CHAPTER 3

Rebecca: A Modern Woman
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Daphne du Maurier’s Rebecca (1938), a first major classic 20th-century Gothic novel and possibly the supreme written one as Richard Kelly, Professor of English of University of Tennessee claims in her obituary in The Independent newspaper that it is “a profound and fascinating study of an obsessive personality, of sexual dominance, of human identity, and of the liberation of the hidden self”. Rebecca is basically a Gothic novel in the conventional sense, though it was written much later than its 18th and 19th century fellows. Vaguely set in the 1920s or 30s, Rebecca enfolds no elements of the supernatural, no true evil villain, and no assaults on the heroine’s life. Instead, what makes Rebecca a Gothic novel is its focus on the primary Gothic trope: the present haunted and troubled by the past even though in Rebecca’s case, this haunting is simply psychological. Horner and Zlosnik argue that Rebecca undoubtedly operates with Gothic elements, but the novel is more complex, and these elements function internally as states of mind and psychological struggles. It is about dreams and nightmares, about desire and the repression of desire, about memory and forgetting, about compulsive repetition, about love of place and homesickness.

Typified by Horace Walpole’s novel, The Castle of Otranto (1764), it has all the ingredients of a gothic. There is an embittered guilt-ridden hero, a brooding old house crammed full of secrets on the edge of the rugged Cornish countryside and overlooking the sea, violence, murder, a sinister villain, sexual passion, a spectacular fire, haunting landscape, and a version of the mad woman in the attic. The novel could be seen as a study of Daphne’s own personality and repressed sexuality and can almost be regarded as an autobiography in disguise. The famous opening line of Daphne du Maurier’s novel Rebecca “Last night I dreamt I went to Manderley . . .” (Rebecca I) has a sinister, haunting melancholy that leads straight to the spirit and centre of her private world. The novel fits the model of the female Gothic which, according to Juliann Fleenor, “provokes various feelings of terror, anger, awe, and sometimes self-fear and self-disgust directed toward the female role, female sexuality, female physiology, and procreation” (Nigro 145). Sally Beauman in her article “Rebecca” is of the view:
du Maurier, at that time was wrestling with her own demons and when she gave aspects of herself to the two women who are the pillars of her narrative, she is entering into an area of deeply personal psychological struggle. She gave her own shyness and social awkwardness to Mrs. de Winters. She gave her independence, her love of the sea, her expertise as a sailor, her sexual fearlessness, and even her bisexuality (strongly hinted at in the novel, if not spelled out) to Rebecca.

Even Daphne’s daughter, Flavia in *The Daphne du Maurier Companion* (2007) by Helen Taylor noted that, “. . . both Rebecca and the second Mrs de Winter are based on my mother: the dark side is Rebecca and Mrs de Winter is the timidity and social awkwardness. . .” (4). In *Rebecca* the unnamed protagonist marries an obvious father-figure in the older, wealthier Maxim, while his dead first wife, Rebecca, fills the place of the mother. The narrator’s move from idealisation of Rebecca to a rejection of her corresponds to the little girl’s move from attachment to the mother to rejection of her. She attains maturity (‘normal femininity’) when she ultimately takes Rebecca’s place as “Mrs de Winter”. Maxim, psychically “castrated” by the loss of his house and status, becomes the narrator’s “child”. As Freud suggested in “Femininity”: “Even a marriage is not made secure until the wife has succeeded in making her husband her child as well and in acting as a mother to him” (134).

In classic gothic novels, the life of female character is usually endangered physically, while in modern psychological novels, the menace often lurks within the individual’s own psyche. Daphne’s *Rebecca* is a skilful mixture of the two. The dangers to the second Mrs de Winter are real but by the end of the book she realises that her own personality has been the cause of much of her suffering. Psychologically *Rebecca* is flawlessly crafted, illustrating how people are ensnared by those who are their opposites. The second Mrs de Winter is a thinker rather than a doer. She has an inert, introverted personality, and becomes fixated with the first Mrs de Winter, an extrovert who was everything she was not, and seemingly possessed those qualities the narrator yearns for.
herself. The novel ends as a continuation of the Gothic tone by permitting Maxim and the narrator to escape the memory of Rebecca only after the destruction of their home.

The novel is named as *Rebecca* as it mainly deals with the character that is dead but still holds the strongest position. The whole story revolves around Rebecca and the readers learn that Manderley is a part of Rebecca and can’t exist without her. Being a strong character, Rebecca dies on her own terms and is able to overpower death and haunt Manderley and its inhabitants until Manderley’s last moments. Even being dead, she is still a lively and omnipresent character whose presence is felt from start to end. Daphne thus ends the novel as a continuation of the Gothic tone by permitting Maxim and the narrator to escape the memory of Rebecca only after the annihilation of their home.

Daphne’s *Rebecca* is a novel encumbered with layers of meaning and has elevated it from the Gothic romance genre to a sombre literary classic. Names are every time worth considering and the name Manderley, whilst acknowledging its similarity to Menabilly, the house on which it was based does enclose more than a hint of the patriarchal society of the time, as Maxim and his home stand as a beacon of patriarchal society. Manderley somewhere stands as a symbol of Rebecca and her strong character like the strong frame of Manderley. Mrs. de Winter was spiteful that Rebecca abbreviated the name Maxim to Max, which, with its possible connotations of castration might entail Rebecca’s contempt of that society, while she “had to call him Maxim,”, implying some timidity but also perhaps, a longing to rebel like Rebecca (*Rebecca* 43).

Most of the novel is spent building up the narrator’s sense of apprehension and inferiority. The book isn’t quite bloodcurdling, like one might expect from a Gothic novel, but the narrator’s anxiety is infectious. The novel plainly explicates the psychological chaos or turbulence of the narrator when she enters the Manderley. Once the narrator is at Manderley, du Maurier brings up the classic aspects of the Gothic, incorporating a haunted mansion with ancestral heritage, an atmosphere of suspense, a story about a mystifying death, gloomy foreshadowing, and ghostly presence. Gothic is the literature of terror, a genre in which terror emerges not only as a sensation or an effect, but mainly as a structuring element.
The setting of this story has a magnificent contribution to the tone and mood of gothic. The fog and jagged sea aid in the sense of foreboding that the mansion has to offer. “I could see the sea from the terrace, and the lawns. It looked grey and uninviting, great rollers sweeping into the bay past the beacon on the headland” (*Rebecca* 122). The story takes place in Manderley, a stone cold mansion segregated in its own world. Basically, the gothic elements revolve around the house itself—Manderley—and its frightening housekeeper, Mrs. Danvers, one of the eeriest figures in fiction who, in her own particular way, frightens her new mistress. Although du Maurier abstains from the usual trappings of gothic writing—hidden staircases, floating ghosts, and the like—the atmosphere of the house is so encompassed by the memory of Rebecca that the marriage of the romantic couple is nearly destroyed and the young bride, believing her marriage a failure, nearly commits suicide—with the encouragement of Mrs. Danvers.

Female Gothic is always ‘going back’: texts are haunted by their predecessors and, in turn, haunt their descendants. The return of the past upon the present is an aspect generally mentioned in conceptualisations of the gothic, although the fundamental hybridism and complexity of this multifaceted genre defies a single definition. Though the gothic is concerning the past, it is also concerning a range of other aspects and abjections. The past surfaces or appears as a paradoxical site that involves maintenance of order, and unruled brutality and superstition. It is usually embodied in spaces such as old houses, castles, abbeys, and cellars and is also a site of abjection, a construction that overwhelms the individual, on which all sorts of transgression are projected. This uncanny echoing is particularly intense in the relationship between the work of Daphne du Maurier, particularly *Rebecca* and the so called “modern Gothic”.

In *Rebecca*, du Maurier delves into the relationship between past and present. In the beginning of the girl’s story in Rebecca, nostalgia for the past is the root of all evil: going back to Manderley with her new husband sets in motion an unstoppable train of memories, real and imagined, which poison their life together and make the loss of home inevitable. For Maxim and his second wife, the past and the present are inextricably linked. Not only are manner and character adequate to invest Maxim with a sense of the
...gothic, but at one point the narration of his new wife overtly plunges him backward to a literary past not of his own time.

Maxim is visibly intended as an ancestor of the gothic past and plays the paradoxical role of both villain and hero: by not telling his second wife about the failure of his first marriage, he efficiently relegates her to the mental prison-house and when he ultimately does open up to her and discloses that his marriage to Rebecca had been devastating, he is her liberator. The wife’s insecure past leads her to feel insecure in her new marriage, and Maxim’s past relationship with Rebecca harms his relationship with his new wife. Manderley, Maxim’s family home, most evidently symbolises the relationship between the past and present. For the reason that Rebecca made Manderley attractive and picturesque, Maxim endured a marriage he loathed. Ironically, his obsession with glorifying his heritage leads to Manderley’s devastation. The novel proposes that either adhering to the past or striving to escape it is equally perilous. As Maxim’s wife learns, one attains an edgy and apprehensive truce with time only by recollecting the past while living firmly in the present. Harbord writes, “[t]he past returns to haunt, to ghost the present and disturb the familiarity of ‘home’” (95).

The Female Gothic is, certainly, always concerned with ‘history’, even when it is set in the present, because it is fixates with a past which keeps returning, just as Rebecca’s boat- Je Reviens (its name means ‘I Return’ or ‘I’ll be right back’) - resurfaces and Rebecca seems to literalize this idea of ‘the return of the repressed’ in the shape of the disgraced mother. As Mary Doane has argued, “In psychoanalysis, the past is aggressive- it returns, it haunts, it sometimes dominates the present” (qtd. in Waldman and Walker 188). The past of the Gothic is closer to that of psychoanalysis: insistently mobile, prone to return, to irruptions into the present. The past in the gothic never quite stays dead, and is thus never fully foreseeable.

One of the key conflicts of Rebecca spins around Maxim and the narrator’s endeavours to escape the past. Maxim is distressed from the very start by the memory of his marriage to Rebecca and his eventual murder of her. Although the narrator never knew Rebecca, she is equally preoccupied by her presence at Manderley through her physical representative, Mrs. Danvers and is so overtaken by the idea and “memory” of
Rebecca that she only sees the dead woman as the holder of the title. In order for the present Self (that is, the main character) to continue to “exist”, she has to renounce desire in the form of Rebecca, who represents this dangerous side of the self, the “aggressive disruptive past that . . . cannot be . . . known” (Rebecca 100). Therefore, Rebecca “must be suppressed”, although her appeal never recedes (Rebecca 102-103). The characters are only able to step forward with their marriage after each one has come to terms with the past in their individual ways. For the narrator, Maxim must expose that he never loved Rebecca in order for her to assume her position as mistress of Manderley.

Maxim, on the other hand, must own up to the consequences of his actions and stop rushing away from the memory of what he has done, “All memories are bitter, and I prefer to ignore them. Something happened a year ago that altered my whole life, and I want to forget every phase in my existence up to that time. Those days are finished. They are blotted out. I must begin living all over again” (Rebecca 39). Mrs. de Winter’s best moments are the moments when she feels genuinely united with Maxim and these moments surpass the constructs of time and apparently are stronger than her memories of past: “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” (Rebecca 6).

In the end, Maxim and the narrator triumph over the memory of Rebecca but only after Manderley, with all of its memories of her, is destroyed, “We can never go back again, that much is certain. The past is still too close to us” (Rebecca 5). Mrs. De Winter is well conscious of the fact that life could be serene only by erasing the fears and suspicions of past and future and thereby focussing on present, “We know one another. This is the present. There is no past and no future. Here I am washing my hands, and the cracked mirror shows me to myself, suspended as it were, in time; this is me, this moment will not pass” (Rebecca 44).

The ultimate place of Gothic mystery and horror is the invisible inner space of the human mind and in the novel the return of the past develops the sense of mystery. The novel is more of a gothic mystery of marriage where Matrimony is presented as crucial
for social and economic propriety. Some people call this gold digging, but in this story, it's more like status digging. Maxim is the most mysterious of the four major characters, uncovering little of himself to anyone. This vagueness increases the ambiguities of the novel since the reader by no means knows for certain whether Rebecca and Mrs. Danvers have fully crushed his spirit. In this story, Maxim, Rebecca, and Mrs. de Winter are all enthusiastic and eager to do anything to preserve the facade of a successful marriage, and seem to see a failed marriage as a fortune worse than death.

Rebecca delves into the darker side of married life, placing it in the category of family drama. It looks at the lengths that some people will go to make a marriage look successful, even when it’s an absolute failure in reality. In the case of Rebecca, veiled marital problems result in tragedy and even in murder. In the eyes of Maxim, his first wife was everything that is traditionally objectionable and unwelcomed in a wife, a threat against patriarchy. Maxim was concerned that Rebecca’s behaviour would cause the other members of society to question Maxim’s ability to fill the role of patriarch; if a man cannot control his own wife, then certainly he cannot be considered an effective patriarch.

Marriage is also looked at from a romantic perspective. This is extremely romantic stuff, a classic Cinderella style story where a rich and good-looking prince sweeps an insolvent servant girl off her feet and gives her a life of wealth and privilege. But, unlike in Cinderella stories, there’s a Bluebeard style catch – the prince is also a wife-murderer. Unlike in Bluebeard, the young wife in Rebecca becomes her husband’s willing partner in crime when she discovers the truth. She sticks by her husband and participates to conceal the murder of his first wife, Rebecca. The shared secrets even spice up the romance. During her early marriage with Maxim, she believed that she could never make him happy like Rebecca did and concluded that her marriage was a failure. The superego as a moral censor and ego seemed to be lost by the Id, for she could not balance the drives of her Id toward the reality, the fact is Rebecca has died and Maxim never loved her, but the second Mrs. De Winter got aggravated and agitated by the “ghost” of Rebecca which made him believe that her marriage was a failure again, “It seemed to me, as I sat there in bed, staring at the wall, at the sunlight coming in at the
window, at Maxim's empty bed, that there was nothing quite so shaming, so degrading as a marriage that had failed. Failed after three months, as mine had done” (Rebecca 232).

She believed, “It was too young for Maxim, I knew too little about the world. The fact that I loved him made no difference. It was not the sort of love he needed. Maxim was not in love with me. He had never loved me. He did not belong to me, he belonged to Rebecca” (Rebecca 232). The marriage of Maxim and the narrator is basically based on a difference of age and knowledge and fits the pattern of a socially acceptable and expected union of the two sexes. She is powerless to fit in the role of the ideal wife, the image of the “bad” wife haunts her, yet on the conscious level, in the form of a “good” wife. Mrs. de Winter affirms “I knew you were thinking about Rebecca all the time. How could I ask you to love me when I knew you loved Rebecca still?” (Rebecca 271).

Mrs de Winter’s mind is never at ease and her jealousy of Rebecca pervades the majority of the novel. Christian House in The Telegraph newspaper mentions that Du Maurier herself illustrated the novel as “a study in jealousy”. As of her youth and timidity, the narrator is incapable to comprehend why Maxim decides to marry her. As she discovers more and more about Rebecca, she gets down to compare herself to Maxim’s first wife, who appears to be far more beautiful, graceful, and sophisticated than she could ever hope to be. Frank says that Rebecca “was the most beautiful creature I ever saw in my life,” stirring envy and a powerful creature (Rebecca 134). The narrator’s obsession and anxiety with Rebecca develops to the point that she ends that Maxim is still in love with her. With this revelation, the dispute between the narrator and the reminiscence of Rebecca becomes a rivalry for Maxim’s love and even for the single “place” of the “mother” allowed within patriarchy.

The narrator’s jealousy of Rebecca transpires itself to be murderous; to service her own identity and sexuality she is prepared to be complicit in the murder. Yet, with her frantic love for Maxim and jealousy of Rebecca, the narrator has no choice until Maxim tells her the truth about Rebecca. Only then can the narrator overcome her jealousy and approach her marriage as the sole Mrs. de Winter. Jealousy also surfaces on Maxim’s side of the narrative, particularly in his relationship with Rebecca and her many lovers. He threatens Rebecca in the boathouse and eventually murders her as she sways his
jealousy into a device for her own devastation. In both cases, jealousy is a destructive force that has the ability to devastate both Maxim and the narrator if they let it. She believes that to shape her marriage with Maxim, she must hide or kill the Rebecca in herself, either she or Rebecca must survive—the two sexualities cannot co-exist.

