

Memory and recollection in rebecca: a close reading



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Daphne du Maurier's gothic romance novel *Rebecca* touches on a young woman, who remains unnamed throughout the novel, and her self-inflicted life of misery. Being recently married into a high social class, the protagonist, Mrs. De Winter, faces internal and external struggles with her new surroundings. She must deal with her husband, Maxim, continually showing signs of indifference to her, Ms. Danvers, the head housekeeper, who is the physical form of her deepest fears and insecurities, and Rebecca, Maxims late wife, who's memory cast an everlasting shadow upon her as she is being introduced to her new life. Throughout the novel *Rebecca* there is a lot of focus on the compelling memory of Rebecca and Mrs. De Winter quest to overcome it, as seen in chapter two, when Mrs. De Winter mentions " we have both known fear" and " we all of us have our particular devil who rides us and torments us"(Du Maurier, 5). This focus is provoking because it foreshadows Mrs. De Winter disposition, in regard to Rebecca, throughout the novel. With the eerie presence of Ms. Danvers, the constant tales about Rebecca, and innuendos the author gives by naming the novel about Rebecca, is it easy to recognize how Rebecca's memory is so compelling it will always be a constant tormentor and driving motivation behind every action of Mrs. De Winter.

Shying away from the memory would insinuate as an easy task but with the help of Ms. Danvers, a considered physical form of Rebecca, Mrs. De Winter couldn't deter Rebecca's memory. Ms. Danvers did not see Rebecca as just a mistress or even friend, but more of an idol. It is easy to assume Ms. Danvers has become obsessed with her and keeping her memory alive. As the antagonist of the novel, Mrs. Danvers constantly opposes Mrs. De Winter and

belittles her any chance she approaches. Mrs. De Winter is insecure in the fact that she will never be like Rebecca and in Chapter 14, Ms. Danver demonstrates her obsession and confirms her antagonist status by using Rebecca's reminiscence against her. While showing the narrator Rebecca's old room she says, "That was her bed. It's a beautiful bed isn't it" (Du Maurier. 168), Ms Danver mocks Mrs. De Winter with, what would seem as such an insignificant item, as an extraordinary rarity. Ms. Danvers use this unordinary bedroom item to further boost Rebecca's already elevated persona and with this now instilled belief that Rebecca can make even a bed, beautiful. Mrs. De Winter's sanity and confidence are challenged and again, defeated.. Ms. Danvers ensures that all of Rebecca's house habits remained the same, even down to the way the menus are arranged. With each reminder of Rebecca, Mrs De Winter loses herself more and more. Mrs. Danvers makes a mission out of ensuring that Mrs. De Winter will always feel Rebecca around her, and recall that she can't and will never be like Rebecca. Mrs. De Winter's self-resilience is so lost in Chapter 14, Ms. Danvers near drives her to suicide, and digging deeper in the chapter the reader can tell Mrs. De Winter is literally and figuratively forced to see, smell, and feel Rebecca's memory. It is in this chapter that the idea of Rebecca "haunting" Mrs. De Winter becomes an actual conscious thought. Ms. Danver depicts Rebecca almost as a living ghost instilling the thought of "the dead come back and watch the living" (Du Maurier. 172). Within the scene, Mrs. Danvers managed to diminish any confidence Mrs. De Winter had left.

Along with the ill-disposed Ms. Danvers to enforce Rebecca's memory in the physical sense, Mrs. De Winter must face the constant rumors of Rebecca,

