايتي جين إير وريبيكا

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المُستخلص

تُحلِّل هذه الدراسة، في إطار علم النفس التطوري، شخصية إدوارد روتشستر في رواية جين آير لشارلوت برونتي وماكسيم دي ونترفي رواية ريبيكا لدافني دو موريه. يستخدم هذا المقال نظرية التطور من كتاب القاتل الذي في الجوار: لماذا العقل مصمم للقتل، من أجل تحليل الكيفية التي تُجسِّد بها الشخصيات الذكورية في العملين قضايا ذكورية مثل الخيانة، والغيرة، والخوف من فقدان السمعة، وهي عوامل قد تدفع الأبطال الذكور إلى ارتكاب جريمة القتل.

ويُفسَّر احتجاز برثا على يد روتشستر، وقتل ريبيكا على يد زوجها، بوصفهما مظهرين تطوريين لرغبات راسخة في السيطرة على المرأة، والحفاظ على الهيمنة الذكورية، وفرض التراتبية الاجتماعية. وبدلاً من تقديم هاتين الشخصيتين في صورة البطل الرومانسي، يبيّن البحث أن السمات المرتبطة بالسلطة الأبوية، وغريزة البقاء، والنزعة العدوانية تتعزّز من خلال إضفاء خصائص قاتلة عليهما.

وتُبرز الدراسة كيف تتحدّى برونتي ودو موريه الصورة النمطية للبطل القوطي، من خلال الكشف عن الدوافع النفسية والتطورية الكامنة وراء سلوكه الذي يبدو في الظاهر سلوكًا حاميًا أو وقائيًا.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الجنون ؛ العنف الأسري؛ القتل؛ النظام الأبوي ؛ بطل الرواية القوطية ؛ديفيد بوس؛ علم النفس التطوري

Introduction

Anyone who has read a lot about the history of literature may see that, even though the 18th century saw many social and cultural changes, women's roles remained severely constrained by patriarchal norms and a limited number of job opportunities. A close look shows that, in Victorian literature, female characters are generally portrayed as virtuous, submissive, and domestic, as was expected of women at the time. However, the representation of women in literature underwent a significant shift from the late 1800s to the early 1900s. There was a great emphasis on contradicting conventional gender stereotypes and promoting female independence.

Jane Eyre, by Charlotte Brontë, published in 1847, and *Rebecca*, by Daphne du Maurier, published in 1938, are two excellent instances of this transition. A more in-depth inspection of both stories reveals that they feature sophisticated, dynamic female protagonists who undergo transformations in their identities and futures under the charge of powerful male figures. From a broader perspective, the female protagonists in these novels, Jane and the anonymous narrator of Rebecca, pursue independence and self-fulfillment. This stands in stark contrast to the behavior of their counterparts among women of the same era. These novels defied conventional notions of gender roles by demonstrating that women are naturally powerful and self-reliant, even when society expects them to behave in a particular way.

By highlighting her moral and emotional independence, an impoverished governess challenges both her humble origins and societal norms throughout *Jane Eyre*. Jane and Mr. Rochester's relationship, which began as a subservient one but eventually developed into an equal and respectful one, is a prime example of Brontë's view of women's emancipation. Following her departure from the shadow cast by her wealthy husband, Maxim de Winter, and her predecessor, Rebecca, it would appear that the primary female character in *Rebecca* can achieve independence and discover her real identity. The novel by du

Maurier challenges the notion of the ideal, submissive lady by presenting a more forceful and accurate depiction of women's power. This research supports the idea that this period of feminism was marked not by overt political confrontation but by subtle forms of opposition embedded in daily conduct and individual decisions. Women frequently exhibited their defiance of societal standards by emotional resilience and symbolic assertions of autonomy rather than overtly contravening regulations. Women often depend on their own strength, knowledge, and a firm refusal to endure inequitable circumstances to maintain self-regulation (Asaad, 2025). This differs from deliberately violating the norms set by conventional society.