Further there are all sorts of complicated gothic sexualities in *Rebecca* as Rebecca herself (though she’s dead before the novel begins, and never re-emerges) is occasionally perceived as bisexual and sometimes perceived as an object of same sex desire. It becomes quite perceptible from diverse sources that Rebecca has eccentric outlook toward sex, and there's some proposition that her sex life with Maxim is entirely unreal or non-existent. She has various affairs, bringing in a long-standing one with Jack Favell. Similarly, Mrs. de Winter’s sex life with Maxim seems to be delightful on their honeymoon, but then sputters out at Manderley—until, that is, Maxim discloses that he loathed Rebecca and murdered her. He accentuates Rebecca’s negative qualities, illustrating her as “vicious, damnable, rotten through and through” and “incapable of love, of tenderness, of decency” (*Rebecca* 271). His confession re-flames the passion and it becomes shocking to see flames fuming above the wall on the one hand and on the other hand it's uncomfortable to know that Rebecca is hated and eventually murdered by her husband because of her sexual activities. The murder of Rebecca, confessed, is the equivalent of staking the female vampire in Bram Stroker’s *Dracula* (1897). Indeed, “Rebecca’s white skin and cloud of black hair, along with her regular and dismaying resurrection from the dead, are classically vampiric” (qtd. in Johnson 25).

Her unfeminine nature, anxiety and discomfort are the main concern in the novel which highlights the gothicness. Moreover, *Rebecca* is one of the foremost modern Gothic Romances, which in many ways stands as a direct criticism of many of the tenets of the gothic romance genre. It is believed to be different from the classic romantic plot in that it turns family unit and the domestic home from sites of love and shelter into ones of fear and horror. Most noteworthy of these is du Maurier’s criticism of the structure of romantic relationships that dominate the field mainly, that of the power unevenness involved in the relationship between a weak and childish heroine and the strong, reserved hero.
Maxim even refers to their trip to Monte Carlo when he learned the truth about Rebecca’s nature only five days after their wedding and asserts: “She sat there, laughing, her black hair blowing in the wind; she told me about herself, told me things I shall never repeat to a living soul. I knew then what I had done, what I had married” (Rebecca 272). It simply stirs our thinking and makes us question our own attitudes and beliefs pertaining to sex and sexuality, and how they relate to marriage. On one hand Maxim de Winter is a portrait of a sexually repressed man, whose repressed urges erupt in violence and anger and on the other hand Mrs Danvers words depict that Rebecca must have been a personality for whom sex was mere a game: “Love-making was a game with her, only game . . . She did it because it made her laugh. It made her laugh, I tell you. She laughed at you like she did at the rest. I’ve known her come back and sit upstairs in her bed and rock with laughter at the lot of you” (Rebecca 340).

In Rebecca, both men and women are shown as curbed by the gender roles of their society. Maxim de Winter, the male lead, is shown as enormously tormented by what he perceives as the need to project a façade of perfect husband. Mrs. de Winter illustrates her early relationship with Maxim as kind of platonic. She compares herself to a schoolboy, and Maxim to ‘sixth form prefect’, which is somewhat like a senior class president, “I was like a little scrubby schoolboy with a passion for a sixth-form prefect, and he kinder, and far more inaccessible” (Rebecca 35). She places herself in a male role while unfolding her take on her affiliation with Maxim. “I remember that, for I was young enough to win happiness in the wearing of his clothes, playing the schoolboy again who carries his hero’s sweater and ties it about his throat choking, with pride” (Rebecca 35-36).

Rebecca is outshining in female roles but takes on roles that are more publicly agreeable for males. This incorporates, possibly, her seeming keenness and eagerness to have affairs, “She had all the courage and spirit of a boy, had my Mrs. de Winter. She ought to have been a boy, I often told her that. I had the care of her as a child. You knew that, didn’t you?” (Rebecca 243). Maxim illustrates Rebecca as a boy before he kills her, “She looked very pale, very thin. She began walking up and down the room, her hands in the pockets of her trousers. She looked like a boy in her sailing kit, a boy with a face like
a Botticelli angel” (*Rebecca* 278). It is through *Rebecca* that Maurier has represented a portrayal of a woman who is different from the other women as she might sexually prefer women over men, “She was not in love with anyone. She despised all men” (*Rebecca* 340). Sally Beauman in *The Daphne du Maurier Companion* (2007) talks about the way in which du Maurier senses herself, the way in which society expected her to perform, and how these expectations were mirrored in Rebecca’s character. Beauman explains:

> Half accepting society’s (and her husband’s) interpretation of ideal womanhood, yet rebelling against it and rejecting it, she came to regard herself as a ‘half-breed’ who was ‘unnatural’. To her, both her lesbianism and her art were a form of aberrance: they both sprang, she believed, from a force inside her that she referred to as the ‘boy in the box’. (59)

The discord du Maurier experienced in terms of accepting society’s principles and rebelling against them can be seen evidently in the character of Rebecca; Rebecca allowed the public to appreciate her as a venerable woman and the perfect wife, while she hid her true self from the people that knew her. The secrets Rebecca veiled from the world, such as her incestuous relationship with Favell and her bisexuality, caused Maxim to elucidate that “She was not even normal” (*Rebecca* 271). As per Beauman, Du Maurier came across similar relationships in her life which instigated her to identify herself as “unnatural” (59). Her unfeminine outlook places her in the category of ‘fallen woman’. In addition to her differing identity, Beauman elucidates that du Maurier “... gave her independence, her love of the sea, her expertise as a sailor, her sexual fearlessness, and even her bisexuality... to Rebecca” (59). Even Maurier’s oldest daughter, Tessa, also mentions the letters one of her mother’s biographers discovered “relating to du Maurier’s affair with [Gertrude] Lawrence and unrequited desire for Ellen Doubleday” (qtd. in Beauman 6). Rebecca’s incestuous and lesbian relationships were inspired by relationships du Maurier went through early on in her life. Both Rebecca and du Maurier sensed that their female identities were confining them back in a world run by patriarchy and were anxious to escape the boundaries of womanhood.
It even gives a picture of the battle between good, represented by Maxim and his new wife, and evil, embodied by Rebecca and Mrs. Danvers. Being a gothic novel, Du Maurier plays with the dichotomy between good and evil. Yet, du Maurier adds density and complexity to each character so that all sense of good and evil turns out to be purely subjective. For instance, Maxim is the main male character who is presented as the hero of the novel and conversely, at the same time, Maxim is a killer who shot Rebecca in a fit of rage, an act that is barely suitable for a hero. In the same way, while Mrs. Danvers is presented as the antagonist of the novel who enthusiastically strives to demoralize the narrator, she is also an individual who is overwhelmed with pain at the loss of her friend and mistress.

The evil in Rebecca is, then, not merely that of aberrant sexuality, but also of the scripting of the self- a narcissistic, “unfeminine” desire which makes its claims via inflexible self-centredness signalled by the indelibility and intrusiveness of Rebecca’s script. She is demonic as Maxim asserts, “It doesn’t make for sanity, does it, living with the devil” (*Rebecca* 273). The evil nature of her servant, Mrs. Danvers, is also plausible because du Maurier persuasively demonstrates how Mrs. Danvers, a plain woman, could be stunned by the power and beauty of Rebecca. The narrator is exceptionally fearful and innocent while Maxim is depicted as sophisticated and jaded: “Rebecca’s power had dissolved into the air, like the mist had done. She would never haunt me again. She would never haunt me again. She would never stand behind me on the stairs, sit beside me in the dinning-room, lean down from the gallery and watch me standing in the hall” (*Rebecca* 285).

The evil housekeeper upon her first meeting has left an enduring impression on Mrs. de Winter, “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 a skeleton’s frame” (*Rebecca* 66). She continues on describing her as having “deathly cold” (*Rebecca* 67) hands and a lifeless voice. At one point, Mrs. de Winter caught Mrs. Danvers having her face distorted into, “an exulting devil” (*Rebecca* 214) showing the reality behind Mrs Danvers motives. She even tried to convince Mrs. de Winter to commit suicide using her devilish tricks and both the narrator
and the spectator are made to experience a kind of annihilation of self, of individual identity, through a merger with another woman: “I won’t push you. I won’t stand by you. You can jump of your own accord. What’s the use of your staying here at Manderley? You are not happy. Mr. de Winter doesn’t love you. There’s not much for you to live for, is there?” (Rebecca 246). Thus, to avoid this loss of self the narrator has to affirm her difference from Rebecca, a rejection and “killing” of the “mother”.

By unifying the concepts of good and evil, Du Maurier generates a set of characters that are truly human in their complexity and motivations. Good emerges victorious in the end, but Maxim and his wife carry everlasting marks as a result of their encounter with evil. Captivatingly, du Maurier illustrates that passive, naive goodness cannot defeat evil. When the wife is fearful and candid, she unconsciously helps the forces of evil. It is only when she herself becomes powerful that she can help Maxim defeat Rebecca. This theme is complicated by the narrator’s drive as she willingly helps Maxim defeat Rebecca, not because Rebecca symbolises evil, but because she learns that he never loved his first wife and his confession to the new Mrs. de winters made her mind clearer: “I hated her, I tell you, our marriage was a farce from the very first. She was vicious, damnable, rotten through and through. We never loved each other, never had one moment of happiness together” (Rebecca 271).

Even though Mrs. de Winter is able to break free of Rebecca’s immortality, Mrs. Danvers has the last act of evilness that haunts the couple for the rest of their lives; setting Manderley on fire. Thus, despite Maxim’s scorn and abhorrence for Rebecca, many other characters were captivated by her presence and adored her; while Maxim depicts Rebecca as the personification of pure evil, Mrs. Danvers attempts to portray Rebecca as the perfect example of womanhood. Throughout the novel, Rebecca is much-loved-and almost worshipped-by many of the characters, but she is loathed by others, such as Maxim and his new wife. Like the characters of the novel, literary critics have different viewpoint on who is the real villain of Daphne du Maurier’s Gothic tale of romance. Many feminist critics believe that, contrary to popular belief, Rebecca cannot be judged as the villain of the novel. Kathleen Butterly Nigro, an Associate Professor of Louis University in her article, “Rebecca as Desdemona: “a maid that paragons
description and wild fame,” contends that Rebecca was in reality a victim of Maxim’s
violent and cold hearted villainy. Nigro begins her article by comparing Rebecca to
Shakespeare’s heroine, Desdemona and likens Maxim to the inhuman and merciless
Othello. She explicates film critic Robin Wood’s belief that scrutinising Rebecca in the
same light as Othello would allow readers to see Rebecca as a woman whose most awful
offence was simply that she resisted male definition, stating her right to define herself
and her sexual desires.

The male characters of Gothic Literature almost never experience constrictions;
they are not entailed to forfeit or give up their own desires in order to pacify their female
counterparts. On the other hand, Gothic female characters are expected to follow and
abide by their father’s every wish until they are married, and then they must comply with
their husband’s desires. Men were permitted to do as they pleased, while their wives and
daughters were basically caged in the worlds of their husbands and fathers. Nigro
mentions that both Rebecca and Othello use “images of locks and keys . . . implying
enclosure and restraint” (146). According to feminist views, Maxim smothered Rebecca
and locked her in his world for the reason that he knew he could not contain her spirit to
be an autonomous woman.

The patriarchal social system of this time period expected women to be
submissive to men. The second Mrs. de Winter is often depicted as the heroine of the
novel because she is willing to submit to Maxim entirely. Contrary to Mrs. de Winter,
Rebecca refused to be submissive and earns the title of being a ‘fallen woman’. Nina
Auerbach in the book Woman and the Demon (1982) mentions that “One constant
element in the myth of the fallen woman, reaching back to the Old Testament and to
Milton’s epic recasting of it, is the absolute transforming power of the fall” (160). At the
Eve’s fall, Milton tells us, “Earth felt the wound, and Nature from her seat/ Sighing
through all her Works gave signs of woe/ That all was lost” (Paradise Lost, IX, 782-84).
In Victorian revisions, it is the woman alone who is injured, moans, laments, and is lost;
indifferent Nature simply reclaims her. Maxim’s decision to murder Rebecca was due to
his inability to keep his wife from having affairs with other men.
Rebecca and Desdemona are both assumed to be having affairs with other men; while Desdemona was naive, Rebecca had been guilty of infidelity. Female characters in the Gothic fiction usually crave for a sense of independence which is not justifiable in men’s world. It is apparent from the novel that Maxim saw Rebecca’s longing for independence to be the sole factor in his possible downfall. In this relationship, Maxim epitomises the old world of patriarchy, and Rebecca stands for the “hope” for a more woman-friendly future. Peter Stallybrass writes of the “prevailing attitude during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries toward women’s bodies as dirty or contaminated, and the notion of motherhood as sinful (and possibly demonic) reflection of that attitude” (qtd. in Nigro 150). Although Rebecca is not in reality pregnant, Maxim assumes and believes that her child will be a regular reminder of her prominent sexuality and his hopelessness as a man, two things that Maxim is not willing to acknowledge. Rebecca often endorses her womanhood through her sexuality and in order to keep his own status—and the institution of patriarchy—Maxim murders Rebecca, the only autonomous woman present in the novel. The character of Rebecca terrorises much more than Maxim’s pride; she endangers a way of life.

The narrator—along with the other female characters of the novel—austerey agrees to the patriarchal society in which she dwells. Rebecca, on the other hand, is motivated to fight to attain a sense of independence. Rebecca is a Gothic heroine who is subjugated by her husband and whose only real crime was claiming on her right to individuality. Regardless of the familiar belief that Rebecca is an evil woman who signifies corruption and annihilation, she has been compared to Desdemona; Rebecca shifts from being the evident villain to a pitied victim, while Maxim—and his wish to preserve male supremacy—becomes the proper villain of the novel. Adapting the view of growth of female subjectivity, Rebecca can be perceived in Freud’s terms as an external, disturbing and distracting influence that initiates off the development of the narrator’s subjectivity. Thus, if female subjectivity and identification are devised in relation to a continually shifting, floating, deconstructed and reconstructed love-object, the story of Rebecca “in effect explores subjectivity as a spectrum, rather than a position, thus presenting female identity as complex and multifaceted” (Horner and Zlosnik, Daphne du Maurier: Writing, Identity and Gothic Imagination 100).
Rebecca, a trope for female subjectivity, is the “absent center of desire, the imaginary lack” (Harbord 100). Her body is absent almost throughout the whole novel, and when it is finally found, it is already decayed. She acts as a referential structure without a referent, a representative of opposing discourses but herself the outcome of the similar discourses. Hence her ambivalence and indecisiveness: she is a ghost, “intangible yet desirable, present yet invisible,” (Harbord 100) something to be subdued yet coming back, something to abhor and worship at the same time. Because of her ambivalence and multiple discursive functions, Rebecca finally becomes what her name to: a knotted cord that holds untied, in the same way as the riddle of female subjectivity remains unexplained. The woman, once so known and domestic, starts to behave in the same way as the word heimlich itself: she “develops towards an ambivalence, until[she] finally coincides with [her] opposite, unheimlich,” (“The “Uncanny”” 135) and keeps coming ‘home’ to agitate the monotonous but “dear tranquillity” (8), even though her haunting place has long perished in fire.

The Gothic tradition originated in response to a period of rapid and far-reaching societal, cultural, and theological change and this novel also centres on the concept of society and class. The presence of servants within one’s domestic environment shifts the boundaries between public and private. There are multiple classes existing within Manderley, for example, the de Winter’s have too much food, while some of the workers and servants might not have quite enough, “Angel cake, that melted in the mouth, and his rather stodgier companion, bursting with peel and raisins. There was enough food there to keep a starving family for a week. I never knew what happened to it all, and the waste used to worry me sometimes” (Rebecca 8).

