

Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca*: A Cautionary Tale Against Villainous Women

By

Erin Spellman

A Master's Thesis

Submitted to the Jackson College of Graduate Studies at The University of Central Oklahoma

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of Master of Arts in Literature

Fall 2024

Daphne du Maurier's Rebecca: A Cautionary Tale Against Villainous Women

Daphne du Maurier's Rebecca: A Cautionary Tale Against Villainous Women

Thesis Title

Erin Spellman

Author's Name

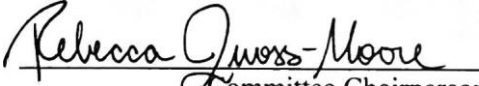
October 24, 2024

Date

Jackson College of Graduate Studies at the University of Central Oklahoma

A THESIS APPROVED FOR
the Degree of Master of Arts in Literature

By


Committee Chairperson



Committee Member



Committee Member

Abstract

Daphne du Maurier's novel *Rebecca* offers an unsettling examination of how Gothic literature is utilized to portray the female struggle for identity within a patriarchal society. Published in the early twentieth century, the novel focuses on a period of immense change in British society. Challenges to traditional gender roles and sexuality begin to arise with the emergence of the feminist and gay and lesbian movements. Daphne du Maurier explores the anxieties surrounding these social changes. The novel can be analyzed through feminist, queer, and psychoanalytical lenses to gain a greater understanding of du Maurier's response to the changing roles of women and how they threaten the patriarchal structure. A close examination of the novel's three female characters reveals that they each represent some facet of the social movements that du Maurier utilizes to villainize them. Rebecca, an independent woman with an ambiguous sexual appetite, refuses to follow the restrictive guidelines set out by Maxim de Winter, and by extension, the patriarchy. While Rebecca's challenges to patriarchy are partially contained by her death, she is not erased; Mrs. Danvers ensures that Rebecca's memory lives on in Manderley. Mrs. Danvers exhibits her own embodiments of resistance; her sexuality is in question, her appearance is bizarre, and her interests are obsessive. These characterizations are, of course, filtered through the narrator; she herself partly casts these women as villains. The narrator, then, seems to be the least villainous—and yet she displays behavior that is questionable and could be described as scandalous. She often lies to achieve an elevated role in society, and she is willing to support a murderer to maintain it. Instead of celebrating the challenges these women pose to the heteronormative patriarchy, Daphne du Maurier is providing a warning that, from her perspective, should these social movements succeed, they will bring destruction to society.

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	1
Rebecca.....	15
Mrs. Danvers.....	33
The Narrator.....	54
Conclusion	76

Introduction

“Nature had come into her own again and, little by little, in her stealthy, insidious way had encroached upon the drive with long tenacious fingers. The woods, always a menace even in the past, had triumphed in the end” (du Maurier 1)

Daphne du Maurier's novel *Rebecca* provides a haunting glimpse into the feminine struggle to find identity independent from men within patriarchal England and how that has subsequently affected the characterization of women in Gothic literature. *Rebecca* was published in 1938 when Great Britain was still recovering from the First World War and on the brink of a second one. The country was experiencing an immense amount of social change. The emergence of the feminists along with the gay and lesbian movements not only brought traditional sexuality and gender roles into question but also elevated anxieties over how changes to these roles might affect society as a whole. Daphne du Maurier capitalizes on these anxieties in her Gothic tale *Rebecca*. Analyzing the novel through a historical perspective allows us to view the characters through both a feminist and a queer lens. In doing so, we are able to delineate du Maurier's response to the social movements and the changing roles of women in early twentieth-century Britain. The manner in which she depicts her female characters displays the period's distrust of women who challenge the patriarchy, specifically women seeking sexual freedom and/or equality with men. It is also significant to note that her female characters are emblematic of the writer's struggle to define her sexuality and her role in society. Daphne du Maurier presents three women

who each personify the challenges presented by the social movements. Rebecca symbolizes the desire for sexual freedom, Mrs. Danvers shows the importance of acknowledging homosocial relationships in whatever form they might take, and the narrator represents the feminine struggle for equality in a phallogocentric society. However, instead of celebrating their stand against injustice, Daphne du Maurier villainizes these three women for the threat they present. Critics such as Alison Light claim that du Maurier concludes her novel by eliminating the threat and leaving the patriarchy intact. However, a closer examination of the text would suggest that Daphne du Maurier's novel provides a warning of what would happen if the social movements succeeded. Just as nature, personified as a woman, triumphs in the destruction of Manderley, so too would the villainous women of the social movements destroy British patriarchy.

It is no coincidence that Daphne du Maurier chose the Gothic genre to address the fears associated with the attempts of the social movements to change the treatment of women. Gothic fiction has steadily increased in popularity since its emergence in the eighteenth century with Horace Walpole's novel *The Castle of Ontranto*. This initial work set forth the characteristics that would make Gothic literature unique. One of the most defining characteristics of the genre lies in its attempt to force readers to come face to face with their anxieties. Jerrold Hogle tells us that "Gothic works hesitate between the revolutionary and conservative" (13). Daphne du Maurier opens her novel with a dream in which the narrator returns to Manderley, the idyllic estate that represents the conservative views of the patriarchy. As she gets closer to the house, she realizes that nature, personified as a woman, has intruded upon the sanctity of the home. The warning becomes clear. The revolutionary movements initiated by women will only lead to the destruction of traditional heterosexual relationships. To combat these forces, Gothic writers like du Maurier often portray these personified anxieties as the villains of their novels.

For Daphne du Maurier, the most formidable source of anxiety was women. Looking at the death of Rebecca and the haunting of the second Mrs. de Winter, one might argue that this novel highlights how women are subjected to mental and physical threats under a system that encourages their dependency on men. However, there is a contradictory approach to reading this Gothic tale. According to Judy Giles, *Rebecca* represents the “acute anxieties of a threatened middle class at a specific historical moment when the security of an older social order appeared in jeopardy” (158). Examining the historical context in which the novel was written as well as referring to the author's system of beliefs, it becomes apparent that *Rebecca* was written as a cautionary tale. Du Maurier recognizes that at the heart of the social movements lies the issue of identity. Traditionally, a woman's identity had been tied to her father or husband. She did not have a voice beyond the control of her home. According to Leona Sherman, the rise of the feminist and the gay and lesbian movements “brings selfhood into question and feels dangerous” (283). The dividing line between men and women becomes blurred and the very bedrock of society threatens to collapse. Daphne du Maurier attempts to warn readers that the success of the social movements will destroy the patriarchy by presenting three characters who each represent a challenge to traditional feminine roles. Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca* forces readers to face the “dangers” associated with the social movements' success and the freedom that women would gain.

At the time of *Rebecca*'s publication, Great Britain was experiencing a period of great change. The early part of the twentieth century was the beginning of a controversy known as the “women's question” (Holton 247). The debate surrounding this controversy stirred up questions about what a woman's proper role was in society. Gender roles were dictated by the separate spheres ideology. Ina Zweiniger-Bargiolowska provides insight into this ideology in her

introduction to *Women in Twentieth-Century Britain*. She states “According to this ideology men and masculinity came to be associated with exclusive access to and participation in the public sphere of work and politics whereas women and femininity were perceived as confined to the private sphere of domesticity and motherhood – idealized as ‘the angel of the house’” (8).

Women were expected to marry and provide children to their husbands. In this way, women did their part to uphold the patriarchy, but in the process, they also gave up their rights and their potential for more self-defined identity. Within this binary, marriage was not a contract born of love, but rather the means of survival for many women when other occupations were not available to them. Their sexuality became a commodity and the contractual nature of marriage forced women into both dependency and servitude to their husbands. Any act of defiance against this patriarchal system could result in the loss of a woman’s very means of survival.

Early inklings of the feminist movement began with the formation of social groups. Most of these groups were formed within the church, which was generally dominated by women except for the clergy. These women did not originally focus their attention on equality but instead provided charity services. They helped women “establish a place in the world outside the domestic sphere, helped to shape social and political movements, learn some of the skills needed for public life and in some instances become acknowledged experts in matters of public concerns” (Holton 249). These early groups helped bring attention to the women’s question and ignited the flame of feminism. Soon, women began to band together in more radical groups such as The National Union of Women’s Suffrage Societies. The Union’s main goal was to achieve equal voting rights for women. The organization utilized traditional methods of campaigning such as petitions and town hall meetings (Holton 251).

Some women thought that the Union was too passive and soon a new organization was formed called The Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU). Led by Emmeline Pankhurst, the group sought the same goal of equal voting rights, but they took a more militant approach to the fight. For example, on October 13, 1905, Pankhurst and another member of the WSPU were expelled from a liberal party meeting for being disruptive. As they were being escorted out, Pankhurst allegedly assaulted the officer (Holton 252). Despite negative press over the incident, Pankhurst viewed any attention to the movement to be positive. However, these tactics caused division amongst the suffragettes and the feminist movement began to lose momentum.

The eruption of World War I obscured the lines even further between the public and the private spheres. The suffragettes felt that they should turn their energies towards the war effort. For example, "The National Union deployed its resources to relieve some of the immediate distress occasioned by the outbreak of war, setting up workshops for the unemployed at home, and ambulance units for the wounded in the war zones" (Holton 257). Women also helped to recruit soldiers and to raise the morale within the country. However, one of the most revolutionary acts of women during the war was their entrance into the workplace. With so many men leaving to fight on the frontlines, factories were left without workers. These factories were changing their production to accommodate the needs of the military, producing ammunition and vehicles. To keep up with the rising needs, women of all classes began to fill the empty positions. They also found roles within healthcare and aviation that they had previously been barred from. Women were finally finding a role outside of the private sphere, proving that they were capable of roles other than those of wives and mothers. They had placed their foot inside the door to equality.

In 1918, that door was slammed back in their faces. The war had ended, and women were expected to revert back to the private sphere so that returning soldiers could retake their positions in the workplace. Women were outraged and they renewed their fight for equal rights. Jane Lewis contends that feminists “deplored the fact that there were so few opportunities for women to live independently and railed against the way in which women forfeited the power to control their own lives” (77). The feminist movement once again took up the fight to gain a political voice for women, but the same divisions that existed before the war plagued the efforts. Even though they all sought the same goal, opposing groups formed and represented “different, but equally valid, interpretations of how best to campaign for women’s rights during the interwar period” (Beaumont 264). These divisions within the organizations hindered the movement from forming a united front in the demands for equality.

Another issue that plagued the feminist movement was the fear that was associated with it. The expectation for women at the beginning of the twentieth century was that they would remain in the home and that they would be satisfied with supporting their husbands and raising the children. Giles infers that “The emergence of innumerable women from the domestic space of the home and their entry into public places hitherto reserved for men, disrupted the public/private division of space along gender lines, a division that was essential to maintaining a gendered map of the social order” (102). Opponents of the feminist movement saw their efforts to allow women into the public sphere as an attempt to dismantle the traditional family structure. There was also a fear that women wanted to take over the role of men. In her treatise on feminism, bell hooks reminds us that “many men blame women working for unemployment, for their loss of the stable identity being seen as patriarchal providers gave them” (53). This was especially true after the war when men were returning home to find their homes empty and their

jobs taken by women. As women began to discover an identity independent of a male counterpart, men were struggling with the loss of theirs.

Women were also beginning to discuss the barriers that had been placed on their sexuality. Lesley Hall recounts that in the beginning of the twentieth century “Female sexual desire was perceived as essentially responsive to the male rather than occurring independently” (51). Women were expected to view sex as fulfilling the needs of their husbands and as a means of reproduction. She was supposed to ignore her own desire and need for pleasure. In contrast, the feminist movement encouraged women to explore their sexuality. This was a threat to the patriarchy for several reasons. One reason was that women might begin to express their sexuality in the same way that men had. Extramarital affairs by men were often overlooked while a woman would be considered a whore and threatened with the loss of her means of survival and status. Another fear was that if women explored their sexuality, they would become dissatisfied with their husbands. Conversely, hooks argues that “Urging women to no longer pretend that they were sexually fulfilled when this was not the case, feminist movement threatened to expose male sexual shortcomings” (79). This fear of exposure causes men to look upon the women within the feminist movement with contempt, vilifying them as man-hating witches.

This view of women bled into another social movement that was taking place in Great Britain during the early part of the twentieth century. The gay and lesbian movement brought additional questions about sexual freedom to the forefront. Unlike the feminist movement that was fought in the town halls, the gay and lesbian movement would be fought through the written word and the courts. At this time, homosexuality for men was considered illegal in England. In 1895, attention was drawn to the issue of homosexuality through the trial of Oscar Wilde. He was accused of sodomy and indecent behavior for his relationship with the son of the Marquess of

Queensberry. Wilde was found guilty and sentenced to two years in prison. During the trial, Wilde was asked to define what was meant by the phrase “Love that dare not speak its name.” He responded by saying “It is beautiful, it is fine, it is the noblest form of affection. There is nothing unnatural about it” (Sturgis 532). Not only did the trial bring the issue of homosexuality to light, but it also begged the question of how to perceive it.

This question would be taken up by sexologists such as Havelock Ellis. According to Phyllis Grosskurth, his biographer, Ellis “was the first person to write a book in English which treated homosexuality as neither a disease nor a crime” (185). He believed that homosexuality was simply an anomaly in nature. His work sought to debunk the idea that homosexuality was a sign of moral depravity or mental deficiency. Ellis also opposed the criminalization of homosexuality. His work *Sexual Inversion*, published in 1897, included thirty-three case studies, six of which were of lesbians. Although his work did not shy away from the stereotypical way of describing lesbians, his work is considered the “first time any of the sexologists attempted to deal with female homosexuality in a serious manner” (Miller 18). Before Ellis, lesbianism was severely overlooked, even in terms of the law. Ellis’s work was banned in England due to claims that the topic was obscene. However, the book was sold in the United States and his theories managed to permeate the discussions surrounding homosexuality.

Another sexologist who became prominent during the early twentieth century for his thoughts on homosexuality was Edward Carpenter. In 1894, he published a pamphlet entitled *Homogenic Love and Its Place in a Free Society*. In the pamphlet, Carpenter not only argued that homosexuality was natural, but that it was actually a third sex. He did subscribe to traditional stereotypes, especially when speaking about lesbians, but he explained this was due to the positionality of homosexuals between the gender binary. This allowed the traditional male and

female characteristics to become crossed. Carpenter also served as president of The British Society for the Study of Sex Psychology. One of the organization's main goals was to oppose criminal prosecution of homosexuality (Miller, 22).

Their work became even more crucial in 1921, when Fredrick Macquisten, a member of parliament, attempted to create an amendment to the Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1885. This act categorized sexual acts between men as illegal and implemented criminal consequences. Macquisten wanted to extend this law to include sexual acts between women. The amendment passed in the House of Commons but was squashed by the House of Lords (Miller 185). However, they did not vote against the amendment out of support for lesbians. Instead, they believed that if they started to prosecute sexual acts between women, it would only attract attention to the issue and encourage further instances of it.

Even though it was never criminalized, lesbianism still faced opposition within British society. In 1928, Radclyffe Hall published *The Well of Loneliness*, which according to Miller “became the most influential lesbian novel of the century and the subject of the most sensational literary trial since that of Oscar Wilde” (183). This novel did exactly what the House of Lords had hoped to avoid. It brought the topic of lesbianism into the light. An article in the *Sunday Express* called for the suppression of the book, claiming that the work was obscene and that it would act as a poison to the soul (Miller 186). The judge who presided over the trial concurred that the novel was an affront to the moral character of the nation and ordered that all copies be destroyed. Despite its ban in England, the novel became a bestseller in the United States. The trial might have removed the physical book, but it served to bring greater awareness to the fight for sexual freedom.

