



## THE LIFE AND TIMES OF PATRICIA MAXWELL (JENNIFER BLAKE)

*FROM WINN PARRISH, LOUISIANA TO DAWN ENCOUNTER*

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Patricia Maxwell is a canonical voice in contemporary American romance writing and has become known as the steel magnolia of women's popular fiction, publishing over thirty books in eighteen languages over the past three decades. Although Maxwell is considered a romance writer, she has also published gothic fiction, murder, mystery, and suspense novels. Publishing was initially difficult for Maxwell but she has nonetheless sold over thirty million volumes of her work. Many of Maxwell's early works are now available in electronic format on <www.e-reads.com>. Maxwell has developed an extremely supportive fan-base despite receiving very little attention in academic circles. Patricia Maxwell is presently the Writer-in-Residence at the University of Northeastern Louisiana and an honorary member of *Romance Writer of America*.

Patricia Maxwell was born on March 9, 1942 in Winn Parish, Louisiana, at the home of her maternal grandmother. Formally educated at Quitman Elementary School and Quitman High school, Maxwell enjoyed class exercises in writing instead of reading. A junior high school teacher noticed Maxwell's advanced creative writing skills. Maxwell was intimidated at first by the teacher's comments since her formulation of a writer was a superior being that lived in New York, England, and other cultural capitols. According to Blake, an artist is one that can earn a living writing and still have time to care for family and friends. With the exception of book reviews no formal biography exists on Patricia Maxwell.

Among many of Maxwell's favorite childhood books are Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women* and *Little Men*; *Rose in Bloom*, *The Five Peppers and how They Grew*; and *Tom Sawyer* and *Huckleberry Finn* by Mark Twain. The main reason why Maxwell became a writer was a passion for escapist literature. Reading heightened Maxwell's critical skills, allowing her to devise innovative plot structures that conclude in a new fashion from most other romance novels. Patricia Maxwell adopted romance because of her love for the historical romances written between the 1930s and 1950s by Thomas Costain, Samuel Shellabarger, Frank Slaughter, and Frank Yarly. A dedication for applying research findings is another explanation as to why Maxwell has chosen historical romance as her main genre. Maxwell was known as a gothic writer early in her career, but switched forms due to a sever decline in the gothic fiction market during the 1970s. American readers were no longer interested in cryptic tales set in old mansions. The public's

taste shifted to historical romance for its sensual representation of history that attempted to redefine female sexuality.

Dorothy Dunnett's *Lymond Chronicles* is the series that most influenced Maxwell's writing. Lymond, the Master of Cutler and protagonist of Dunnett's *The Game of Kings*, compelled Maxwell to create complex characters driven by a psychoanalytical imperative. Another inspiration is George Heyer's historically charged dialogues. Other writers that power Maxwell's texts are Daphne du Maurier, Victoria Holt, Mary Stewart, Alexandre Dumas, Jane Austen, Paul William, Agatha Christie, Dorothy Sayers, Zane Grey, and Frances Parkinson Keyes. Patricia Maxwell's favorite novels include Ernest Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises*, J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher and the Rye*, Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*, *Gone with the Wind* by Margaret Mitchell, and M.M. Kaye's *The Far Pavilion*. Maxwell's creativity stems from collected historical data, personal experience, reading, and an endeavor to reconstruct a setting or time period. Louisiana, the colonial period, pre-Civil War Spain, and France are Patricia Maxwell's preferred locales for her books.

In 1957, Patricia Maxwell married Jerry Maxwell at age fifteen. Northern Louisiana has been Blake's home since 1998. Maxwell passes her time gardening, collecting antiques, painting, and quilting. The secret to a long marriage, in Maxwell's estimation, is love, tolerance, and the willingness to aid one's spouse achieve their goals. Maxwell's heroes are typically males that suit a woman's ideal conception of masculinity. The attraction between the hero and heroine is a sub-conscious one triggered by a chemical spark that recognizes similar features. Patricia Maxwell proposes that women seek men that encourage female individuality. Romantic love scenes are reflections of developing emotions among characters who express their views of one another in juxtaposition with their present situation. Love scenes are therefore legitimate beyond sexual intercourse. Maxwell's antagonists symbolize male qualities that women must change in their lovers.