This optimistic picture of freedom and empowerment is made more problematic by the combination of factors in these two novels, which draws attention to a darker subject present in both. Not only are Mr. Rochester and Maxime de Winter complicated individuals, but they are also fundamentally flawed and potentially dangerous.

David Buss, an acclaimed evolutionary psychologist, has done a lot of research on how people choose their partners, including some grim topics like envy, infidelity, and violence against intimate partners. This study does not support or encourage violence; it looks into the genetic causes of these kinds of actions in men who are in the same situation as Rochester and de Winter.

Buss's evolutionary psychology offers a framework that enhances our comprehension of violent conduct, especially in the context of personal relationships. The information in Buss's 2005 book *The Murderer Next Door: Why the Mind Is Designed to Kill* shows that the human mind has developed psychological techniques for murder in reaction to threats to life, reproductive success, or social prestige. In this context, it is evident that one of the most prominent catalysts, particularly for men, is sexual jealousy. Buss stresses that "the most common reason a man kills his wife is sexual infidelity or its suspicion" (Buss, 2005, p. 105). This observation supports the view that a significant body of psychological and criminological research indicates that men frequently resort to excessive violence when they experience feelings of betrayal, humiliation, or a perceived loss of control (Buss, 2005).

This article employs Buss's evolutionary model as an interpretive paradigm, rather than a direct interpretation of fictional behaviour. The objective is not to assess literary characters through the lens of evolutionary psychology, as they are not biological entities. Rather, Buss's model functions as a heuristic framework that elucidates the manner in which Gothic narratives define masculine jealousy, dominance, and violence in intimate relationships. By integrating Buss's analysis of intimate partner homicide with Rochester and Maxim de Winter, the paper investigates the ways in which literature reflects and dramatizes contemporary concerns regarding masculine aggressiveness and patriarchal power.

Literary historians have examined the manifestation of psychological motivations in narratives, particularly in the characterization of Gothic and romantic protagonists. Buss says that severe motivations in males often show signs of jealousy, obsession, and a need to be in charge, all of which could lead to murder. Both Mr. Rochester in Brontë's *Jane Eyre* and Maxime de Winter in du Maurier's *Rebecca* are haunted by memories of their lives with their ex-wives and their attempts to hide their difficult pasts. They engage in actions such as holding secrets, manipulating people's feelings, and

mentally influencing them to show how afraid they are of being found out or rejected, and of losing their power. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, in their landmark feminist book *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979), argue that 19th-century literature often depicts men in charge and women in subservient roles through stories and symbols. Recent feminist literary criticism echoes these observations, challenging the normalizing or romanticization of male violence in love and marriage; this notion introduces a romantic aspect to ambiguous actions undertaken by men seeking to impress another woman (Gilbert & Gubar, 1979). Utilizing Buss's evolutionary notions, scholars may demonstrate how masculine protagonists in literature embody biologically driven impulses to dominate female counterparts.

This positions the analysis at the intersection of evolutionary psychology and literary criticism, demonstrating that fictional characters such as Rochester and de Winter exemplify the inherent impulses identified by Buss in real domestic-violence situations. From this perspective, literature functions as a medium for storytelling and the exploration of the more sinister aspects of female empowerment and domestic abuse that reflect actual circumstances. Buss investigates the evolutionary and psychological foundations of violent behavior. He examines the potential that individuals inclined towards control and governance, exemplified by Rochester and de Winter, may be willing to exert significant effort to maintain their authority and power. Rochester's hiding of his first wife, Bertha Mason, and de Winter’s unclear role in Rebecca's murder show how bad these relationships can be. This makes the heroines look weaker than they really are. This examination of the two novels is founded on Buss's *The Murderer Next Door*. Buss contends that none of the hypotheses have proven that the actual perpetrator was an intimate relative of the victim and that the murderer was the individual least suspected by the other accused (Buss, 2005).