The history of these movements is much more extensive, but this overview does depict the spirit in which these struggles took place during the first few decades of the twentieth century. Both social movements challenged sexual ideology and brought forth immense change as a result. They joined women from different classes together for the first time to fight for a common cause. Looking back from a modern perspective, it is apparent that these movements brought forth positive change, but at the time of their emergence, there was a genuine fear about the destruction they would cause to society. Gothic writers such as Daphne du Maurier utilized this fear to create villains within their novels. Helene Meyers defines Gothic at its most basic level as “encounters with otherness, often violent transgressions of boundaries, and the excess of fear that such encounters and transgressions breed” (2). All three of du Maurier’s female characters cross a boundary set for women by the patriarchy. The novel *Rebecca* stood as a warning to the disastrous effects that awaited any society that allowed women to step out of the roles they had been assigned to play.

Daphne du Maurier was both a product of her time as well as a contradiction. She supported the patriarchy and ascribed to the belief that women should be happy to remain in the home, dedicated to the care of their husbands. In her biography, Margaret Forster quotes du Maurier stating that “women should not have careers. It’s people like me who have careers who really have bitched up the old relationship between men and women. Women ought to be soft and gentle and dependent. Disembodied spirits like myself are all wrong” (235). It is this belief that allows her to write a little bit of herself into each of her female characters and then vilify them.

It seems odd that a woman who supports the patriarchal view that women should remain in the private sphere would pursue such a public occupation. Traditionally, the view was that

men were the only ones capable of producing great literature. The pen was considered a metaphor for the phallus, giving life to the written text. Daphne du Maurier justifies her emergence into this male occupation by a belief that she is of two selves. One self is feminine and plays the role of wife to Frederick Browning and the mother to three children. The other self is a male persona that she names Eric Avon (Forster 14). Even as a child, Daphne had despised being a girl. According to Forster, “Her outward form was a mistake: inside, she was a boy, with a boy’s mind and heart and ambitions. Everything she did, she did as she judged a boy would do” (14). It is with this male persona that du Maurier created her novels, often utilizing a male voice to narrate.

This masculine energy did not just extend to her creativity. Daphne du Maurier exhibited same sex attractions from a very early age but refused to acknowledge herself as a lesbian. Instead, she rationalized her feelings toward other women as “Venetian tendencies”. For du Maurier, these attractions for other women simply meant that she was actually a man. According to Forster, “Her attitudes then were distinctly homophobic and she was repelled at the idea of being associated with homosexuals” (28). This fear did not stop her from having relationships with women, even after she was married to Browning. The rules of chastity and faithfulness did not apply to her. However, she often blamed her own sexuality and promiscuity for the difficulties in her marriage.

Daphne du Maurier’s *Rebecca* is a representative of the patriarchy and the threats that exist against it, but it is also illustrative of du Maurier’s struggle to reconcile her identity within her society. As Gina Wisker asserts, “What is at stake in those stories is the insidious undermining of the security of both the everyday normality of life – that which we would label as real and trustworthy – and of the inner narratives by which we construct and interpret our

worlds” (4). The three women in Daphne du Maurier’s *Rebecca* are fighting for the freedom to experience pleasure, grief, and power on their own terms. Each of these characters also represents conflicting aspects of du Maurier’s sexuality. She then villainizes these women to show how a change in the gender dynamic of the patriarchy could lead to the destruction of the entire system. For Daphne du Maurier, deviation from the order of the patriarchy was a form of villainy.

Works Cited

- Beaumont, Caitriona. "The Women's Movement, Politics and Citizenship, 1918-1950s", *Women in Twentieth-Century Britain*. Ed. Ina Zweiniger-Bargiolska. England: Pearson, 2001, pp. 262-277.
- Du Maurier, Daphne. *Rebecca*. New York: Harper, 1938
- Forster, Margaret. *Daphne du Maurier: The Secret Life of the Renowned Storyteller*. New York: Doubleday, 1993.
- Giles, Judy. *Women, Identity and Private Life in Britain, 1900-50*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995.
- Grosskurth, Phyllis. *Havelock Ellis: A Biography*. New York: Knopf Publishing, 1980.
- Hall, Lesley. "Sexuality". *Women in Twentieth-Century Britain*. Ed. Ina Zweiniger-Bargiolska. England: Pearson, 2001, pp. 51-68.
- Hogle, Jerrold E. "Introduction: The Gothic in Western Culture". *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction*. Ed. Jerrold E. Hogle. Cambridge: University Press, 2002, pp. 1-20.
- Holton, Sandra. "The Women's Movement, Politics and Citizenship from the Late Nineteenth Century Until 1918". *Women in Twentieth-Century Britain*. Ed. Ina Zweiniger-Bargiolska. England: Pearson, 2001, pp. 247-261.
- hooks, bell. *feminism is for everybody: passionate politics*. New York: Routledge, 2015.
- Lewis, Jane. "Marriage". *Women in Twentieth-Century Britain*. Ed. Ina Zweiniger-Bargiolska. England: Pearson, 2001, pp. 69-85.
- Meyers, Helene. *Femicidal Fears: Narratives of the Female Gothic Experience*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2001.
- Pons, Auba Llompart. "Patriarchal Hauntings: Re-Reading Villainy and Gender in Daphne du

Maurier's *Rebecca*". *Atlantis*, vol. 35, no. 1, 2013, pp. 69-83. *JSTOR*,
www.jstor.org/stable/43486040.

Miller, Neil. *Out of the Past*. New York: Vintage Books, 1995.

Sherman, Leona F. and Norman N. Holland. "Gothic Possibilities". *New Literary History*, vol. 8,
 no. 2, 1977, pp. 279-294. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/468522.

Sturgis, Matthew. *Oscar Wilde: A Life*. New York: Knopf, 2018.

Wisker, Gina. "Undermining the Everyday: Daphne du Maurier's Gothic Horror", *Revue LISA*,
 vol. 19, no. 52, 2021, pp. 1-16. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/lisa.13590>

Zweiniger-Bargiulowska, Ina. "Introduction". *Women in Twentieth-Century Britain*. Ed. Ina
 Zweiniger-Bargiulowska. England: Pearson, 2001, pp. 1-15.

Rebecca

“Rebecca knew she would win in the end. I saw her smile,
when she died” (du Maurier 286)

In du Maurier’s Gothic tale of suspense, the woman who most clearly poses a threat to the patriarchy is the title character Rebecca. However, her role as the villain is not immediately revealed. In fact, despite her haunting presence early in the novel, Rebecca is often described as the perfect wife and mistress to Manderley. She fits the description of Zweiniger-Bargielowska’s “angel of the house” image (8). This idyllic image of Rebecca is first introduced by Mrs. Van Hopper. As she schemes to make the acquaintance of Maxim de Winter, she tells the narrator, her paid companion, about his deceased wife. She comments “I never saw her...but I believe she was very lovely. Exquisitely turned out, and brilliant in every way” (43). These initial remarks provide a list of characteristics that the mistress of Manderley is expected to exemplify. Through her beauty and brilliance, Rebecca obtains the adoration of all who knew her and convinces the illustrious Maxim de Winter that she would be the consummate spouse.

Mrs. Van Hopper is not the only one to sing Rebecca’s praises in the novel. In fact, everyone seems to simply adore her. Beatrice, Maxim’s sister, reminisces that “She had an amazing gift, Rebecca, I mean of being attractive to people; men, women, children, dogs” (190). Rebecca had been capable of gaining the respect of Manderley’s entire staff and she displayed the intelligence needed to run the daily operations of a stately home. She possessed the organizational skills needed to plan grand costume balls and the diplomacy to play hostess to the most elite members of her society. Rebecca is praised for being a woman of many skills and an

overwhelming personality. It seems odd that a woman of such talents would be restricted to the role of mistress of Manderley. However, it is reminiscent of the women who entered the factories during World War I and proved they were just as capable as men. Their skills were forgotten when the soldiers returned home and the women were expected to remain within the private sphere. Zweiniger-Bargioloska reiterates that:

Although women widened their opportunities in many areas, traditional gender stereotypes which assumed that women's primary role is in the domestic setting continued to be influential, men held on to their dominant position in society and the double standard in sexual morality proved remarkably persistent. The history of women in the twentieth century is distinguished by this interplay of change and continuity. (1)

This distinction between men and women becomes even more apparent when looking at the discrepancies within the pay scale for performing the same job. Compensation for women was significantly lower than that of their male counterparts. Studying the historical context that contributed to *Rebecca* made me question where this gender bias originated.

As I studied divergent cultures and different historical periods, it became clear that the view of women is inconsistent. Some cultures adopt a matriarchal system in which women are given the roles of dominance and privilege. This is especially prominent in Asian and Native American cultures. However, even England has a history of female rulers. Therefore, it is important to be aware of the historical view of women that was prevalent during the early twentieth century in England to understand how Daphne du Maurier writes her three female characters. In her work, *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir examines the critical question of what constitutes a woman, whether it is merely physical anatomy or if there is something more inherent. It is this very question that has led to the debate about the very role of women in

society. Judith Butler asserts that “Rather than a stable signifier that commands the assent of those whom it purports to describe and represent, *women*, even in the plural, has become a troublesome term, a site of contest, a cause for anxiety” (4). Du Maurier capitalizes on this anxiety over the role of women when she introduces readers to Rebecca.

At the time of *Rebecca*’s publication, one of the most prominent figures speaking about gender and sexuality would have been Sigmund Freud. According to Freud, the characteristics that differentiate males from females do not develop until puberty, and “From that time on, this contrast has a more decisive influence than any other upon the shaping of human life” (287). According to Freud’s theories, when children are born, they are technically genderless, but he terms them both as masculine, stating that the clitoris stands in as male genitalia. As boys reach sexual maturity, the only change they must undergo is a shift from the sexual desire they have for their mothers to other women. For girls, reaching sexual maturity requires a much more extensive transition. First, she must become aware of her lack of male genitalia. The lack leads the girl to resent her mother not only because she shares this deficiency, but also for not providing her with one. This realization also leads to penis envy. She starts to desire what she is lacking. However, one of the most significant changes that occur when the girl realizes that she lacks male genitalia is that she begins to feel the shame associated with clitoral stimulation. It is at this point that girls begin to repress their sexual desires and their erogenous zone shifts to the vagina in support of heteronormative practices. For this to be accomplished, the object of her sexual desire must also shift from the female to the male.

Freud’s theory on female sexual development had a profound effect on how women were viewed during the early part of the twentieth century. One such impact was that Freud’s theory suggests that for a woman to develop normally, she must repress her sexual desires in favor of

phallogocentric sexual practices. This meant that if a woman expressed sexual desires outside of those that would provide either pleasure for her male counterpart or reproduction, it was considered unnatural. She would have been considered to have been subject to an arrested development. Freud also believed that since women had to undergo more changes than men, they were subject to more neurosis. He suggests that the superego, which controls the moral composition, is not as strong in women. Therefore, they are controlled by their emotions and desires. Overall, Freud's theories suggested that women were inferior to men and that they were subject to their sexual whims.

Another psychoanalyst who was picking up the discussion where Freud left off was Jacques Lacan. Lacan introduces the concept of the Other, which is the symbolic center of language. Other terms used to refer to the Other is the Phallus or the Law of the Father. Mary Klages explains that "the Phallus is the idea of the Father, the patriarchal order of the culture, the ultimate idea of culture, the position that rules everything in the world" (60). The Phallus is not an actual person or place, but it is symbolic of a place in which there is no lack. According to Lacan, all humans experience a loss or a lack and they strive to get to a place where they can become whole. This goal is to get to the center. Men are closer to this center because they have male genitalia, which is a source of control and activity. Women, on the other hand, are further from the center because they lack the phallus. She is othered by this lack. Anthony Elliot provides further explanation of Lacan's theory. He expounds "Masculinity is constructed around the sign of the phallus, a sign which confers power in most contexts of modern societies. By contrast, femininity is constructed through exclusion from the symbolic realm of power. Femininity is on the outside of language, culture, reason, and power" (132). Women's lack of the phallus placed them on the opposite side of the binary as the other. Lacanian theory associates

women with insufficiency. The theory further lends itself to a system of patriarchy by suggesting that since men are positioned closer to the symbolic center, they inherently have the right to exert control over all others. According to Butler, “The binary regulation of sexuality suppresses the subversive multiplicity of a sexuality that disrupts heterosexual, reproductive, and medico juridical hegemonies” (*Gender* 26). This allows for any form of gender or sexuality that does not align with the patriarchal expectation for heteronormative, male-centered relationships to be othered by society and in some cases to villainize it.

Feminists have challenged this idea of the phallogocentric society, claiming that gender is not determined by biology and by extension does not align with a binary system. De Beauvoir contends that “one is not born, but rather becomes, woman” (283). De Beauvoir’s claim implies that gender is a social construct and that a woman’s character is developed through her experiences as well as her surroundings. This would suggest that just as gender itself is arbitrary and mutable, so too is the role assigned to women. Under the patriarchy, gender could be seen more as a theatrical role than as something assigned by biology. Judith Butler examines this concept in their article “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution.” Butler analyses how gender is instituted through a repetition of actions. They suggest that “to be a woman is to have *become* a woman, to compel the body to conform to an historical idea of ‘woman,’ to induce the body to become a cultural sign, to materialize oneself in obedience to an historically delimited possibility, and to do this as a sustained and repeated corporal project” (522). This repeated embodiment of femininity encompasses all aspects of a woman’s life from the way that she behaves to the clothing that she wears.

Daphne du Maurier would have been subject to these societal expectations and as a product of her time, she agreed with the assigned role given to women. However, the

contradiction for du Maurier was that she believed that she was, in fact, a boy. Outwardly, du Maurier was admired for her beauty. She was “slim, blonde and strikingly attractive” (Forster 29). She was not vain in her beauty and often downplayed it by dressing in a more masculine style. She also upheld the patriarchal expectation of marrying and having children as was expected of women. But there was another side to Daphne du Maurier, one that desired to live outside of these conventions. She desired the freedom to explore her sexuality, which she did in secret many times. In fact, the relationship between Rebecca and the narrator could be read as the contradiction that existed within Daphne du Maurier. Rebecca represented all of the desires that du Maurier was unable to act upon in her own life while the narrator pines for the knowledge held by the first Mrs. de Winter. Du Maurier villainizes Rebecca because she represents the parts of du Maurier that she has had to repress in order to play her role within the patriarchy.