Mrs de Winter has classic rags-to-riches transformation in Rebecca. She starts off as a paid companion (a low-class job) and unexpectedly uncovers herself as the lady of the house at Manderley. Nevertheless, she by no means fully gets over her roots: she constantly feels like she’s hovering between classes, never quite at ease where she finds herself. Gothic deals with all kind of mental turmoil and Mrs de Winter even after being the rich mistress of the mansion constantly feels restless about what both the servants and her newly acquired peers will contemplate of her. In a novel with a lot of class tension,
there are very stern behaviour codes and custom eccentric to each class, which also oversee how they are supposed to interact with each other. But ironically no one follows these codes as all the major characters radically break the social conventions they so dreadfully want others to believe they adhere to. Maxim chose Mrs. de Winter as she wasn’t nurtured like Rebecca was. Mrs. De Winter unlike Rebecca observes her “diffidence” (lack of self-confidence), her “gaucherie” (social awkwardness), and the other qualities stated as symptoms of her lack of ability to fit in with the peers she attains when she marries Maxim. She asserts, “At any rate I have lost my diffidence, my timidity, my shyness with strangers. I am very different from that self who drove to Manderley for the first time, hopeful and eager, handicapped by a rather desperate gaucherie and filled with an intense desire to please” (Rebecca 9).

Mrs. de Winter as Mrs. Van Hopper’s companion was always demeaned by Mrs. Van Hopper and her affluent peers. Unfortunately, she was also belittled and ridiculed by waiters and others in a servant class, as hinted at by the enormously unappetising meal she served. “I remember well that plate of ham and tongue. It was dry, unappetizing, cut in a wedge from the outside, but I had not the courage to refuse it” (Rebecca 10). Mrs. Van Hopper is mad but is aware of class differences as her paid companion, and she enjoys in adding force to her companion’s insecurities. The narrator is completely conscious of class divisions. She sees the rich, famed people as so different from herself that they couldn’t probably like her or be interested in her and this is the reason why it takes so long for her to become conscious about the fact that Maxim is interested in her romantically. Mrs. Danvers does see Mrs. de Winter as poorly bred and thus she is doubly offended by the idea of her replacing Rebecca, who she regarded as the epitome of well-bred: “She stooped to pick them up, and as she handed them to me I saw a little smile of scorn upon her lips, and I guessed at once she considered me ill-bred” (Rebecca 67).

Mrs. de Winter comprehends that it is very essential that she corresponds to certain standards that define her status. “I’m afraid that would not do for very long,” she said; “it’s usual, you know, for ladies in your position to have a personal maid” (Rebecca 72). It is Maxim’s social and economic reputation that protected him from prosecution for
his crime as there seems to be a ring of truth in Favell’s statement: “Oh, I see, said Favell, ‘you’re going to hold his hand through this. You're going to back de Winter. You won’t let him down because you’ve dined with him, and he's dined with you. He’s a big name down here. He’s the owner of Manderley. You poor bloody little snob” (Rebecca 332).

Being a gothic novel the female character is throughout in the pursuit of identity and in Rebecca, the narrator sets up her as a feeble character without her own sense of identity as only Maxim learns the narrator’s “lovely and unusual” name. This fact is driven entirely firmly home when Maxim de Winter remarks, “You have a very lovely and unusual name” and the narrator replies, “My father was a lovely and unusual person” (Rebecca 24). Her name is not symbolic and descriptive of her- instead, it is representative of the first vital man in her life: her father. Like the narrator, Daphne du Maurier became subjected to many issues with accepting her identity. In Daphne du Maurier (1987), Richard Kelly references du Maurier’s wish to discard her female identity, a contemplation she expresses in her autobiography, Growing Pains. Kelly elucidates that “Du Maurier . . . had powerful yearnings as a youth to be a boy. Why wasn’t I born a boy? . . .” (26). In order to escape the disgusting and overpowering restrictions of society, du Maurier “adopted the persona of a fictitious character she named Eric Avon. . .” (6). The concept of the “boy-in-the-box” (3) is a sheer manifestation of her desire to be anyone other than herself, an attribute that du Maurier shares with the unnamed narrator of Rebecca. Sally Beauman in The Daphne du Maurier Companion addresses the personality attributes that du Maurier shared with the timid narrator of Rebecca. Beauman states: “Shy, and socially reclusive, she detested the small talk and the endless receptions she was expected to attend and give, in her capacity of commanding officer’s wife. This homesickness and her resentment of wifely duties, together with a guilty sense of her own ineptitude when performing them, were to surface in Rebecca…” (48).

Du Maurier’s lack of confidence in social interactions is directly mirrored in the narrator’s timid personality and her lack of identity. In the start, she is nothing more than a paid companion to an American woman named Mrs. Van Hopper and it is through this that narrator’s small identity is established and becomes evident when the narrator and
reader are introduced to Maxim de Winter. Without her connection to Mrs. Van Hopper, the narrator seems to have no identity at all. This concept of merging her identity with other characters in the novel can be seen even more clearly in the second chapter. As she tells the reader about Manderley and her life as Maxim’s wife, she persistently refers to “we”. The narrator appears to merge Maxim and herself into one person, much as she had done with Mrs. Van Hopper. Early in the novel, the narrator goes into great detail about her current life with Maxim and explicates how robustly they have combined their identities into one:

We have no secrets now from one another. All things are shared. Granted that our little hotel is dull, and the food indifferent, and that day after day dawns very much the same, yet we would not have it otherwise. We should meet too many of the people he knows in any of the big hotels. We both appreciate simplicity, and if we are sometimes bored—well, boredom is a pleasing antidote to fear. We live very much by routine, and I—I have developed a genius for reading aloud . . . (Rebecca 6)

The narrator is a kind of blank canvas, an incomplete, nameless person. As a matter of fact, this blank canvas doesn’t get a name until she finally presumes her husband’s when she reaches her final destination at Manderley and is addressed as “Mrs. de Winter,” although this is not representative of her any more than her given name. She becomes fully dependent on Maxim because without him, she has no identity at all. The narrator finds it awfully hard to wholly identify herself as Mrs. de Winter. For example, when the ship runs ashore at Manderley, and she meets some tourists, she fails to acknowledge she is Mrs. de Winter; “I wished I could lose my own identity and join them” (Rebecca 257).

Likewise, du Maurier felt that her father had a dominating influence on her life. Richard Kelly in Daphne du Maurier (1987) explains that du Maurier’s “. . . biography, in a sense, is an attempt, only partially successful, to exorcize this powerful spirit, to
distance him, to gain a perspective on him that will allow her the freedom to develop her independence” (3); it is not until the men disclose their secrets in the women that the roles are reversed. The name Mrs. de Winter fits in or belongs to both the narrator and Rebecca and as a result, her only established identity fuses her with Rebecca. Though Mrs. de Winter continues to reject Rebecca, she does seem to identify with her in her daydreaming. Through her identification process “she has erased her identity in becoming a living simulacrum of Rebecca” which becomes unbearable for Maxim (Johnson 23).

The reflection of Rebecca at the end of the novel that fuses with the identity of the narrator fortifies this connection, now that they both share a female sexual response to the same man. On two separate events, she emerges to alter into the late Mrs. de Winters as the attachment to the “mother” (Rebecca) empowers the narrator to take the place of the phallic mother. During a meal with Maxim, she commences to fantasize about Maxim’s life when Rebecca was still alive. She explains “. . . I had so identified myself with Rebecca that my own dull self did not exist, had never come to Manderley. I had gone back in thought and in person to the days that were gone” (Rebecca 200). She amalgamates or becomes one with Rebecca so strong that her husband becomes very terrified and pictures herself as “dull” and thinks Rebecca was anything but dull.

Since the two women have the same title, many of the characters in the novel, together with the narrator, assume her to become Rebecca in a metaphoric or emblematic sense. She is assumed to abide by the same schedule Rebecca followed while she was alive. The second Mrs. de Winter discovers of Manderley’s firm and authoritarian schedule during her conversation with a servant named Frith. Frith elucidates to Mrs. de Winter that “The fire in the library is not usually lit until the afternoon. . . Mrs. de Winter always used the morning-room” (Rebecca 81). This suggests that the heroine might never quite be an individual until Manderley has been burned down and the traces of Rebecca were truly left. When Mrs. Danvers first addresses the narrator with her married name, the narrator responds, “I’m afraid you have made a mistake. [...] Mrs. de Winter has been dead for over a year” (Rebecca 84). Regardless of the fact that she has been given a name, that name does not lead to a sense of self in any way, shape or form. In fact, the only “sense of self” the narrator gets—she gets from spending time with her new
husband: “Maxim put his arm round my shoulder, [and] I began to feel more like the self I wanted to become” (Rebecca 76).

In spite of the fact that he, in ways, begins to define her, however, the inherit imbalance in their relationship is publicised by the manner which de Winter addresses his new wife, a kind of indifferent pleasance: “I’m being like Jasper now, leaning against him. He pats me now and again, when he remembers, and I’m pleased, I get closer to him for a moment. He likes me in the way I like Jasper” (Rebecca 101). While a husband is a comfort to a weak wife, such a wife cannot provide any sort of comfort to her strong husband. Beyond comfort when sad, however, such a relationship is also incompetent of providing either party with companionship. When the narrator describes her job as a companion to de Winter, “I did not know one could buy companionship, he said, ‘it sounds like a primitive idea. Rather like an eastern trade market’. I looked up the word companion once in the dictionary, I admitted, and it said, ‘a companion is a friend of the bosom’. ‘You haven’t much in common with her,’ he said” (Rebecca 24).

De Winter recognises immediately that companionship needs and demands more than an agreement to spend time together; it requires a resemblance between the two parties that is missing in the narrator’s relationship with Mrs. Van Hopper. After their marriage, it is de Winter who first becomes conscious that there is a lack of “companionship” between them: “I wonder if I did a very selfish thing in marrying you [...] I’m not much of a companion to you, am I? he said. There are too many years between us” (Rebecca 145). Neither du Maurier nor the narrator felt restful performing the social and wifely responsibilities requisite of them as respectable women of society. In an interview with Helen Taylor, du Maurier’s daughter, Flavia, recalls how her mother “... didn’t get up in the morning when the Duke of Edinburgh was staying at Menabilly. She was terrified to go down to breakfast” (qtd. in Beauman 4). After their marriage comes to the point of failure, the narrator is forced to confront this fact herself, as well, when she confesses,

We did not get on. We were not companions. We were not suited to one another. I was too young for Maxim, too inexperienced, and more
important still, I was not of his world. The fact that I loved him in a sick, hurt, desperate way, like a child or a dog, did not matter. It was not the sort of love he needed. He wanted something else that I could not give him. (Rebecca 232)

It is only at this time that the narrator can identify the powerlessness with the traditional gothic romantic relationship. The narrator instantly makes a decision to show her husband that she can be tough, telling him, "'I don’t want you to bear this alone,’ I said. ‘I want to share it with you. I’ve grown up, Maxim, in twenty-four hours. I’ll never be a child again’” (Rebecca 264). It is only when de Winter is sure that the narrator is strong enough to endure the weight of his secrets that he tells her about killing his first wife, bridging the lack of communication that had separated them for so long. It is also only at this moment that he declares his love and passion for her and the narrator instantly becomes aware of the difference in the tenor of their relationship: “I was free now to be with Maxim, to touch him, and hold him, and love him. I would never be a child again. It would not be I, I, I any longer, it would be we, it would be us. We would be together. We would face this trouble together, he and I. [...] Our happiness had not come too late. I was not young any more. I was not afraid. I would fight for Maxim” (Rebecca 285).

By forcing herself to “grow up,” she takes a fine share of the power—and as a result responsibility—in their relationship, evening the imbalance that had thus far existed. Certainly, it is not fair to say that this imbalance was entirely the narrator’s fault for failing to previously ‘step up’. Throughout the novel, de Winter persuaded her dependence on him, mentioning throughout that he adores the fact that she is childish, and telling her, “It’s a pity you have to grow up” (Rebecca 53). Even after they have shared their secrets and he has told her he loves her, he speaks with regret, “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 . . .” (Rebecca 299). In some ways, his power and strength was defined by her former weakness. Even if the change is for the better, he cannot help but wish for some of her old dependence on him. She perceives her own fade self in contrast to Rebecca’s
and to inhabit the identity of Mrs de Winter of Manderley, she crafts a pseudo-community of persecutors (both living and dead), of which [she], in reaction to her feelings of seclusion and abandonment, becomes an important centre, since to be persecuted is better than being ignored.

Maxim desires her wife to be naive, polite, proper and ignorant, in contrast to Rebecca, who has “breeding, brains and beauty” (Rebecca 272) but her next makeover or transformation into Rebecca happens just before the opening of the annual Manderley fancy dress ball when she copies a picture of Caroline de Winter from the gallery and impersonates to use as her costume for the ball. Maxim gets infuriated as he doesn’t want her to be Rebecca in any way. Beatrice asserts: “Why, the dress, you poor dear, the picture you copied of the girl in the gallery. It was what Rebecca did at the last fancy dress ball at Manderley. Identical. The same picture, the same dress. You stood there on the stairs, and for one ghastly moment I thought. . . .” (Rebecca 216).

Though Beatrice never concludes or ends her statement, it is safe to presume that she thought it was Rebecca who was walking down the stairs as opposed to the narrator. This event permits Maxim, as well as his friends and relatives, to see the ever present competition between Maxim’s two wives. The endless association or comparison between the second Mrs. de Winter and Rebecca causes the former to transform into the latter. It is the comparison to Rebecca and Mrs. Danver’s bitterness which causes the narrator to feel lower and substandard to all of the other servants of the house as well. Mrs. De Winter’s posing as Rebecca posing as Caroline de Winter visually correlates the three women, or rather, identifies them as one, which proposes a kind of optional ancestral line within the precincts of Manderley: that of women. It intensifies Rebecca’s allegorical significance, which replays the fate of long-forgotten female ancestors, who were possibly silenced and subjugated just in the same way as Max tries to silence and subdue Rebecca and the narrator. The glaring “dressing-up,” which connects the three women characters, implies that women have been executing or playing a masquerade of gender for centuries.

The narrator being unidentified from the very beginning has a feeling similar to other female Gothic characters of non-belongingness throughout the novel. After the
wedding, upon arriving at Manderley, the heroine says “Standing here, looking down upon it from the banks, I realised, perhaps for the first time, . . . that I belonged there, and Manderley belonged to me” (Rebecca 259). She continues by listing all the things she can do, for example walking in the gardens and talking to the gardener. The word “belong” is everywhere here, as one of the paramount or superseding feelings the heroine has is of not belonging. The heroine’s vigour 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 fascinating to compare the implied vigour and feeling of commandment in this moment with the later vulnerability 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 manipulated and persuaded by the house. Though of course this is not to imply that the heroine is ever truly strong, certainly if she were strong, self-assured and confident, she would have transformed the house to her taste and ignored the abhorrence of Mrs Danvers from the start, which we can imagine would either have led a stubborn Mrs Danvers to quit, or else to stoop to her new mistress’s desires instead of growing ever more authoritative herself. She uses the heroine as puppet to remind others of Rebecca and brings Rebecca to the forefront where really Rebecca should have been forgotten by everyone excluding Mrs. Danvers. The heroine’s individuality appears to become as one with Rebecca’s as she possesses over woman and Mrs. Danvers whispers in the narrator’s ear this truly creepy line: “Rebecca is still mistress of the house, it is you who are the ghost!” (Rebecca 200).