Jane Eyre and *Rebecca* are important works in the English literary canon because they are closely related to Gothic traditions and use new narrative techniques. When one looks more closely, it is evident that these works draw on and transform Gothic themes such as the haunted house, the Byronic hero, psychological terror, and the "madwoman" image. This shows how dangerous it can be to have a tyrannical character as the head of a household. Mr. Rochester and Maxim de Winter, the male leads, are portrayed as mysterious, dark characters who fit the Gothic hero mold of moral ambiguity. People are both fascinated and scared by this person's deep psychological problems (Botting, 1996). One possible explanation for this phenomenon is that their tendency for violence, particularly toward women, is a defining characteristic of Gothic fiction, in which masculine power frequently conceals a latent murderous intent (Hoeveler, 1998). Thinking of these people as possible murderers from a psychological point of view makes the readers think of their old ideas about the works. It links them to important Gothic ideas about psychological violence, power, and gender. This approach is consistent with contemporary Gothic studies, which frequently examine how well-known works reflect cultural concerns about domestic abuse and men (Wisker, 2005). Thus, the article reinforces both established literary scholarship and current debates in Gothic and gender studies.

Literature is full of examples of homicidal partners, and folklore in its fictional stories—for instance, the tales of Blue Beard and Shahryar in *One Thousand and One Nights*—nourish the stereotypical image of male domination over women, while also showing many portrayals of women who deserve

to be killed. Instead of viewing his wife's betrayal as a personal act of disloyalty, Shahryar found it easier to generalize his outrageous hate for the whole gender, so he decided to destroy and kill a new bride each night as vengeance for the perceived betrayal of his unfaithful wife. The same pattern appears in the story of Bluebeard, who kills his wives for being curious, despite curiosity being a natural human trait, mainly for women. This idea of punishment against women persisted for centuries, as it was common for men to think that women were the source of all evil, and because of this, any act of rebellion by a woman was met with violence and suppression, or simply, such a woman was accused of being crazy or a witch. In his book *The Murderer Next Door: Why the Mind Is Designed to Kill*, Buss presents examples of deep-seated urges to kill one's romantic partner, a phenomenon connected to evolutionary psychology. According to Buss's theory, homicide of such kind is often committed by someone known and trusted within close relationships. The book investigates the hidden acts of violence that can occur in seemingly normal lives. Hence, Rochester in *Jane Eyre* and de Winter in *Rebecca* are seen as killers with inherited urges toward their ex-wives, either directly or indirectly. Using Buss's work as an example, this work aims to identify landlords as masculine figures and to highlight the prominent personality traits that shape the events of both *Jane Eyre* and *Rebecca*. This analysis highlights the importance of understanding the evolutionary motives of specific actions, which do not justify or rationalize them. Still, it also points out that evolutionary psychology elucidates the possible origins and reasons for human behavior. Yet, individuals are held responsible for their decisions and behaviors. The present article investigates how the two landlords in these works are held responsible for their wives' deaths and whether the male characters' actions are largely similar to those of Buss's "sinister figure." This article is innovative because it offers an alternative interpretation of the referenced works from Buss's perspective.

The Absent but Always Present Woman

It is well-rooted in human history that the other woman, the third party in all stories of couples, is often seen as the source of all evils. The biblical story of Lilith, the first wife of Adam, exemplifies this idea well. Moreover, literature, through its fictional stories, continues to promote the conventional image of male dominance over women and portrays many depictions of evil and unfaithful women who resist this dominance. The other woman has been portrayed as a subject of moral decay and condemnation. The biblical story of Lilith shows how this trend works. It shows how women's freedom is at odds with the order of society and heaven. This pattern can be perceived as a more precise way to comprehend the situation. Literary traditions have facilitated this pattern's development by portraying powerful males and associating women, particularly those who transgress sexual or social norms, with treachery and malevolence. Religious and ideological convictions associate women with Satan as the source of humanity's moral degradation (Shapiro, 2019) and frequently endorse such an image. With the expansion of the women's rights movement, the portrayal of female characters in literature evolved. Advocates for equality began to highlight strong women, categorizing them as "other women." Individuals of either gender can inflict harm against them. Individuals now perceive them as ladies who transgressed the conventions of their society.