Throughout her career Patricia Maxwell has won numerous literary prizes. In 1985, *Romantic Times* awarded Maxwell the Historical Romance Author of the Year Award, and *Georgia Romance* bestowed the Maggie prize for *Midnight Waltz*. Maxwell was the 1987 recipient of the Maggie reward for *Southern Rapture*. The *Northern Louisiana Romance Authors* association proclaimed Maxwell the winner of the Climbing Rose award, and *Romance Writers of America* revived the Golden Treasure prize for lifetime achievement. *Southern Rapture* won the Silver Plume award in 1988, and *Louisiana Dawn* was listed the Best Colonial Romance by *Romantic Times*. Maxwell has also been named the keynote speaker at the *Romance Writers of America's* National Conference. Between 1991-94, Maxwell received the Reviewers Choice Certificate of Excellence that is issued annually by *Romantic Times*, for *Wildest Dream*, *Arrow to the Heart*, and *Shameless*. From 1994-97 Maxwell won the Reviewers Choice Award from *Affaire du Coeur* for *Shameless*, inducted into the Romance Hall of Fame, and a lifetime honorary membership to Coeur de Louisiana, Inc. *The North Louisiana Romance Authors* named Maxwell victor of the Climbing Rose prize, and *Silver Tongued Devil* won the Hot Medallion award from *Virginia Romance Writers*. 1997 was the

year that Maxwell accepted the Frank Waters Award for Writing Excellence from *Pike's Peak Writers, Library District Board*.

Over the past thirty years Patricia Maxwell has written under five pseudonyms. Patricia Maxwell was her first *alias* and was used from 1970 to 1978 for eight gothic mystery suspense tales for Fawcett Gold Medal and Popular Library. Maxwell released a murder mystery and a suspense novel in 1973 under the pen names Elizabeth Trehearne and Patricia Ponder. From 1978 to 1980, Maxwell wrote under the *nom de plume* Maxine Patrick for six light contemporary romances published by New American Library. The Jennifer Blake persona first appeared in 1977 on the cover of Maxwell's first *New York Times* bestseller, *Love's Wild Desire*. Maxwell's current pen name, Jennifer Blake, is the one that has enjoyed the most success. Fawcett Gold Medal was the first publishing house to sign Patricia Maxwell in 1969, and her most recent publisher is Mira Books.

Patricia Maxwell's first publication was a poem that sold for one dollar to a local newspaper. Her debut novel, *The Secret of House Mirror*, appeared in 1970. After several publishing houses rejected Maxwell's work, Fawcett Gold Medal accepted Maxwell's manuscript asking only that thirty pages be added. Maxwell writes from her second floor home office overlooking the waves, birds, and sail boats as she works anywhere from six to eight hours daily. Book reviewers have described Maxwell's writing as "sure-fire for the large following"<sup>1</sup> and "a master of romantic fiction." Maxwell's novels "consistently produce high-energy, compelling stories rife with steamy southern atmosphere." Such acclaim demonstrates that Maxwell's books are based on captivating the reader's sense of passion.

*The Bewitching Grace*, Maxwell's third novel, was released in 1973 by The Popular Library. Maxwell's book is a story of a young girl found dead among a row of trees. The murder is a random one committed by a serial killer. Maxwell's protagonist, Anne Tarrington, is a rising journalist who has never witnessed such an act of violence. Anne's investigation leads her through a path of Voodoo mysticism to a tumultuous Louisiana plantation. Three possible suspects may have caused the uproar including Nico, the obtuse Greek, the Voodoo expert, Lena, and Anne's old friend, Miranda. Anne's journey culminates with her confrontation with the nature of evil at an Indian Mound. Maxwell's novel charts Anne's realization that the root of evil permeates in the human sub-conscious.

During the early 1990s, Maxwell switched from producing detective fiction to writing historical romance. *Royal Seduction*, part one of the Royal Books series, is the story of the development of Angeline's love for an ambitious man. Angeline was residing at the steamy countryside near New Orleans with her aunt when Rolfe, the prince of Ruthenia, suddenly mistakes her for his brother's mistress and quickly kidnaps her. Rolfe becomes shocked when he discovers that Angeline is no longer a virgin. Maxwell's story follows the fairy tale genre for the reason that it debates the representation of women in marriage in juxtaposition to contemporary perspectives on gender roles. The

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<sup>1</sup> All quotations cited without a page reference are found on either [www.jenniferblake.com](http://www.jenniferblake.com), [www.e-reads.com](http://www.e-reads.com) or front and back covers of Patricia Maxwell's novels. Please contact Mira Book's publicity department for further bibliographical information.

reader maintains a high opinion of Angeline as she remains important to the novel's stance on gender even though the other characters believe that her value on the marriage market has declined. Maxwell ultimately concludes that women have more value than virginity. *Royal Seduction* is the first Maxwell text to appear in electronic format on *e-reads.com*.