Certainly, Rebecca was also a skilled actress. She was fully capable of donning the mask and playing the role of the ideal woman. Everyone who encountered her was in awe of her perfection. Even Maxim’s grandmother, who was known to be difficult to please, sang her praises. She applauded Maxim’s choice of bride, stating “She’s got the three things that matter in a wife...breeding, brains, and beauty” (276). Rebecca was not lacking in beauty. Frank Crawley, Maxim’s assistant, affirms that Rebecca “was the most beautiful creature I ever saw in my life” (137). However, it is not simply about being beautiful, but rather about how that beauty is used. Women are expected to utilize their beauty to bring esteem to their husbands. In this way, women become a symbol of their husband’s prowess. Beauty is not meant to encourage a sense of pride in the self for a woman. Allison Vanderberg explains that:

actions are situated within discourses on the body that encourage and facilitate women’s experiences of themselves as split subjects whose actions are not necessarily for the self,

but are informed by *an other* (or set of others) who establish and maintain ideals of beauty, as well as the normative practices one is expected to engage in in order to meet beauty ideals, and the extent to which one's body and bodily practices fit within the hegemonic expectations for beauty. (173)

In this case, the concept of beauty is not determined by an individual, but like gender, it has also become a social construct. Women are expected to meet the standards of ideal beauty, but they are also to understand that their beauty only exists to glorify their husbands. The ideal concept of beauty was for a woman to embody the image of both the virgin and the whore concurrently. The difficulty with Rebecca was that she not only portrayed the image of both the virgin and the whore, she enacted both roles simultaneously.

The concept of wanting both the virgin and the whore bleeds into the issue of sexuality as well. The patriarchy establishes sexual inequality within the heterosexual marriage structure. Kathleen Gough claims that this power structure seeks to “deny women sexuality” (69). Women are expected to think of sex as a way to serve the needs of their husbands and a means of child production. They are led to believe that they are devoid of sensuality and that any attempt at satisfying their own desires is a form of deviance. Foucault explains that just as we saw taking place with gender, “sex is placed by power in a binary system: licit and illicit, permitted and forbidden” (83). In order to maintain this type of control over female eroticism, men must prohibit women from obtaining knowledge of their own sexuality. One theory as to why men feel the need to control sexuality is a fear of the insatiability of women as they become aware of their sensuality. However, Adrienne Rich counters this by suggesting that it is more likely that men fear “that women could be indifferent to them altogether, that men could be allowed sexual and emotional – therefore economic – access to women *only* on women's terms, otherwise being left

on the periphery of the matrix” (643). According to Rich’s theory, allowing a woman access to her own sexuality could completely overthrow the power structure that exists within the patriarchy. Therefore, it is extremely important for women to strive to be the ideal wife within the patriarchy.

It is this image of perfection that the narrator first becomes obsessed with and that threatens her stability and the foundation of her marriage. When Rebecca was murdered, her body was placed in her boat and then purposely sunk to the bottom of the sea. Her boat was named *Je Reviens*, meaning “I will return”. This name could not be more fitting for Rebecca’s resting place. Not only does the physical boat return from the depths of the water, the spirit of Rebecca returns to Manderley and haunts those within. Despite her death, Rebecca is always present on the periphery. In her book *Femmes Fatales*, Mary Anne Doane relates that “In psychoanalysis, the past is aggressive – it returns, it haunts, it sometimes dominates the present” (91). Maxim thought that killing Rebecca would eliminate her villainy from his life, but he soon discovers that she continues to torture him from her watery grave. Mrs. Danvers described to the narrator how Maxim used to pace the floor in the library in the days following the murder. She recounted “He did...after she died. Up and down, up and down, in the library. I heard him. I watched him too, through the keyhole, more than once. Backwards and forwards, like an animal in a cage” (248). Maxim feels trapped in Manderley by Rebecca’s memory. Finally, her presence becomes too much for him and he departs for Monte Carlo. But even away from Manderley, Rebecca continues to dominate his thoughts. Almost as if she is guiding him, he returns to the cliff where Rebecca confessed her true nature to him. It is almost as if he is in a trance. He explains to the narrator that he had been there years before and wanted to see if it had changed. When she asks if it has, he replies “No, it has not changed” (30). Maxim is not actually speaking

about the cliff. He comes to the cliff to find out if Rebecca's death has actually changed anything, but the trip has only confirmed that she will continue to haunt his mind, even if he leaves Manderley.

Monte Carlo is also where Rebecca begins to penetrate the mind of the narrator. Mrs. Van Hopper had already informed the narrator that Maxim had lost his wife and was having a difficult time getting over her death. However, despite knowing that she has died, the narrator can't help feeling jealous of her. This jealousy first appears when Maxim gives the narrator a volume of poetry. She opens to the title page and discovers the inscription "Max – from Rebecca" (33). She studies the confident slant of the handwriting before slamming the book shut. She is angry that she has to call him Maxim while Rebecca was allowed the intimacy of referring to him as Max. Despite her jealousy, she cannot stop looking at the page (58). Rebecca is haunting the narrator just as she is Maxim, but instead of running away, the narrator "engages in the secret indulgence of violently destroying her predecessor's script, namely, cutting out and burning Rebecca's book dedication" (Linkin 231). Once again, Rebecca has driven another to violence due to her threat to the narrator obtaining the affections of Maxim de Winter.

Even after the symbolic demise of Rebecca, the narrator finds that she is still faced with her memory as she arrives at Manderley. Janet Harbord contends that "Rebecca quickly comes to dominate her thoughts, even to the extent that, like Danny, she can imagine her presence" (102). The narrator is so enthralled with Rebecca that as she enters each of the rooms, her mind runs wild with fantasies about what the former mistress of Manderley would have done. In the morning room, she sees her sitting at the desk writing out her correspondence for the day on her personalized stationery and approving the menus (88). In the library, Rebecca would have sat in her chair before the fire, lazily stroking Jasper's fur (79). Her obsession with envisioning

Rebecca leads her to believe that Maxim is having the same thoughts of his previous wife, comparing the two women and of course finding the narrator lacking in comparison.

These comparisons lead her to believe that she is incapable of filling the gap that was left at Manderley by Rebecca's death. She expresses these feelings of inferiority to Frank Crawley when she states "And I realise, every day, that things I lack, confidence, grace, beauty, intelligence, wit – oh, all the qualities that mean most in a woman – she possessed" (135). Rebecca's performance as the ideal woman has left the narrator feeling inadequate. She believes that Maxim is still in love with Rebecca and is questioning his decision to remarry such an inferior woman. Her solution is to try to change who she is in order to be more like Rebecca and by extension fit the role that society has assigned to a woman in her position. The narrator struggles with opposing emotions toward Rebecca. According to Auba Llompart Pons' article "Patriarchal Hauntings," the inability to fit into this society makes "her both hate and identify with Maxim's dead wife, Rebecca, whose ghostly presence represents the beauty, the intelligence and the knowledge that Mrs. de Winter would like to possess" (73). In addition to not being able to live up to the standards set by Rebecca, the narrator also finds herself incapable of connecting with Maxim in the same way that they did when they met in Monte Carlo. The innocence and naivete that once was an attraction to him have now become an annoyance. The narrator speculates that this is caused by their return to the home that he shared with his late wife and his realization that his new bride is not capable of filling the void left by Rebecca. The narrator's response is to continually adapt her role to become more like Rebecca, thereby perpetuating the memory of the first Mrs. de Winter.

The difficulty with the narrator's course of action was that Rebecca was not the ideal woman within the patriarchy. The image that she portrayed was merely a façade. Rebecca was

aware that she was playing a role and she laughed at the convention. When Maxim finally revealed the true nature of their marriage to the narrator, he explained the bargain that had been struck between them. Maxim recounted Rebecca saying “I’ll run your house for you...I’ll look after your precious Manderley for you, make it the most famous show-place in all the country, if you like. And people will visit us, and envy us, and talk about us; they’ll say we are the luckiest, happiest, handsomest couple in all of England. What a leg-pull, Max...what a God-damn triumph” (277). As long as Rebecca agreed to keep her proclivities in London and continue to uphold the image of Manderley, Maxim was willing to keep up the charade of their marriage. This theatrical performance allowed the patriarchy to remain intact and Maxim’s reputation to stay impeccable. Daphne du Maurier had made it clear that “she had wanted to write about the balance of power in marriage and not about love” (Forster 138). The relationship between Maxim and Rebecca is a perfect example of this. Within the patriarchy, Maxim is supposed to hold all of the power within the relationship and while Rebecca is willing to play her assigned role, he does.

Rebecca lived by her script for a few years, but eventually she grew tired of pretending. Rebecca refused to live by anyone’s rules but her own. She began to take back some of the power within the relationship. Much like the women of the early feminist movement, Rebecca began to challenge her role within the domestic sphere. In her work *feminism is for everybody*, bell hooks states that “Early on feminist activists focused so much attention on private bonds and domestic relationships because it was in those circumstances that women of all classes and races felt the brunt of male domination, whether from patriarchal parents or spouses” (78). When Rebecca revealed her true self to Maxim, he was horrified and disgusted. He made the claim that “she was not even normal” (275). Maxim is not referring to sexual deviance in this statement. He

knew about her dalliances from the first few days of their marriage. Instead, he refers to her refusal to follow the expectations placed on women and to uphold her part in the marriage. A woman in her position was supposed to use her beauty and grace to bring esteem to her husband, but Rebecca had found ways to use them for her amusement. She had laughed in the face of convention. Maxim felt as long as he could exert some form of control over her through their agreement, he could maintain the patriarchal standard of his stately home. However, Rebecca could not be controlled. She refused to be boxed in. Harbord comments that “Rebecca does not simply invert a binary of virgin/whore; she refuses the terms of this restriction, to be contained by the structure” (101). Rebecca is a character whose ambiguity defies all social constructs and rules. As her two lives of Manderley and London started to collide, Maxim feared that people would begin to figure out that their marriage was a farce and everything that Manderley stands for would be shattered. Pons claims “that his main concern is not so much Rebecca’s sexuality per se, but the effect that it might have on his estate and on his reputation” (75). In reality, Rebecca as a person is inconsequential to Maxim. He did not marry her due to a love for who she was, but rather for how well she played her expected role. However, Rebecca is an example of what happens when a woman does not stick to her script. Judith Butler postulates that “As a corporal field of cultural play, gender is a basically innovative affair, although it is quite clear that there are strict punishments for contesting the script by performing out of turn or through unwarranted improvisations” (531). Rebecca refused to conform and play her role. Her life was the price for that freedom.

Rebecca’s villainization is directly linked to her rebellion against the patriarchy. She was aware of what the expectations were for a woman of her class and most of the time she played this role spectacularly. However, there was one aspect of her persona that she refused to restrict

to the patriarchal confines. This was her sexuality. According to her chapter on sexuality, Lesley Hall indicates that “At the beginning of the twentieth-century women indicated sexual respectability not only by chaste conduct but by ignorance of matters sexual” (52). Female sexuality was considered to be a response to male desire. Many women living under this oppressive society entered marriage with no idea what would occur on their wedding night (Hall 51). There was no formal education about sexual matters other than hygiene for menstrual cycles. Once married, a woman was expected to cater to her husband’s sexual needs and forget about her own. According to her chapter on marriage, Jane Lewis suggests that marriage was a way of constricting female sexual desire. She states that “As an institution, it imposed rational bonds on irrational sexual urges” (77).

Rebecca did not show any restraint when it came to her sexuality. Instead, she thought of sex as a game as well as a way to control people. She was forthcoming about her exploits with Maxim after they were married. He recalled that “She sat there, laughing, her black hair blowing in the wind; she told me about herself, told me things I shall never repeat to a living soul” (276). Maxim does not give specific details about what exactly Rebecca revealed to him, leaving her sexuality under a veil of ambiguity. For du Maurier, Rebecca represents the women of the feminist movement who fought for the right to explore their own sexuality. She shared the fears of her era that if women gained a greater knowledge of sexual matters, the power within heterosexual relationships would shift and the patriarchy would become unstable. It is this threat to the patriarchy that causes du Maurier to villainize Rebecca.

Interestingly, many of the struggles with gender and sexuality that villainize Rebecca are reflections of Daphne du Maurier’s life. Martyn Shallcross spent time interviewing the author and later wrote of these meetings in his book *The Private World of Daphne du Maurier*. In his

account, he notes that “Daphne lived through the characters she created” (22). Like Rebecca, Daphne du Maurier was a brilliant and beautiful woman, but she also struggled to fulfill the role women of her time were expected to play. She longed to experience the freedoms that were only afforded to men. One such freedom was the ability to explore her sexuality. Just as Rebecca had a relationship with her cousin Favell, Daphne admitted that her first inkling of sexual attraction was for her cousin Geoffrey Millar when she was fourteen. She describes “a physical thrill which she identified immediately as quite different from any feeling she had had before – dangerous, exciting, having little to do with schoolgirl crushes” (Forster 17). Her father recognized the attraction between the two and attempted to keep them apart, but this only made the affair even more attractive for Daphne. For her, sex became a game, just as it had for Rebecca. She began to explore relationships with both men and women, despite her declared abhorrence for lesbians.

However, despite her sexual explorations, du Maurier knew that her behavior was considered a form of deviance in the society that she belonged to. According to Forster, “Daphne was trying hard to explain the tremendous contradictions she knew existed in her own personality” (277-8). In an attempt to justify her sexual rebelliousness, she relied on her male persona Eric Avon. As long as she believed that she was a male, then she was not revolting against the patriarchy. This all changed when she met Frederick “Tommy” Browning, and they got married in 1932. The two had very different beliefs about sexuality. Tommy “was very much of the opinion that affairs were ‘sleazy’ and that ‘nice girls didn’t’”. Daphne, always proud of not being one of those nice girls she despised, was taken aback and found that she had rapidly to revise her ideas on sex and love and even marriage” (Forster 92). She was forced to repress Eric Avon and play the persona of the perfect military wife.

Daphne du Maurier's struggle between societal expectations and her desire for sexual independence impacted how she wrote the character Rebecca. Like the women of the feminist movement, Rebecca represented the right to sexual knowledge as well as the understanding that women also experienced desire and pleasure. Rebecca refused to repress her sexuality and capitulate to the patriarchal dictates placed on women. Even after marrying Maxim, she laughed in the face of convention. Despite du Maurier's desire to live as Rebecca did, she knew society would villainize her. Helene Meyers suggests that "*Rebecca* links women's sexual freedom with the demise of the social order and suggests that men will kill to keep the status quo" (36).

However, it is not only men who will kill to ensure that the patriarchy remains intact. Daphne du Maurier believed that the women who participated in the feminist movement and even herself were a threat to the natural order of society in which women remained in the private sphere. She writes *Rebecca* in response to the movement's requests for equality, warning that should the movement succeed, the patriarchy would be destroyed. She highlights Rebecca's deceptive nature and villainizes her sexual tenacity. Through the villainization and murder of Rebecca, Daphne du Maurier symbolically kills the aspects of her own personality that keep her from fulfilling her role in society.

Rebecca was what women wanted to be but were denied under a patriarchal society. Her character destabilizes the very foundation of the home and all of its inhabitants. More importantly, Rebecca leaves readers with a feeling of uncertainty. Daphne du Maurier portrays her as scandalous and cold, but at the same time, it is difficult not to be in love with her. In this way, the reader experiences the same tumultuous emotions that the narrator has. Rebecca refused to change who she was to fit into the role that the patriarchy had assigned to her. For this reason, she was presented as a villain, and for Manderley to survive, she needed to be removed.

However, like nature, she came creeping back into the lives of those who remained in the home.

Rebecca could not be tamed, even by death.