Despite these concise moments of disappointments, however, the romantic relationship has found its equilibrium in the gothic Romance:

I sat on the floor at Maxim's feet, my head against his knees. He ran his fingers through my hair. Different from his old abstracted way. It was not like stroking Jasper any more. I felt his fingertips on the scalp of my head. Sometimes he kissed me. Sometimes he said things to me. There were no
shadows between us anymore, and when we were silent it was because the silence came to us of our own asking. (*Rebecca* 287-288)

The narrator lives through a sense of mystification concerning Maxim’s desires for her and it is a straight reflection of du Maurier’s relationship with her father. As the narrator spends the novel struggling with the spectre or the ever present spirit of Rebecca, du Maurier in the much similar manner spent her life battling the relationship between her mother and father. Richard Michael Kelly in *Daphne du Maurier*, explains:

It seems that du Maurier was never totally convinced of her father’s all-consuming love for her . . . and so, through this adult fairy tale, she transforms her father into Maxim de Winter, a man seemingly dedicated to the memory of his domineering wife, who suddenly reveals that he loves none other than the nameless adoring heroine who, if she were named, might be called Daphne. (56-57)

With the creation of Maxim—and his declaration of abhorrence for Rebecca—du Maurier accomplishes her own desires to be the sole object of her father’s affections. Just as the narrator is able to outshine Rebecca and turns out to be Maxim’s one true love, du Maurier believed she had overpowerd her mother, and her prize was her father’s whole and undivided love and consideration. Though narrator sits at his feet, they are no longer playing out the dominant/submissive roles they did before. Those roles are even reversed in certain cases, as when the narrator provides him reassurance and relief after Rebecca’s body has been found: “I held him and comforted him as though he were Jasper. As though Jasper had hurt himself in some way and had come to me to take his pain away” (*Rebecca* 352).

Even more essentially, however, the narrator gets transformed like other female gothic heroines and has found her own potency, her own identity, and prizes this even more greatly than the new-found relationship with her husband. By constructing her own identity, she could develop their identity and the exclusion of a name lets du Maurier to
more fully explore the idea of self, position, reputation. She asserts, “At the moment it inspires me, if not with love, at least with confidence. And confidence is a quality I prize, although it has come to me a little late in the day. I suppose it is his dependence upon me that has made me bold at last” (Rebecca 9).

Rebecca is not a sensation novel but a gothic one; with the distinct characteristics of the unfamiliar author, the past overshadowing with the future, haunting and ghosts, incest and the innocent, naïve heroine as discussed above. Du Maurier also employs a dissimilar form of madness and mental disturbance which holds an important place in the gothic novels. Mrs de Winter does not primarily know that she has a previous and dead Mrs de Winter to match up to and this is the journey of hers in the novel. There, she learns that she’s haunted by mementos of Rebecca, who had deceased in a dreadful boating accident the year before. In this case, the haunting is not essentially a physical presence, the haunting is more psychological. Even though Rebecca does not once turn up or appear as a spectre or a phantom in the novel, her spirit manages to efficiently influence everything that comes to pass at Manderley, “Instinctively I thought, ‘She is comparing me to Rebecca’; and sharp as a sword the shadow came between us . . .” (Rebecca 8).

Madness further exposes hidden secrets and leads to numerous mysterious activities as Allan Lloyd Smith writes of two aspects of the secrets in Rebecca: one is that the aristocracy, represented by Rebecca (who possessed “breeding, brains, and beauty”) was really crooked underneath (305), “I put Manderley first, before anything else,” and the second is the secret of Rebecca’s murder (Rebecca, 273-74). Maxim tells the narrator, explaining his motivation for murdering his first wife and she responds in support of him, pardoning his blame about the secret and still offering her love, the suitable reaction for the typical women in the patriarchal society. The other “hidden” element is the violet response or reaction of fully socialised male to the sexually liberated wife. This incident echoes the response to a menace to the ‘patriarchal heritage’ of Manderley which acts like one of (Freud’s) unheimlich homes. However, it is fascinating that when Doctor Baker is eventually located to uncover the medical condition of Rebecca, he reports that she had a malformation of the uterus and could not have produced children anyway. It not
only strengthens that facet of female Gothics delineated by Juliann Fleenor pertaining to
a pessimistic sensation toward female reproduction, it also entails a lack of healthiness in
the social state: once the narrator thinks that Rebecca was “evil and vicious and rotten”
(Rebecca 284), her personal feelings of incompetence are expunged. Rebecca is herself a
crucial element in the construction of Maxim de Winter as a gothic figure.

Madness is veiled in the novel and is blended flawlessly, given that Mrs Danvers
and Rebecca are the ‘mentally disturbed’ duo and not Maxim, Favell or the new bride.
One can say that Maxim was psychologically traumatised to an extent since he murders
Rebecca because she wasn’t a female subordinate; which was a massive disaster in their
marriage. Possibly his love or infatuation with a charmingly beautiful woman got out of
hand since she was an incestuous, evil and calculative woman. Angelico Gabby mentions
in a blog “Musing from a Sick Girl” that “Darwinian psychiatry undoubtedly intimidated
many feminists with its prophecies of hysterical breakdown for women who transgressed
their destined roles”. Rebecca according to Darwinian psychiatry was not a submissive
woman and was thus affected with hysteria and psychic disturbance. This was apparent in
her incestuous relationship with Favell, her cousin. Further, Angelico asserts that
madness is basically the outlet medium, and Elaine Showalter questions about the
relation of feminism to hysteria, “Was hysteria- the “daughter’s disease”- a mode of
protest for women deprived of social or intellectual outlets or expressive options?” (The
Female Malady 147). It is evidently visible how Du Maurier later justifies the killing of
Rebecca as she is declared unwell with cancer and wanted to die. So, Rebecca transforms
from the morally wrong wife to an angelic martyr.

Daphne de Maurier further employs basics of the alleged supernatural to intensify
the stress of the story. As is common in the Female Gothic, however, these
“supernatural” forces are constantly found to have very natural explanations and these
explained paranormal elements serve their purpose as a literary device without asking the
reader to accept implausibility and elements of the supernatural, as is seen in sternly
Gothic works. Du Maurier, in Rebecca also relies on the explained paranormal to
fabricate stress and nervousness within the plot. Always though, supernatural
appearances provide correlates for emotional suffering and anguish, underlining
ambiguity and signifying cosmic disturbance behind it. Even though not as explicit as a nightmarish encounter, the supernatural elements in *Rebecca* are often dark feelings or presentiment the narrator experiences as she discovers her new home at Manderley. Upon her first visit to Rebecca’s private boat house on the coast, the novel’s unidentified protagonist (known to literature experts and critics as simply *I*) fights against inexplicable feelings of terror as she opens a mystifying door: “I went to it, and opened it, a little fearful now, a little afraid, for I had that odd, uneasy feeling that I might come upon something unawares, that I had no wish to see. Something that might harm me, that might be horrible” (*Rebecca* 113).

This thus reveals how profound and ominous the supernatural presence of Rebecca’s ghost seems to *I*. Certainly, the something she “might come upon” is the secret of Rebecca’s death, not her ghost, but the narrator has no suspicion of the truth at this point in the story. Throughout the novel, there is the presence of Rebecca’s spirit prominent in almost every room of the house, even though the newly married couple were moved to the opposite side that was not subjugated by the late Mrs. de Winter. Everywhere she was the presence and menacing feeling of Rebecca loitered, waiting throughout the house. Spirits (as personified supernatural forces) “have purposes and intentions of their own as well as the power to achieve their objectives” (Swanson 7). Maxim’s narrative liberates or releases the narrator of her doubling with Rebecca as Doppelganger is a term which literally means “double” (doppel) “walker” (ganger). It is a supernatural figure that doubles living people. Significant and valid at both the individual and societal levels, Gothic “doubling” in itself proposes an absolute lack of oneness, thereby clearly suggesting an inherent instability or uncertainty found within the characters and their environments in the Gothic novel. The double, which as the split of the self means a simultaneous enticement and menace, repression and the desire to expose rarely evokes pure terror; instead, as Royle quotes Otto Rank in *The Uncanny*, “the main character is incapable of hating his counterpart” (190).

Another fundamental aspect of the gothic novel is the uncanny; most often is feared to be some supernatural entity. Freud’s “uncanny” has a unique place in the analysis of the Gothic and he contends that the uncanny blends something ancient
concealed and elementary that has close connection with infantility, psychosis, and primordial, magical thinking. Rebecca becomes her double, as she is everything the narrator is not and could be seen as photo-negative reversals of each other, “And I realize, every day, that things I lack, confidence, grace, beauty, intelligence, wit – Oh, all the qualities that mean most in a woman – she possessed” (Rebecca 131). The two examples of the uncanny would be the experience of déjà vu and the concept of the double. Basically, “the double is a threat to the integrity of the self, and frequently evidence of a Gothic, supernatural force at large that brings with it death and destruction” (Dryden 38). The uncanny figure most often is feared to be something more (or less) than human in the minds of the others only to be exposed as impenitently human by the story’s climax.

Moreover, Du Maurier’s reference to Mrs. Danvers being “a shadow”, lacking substance with a mere skeletal figure, entailing the supernatural, evil and ghost-like: (Narrator) “I looked about me stunned and stupid like a haunting thing . . . it was Mrs. Danvers . . . The face of an exulting devil” (Rebecca 214). Mrs. Danvers has become the ghost of Rebecca making it more and more complicated for the Narrator not to form both psychological and corporeal boundaries between herself and Manderley:

Rebecca, always Rebecca. Whereas I walked in Manderly . . . it is the costume of Caroline de Winter/ Rebecca that completes the uncanny metamorphosis. Gazing at herself in the mirror, the heroine can only scrutinize narrower, the skin white and clear? “The curls stood away from the head in a little cloud. I watched this self that was not me and then smiled; a new, slow smile. (Rebecca 237-38)

She is no longer binary opposite of Rebecca and her identity can no longer be encapsulated through dichotomous system of representation. In this section and elsewhere in novel, Daphne du Maurier weakens or threatens the polarities she may seem to have approved at first sight. As Andrew Smith says in his book Victorian Demons (2004), “For Freud the terms of the uncanny and homely slide into each other in an
(uncanny) way; so that the everyday, the homely, also becomes the site of secrets” (87). Bridging the gap between her two heroines in spite of appearances, she gives birth to a gothic hybrid, the perseverance of which is reasserted in the opening dream: “There was another plant too, some half-breed from the woods, whose seed had been scattered long ago beneath the trees and then forgotten, and now, marching in unison with the ivy, thrust its ugly form like a giant rhubarb towards the soft grass where the daffodils had blown” (Rebecca 3).

Rebecca employs the gothic element of dream vision to focus on the fact that Rebecca remains the twisted, egocentric figure in the reader’s mind, and the protagonist remains ecstatically unconscious of her own (sexual) feelings. In the first dream, which she has just before finding out Manderley is burning down, she and Rebecca are the same person. In Freudian terms, it is exciting to note that where the narrator before constantly attempted to ‘kill’ Rebecca, she now identifies with her. Maxim, who is also there in the dream, brushes her hair, after which he “wound it slowly into a thick rope . . . took hold of it . . . and put it around his neck” (Rebecca 379). Though this may be a forebode to the upcoming discovery of the fire, the fact that the nameless protagonist and Rebecca are the same person is possibly her own unconscious being allowed further into repressed sentiments.

In psychoanalytical term, an ordinary Oedipus complex would have ultimately evolved in the girl fixating her sexual desire on other men than her father. Yet, Maxim, a father figure to the narrator, being smothered by the ultimate symbol of femininity, long hair, seems to involve both the narrator’s own overpowering sexuality, and conceivably even lesbian feelings, the male fear of being overpowered and eventually replaced. So, being a paternal function, and in the words of Chodorow herself, bestows the narrator with the chance for a ‘last ditch attempt to escape’ the conditions in which her identity is persistently under fire. The narrator has at last navigated her way effectively through her oedipal scenario, gaining the exclusive love of her father figure and, as a result, separating herself from the all-consuming threat of the maternal, her experiences at Manderley soon prove this to be false. Chodorow even explicitly references paternal affection as necessary to the girl’s process of individuation, arguing as follows: “A
daughter turns to her father looking for . . . a sense of separateness from her mother and cares especially about being loved” (*ROM* 119).

The second dream, which occurs at the opening of the novel and is full of sexual imagery, demonstrates this downward sliding path-away from Victorian decency and motherhood, and towards the “abject” pit of unrestrained sexuality. Although it is expected from a woman in her time to react with horror to any form of promiscuity, the narrator, though she might never confess it, has not gotten rid of Rebecca’s ghost at all. The protagonist’s own (unconscious) identification with Rebecca further looks into the issue as to this unavoidably being a bad thing. Rebecca might look, on the surface, the antagonist who needs to be overpowered; it needs to expound normative choices (that is, a heterosexual relationship and marriage) as both a choice and destiny.

Though, Rebecca appears to have won at the very end, as it is deeply understood that she the supernatural force behind the fire. Even though it is unknown who set the actual fire, Mrs Danvers’ disappearance makes it possible that she had something to do with it, and with her intimate connection to Rebecca, her being the active performing agent would make Rebecca the supernatural agent, further implied by “the salt wind from the sea” carrying the ashes of Manderley towards the de Winters (*Rebecca* 380). To Maxim, this is his greatest fear come true, the loss of his family estate. However, it might also be read as Rebecca inflicting revenge, which raises the question if she is justified in her retaliation.

As both the protagonist’s dreams involve a further stoop into the abject state of wild sexual desire, it might even be implied that both Rebecca and the protagonist are two sides of the same coin: both sides cope with the aftermath of being married in drastically dissimilar ways. One the reputable, traditional way, the way it is “supposed” to be and thus the proper, public choice to identify with; the other as an loathing against the former, disinclination. Although the narrator may never confess it, her dreams do expose an unconscious tendency to identify with the latter. Even if never articulated, it does not mean that it is not present as the narrator’s true feelings are suitably hidden by her own narrative.
Du Maurier uses the grotesque and the sinister to explore shifting anxieties concerning the nature of identity. As Freud asserts, however, not only two people can function as each other’s doubles but in *Rebecca*, the narrator is split as a narrator. Nicholas Royle in *The Uncanny* argues that each and every narration is an uncanny process, when the narrator knows and mediates other characters’ thoughts and feelings. In *Rebecca*, the narration emphasises this ‘mad scenario,’ the clearly estranging effect of any narration. The “true” Gothic novel sustained its reputation and popularity through the early nineteenth century, and Kay Mussel points that “although a small but consistent demand for this form combining romantic fantasy with a mystery and an apparent upsurge of supernatural evil continued well into the twentieth” (qtd. in Maddox 238).

This nameless, threatening “half-breed,” which irresistibly gains ground and metaphorises the narrator herself, challenges patriarchal and romantic identity struck the novel. *Rebecca* is an exhilarating novel which delves into how liminality affects a person’s mind and consciousness. Throughout the novel, Rebecca is persistently made an issue of within the narrator’s mind. Before the narrator marries Maxim, he gives her a poetry book and on the very title page the narrator reads a dedication to Maxim from Rebecca. This is the first perceptible sign of Rebecca’s existence and it immediately agitates the protagonist. “And then as it bubbled through the nib, it came a little thick, so that the name Rebecca stood out black and strong, the tall sloping R dwarfing the other letters” (Rebecca 33).

The R in Rebecca’s signature stands out to the Mrs de Winter and almost disturbs her. In *Daphne du Maurier: Writing, Identity and Gothic Imagination* (1998), Horner and Zlosnik without going into details associate the curious letter R in Rebecca’s name with “a runic power which derives from its powerful visual impact and its refusal to be destroyed” (110). When she is staying in Manderley, Mrs de Winter finds more examples of the slanted R and each one she finds increases or intensifies to her turmoil and suspicion. The uncanny feature for her is that even though Rebecca is dead, her memory is kept very much breathing at Manderley as according to Freud, we all experience uncanny feeling in relation to death. However, she misapprehends the memory for love and believes that Maxim is still in love with her. It is a commonplace that an initial
“stands for” something or someone; the persistency of the letter initiates to ask what “R” entails beyond Rebecca's name. It is possibly, of course, to see the letter R as an iconic representation of a woman's form; its curved formation and pinched-in waist inscribe an inflated femininity on the shape of the female body.

