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THE GOTHIC HEROINE IN *REBECCA* BY

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ABSTRACT

The present thesis will explore Daphne du Maurier's treatment of female Gothic in her novel *Rebecca*. The main purpose is to find out how the author uses the conventions of the canon stretching back to Ann Radcliffe's female Gothic heroine in order to produce her own version of the Gothic heroine.

The thesis consists of an introduction, two main chapters, and a conclusion. The introduction gives a general overview of Daphne du Maurier as an author, and her novel *Rebecca*. The first chapter will give an overview of the female Gothic genre and its use in the novel in the context of pertinent scholarship. The second chapter will analyse du Maurier's novel *Rebecca*, pinpointing innovations and digressions from the Gothic canon used by the author to create her own version of the Gothic heroine. The findings of the thesis are summarised in the conclusion.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

R du Maurier, Daphne. 2015. *Rebecca*. London: Virago Press.

INTRODUCTION

Daphne du Maurier is probably most well known as the author of *Rebecca*. Published in 1938, the novel which she herself called a “study in jealousy” is about a young unnamed woman who marries a wealthy aristocrat, Maxim de Winter, and her torment by the presence of his deceased first wife Rebecca in a country estate called Manderley (Shallcross 1991: 83). The novel instantly gained commercial success, selling thousands of copies in the first month. The same year, Orson Welles adapted the novel into a radio play, himself starring as Maxim de Winter. In 1940, the Academy Award-winning movie adaptation directed by Alfred Hitchcock was released (Snodgrass 2005: 287,288). The critics, however, dismissed the novel as “women`s fiction” (Beauman 2015: 429). In addition to du Maurier being a female writer of stories containing romance, the reception of du Maurier as a romantic novelist was certainly also influenced by her connection to Cornwall, a county in northwest England linked to legends such as these of King Arthur and Tristan and Iseult. (Kelly 1987: “Preface”, para. 1). It was only later that both *Rebecca* and the rest of du Maurier`s works were reappraised and became subjects of critical analysis. Among other interpretations, *Rebecca* has been studied as a part of the Gothic tradition, in relation to its predecessors such as *Jane Eyre* and “Bluebeard”, from the perspectives of psychoanalysis and gender studies.

The aim of this paper is to study the nameless female protagonist as a version of the heroine in the tradition of Ann Radcliffe, also known as the Female Gothic. The literature review provides a brief background of Gothic literature and the concept of Female Gothic, as well as previous studies on du Maurier and *Rebecca*. The second chapter provides a close reading of *Rebecca* in the context of the Female Gothic, identifying the digressions from the tradition on the example of the heroine.

1 DAPHNE DU MAURIER AND THE FEMALE GOTHIC

Since *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) by Horace Walpole, the novel which is generally considered the first “Gothic” novel, the genre has commonly been associated to specific elements including gloomy settings, such as castles or ruins, the haunted past, and characters, such as the hero-villain and the intrepid heroine (Sage 1998: 81). These superficial elements, however, are only tools serving the purposes of creating a distinctive atmosphere and evoking intense emotions.

Gothic literature sprang as a response to the Enlightenment and its values of rationality by the romantics, who argued that human experiences such as emotions and imagination were beyond rational explanations. This idea was supported by the revival of the concept of the sublime in *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origins of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* by Edmund Burke which was published in 1757. (Smith 2007: 2). Narrowing the term which first appeared in a classical text by Longinus and referred to a “grand style”, Burke focused on terror as one of the key aspects of the sublime. The idea was utilised by Horace Walpole and the following Gothic writers. (Clery 2002: 27-29) Rather than blatant, often violent descriptions of horror, Gothic terror is more concerned with suspense and the hidden (Hogle 2006: xiv). According to Max Fincher, terror is characterized by “uncertainty, anxiety, suspicion, paranoia, obsession, and a powerless inability to distinguish between what may be real or imagined” (2016: 683).

One way of achieving the desired emotions has been the victimisation of vulnerable females, a pattern originating in fairy tales. For example, “Bluebeard”, a French folktale about a young woman who discovers her husband had murdered his previous wives. A common scenario since the Middle Ages has been the rejection of arranged betrothals, with the women choosing “torture and death over union with odious, sometimes murderous husbands” (Snodgrass 2005: 118). In *The Castle of Otranto*, the virgin flees from danger

despite her fear. In most of the following novels, the safety of the woman following her escape depends on her husband. However, it was Ann Radcliffe and her *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) that introduced a new type of heroine in what later became known as the Female Gothic. (Snodgrass 2005: 118)