Works Cited

- Butler, Judith. "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory." *Theatre Journal*, vol. 40, no. 4, 1988, pp. 519-531. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/3207893
- *Gender Trouble*. New York: Routledge, 2007.
- de Beauvoir, Simone. *The Second Sex*. New York: Vintage Books, 2011.
- Doane, Mary Anne. *Femmes Fatales: Feminism, Film Theory, Psychoanalysis*. New York: Routledge, 1991.
- Du Maurier, Daphne. *Rebecca*. New York: Harper, 1938.
- Elliot, Anthony. *Psychoanalytic Theory: An Introduction*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1994.
- Forster, Margaret. *Daphne du Maurier: The Secret Life of the Renowned Storyteller*. New York: Doubleday, 1993.
- Foucault, Michel. *The History of Sexuality: Volume one*. New York: Vintage, 1990.
- Freud, Sigmund. *The Freud Reader*. Ed. Peter Gay, New York: W. W. Norton, 1995.
- Gough, Kathleen. "The Origin of the Family." *Toward an Anthropology of Women*. Ed. Rayna Reiter. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1975.
- Hall, Lesley A. "Sexuality," *Women in Twentieth-Century Britain*, Ed. Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska, England: Pearson, 2001, pp. 51-68.
- Harbord, Janet. "Between Identification and Desire: Rereading *Rebecca*." *Feminist Review*, no. 53, 1996, pp. 95-107. *JSTOR*, doi.org/10.2307/1395663.
- hooks, bell. *feminism is for everybody: passionate politics*. New York: Routledge, 2015.
- Klages, Mary. *Literary Theory: The Complete Guide*. New York: Bloomsbury, 2017.
- Lewis, Jane. "Marriage," *Women in Twentieth Century Britain*. Ed. Ina Zweiniger

- Bargielowska. England: Pearson, 2001, pp. 69-85.
- Linkin. Harriet Kramer. "The Deceptively Strategic Narrator of *Rebecca*", *Journal of Narrative Theory*, vol. 46, no. 2, 2016, pp. 223-253. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/45274868.
- Meyers, Helene. *Femicidal Fears: Narratives of the Female Gothic Experience*. New York: State University Press, 2001.
- Pons, Auba Llompart. "Patriarchal Hauntings: Re-reading Villainy and Gender in Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca*", *Atlantis*, vol. 35, no. 1, 2013, pp. 69-83. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/43486040.
- Rich, Adrienne. "Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence." *Signs*, vol.5, no. 4, 1980, pp. 631-660. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/3173834
- Shallcross, Martyn. *The Private World of Daphne du Maurier*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992.
- Vandenberg, Allison. "Toward a Phenomenological Analysis of Historicized Beauty Practices." *Women's Studies Quarterly*. vol. 46, no. ½, 2018, pp. 167-180. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/26421169.
- Zweiniger-Bargielowska, Ina. "Introduction". *Women in Twentieth Century Britain*. Ed. Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska. England: Pearson, 2001, pp. 1-15.

Mrs. Danvers

“Once more I glanced up at her, and once more I met her eyes, dark and sombre, in that white face of hers, instilling into me, I knew not why, a strange feeling of disquiet, of foreboding” (du Maurier 73)

Rebecca’s continuing presence at Manderley is tied directly to Mrs. Danvers’ obsessive devotion to her. Through her unwavering commitment to keeping her mistress’s memory alive, Mrs. Danvers becomes the helmsman of Rebecca’s rebellion. This commitment alone is not enough to categorize Mrs. Danvers as a villain. It would be considered endearing and romantic if that devotion had been spent on a man. Instead, the housekeeper’s sexuality is called into question. It is unclear as to whether she harbors a sexual desire for her late mistress, or if a homosocial connection between the women drives her devotion. In an interview with Karla Hammond from *American Poetry Review*, Audre Lorde commented that “the true feminist deals out of a lesbian consciousness whether or not she ever sleeps with women” (5). In this sense, whether Mrs. Danvers and Rebecca shared a physical relationship is insignificant. The underlying connection between the two women is indicative of their shared knowledge of sexuality beyond the confines of the patriarchy. This does not pose a threat until Mrs. Danvers elicits the desire of the narrator to share in this homosocial connection and the forbidden feminine sexuality that was exuded by the former Mrs. de Winter.

Mrs. Danvers also seems to trigger the narrator’s insecurities. The narrator projects her inferiority onto Mrs. Danvers, paranoid that the housekeeper is constantly judging her and trying to undermine her position as mistress of Manderley. Outside of the narrator’s imagination, Mrs.

Danvers performs her duties as housekeeper without any outward sign of disrespect, despite the grief she feels watching as her beloved mistress is replaced. It is not until Maxim threatens her right to grieve for Rebecca and maintain her remaining connection to her that Mrs. Danvers begins to threaten the marriage. She utilizes the narrator's insecurities and inadequacies to drive a wedge between her and Maxim. This proves that Mrs. Danvers is not a villain in the traditional Gothic sense, but rather she is villainized by the narrator and by extension, by du Maurier for her sexuality that crosses the boundaries of the patriarchy as well as her refusal to be controlled in the ways that she experiences the grief of losing a loved one.

In order to understand how Mrs. Danvers is villainized, we must first identify the characteristics of a Gothic villain. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen utilizes the term monster in place of villain. He explains that:

refusal to participate in the classificatory 'order of things' is true of monsters generally: they are disturbing hybrids whose externally incoherent bodies resist attempts to include them in any systematic structuration. And so the monster is dangerous, a form suspended between forms that threatens to smash distinctions. (6)

In other words, monstrosity represents the attempt to degrade a system or person. This intersects with villainy, which is the use of deception to obtain a desired response. The patriarchy represents a binary system of gender, with the male standing in the position of power and the female representing the lack of control. Sexuality is also considered a binary system under the patriarchy. Women who participate in devoted, heteronormative relationships are considered the ideal while women who desire the freedom to explore their sexuality in different forms are categorized as others or monsters for their attempt to destroy the binary. In Gothic literature, the

figure of the other represents something dark and uncontrollable. The other becomes a source of anxiety.

Mrs. Danvers is othered because she defies the patriarchy's attempt to categorize her under the binary. There are several moments throughout the novel in which her gender can be misconstrued. For example, Rebecca refers to the housekeeper by the androgynous nickname of Danny. The narrator also expresses difficulty in identifying Mrs. Danvers' gender when speaking to her on the telephone. The title of Mrs. preceding her name is another source of confusion. For someone who lacks common knowledge of English estates like the narrator, the prefix Mrs. would indicate that a woman is married and is conforming to the patriarchal expectations set for women. However, according to Sian Evans, "Housekeepers were persons of authority and integrity; many of them remained in the post for decades, and they were given the courtesy title of 'Mrs.' whether married or not" (45). This title is a sign of respect rather than an indication of sexual preference. The title did however place the housekeeper in a position of authority, which was often only given to men. The title of Mrs. is usually associated with a married woman who would be under the control of her husband. In the case of Mrs. Danvers, the title instead acts as another form of androgyny to further complicate her perceived sexuality. However, through declarations of undeterred love and devotion for Rebecca, along with moments of shared homoerotic desire with the narrator, Mrs. Danvers' preferences become more obvious and she becomes a threat to the traditional view of femininity and marriage. This threat casts her into the role of villain.

Representations of the repressed are also sources of villainization within the Gothic novel. Kelly Hurley further expounds on this characterization stating, "A psychoanalytic reading of the Gothic might identify the genre's monster as the 'return of the repressed': the embodiment

of unbearable or unacceptable fears, wishes, and desires that are driven from consciousness and then transmuted into representations of monstrosity” (197). Mrs. Danvers is not villainized for who she is, but rather because she is a physical manifestation of the sexual deviances that Maxim and by extension, the patriarchy have attempted to repress. The narrator’s conflicting desire and repulsion to the lure of Rebecca brings this villainy to the forefront of the novel. Through her devotion to Rebecca, Mrs. Danvers thwarts Maxim’s attempts to bury the memory of his first wife and her sexual proclivities. Mrs. Danvers reveals her knowledge of Rebecca’s dalliances when she exclaims “Lovemaking was a game with her, only a game” (346). With this revelation, Mrs. Danvers rips away the veil that shielded Maxim and his new bride from the truth, thereby threatening the security of the heteronormative union.

It was not just the repressed knowledge of Rebecca’s sexuality that Mrs. Danvers represented though. She also forced the narrator to confront her own same-sex desire. While in the presence of Mrs. Danvers, the narrator expresses feeling “a sensation of discomfort and of shame” (68). This discomfort and shame arises during moments of physical contact or shared homoerotic desire for Rebecca. The narrator longs to have the same sexual knowledge as Rebecca, but her role as Maxim’s obedient wife bars her from exploring her erotic inclinations. Mrs. Danvers not only stirs these feelings when they touch, but she also invites the narrator into Rebecca’s room and encourages her to experience the feel of her clothing upon her skin. As Nicky Hallett notes “Mrs. Danvers’ portrayal and her relationship to Rebecca and to the unnamed second wife (and hers to the dead Rebecca) is rich in lesbian overtones” (38). These intimate interactions with Mrs. Danvers and with the memory of Rebecca threaten to reignite the repressed sexual desires of the narrator. This poses a threat to her complacency in her role within the patriarchy.

The villainization of Mrs. Danvers is therefore not due to any overtly evil act on her part. Rather, it comes from her deviation from the prescribed binary roles of the patriarchy as well as the narrator's projections of insecurity and self-repression. Analyzing these interactions between Mrs. Danvers and the narrator shows that the housekeeper is acting within the guidelines of her role within the estate, but she is also a woman who is grieving. Many of the descriptions that the narrator suggests are signs of villainy are just as easily read as manifestations of her agony at the loss of Rebecca. The narrator utilizes these interactions with the housekeeper to deflect attention from her own shortcomings and failure to fulfill her role.

The reader's first introduction to Mrs. Danvers comes in the present time while the narrator is in exile from England. The narrator is reminiscing about the meals that had been served at Manderley. She remembers wondering what had become of all the leftover food, but she recounts "But I never dared ask Mrs. Danvers what she did about it. She would have looked at me in scorn, smiling that freezing, superior smile of hers...I think it was the expression on her face that gave me my first feeling of unrest. Instinctively I thought, 'She is comparing me to Rebecca,' and sharp as a sword the shadow came between us" (8). Due to the narrator's portrayal of innocence, it is easy to overlook the fact that this entire memory is fantasy. She is imagining a scenario in which Mrs. Danvers presents herself as superior and from this, the narrator concludes that the housekeeper does not think her fit to run the household, especially in comparison to Rebecca. What is taking place in this scene is a revelation of the narrator's own insecurity. She did not feel confident in her position as the mistress of Manderley. She acknowledges that she is unaware of the normal proceedings of the household staff, including the fact that "there would often be leftovers sent back from 'upstairs', and these were consumed by the servants" (Evans 94). This lack of understanding causes her to feel inferior to the housekeeper. She projects this

insecurity onto Mrs. Danvers by imagining an expression of judgment. However, the narrator presents this information in a way that forces readers to feel pity for her. At the same time, the narrator presents Mrs. Danvers as cruel and leaves the reader with preconceived notions about the housekeeper before they are even introduced to her.

After spending several weeks exploring France and Italy on their honeymoon, Maxim and the narrator arrive at Manderley, where the preconceived beliefs about Mrs. Danvers continue. As they approach the estate, Maxim realizes that Mrs. Danvers has gathered the staff to greet them. This would have been a common practice within the English estate as well as a sign of respect to Maxim and his new bride. Although it was expected that the staff is not seen most of the time, exceptions were made for religious practices and special occasions. Sarah Warwick explains that often the staff would gather every morning for prayers led by the master (27). Margaret Powell recounts that while she was in service to the Cutler family, the servants would gather in the hall on Christmas Day to accept a gift from the master of the estate (155). Despite Mrs. Danvers' intention to acknowledge the special occasion of his marriage, Maxim treats it as an imposition and exclaims "Damn that woman...she knows perfectly well I did not want this sort of thing" (66). Maxim's irritation sets the narrator on edge and instills the belief that Mrs. Danvers has gathered the staff to judge and humiliate her upon her arrival. The narrator's lack of household protocol along with Maxim's disregard for his staff's acts of reverence add to the inference that Mrs. Danvers is petty and vindictive.

As the narrator walks through the door, the belief that Mrs. Danvers is a villain has already solidified in her mind. So it comes as no surprise that she singles her out, despite being met by the entire staff, which she described as "a sea of faces, open-mouthed and curious, gazing at me as though they were the watching crowd around the block, and I the victim with my hands

behind my back” (67). Naturally, the staff is curious about Maxim’s new bride, as she will be in charge of many of the decisions that will impact their daily activities. According to Jacky Hyams, “She has so many time-consuming functions, the first being to oversee and liaise with the upper servants – particularly the cook and the housekeeper – on the day-to-day running of the house” (46). She is responsible for choosing the meals to be served and for organizing any of the social gatherings at the estate. She also oversees the décor of the home. As the narrator stands before the staff, she is self-conscious about how she must appear to them. She feels awkward in her stockinette dress and her gauntlet gloves (67). At this moment, she is aware that she is out of place in this stately home, and she fears that the entire staff can sense that she is closer to them in class than she is to her husband.

However, there is one pair of eyes that she fears the most. The narrator recounts that “Someone advanced from the sea of faces, someone tall and gaunt, dressed in deep black, whose prominent cheek-bones and great, hollow eyes gave her a skull’s face, parchment-white, set on a skeleton’s frame” (67). The narrator’s description of the cadaverous housekeeper would certainly fit the image of the Gothic monster, but the challenge is to separate the narrator’s claim of villainy from the reality of the woman before her. At the arrival of the new mistress of Manderley, Mrs. Danvers steps out from among the staff to greet her. This would have been customary according to Samuel and Sarah Adams’ guide for servants. They state that as the housekeeper, Mrs. Danvers would have been considered “the locum tenens, the Lady Bountiful, and the active representative of the mistress of the family” and as such, she would have been “expected to do, or to see done, everything that appertains to the good and orderly management of the household” (52). Therefore, establishing a respectful relationship with the narrator would

have been an integral task in the successful management of Manderley. This moment should not have been confrontational, but rather a time to forge an alliance between the two women.

Instead, the narrator proceeds to provide a very critical depiction of Mrs. Danvers' appearance. Mrs. Danvers is described as being dressed in deep black. The narrator fails to provide details about the clothing of the rest of the staff, but Hyams describes the typical housekeeper "In her stiff black dress, silk apron trimmed with beads, lace collar, small lace cap and belt jingling with keys" (50). Even though the uniform might include adornments to set her apart from the rest of the staff, the color of her clothing was coincidental and not symbolic of evil. The narrator does not only attribute the look of evil to her clothing though. Bridgett Marshall argues that "Evil as physically manifested becomes central to our understanding of the villain, who is always in some way marked not only for the other characters, but also for the reader, by some sort of physical deformity" (161). The narrator further depicts the housekeeper as skeletal with sunken eyes (71). According to the narrator, Mrs. Danvers looks positively nightmarish. In her portrayal, Mrs. Danvers's outside appearance is meant to represent the villain inside.

Conversely, there is a more feasible explanation for the gaunt appearance of the housekeeper. Mrs. Danvers is grieving. It is important to remember that Maxim is not the only one who lost Rebecca. He is, however, given the space to grieve that loss. He can run away to Monte Carlo, where except for Mrs. Van Hopper, he is left alone. Mrs. Danvers is not afforded that luxury. While analyzing grief experienced outside of familial relationships, Martha Fowlkes comments that "our own contemporary society has, by and large, failed to consider that intimate bonds are more widespread and complex than is conventionally imagined, and on that account, has also failed to recognize that the loss of an intimate other does not necessarily carry with it the

social confirmation of the very right to grieve” (636). Mrs. Danvers’ love for Rebecca is not socially accepted and therefore her need to grieve after her loss is not recognized. Mrs. Danvers must remain at Manderley and conserve her lady’s home. She is constantly faced with reminders of the woman that she loves.