The recurrence and echo of Rebecca and her memory plagues the narrator to the peak. This is revealed within her dreams. As an example:

> When I looked down to see what I had written it was not my small square handwriting at all, it was long, and slanting, with curious pointed strokes. I pushed the cards away from the blotter and hid them. I got up and went to the looking-glass. A face stared back at me that was not my own. It was very pale, very lovely, framed in a cloud of dark hair. The eyes narrowed and smiled. The lips parted. The face in the glass stared back at me and laughed’ (Rebecca 379).

The extract illustrates how the slanted R of Rebecca has made a massive impression on the second Mrs. De Winter. The dream itself commences to aggravate another form of the uncanny other than repetition and presents how the use of the doppelganger can be used within the gothic novel. Mrs de Winter stares in the mirror and sees not her own reflection, but Rebecca’s. They may have the same name, yet the two wives are very paradoxical in every way. The narrator saw Rebecca as being almost ideal in every way; she was stunning, sharp, and socially confident and most of all, loved greatly by Maxim. This is all that lacks in narrator and because of this she feels disgraceful of her husband and his serving staff, such as Mrs. Danvers. It proves that mirroring plays a vital role in producing an uncanny effect in the novel, with the narrator as the child, Maxim as the father, and Mrs Danvers as the surrogate mother. Allan Lloyd Smith writes of the psychological “phantom” which has main implications for the study of the uncanny in literature: one aspect of this “phantom” is the “unknowing awareness of another’s secret” (66).
Claire Kahane in her article “The Gothic Mirror” asserts that the potential for childbirth in the sexual act can be seen as a female Gothic terror, “committing women to an imprisoning biological destiny that denies the autonomy of the self” (347). Terror, as opposed to graphic horror and physical aggression, has also been elected as a unique and distinct feature for the female gothic. It is narrator’s powerlessness to separate herself “not from something external, alien, or unknown but-on the contrary-from something strangely familiar” which produced the terror in the uncanny for Freud and it is this same powerlessness in the narrator which petrifies her (Olson 325). The novel does have one genuinely scary moment towards the end, shortly before the big secret is revealed. The medical fact that Rebecca has a malformation of the uterus and the point that the narrator never does bear children accentuates not only their struggle for autonomy but also the uncanny ironic results of both unhealthy marriages.

Edmund Burke’s philosophical treatise on the sublime, a work whose manifestation paralleled the rise of the early Gothic in the eighteenth century, makes a lucid statement about the function of terror: “No passion so effectually robs the mind of all its powers of acting and reasoning as fear” (101). Fear evokes terror like the fear of a social crises, the fear that some inherent and unarticulable inadequacy will transpire, the fear of losing the love of the male figure in whom all importance is vested. The female character in the novel is depicted as being entirely subjugated by their offensive husband. She is always scared of losing Maxim; it doesn’t seem that he’s intentionally fostering this fear. Burke even writes that our sentiments and emotions are more affected by nature when it is at its most wild: “the terrible and sublime blaze out together” (109). The wilderness of engulfing Manderley in the opening dream of the novel is without doubt petrifying, but Rebecca has an alliance with the wilderness as well. Maxim tells the narrator that Rebecca was the basic reason behind the natural beauty at Manderley: “God, the place was a wilderness, lovely yes, wild and lonely with a beauty of its own, yes, but crying out for skill and care and the money that he [Maxim’s father] would never give to it . . .” (Rebecca 274).

Rebecca is associated throughout with the white azaleas of Happy Valley, the “blood-red and luscious” rhododendrons which stand outside the window of the morning
room, and all the lavishness of growth which characterises the setting of Manderley (Rebecca 82). She has empathy with the wilderness and is able to manage and direct its energy. When, at sixteen, she is able to overpower the horse to “teach him,” she is acting in response to that power which, to Burke, evolves from the menace of danger and pain, escalating the sensation of the sublime. Unlike others Rebecca appreciates and indeed experiences its ferociousness. It is a human propensity to cultivate, Iago in Othello says: “Our bodies are our gardens, to which our wills are gardeners” (1.3, 317-18). However, as the Mrs de Winter’s reverie means, the wilderness defies cultivation and “will come into her own again” (Rebecca 1).

Gothic Literature is obsessed with death. There are portents of death, unnatural deaths, and series of deaths, all of which contribute to an atmosphere of horror. The central characters in Rebecca are all either dead, look dead, or are perilously adjacent to death. Indeed, the title character, Rebecca, is dead before the story even starts but still her name echoes throughout the book. Her spirit continued to exist in every room of the great house, in the terraces and woods and trees of Manderley; in the hearts of the servants and in the heart of Maxim de Winter, whose wife she had been. She is responsible for Maxim’s uneasiness, much of his wife’s lack of self-confidence, and Mrs. Danvers’s vengeance. It is in Gothic Literature that death is gruesome and dreadful as it is often not quite end and thus obstructs the human desire for certainty. No doubt there’s murder involved (Maxim killed his wife), but death by natural causes is also a factor: Rebecca was incurably ill with a cancerous growth when she died. So these characters prefer a murder to a natural death. In any case, one of the most convincing things about Rebecca is that without essentially being one it shows signs of a haunted house/ghost story. Rebecca never comes back to life or appears as a ghost but the ghost of Rebecca is crafted in the minds of the living people who are intensely preoccupied with her existence and her death.

It is basically Mrs. Danvers who constructs the ghost of Rebecca by means of keeping her physical or corporal sphere of existence intact, and by always recalling her from her memory. Rebecca’s body is deprived of its garments in her death (each time the body is “found,” it is nude), while the clothes, scents and notes begin to serve as semiotic
substitutes for Rebecca, as well as fetishistic articles to blur the line between life and death and make the absent lover present: “Here is the nightdress inside the case. You’ve been touching it, haven’t you? This was the nightdress she was wearing for the last time, before she died. Would you like to touch it again? […] Feel it, hold it […], how soft and light it is, isn’t it? I haven’t washed it since she wore it for the last time” (Rebecca 176).

The characters in Rebecca aren’t afraid of dying and would rather prefer death to a disgraceful life. The mothers of Maxim, Rebecca, and Mrs. de Winter are all dead and this is evidently vital to understanding their relationships. He immediately discovers that the soon to be Mrs. de Winter is an orphan and this will make marrying her pleasant and opportune. He also perceives this as a point in common with her, bearing in mind that his own parents (and his wife) are all dead too as he asserts, “Haven’t you any family?” “No, they’re dead” (Rebecca 24). Death is omnipresent and is never forgotten in the novel. Mrs de Winter throughout the novel strives to assure herself that Rebecca is not a living force who exercises power over those who she left behind. “She was dead. She had been dead now for a year. She lay buried in the crypt of the church with the other entire dead de Winters” (Rebecca 165). Further, Max asserts that, “The woman buried in the crypt is not Rebecca,” [Maxim] said. “It’s the body of some unknown woman, unclaimed, belonging nowhere. There never was an accident. Rebecca was not drowned at all. I killed her. I shot Rebecca in the cottage in the cove” (Rebecca 266).

Daphne du Maurier is the foremother of the modern gothic romance tradition in the women’s fiction. She uses the genre of the Gothic romance to pose questions about the institution of marriage, the development of female subjectivity, sexuality, and homoerotic desire. When it was published in 1938, it became an instant bestseller as Sally Beauman in an afterword to Rebecca affirms; a “story in which the good woman triumphs over the bad by winning a man’s love . . . undoubtedly [was] the reading that made Rebecca a bestseller” (437). In popular romance, just as in the feminine gothic, (the lack of) property and (the possession of) propriety create both the female subject and the monstrous-feminine. The female gothic of the mid-twentieth century onwards illustrated the conflicts involving women in their relationship with other female characters and abjection seems to be a strong element to describe latter-days female gothic narratives
centered on conflicts involving women. From a more feminist angle, Tania Modleski has indicated that the Gothic romance-a genre to which *Rebecca*, possibly the greatest haunted-house story of modern times, is so noticeably related- “deals ‘with women’s fears of and confusion about masculine behaviour in a world where men tend to devalue women’, ‘giving expression to women’s hostility towards men while simultaneously allowing them to repudiate it’” (qtd. in Johnson 33-34).

Gothic fiction has always dealt with abjection in its diverse manifestations. Being a genre closely concerned with such images as the ghostly, the monstrous, body worsening, and the double, and to the many ways by which we project our complexities onto these figures in search of lucid and immutable identities, the gothic has managed to construct and execute scenes of abjection, and to elect them as part of its accustomed narrative strategies, which figure as metaphors for mysterious psychic and cultural conflicts. By dealing with the powers of abjection and its centrality to the structuring of binary oppositions, the gothic permits for a critical view of those oppositions, which point to their vulnerability and pliability, suggesting how easily one term of the opposition may slip into the other and defy its coherence and pretensions to a hierarchical superiority. For if the abject is “what disturbs identity, system, order […] the in-between, the ambiguous, the composite” (*POH* 4), then its potential for the subversion and implosion of stable identities suggests a suitable pathway when discussing the quandaries and dangers implied in any attempt at a conventionally unaltered identity.

The gothic has epitomised abjection in narratives of confusion and disorder, in which the past comes out as a locus of fear and desire. As it is discussed earlier Gothic characters exhibit their fear of the past as it may bring along secrets best kept veiled, but desire it since it represents an idealised locus of order and communion, which are basic aspects of the constitution of the psyche. The heroine is generally in the state of abjection caused by the separation from her past through marriage; she here also experiences an absolute separation from the ‘other woman’ who may haunt or else torture the heroine but who is not an object of desire. The ‘other woman’ is “at the same time the heroine’s double and her opposite”, a classic feature of the female Gothic text, according to Joanna Russ (Horner & Zlosnik, *Daphne du Maurier: Writing, Identity and Gothic Imagination* 2001).
The abject is constitutive of subjectivity because, as Kristeva argues, “the abject appears to uphold “I” within the Other” (POH 15). The pattern Mussell discovers in many gothics is very much related to Rebecca: “Beautiful women are attractive to men; they are passionate and therefore dependent on and corrupted by their sexual nature; …. they either lack ‘natural feminine instincts’ (bad mothers) or … become cruel and criminal (possibly guilty of murder)- in both cases they are similarly unnatural, unfeminine, ‘monstrous’” (qtd. in Becker 87).

The ‘other woman’ is heroine’s opposite: rich, gorgeous and sexual. The abject Other is recognised as a projection of and from the self. Confronting that which repels, shocks and disgusts, and identifying ourselves in it, is a way of defeating our fears and owning up to them, admitting them to be parts of ourselves. A great deal of women's horror insists on this identification and recognition of ourselves in the construction of that which has conventionally been seen as Other, as disgusting, and repelling as abject. In Powers of Horror (1982), she contends that emotions like horror, abhorrence, and loathing play an essential role in the construction of identity; and she refers to this amalgam of unpleasant emotions as abjection.

Considering horror and abject, Kristeva (1982) defines the abject as those matter that the body needs to discard, make Other, in order for the subject to be able to recognize itself. She asserts that the first abjected “Other” is mother, so mothers and, by contagion, women, are constructed as Other; borderline creatures fascinating because of their difference from the self, but engulfing and devastating, overpowering the self. In Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection (1982), Kristeva identifies an especially male-derived imaginative response that fears women’s generative powers and their potential for engulfment, responding for self-preservation, with hurtful acts, making an effort to destroy the Other. In this economy, women and sexually active women, in specific, can be constructed as treacherous, attractive but destructive- the femme fatale, Medusa, a myriad of demonised female figures, dramatised. Such Othering is followed by destroying the perpetrator, the woman.

As Kristeva and others indicate, nonetheless, it is the male who creates this kind of female figure from his endangered psychical position. Self-identity can only be
avowed not through the mirroring of self in other, but through the self being the other. This identification of the Other, the impulse to abject, can be turned to positive effect in contemporary women’s horror. Recognising that the Other is our other half, that we offload fears of death onto this monstrous female construction, can liberate. Celebrating our Other is empowering as it can undercut binary oppositions by demonstrating that they are twin sides of the same: yoked and returns time and again to disability, and particularly female disability, as a means of representation of grotesque otherness.

If the familiar themes within Gothic fiction are looked at, which, according to Gina Wisker, are “fears of displacement, incarceration, loss of identity, home, heritage, family, friends, and security”, Rebecca does certainly seem to fall under the category of Gothic (Horror Fiction 147). The protagonist faces or becomes subjected to many fears such as (potentially) losing her husband and thus her only family questions her own identity as a woman, and seems to be inapt and unbefitting in Manderley. In Rebecca the author creates the evil and grotesque by means of repetition, return, and doubling or multiplication, which stimulates fear and unease in the narrator, regarding her identity as the second Mr. de Winter. It implies, as well, that it is not only Rebecca who is the narrator’s double, but the second Mrs. de Winter also functions as the double of the first one.

Horner and Zlosnik in the book Daphne du Maurier: Writing, Identity and the Gothic Imagination (1998) identify Rebecca as the narrator’s “transgressive double,” who is “a manifestation of an anxiety which drew [du Maurier] continually back to the Gothic mode of writing” (6). Paul Coates argues in his study The Double and the Other (1988) that “Paradoxically, the Double enhances the ideology of individualism: it puts the self in the place of the other” (qtd. in Spooner, Fashioning Gothic Bodies 129). Accordingly, if women within patriarchal society have not been permitted access to a unified subject-position, it follows that the representation of doubles will be proportionately less. As the thought of woman as a unified speaking subject-position has become more firm within the twentieth century, female doubles have become more common and widespread in women’s writing. The presence of doubles in Gothic
literature, and in fiction in general, is connected with the suppressed aspects of our psyche.

Further, Maxim’s unconscious drive to bring Rebecca back puts in danger not only his power and authority over her, but his masculine distinctiveness also. In *Daphne du Maurier: Writing, Identity and the Gothic Imagination* (1998), Avril Horner and Sue Zlosnik highlight that, “Maxim needs woman in order to construct his masculinity in opposition to the Other” (105). Maxim’s tries to craft the Other, though, persistently fail, as for him woman has only “two faces: that of demon and that of angel” (Horner & Zlosnik 105). It necessitates that in the course of constructing the Other, Maxim has to lean on binaries like object/subject, devil/angel and feminine/masculine, and when Rebecca puts the whole meaning of these binaries in danger by snubbing to conform to them, Maxim kills her, anticipating that as soon as Rebecca is dead, the traditional binary structures can be re-established, and his masculine identity secured with another marriage. His return to Manderley with his new wife intensifies Rebecca’s uncanny presence: the second Mrs. De Winter in spite of her own conscious endeavour commences to incorporate certain features of Rebecca’s into her own subjectivity. It is as if the very aspects of Rebecca that Max tries to restrain or conceal by murdering her were resurrecting in the new Mrs. De Winter, who has been chosen by Max directly because she is so much the opposite of what Rebecca represents.

This amalgamation of the narrator’s and Rebecca’s character, the mixing of the unruly ‘wicked woman’ with the apparently submissive “blondie” not only undermines the binaries of feminine/masculine and angel/witch, but, by Rebecca’s continual return as an uncanny presence the border line linking life and death is also distorted. In addition, as the narrator fails to be different from Rebecca, she can no more perform her role as the vital Other for Maxim to build his own masculine identity. The exploration of unexpected emergences of the unknown sides of ourselves is connected with Julia Kristeva’s theory of the abject. The self is supposed to be created by accepting certain qualities as ourselves while rejecting others as not ourselves.

In Daphne du Maurier’s *Rebecca* the double is an image of perfected femininity which fades the protagonist’s own identity and, at the crucial scene at the fancy dress ball
at the centre of the text, warns to seize it together. Rebecca is no more the madwoman in attic of the Gothic novel, but inside the mind of bourgeois woman and trying to get out. With this internalisation of the doubles comes a more complex and overt risk to the heroine’s sense of self. Thus she turns to Maxim (father figure) which will according to Irigaray allow her to turn only the identity of “mother”. The result is vicious circle where by the two women rivals for the single place available to them as she asserts “When the one of us comes into the world the other goes underground. When the one carries life, the other dies” (qtd. in Hirsch 137).