The literary criticism of Gothic literature has changed over time. Whereas at the beginning of the 20th century, the Gothic was seen more as a subsidiary part of the general literary history, the second part of the century saw a re-examination of the genre. The first attempt to categorise different types of Gothic texts was made by Montague Summers in *The Gothic Quest* (1938). Among the different approaches to Gothic literature was the theory of “female Gothic”, a term coined by Ellen Moers in *Literary Women* (1976). Named as “one of the most significant directions in recent Gothic criticism” by Fred Botting, it brought along the linking of the Gothic genre to “a wider feminist critical movement” (Botting 2005: 11-13). Whereas Moers used the term in reference to Gothic texts written by women, later critics have argued whether the term could also apply to some male-authored texts, such as those of J. Sheridan Le Fanu (Smith 2007: 8). As pointed out by Diana Wallace, however, the Gothic genre was especially attractive and important to the female writers because it allowed them to explore the female history in a very much male-centred culture (2013: 3). Besides the authorship, the female Gothic differs from the earlier, “male Gothic”, tradition in its depiction and treatment of female characters. That is, in Male Gothic, with the plot often focused on the male and his transgressions, female characters are commonly objectified and victimised as a tool of horror. The female Gothic, however, is more concerned with the female experience, more specifically the torment of the female at the hands of a transgressive authoritative male. (Wallace 2016: 234) Since the perspective is usually singular, that of the heroine, instead of the multiplicity in points of view typical of the Male Gothic, the terror often comes from

the fears of the narrator. (Punter, Byron 2004: 278, 279) The occupation of the female Gothic with the entrapment in the claustrophobic home environment is also noteworthy and has to do with domestic ideology. The Industrial Revolution changed ideas and ideals around domesticity in the mid-eighteenth century. With production moving from the cottage to the factory, the domestic space was separated from the public sphere, becoming much more private than before. Instead of working, women were now expected to take care of the home. With the servants now employees instead of part of the family which they had been before, the family life was now strictly private. This presented the opportunity for fiction to explore the vulnerability of the “weaker inhabitants”, usually the women, within the home. Such a space also typically includes the classic Gothic tropes such as the haunting past and family curses (Hartnell-Mottram 2016: 185).

The author cited by Ellen Moers as the first Female Gothic author, and a major influence on the following novels of that tradition, is Ann Radcliffe. In addition to her use of the “supernatural explained”, meaning that all mysterious events finally get a rational explanation, thus differing from the male Gothic tradition, Radcliffe set the model for the future Female Gothic heroines. (Punter, Byron 2004: 279) Ann B. Tracy summarises the traditional heroine as being the following: an orphan without human support, she goes out to the world, either by being a governess, getting a new guardian, or marrying hastily, where she encounters even more dangers. However, by maintaining her virtue, penetrating disguises, and uncovering the evil, she receives a happy ending, often in the shape of a peaceful domestic life. (Tracy 1998: 104).

The twentieth century sees the diffusion of Gothic, with the elements scattered across different genres. Matt Foley suggests discussing Gothic literature from 1900 to 1950

“in terms of “technique,” “craftsmanship,” and “psychological knowledge””, an idea originally by H. P. Lovecraft; that is, the old tropes are contemporised and fit into the modern sense of understanding (2016: 287).

Daphne du Maurier was born in 1907. While during her writing career of over forty years, she wrote eighteen novels, two plays, over forty short stories, and non-fiction including memoirs and biographies, she is mostly known as the author of *Rebecca* (1938), often named as the first and greatest Gothic novel of the 20th century. (Horner, Zlosnik 2016: 209-210) Indeed, the novel was so influential that many of the following Modern Gothic novels in the 1950s and 1960s were advertised as “in the Gothic fashion of *Rebecca*”. These novels, as suggested by Joanna Russ in her essay “Somebody’s Trying to Kill Me and I Think it’s My Husband”, were focused on the heroine and her love interest rather than the ghost stories of the earlier Gothic tradition, targeted at a mainly female audience. For this reason, the novels, including *Rebecca*, were initially dismissed by academics. (Russ 1973: 665)

However, in one of the first full-length critical studies of du Maurier as a Gothic author, Avril Horner and Sue Zlosnik argue that the works by du Maurier are examples of Gothic writing and its connections to “personal and broader cultural values and anxieties” (1998: 3). According to the authors, although du Maurier made use of the Female Gothic tradition, her work cannot be strictly limited to this categorisation, as there are also elements of Male Gothic in her fiction. Instead, they state, Gothic conventions are used by du Maurier in popular forms as tools to explore female identity. (Horner, Zlosnik 1998: 3, 25) In *Rebecca*, for example, du Maurier presents the complexities of female identity by contrasting the narrator and Rebecca, named as one of the iconic characters in Gothic literature by Horner and Zlosnik. (1998: 99, 100) While Rebecca is the presence haunting the narrator and Manderley, the classic Gothic mansion, throughout the novel, she is not a

ghost in the paranormal sense. Rather, she is more in accordance with the Radcliffian method of “supernatural explained”, haunting the characters psychologically. (ibid.: 25)

As stated by Verena-Susanna Nungesser in her work drawing parallels between *Jane Eyre* and *Rebecca*, the character of Rebecca presents female sexuality, functioning as a double for the narrator (2007: 209).