Simultaneously, the narrator works hard to paint a picture of Mrs. Danvers as a villain. Her self-proclaimed innocence convinces readers to believe everything that she says while suspecting the housekeeper of evil deeds. This smokescreen causes the conflict between the narrator and Mrs. Danvers to be overlooked. Holly Blackford postulates that “Although it would seem that Mrs. Danvers does become increasingly hostile to the second Mrs. de Winter, her words, looks, and actions can actually be read as a projection of the highly imaginative and insecure narrator” (244). The narrator has already admitted to creating scenarios in which she is judged by Mrs. Danvers. Therefore, it is not inconceivable to assume that the narrator’s account of meeting the housekeeper might also be exaggerated. After Mrs. Danvers welcomes Mrs. de Winter to Manderley, the narrator describes how “she waited, as though for a reply, and I remember blushing scarlet, stammering some sort of thanks in return, and dropping both my gloves in my confusion. She stopped to pick them up, and as she handed them to me I saw a little smile of scorn upon her lips, and I guessed at once she considered me ill-bred” (68). As before, Mrs. Danvers is acting in accordance to the expectations of her role as housekeeper. She has greeted the new mistress and even lowers herself to retrieve the narrator’s gloves from the floor. Despite the grief of losing Rebecca, Mrs. Danvers smiles at the narrator. Mrs. Danvers has not disrespected the narrator nor has she acted in a way that would indicate that she is judging her. The narrator, who believes herself to be a fraud at Manderley, is projecting her self-deprecation upon Mrs. Danvers and is looking for any sign that she might have been caught in her deception.

The narrator also villainizes Mrs. Danvers by insinuating that she obsessively keeps Manderley the way in which Rebecca desired the house to be run. Gina Wisker argues that the narrator “cannot begin to inhabit the space Rebecca has left, not least because the presence of the energetic, sexually decisive and wayward first wife is still inhabiting that space through Mrs. Danvers’ reminders and her passive-aggressive responses to the new wife, as she keeps Rebecca’s memory alive in sections of the house, and in everyday references” (9). Wisker is insinuating that Mrs. Danvers was maliciously standing in the narrator’s way of taking up the role of mistress at Manderley. However, there are several interactions that contradict this theory. After their introduction in the hall, Mrs. Danvers escorts the narrator to her room. During their conversation, the narrator once again imagines that Mrs. Danvers is looking at her with judgment. In her attempt to ease the tension, she expresses her eagerness to make Maxim happy and to be successful in her role there. She goes on to say “I know I can leave all household arrangements to you, Mr. de Winter said so, and you must just run things as they have always been run, I shan’t want to make any changes” (74). Due to her insecurity, the narrator hands over the reins of the household to Mrs. Danvers and instructs her to keep everything just as Rebecca maintained it. Mrs. Danvers’ references to Rebecca and the way that she ran Manderley come merely as suggestions or to allude to how things had been done previously.

The planning of the meals is another example of how the narrator fails to take charge of her responsibilities in the house. According to Adams, “One of the principal objects of the mistress of the house is the economy or management of the table, the general display of which will evince her judgment and taste” (15). Mrs. Danvers referred to the narrator for approval of the daily menu, as would have been the expectation. However, the narrator once again encourages the housekeeper to serve what she sees best. Mrs. Danvers has to insist that she

review the selections. She further stresses “If you wish anything changed please say so...and I will give orders at once. You will notice that I have left a blank space beside the sauce, for you to mark your preference. I was not sure what sauce you are used to having served with the roast veal. Mrs. de Winter was most particular about her sauces, and I always had to refer to her” (87). Mrs. Danvers is encouraging the narrator to step into her role and to make decisions about the way that the house is run. Mentioning Rebecca was not a passive-aggressive way to compare the two women, but rather to state that even if Mrs. Danvers kept everything the same, she would still refer to the narrator for the choice of sauce as she had done in the past. These examples provide proof that Mrs. Danvers is not upholding the household out of obsession for Rebecca, nor is she keeping the narrator from taking control.

Upon meeting Mrs. Danvers, the narrator experiences a myriad of feelings. On the one hand, she is envious of her composure and her knowledge of the house, but she also admits to feeling unsettled. She comments that when Mrs. Danvers takes her hand, “she began to speak, still leaving that dead hand in mine, her hollow eyes never leaving my eyes, so that my own wavered and would not meet hers, and as they did so her hand moved in mine, the life returned to it” (68). Two separate dynamics are simultaneously unfolding within this interaction. The first is a feeling of inferiority that Mrs. Danvers is able to elicit from the narrator. The other is more subtle. The touch of their hands brings Mrs. Danvers to life while making the narrator feel shame. Although not explicitly stated, this scene has definite sexual undertones that would suggest that Mrs. Danvers is experiencing a same-sex attraction toward the narrator.

Nonetheless, Mrs. Danvers’s sexuality, similar to Rebecca’s, would not be considered villainous as long as it did not pose a threat to Manderley. However, Hallett reminds us that “homosexuality was frequently associated with a double transgression, a socially inverted sexual

corruption of higher class innocents by members of a lower order” (40). The narrator has portrayed herself as innocent, but she has also expressed the desire to be older and to possess the sexual prowess of her predecessor. However, in order to fulfill the role of Maxim’s wife, she must maintain her chasteness. Maxim has explicitly told her that “There is a certain type of knowledge I prefer you not to have. It’s better kept under lock and key” (205). In the moment that their hands touch, the narrator might not be able to identify the source of her discomfort, but she is aware of a stirring within her. Mrs. Danvers is fully aware of what has transpired, and she comes to life in this moment. Lesbianism within the early twentieth-century Gothic novel often acted as what Adrienne Rich considered to be “a form of nay-saying to patriarchy, an act of resistance” (649). Mrs. Danvers’ categorization as a lesbian is only villainous when she threatens to expose the repressed sexual desires of the narrator.

It is in Rebecca’s bedroom that this threat becomes the most powerful. Mrs. Danvers has kept the room exactly as it was on the night that Rebecca died. Although it seems as if this can be blamed on Mrs. Danvers’ obsession with her former mistress, it is Maxim who asked for the room to simply be shut up and to have new quarters established for his bride. Mrs. Danvers followed his orders, but she also took advantage of the space that had been left as a place for her to grieve. Mrs. Danvers must maintain her sense of decorum while conducting the business of the household. It is only in Rebecca’s bedroom that she can feel the loss of the woman she loved. It is where she can breathe in her smell and caress the things that Rebecca had once touched. When the narrator enters this room, she comments “I noticed with a sick dull aching in my heart that there were creases in the nightdress, the texture was ruffled, it had not been touched or laundered since it was last worn” (169). Mrs. Danvers had kept the room as a shrine to Rebecca, almost as if she hoped that she would return.

Instead of Rebecca, it is the narrator who enters the room. If Mrs. Danvers held malice toward the new Mrs. de Winter then we would expect her to express anger towards the narrator's intrusion into Rebecca's room. Instead, Mrs. Danvers invites her into the sacred space. She questions "Why have you never asked me to show it to you before? I was ready to show it to you every day. You had only to ask me" (170). She takes hold of the narrator by the arm and walks her further into the room. This physical contact makes the narrator uncomfortable. The narrator states "I could not resist her; I was like a dumb thing" (171). Mrs. Danvers shows signs of excitement as she guides the narrator through the room. At this moment, the housekeeper and the narrator are both experiencing a desire for Rebecca and crossing the boundary that Kirsti Bohata outlines when she claims that "Class distinctions and a proper distance must be maintained for the sake of social order and patriarchal domestic harmony" (342). Mrs. Danvers crossed the boundary of what would be considered proper distance from her mistress. As Lovell-Smith suggests Mrs. Danvers serves as the "older woman who plays the role of initiator offering the way to necessary knowledge" (203). She is seeking to share her same-sex desire with the narrator, feeling like she has found someone who shares her inclinations. Once again, Mrs. Danvers is seeking to ally with the narrator.

Mrs. Danvers initiates this alliance by inviting the narrator to touch Rebecca's things. She guides the narrator to the bed and informs her "Here is her nightdress inside the case. You've been touching it, haven't you? This was the nightdress she was wearing for the last time, before she died. Would you like to touch it again?...Feel it, hold it." (171). There is no anger expressed in Mrs. Danvers's tone. Instead, she seems to be excited and giddy that she can share these memories with someone else. Hallett reminds us that "It is not only about how women touch each other, and so make spaces queer, it is also about the ways in which things can be affected by

touch, become themselves subjectified” (37). Rebecca’s bedroom should be a space representative of marriage and heterosexuality. However, at this moment when Mrs. Danvers and the narrator are touching Rebecca’s most intimate objects, the space becomes queered. Mrs. Danvers allows the narrator to glimpse the intimacy that she shared with Rebecca, inviting her to become a part of the challenge to the patriarchy. This is not only driven by Mrs. Danvers’ sexual attraction to the narrator; she also wants to form a homosocial bond in which she can be open about the loss that she has suffered. Mrs. Danvers does not display any animosity towards the narrator within this scene.

Instead, Mrs. Danvers’ disdain is directed at Maxim. When Rebecca was still alive, there appeared to be an element of competition between the husband and the housekeeper for her affection. She recounted that when Maxim would brush Rebecca’s hair, she would constantly demand that he brush harder until he would finally relinquish the task to Mrs. Danvers (172). As the housekeeper took up the brush and ran it through Rebecca’s hair, the women shared a moment of intimacy. Rebecca also shared the secrets of her life in London with Mrs. Danvers. In all of Rebecca’s other relationships, she was playing a role, either as the perfect angel of the house at Manderley or the consummate lover with her latest conquest. With Mrs. Danvers, she showed her true nature and revealed that it was all a game to her. Mrs. Danvers even goes so far as to suggest that had she been home the night that she died, Rebecca would have not gone sailing. She asserts “She always listened to me” (173). This declaration would suggest that Rebecca put more concern and emphasis on her relationship with Mrs. Danvers than she did in her marriage to Maxim and that a relationship between women could be more meaningful than the patriarchal idea of marriage.

Mrs. Danvers's contempt for Maxim reaches a pivotal point when he threatens the few remaining connections that she has with Rebecca. Maxim makes it very clear that Mrs. Danvers is not allowed to have visits with Favell, Rebecca's cousin and lover, at Manderley. The narrator overhears this interaction and from her hiding spot, she is able to catch a glimpse of Mrs. Danvers's face as she leaves the library. The narrator describes it as "grey with anger, distorted, horrible" (192). Until this moment, Mrs. Danvers has fulfilled her role as the housekeeper dutifully. She has tried to accommodate the needs of Maxim's new bride and hold the staff to a high standard of service, all while dealing with the grief of losing Rebecca. Maxim's intrusion into her remaining connection to her mistress is unforgivable. To add insult to injury, Mrs. Danvers believes that the narrator informed Maxim about Favell's visit to the house. She is under the assumption that this woman to whom she bared her soul and exposed her true desires has betrayed her to maintain her role within the patriarchy.

It is this betrayal that causes Mrs. Danvers to lash out at the narrator and, by extension, Maxim. As the costume ball approaches, Mrs. Danvers suggests that the narrator go dressed like the portrait of Caroline de Winter that hangs in the hall. She knows that this is the exact same costume worn by Rebecca. She knows that seeing his new bride in this costume would hurt Maxim and cause a rift within the marriage. Her plan works flawlessly. When Maxim sees the narrator on the staircase, dressed as Caroline de Winter, anger flashes in his eyes, and he demands that she return to her room and change immediately. As the narrator runs down the hall, unaware of what she has done wrong, she catches a glimpse of a figure in the West Wing. She conveys "It was Mrs. Danvers. I shall never forget the expression on her face, loathsome, triumphant. The face of an exulting devil. She stood there smiling at me" (217-18). This moment is pivotal. Although the narrator would have readers believe that she has always been the villain,

it is in this moment that we actually see Mrs. Danvers transform from the grieving skeletal housekeeper to the smiling villain.

When the narrator confronts her nemesis in Rebecca's room, Mrs. Danvers releases all of the emotions that she has been holding on to. When she turns to face the narrator, "her eyes were red and swollen with crying" (244). She confesses to the difficulty she has experienced in watching the narrator come to Manderley and take Rebecca's place. Fowlkes postulates that "Perhaps the loneliest and potentially most destructive grief of all [...] is the grief following a loss that is not merely socially and morally undervalued, but one that is actually devalued" (644). Mrs. Danvers remarks that her grief has never been acknowledged. Maxim's whirlwind romance and marriage with the narrator so soon after the loss of Rebecca not only insult the memory of her mistress, but it also feels like an affront to Mrs. Danvers. She exclaims "What do I care for his suffering? ... He's never cared about mine. How do you think I've liked it, watching you sit in her place, walk in her footsteps, touch the things that were hers?" (246). What an incredible amount of self-control Mrs. Danvers has displayed to continue serving dutifully in this household while suffering under the weight of unacknowledged grief.

It was not until Maxim threatened her connection to Rebecca that she acted on her grief and anger. She proclaims "I made up my mind then I'd teach you a lesson, and him too. Let him suffer, I say. What do I care? What's his suffering to me? Why shouldn't I see Mr. Jack here at Manderley? He's the only link I have left now with Mrs. de Winter" (249). Mrs. Danvers does not turn against the narrator or Maxim due to her obsession with Rebecca or some innate villainy that comes out at the arrival of a new mistress. The pressure of living in a patriarchal society that refuses to recognize the legitimacy of her love for Rebecca or the anguish that she experiences at its loss has pushed Mrs. Danvers to her breaking point. She thought that she had found an ally in

the narrator, someone that she could express her feelings to and who would understand. She discovers that she was wrong and that the narrator is, as Auba Llompart Pons suggests, a “selfish and hypocritical character who tries to restore patriarchy and protect the patriarch for her own benefits” (78). The narrator is nothing like her beloved Rebecca, who challenged the world she lived in and the expectation that women had to behave a certain way. This realization about the narrator causes Mrs. Danvers to lose all respect for her. It is at this junction that Mrs. Danvers encourages the narrator to leave Manderley. She guides the narrator to the window of Rebecca’s room while telling her that she will never be able to take her place. She taunts “You’ll never get the better of her. She’s still mistress here, even if she is dead. She’s the real Mrs. de Winter, not you. It’s you that’s the shadow and the ghost. It’s you that’s forgotten and not wanted and pushed aside. Well, why don’t you leave Manderley to her? Why don’t you go?” (250).

Only in the extremes of her grief does Mrs. Danvers begin to act in “villainous” ways. Even in these moments, she is a woman grieving the loss of her love. It is only when her freedom to maintain her connections to Rebecca is threatened that she starts to lash out. The tumultuous relationship between Mrs. Danvers and the narrator is indicative of the changing society of the early twentieth century. Mrs. Danvers and her devotion to the memory of Rebecca represents a deviation from the patriarchy and the required performance of women. Although she fails, the narrator attempts to uphold the system. Pons states “The novel portrays the characters’ inability to fulfill the highly demanding gender roles imposed by this system, which leads them towards hypocrisy, hysteria, and crime” (71). Mrs. Danvers’s inability to support the heteronormative system within the household leads to her villainization by the narrator. In one final act of resistance to the system, Mrs. Danvers burns down the one remaining representation of the patriarchy – Manderley.