Rebecca’s power over the nameless heroine is due to her objective existence, but to the symbolic bend she clings over the heroine’s fantasies and neuroses. She is not a gruesome madwoman, but an enchanting image of social and sexual sophistication. Her absolute perfection distresses and tortures the heroine by stressing her perceived inadequacies, providing a model she is expected to live up and cannot. This domineering image of faultless or unblemished femininity is by no means only a product of modernity, yet in du Maurier and her successors take on a form which seems specific to the twentieth century, and explicitly to the development of the woman’s magazine. There is only one direct reference to women’s magazines in Rebecca: when the heroine imagines her employer Mrs Van Hopper’s bed “littered with the separated sheets of the daily papers folded anyhow, while French novels with curling edges and the covers torn kept company with American magazines” (Rebecca 40).

Rebecca’s heroine spends the majority of her time either struggling to master the ‘art form’ of femininity, or feeling utterly inadequate in her perceived inability to do so. Ironically, it is Rebecca’s apparently perfect or faultless femininity that turns out to be unnatural- ‘not even normal’- while the femininity as spectacle, is what attracts her husband to her. However, there remains an everlasting gap between the woman the heroine aspires and expects herself to be and the woman she is, which is fed not by the demands of her husband, who is contented simply by her difference from his first wife, but by her own fantasies. These fantasies are clearly a source of anxiety but also, awkwardly, of pleasure. As with the forming of the “self”, Rebecca’s image is therefore played with throughout the novel, and in that sense, hers is not a firm identity but a fluid
one. This fluidity seems to be Rebecca’s very core. Putting up a farce for people as the reputable and decent Mrs de Winter, she evidently had an entirely different side to her which she exposed only in London. All of these different personas, however “had an amazing gift”, according to Maxim’s sister Beatrice, to be “attractive to people” and even animals (Rebecca 187).

Rebecca as abject is the embodiment of the strongest and most destructive feminine principle which marks a permanent state of risk not only from outside but also from within (through their own sexuality) and it must be rejected by Maxim, so that it can remain part of the symbolic order Manderleys. Kristeva’s abjection as a concept serves in identity construction by all together inventing and excluding an element of fear, revulsion, and hatred and shows how abjection as a conflict between inside and outside must be understood. Rebecca appears pure and beautiful on the outside but evil may, nevertheless, reside within. Maxim characterises her as shrewd; proficiently hiding her “true”, malicious nature and making people fall for her. A dualism that leads to the splitting of the human being into a divine immortal soul and an earthly corruptible body, degrading the fecund and ever-changing corporeal world of nature into abject materiality.

The sin/abjection as something which comes from inside unlocks the way to position woman as deceivingly dangerous and it is this stereotype of feminine evil-beautiful on the outside/corrupt within- that becomes so popular within patriarchal discourses about woman’s evil nature. Kristeva’s notion of the abject pictures the frailty of the boundaries between inside and outside because the abject embodies both the internal and the external at the same time and can only be maintained through a process of othering. Rebecca’s sacrifice as abject ultimately serves the stabilisation of these traditional patterns of living and thinking. Although it is tough to be sure what part of Rebecca’s personality was fake and what was sincere, genuine charm seems to be a definite characteristic that Rebecca possessed, and was likely her most treacherous quality: being simultaneously “abject” and charismatic.

This fluidity within Rebecca’s character is also that which characterises the New Woman, all together feminine and masculine, antagonistic and heroic, silenced yet vocal. As reconstructed through the memories of Mrs. Danvers, Rebecca signifies both
femininity and masculinity. Not holding on to traditional standards of femininity but instead adopting masculine ones, she was often considered a threat to society, even within this context, however, she could not evidently be defined. Was she a manly woman, was she an over-sexualised woman, was she a woman at all? This was what made the New Woman so dangerous—she did not only break the rules, she disturbed the formerly stable gender boundaries on which the foundations of society rested. Rebecca, as well, threatened to destroy exactly those pillars on which Manderley was built: family life, respectability, and nobility. It was for this reason she needed to be silenced and abjected.

Rebecca’s sexual prowess, her strength of character, her ability to interact successfully with anyone, her skills as hostess, as well as her physical fitness and energy—all describe that which the narrator lacks. She has all the traits to be titled as ‘New Woman’ which were also titled the ‘Old Woman’, the ‘Wild Woman’ and ‘Fallen Woman’ in various Victorian texts. The other titles attached to the term of ‘New Woman’ emphasises the point that transgression against the ordained role within society or any anti-social behaviour is sinful and thus becomes the ultimate model of abjection. The New Woman is therefore almost solely a middleclass (and to some extent upper class) phenomenon and was primarily used as a mouthpiece by her opponents, in an effort to ridicule and silence feminism. As such, the New Woman was not only an admirable figure, but a perverted and sometimes even monstrous one as well.

“Woman is literally a monster: a failed and botched male who is only born female due to an excess of moisture and of coldness during the process of conception” (Ussher 1). This trait of being admirable and monstrous at the same time gives rise to the concept of abjection. The New Woman who demands more rights and gives in to her immoral desires is often portrayed by her critics as immoral, wicked, and sometimes even quite monstrous. Yet, it is this dreadful, grotesque, scary woman that is often the most interesting. Usually the ammunition of her opponents, this terrifying New Woman is used to scorn, control and eventually silence women of her kind—consequently she, herself, is often silenced. Rebecca unlike narrator behaves in an unfeminine manner and what Mrs Danvers loved in Rebecca, it seems, was her strength, her courage, and her “spirit”: “She
ought to have been a boy, I often told her that” (Rebecca 243). In fact, throughout the novel, Rebecca’s handwriting is associated with a masculine power and an indelible authority that runs counter to Maxim’s idea of the good wife.

Du Maurier’s Rebecca presents the female subject as “split” between a seemingly conforming self, which represents a conventional respectable femininity, and an inner repressed self, full of erotic and transgressive desire. Like all vampire figures, Rebecca is associated with a transgressive, polymorphous sexuality and is treated as a figure of abjection. The Gothic has used Julia Kristeva’s Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection to delve into how representations of the abject in certain texts relate to certain discourses and cultural values at a particular historical moment. Kristeva’s concept of the abject in that way becomes a concept which allows them to define how shared constructions of ‘otherness’ are predicated upon shared cultural values at specific times: by this logic, you may know a culture by what it ‘throws off’ or “abjects”.

She describes the abject as possessing the qualities of Otherness, and the ambivalence of horror and desire. The abject is a polluting agent, defined against the boundaries it threatens. It is not astonishing, then, to find that the sexual threat represented by Rebecca as ‘vamp’ is further inflected by the text’s association of her with vampirism. Rebecca was supposedly based on Jan Ricardo who was engaged to Major ‘Boy’ Browning before his marriage to du Maurier; she was a “dark-haired, rather exotic young woman, beautiful but highly-strung”, according to Margaret Forster (Avril Horner & Angela Keane 214).

In her portrayal of Rebecca, who can be seen as the alter ego of the quietly complaint and shyly awkward nameless second wife, du Maurier draws on both the tradition of the Gothic double and the legacy of the female vampire. By doing so, she reveals and echoes widespread cultural ambivalence about the increasing power and sexual freedoms that many women were demanding during the first few decades of the twentieth century. Although Rebecca is like a “psychic” vampire, her identity is insinuated by characteristics traditionally associated with the vampiric body: facial pallor, plentiful dark hair, and an insatiable sexual appetite; moreover, like the vampire, she has to be “killed” more than once (she was shot; she had cancer; she drowned). The cultural
slippages between the terms “vamp” and “vampire” are mirrored not only in the unstable status of Rebecca’s body (missing dead body; wrongly identified body; diseased body; erotic ghost) but also in her association with a transgressive, polymorphous activity- for Rebecca is both a heterosexual adulterer and (it is implied through her relationship with Mrs. Danvers) a lesbian. In dislocating the boundaries between masculine and feminine, dead and alive, heterosexual and queer, Rebecca represents the Kristevan abject: that which disturbs “identity, system, order,” and does not respect “borders, positions, rules,” and represents “the in-between, the ambiguous, the composite” (POH 4).

Even Mrs Danvers is a woman herself, and also one who explicitly expressed her homoerotic feelings for her former mistress and is hereby destined to the limbo of the “abject”, the ‘non-human’. This also involves losing one’s status within “normal” society, for which one, according to Butler, will be ostracised. Mrs Danvers, as an abject body, will not be taken seriously by those that are part of normative society, and she is thus quietened, as Rebecca was for not adhering to the heterosexual normativity either.

In Bodies that Matter: on the Discursive Limits of “Sex (1993), Bobby Noble like Judith Butler while talking about the position of “abject” bodies that do not fit society’s hetero-normative norms and morals, contends that, as opposed to society’s enforcement of a certain fixedness of self-identity, “becoming a self is a socially and discursively over-determined process that is on-going . . . [But] not all ‘selves’ are commensurate with, and reducible to, hegemonically intelligible bodies” (83). These latter “selves” are the bodies that question normalcy, and are thus a threat to society’s usually stable pillars of gender divisions.

On the other hand the narrator, possibly Rebecca’s “alter-ego” at first is utterly afraid of Rebecca and feels reluctant to ask any question about her. She dreads any remark about her and her death, but she cannot stop thinking about her and uttering or hearing her name is the menace and relief at the same time. She doesn’t feels confident to give orders to her servants as Daphne du Maurier herself being an army wife hated entertaining and had no idea how to give orders to the servants. “Her feelings of inferiority in this respect and of being intimated went straight into the character of the
second Mrs de Winter,” *(Rebecca* 134) writes Margaret Forster in her masterly 1993 biography.

What seems to be a persistent theme in the framework of articles written on *Rebecca*, then, is Rebecca—representing either “Evil” or ‘the female voice’—being repressed, but little is said on how far she in reality succeeds to make her voice be heard. Even though on surface level Rebecca’s defeat is effectively implied, the fact that the narrator begins her story at the end of the narrative, with an extremely sexualised dream, might expose that, as a sexual spectre, Rebecca never actually can be suppressed. On the one hand, the housekeeper stresses on her beauty, sensuality, and femininity by bestowing her fine clothes with a metonymic significance and on the other hand, she stresses Rebecca’s power and masculinity.

In Mrs Danvers’ mind, Rebecca’s sexual inversion or free-spiritedness is not something sinful but something that, because she was a woman, could not be accepted by society and thereby treated as an abject figure. She claims that Rebecca “had all the courage and spirit of a boy, had my Mrs de Winter. She ought to have been a boy” *(Rebecca* 243). June West assigns to the New Woman the propensity to “[ape] the dress, manners, customs, occupations, amusements, and habits-good or bad-of the so-called superior [male] group” in wishing the same rights as men possessed (59). The Modern Woman began to wear low-heeled shoes, knickerbockers and bobbed hair, to drink, smoke and swear, and to read and write smutty stories amongst other things.

Rebecca purportedly did most of this, as Mrs Danvers names many examples of Rebecca’s masculine side, her wearing trousers for example, and she proudly memorises that when Rebecca cut off her long, stunning hair, the very symbol of Victorian femininity, “everyone was angry with her, . . . but she did not care. ‘It’s nothing to do with anyone but myself’, she would say” *(Rebecca* 169). These are all characteristics of the Modern Woman, and it is precisely the more ‘masculine’ side of Rebecca – her being freethinker, rebellious, and highly sexual – that does not seem to be to Maxim’s liking. “She told me about herself”, he reveals to the protagonist, “told me things I shall never repeat to a living soul. I knew then . . . what I had married” *(Rebecca* 272). The fact that Maxim does not refer to Rebecca as ‘who’ but as ‘what’, hereby, as it were, de-
humanising her, signifies Rebecca’s situation as an abject body of which, as Butler foresees will happen in such a case, the ‘human-ness’ is disputed (8).

Abjection is the psychic experience of rapid slippage outside the borders of our ego, which permits us to behold and experience the repressed or subdued sides of ourselves, and which produces an uncanny effect of horror. The theory of abject is naturally connected with Freud’s theory of “the Uncanny” because it involves the rediscovery of things suppressed for a long time. Thus the presence of doubles is connected with the rejected and renounced desires or identities which we put aside as not belonging to ourselves, but which may come out and haunt us. The figure of Rebecca may be judged as one of these suppressed spectres and the narrator strives in hopelessly with her incessant presence. One of the symbols of Rebecca’s eternal and undying presence is the constant emergence of her handwriting, signature and monogram whose peculiar form is the mark of Rebecca’s outstanding personality. The narrator’s depiction of her first encounter with her handwriting hints at the power and intensity of Rebecca’s personality.

Daphne du Maurier, was, perhaps without her intentionally realising it, living within a time span during which her role as a woman in the public sphere was just starting to become accepted. Her novel Rebecca exemplifies this as no other, as it not only shows the struggle of a woman to attain that very aim – to live without restraint, as men could, without frightful social consequences–and who was subsequently looked upon with contempt and fear. It also points up the emptiness of a woman who allows or permits others, especially men, dictate her life. Although she is persuaded to choose the same path as her predecessor, she is too terrified to show it and ends up living the way society dictates, and as a result has no true-self identity to speak of. In the novel, Rebecca’s non-identity exemplifies as it is exactly the woman who was quietened because of her desire for independence and liberty and whose name is immortalised through the novel’s title.

It is basically about the long road the Modern Woman had to traverse in order for her sisters to have the freedom to live as one desires to, revealing the evolution of ideal of femininity throughout the nineteenth and first few decades of the twentieth century. To a
degree this struggle of the New Woman is reflected in du Maurier as well as her letters to (female) friends reveal a clear hatred against homosexuality, yet she herself was, as stated by her biographer Margaret Forster, bisexual, and had loathed to be a girl as a child, efficiently embracing an “alter ego” by the name Eric Avon. Her fight with her own “Venetian tendencies” (which stands for her code word for lesbianism) and her issues with the ethics of her own gender are both mirrored in Rebecca and it makes du Maurier herself an epitome of the struggle many women had with society’s expectations of what Woman should be.

Primarily the narrator believes Rebecca was the ideal and flawless wife, lover, and woman, and she herself is nothing in comparison, likening herself to “a guest in Manderley” (Rebecca 137). She feels endangered by Rebecca, who continues to run the house in the form of the servants’ still organising things the way in the first Mrs de Winter would have liked, and thus her successor, in all her coyness, cannot help but abide by these footsteps. Rebecca is a grotesque body which generates the feeling of both fear and fascination and is so robustly present all through the novel that the protagonist senses her breathe down her neck with every step she takes. As for Kristeva “the Grotesque-abject body is a body of fear, but fear tempered with fascination” (qtd. in Hurley 138). A body with the function of an abject is a body, which allowed neither a way nor a looking away, because the subject just as threatened as fascinated by showing the possibility of self-dissolution. Although the main character despises and snubs Rebecca, she is at the same time deeply jealous of everything that she stood for, wanting to become her simultaneously wanting to kill her memory. The figure of abjection in a Gothic text may, certainly, be presented as simultaneously repellent and charismatic, thus permitting the reader to indulge in a transgressive redefinition of “self”.

This is symbolised in the way the protagonist is called all through the novel; her own name being anonymous, the narrator is only identified through the relationships she has with other men- a daughter to her father, a wife to her husband. Rebecca, in contrast, shared these relationships, being the first Mrs de Winter, but at the same time she kept her self-identity as Rebecca, possessing distinct and independent thoughts and needs separated from her wifely duties. It is her over- powering deadly presence which acts as a
great barrier in narrator’s life and in order to claim an independent identity of her own she needs to abjectify Rebecca, as the abject figure is merely regarded as something to be annihilated. As Kristeva contends that the process of becoming a subject inherently requires breaking away from one’s mother. “The abject confronts us . . . with our earliest attempts to release the hold of maternal entity . . . It is a violent, clumsy breaking away, with the constant risk of falling back under the sway of a power as securing as it is stifling (POH 13).