As a genre characterised by excess and transgression, the Gothic lends itself to the discussion of sexuality (Botting 2005: 3). In the case of du Maurier, Teresa Petersen notes that the author uses the genre not just for the exploration of female identity in general, but also the female sexuality (2009: 60). Multiple scholars have analysed the lesbian subtext of the text. For example, Nicky Hallett has discussed the theme of lesbian desire and its effect on spatial and temporal structures (2003: 35). Furthermore, the biographer Martyn Shallcross claims that during a conversation to du Maurier, the author agreed that one of the characters, Mrs. Danvers might have had a romantic relationship with Rebecca (1991: 63). While Shallcross does not confirm this, many queer readings of the novel have drawn upon the allusions that du Maurier herself was bisexual by biographer Margaret Forster. However, Zlosnik and Horner argue that the sexuality of Rebecca is not so much an indicator of lesbianism- either that of the character or the author - as that of “the multiple possibilities inherent in female sexual identity” (1998: 10, 125). Along with the lesbian subtext in *Rebecca*, multiple authors have also linked the Gothic exploration of (sexual) identity to psychoanalysis, specifically the Freudian theory of the Oedipal complex. As stated by Horner and Zlosnik, incest has been a motif in Gothic literature since Horace Walpole. This can be explained by the patriarchal society and the repression of female sexuality within it. (Horner, Zlosnik 2009: 115) Putting Rebecca into the context of the Oedipal family model, Diana Wallace establishes Maxim as the father figure, Rebecca as the mother-rival and the narrator as the child (2016: 138). Likewise, Teresa Petersen points

out how the narrator, just like other females in Gothic texts, desires nurturing love from her husband as a substitution for missing motherly love, and how Maxim in return treats the narrator as a child. According to her, the sexual Rebecca challenges the conventions of female submission and patriarchal power with her sexuality. (2009: 61)

Daphne du Maurier has always been considered a great storyteller. According to Richard Kelly, what made her a master at it was her ability of manipulating the female fantasy (1987: 142). Therefore, the style and narration of *Rebecca* has also gained the attention of multiple scholars. Teresa Petersen, for example, states that du Maurier uses withholding information as a strategy to create the mystery distinct to the Gothic (2009: 57). *Rebecca* conforms to the Female Gothic tradition by using a singular narrative. Osmond Chien-ming Chang discusses the topic in his article “Dark Shadows and the Gothic Lights: Daphne du Maurier’s *Rebecca*”. According to him, while telling the story from a third-person view, the narrator being a character results in a restricted view of the events. Instead, *Rebecca* focuses on the experiences, both internal and external, of the narrator. In addition, the reliability of the narrator is questionable, creating an uncertainty also contributing to the Gothic atmosphere. (2016: 40) Harriet Kramer Linkin also calls the narrator deceptively strategic. However, the author says that while the narrator is unreliable, she is so not only because her point of view is restricted, but also because, the story being told retrospectively, the narrator deliberately filters the story in order to portray herself in a favourable manner. (2016: 224)

With the novel thus being focused on the narrator, the following chapter will, based on examples from the book, analyse the character as a version of the Female Gothic heroine.

2 ANALYSIS OF THE HEROINE IN *REBECCA*

Rebecca centres around a young woman, the narrator, and her experience in the marital relationship and the Gothic house. For the most part, the storyline is that of a typical Female Gothic novel. Namely, at the beginning of the novel, the narrator, having lost her parents, is working as a paid companion of an older woman by the name of Mrs. Van Hopper (*R* 26). She is rather resentful of the older woman, though, since she feels degraded by her. On one occasion, she makes a remark on the tone Van Hopper uses when speaking to her near other people, noting that it makes her seem like a childish and unimportant servant (*R* 14). For this reason, as she meets Maxim, she is charmed by him paying attention to her as an equal (*R* 14). The manner in which they get married can only be described as hasty, something already mentioned above as being very typical of the Female Gothic. By the time of the proposal, they have only known each other for a few weeks, with the wedding following shortly after (*R* 65). However, contrary to the usual romantic theme, it is clear that this is not a marriage for love. From the start, Maxim states that he wants a companion in order not to be alone with his memories in Manderley. For example, he says the following:

"instead of being companion to Mrs. Van Hopper you become mine, and your duties will be almost exactly the same. I also like new library books, and flowers in the drawing room, and bezique after dinner. And someone to pour out my tea. The only difference is that I don't take Taxol, I prefer Eno's, and you must never let me run out of my particular brand of toothpaste." (*R* 59)

Meanwhile, although the narrator first expresses hesitation, her motivation for accepting seems to be the attraction to the idea of the prestigious title of Mrs. de Winter and mistress of Manderley rather than Maxim as a person: "Mrs de Winter. I would be Mrs de Winter. I considered my name, and the signature on cheques, to tradesmen, and in letters asking people to dinner" (*R* 60). For her, Manderley is a fairy tale house she has so far only seen

on a postcard (*R* 59, 60). In addition, going with Maxim, the narrator is also freed from Mrs. Van Hopper whom she obviously dislikes.