Mira Books contracted Patricia Maxwell in the late 1990s. The first novel published by Mira Books was *Kane*. Kane is obsessed to prove that Regina's goal is to ensure that here conglomerate's plan to put his grandfather out of business comes to fruition. The only solution left for Kane is to ensure that he grows to be Regina's close friend. While the friendship between Kane and Regina turns into love, they both still refuse to part with the notion that family comes first. Maxwell's *Kane* proves that in an aggressive market economy one must always be careful of greedy individuals that will try to manipulate the emotions of someone wealthier in order to advance financially. *Kane* was a well-received book by critics that claimed the novel "touches the heart" of an audience that "understand[s] and sympathizes with the characters." Maxwell's *Kane* is the first instalment of the Louisiana Gentlemen series—a saga that explores the valor and drive connected with Louisiana manhood.

*Bayou Bride*, an early work of Patricia Maxwell's, was re-released on *e-reads.com* in 1999. Maxwell underscores the emergence of Sherry Mason's agreement to pose as Paul's lover in order to protect him from a marriage enforced by his arrogant older brother, Lucien. Sherry Mason is apprehensive of what extreme Lucien will reach to maintain Paul's subservience. Lucien later imprisons Sherry in his Louisiana Bayou mansion in a desperate attempt to thwart Sherry's plan of overthrowing his rule. Sherry's rebellion ultimately fails when she develops a love for Lucien. The point of Maxwell's *Bayou Bride* is to question whether passion overpowers friendship in a psychological battle between genealogy and hierarchy. The resolution of the novel lies in the reader's application of Maxwell's themes and plots to their own lives.

Patricia Maxwell followed *Bayou Bride* with *Luke*—the second part of the Louisiana Gentlemen series. Luke Benedict believes that he is the sole member of Turn-Coupe, Louisiana capable of protecting novelist April from a vengeful stalker. The story begins several years before the opening scene at a time when Luke disappoints April by not fulfilling an oath he made to her. Luke's attempt to redeem his relationship with April turns problematic for the reason that she cannot completely trust him. Maxwell's novel explores a painful quest to recuperate the admiration of a friend. The conclusion of Maxwell's tale revolves that the ideal man will always understand and eradicate his wrongs.

*Bride of a Stranger* narrates Claire's reluctance to accept the cruel nature of her marriage. Claire interprets the accidents that occur to her as coincidental instead of an evil plot devised by her fiendish husband to eliminate her. Justin Leroux, Claire's spouse, plans his wife's downfall through an orchestrated entanglement of passion and intrigue. Claire is obliged to survive in a world that equates love with danger. *The Chicago Times Tribune* states that Maxwell's writing is "as steamy a still July night on the bayou, as overwhelmingly hot as Cajun spice." Patricia Maxwell's *Bride*

*of a Stranger* explores how the love affairs included in romance novels are not always perfect. The book's intention is to argue that postmodern women must contemplate upon the injustices that women of past generations overcame in order to construct contemporary womanhood.

Mira books released *Roan*, the third episode of the Louisiana Gentlemen series in 2000. Sheriff Roan Benedict's stubbornness leads him to the rescue of a similar type of woman. Benedict uncovers that the woman that he is attempting to save is lying when she claims that she has no knowledge that the man who attempted to murder her is still perusing her. The irony is that Benedict protects this lover because of the notion that a Louisiana man always guards his most valued treasure. Patricia Maxwell's *Roan* defines the ideal man in terms of valor and compels women to instil such qualities in their own lovers.

Patricia Maxwell completed the fourth episode of the Louisiana Gentlemen series with *Clay* in July of 2001. Janna Kerr's daughter falls extremely ill and her only hope of recovery is a money-driven, untrained doctor. Janna and her child Lainey seclude themselves in a log cabin only to be discovered by Clay whose family owns the entire estate. Clay becomes captivated by Janna's beauty but she refuses a close association with such a powerful man. Janna dedicates herself to risking everything for her daughter's survival by distancing herself from Clay when he begins to comprehend her situation. Clay declines to stop perusing Janna since as a Louisiana man he must never leave a goal incomplete. Maxwell's *Clay* extols the ability of a Louisiana man's enthusiasm to better understand the complexity of the woman he loves.