Mrs. Danvers provides a personification of Daphne du Maurier's struggle with how society was changing at the time of the novel's creation and how she fit into it. The villainization of Mrs. Danvers reflects du Maurier's struggle with her sexuality. Her biographer Margaret Forster claims that du Maurier "reflected the sexual judgment of her era" (418). Daphne du Maurier, like Mrs. Danvers, experienced same-sex attraction, but she refused to refer to herself as a lesbian. So when she was introduced to Ellen Doubleday for the first time, "her feelings of excitement were mixed with ones close to terror" (Forster 221). She once more brought forth her male persona, Eric Avon, and thought of Doubleday as Rebecca. This allowed her to normalize the feelings that she was experiencing. However, despite many letters professing her love for Ellen, du Maurier's love was unrequited. In order to maintain a friendship with Doubleday, du Maurier had to repress her Venetian tendencies once more. Du Maurier was constantly having to fight against her attraction to women; when she was unable to eliminate her feelings, she would justify them with her belief that she was a boy. In contrast, Mrs. Danvers does not try to create a narrative to explain her feelings for Rebecca. She tells the narrator about them unapologetically. The narrator's response to this revelation is similar to du Maurier's. Despite feeling a powerful attraction to Rebecca, the narrator denies that side of her sexuality and instead villainizes it.

Daphne du Maurier also experienced a similar difficulty in expressing grief over same-sex love as Mrs. Danvers. Although she did not go through this experience until after the creation of this novel, du Maurier also lost a woman that she had loved. Gertrude Lawrence was an actress who had starred in a film adaptation of one of Daphne's other literary works. The two women grew close and eventually the relationship did turn physical. On September 6, 1952, Gertrude passed away from cancer (de Rosnay 217). Nobody within du Maurier's family had known the depth of the relationship that the two women had shared and therefore they were

incapable of providing the proper acknowledgement of her grief. Tatiana de Rosnay describes how “Her family and friends watch in astonishment as she withdraws into a catatonic sadness” (217-18). They detail some of the same physical manifestations that readers saw in Mrs. Danvers, including the white pallor of her skin.

It can be concluded that Daphne du Maurier is more comparable to Mrs. Danvers than she would have liked to admit. Du Maurier’s desire to repress her same-sex attractions causes her to villainize the character who expresses these passions openly. This villainization is compounded by the narrator’s projections of her insecurity. Mrs. Danvers is not the villain that she is often portrayed as. Instead, she is a personification of the anxiety surrounding the changing views of sexuality. Patriarchy expects women to center their lives around the home and the needs of their husbands. The rise of the gay and lesbian movement challenged this expectation. The movement fought for sexual freedom, something that Rebecca embraced. Mrs. Danvers’s devotion to keeping Rebecca’s memory alive and introducing the narrator to these revolutionary ideas puts her in direct opposition of the patriarchy. She was a threat to the traditional family, and like Rebecca, she could not be allowed to continue to promote her views. Mrs. Danvers had to be villainized for the patriarchy to remain intact. However, Mrs. Danvers got the last word. She set fire to the home, burning down the structure. She had triumphed in the end.

Works Cited

- Adams, Samuel and Sarah. *The Complete Servant*. United Kingdom: Knight and Lacey, 1825.
- Blackford, Holly. "Haunted Housekeeping: Fatal Attractions of Servant and Mistress in Twentieth-Century Female Gothic Literature." *Literature Interpretation Theory*, vol. 16, 2005, pp. 233-261. DOI: 10.1080/10436920590946859
- Bohata, Kirsti. "Mistress and Maid: Homoeroticism, Cross-Class Desire, and Disguise in Nineteenth-Century Fiction." *Victorian Literature and Culture*, vol. 45, no. 2, 2017, pp. 341-359. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/26347345
- Cohen, Jeffrey Jerome. "Monster Culture: Seven Theses." *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*, Ed. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, pp. 3-25.
- De Rosnay, Tatiana. *Manderley Forever*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 2017.
- Du Maurier, Rebecca. *Rebecca*. New York: Harper, 1938.
- Evans, Sian. *Life Below Stairs*. Great Britain: National Trust Books, 2011.
- Forster, Margaret. *Daphne du Maurier: The Secret Life of the Renowned Storyteller*. New York: Doubleday, 1993.
- Fowlkes, Martha R. "The Social Regulation of Grief." *Sociological Forum*, vol. 5, no. 4, 1900, pp. 635-652. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/684689
- Hallett, Nicky. "Did Mrs. Danvers Warm Rebecca's Pearls? Significant Exchanges and the Extension of Lesbian Space and Time in Literature." *Feminist Review*, no. 74, 2003, pp. 35-49. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/1395950
- Hammond, Karla. "An Interview with Audre Lorde." *American Poetry Review*, vol. 9, no. 2, 1980, pp. 18-21. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/27776388.
- Hurley, Kelly. "British Gothic Fiction, 1885-1930." *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic*

- Fiction*, Ed. Jerrold E. Hogle, Cambridge, 2002, pp. 189-207.
- Hyams, Jacky. *The Real Life Downtown Abby*. England: John Blake Publishing, 2011.
- Lovell-Smith, Rose. "Anti-Housewives and Ogres' Housekeepers: The Roles of Bluebeard's Female Helper." *Folklore*, vol. 112, no. 2, 2002, pp. 197-214. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/1260676
- Marshall, Bridgett M. "The Face of Evil: Phrenology, Physiognomy, and the Gothic Villain." *Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies*, vol. 6, no. 2, 2000, pp. 161-172. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/41274102
- Pons, Auba Llompart. "Patriarchal Hauntings: Re-reading Villainy and Gender in Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca*." *Atlantis*, vol. 35. No. 1, 2013, pp. 69-83. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/43486040
- Powell, Margaret. *Below Stairs: The Classic Kitchen Maid's Memoir That Inspired Upstairs, Downstairs and Downtown Abbey*. Thorndike Press, 2011.
- Rich, Adrienne. "Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence." *Signs*, vol.5, no. 4, 1980, pp. 631-660. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/3173834
- Warwick, Sarah. *Upstairs & Downstairs*. London: Carlton Books, 2012.
- Wisker, Gina. "Undermining the Everyday: Daphne du Maurier's Gothic Horror," *Revue LISA*, vol. 19, no. 52, 2021, pp. 1-16. DOI: doi.org/10.4000/lisa.13590

The Narrator

“I am Mrs. de Winter now” (du Maurier 295)

Compared to Rebecca and Mrs. Danvers, one might find it difficult to see the unnamed narrator as a villain in this novel. On the contrary, we are more likely to feel sympathy for her because she is an orphan and forced to work as the paid companion of Mrs. Van Hopper. As a woman, the narrator would have been afforded very few opportunities to advance within society. The narrator also possesses a talent for portraying herself as naïve and innocent, a portrayal that aids readers in ignoring her acts of manipulation and her ineptitude as mistress of Manderley. Much like Rebecca, the narrator is playing a role, but for her, it is constantly shifting as she attempts to become the woman she believes Maxim wants her to be. Through her devotion to Maxim and his estate, the narrator almost seems to fit the mold of the perfect wife within the patriarchy, but if there is a lesson to be learned from Rebecca and Mrs. Danvers, it is that Daphne du Maurier’s female characters are just as complex and contradictory as the author herself.

The narrator begins her tale in Monte Carlo where she has accompanied her employer Mrs. Van Hopper. The early twentieth century would have offered very few employment opportunities to a lower-class female like the narrator. During this period, there was a policy of separate spheres that dictated the roles of the genders. Women were expected to remain in the private sphere of the home, where they would be expected to care for their husbands and provide them with children. However, this binary of separate spheres does not address the issue of widows and spinsters. Like the narrator, these women would have been forced into the public sphere in search of work, many in domestic service. According to Deidre McCloskey, two in

every five women were employed in domestic service in the early part of the twentieth century. (167). Other career options might include unskilled and repetitive labor. To add insult to injury, women were paid significantly less than men for working the same positions. This class and gender inequality can be seen when the narrator describes her role as a paid companion and the ninety pounds a year that she makes to Maxim. He responds by comparing it to “the eastern slave market” (24). For the narrator, this was her only option for financial stability and ninety pounds a year would have seemed like a lot of money to her. The patriarchal system of early twentieth-century Britain had placed women in a position of submission and subjectivity.

Daphne du Maurier was familiar with the challenges faced by women as well as the fight to alleviate some of the injustices taking place. Helene Meyers claims that “Written between the first- and second-wave feminist movements and just prior to the cataclysm of World War II, *Rebecca* inscribes rather than resolves the sexual tensions of the age” (38). Many of these tensions were caused by a misconception of what the aim of the feminist movement was exactly. The fear was that women would attempt to overthrow the traditional family and societal structures. In reality, the women of the early twentieth-century feminist movement embraced the differences between the sexes. According to Giles, “Domesticity, the home, housework, and ‘private’ life shaped the day-to-day existence of most women and, despite expanding employment opportunities, continued to be the arena in which women of all classes sought to define and understand themselves, whether as wife, mother, housewife, servant or mistress” (1). It was this identity within the domestic sphere that led women to believe that they should play a larger role in society. They believed that with the unique ability to nurture and regard for a strict moral code, women could provide a specialized perspective in state decisions. They also believed that the term ‘angel of the house’ extended beyond the familial home. England was also their

residence, and they argued that they deserved to have a voice in the matters of the home. Not everyone agreed that women had a natural place in politics. Anti-suffragists argued that the feminist movement sought to enter inappropriate roles, rivaling men for these positions. There was also the fear that as women entered the public sphere, their duties within the home would be neglected such as child rearing and the care of their husbands (Giles 110).

It is during this period in which women are looked upon with suspicion that we encounter the narrator. Gina Wisker theorizes that one of the difficulties we face with the narrator lies in “the insidious undermining of the security of both the everyday normality of life, that which is labeled as real or trustworthy, and of the inner narratives by which we construct and interpret our worlds” (3). Just as du Maurier described nature encroaching upon the house, so too is the narrator deceptively undermining the societal expectations of women. However, it is not always apparent how she manages to do this. The narrator’s character is revealed through her recounting of interactions with other characters as well as glimpses into her thoughts. These glimpses can be very misleading. The narrator has a very active imagination, and she seems to have difficulty separating fact from fiction. Often these imagined scenes create tension, especially between the narrator and Maxim. For example, after she breaks an ornament that had been a wedding present to Rebecca, the narrator convinces herself that Maxim is thinking of Rebecca. As she looks at him, she broods “He is thinking how strange it was that a wedding present to me should have been the cause of destroying a wedding present to Rebecca” (151). She goes on to envision the day that Rebecca received the gift and how Maxim enjoyed that moment with her. Although this event never took place, the narrator describes the thoughts in her mind as “bitter and resentful” (151). The narrator’s penchant for creating these types of situations destabilizes her relationships

with those around her and makes it difficult to decipher fact from fiction when she describes her interactions with others.

The narrator's reliability is also called into question by her tendency to leave out certain details. Harriet Linkin argues that "she filters the details of her story; moreover, as she produces her confessional memoir, she engages in paralipsis, or omission, to exonerate her questionable actions" (224). Although often overlooked, the description of the narrator's time in Monte Carlo provides several hints that she is not completely forthcoming with all of the details of her story. The narrator even provides a cryptic warning that she is going to leave details out of the story through the guise of caring for Maxim's sensitivity. To spare him any additional pain, she says that she will "keep the things that hurt to myself alone" (7). She might be speaking specifically about the news stories that she reads aloud to Maxim, but this statement supports Linkin's claim that the narrator will filter her stories to portray herself as the victim.

Much of the narrator's ability to deceive is learned during her time as a paid companion to Mrs. Van Hopper. The narrator frequently acts as a co-conspirator in her employer's schemes to become associated with the elite members of society. The narrator would play the middleman in these schemes. She recounts that "sometimes she would employ me as a bait to draw her prey, and, hating my errand, I would be sent across the lounge with a verbal message, the loan of a book or paper, the address of some shop or other, the sudden discovery of a mutual friend" (12). Despite her claim to hate these particular tasks, she continues to carry them out with skill, indicating that she is well-versed in deceit. She has learned the art of gaining the attention of what she termed the "visitors of distinction" (12).

There is a desire to feel pity for the narrator and to make the excuse that she had no choice but to initiate these contacts for Mrs. Van Hopper. This is her job after all. However, when

Maxim de Winter makes his appearance at the hotel, the narrator finds a way to distance herself from Mrs. Van Hopper's predatory behavior. She is sent to fetch a letter from her employer's nephew to serve as an introductory prop. Instead of rushing to the task as she would normally have done, the narrator impedes the plan by spending time in contemplation of how she might warn Maxim. This stall tactic works. She comments, "I had been longer than I thought, for when I returned to the lounge I saw he had already left the dining-room, and she, fearful of losing him, had not waited for the letter, but had risked a bare-faced introduction on her own" (13-4).

Although her actions did not keep Maxim from being ensnared by Mrs. Van Hopper, they did keep the narrator from being associated with the manipulation. She was able to maintain an air of innocence in his opinion. The fact that she had never expressed a desire to warn any of Mrs. Van Hopper's other prey indicates that she views Maxim differently, but it also shows that she was complicit in the previous plots. It seems as if the narrator has her own agenda when it comes to Maxim de Winter.

With this in mind, one might begin to question if the narrator is actually as different from Mrs. Van Hopper as she tries to make herself seem. This desire to differentiate herself from her employer becomes most apparent when she is conversating with Maxim. She describes a time when Maxim makes a sarcastic comment, but Mrs. Van Hopper is oblivious to the insult and simply laughs it off. The narrator recounts her embarrassment saying, "There was a pause, and I felt the colour flood into my face. I was too young, that was the trouble. Had I been older I would have caught his eye and smiled, her unbelievable behavior making a bond between us; but as it was I was stricken into shame, and endured one of the frequent agonies of youth" (16). This comment shows the narrator's struggle with her current role. She despises her station in life as a paid companion, but it is all she has known. She also wishes to be older and more knowledgeable

of the way to navigate social situations, a lesson she will never learn with Mrs. Van Hopper. This comment also eludes to her desire to kindle a more intimate relationship with Maxim, one that would allow her to elevate her status above that of her boss. The narrator is not in love with Maxim, but she recognizes that an alliance with him would offer her more options in life than she would otherwise have. In order to create that alliance, the narrator must create opportunities for intimacy with Maxim.

One of the first intimacies the narrator shares with Maxim is her name. Upon her introduction to Maxim, the narrator recalls how Mrs. Van Hopper “flushed with her success, waved a vague hand in my direction and mumbled my name” (14). To Mrs. Van Hopper, the name of her paid companion is of no great importance. In fact, her name is never actually revealed within the novel. Daphne du Maurier is very particular when creating her characters. So the fact that the narrator is never named is significant. According to Margaret Forster, “The author [...] worried about whether, behind the obvious excitement of the plot she had so carefully concocted, critics would recognize that she was trying to explore the relationship between a man who was powerful and a woman who was not” (138). This suggests that a name is a source of power within the novel. Maxim’s name elicits respect and admiration. On the other hand, the narrator remains nameless until Maxim gives her the privilege of taking his name. Even after taking his name, she is not given the same power. Auba Llompart Pons claims that the fact “that she is always referred to as ‘Mrs. de Winter’ suggests that she is no one but Mr. de Winter’s wife” (72). However, even if her identity is tied to Maxim’s, her status in society is significantly elevated through her association and subsequent marriage to him.