Although older men marrying young women is nothing uncommon in not just the Gothic tradition but literature in general, the insecurity of the narrator about her age, and the attitude of Maxim, is a noticeable causer of tension throughout their relationship. Firstly, the narrator often seems to use her age as a justification for her shyness, as illustrated in the following quote: “They are not brave, the days when we are twenty-one. They are full of little cowardices, little fears without foundation, and one is so easily bruised, so swiftly wounded, one falls to first barbed word” (*R* 37). This is a noticeable feature of the narrator already before the marriage. For instance, during an embarrassing incident, she notes:

“Had I been older I would have caught his eye and smiled, /.../; but as it was I was stricken into shame, and endured one of the frequent agonies of youth” (*R* 16, 17). However, the feeling is intensified when the narrator marries Maxim who is forty-two years old at the beginning of the novel, exactly twice her age. (*R* 45) Whereas the narrator tells Maxim that he is not too old for her, she continues to struggle with the topic during their marriage (*R* 61). Not only is she herself self-conscious when it comes to the topic, but the attitude of Maxim towards is also clearly influenced by the age difference. Even before the wedding, Maxim makes a comment about being old enough to be her father (*R* 45). The theme continues after the marriage, with him stating: “A husband is not so very different from a father” (*R* 226), fuelling the connections to Oedipal theories mentioned earlier. Because of her association of age with shyness, she repeatedly wishes she was older, and thus probably also more respectable, with her idea of it being dressed in black and wearing pearls (*R* 40). While the narrator dreams of being older, she ignores the fact that Maxim is only attracted to her because she is young. In addition to this being reflected in his behaviour towards her - on one occasion, for example, the narrator compares the way the

man treats her to that of the family dog, a pet to be rewarded from time to time (R 132) - he himself admits it both before and after the wedding. For example, during a car ride before the engagement, the answer by Maxim to the narrator expressing the wish she was older is the following: "You would not be in this car with me if you were" (R 40). Despite her confessing her frustration about this in the narration, she, suppressed by her insecurities, does not dare to speak to Maxim about it (R 219, 220). The one time she does, he fails to, perhaps because he simply does not want to, take her seriously (R 227). There is a curious instant when, after imagining herself as Rebecca, Maxim makes a note on the expression of the narrator, claiming she looked older in a rather disapproving tone, demonstrating how he intends to keep her an innocent girl (R 224, 225). The anxiety about her age is only resolved by the discovery that Maxim had killed Rebecca once later in the novel. At one point during his confession, Maxim says: "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..." (R 334). The claim that the narrator seems to have grown up so suddenly demonstrates how it was her inexperience rather than the age that made her so maidenly innocent. After the confession, the narrator no longer worries about her age.

The mentioned inexperience can mostly be highlighted in connection to Manderley and its staff. Especially in the first days at Manderley, the narrator, coming from a middle-class background and therefore inexperienced in managing an estate such as Manderley, many of the terrors within the house derive from that insecurity. For example, she is initially worried about the servants laughing at her and is embarrassed to ask the butler directions to a room in the house which she has not yet been to (R 90,92).

The incident perhaps best demonstrating not only the insecurity in a new environment but also her straight-out childishness concerns a china cupid. After

accidentally breaking it, the narrator hides the pieces in a drawer and does not speak of it until a servant is accused of breaking it. As she tells Maxim about it and begs him to be the one to tell the staff, she admits to being afraid of the staff. (*R 158*) The member of staff she is most afraid of is Mrs. Danvers, the housekeeper. The first introduction to the lady immediately paints her as a Gothic figure: “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 skeleton's frame.” (*R 74*) A little later that same day, she is embarrassed in front of the housekeeper because she does not have a personal maid (*R 80*). In the scene with the cupid china, Mrs. Danvers almost sounds like a scolding parent, despite the narrator being her mistress. Namely, Danvers says: “Perhaps, if such a thing should happen again, Mrs de Winter will tell me personally, and I will have the matter attended to? It would save everybody a lot of unpleasantness” (*R 159*).

As is the case with the previous and following anxieties discussed in this chapter, the terror derives mostly from the mind of the narrator. While Mrs. Danvers is an embodiment of Rebecca and she is indeed the one who suggests that the narrator should wear a costume, unbeknownst to the narrator, previously worn by Rebecca at the ball, thus creating the uncanny effect of doubling, it also becomes evident later that instead of malice, the motivation for the actions of Mrs. Danvers is grief over Rebecca. To illustrate this, upon the narrator confronting Mrs. Danvers about the incident with the costume, the former discovers her crying and comments that she “was an old woman who was ill and tired” (*R 270*).

Mrs. Danvers and the rest of the staff, however, are not the only ones that the narrator dreads. In fact, there are a few characters she is not scared of. The anxiety of being scrutinised by others is manifested in many ways. For example, the narrator, having heard

Mrs. Van Hopper gossiping about the topic, is terribly afraid of her marriage being considered a failure. In one specific moment which could be interpreted as either, if not both, a moment of clarity or that of self-pity, she sheds light on her motives for accepting the poor behaviour of Maxim towards her (*R 260*). As was already mentioned before, she accepted the marriage proposal because she wanted to be Mrs. de Winter (*R 60*). Now, it seems that while she acknowledges that she and Maxim are not a great match, she is more willing to be in an unhappy relationship but put on a performance of an idyllic marriage-similar to that of the previous de Winter marriage – than face what she perceives as a public disgrace. Mrs. Danvers also uses that fear against the narrator, making the latter even consider suicide (*R 275*). While at that moment, the narrator is strongly manipulated by Mrs. Danvers, her considering the idea demonstrates the extent to which she is ready to go. Most significantly, however, the narrator, possibly as a result of being so insecure, is afraid of her husband even before, or perhaps, in a curious twist, until the discovery that Maxim is a murderer.

