

Dear Reader,

They say write what you know, and *Madam* is indeed drawn from my personal experience, both as a Classics teacher, and as a girl in a British boarding school. There is truth to the traditions, societal expectations, traumas, and struggles depicted within the pages of *Madam*, and some of it may surprise you. Caldonbrae Hall is certainly no Hogwarts.

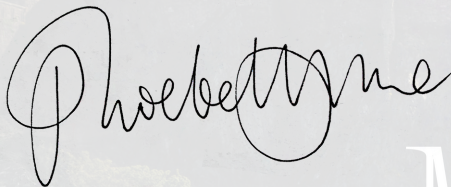
Institutions are dangerous places, and no genre knows this better than the gothic. I've always been compelled by the menacing ideas of the looming building, the male oppressor, the subjugated female, and her desire for escape. My greatest gothic writing 'shero' is Daphne du Maurier, who spun her fascinating webs so eerily and uncomfortably that they upset her contemporaries and stood the test of time, just as Emily and Charlotte Bronte managed before her.

Just like Jane Eyre, my heroine, Rose, learns that she must connect herself to something substantial to exist. Rose clings to her education and to the academic institution she knows well. But the one she's thrust into is rotten, as are its age-old customs. The girls enjoy these customs, as they know nothing else. But for three young students, their new teacher's tales of classical literature unlock something within them. Having absorbed the lessons of the ancient heroines passed on to them by Rose, they rise up, discovering their own version of compassion, and some version of autonomy. *Madam* is at its heart a story about rebellion, and how we must break free of oppression to find true connections and live as liberated women.

*Madam's* catastrophic ending came to me first, its setting and imagery so powerful that I was forced to find the story's beginning from there. Greek tragedy was my great friend and influence, with its themes of moral dilemma, suffering, and catharsis. I stormed through *Madam* as if it were a story possessed, peppered with bright characters with loud voices that crowded around my mind, and crowd around it still. Heroines both real and literary pushed through the pages to express themselves and rid themselves of their constraints.

I hope you find their freedom as exhilarating as I did.

Very best wishes,



Phoebe Wynne

MADAM