Mr. Rochester, who is mysterious and moody, has a big effect on *Jane Eyr*e. He helps the main character find herself and become independent. This may be attributed to his complex personality and

secret past, which challenge Jane Eyre's beliefs and ideas and, eventually, help her gain a deeper understanding of herself and the world around her.

Comparable effects are obvious in *Rebecca*, as the mysterious Maxim de Winter looms over the story, shaping its dynamics and mood. Much of the novel's tension and drama stems from his turbulent past and his tumultuous relationship with the late Rebecca, his wife, which shapes the choices and deeds of the unidentified protagonist; du Maurier wrote in the twentieth century and was greatly influenced by Charlotte Brontë, a pioneer of classic literature, particularly *Jane Eyre*, which significantly shaped du Maurier's writing style.

The two novels, written by women, may seem romantic. They begin with a love story between a man and a woman, and sometimes include obstacles, such as a malicious woman trying to ruin the protagonists' lives. These challenges end with the wicked woman's disappearance and the couple living happily ever after. Despite the similarities between the heroes and heroines of the two novels, the most striking similarity lies in their settings. They are both characterized by being "... dark subterranean vaults, decaying abbeys, gloomy forests, jagged mountains and wild scenery inhabited by bandits, persecuted heroines, orphans and malevolent aristocrats" (Botting, 1996, p.41). Yet the story is told only from the protagonists' perspectives, particularly the male protagonist's. There is an obvious deficiency of details about the other women's attitude, including their motives for their actions, their feelings, their past relationships with the hero, and the reasons for their actions, which irritate the proud protagonists and cause them to hide the problematic wife's existence, erase their presence, or even their memories.

The Mysterious Attic and the Enigmatic Mansion

According to Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, the conflict stems from male authors' tendency to categorize female characters as either pure, angelic women or rebellious, uncivilized madwomen (Gilbert & Gubar, 1979; Federico, 2009); this idea is explored in relation to the notion that nineteenth-century writers felt bound to portray their female characters as either "angels" or "monsters" in their stories. Accordingly, Mrs. Rochester is portrayed as the monster, the grotesque being in charge of all the suffering that Jean, the angel figure, and Mr. Rochester withstand. However, readers remain ignorant of what led Bertha Antoinetta Rochester, the madwoman, to insanity. The same applies to Rebecca, although she is not shown as a madwoman but as having some psychological issues, as her husband claims. Men like Mr. Rochester and Mr. deWinter display patriarchal views toward the women in their lives. They are the embodiment of the traditional Adam, who disapproves of the liberation that Lilith longs for and instead looks for a companion who is passive, obedient, and devoted to him.

Mrs. Rochester is described from Jane's perspective as the sophisticated landlord who hides his wife from public view due to her insanity, attributing her madness to her malevolent nature. Jane exhibits a clear emotional bias favoring Mr. Rochester while belittling Bertha. It is apparent that those with mental illness were blamed for their condition, which is a huge injustice that hurts those people. This viewpoint ignores the possibility of humane treatment, choosing instead to have them subjected to imprisonment and torture, sometimes leading to executions for witchcraft, as seen in both the USA and Europe. This tendency appears to depend on the context in which insanity is a ready and easy

accusation against those who may annoy others, even though it "conceals beneath error the secret enterprise of truth" (Foucault, 2006, p. 33).

It might occur to someone that Mr. Rochester has become frustrated with his first wife's rebellious nature, which does not align with the ideal image of the angelic wife often portrayed in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Otherwise, how could one figure out Bertha's ability to trick the maid and escape, as well as her understanding of her husband's approaching remarriage, which contradicts Victorian social norms of that time? Bertha can differentiate between the new threat represented by Jane and that of her husband. Her attempts to warn Jane to stay away from Rochester suggest that she wants Jane to keep away from her captor and spare her the suffering that she might face. These actions deeply contradict her violent attacks on Mr. Rochester, possibly as a reaction to being degraded, imprisoned, and labeled as insane. In addition, her efforts to wound her brother, Mr. Mason, may be seen as an act of vengeance against him for supporting Mr. Rochester, as well as a punishment for his knowledge and for his silent approval of her plight, without offering a helping hand.