The theme of the wife fearing the husband is a tradition of the Female Gothic. Whereas the manner in which Maxim treated the narrator might be seen as not quite terrifying according to the usual Gothic standards, the suspenseful tension concerning the secret about what later turns out to be the murder of Rebecca hint at the narrator being truly frightened of Maxim. When the secret is finally revealed, the narrator asks Maxim why he had not told her about the murder earlier, to which he replies that she had seemed too aloof and disinterested in talking to him (*R 303*). A little later, the narrator herself admits that had she overcome her shyness, she would have learned the truth much earlier (*R 309*). Indeed, while she asks other characters about Rebecca, it would only seem natural that the person who would know the most about what she is interested in would be Maxim, her husband. Yet, she rarely speaks of Rebecca in the presence of Maxim. In fact,

there are a few moments when, would she enquire further, she would most likely have been told the truth about the relationship between Maxim and Rebecca. These scenes create an almost foreshadowing suspense. For example, early on, while at the cliffs reminding Maxim of Rebecca, the narrator notes Maxim getting lost in his thoughts. Although she does wonder about it, the narrator does not ask about it and instead wishes she was not there at all. (*R 32*) In another scene, during an outburst Maxim reveals that he is tortured by memories regarding the beach and the beach house, the latter of which later turns out to be a murder scene. (*R 129-130*) Again, the narrator has a great opportunity to investigate further, and again, she shies away, frightened by the look in his eyes, and trying to calm Maxim down by blaming herself for angering him. Furthermore, not only is she extremely careful with her own words, but she also gets nervous around guests, fearing they would accidentally mention something that would anger Max (*R 135*). The question of what would happen if Maxim were to get angry remains open-ended.

The lack of communication and the resulting silence open up the possibilities for Gothic imagination and terror. Early on, Maxim points out loneliness as something the two have in common (*R 26*). The first day in Manderley demonstrates how the two continue to be lonely even when physically in the same room. Namely, after retreating to the library, instead of having a conversation, Maxim starts reading letters in silence, while the narrator drifts away in her mind, fantasizing about her and Maxim as an elderly couple (*R 76, 77*). While the narrator notes how Maxim uses silence as a barrier, she fails to realise that she herself is doing the exact same thing, only with a different method (*R 24*) Seen from the perspective of the narrator, this is unsettling because while she continuously lives inside her dream world, she is still unhappy with Maxim in reality, and simply ignores it.

It could be claimed that the majority of the novel is occupied with the imagination of the narrator. In the case of Maxim, the narrator creates an idealised mental image of Max, first fuelled by Mrs. Van Hopper describing him as "the man who owns Manderley", adding that he is grieving for his wife (*R 11*). With this, two things are established: firstly, Maxim is a rich aristocrat living in a dreamy house, and secondly, from there on, Maxim is inseparably linked to Rebecca, the tragically deceased wife. The narrator sees Maxim as a hero, comparing his appearance to a painting of a medieval gentleman (*R 15*). This image distracts her from viewing Maxim objectively throughout the novel. Since the first remark by Mrs. Van Hopper, the dead wife becomes an object of fascination, soon turning into an obsession fed by the information provided by all characters except Maxim. In fact, it should be mentioned that when speaking of Rebecca here, there are two separate Rebeccas- the "real" character who was married to Maxim and whose corpse was later found in the boat, and the psychological phantom haunting the narrator. While the latter is obviously based on the former, the reader is not provided much objective information about her. Whereas the narrator forms her version of Rebecca based on what others tell her, the opinions of others are based on their personal perspectives and by no means objective. Nonetheless, for the analysis of the narrator, the image and complex feelings towards it are important.

For much of the novel, the narrator perceives Rebecca as the ideal wife. The first person from whom the narrator learns about Rebecca is Mrs. Van Hopper. She portrays Maxim as the grieving widow and describes Rebecca as "brilliant in every way" (*R 11, 46*). These clues leave the narrator with the impression that Maxim must have loved Rebecca. While the narrator is already previously insecure, the image of Rebecca as the ideal contributes to her development of an even greater inferiority complex. For instance, she initially avoids as much as mentioning Rebecca. The first time she does it, she

immediately feels as if she had committed a crime (*R 41*). This helps to explain why she considers openly speaking of Rebecca with guests enough of an achievement for her to say: “I could not believe that I had said the name at last” (*R 139*). In addition, while hosting visitors, she imagines them deeming her dull and commenting how different she is from Rebecca (*R 137*). With her feeling the pressure of being constantly compared to her predecessor, she on one occasion breaks down over the phone, thinking that Maxim loves Rebecca instead of her (*R 267*).