even in their dramatized manner. Rebecca is remembered as beautiful, graceful, talented, elegant, etc woman. Not only does Mrs. De Winters insecurities not allow her to recognize these adjectives within herself, but stories of Rebecca and Maxim's everlasting love takes a toll on her conscious as well. Maxim admits himself " No one would guess meeting her that she was not the kindest, most generous, most gifted person in the world." (Du Maurier . 271). Through rumors of Rebecca her memory lives on, and she will forever be known as " so lovely, so accomplished, so amusing" (Du Maurier. 272). Although these stories may have fabricated, like Rebecca's memory, the stories linger and constantly remind Mrs. De Winter of what she is not. Being second place to such a highly talked about person is a constant pester on Mrs. De Winters mind, and those rumors constantly plague her even after knowing the ugly truth about her. To emphasize her torment, Mrs De Winter can't expose the real Rebecca because the truth will expose Maxim. Rather letting the public know what Rebecca has really done, tarnish Rebecca's reputation forever, and finally prove that she is the superior wife and woman of Mandery, Mrs. De Winter has to accept Rebecca as the idolized figure that she can't compete with and play along as if she doesn't carry the secrets that could finally smear Rebecca's perfect memory and put an end to the constant rumors about how perfect she once was.

Although it could be argued that Mrs. De Winter's torment is self-afflicted and Rebecca's shadow is exaggerated by the unreliable narrator, Mrs. De Winters herself. The author discredits this theory by naming the novel after Rebecca. Much like her personality, Rebecca is so influential she manages to be the title of the novel. She is so dynamic Daphne du Maurier gave her a

name rather than the protagonist. Mrs. De Winter is instead given the already used name, of course by Rebecca, of just Mrs. De Winter. There are constant reminders of Rebecca on every page and it seems that if Mrs. De Winter wasn't the narrator, Rebecca would be talked about more than Mrs. De Winter because everything in the book is about Rebecca or her influence. This shapes Mrs. De Winter as a character to the reader because it is apparent she is not the main focus of the novel. From the title being named after Rebecca, the reader is able to make the connection that the entirety of the novel is about Rebecca's memory.

This memory lives on through constant gossip and overgrowing rumors about Rebecca. They are spreading and flourishing so greatly that Mrs. De Winter was even able to compare how she has less rumors about herself than Rebecca did. In Chapter 12 on page 144 Maxim's reactions to this confession makes Mrs. De Winter even more uncertain of herself. From this the reader is able to see another insecurity of Mrs. De Winter. She is worried that even after she is gone, unlike Rebecca, no one will remember her, or have anything to say about her. Dead or alive Mrs. De Winter is tormented by Rebecca's long withstanding memory, and it becomes apparent Rebecca is the cause and effect of everything Mrs. De Winter seems to do or think of, and with this, more power is added to her rumors making Rebecca's even more of a dominant character.

So along with Mrs. De Winter living in Rebecca's memory, not being able to expose the fraud within Rebecca's memory, and constantly hearing how even though she does everything with Rebecca in mind, she is still not like Rebecca, Mrs. De Winter's torment is further injected in Chapter 16, when Ms. <https://assignbuster.com/memory-and-recollection-in-rebecca-a-close-reading/>

Danvers strikes again. In this chapter Ms. Danvers maliciously persuades Mrs. De Winter to wear the same costume Rebecca wore last year. Ms. Danvers knew who the last person to wear the white dress was and she knew the exact reaction Mrs. De Winter would get from wearing the dress, yet to further Mrs. De Winter's self-destruction and torment, she allowed Mrs. De Winter to embarrass herself. For Mrs. De Winter, the dress symbolized her ultimate fear, and what can be considered a huge loss in the internal match she plays with Rebecca's memory. Until this scene, Mrs. De Winter was in denial of the obvious conclusion that, even though she does everything like Rebecca, she will still face rejection because, regardless, she is not Rebecca. After the matter, Ms. Danvers even went as far as to smear Maxim's love for her when she said, " Why don't you go? We none of us want you. He doesn't want you, he never did. He can't forget her. He wants to be alone in the house again, with her. It's you that ought to be lying there in the church crypt, not her. It's you who ought to be dead, not Mrs. de Winter." (Du Maurier. 246). At this moment Mrs. De Winter is forced to face her deepest insecurity head on, and realize that even though she is dead, Rebecca is still at Manderly.

Everything Mrs. De Winter's has done in the novel was to live up to the overcasting shadow that is Rebecca's memory. Even after Manderly has been destroyed and Rebecca's body has been identified, Rebecca's memory stays with her.

References

Du Maurier, Daphne. *Rebecca*. New York: Avon Books, 1971.

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