An unbiased reader observes that Rochester makes horrible accusations against his wife, Bertha, claiming that he is an innocent victim of her and her family. He argues that what happens to Bertha simply reflects her evil nature and immorality, asserting that she inherited these traits from a family he describes as a crazy father and a drunken mother. Besides labeling her as mad, he considers her to be of a lower race than himself, a racist view that reveals the depth of his hatred and contempt for her. The origin of the conflict between Bertha and her husband may stem from her rejection of the Victorian lifestyle, given that she was born in Jamaica to a Caribbean mother. It could be that the role of women in Victorian English society does not satisfy her, thus she seeks her freedom, making herself an outcast in the new society she lives in; as Foucault states, "Liberty, far from putting man in possession of himself, ceaselessly alienates him from his essence and his world" (2006, p. 214). Therefore, instead of understanding how she viewed herself, society accused women like her of two standard charges: being morally loose or being a lunatic. As usual, the husband's attitude will serve as the core for these accusations.

As a result, Bartha is branded with the stigma of madness. Instead of recognizing her as a person with a mental illness and offering her help and comfort, Mr. Rochester isolates his wife as a dangerous madwoman. In his book Madness and Civilization, Foucault says, "Madness is a false punishment for a false solution, but under its virtue, it highlights the real problem, which can then be really solved "(2006, 33). He further states that, on its own, it reveals the actual issue that can be addressed meaningfully; however, society never resolves such issues regarding sexual equality. Rochester sees his wife as a ferocious beast deserving of confinement. As a result, he seeks solace in other women, including the child's mother in his care, and then develops feelings for his ward's governess. He becomes connected to Jane, as her character starkly contrasts with his wife's. She represents the idealized lady, the revered angel of the Victorian era. The predicament of Bertha, or Mrs. Rochester, stems from her unfortunate circumstances, for which she has no fault. She highlights the plight of women in that era who may fall victim to an abusive spouse and an unjust society. Mr. Rochester's alleged effort at the end to save her may stem from his hidden sense of guilt toward her. Although Mr. Rochester told Jane that he was not directly responsible for Bertha's death, the event could still lead

others to see him as somewhat responsible for his wife's end, either directly or indirectly. In a symbolic or figurative view, his choices and actions might have contributed to her tragic fate. Here are several justifications to consider Mr. Rochester as Bertha's killer:

First of all, Rochester feels superior and feels inside that this mad woman of low origin is not worthy to be his wife. "Bertha Mason is mad, and she came of a mad family; idiots and maniacs through three generations. Her mother, the Creole, was both a madwoman and a drunkard—as I found out after I had wed the daughter, for they were silent on family secrets before. Bertha, like a dutiful child, copied her parent in both points" (Brontë, p. 445). Getting rid of her and replacing the “bad, mad, and embruted partner!” (Brontë, 445) with a “ young girl, who stands so grave and quiet at the mouth of hell”(448) is the first catalyst to murder the insane wife. Rochester’s ego is not content with keeping this lunatic creature who ruins his life and stands as an obstacle in the path of his well-being. Buss declares that males can kill their wives “ to get rid of someone who they perceive is inflicting costs on them” (Buss, 2005, p.24).