On the other hand, however, the narrator is also curiously attracted to Rebecca. Namely, the image she creates of Rebecca is not that of a rival, as could be expected, but much more in accordance with the readings focused on the lesbian subtext. For example, after having heard Mrs. Van Hopper praise Rebecca early on in the novel, the narrator imagines Rebecca as the following:

“She had beauty that endured, and a smile that was not forgotten. Somewhere her voice still lingered, and the memory of her words. There were places she had visited, and things that she had touched. Perhaps in cupboards there were clothes that she had worn, with the scent about them still. In my bedroom, under my pillow, I had a book that she had taken in her hands, and I could see her turning to that first white page, smiling as she wrote, and shaking the bent nib.” (*R 47*)

Considering that the narrator has never met the subject of this imagination, nor seen a picture of her, this image can be considered rather intimate. Whereas the extract above Rebecca above is from a time in the story when the narrator has not yet been to Manderley, she senses the presence of Rebecca even more intensely once she is in the house. From the morning room to the handwriting and the rhododendrons, the house is full of reminders of Rebecca, making the narrator feel like an intruder. In addition, Mrs. Danvers, the housekeeper, still grieving over her previous mistress and keeping her bedroom as if still in use, making for the secret space typical to the Gothic house. The involvement of Mrs. Danvers adds to the complexity even further. Namely, after someone

pointing out that Mrs. Danvers adored Rebecca, the narrator almost appears to be jealous, as she says:

“Mrs. Danvers knew how she [Rebecca] walked and how she spoke. Mrs. Danvers knew the color of her eyes, her smile, the texture of her hair. I knew none of these things, I had never asked about them, but sometimes I felt Rebecca was as real to me as she was to Mrs. Danvers.” (*R 153*)

The third scene referring to the intimate nature of the relationship takes place between the narrator and Mrs. Danvers in the bedroom formerly belonging to Rebecca. As the narrator, first alone, wanders around the room, she touches personal items such as the brush and dressing gown, pressing her face against the nightdress (*R 187*). The scene escalates and becomes downright appalling, however, when Mrs. Danvers enters and begins to re-enact conversations between her and Rebecca while forcing the narrator to touch the items in the bedroom. (*R 190*) In the context of the narrator seeming jealous, the actions of Mrs. Danvers could be seen as her re-asserting her possession over Rebecca. Considering the lack of intimacy in the relationship between the narrator and Maxim, the fascination with Rebecca allows the narrator to explore her sexual identity.

While the narrator is occupied with her insecurities and vivid imagination, she does not do much in terms of taking action in order to improve her situation. With the typical Female Gothic heroine being distinctly curious and employing this to find her way out of danger, this passiveness of the narrator is one of the major departures from the tradition. An example of this is her life in Manderley. While she dreams of the life of the mistress of the estate beforehand, she does not take any interest in the estate once she actually gets there. Although this might be explained by her initial shyness, for a long time after she has arrived, Mrs. Danvers, and the presence of Rebecca, continues to run the estate, with her not having enough courage to take matters into her own hands. For instance, she is worried about the leftovers from the sumptuous afternoon tea yet does not want to enquire, fearing the disapproval of Mrs. Danvers. (*R 8,9*) In addition, she does not

even want to explore the house which, although no doubt huge, should be her domain. To illustrate, while running away from her visiting sister-in-law, she stumbles across the west wing, where the bedroom of Rebecca is. While the bedroom becomes a significant setting later, when Mrs. Danvers initially offers to show her around, she declines (*R 102*). She also does not claim to have any hobbies besides sketching, yet the reader does not see her doing it much while she is at Manderley. Throughout the story, she also allows herself to be degraded by Mrs. Van Hopper, Mrs. Danvers, and Maxim without much resistance. While the narrator admits that she is being mistreated by Maxim, she does not even make an attempt to escape from the situation and instead accepts the position of the submissive (*R 260*). What is even more important, however, is her passiveness when it comes to Max and finding out the secret that has haunted her for most of the story. Unlike the traditional Radcliffean heroine, she does not do much to find out the truth about Rebecca. Even the secret around which the novel revolves, namely, that Maxim had killed Rebecca, is revealed not as the result of the efforts of the heroine, but because Maxim himself comes to her and confesses after the sunken boat with the body is accidentally discovered. (*R 298*) The reaction of the narrator to the revelation leads to yet another major digression from the Gothic plot.

While the relationship troubles were not enough for the narrator to flee, murder makes Maxim an antagonist from whom the innocent heroine should escape. After all, her main goal should be the preserving of her virtue. The narrator, however, after she has overcome the initial shock, accepts the evil deed of her husband, thus becoming its morally corrupt accomplice instead. At this point, the borders between good and evil become hazy. Maxim justifies his crime by claiming Rebecca to have been evil, the “evil” mostly meaning that she was a disobedient adultress. (*R 308*) The narrator accepts this version since whereas through the murder, Maxim becomes the Bluebeard, him claiming

to have killed the true evil embodied by Rebecca would once again make Maxim a conquering hero. What she fails to consider, however, is that at the time of the murder, Maxim believed Rebecca to be pregnant. The fact that Rebecca lied about the pregnancy and had cancer instead, considerably lessening the guilt of Maxim, is revealed only later. Therefore, while Rebecca may have been evil, the supposed baby would have been an innocent victim.

