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The Subversion of the *Bluebeard* Tale with a Modern Female Gothic Twist:

On the Marriage Theme in Gillian Flynn's *Gone Girl*

Abstract

Marriage, as one of the most common themes in literature, is usually a place of endless gender conflicts, and marital infidelity is the key that unlocks the forbidden bloody chamber. The *Bluebeard* tale, a 17th-century French folktale written by Charles Perrault, exerts a great impact on the Male Gothic literary treatments of women's marital disobedience and infidelity. Perrault portrays a gruesome and bloodstained marriage, in which a sadist husband carries out his obsessive actions of punishing his sexually curious wives for breaking a promise. Conversely, Gillian Flynn, a contemporary American female author, achieves the subversion of the *Bluebeard* tale with a modern female gothic twist. In Flynn's 2012 bestselling novel, *Gone Girl*, a bone-chilling and poisonous marriage slowly reveals itself, as a femme fatale carries out her murderous plan of punishing her unfaithful husband. More specifically, by overthrowing the inherited patriarchal doctrine haunting the *Bluebeard* tale that "the married woman is civilly dead," *Gone Girl* provides a female gothic reading of modern marriage and raises some thought-provoking questions about the female dark side. Flynn ingeniously peels away layer upon layer of the hatred and secrets that a married couple hold, unfolding a dark satire of how marriage, gender relations, and gender roles crack under financial and emotional strain.

On the strengths of Female Gothic perspective on marriage, this paper aims to analyze how Gillian Flynn, as a contemporary female author, subverts the *Bluebeard* tale

in *Gone Girl* and redefines the conventional Gothic marriage theme that punishes women when they challenge their husbands' patriarchal dominance. In other words, this paper explores how Flynn redefines the marriage theme which historically, culturally, politically, economically, and socially imprisons, represses, and exploits women as the "other" and asserts control over their choice and autonomy; how she renovates the marriage theme within the prevailing Gothic genre in which married women are usually portrayed as the ghostly, hysterical, and defenseless domestic victims, doomed to suffer pervasive violence and gender stereotypes; and how she ultimately empowers and elevates the marginalized Female Gothic genre into the mainstream spotlight.