According to Buss, “sexual infidelity is often the cause of these murders” (Buss, 2005, pp. 99-100). Rochester, besides thinking of his wife as a lunatic, considers her an infidel. He declares to Jane all the vicious characteristics of his wife: “Bertha Mason, the true daughter of an infamous mother, dragged me through all the hideous and degrading agonies which must attend a man bound to a wife at once intemperate and unchaste” (Brontë, p.467). He presents himself as an innocent and misled man, pitted against his unfaithful wife, whom he describes as a skillful deceiver. This can be an outstanding justification to murder his wife because “A man who discovered infidelity would be incentivized to weigh the cost and benefit of revenge-killing his partner. He could conclude that murder likely would be net positive” (Larsen, 2023, p. 11). While Bertha's adultery is not made obvious in the novel, Rochester's description of her as morally repugnant and his subsequent actions, such as locking her away, can be understood as an excessive response to what he saw as a threat to his honor and authority. This proves Buss's theory that men are highly aware of signals that point to infidelity even when they do not receive obvious proof. In his book *When Men Behave Badly: The Hidden Roots of Sexual Deception, Harassment, and Assault*, Buss further examines the significant influence of sexual infidelity on male jealousy. "In cultures with heavy male parental investment, men showed an even stronger endorsement of sexual infidelity as more distressing than emotional infidelity" (Buss, 2021, p. 142). This sharp distress can, in extreme cases, lead to violent actions, including uxoricide.

Rochester might not be born as a natural killer, but his “cost-benefit calculators have arrived at a deadly solution” (Buss, 2005, p. 24) to his problems. Thus, the benefits Rochester acquires from removing Bertha from his life will have significant effects for him, and he can marry Jane, the reverse of everything Bertha represents for him. He declares, “That is my wife," he says, pointing to mad Bertha, "And this is what I wished to have . . . this young girl who stands so grave and quiet at the mouth of hell, looking collectedly at the gambols of a demon. I wanted her just as a change after that fierce ragout. . . . Compare these clear eyes with the red balls yonder—this face with that mask—this form with that bulk” (Brontë, p.488). He frankly declares that he wants to have Jane as an amendment for the brute he has as a wife. So, murdering the beast will allow him to make this change.

Another drive for using violence against women is to keep control; Rochester locks up his wife like a wild animal; his position of privilege and authority as a wealthy landowner renders him the ability to control Bertha inside the social framework of Victorian England without being questioned for his actions. The power inequalities in his relationship with Bertha are further reinforced by Mr. Rochester's commitment to patriarchal norms and gender roles, highlighting how societal strains and institutional discriminations contribute to her humiliation and subjugation. Accordingly, "men's violence to women arises from patriarchal values, which motivate men to seek to control women's behavior, using violence if necessary" (Bates et al, p. 1). Therefore, removing Bertha and finding a new partner becomes a way for Rochester to exert control over his life.

Although Mr. Rochester is not explicitly said to have murdered Bertha Mason in Jane Eyre, his actions, attitudes, and treatment of her are the true culprits of her psychological, emotional, and social death that ultimately contribute to Bertha Mason's fatal outcome. Mr. Rochester has a complex role in Bertha's life, affecting her well-being through psychological manipulation, emotional neglect, and systemic oppression as part of societal participation, even if his actions have not killed her physically. Still, he is the true murderer of her soul, identity, and voice. In this respect, Rochester can be viewed as a responsible of a symbolic or structural murder, in which Bertha's autonomy, voice, and identity are systematically destroyed in the absence of direct physical homicide.

A Substitute for Rebecca

Maxim de Winter, the mysterious landlord of Manderley in Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca* (1938), is one of the most sophisticated male protagonists in twentieth-century Gothic literature. People say he is the paragon of the perfect English gentleman: rich, aristocratic, and reserved. But an image of a dark, mysterious man, haunted by the memory of his first marriage, lurks behind this lovely facade. His calm attitude and carefully chosen words conceal deep inner battles he fights between being sensitive and being assertive. Maxim changes over the course of the novel into a figure with two sides: he is both a protector and a possible threat, kind yet controlling, and affected by regret, hiding, and the rigid rules of his house, Manderley.