There are several indications that the marriage to Maxim might not actually be the happy accident that the narrator portrays it to be. The narrator drops several hints that she had extensive

knowledge of Maxim and his home Manderley before they ever crossed paths. As she begins her story, she makes the boast “I am a mine of information on the English countryside. I know the name of every owner of every British moor, yes – and their tenants, too” (7). Although she makes this proclamation after the destruction of Manderley as a way of describing how she spends her time, it is not likely that she has just taken up this hobby. It is suggestive that she has always had an interest in the large British estates. This is further indicated by a comment made by Mrs. Van Hopper when she is talking to the narrator about Maxim. The narrator recalls her employer commenting “It’s Max de Winter...the man who owns Manderley. You’ve heard of it, of course” (11). The narrator provides no refutation to this statement. In fact, later when she brings up Manderley in conversation to Maxim, she ponders “why it was that this home of his, known to so many people by hearsay, even to me, should so inevitably silence him” (23). The narrator not only states that she has heard of the famous home, but that she had previously bought a postcard with its picture portrayed on the front of it. The narrator knows more about Maxim and his estate than she wants to admit.

By implying that the narrator knew about Maxim prior to meeting him at Monte Carlo, it could be further suggested that the relationship was not accidental or happenstance. During the interaction between Mrs. Van Hopper and Maxim, the narrator claims that she barely spoke. Instead, she describes her daydreams of being a woman with the intelligence and breeding to be capable of interacting with Maxim with ease. Mrs. Van Hopper paints a very different picture of what took place. She prosecutes the narrator for being immodest, declaring “By-the-way, dear...don’t think I mean to be unkind, but you put yourself just a teeny bit forward this afternoon. Your efforts to monopolise the conversation quite embarrassed me, and I’m sure it did him” (19). It is not clear at this point in the narrative who is to be believed. If we believe Mrs.

Van Hopper, then it would appear as if the narrator were lying and that she is attempting to attract Maxim's attention. However, the narrator describes her employer as a spider constantly drawing others into her web. She tries to convince us that she was quiet throughout the conversation and embarrassed by Mrs. Van Hopper's forward behavior. The narrator's position is contradictory because when she claims that she maintains her innocence in the entrapment of Maxim, she has then necessarily admitted to being complicit in Mrs. Van Hopper's endeavors to ensnare others. Therefore, it is not difficult to consider the possibility that she has her own scheme in mind to gain the affection of the illustrious Maxim de Winter.

This scheme begins to unfold when Mrs. Van Hopper falls ill and the narrator goes to the restaurant alone for the first time. Maxim is seated at the table next to hers engrossed in a newspaper. He has not seen her, and she has ample time to leave the dining area as one would expect someone as shy as she is to do. Instead, her desire to be older and wiser makes her bold and she takes her seat. She is distracted by her thoughts of the type of woman she would need to be to attract him and she states, "I went to our table, looking straight before me, and immediately paid the penalty of gaucherie by knocking over the vase of stiff anemones as I unfolded my napkin" (22). In the previous interaction with Maxim, the narrator claims that it had been her awkwardness and innocence that had drawn his attention to her. Linkin asserts that "the narrator simultaneously asserts the naivete of her younger self and implicates that self's awareness about what attracts Maxim" (228). She realizes that she does not possess the sophistication that men of his standing are normally drawn to, but she does have the ability to portray the innocence of a child. Maxim seems to respond to this quality, so despite her own desire to be older and different, she willingly plays the role that will win his affection (22).

As the narrator continues her act of innocence with Maxim, she displays a very different side of her personality in her interchanges with Mrs. Van Hopper. When her employer inquires how she is spending her afternoons, without hesitation the narrator lies and informs her that she has been taking lessons with the tennis coach. Mrs. Van Hopper probes further and asks if she still serves underhand. The narrator is quick to answer yes, but inside, she is shaken by the question. She thinks “how just and appropriate her word. It described me well. I was underhand” (36). The narrator acknowledges that she has acted deceptively, but in her desire to continue her pursuit of Maxim, she does not repent of her actions. Lying becomes second nature when it benefits the narrator.

The outings with Maxim provide more than just a break from Mrs. Van Hopper. They also help to elevate her status at the hotel. She imparts “I had already risen in importance from my lunch with him, for as we got up from the table the little maître d’hotel rushed forward to pull away my chair. He bowed and smiled – a total change from his usual attitude of indifference – picked up my handkerchief that had fallen on the floor, and hoped ‘Mademoiselle had enjoyed her lunch.’ Even the page-boy by the swing doors glanced at me with respect” (26). As Mrs. Van Hopper’s paid companion, she had been treated as inferior, being given food that had been sent back by other patrons as inedible (10). Now with Maxim by her side, she is treated with reverence. This shows that money is not the only factor that is at play. Mrs. Van Hopper is given respect because she has money, but also because of her marital name. This respect does not extend to her female companion. It is not until the narrator is dining with a respected man such as Maxim de Winter that the staff of the hotel Cote d’Azur begin to view her as a lady worthy of esteem.

After getting a taste of what life is like for a woman of distinction, the narrator has no desire to return to her role as just a paid companion. So, when Mrs. Van Hopper informs her that they will be sailing for New York, the narrator is devastated. As a woman, the narrator does not have many options for advancement in society on her own, but meeting Maxim opened a door of possibility. Now that door was being slammed back in her face. Her mind races to find a way to reach out to Maxim, but she continually recoils at his imagined indifference. However, when Mrs. Van Hopper decides to expedite their departure, the narrator, in a moment of panic, exclaims “Well then, I would fling away restraint and modesty, I would not be proud anymore” (50). She rushes to his room without a single thought of propriety and bangs upon his door. When he answers, she does not make a grand pronouncement of love for him, but rather, she laments that she will hate New York and will be utterly miserable. This is a bold move for a woman of this time, barging in on a man alone before he has even dressed, but the narrator is desperate, and she certainly didn’t learn modesty from Mrs. Van Hopper. Despite the indecency of her outcry, the narrator’s trap is set and Maxim proposes by saying “I’m asking you to marry me, you little fool” (52).

Despite the narrator’s attempts to characterize herself as innocent and naïve, her account of her time in Monte Carlo paints a very different portrait. Like many other women in the early twentieth century, the narrator feels trapped by the limited options afforded to someone of her gender and background. In her article “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution,” Judith Butler theorizes that “As an intentionally organized materiality, the body is always an embodying of possibilities both conditioned and circumscribed by historical convention” (521). By this, she means that the narrator’s role will be dictated by cultural expectations of a woman’s performance. As an orphaned girl of lower class, her only option is to work in low-income jobs

geared towards women, such as secretarial positions in an office or domestic tasks such as cooking and cleaning. Even as the paid companion of Mrs. Van Hopper, the narrator is treated more like her servant than her employee. Within this patriarchal society, the only chance that the narrator has to move up is through marriage to a man of a higher class.

For this reason, the behavior exhibited by the narrator in her interactions with Maxim merits further consideration. The ease with which she lies to Mrs. Van Hopper and then transitions into the role of an innocent child with Maxim offers a reading of the narrator as, like du Maurier's other women characters in the novel, having villainous tendencies. Feeling betrayed by the narrator's deception, Mrs. Van Hopper condemns her deviousness by saying "I suppose I've got to hand it to you for a double-time worker. Still waters certainly run deep in your case" (59). Mrs. Van Hopper insinuates that the narrator has utilized her feminine wiles to ensnare Maxim, not unlike the way in which nature is described as using her long, tenacious fingers to encroach upon Manderley. In reality, the patriarchy had given the narrator little choice. She could remain in a position of servitude, participating in Mrs. Van Hopper's schemes for the rest of her life or she could don the quiet and naïve persona that Maxim de Winter was seeking in her. Like many of the women who came together to form the women's suffrage movement, the narrator decided that she wanted more than her lower-class existence. As the feminist movement expanded, there was a genuine fear that women were trying to destroy the structure of society. Through the narrator, Daphne du Maurier highlights that what might seem like small, innocent changes is actually something more menacing and deceitful. Through the use of Gothic literature, du Maurier shows that in the end, the desire of women like the narrator to obtain more status and opportunity will lead to the destruction of the patriarchal structure.

It might seem as if the narrator had gotten her fairy tale ending in this classic Cinderella tale of rags to riches, but in reality, it was far from happily ever after. She may have gained the title of Mrs. de Winter, but she struggled to fill the substantial gap that had been left by Rebecca's passing. Before parting ways, Mrs. Van Hopper makes the first insinuation that the narrator does not possess the qualities needed to fit into Maxim's society and run his household. Discouragingly, she predicts "You will have your work cut out as mistress of Manderley. To be perfectly frank, my dear, I simply can't see you doing it" (60). Despite the narrator's determination not to allow these disparaging words of conjecture to shake her self-confidence, they wriggle their way into her unconscious thoughts, and she is plagued with doubt as they approach Manderley.

The narrator quickly realizes that the plain looks and shy persona that had attracted Maxim in Monte Carlo are of no benefit to her as mistress of Manderley. Instead, her vast difference from the first Mrs. de Winter leaves her vulnerable to judgment. As she steps into the grand entrance of Manderley and is met by the entire staff, she recalls feeling a pain in her stomach imagining how she must appear to them, "a slim, awkward figure in my stockinette dress, clutching in my sticky hands a pair of gauntlet gloves" (67). Although the gathering of the staff is a sign of respect and welcome to her, the narrator is intimidated and fears that she will be discovered to be a fraud. As outlined in the earlier discussion of Mrs. Danvers's characterization, the narrator projects her feelings of inferiority.

The fear of judgment is not limited to the household staff. The narrator is also concerned about how she will be received by Maxim's family and neighbors. She dreads their visits, thinking that "They only come to call at Manderley because they are curious and prying. They liked to criticize my looks, my manners, my figure" (128). This fear of judgment stems from a

much greater concern. The narrator is afraid that she will be discovered to be an imposter. The narrator realizes that if she fails to fulfill her role as Maxim's wife and mistress of Manderley, she might find herself back where she started, destitute and working as a paid companion once again. In an attempt to mask her lower-class breeding, the narrator is constantly changing her persona. Wisker claims that "she spends her time trying to find out what the role is which she is meant to step into, what to do with the management of finances and meals, the writing of letters, relationships. The unfamiliar place and the new set of expectations are worrying, and her sense of reality is constantly brought up short and contradicted by people's behavior and events" (8). The narrator's inability to figure out her place within Manderley serves as a form of destabilization to the patriarchy. Her meek persona that attracted Maxim seems to fall short of his expectations at Manderley, but each time that she tries to assert herself, it only serves to anger him further.

Beyond her relationship with Maxim, the greatest risk of exposure comes from the narrator's relationships with the staff. During the early twentieth century, there would have been several manuals published that outlined the proper behavior of household staff as well as the way in which the mistress of the home should interact with them. Kirsti Bohata notes that "Mistresses are reminded that they must refrain from familiarity and the manuals cast aspersions on the intelligence and breeding of ladies who stoop to fraternize with the domestics. Class distinctions and a proper distance must be maintained for the sake of social order and patriarchal domestic harmony" (342). However, the narrator's past makes her feel more at ease with the staff than she does with the members of Maxim's society. She even admits to Maxim that she feels like one of the servants. She proclaims "I am like a between-maid...I know I am, in lots of ways. That's why I have so much in common with Clarice. We are on the same sort of footing" (146).

Clarice was hired to be the narrator's personal maid, but she becomes a friend and confidante. The two women share secrets and giggle together as the narrator plans her costume for the ball.

The inappropriate familiarity with her maid is not the only way in which the narrator displays her lack of understanding of her role. She does not know about how an estate such as Manderley is run. According to Jacky Hyams, the mistress of the house was to act "as a kind of superior manager of the household" (109). She was to oversee the décor of the house and the meals, working closely with the housekeeper to ensure that everything ran smoothly. The narrator did not step into this role when she arrived at Manderley. Instead, she left the household management to Mrs. Danvers. Even Maxim began to notice that the narrator was not playing her role as mistress of Manderley when a problem arose with the staff. He questions "I wonder why they come to me about it. That's your job, sweetheart" (143). It was not just that she lacked the knowledge of the customs and routines of the house. She could have easily learned these things. The narrator did not have the confidence to take up her position and order the staff about. She was still thinking as a lower-class citizen who was afforded no rights.

Another factor that contributed to the narrator's lack of confidence was the lingering memory of Rebecca's perfection. Rebecca haunts the narrator and provides a constant reminder of all of the attributes that she does not possess. Alison Light describes the binary created by the two women, stating that "Rebecca emerges as an aristocratic mix of independent and 'essential' femininity, a strong physical presence, a confident and alluring sexuality. The girl emerges as literally a girl, immature by Rebecca's standards" (11). The narrator wants to make her mark at Manderley. She wants to be able to feel like she is meeting the expectations that exist for a woman in her standing, but she is constantly haunted. Sylvie Maurel explains that "The ghost who poisons the heroine's own idyll ceaselessly returns in the guise of a socially sanctioned

figure of femininity, that of the perfect wife, the perfect lady of the manor, possessed of everything that matters in a wife” (135-6). Even though Rebecca is the ghost in the novel, the narrator is the character who plays the shadow. She tries to become more like Rebecca, but each attempt seems to end in failure. She thinks “I wanted to be happy, to make Maxim happy, and I wanted us to be together. There was no other wish in my heart but that. I could not help it if I felt like a guest in Manderley, my home, walking where she had trodden, resting where she had lain, I was like a guest, biding my time, waiting for the return of the hostess” (140). Everything within the home belongs to Rebecca. For example, the morning room remains decorated as Rebecca requested and her stationery still sits upon the desk with her bold handwriting. Her choice of flowers is still brought in each morning. After receiving a set of art books from Beatrice, the narrator decides that she wants to display them on the desk to add her own flair to the room. When she places them on the desk, they tip over and break a cupid statue that belonged to Rebecca. The narrator immediately hides the broken cupid and moves the books to the library, abandoning the idea of changing the room. However, this moment is symbolic because it shows that in order for the narrator to take up her role at Manderley, she will have to destroy the memory of Rebecca. The patriarchy forces women to compete against each other to find a place within its ranks. Du Maurier either does not realize that one of the goals of the feminist movement is to eliminate the competition among women by affording them more rights within society or fears the destabilization caused by that elimination enough to villainize it. Although she does not hold herself to the same standard, she believes that a woman’s role in society is determined by class and marriage. Had the narrator stayed within her role, the need to compete with Rebecca would not have existed.