The disgust and rejection of the image (i.e. Rebecca) fulfils the narrator’s invitation for a compulsive reaction, the kind of reaction that Kristeva famously describes in her treatise on abjection. Presenting the woman as an abject figure who is both absent and present, attractive and repulsive, known and unknown removes viewer identification from concepts of the real into the imaginary or representational so that “the pure/impure opposition represents [...] the aspiration for an identity, a difference” (POH 82). The narrator’s identity is constructed in terms of her difference from Rebecca and she herself appears to apprehend this difference in self-assertion when comparing her own handwriting to that of Rebecca’s. The penmanship of that of her predecessor becomes prominent from the paper, particularly her own name; “Rebecca stood out black and strong, the tall and sloping R dwarfing the other letters” (Rebecca 33). Her own handwriting however, pales in comparison: “I noticed for the first time how cramped and unformed was my own handwriting; without individuality, without style, uneducated even” (Rebecca 87). These writing styles, then, reflect the (lack of) individuality of their respective owners: one is seemingly completely content with having her identity be decided by others, overshadowing her own individuality, while the other snubs to give up her self-identity in order to conform.

For Kristeva, the experience of the abject never ceases to haunt the borders of identity; it constantly threatens to dissolve the unity of the subject. It is in fact an integral part of the other. Mrs Danvers (the housekeeper) fuels the heroine’s fears and uncertainties about the substance of her identity by accentuating Rebecca’s enduring hold on Manderley: “You’ll never get the better of her. She’s still mistress here, even if she is
dead. She’s the real Mrs de Winter, not you. It’s you that’s the shadow and the ghost. It’s you that’s forgotten and not wanted and pushed aside” (*Rebecca* 245-246).

Rebecca somewhere holds a great control on narrator’s psyche which allows her to have a control over her identity as abjection is something which “disturbs identity, system, and order” (*POH* 4). The fact that the narrator feels negative towards Rebecca is largely due to her affection to her husband, who also keeps Rebecca among the living by possessing over her—although not for the reasons his second wife assumes. Through Maxim, she learns that Rebecca was not the “ideal” woman that everyone thought she was. In fact, he avows that she was nasty, insensitive and shamelessly self-indulgent; Rebecca, he claims, “was incapable of love, of tenderness, of decency. She was not even normal” and their marriage was “a farce from the very first” (*Rebecca* 271).

The fact that Maxim doesn’t finds any femininity in his wife, very well points what his hopes of a wife are. Upon finding out that Rebecca was not an ideal embodiment of femininity but in fact rather a-typical, the narrator seems to gain more confidence in herself as the Mrs de Winter: in spite of this, Rebecca continues to trouble her and threaten her very identity, albeit in a rather different manner from that which the narrator herself cares to admit, as her dream of Manderley may show. It is no surprise that the main character, imagining she has “defeated” Rebecca, desires to liberate her near the end of the novel, just like she wishes to distance herself from Rebecca’s sexuality, “I did not like it. We would give the satyr away” (*Rebecca* 376).

Rebecca, an abject figure has an eternal presence which elevates the feeling of fear, loathing and hatred as she is no longer there but is still idolised by seemingly everyone, a thought that the nameless main character cannot overcome. The purpose for the fear of the sexual spectre is that Rebecca appears to stem from a deep desire to correspond to heteronormative society. Judith Butler contends that any digression from the normative path, towards what she calls “the abject”, will lead to rejection and exclusion, one’s “humanness” questioned (3-8). One needs to identify with certain normative discourses in order for an “I” to exist within societal boundaries. It is for this reason that the unnamed protagonist feels so anxious to conform, always daydreaming of romantic scenarios in which she is perfect wife, hostess and employer, overtly
disagreeing with her predecessor’s adultery and queerness, and that Rebecca, as an abject body, is deemed evil and “not . . . Normal” by her former husband (Rebecca 29).

Even after they have lost the estate, the couple continues to live as an old Victorian couple, following their daily rituals and routine such as teatime, always having the same: “Two slices of bread and butter each, and China tea” (Rebecca 8). The narrator seems to be the perfect housewife and they continue to hold on to the Victorian standard of married life. In contrast to the second Mrs de Winter, Rebecca’s choices were the total opposite of this principle as she, too, was expected to live by Manderley standards. Kristeva in Powers of Horror states that “the time of abjection is double: a time of oblivion and thunder of veiled infinity and the moment when revelation bursts forth” (9). Therefore, at the instance that it appears, abject is taken care of by ejection, annihilation, vomiting, exclusion, disgust, fear, horror, phobia, purification, exorcism, catharsis, or hatred. Abject momentarily appears to be dismissed, just to catalyse the identity, meaning, or truth.

Using the theoretical framework for Gothic fiction Rebecca stands as a femme fatal that represents the Kristevan abject and threatens the symbolic order which surrounds her husband. Being an epitome of culturally transmitted and artistic repeatedly staged image of the femme fatale, she is characterised by the attributes and patterns as mentioned in Body Matters: Feminism, Textuality, Corporeality (2000):

Her rather morbid sexuality connects her beauty with barrenness, lack of production, death and obliteration; Because her power situates the femme fatale as evil, she is invariably punished or killed (Often by a man); finally, she is oft associated with a sexually ambiguous identity, in so far as she is linked with androgyny, bisexuality and / or lesbianism. (210)

Maxim voices his loathing and hatred over her several times through the novel, confessing even that he is “glad [he] killed Rebecca” (Rebecca 299). His lack of interest
in the female body and his increased hatred of Rebecca’s behaviour in which he sees only
the realisation of his repressed desires and lets him become a melancholy patriarch who
himself has no access to one’s homoeroticism. The killing Rebecca as fantasised center of
a nimbus of sexual perversity is a prime example of a process of abjection, just because
here the abject typically “intolerable ideas and effects that must be repressed, displaced
and projected elsewhere” (Hurley 144) embodies.

Women seem to have a sternly limited number of acceptable activities and
employment opportunities. The ‘female Gothic’ is often informed by an awareness of the
economic dependency- or powerlessness- of women. This isn’t even to bring out the
stress and strain on married women to produce a male heir but Daphne de Maurier does
not overlook the male perception. Although it is implicit from the starting that Rebecca
was an independent, methodical, iron-willed, determined woman who took care of her
own business and enjoyed to run the show herself. Sally Ledger in The New Woman:
Fiction and Feminism at the Fin de Siecle (1997) writes, the “domestic Angel” who is
restricted to the private sphere is a myth, as most working-class women themselves
worked outside the house (19). It is even publicised that she might have been a bit too
free- spirited for conventional tastes and her many affairs, some of which may or may not
have involved other women, would have made Rebecca a distinctive example of ‘sexual
inversion’, which is, having characteristics that ‘belong’ to the opposite gender.

The fact that it was Rebecca who turned Manderley into a gainful business
signifies not only her confident side, but also that she evidently had enough money to be
able to accomplish this – a radically different image from that of the coy housewife. It
was this quality which has made him pretend in public of having a perfect married life.
According to Kristeva, men depend upon the abject feminine to construct male
subjectivity but are threatened when this dependence is made evident. Kristeva explains
that the abject feminine destabilises male identity, but nevertheless it is integral to the
formation of male subjectivity:

We may call it a border; abjection is above all ambiguity. Because while
releasing a hold, it does not radically cut off the subject from what
threatens it — on the contrary, abjection acknowledges it to be in perpetual danger. But also because abjection itself is a composite of judgment and affect, of condemnation and yearning, of signs and drives. (POH 9-10)

In Mrs Danvers’ description of Rebecca the latter is pictured like an angel, someone who is above sheer humanity and declares several times that Rebecca was never in love with anyone and even “despised all men, . . . was above all that” (Rebecca 340). This independency from men was, according to Victorian scholar Sally Ledger, a very real fright amongst many male writers at the end of the Victorian period, who often depicted New Woman characters as overt lesbians who never marry and perhaps even wish to overpower men. The fact that Rebecca and Maxim’s marriage, though on the surface being idyllic, was nothing more than a contract between two parties seems to come close to realising this fear: two equals who come to an arrangement of which both will profit entails that both parties need each other instead of one person needing to be taken care of by the other.

Maxim tries to maintain his masculinity by not letting his second wife follow the footsteps of Rebecca. Though the protagonist persists to reject Rebecca, she does appear to identify with her in her daydreaming. Although her fantasies are romantic and dramatic in character, they seem to gain a gloomy edge that manifests itself in real life as well as the plot develops. During one such specific reverie, in which the narrator daydreams about how Rebecca must have triumphed over an envious Maxim and where, “for one second . . . I had been Rebecca”, she shows a facial expression which Maxim notices does not seem normal for her: “you did not look one bit like yourself just now. . . . You looked older suddenly, more deceitful. It was rather unpleasant” (Rebecca 201). When his wife compels him to tell why he did not like her look, he elucidates that she seemed to have momentarily gained knowledge, “not the right sort of knowledge” (Rebecca 201). He wants to prevent the narrator from entering Rebecca’s sphere and when further pressed to explain himself, Maxim inquires:
When you were a little girl, were you ever forbidden to read certain books, and did your father put those books under lock and key?’

‘Yes’, I said.

‘Well, then. A husband is not so very different from a father after all.

There is a certain type of knowledge I prefer you not to have’. (Rebecca 202)

Again, knowledge of “forbidden” books is stated, and being brought in connection with certain sexual illumination that fathers do not want for their daughters to have, nor husbands for their wives, for it would make them, in Victorian terms, a failure to be a decent and respectable girl. This is reminiscent of Victorian fears about women reading novels, in which it was believed that reading would give young, vulnerable girls the wrong ideas about romance, marriage and family life – including sexual relationships. These thoughts are somewhere patriarchal thoughts with a sense of insecurity which the men have regarding women. Mary Wollstonecraft argues in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) that “a slavish bondage to parents cramps every faculty of the mind” (155). This bondage is especially true for the female sex because “girls, from various causes, are more kept down by their parents, in every sense of the word, than boys . . . and thus taught plausibly to submit to their parent, they are prepared for slavery of marriage” (qtd. in Tichelaar 7).

Maxim, as well, seems to want his wife devoid of such thoughts. Her youthfulness is, seemingly, the reason why he married his second wife in the first place: “that funny, young, lost look that I loved” was what initially drew him to her (Rebecca 299). This also appears to be accentuated by how Maxim continues to treat his wife throughout the novel. Seemingly, he associates her with his mother, as he puts her in a room which faces the rose garden, a flower inherently connected to memories of his childhood and his mother: this connection with motherhood entails the role he wants his own wife to take. Her wing is positioned also opposite of where Rebecca’s wing was located, and she
perceives that the sea cannot be heard from there. This might connote that Maxim is trying to keep his young, naïve second wife away from Rebecca’s treacherous influence, the sea symbolising the latter’s fluidity as a sexual spectre. Moreover, Maxim incessantly refers to the narrator as ‘child’ (My good child” (Rebecca 115), “My sweet child” (Rebecca 142)), at times even handling her like one would a pet, kissing the top of her head: “He pats me now and again, when he remembers” (Rebecca 101). Though their age difference might have played a role as well, it appears more likely that Maxim is intentionally keeping his wife ‘young’, that is, naive, wifely, motherly and pure, as a good Victorian wife would be. She is expected to fall under the prototype which is created by her male counter and it very well justifies the patriarchal influence.

That is the way in which the entirety of her identity is described by the other (male) characters. The narrator has no name, though it is mentioned that it is “very lovely and unusual” (Rebecca 24). She is only defined, then, as her role as wife to Maxim, Mrs de Winter. Aside from “child”, he calls her his wife, and other characters do the same, constantly calling her ‘Mrs de Winter’, although some do so sarcastically – Jack Favell incessantly refers to her as “bride”, hereby sometimes bringing in his doubt about her virginal purity (“I wonder what you have been doing. Leading Frank Crawley up the garden-path?” (Rebecca 322)). In becoming ‘Mrs. de Winter’ (taking the “Name of the Father”) her separate identity is lost but this merger with Maxim is socially sanctioned. It is the man who can provide a secure identity for the woman. Mrs Winter is a child figure and during her struggle to become a subject, “a third party, eventually the father . . . helps the future subject . . . in pursuing a reluctant struggle against itself. Ab-jecting” (POH 13). This brings us, though by a different route, back to the Freudian necessity for the woman to reject the 'mother' in order to establish an adult identity.

Such psychoanalytic readings are inherently ahistorical. As Luce Irigaray in The Sex which is Not One (1985) remarks:

The problem is that [Freud] fails to investigate the historical factors governing the data with which he is dealing. And [ ... ] that he takes female sexuality as he sees it and accepts it as a norm. That he interprets
women's sufferings, their symptoms, their dissatisfactions, in terms of their individual histories, without questioning the relationship of their 'pathology' to a certain state of society, of culture. (70)

All of the terms symbolise her status as an ‘Angel in the House’; idealised, chaste, something to be taken care of. Feminist writer, Olive Schreiner would likely have called her a “parasitic woman” (qtd. in Ledger 42). The narrator, for her part, is seemingly satisfied with this, she herself referring to her husband as being “my father and my brother and my son” (Rebecca 145). As she had no living relatives at time she had a job as a paid companion to the affluent and pretentious Mrs Van Hopper, it might have been the case that the narrator was in pursuit of an controlling father surrogate, or, as Plath expressed it in her poem Daddy, a “man in black with a Meinkampf look”, a role which Maxim appears to have no qualms about to fulfil (qtd. in Beauman, “Rebecca”).

It is fact that a father’s absence affects children not because their households are poorer and their mothers are more strained, but because they lack a father figure, a model, a disciplinarian, and a male figure in their lives. Freud asserts that, “I cannot think of any need in childhood as strong as the need for a father’s protection” (CAD 32). Her hunt for this man comprised both self-effacement and abnegation and she duly finds her ideal in de Winter, whose last name signifies sterility, frostiness, an unproductive season, and whose Christian name- Maxim, as she always abbreviates it – is a synonym for a rule of conduct. It is also the name of a weapon- a machine gun. In this light it appears fitting and simultaneously ironic that Maxim suggests she dresses up as Alice in Wonderland for the ball: the tale of an naive girl uncovering a strange yet alluring world appears to resemble the tale of the narrator herself, who goes further and further down the rabbit hole, discovering her inner self although she does not wish to.

Maxim is thus supplying her with a ghostly persona consonant with her characterisation as a child. But an alternative role is also forged for the second Mrs de Winter at this juncture: the fact that she essentially appears wearing a dress copied from a portrait of Caroline de Winter, identical to the one worn by Rebecca for her last fancy-dress ball at Manderley, invests her with an adult identity. If Maxim is an apparent father
figure, Rebecca (a boyish Snow Queen) takes the place of the Oedipal mother-rival that must be destroyed if the daughter-narrator is to take her place as ‘Mrs de Winter’. Rebecca’s serpentine—“She gave you the feeling of a snake”, says Ben (Rebecca 154)—connect her with Lee’s Snake-Lady, the phallic mother.

In Powers of Horror, Kristeva talks about in detail the process of identity formation and proposes that the first thing to be abjected is the mother’s body and this accounts for the proposed expulsion of the mother both from theories on identity and the Gothic world. In this sense, Kristeva is in favour of the subject in-process that accords her subject a fluid identity. In narrator’s case she has to abject both the mother bodies of Rebecca and Mrs Van Hopper in order to attain an independent identity of her own as it corresponds to Kristeva’s abject theory, in which also the maternal body with death and dissolution is identified and consequently declared the abject.

On the other hand, Irigaray in The Irigaray Reader (1992) stresses that women must retain and value their attachment to the mother: “Neither little girl nor woman must give up love for their mother. Doing so uproots them from their identity, their subjectivity” (44). Moreover, they must reclaim their mothers history as subjects rather than mothers: “It is also necessary, if we are not to be accomplices in the murder of the mother, for us to assert that there is a genealogy of women. [...] Let us try to situate ourselves within this female genealogy so as to conquer and keep our identity” (44). Mrs. Van Hopper, a woman who takes over the role of mother in narrator’s life and is somewhere acts as a danger to her individual identity. Mrs. Van Hopper, considerably “a woman old enough to be [the narrator’s] mother” (Rebecca 19), is a charade as far as maternity is concerned. She treats her young “companion” (Rebecca 24) as a kind of all-purpose maid, while at the same time thwarting her continuously, and involving her repeatedly in her shameless attempts at social climbing.

