

The Loyal Maid and the Selfish Husband

by Matias Ahrensdoerf

In the twisted gothic novel, *Rebecca*, by Daphne Du Maurier, Mrs. Danvers, the baleful and yet devoted housekeeper, dedicates her life to serve her mistress Rebecca, even after her tragic death. As Mrs. Danvers shows Mrs. DeWinter, Rebecca's chamber, a perfectly preserved and beautiful room overlooking the sea, she boasts, "I did everything for her, you know" (Du Maurier 171). Mrs. Danvers's tour around the bedroom demonstrates that her life still revolves around Rebecca and that her entire identity has become intertwined with her servitude to Rebecca. This obsessive devotion takes such a toll on Danvers's health that at one point in the novel Mrs. De Winter stumbles upon Mrs. Danvers sobbing and describes her as an "old woman who was ill and tired" (245). This statement illustrates the effects of Mrs. Danvers's dedication to the memory of Rebecca on her appearance and even her well-being, leaving her sickly and empty without her mistress, her source of happiness. When the narrator, distraught and embarrassed, goes to confront Mrs. Danvers after she had cunningly tricked her into making a fool of herself, Mrs. Danvers lashes out at the new Mrs. De Winter by declaring, "How do you think I've liked it, watching you sit in her place, walk in her footsteps, touch the things that were hers" (246). Bitter and resentful, this proclamation from Mrs. Danvers reveals that she worships the dead Rebecca as though she were a holy being and regards any attempts to replace her as blasphemous. Throughout the novel Mrs. Danvers might appear as a simply sadistic and nefarious human being but the novel also presents her as a loyal and faithful disciple to her dead mistress.

Maxim De Winter, the self-centered lord of Manderley, lets his poor second wife suffer throughout the story, never taking the time to comfort her and explain that he doesn't love Rebecca, his cold-hearted yet popular first wife. When the narrator first notices that Mrs. Danvers despises her, she informs her husband, who promptly dismisses her concern, declaring, "Let's forget about Mrs. Danvers, she doesn't interest me very much, I'm afraid" (77). Maxim's new bride, insecure and frightened, shares her worries with him, but rather than helping her he fails to take her troubles seriously and evidently puts them out of his mind. When Beatrice, Maxim's well-meaning and talkative sister, comes to visit she tells the narrator that Maxim "went through a ghastly time, and let's hope you have made him forget about it" (100). Maxim has given his sister and everyone else around him the impression that Rebecca was a perfect wife whom he loved greatly but never for one second does he stop to think how this impression might affect his new wife. When Mrs. Danvers is showing Rebecca's old rooms to the new Mrs. De Winter, she explains that Maxim "has not used these rooms since the night she was drowned" (174). Maxim, thoughtless and indifferent, leaves all of Rebecca's belongings just as they were before she died without bothering to consider the pain he is thereby causing his new wife to feel. Mr. De Winter cares only for himself, oblivious to the fact that his new wife is tortured by the constant reminders of Rebecca throughout Manderley.

Work Cited

Du Maurier, Daphne. *Rebecca*. New York: HarperCollins, 2006. Print.