*With a Southern Touch* depicts the lives of characters Heather Graham and Diane Palmer. Maxwell's southern romance glorifies the uniqueness of Louisiana love. Readers, in Maxwell's judgment, are supposed to have the novel renew their faith in the power of love. Maxwell's intention is to have the audience escape with their lover in an escapade to a time in American history when the south was a territory of exile and tranquillity. The mundaneness of postmodern love must therefore revive its liveliness by adopting the idyllic elements of nineteenth century romance. *With a Southern Romance* is part four of the Louisiana Gentlemen series.

Patricia Maxwell wrote *Wade* in 2002 roughly a year after the September-11-2001 bombings. Critics complemented Maxwell's ability to compose a well-structured novel shortly after a national panic. *Wade* concludes the Louisiana Gentlemen's series with the story of Brother Wade and his powerful family of early Louisiana settlers. The Benedict family is a close-knit unit of the Turn-Coupe, Louisiana community, that has a significant amount of seniority. Wade Benedict fulfils his dying friend's last wish to save his daughter who is trapped in the Middle East. Chloe Madison, the rescued, does not want to be salvaged for the reason that she fears her tyrannical step-brother's rule. The only manner that Chloe wants to return to America is if she can live with her father. Chloe refuses Wade's assistance fearing that her step-brother will harm her family. Chloe accepts Wade's offer only when she realizes that her step-brother has sold her marriage rights. *Wade* ends with a traditional reunion scene that sees Chloe's homecoming. Sharon Galligar Chance of *Times Record New* states that

"[Maxwell] has done a very admirable job portraying the desperate feelings and dire circumstances of women caught in a primitive culture." The Madison reunion scene advocates that kinship is of primordial importance in understanding that security comes only from people that have known one another for a long period of time. Maxwell's text also suggests that women enforce their agency in the marriage market.

The Master at Arms series debuted in 2005 with the launching of *Challenge to Honor*. Patricia Maxwell explores Celina Vallier's struggle to convince master swordsmen Rio de Silva not to murder her brother in an upcoming duel. Celina proposes that she trade her virginity to de Silva in return for sparing her brother Denys' life. Although the relationship between Celina and Rio appears somewhat perverted at first, it later turns into a long-lasting love. The relationship is convenient for Celina because she can use the liaison to both save Denys' life and release her from a loveless engagement to the Count de Lérida. Rio benefits from Celina as well for the reason that the Count is the uncle that he has long sought to avenge for murdering his family. The *Romance Review* considers "Blake's anticipated return to the historical romance to be worth the wait." Maxwell's latest novel exemplifies southern men like Rio de Silva for pursuit to honor their promises with the hope of bettering several lives.

The second installment of the Master at Arms series the forthcoming *Dawn Encounter*. Caide O'Neill discovers the young widow, Lisette Moisant, lying half dead in a cemetery. Lisette requires the protection of Caide from her money-crazed father-in-law. Maxwell incorporates the popular nineteenth century love triangle plot to show that a man like Caide is the only one in Louisiana that can ensure a woman's absolute safety. The winner of the three-pronged duel is always the master swordsman since his skills have been bestowed upon him by men of great dignity and honor. The Master at Arms saga is a projected six-volume collection about the New Orleans French Creole society of the 1840s. The argument of the series is that the master swordsman's talent allows him to attain whatever goal he sets.

Patricia Maxwell advises aspiring writers to composed creative writing for joy, energy, and fascination with the hope of producing a reciprocal feeling in the reader. Moreover, writers must produce literature that future generation can enjoy. If writing turns to toilsome labor, then the absence of creative imagination will surely guarantee failure. The longevity of Patricia Maxwell's career is therefore contingent on her passion to compose an invigorating form of writing that encourages women to seek a greater degree on autonomy.

Although romance writing has rationally been termed escapist, facile, and inartistic, Patricia Maxwell's fiction proves that integrating history into popular writing generates a form that the mass public can read as informative "commercial fiction" (Mussell, 3). Patricia Maxwell, like most other romance writers, redefines and resituates the origins of the different representations of female sexuality. Kay Mussell notes that readers of romance fiction follow an

heretical condition, questioning and challenging the traditional verities, and suggesting instead that under certain conditions popular culture acts in concert with other social forces as a powerful agent of challenge, especially during periods of social and political turbulence, precisely because of its power to legitimise. [6]

Twentieth century romance is consequently a significant genre read by millions of people each year for the self-reflexive connection that it makes between literature and the contemporary world.

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### **GENRES**

Romance; Historical Romance; Gothic; Murder Mystery; and Suspense Tale.

### **PSEUDONYMS**

Patricia Maxwell, Jennifer Blake, Maxine Patrick, Patricia Ponder, and Elizabeth Trehearne.