It is appropriate, then, that she is something of a physical caricature with the exaggerated breasts and hips of a fertility goddess; motherly features that are undercut, however, by an incongruous and irreverently described “expanse of forehead” that is as “bare as a schoolboy’s knee” (Rebecca 9). In spite of her comic construction, Mrs Van Hopper constitutes a real and concrete threat to the heroine’s process of identity
formation. This is simply because the position in which the narrator is employed requires that she be entirely self-effacing. The aged woman expects a silent helper, someone passive and submissive who follows orders and meets her demands—someone to trot, as the narrator has done, “in her shadow, drab and dumb” (*Rebecca* 59). The young woman is, in her employer’s eyes, saturated by this position and she regards her as fairly without any objective and free desires and decisions, or an identity of her own, and nowhere is this clearer than in her surprised reception of the news that the narrator is getting married. “Still waters certainly run deep in your case” (*Rebecca* 58), she states, evidently articulating the lack of personality by which she has thus far understood her companion to be characterised.

As a result of Mrs Van Hopper’s continual authoritative attitude, the narrator feels as if she has little will of her own. She finds no alternative, for instance, to her employer’s decision to leave for America. “Why in heaven’s name go with her . . .?” Maxim asks, to which she plainly answers, “I have to” (*Rebecca* 50). Hence the older woman appositely reveals the narcissistic quality by which, Chodorow argues, a mother’s relationship with her is defined, and which results in the child finding it almost difficult and unfeasible to separate. For this to happen there is a rejection, a pushing away of that which is not me. Mrs Van Hopper’s propensity to subsume her young companion under the broad terms of her own identity thus implies the overwhelming maternal. She renders her employee, whose prime objective must be the gratification of her will, an extension of herself, such that the two women remain at endless risk of being, in the narrator’s own startled words, “bracket[ed] together” (*Rebecca* 16). Narrator is not free to be what she wants to and is mere marionette in the hands of her master. Kristeva asserts that: “The relation to abjection is finally rooted in the combat that every human being carries on with the mother. For in order to become autonomous, it is necessary that one cut the instinctual dyad of the mother and the child and that one become something other” (Kristeva & Oliver 375).

Rebecca is a second ghostly mother figure whose presence is felt everywhere and acts as a maternal threat to Mrs Winters and even a great threat to symbolic order of Manderley: “Rebecca, always Rebecca. Wherever I walked in Manderley, wherever I sat,
even in my thoughts and in my dreams, I met Rebecca… I knew the scent she wore; I could guess her laughter and her smile. If I heard it, even among a thousand others, I should recognize her voice. Rebecca, always Rebecca. I should never be rid of Rebecca” (*Rebecca* 233-234). Kristeva describes the horror of the cadaver figure; “[t]he corpse (or cadaver), that which has irremediably come a cropper, is cesspool, and death; it upsets even more violently the one who confronts it as fragile and fallacious chance” (*POH* 3). Even Mrs. Danvers states:

> It’s not only this room . . . It’s in many rooms in the house. In the morning-room, in the hall, even in the little flower room. I feel her everywhere. You do too, don’t you? . . . Sometimes, when I walk along the corridor here, I fancy I hear her just behind me. That quick, light footstep. I could not mistake it anywhere . . . I can fancy the sound of her dress sweeping the stairs as she comes down to dinner…Do you think the dead come back and watch the living?” (*Rebecca* 172)

Manderley’s symbolic order is hidden in the name of “Manderley” from the first syllable of “Man”, which identifies this place as patriarchal occupied. Thus the estate is also a ‘world of class-bound patriarchal authority’. About the patriarchal character Maxims and thus Manderleys show the structure of his thinking and his world into binary, hierarchical oppositions. He is a tyrant as his very name summons up coldness, stiffness, even a slightly repressive streak. He controls and totally oppresses his wife and constraints her from living profusely as Rebecca did. All the second Mrs. De Winter expects from her husband is his love and tenderness, but he constantly shuts her out of his opinions and feelings, handling her as a pet dog he pets absentmindedly. A conversation during the marriage proposal demonstrates the patriarchal ideology of Maxim and shows the heroine’s steady preoccupation with class:

> “I don’t think I know how to explain. I don’t belong to your sort of world for one thing.”
“What is my world?”

“Well- Manderley. You know what I mean.”

“You are almost as ignorant as Mrs. Van Hopper, and just as unintelligent. What do you know of Manderley? I’m the person to judge that, whether you would belong there or not”. (*Rebecca* 52)

For Maxim it is established “Women are not like men” (*Rebecca* 268), and separates the sexes from each other not physically, but also in their ability to think, because the “twisted, torturous minds of women” (*Rebecca* 201) in his views are inscrutable and confusing. During the time “Rebecca” was published, the man was still the head of the household, and woman persistently fought for equal rights. Women in this time could sympathize with the second Mrs. De Winter, for they were able to share her anguish due to a domineering and stern husband. For Michelle Masse, the Gothic romance is about female masochism, as it portrays “suffering women whose painful initiations provide some vague pleasure for women authors, characters, and readers” (qtd. in Pyrhönen 117).

Following the cultural gender dichotomy, Rebecca is displaced as a woman in the sphere of nature and seem even to be a force of nature, as her seductive, autonomous eroticism added journeyman male power and domination of nature. She is a New Woman with an independent frame of mind that even Manderley continues to run according to Rebecca’s instructions; no changes are made in the environs she designed; her study, bedroom, and wardrobe are left intact; and even the fancy dress ball follows her arrangements. Rebecca’s moral stance was ‘not normal’, and if Mrs Danvers’s account is to be understood, Rebecca’s sexual experiences certainly were quite unrestrained. The lovemaking with the many men was all a game for Rebecca, Mrs Danvers asserts, and she did it because it made her laugh: “No one got the better of her, never, never” (*Rebecca* 243). Though influencing and controlling people is usually not a positive trait, Rebecca might, to a certain extent, be exempted from her behaviour when doing it in
rebellion against the conventional institution of marriage, which she was supposedly forced into, and all the conventions of class values and societal norms it brought with it.

According to Maxim, Rebecca would scorn people behind their backs – yet, upper class people and all their affectations are mocked by the novel itself as well, including by Maxim and the narrator themselves, particularly in the form of Mrs Van Hopper, who is scorned by them on almost every occasion. The fact that Rebecca blatantly adhered to this traditional, Victorian environment she was brought into as a wife, but ridiculed it at the same time does not essentially make her a morally corrupted person, but perhaps more so a rebel who fights the established order because she does not agree with it, and above all unmask its hypocrisy. Mrs Danvers might have been the only person who saw this side of Rebecca. She even mentions that Rebecca would often laugh at people: “I’ve known her come back and sit upstairs in her bed and rock with laughter at the lot of you” (Rebecca 340). Rebecca, then, seems to have found it, above all else, noticeably funny to expose people’s pretence and duplicity and use it against them.

Moreover, the ‘psychic unlivability’ which Butler pointed out as a threat against those suspected of ‘queer’ behaviour, is marked as physical unlivability in Rebecca since she had a deformation of the womb which prohibited her from ever producing children. Following Butler, who states that reproductivity was the domain than women ought to be fully restricted to according to society, Patricia MacCormack argues that “sexually women are defined through their reproductive capacity rather than their desire” (116). The aspect of reproductivity and that which biologically defines one as a woman is absent in Rebecca. Again, she is defined as a nonhuman not only because she did not possess that which sexually and biologically defines a woman as a woman, but also as she instead turns her sexual desire and pleasure, usually reserved for men, into her own female identity, unhindered by guilt.

Rebecca’s illness, of which it is robustly implied that it was cancer of the uterus, further, symbolises the abjection of her masculinised femininity. Cancer, a malevolent, uncontrolled growth of cells, might symbolically represent Rebecca’s lack of control in her love affairs, or the manifestation of having normative society’s label ‘mental illness’, but it can also imply a growth of negative feelings – those of aggravation about and
rebellion against the restrictive corset that society forces women to wear. If it was in reality cancer of the uterus, the uterus representing the base of womanhood, where life grows, it is also the base of Rebecca’s worries, namely her identity as a woman which was forced by ‘the law of sex’ to fit into certain categories, particularly that of motherhood, and be expelled from others, namely that of sexual fervency.

Du Maurier’s attitude toward female disability is also gentler in the novels, where she tends to conform to the (perhaps uncomfortable) romantic stereotype of female illness as a form of containment for female independence. Nina Auerbach in Haunted Heiress notes that in the novels, Du Maurier’s most independent women become either “paralysed” or devoured from within, usually by some variety of female cancer, “crippled or cancerous, du Maurier women are doomed, not because they are weak . . . but because they are not really women . . . they do not love enough, or well enough, or consistently enough, or at all” (111-112). According to her, this uterine cancer is “a recurrent symptom . . . of the refusal to love” (111).

Auerbach points to Rebecca’s posthumously diagnosed uterine cancer and ‘malformation of the uterus’, and the uterine cancer prevents her from having the children she craves. It is later learned that Rebecca could not have children due to a malfunctioning of the womb; although it is not known how she feels about this, she does use motherhood as a way of an ultimate taunt towards Max. By mentioning she is pregnant with another man’s child (of which it is heavily implied that her cousin Jack Favell, is the father, which makes the baby a product of incest and therefore all the more a monstrous pregnancy), she arouses Maxim’s ultimate fear, which forms the trigger to shoot her: namely, that another man’s child, an outsider, will inherit Manderley and take over the de Winter legacy of which he is so proud.

Rebecca’s sickness and subsequent death are in many ways evocative of the warning that Butler issues when one does not conform to the conventional model of what she deems “heterosexual imperatives” (Butler 3). She quotes Freud’s The Ego and the Id in pronouncing that at times, “sexuality [is figured] as illness”, this illness being “symptomatic of the structuring presence of a moralistic framework of guilt” (qtd. in Butler 63). By persistently being illustrated as being ‘ill’–that is, mentally ill or abnormal
– for having sexual desire, Rebecca subsequently became physically ill. It is the threat of abjection, Butler writes, that makes people identify with what she calls “the law of sex” (14). Those who do not are endangered, by means of psychosis, ostracism, and “psychic unlivability” – the latter involving that it is not possible to live normally as an abject body (Butler 15). Violation of certain taboos will bring on “the spectre of psychosis”, and one will lose the status as subject (or a body within cultural intelligibility) and be ostracised from “normal” society (Butler 98). Rebecca is portrayed as a devil by her husband, with characteristics that can easily be accredited to a psychopath – being shrewd and manipulative, possessing no empathy, remorse or guilt, inability to love (Rebecca 29).

Rebecca thus rejected the social conventions and, as Judith Butler asserts, the threat of death became reality. Mrs Danvers claims that Rebecca “was beaten in the end. But it wasn’t a man, it wasn’t a woman. The sea got her. The sea was too strong for her. The sea got her in the end” (Rebecca 244). Although we later find out that Rebecca did not drown, it can still be argued that it was indeed the “sea” that got to Rebecca, namely, the “sea” within her, her fluidity, her identity as a woman possessing (too much) masculinity for conventional womanhood to live in a heteronormative society. It is therefore no surprise that the Modern or New Woman was referred to as a woman who was “adrift”: not merely, as Freeman in an article “Image and Lifestyle” explains it, women who lived independently from their parents and in a working-class environment, but also as women who had drifted away from normal social conventions.

Rebecca, being associated to the sea on numerous occasions and at last having merged with the sea, is the final and crucial woman adrift. That Rebecca chose her own death rather than dying of an illness that heavily implicates her own inability to live as a restrained woman might be a decisive act of retribution. Although Maxim believes she ridiculed and insulted him into murdering her as a way to make his life miserable even after her death, perhaps going to jail for the murder but at the very least having to live with the fear of being found out someday, her choice might also ascend above mere pettiness and ensure her way of having the final word. As she chose Maxim, the embodiment of the heterosexual matrix, to kill her by aggravating him, she made it so that it was society which could not live with her, the threat of (Victorian) heterosexuality,
and is thus forced to silence her, hereby highlighting its own fear of those who live in the abject and making it aware of their existence. The narrator may have gotten her husband, but Rebecca has gotten the last word, and the title of the book. In that sense, Rebecca is a true “New” Woman. The coming of the “New” or “Modern” Woman produced many different responses. She had a clear voice, which was used as a mouthpiece both by her rivals and by her supporters; one attempted to ridicule and restrain her, the other let her rampant. Represented as a heroine, a monster, a sexual deviant, and a-sexual body, the response to her was multi-fold. Very much like her gender, her identity was fluid.

The “Modern” Woman was the first woman to seize formerly purely masculine attributes and declare them as hers, too. By doing this, she tore apart the social fabric of which gender conventions existed, hereby disturbing not only the boundaries between “male” and “female” but also the foundation of society which rested upon these pillars. The New Woman was, most of all, a reminder of changing times, being an ally of the Modern and an opponent to Convention. For her opponents, she was an abomination of what a ‘real’ woman should be. Abnormal, insane, perverted- all terms that were applied to the “Modern” Woman, and all terms that imply an inversion of societal norms.

In all her fluidity, possessing both male and female characteristics, she was believed to be neither, a deficient human being. As a consequence, many Modern Women struggled with their newly obtained social freedom, and most of all with the concept of what it meant to be a “woman”. This struggle of New Woman is centralised in the two main female characters as the nameless main character epitomises the inability to (directly) confront one’s own sexuality, and Rebecca symbolises the indulgence of a woman who did not care about conventions. Many women, especially during the Victorian Period, likely reacted to any instance of sexuality in the same manner as Rebecca’s narrator does: publicly disparaging it, refuting and suppressing its existence, but inwardly, unconsciously, also seeking it, identifying with this spectre of sexuality.

As Judith Butler claims, candidly identifying with that which society denounces, so refusing to adhere to the normative standards of that particular time and place, means being detested from “normal” society, forced to live in an “abject” state, which makes it, according to Butler, impossible to function as a human being. If those who are nowadays
considered “queer” are looked at—the mentally ill, criminals, and homosexuals—it can be observed that these people are usually not completely integrated in society; if they attempt to do so, they are generally looked upon with fear, contempt and apprehension. This is how Rebecca can be viewed as well. Since she is dead, the reader will never know her own opinions and feelings but can only make assumptions from what is known—and that is from the profoundly prejudiced perspective of Maxim, the very person who silenced her. Maxim paints her as sexually and morally immoral and corrupt; according to him, Rebecca “was not even normal”, likening to a sociopath who had no feelings of repentance about her own acts of adultery whatsoever, was cunning, and artificial (Rebecca 271). He hereby takes Rebecca’s humanity away from her, even referring to her as ‘what’ (Rebecca 271). She is de-humanised, and subsequently killed, presumably never to be heard from again. However, Rebecca’s spirit returns, and with a revenge.

A totality of disgust and abjection builds up the human body. “The corpse, seen without God and outside of science, is the utmost object of abjection. It is death infecting life” (POH 13). Although she is dead, she has a stronger presence than the main character, which Mrs Danvers puts into words: “It’s you that is the shadow and the ghost. It’s you that’s forgotten and not wanted and pushed aside” (Rebecca 246). Rebecca’s body acts as a metaphor for female subjectivity in that it is equally floating, unstable, and continually altering meaning. When the body is found, the narrator acquires power and is not scared of Mrs. Danvers or Maxim any more. Max turns out to be dependent on her, and this is what makes her “bold at last” (13). Kristeva’s argument plainly deposits that the structure of abjection is inevitable for constructing identities; yet this structure may materialise in different ways. The novel thus supports the feminine mystique by providing a glamorised version of the lives many women do live and lives characterised by passivity, masochism, and victimisation within the domestic environment.