The significant failure to recognise Maxim as evil might be explained through the abovementioned factors affecting the narrator. More specifically, after the confession, the narrator seems to ignore the murder completely and instead believes that with the ghost of Rebecca gone, she and Maxim can finally be happy as a couple. Firstly, this is because her strong-held belief that Maxim had dearly loved Rebecca and therefore could not love her is finally disproved (*R 319*). After all, the first time Maxim tells her he loves her is after having told her that she had killed Rebecca (*R 300*). What also seems to be important for the narrator is that there are no more secrets between her and Maxim. Having discussed the barrier of silence between the couple earlier, the narrator used to believe that while silent, Maxim used to think of Rebecca the whole time. (*R 303*) Learning that this was not in fact true, it is reasonable of her to assume that from that point onwards, the secret about Rebecca no longer separates them. Secondly, the narrator learning that her fixed image of Rebecca as the ideal wife was false impacts her self-perception. The news that the “real” Rebecca was nothing like she had imagined is a shock for the narrator. Considering her obsession with the mental construction of Rebecca, adjusting to the reality plays a key role in drawing her attention away from the horror of the murder, and the possibility that what Maxim told her about Rebecca may not necessarily have been the truth, since he had hated Rebecca enough to kill her. As she has been wanting to see Maxim as a romantic hero from the first time they met, the narrator is

now probably willing to accept any version that would restore the status of Maxim as the hero. As she herself says, “Now that I knew her to have been evil and vicious and rotten I did not hate her any more” (*R* 319). That is, she no longer has a reason to think of herself as inferior to Rebecca.

With the narrator thinking her marriage is finally free from Rebecca, the suspense and anxiety in the following investigation into the death of Rebecca revolves around the fear of Maxim getting caught. Indeed, in that portion of the novel, the narrator undergoes a change. Firstly, the change is notable already when the sunken ship is found. As the narrator tells Maxim, she has suddenly grown up (*R* 296). Indeed, from that point onwards, the narrator is no longer concerned about her age, and is, upon Maxim revealing his true feelings for Rebecca, freed from the sense of inferiority. One of the first notable changes in her occurs when she is informed of the discovery. The comment she makes - “My first feeling was one of thankfulness that Maxim was not there to hear” (*R* 294) – is indeed less like that of the jealous insecure girl she had been before and more that of a supporting wife. For a moment, as she believes the found corpse to be that of a lover of Rebecca, she even wonders whether it would be possible not to tell Maxim since she still thinks Maxim loved Rebecca and would be heartbroken upon finding out her beloved deceased wife had a lover. In the building-up of the big twist of a murder confession, the roles are reversed, with Maxim being the one to ramble about Rebecca having won, and the narrator being the grownup. In a contrast to Maxim constantly referring to the youth of the narrator, she now notes: “He held my hands very tightly like a child who would gain confidence” (*R* 302). All this would give reason for the belief that the narrator has undergone a character development and can now be rewarded with the happy ending common to the Female Gothic.

However, in a final twist, the ending of the novel does not deliver a happy domestic life to the narrator. Instead, after Maxim is cleared of the murder accusation, the couple returns to Manderley only to find that the house is on fire. While the burning house is yet another echo from *Jane Eyre*, it could also be interpreted as du Maurier restoring justice and punishing evil. Interestingly enough, although the arsonist is meant to remain unclear, Mrs. Danvers, the antagonist, is commonly understood to have set the fire in revenge for Rebecca, once again questioning not only the status of Mrs. Danvers but also the dichotomy between good and evil in general. Furthermore, shortly before the arrival at the burning Manderley, the narrator has a dream of becoming Rebecca (*R* 426). Since Rebecca was considered to be evil, the narrator becoming her is the clear and final indication of her loss of innocence. Therefore, the loss of Manderley could be interpreted as the punishment.

While the arrival at the burning Manderley is the last scene of the novel, the beginning of the novel offers a glimpse into the life of the couple after the fire. In that scene, the couple is seen in a small hotel room overseas, living what Sally Beauman called the life of an elderly couple in the afterword (*R* 434). Being in the beginning of the novel, this is the first introduction to the characters. Yet, even for a first-time reader, and without the previous chapter, with the famous opening line “Last night I dreamt I went to Manderley again” to set the Gothic atmosphere, there is something unsettling in the superficial calmness (*R* 1). At first glance, this could be interpreted as the peaceful married life pursued by the Gothic heroine, with the narrator reaffirming how they can now finally be happy. However, considering their past, it can be argued that not only is the narrative circular, but also the character development of the narrator, with her being back in a place similar to that from where she started, if not even worse. Firstly, she is back in a hotel, but as she herself states, instead of Hotel Côte d'Azur in Monte Carlo,

with a vast and ornated dining-room, the hotel where she and Maxim are staying is small and dull (*R 6,10*). The latter is deliberate, since the couple tries to avoid any acquaintances which, as the narrator comments, they certainly would in a bigger hotel (*R 6*). There lies another difference. Since Mrs. Van Hopper went to Monte Carlo in order to meet well-known people, being her companion meant the narrator could travel and be introduced to them, despite the attitude of Van Hopper towards her being belittling at times, while as a companion to Maxim without Manderley consisted of avoiding people, and even hiding from them. (*R 6, 10*) Despite claiming to enjoy the simplicity of such a life, the dreams of Manderley and the homesickness for England experienced by the narrator suggest otherwise. Similarly to living in a dream world as a young bride, the narrator is once again in denial. Most significantly, it is evident that the couple does not converse with each other much. Instead, the narrator carefully observes her husband, reporting on his behaviour. For example, she praises Maxim as being “wonderfully patient”, and makes the following comment:

