

How effective is the character 'mrs. danvers' in daphne du maurier's 'rebecca'? e...



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Rebecca has been described as the first major gothic romance of the 20th century; Mrs. Danvers' character is one of the few Gothic interests within the novel. Her unnatural appearance and multi-faceted relationship with Rebecca provides scope for manifold interpretations and critical views.

Furthermore, Mrs. Danvers connection with Rebecca and Manderlay is a subplot in itself, making Mrs. Danvers the most subtly exciting character in the novel. Mrs. Danvers bond with the late Mrs. De Winter is not just a typical servant/mistress relationship, nor even friendship; it is stronger and more passionate than mere companionship.

In Chapter Fourteen when Mrs. Danvers finds the narrator looking in Rebecca's room, she demonstrates adoration for everything that was Rebecca's: " That was her bed. It's a beautiful bed, isn't it? ", " Here is her nightdress...how soft and light it is, isn't it? "- Even the room itself: " The loveliest room you have ever seen". Much like in modern day culture, where unhealthy almost addicted ' fans' of famous individuals, worship everything that belongs to the celebrity, simply because it belonged to that person, as the superlative suggests, Mrs. Danvers is obsessed, idolising Rebecca and all that was hers.

Additionally, Mrs. Danvers preserves Rebecca's room from the day that she died: " You would think she had just gone out for a while and would be back in the evening". Mrs. Danvers keeps Rebecca's room in a shrine-like manner and from this we discover the way in which Mrs. Danvers puts Rebecca on a pedestal: The description " standing out from her face like a halo" uses the simile to imply angelic qualities. Mrs.

Danvers even depicts Rebecca with the eternality and omniscience of a God: "Do you think the dead come back and watch the living?", "she can see us", "I feel her everywhere". Mrs. Danvers worshipped Rebecca ("I did everything for her you know") and much like a theist Christian, ignoring the evidence against Christianity, Mrs. Danvers preserves the memory of the reputed Rebecca, the beautiful, witty Rebecca. Rather than the wicked whore that she secretly was. In fact some critics take a homoerotic view of Mrs.

Danvers, drawing less on the religious context and more on the sensual passion that Mrs. Danvers had for Rebecca. "She looked beautiful... The scent is still fresh". Sexual tension is often implied "you can almost imagine she had only just taken it off", "these are her underclothes", and "I'd stand behind her by the stool here, and brush away for twenty minutes at a time". Brushing Rebecca's hair meant intimacy for Mrs.

Danvers, a moment that they shared together every evening, allowing her to be close to Rebecca's scent and beauty. The use of soft consonants- scent, off, brush- further implies the sensuality of the contact between them. In this way, Du Maurier allows the reader to deduce that there could have been a lesbian relationship between Mrs. Danvers and Rebecca. In an article published in the 'Guardian' in June 2006, Anne Massey, an actress playing 'Mrs. Danvers' at the time, said, 'Whether Mrs.

Danvers was a latent lesbian, I have no idea. But she was certainly in love... I played her rather like a lesbian in a French film'. At the time this was first published (1931), however, the topic of lesbianism and indeed any kind of

same sex relationships was repressed, making Du Maurier's references to homosexuality a move against the grain of polite discourse. This is perhaps why Du Maurier conceals Mrs. Danvers' sexuality with perceivably mundane actions such as brushing hair.

Mrs. Danvers' Gothic appearance is meticulously described throughout the novel. In the opening description, Du Maurier describes her to be "tall and gaunt" with a "skull's face, parchment white" with "hollow eyes". This ghoulish description is revisited and embellished upon almost her every entry: "A black figure stood waiting for me... the hollow eyes watching me intently from the white skull's face." (Chapter 7) The use of sibilance only adds to her evil, "I shall never forget the expression on her face" (Chapter 14). The repetition of the description of her disturbing, haunting presence is a key facet of the novel's uncanny gothic atmosphere.

Furthermore, Du Maurier's reference to Mrs. Danvers being "a shadow", lacking substance with a mere skeletal figure, implies the supernatural, evil and ghost-like: (Narrator) "I looked about me stunned and stupid like a haunted thing...It was Mrs. Danvers...The face of an exulting devil". Mrs. Danvers has become the ghost of Rebecca, mistress of Manderlay, encapsulating and preserving Rebecca making it more and more difficult for the Narrator not to form both psychological and physical boundaries between herself and Manderlay: "Rebecca, always Rebecca.

Wherever I walked in Manderlay..." Mrs. Danvers' journey is parallel with that of Rebecca and in turn Manderlay. For example, the Fancy Dress Ball; whilst Manderlay is in its prime, hosting a grand event, flooded with the awe-swept

public enchanted by its beauty- " Manderlay had come alive"-, Mrs. Danvers succeeds in manipulating the Narrator in reviving the " Identical" physical appearance of Rebecca, allowing Rebecca's memory to reign superiorly, causing intended distress to the other key characters.

Moreover, in the final chapter, we see the demise of Manderlay linked with that of Rebecca and Mrs. Danvers: As Maxim, the Narrator and the reader discover that Rebecca was fighting a terminal disease, and was not as invincible as she had seemingly appeared, " Mrs. Danvers clears out" and Manderlay goes up in smoke. The slate would appear clean. However from the famous opening lines of the novel- " Last night I dreamt I went to Manderlay again"- it is clear that moving on, ending the era and beginning a new chapter is not that easy.

Written in a changing and evolving society, in which there was an abrupt shift to a more conventional lifestyle, as countries were struggling to find a solution to the Great Depression, Du Maurier impresses upon the need to leave the past behind, however reluctantly it is done, to give way to something new. Du Maurier has created a sensational evil female character of literature with Mrs. Danvers; a character with several roles and who can be read in a number of different ways. Thus cunningly creating a smoke screen for the reader, never knowing exactly which interpretation of Mrs. Danvers the author had originally intended.

(Narrator, Chapter 7) " She spoke in a peculiar way, as though something lay behind her words..." Du Maurier enchants the reader with the unknown, unnerving and mystical, captivating imaginations for decades with the

ambiguous Mrs. Danvers. Bibliography: ' Rebecca' Pan Books Ltd 1975

<http://www.dumaurier.org/reviews-rebecca>.

html <http://film.guardian.co.uk/features/featurepages/0,,1807814,00>.

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