Rebecca's memory is not the only challenge to the narrator's attempts to fulfill her role as mistress of Manderley. Maxim also creates a barrier through his desire to keep the narrator childlike and naïve. Even before learning of Rebecca, the narrator expresses a desire to be different. On a drive with Maxim, she proclaims "I wish I was a woman of about thirty-six dressed in black satin with a string of pearls" (38). The narrator wants to be a woman of maturity and beauty, but Maxim makes it clear that she would not be riding in his car if she were. According to anthropologist Kathleen Gough, there are eight characteristics of male power. Included in these characteristics are the tendencies to "deny women sexuality" and "to withhold from them large areas of the society's knowledge and cultural attainments" (69-70). Not only does Maxim dislike the idea of the narrator dressing more fashionably, but he does not want her to know about certain topics, specifically pertaining to sexuality. He chastises the narrator saying "A husband is not so very different from a father after all. There is a certain type of knowledge I prefer you not to have. It's better kept under lock and key. So that's that. And now eat up your peaches, and don't ask me any more questions, or I shall put you in the corner" (205). In this moment, we start to gain an answer to the question of why Maxim marries a woman so below his class and inept at running his household. The narrator performs a willingness to allow herself to be controlled by Maxim, the opposite of Rebecca.

However, the narrator does not wish to actually be controlled. She laments "I wished he would not always treat me as a child, rather spoilt, rather irresponsible, someone to be petted from time to time when the mood came upon him, but more often forgotten, more often patted on the shoulder and told to run away and play" (199). Much like the women in the feminist movement, the narrator wants to be seen for her value beyond her meekness. She wants to have a voice within the household, but each time she asserts herself, it backfires. She believes that it is

because she lacks the beauty, brains, and breeding of Rebecca, but it is actually because Maxim is constantly creating a barrier to her ability to express her womanhood and participate in the power structure of the relationship. The narrator questions, “Would we never be together, he a man and I a woman, standing shoulder to shoulder, hand in hand, with no gulf between us?” (199). The narrator is seeking a marriage of equals in a patriarchal society that dictates that women should be subservient to their husbands in all situations.

For the narrator, this includes murder. When Maxim finally admits the truth about who Rebecca really was and that he killed her after she told him she was pregnant, the narrator does not stop to question his story. Instead, she allows herself to be swept up in his story and, as she did with the Cupid statue, she metaphorically joins him in killing Rebecca. She states “I had listened to his story and part of me went with him like a shadow in his tracks. I too had killed Rebecca, I too had sunk the boat there in the bay” (289). Throughout Maxim’s confession, the narrator only seems concerned with the knowledge that he never loved Rebecca and that her role at Manderley is safe. She is willing to keep his secret and as Light proposes “She is rewarded with the identity of Mrs. de Winter, the security of belonging to the male, but only at the cost of underwriting his definitions of what femininity should be” (16). Even though the narrator claims to love Maxim, her main priority is to maintain her position at Manderley. Before discovering Maxim’s secret, the narrator expresses relief when he leaves the estate, and she can be alone without his harsh expectations. She even imagines that if the marriage fails, perhaps Maxim would allow her to stay at Manderley to keep up appearances while they lived separate lives. Patricia Smith explains why the narrator is willing to stay faithful to Maxim even after discovering that he is a murderer. She expresses that “what is at stake for a woman under such conditions is nothing less than economic survival, as the object of exchange is inevitably

dependent on the exchanger for her continued perceived worth” (572). The narrator is aware that if her marriage to Maxim ends, she will have to return to a life of servitude. She would rather align herself with the destruction of her fellow women than return to a lower-class standing.

The narrator does not remain the gentle and shy woman that she came to Manderley as. Maxim’s revelation changes her. He mourns “It’s gone forever, that funny, young, lost look that I loved. It won’t come back again. I killed that too, when I told you about Rebecca. It’s gone, in twenty-four hours. You are so much older...” (304). The narrator has finally gotten what she wanted. She wanted to be older and wiser so that she could establish herself as mistress of Manderley. As Rey Chow explains “In the course of the second wife’s progress, she gradually moves from being a powerless outsider, rejected by her society, to being an insider firmly rooted in the patriarchal order, its angel of the house. Her power as woman, notably, is achieved through the removal and exclusion of others, especially other women, from her arena” (159). In accepting a patriarchal society, the only opportunity complicit women have to exert power is through the elimination of other women. While Rebecca was still seen as the angel of the house, the narrator could only exist within the shadows. Once she overcomes her fear of the ghost of Rebecca, the narrator begins to assert herself above the staff. She claims “I had not thought it would be so easy to be severe. I wondered why it had seemed hard for me before” (294). More significantly, she establishes her dominance over Mrs. Danvers. When the housekeeper questions her method of sending messages through Robert, the narrator responds that she is the mistress of the house and she will act as she chooses. She has come into her own and taken over Manderley.

However, the servants are not the only ones that the narrator is asserting authority over. The roles between Maxim and the narrator have been reversed. This reversal is significant because it suggests that true equality in marriage is not possible. The narrator had previously

stated that she wanted to stand hand in hand with Maxim, but it is not until he has fallen that she begins to feel a sense of confidence. Pons states that “As Maxim becomes childish, Mrs. de Winter becomes more like a mother figure – a protector – and the dependence that exists between them is reinforced” (74). The narrator always blamed Rebecca for the disconnect in their marriage, thinking that he was still in love with her. However, this shift shows that it was the narrator’s lack of confidence that placed a wedge in her marriage.

The narrator presented a unique challenge for Daphne du Maurier. The author genuinely believed in the patriarchal ideology of separate spheres. However, she did not follow the dictated role for women in her own life. She saw this as the reason for the difficulties in her marriage to Fredrick Browning. She commented, “that in being so career-minded she had somehow gone against nature and reaped the consequences.” (Forster 251). She believed women could not be married and stand on equal footing with their husbands. A choice had to be made and according to the patriarchy, that choice was clear. Women needed to remain in the private sphere and be subservient to their husbands. Daphne du Maurier introduces the narrator as a way to warn her readers against the subtle deception of the feminist movement. Du Maurier believed that like the narrator, the women of the feminist movement had an ulterior motive in the demands for equality. Like the narrator, the desire to have a voice and to improve their societal conditions would only be the beginning. The narrator is presented as an innocent lower-class woman stuck working in a very menial service job. Readers feel sorry for her, and it seems like the classic Cinderella tale when she meets Maxim de Winter. It is at this point that a different side of the narrator appears. She becomes deceptive in an attempt to win his affection and participates in the metaphorical murder of anyone who stands in her way, most notably Rebecca. Like the feminist movement, she claims that she just wants to stand on the same footing as Maxim, but in the end,

it is the narrator who is in control of the de Winter family. Daphne du Maurier is utilizing the narrator as a warning that although the demands of the feminist movement seem small and harmless, if they are allowed to succeed, they will encroach upon the traditional family structure and destroy it.

Works Cited

- Bohata, Kirsti. "Mistress and Maid: Homoeroticism, Cross-Class Desire, and Disguise in Nineteenth-Century Fiction." *Victorian Literature and Culture*, vol. 45, no. 2, 2017, pp. 341-359. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/26347345.
- Butler, Judith. "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory." *Theatre Journal*, vol. 40, no. 4, 1988, pp. 519-531. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/3207893.
- Chow, Rey. "When Whiteness Feminizes: Some Consequences of a Supplementary Logic." *A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*, vol. 11, no. 3, 1999/2000, pp. 137-68.
- Du Maurier, Daphne. *Rebecca*. New York: Harper, 1938.
- Forster, Margaret. *Daphne du Maurier: The Secret Life of the Renowned Storyteller*. New York: Doubleday, 1993.
- Giles, Judy. *Women, Identity and Private Life in Britain, 1900-50*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995.
- Gough, Kathleen. "The Origin of the Family." *Toward an Anthropology of Women*. Ed. Rayna Reiter. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1975.
- Hyams, Jacky. *The Real Life Downtown Abby*. London: John Blake Publishing, 2011.
- Light, Alison. "Returning to Manderley: Romance Fiction, Female Sexuality and Class." *Feminist Review*, no. 16, 1984, pp. 7-25. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/1394954.
- Linkin, Harriet Kramer. "The Deceptively Strategic Narrator of *Rebecca*." *Journal of Narrative Theory*. vol. 46, no. 2, 2016, pp. 223-253. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/45274868.
- Maurel, Sylvie. "Romantic Ghosting in Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca*." *Anglophonia*, no. 15, 2004, pp. 131-140. DOI: doi.org/10.34061/calib.2004.1511

- McCloskey, Deidre. "Paid Work," *Women in Twentieth-Century Britain*, Ed. Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska, England: Pearson, 2001, pp. 165-179.
- Meyers, Helene. *Femicidal Fears: Narratives of the Female Gothic Experience*. New York: State University Press, 2001.
- Pons, Auba Llompart. "Patriarchal Hauntings: Re-reading Villainy and Gender in Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca*" *Atlantis*, vol. 35, no. 1, 2013, pp. 69-83. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/43486040.
- Smith, Patricia Juliana. "And I Wondered If She Might Kiss Me: Lesbian Panic as Narrative Strategy in British Women's Fictions." *Modern Fiction Studies*, vol. 41, no. ¾, 1995, pp. 567-607. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/26285755.
- Wisker, Gina. "Undermining the Everyday: Daphne du Maurier's Gothic Horror." *Revue LISA*, vol. 19, no. 52, 2021, pp. 1-16. DOI: doi.org/10.4000/lisa.13590.

Conclusion

The beginning of the twentieth century in England was a period of transition for women, but the changes associated with these early decades did not come easily. There was a struggle to hold on to the traditional patriarchal view of women which dictated that they belonged in the private sphere of the home. This was opposed by the feminist and the gay and lesbian movements, which encouraged women to expand their horizons and seek out the freedom to find their own identity. Both sides of the opposition experienced anxiety over what would happen if the movements succeeded. It is this anxiety that Daphne du Maurier addresses in her Gothic tale *Rebecca*.

One interpretation of du Maurier's novel suggests that she utilizes the characters of Mrs. Danvers and Rebecca to challenge the patriarchal image of marriage between Maxim and the narrator. They are villainized for their efforts to drive a wedge between the couple and the threat they pose to the narrator's ability to fulfill her role within society. These same interpretations suggest that du Maurier eliminates these threats through the death of Rebecca and the expulsion of Mrs. Danvers from the home. This would allow the patriarchy to remain intact and the marriage to resume unchallenged. Another perspective is that the women triumph in the end and that du Maurier is celebrating their victory. Rebecca and Mrs. Danvers have succeeded in destroying the home.

However, what this thesis aims to prove is that Daphne du Maurier shared in the anxiety over the possible success of the social movements, and she wrote *Rebecca* as a cautionary tale. She opens the novel with a foreshadowing of the destruction that is to come. She writes "Nature had come into her own again and, little by little, in her stealthy, insidious way had encroached

upon the drive with long tenacious fingers. The woods, always a menace even in the past, had triumphed in the end” (1). It is no coincidence that nature is personified as a woman in this passage, nor does du Maurier try to shield us from the ending. She tells us clearly that the women in her novel will triumph in the end. However, the tone and word choice indicate that this triumph is not a cause for celebration. Instead, this metaphorical woman is depicted as dangerous and intrusive. This passage not only provides foreshadowing for the novel but is also indicative of the view of women at the time of its publication.

In order to obtain a complete understanding of the way in which du Maurier addresses the anxieties of her time, it is important to have background knowledge of the period in which it was written. This included studying the social movements and exactly what they aimed to accomplish. The feminist movement sought to give women a voice and the option to participate in the public sphere. This would have allowed women to enter the workforce and procure financial independence. It also encouraged women to explore their sexuality without the shame that had become ingrained in the notion of self-fulfillment. The gay and lesbian movement expressed the need to acknowledge same-sex attraction as natural and to eliminate the criminal prosecution of its expression. Writers such as Oscar Wilde and Radclyffe Hall brought this issue to light through their work and subsequent obscenity trials. Despite the ban on their work in England, their stories permeated society and conveyed the message that sexual freedom was a right and should not be governed.

The social movements' efforts were often thwarted by the beliefs that were held about women at the time. Prominent figures such as Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan presented theories that indicated that women were inferior to men, thus giving further justification for the control executed by the patriarchy. Freud postulated that the sexual development of women

subjected them to more neurosis and their lack of the male symbol of power and control left them vulnerable to their emotions. He also suggested that their unconscious was less anchored and therefore their repressed desires were not as controllable as those experienced by men. This line of thought created a justification for the control placed upon women through the patriarchy, explaining that women were not able to make their own moral decisions. Lacan deviated slightly from Freud, suggesting that the phallus is the symbolic center and that proximity to the phallus was the determining factor in superiority. The possession of male genitalia placed men closer to the center, enabling them to exert power and control while women remained on the outside. The views of these early psychoanalysts contributed to the view that women needed to be confined to the private sphere.

It is also important to understand that Daphne du Maurier supported the views of the patriarchy even though she herself crossed the boundaries set for women. Du Maurier grew up believing herself to be the son that her father had wanted. She created a male persona by the name of Eric Avon, and she utilized this persona to justify any action that would have been seen as masculine. This included her writing, which was considered a male occupation. The act of writing is aligned with procreation. The pen is a metaphor for the phallus and the written word is the offspring of the writer. Du Maurier allows herself to break into the public sphere despite her harsh criticism towards other women who choose to have a career. Daphne du Maurier also uses this male persona to explain the same-sex attractions of several women in her life. Du Maurier despised the term lesbian and refused to admit that she was a part of the gay community. Instead, she clung to the thoughts of her time, the belief that a lesbian was simply a woman who should have been born a man. However, despite this belief, she thinks that she is unique and she despises other women who express same-sex attraction.

In response to the efforts to procure freedom for women, Daphne du Maurier introduces her readers to three women who each represent a different threat posed by the social movements. She villainizes each of them and proceeds to depict the destruction that each threat will wreak upon the patriarchy. Rebecca represents the struggle for sexual freedom. She is knowledgeable of sexual matters, and she pursues pleasure on her own terms. Du Maurier portrays her as a sexual deviant, with Maxim stating that “she was not even normal” (275). Her deviancy threatens the marriage of Maxim to the innocent narrator, always tempting her to embrace the freedom that Rebecca died to gain. Mrs. Danvers further exploits sexual deviancy by representing the fight for the right to participate in and acknowledge homosocial relationships. According to du Maurier, Mrs. Danvers harbored an unnatural love for Rebecca. After her death, this obsession with her mistress caused Mrs. Danvers to remain devoted to her memory. She keeps the home exactly as Rebecca did and she tortures the narrator by constantly comparing her to the previous mistress. Much like Rebecca, Mrs. Danvers’ abnormal sexuality threatens to destroy the marriage by perpetuating the haunting of Rebecca.

Du Maurier is a little more subtle in how she villainizes the narrator. Readers are drawn to this character because she is portrayed as innocent and the victim of the psychological warfare enacted by the other two characters. However, a discerning eye will deduct that the narrator is not actually a reliable source for the story. There are several times in which she either fabricates scenarios or she openly admits that she is not telling the whole truth. What we do discover about her is that she is representative of the women’s struggle for equality with men. Her methods of obtaining said equality are less than moral though. She is willing to lie to her employer and change her personality to attract the attention of Maxim de Winter. Once they are married, she insists that she desires a marriage of equal footing, but in the end, the narrator is in control of the

relationship. Du Maurier is suggesting that true equality between men and women is not obtainable and that the women's movement's attempt to gain equality will only shift power to the opposite end of the binary.

Daphne du Maurier villainizes the women in her novel because they are fighting for the right to experience pleasure, grief, and power. She allows them to triumph in this fight, but not because she believes that the social movements should be allowed to succeed. The triumph of these women allows readers to see the destruction that follows. The patriarchy is burned to the ground and women are in control.