**Identity In Daphne Du Maurier’s *Rebecca***

**Taken from** [**http://wormhole.carnelianvalley.com/**](http://wormhole.carnelianvalley.com/)**, a literature blog.**

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Identity is so important in the novel, and the biggest sign of it is du Maurier’s decision to never name her heroine. If she had a name for her then one would believe she would’ve provided it, perhaps at the end of the book where the character finally comes into her own. But du Maurier says nothing, and it makes sense that it was a case of choice rather than a writer having no inspiration before she realised it made for an interesting style. The unnamed heroine does come into her own at the end of the book and yet still she is relegated to being called Mrs de Winter. And since Mrs de Winter was always Rebecca, even after the re-marriage, continuing to use that name suggests that the heroine might never quite be an individual. Until, perhaps, Mandeley burned down and the traces of Rebecca truly left.

Of course the very usage of Rebecca’s name as the title emphasises who this book is about and makes it clear that in death a person can still be the strongest character. The heroine is pushed into a corner and never earns herself a name of her own; we hear of Rebecca constantly. Indeed is the heroine’s role in the book to aid the remembrance of Rebecca, in more ways than the obvious role of new wife dealing with the affects of the old? That is surely what Mrs Danvers’s role is about, to remind the house of Rebecca through the heroine, causing the heroine to be Rebecca’s ghost somewhat, even whilst the housekeeper hates her.

And what is it about those who care for our heroine – they don’t use her name either. Of course this is a device by du Maurier and in real life they likely would have used her name. This non-usage diminishes the heroine’s place in the house, in the story, ever further. To bring in the film adaptation, the performance by the actress suggests someone who is truly never called by her name. It may be an adaptation but it appears that Hitchcock has focused on this and used it to show the emotional turmoil even further. The film is a fantastic adaptation that is true to the spirit of the novel and its characters, and through the use of visuals it would appear that the heroine is never known by anything other than “darling”. There would surely be a difference in the attitude of the heroine, both in the book and in the film, if she was called by her first name, no matter if the reader knew or if it was confined to subtext. The very thought of a name being included somewhere down the line makes you think there would be a difference in nature and attitude, as the heroine acts very much like someone truly lost, lost in a world where no one knows who she is, in a very literal way.

Or does the fact that no one calls the heroine by her name reflect how a person can be accepted for who they are without special treatment? Beatrice certainly likes the heroine and the heroine is a different person around her. Indeed it could be said that the omission of a name allows du Maurier to more fully explore for her readers the idea of self, position, reputation. Without a label, a person can be who they want. And indeed once the label of Rebecca’s successor is gone, once Max tells her he never loved Rebecca, the heroine is a different person and able to defeat Rebecca.

After the wedding, upon arriving at Mandeley, the heroine says ‘And now I belonged here, this was my home’. She continues by listing all the things she can now do, for example walking in the gardens and talking to the gardener. The word ‘belong’ is everything here, because one of the overriding feelings the heroine has is of *not* belonging. The heroine’s strength relies on her having not yet entered the house, having not seen that everything is the same as it was when Rebecca was alive, having not met Mrs Danvers. It is interesting to compare the implied strength and feeling of commandment in this moment with the later weakness and submission to Mrs Danvers, the lack of will to change the house to suit her [the heroine]. Comparing the heroine’s thoughts before and afterwards, her dreams and wishes are influenced by the house. Though of course this is not to suggest that the heroine is ever truly strong, indeed if she were strong, self-assured and confident, she would have changed the house to her liking and ignored the hatred of Mrs Danvers from the start, which we can assume would either have led a stubborn Mrs Danvers to quit, or else to bow to her new mistress’s wishes instead of growing ever more powerful herself. (It is interesting to contrast the downfall of the heroine, who should have had the power, with the rise of Mrs Danvers who should have been courteousness if not welcoming.)

Consider the phone call from Mrs Danvers in which the heroine responds that Mrs de Winter is no longer alive. The heroine is so overtaken by the idea and ‘memory’ of Rebecca that she only sees the dead woman as the holder of the title. Yet you could also say that the heroine’s response could be applied to herself – the heroine, who is rightly Mrs de Winter, too – is no longer an individual, or independent in any way. Rebecca has consumed her, her new life has taken over, and she is no one.

Looking back at the way Mrs Danvers uses the heroine to remind others of Rebecca and the way the heroine gets so caught up in worrying that she brings Rebecca to the forefront where really Rebecca should have been forgotten by everyone except Mrs Danvers, the heroine’s identity appears to become as one with Rebecca’s as she obsesses over the woman. In a way, the heroine *is* Rebecca, or at least could be called Rebecca, for the way in which she submits to being the second wife, the runner-up to the winner so to speak, and the way she fails to do anything to change Mandeley to suit her own needs and person. Of course the heroine’s background precedes her – she worked as a servant and comes from a different background to Max – but given Max’s attitude there is no reason the heroine ought to have been so submissive. The book is a lesson in being strong, which the heroine is not. Being Rebecca’s successor surely renders her own name irrelevant.

Mandeley and Rebecca are one and once Rebecca has gone, so too does Manderley; the heroine and Max are free to be themselves. What made Max his own person was surely his striving to live with the awful wife he had and to submit only where he had to, to confront her when he could.

Rebecca owns the book without truly existing. The book begins after her death, thus she has never actually been alive and there are no flashbacks in either book or the film adaptation (how would the story have changed if Hitchcock had created a flashback from Max’s monologue in the boathouse?). This shows just how powerful memories can be. It is only the heroine (and Mrs Danvers, admittedly – would she have been so wretched if the heroine had been strong?) who thinks of Rebecca. The references to the woman make her seem as important as anyone else. She isn’t really, and yet she is the catalyst.

Rebecca the book is, in name and subject. And our heroine is surely somewhat Rebecca herself.