

Free essay on marriage in a patriarchal society

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Do you agree with Robin Wood that REBECCA acknowledges that marriage in a patriarchal society is inherently problematic for women? Or would you agree with Laura Mulvey that REBECCA, like Hollywood film in general, generates pleasure by punishing its female characters?

Introduction:

Women have always had the shortest straw when it comes to being on an equal footing and although matters have changed over the past decades and years, the portrayal of Rebecca in Daphne du Maurier's book and the subsequent film by Alfred Hitchcock reaffirms these stereotypes. The relationship between the housekeeper and the new Ms de Winter also shows that women can be their own worst enemies as they continually reaffirm their own perceived inferiority.

The death of the original Ms De Winter is a problem for the lord of the manor. He takes a new young wife and is obviously in total control over her not least due to his own economic prowess and capability. Thus the marriage is nothing more than a simple contract and when the earlier exploits of Rebecca de Winter come to life, it demonstrates that marriage was simply an agreement for convenience. Hitchcock's subtle portrayal of the guilt which permeated Max De Winter that eventually led to his first wife's murder shows that marriage can indeed turn sour in more ways than one. Thus the thesis presented by Robin Wood may appear to be correct at first glance although when one watches the film, there is punishment awaiting Max de Winter who has to atone for his terrible crime and fatal deed.

Pleasure by punishment

Laura Mulvey's thesis for *Rebecca* is that the film actually generates pleasure by punishing its female characters and this is certainly the case. However one must also consider the fact that Rebecca de Winter was having a number of extra marital affairs although these were actually with the consent of her husband who seemed oblivious to the fact that he was being eaten up inside. We almost take a voyeuristic pleasure in urging the new Ms de Winter to jump from the window and committing suicide as insisted upon by the housekeeper. The reverse psychology practised by Du Maurier is not only fascinating but it touches upon the raw nerves which form an intrinsic part of our psychological makeup.

Rebecca is comparable to other Hitchcock films where the woman is doomed such as *Vertigo* and *Psycho* where the theme of heights and water returns in almost leitmotif intervals. Madeline and Judy both die when they fall from a great height while Marion Crane is strangled in the shower with water coming down, both quite similar fates to Rebecca. Perhaps Hitchcock was consistently obsessed with the theme regarding cruelty to women and being very much a patriarchal person he probably found himself quite comfortable exploring these sinister and morbid themes. Finally, *Rebecca* is a study in the hopelessness of women who descend into the maelstrom of infidelity as their husband will always be there in the end to mete out justice.