Using Buss's ideas of the roots of homicidal tendencies to analyze the character of Maxim de Winter, we can detect several traits in Maxim's character that led him to murder his wife:

Othello Syndrome (OS) is a condition that is defined by a delusion of jealousy, which is a permanent, inaccurate perception that one's spouse is involved in extramarital behavior, resulting in tension in marital relationships (Todd & Dewhurst, 1955). The concept is employed in this article as a heuristic framework to elucidate patterns of obsessive jealousy and possessiveness in literary representation, rather than to indicate a clinical condition in the fictional character. It is thus employed metaphorically rather than diagnostically. Sexual jealousy is the most powerful impulse when it comes to killing a partner. Rebecca is the target of Maxim de Winter's feelings of jealousy, as stated by the narrator, because of the carefree manner in which his wife has been living. In their article "Male Sexual Proprietariness and Violence Against Wives", Margo I. Wilson and Martin Daly explore the concept of male sexual proprietariness and its link to violence against wives. They confirm that wives who face assault frequently assert that their husbands exhibit extreme jealousy regarding their interactions with

other men (Wilson & Daly, 1996). They further note that: "The discovery of wifely infidelity is viewed as an exceptional provocation, likely to elicit a violent rage, both in societies where such a reaction is considered a reprehensible loss of control and in those where it is considered a praiseworthy redemption of honor. Indeed, such a rage is widely presumed to be so compelling as to mitigate the responsibility of even homicidal cuckolds." (p. 2).

Buss's evolutionary theory implies that reputational damage is a basis factor in spousal homicide. A wife may be murdered to avoid competition that could destroy her reputation and to prohibit another man from having her. The theory suggests that men may have evolved specific mechanisms of homicide for killing their spouses. Spousal homicides are regularly analyzed, mainly in cases encompassing love triangles, where these factors may be more pronounced. Buss (2005) argues that reputational harm is a major reason for husbands to kill their wives. Rebecca, Maxim's first wife, is shown as cunning and faithless, having multiple extramarital relationships. Her actions jeopardize Maxim's reputation and social standing, particularly in their traditional society. Because of this, he is frustrated by his second wife's efforts to copy Rebecca and become a second version of her.

Like Rochester, de Winter intends to exercise extreme control over his household; any threat urges him to eliminate the danger of losing that control. Such men are so controlling that they restrict contact with female friends (Wilson & Daly, 1996). Feeling powerless and depressed by Rebecca's authority, Maxim turns to murder to resume his dominance and reclaim control over his own life and possessions. He tries to remove Rebecca as a threat to his name, personally and socially, by killing her.

Buss declares that the two most influential triggers for men's frequent thoughts of murdering their partners are, by far, a woman's infidelity and her behavior (Buss, 2005). After realizing his wife's infidelity, Maxim probably considers replacing her with another partner. Thus, killing her out of jealousy becomes easier. "A man who discovered infidelity would be incentivized to weigh the cost and benefit of revenge, killing his partner. He could determine that murder likely would be a clear positive. Perhaps the reputational effect would prevent infidelity from future partners" (Larsen, 2023, p. 11). Buss emphasizes, "A damaged reputation endangers a man's current social position. It hinders his future ascension in the social hierarchy" (2005, p. 94). So, jealousy and adultery are major motivations for homicidal conduct. Rebecca's infidelity irritates Maxim's deep bitterness and rage, further fed by her mockery of them. His wish to end his agony and shame drives him toward murder.

Rebecca was hardly the ideal wife, as Maxim explains to the narrator (the second Mrs. de Winter). She was unfaithful and enchanted everyone, even Maxim, with her allure. Rebecca's behavior promptly threatened Maxim's reputation, particularly in a society that highly appreciates social position and outward appearance. "She was vicious, damnable, rotten through and through. We never loved each other, never had one moment of happiness together. Rebecca was incapable of love, tenderness, and decency" (du Maurier, 2018, p. 245). As Buss notes, "Men use an array of tactics in an attempt to solve the problem of a partner's sexual infidelity, and violence is one tactic in that array" (Buss & Duntley, 2011). Rebecca insults Maxim's ego and his efforts to conserve respectability, even though she knew that if her behaviors were discovered, they would ruin his image: "I shall never forget the way she looked at me, the expression on her face. 'Well,' she said, 'which of us is it to be? Which one of us is