“Of course we have our moments of depression; but there are other moments too, when time, unmeasured by the clock, runs on into eternity and, catching his smile, I know we are together, we march in unison, no clash of thought or of opinion makes a barrier between us” (*R 5,6*).

Her repetition of the pronoun “we” is, at that moment, as if an affirmation of them being a successful couple, whereas her behaviour is more reminiscent of a domestic abuse victim, finding excuses for her husband while also terrified of the next outburst of a violent husband. As a way of filling the silences, the narrator has developed a habit of reading the news aloud. Yet even this activity is not entirely safe, since the look in the eyes of Maxim which the narrator has been afraid of returns whenever the discussed topic is even vaguely reminiscent of Manderley (*R 6,7*).

Lastly, in comparing the companionships to both Mrs. Van Hopper and Maxim, a significant difference can be noted in the attitude of the narrator. While the narrator used

to criticise Mrs. Van Hopper, confessing her discontentment, and seizing the first opportunity to get away from her, she seems to have completely lost her sense of critique by that scene with Maxim in the hotel room. Although her staying with Maxim might be considered as her being the loyal and responsible wife she dreamed of being earlier, she thereby seems to have abandoned her individual happiness, identity and will, not for once considering that she could have a better life without Maxim.

CONCLUSION

This thesis analysed *Rebecca* by Daphne du Maurier as a Gothic text. The novel is linked to a tradition established by Ann Radcliffe in the 18th century, later becoming known as female Gothic. The thesis provides an overview of the development of female Gothic, as well as contextualises *Rebecca* within that tradition. Previous research has shown how du Maurier used the genre as a vehicle for the exploration of female identity. By using the method of close reading, this thesis has analysed the narrator and heroine of the novel, considering her as du Maurier's version of the female Gothic heroine. The thesis has found that while du Maurier makes use of the plot structure and style of narration common to the genre, and the recognisable Gothic elements, there are also some major digressions from the tradition. While the digression is perhaps the most visible in the lack of the happy ending common to the Female Gothic, what is even more notable is that the terror in the novel derives not so much from the actions of the tormenting husband as the mind of the narrator. Namely, as this thesis has discussed, her various insecurities, active imagination, and passiveness are the main factors creating the Gothic terror. While the former two are typical of the genre, the passiveness of the narrator highlighted by du Maurier is a digression from the tradition, resulting in the unconventional ending of the novel. The cyclical structures of both the narrative and the character development of the narrator further add to the unease distinct to the Gothic atmosphere.

Overall, as seen in the analysis above, Daphne du Maurier has indeed not only effectively used the Gothic genre in *Rebecca*, but also enriched it with various innovations.

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RESÜMEE

TARTU ÜLIKOOL
ANGLISTIKA OSAKOND

Grete Pärn

The Gothic heroine in *Rebecca* by Daphne du Maurier

Gooti kangelanna Daphne du Maurier romaanis „Rebecca“

Bakalaureusetöö

2020

Lehekülgede arv: 30

Annotatsioon:

Käesoleva bakalaureusetöö analüüsib Daphne du Maurier` romaani „Rebecca“ gooti kirjanduse kontekstis. Töö põhieesmärk on lähilugemise meetodi abil uurida, kuidas autor on kasutanud ja uuendanud Ann Radcliffe`i rajatud *Female Gothic`u* („feminiinse“ gooti kirjanduse) traditsiooni.

Käesolev töö on jagatud sissejuhatuseks, kaheks sisupeatükiks ja kokkuvõtteks. Sissejuhatus annab üldise ülevaate Daphne du Maurier`st kui autorist ja tema romaanist „Rebecca“. Esimene sisupeatükk annab ülevaate gooti kirjanduse ajaloost, „feminiinse“ gooti kirjanduse arengust ja varasematest uurimustest du Maurier` ja „Rebecca“ kohta. Teises sisupeatükis analüüsitakse tekstinäidete põhjal, kuidas du Maurier on „feminiinse“ gooti kirjanduse elemente kasutanud ja uuendanud, keskendudes romaanis jutustajast peategelasele kui gooti kangelannale. Käesolev töö lõppeb kokkuvõttega, kus on välja toodud töö põhipunktid järeldusega, et Daphne du Maurier on gooti kirjandusžanri uuendanud ja rikastanud.

Märksõnad: Daphne du Maurier, Rebecca, gooti kirjandus, gooti kangelanna

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