going to have our secret out in the open first?'" (du Maurier, 2018, p. 126). He despises her defiant attitude, which threatens his manhood, his role as lord of the household, and his reputation. Deeply problematic, Maxim and Rebecca's relationship was defined by emotional manipulation and infidelity. It is likely to see his decision to marry the second Mrs. de Winter as an attempt to regain the inner peace, happiness, and normalcy that Rebecca stole. However, Rebecca's shadow keeps on looming over his live, causing the new Mrs. de Winter to be anxious and intimidated. Rebecca's memories cause a mental disturbance among the novel's leading characters, as shown by the second Mrs. de Winter's visit to Rebecca's room and the many reminders of Rebecca's presence throughout the large estate of Manderley. Maxim's admission of Rebecca's death and his admission that he is glad to be free of her show that she had a big effect on what he did. "I shot Rebecca in the cottage in the cove. I carried her body to the boat, took the boat out that night, and sank it there, where they found it today"(du Maurier, 2018, p.249). Maxim's confession expresses that he killed Rebecca out of a complex mixture of envy, rage, and a yearning to escape Rebecca's dominating power. Her defiant nature and confession that she might get pregnant by someone else's child further increases his drive, which blends his desire to maintain his marriage and reputation with sexual envy. Men tend to be intensely sensitive to symptoms of infidelity since it would be devastating to invest resources in the child of another man. This sensitivity can feel like deadly aggressiveness in some situations or like extreme caution (Buss, 2018).

Buss continues by stating that men may turn to murdering their partners in an effort to keep them from getting remarried or losing the benefits of a partnership. Maxim's inheritance is at risk due to Rebbeca's careless behavior. Maxim may have been forced to remove her to avoid losing Manderley, his reputation, and the splendor that accompanied it. “She knew I would sacrifice pride, honor, personal feeling, 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 then. 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 " (du Maurier, 2018, p.256). The quote above highlights Rebecca's cunning nature, according to Maxim, and how she drove Maxim to the edge by taking advantage of his fear of being embarrassed in front of others, which finally resulted in a murder.

When these elements are analyzed, it is evident that Buss's justifications for why a man may decide to kill his wife align with Maxim de Winter's actions. He behaves aggressively and severely in response to Rebecca's actions because of a psychological framework that involves jealousy, envy, fear of losing property and status, and concerns about his reputation. “I hated her, I tell you, our marriage was a farce from the very first. She was vicious, damnable, and rotten through and through... Rebecca was incapable of love, of tenderness, of decency. She was not even normal "(du Maurier, 2018, p.254).

The killing of Rebecca by Maxim de Winter could be understood as a response to fundamental male psychological issues, such as the fear of cheating, the need to protect one's reputation, the negative effects of jealousy, and the stress of raising a child of another man, according to the evolutionary theory proposed by David Buss. Because of these and other factors, he does not consider Rebecca to be a potential romantic partner; rather, he sees her as a serious threat to his manhood, his family, and his social rank. The criminal conduct committed by Maxim is founded on long-standing concerns that

continue to influence the behavior of men in fiction and in real life, regardless of the Gothic style that du Maurier employs to tell the story. Maxim is more than just a depressed and unstable nobleman; he is also a complex combination of paternal authority, social standards, and his own distinct instincts for survival.

Conclusion

Applying David Buss's theory of evolution to Edward Rochester and Maxim de Winter, one can see a clear pattern. The two men's stories are told in very different ways and settings, but they are both driven by instincts that have to do with power, dominating women, and worries about their social status and reputation. Maxim kills Rebecca, and Rochester puts Bertha in confinement due to their rooted fear of deception, rejection by society, and losing their male authority. These fears, which come from evolutionary psychology, manifest as urges to silence or kill women who speak out against them. Both du Maurier and Charlotte Brontë show the evil side of abusive men, even if they didn't mean to. They show that Gothic figures can be attractive, strange, and dangerous all at the same time. Rochester and de Winter are no longer seen as heroes; instead, they are perceived as people who should be taken seriously because they show how power, fear, and jealousy can affect men.

Buss's framework functions not as a biological diagnosis of fictional characters but as a critical instrument that elucidates how Gothic narratives dramatize anxieties over masculine dominance and intimate violence.

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