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**“You have a lovely and unusual name.”
Mrs de Winter from Daphne du Maurier’s *Rebecca* –
a Gothic Heroine in Search of Identity**

ABSTRACT

The paper is devoted to the analysis of Mrs de Winter, one of the main characters from Daphne du Maurier’s *Rebecca*, as an example of a Gothic figure. The analysis traces the stages in the development of the heroine by demonstrating how she first becomes, through the process of *gothicisation*, “the Gothic damsel in distress.” Vulnerable and easily threatened, she is defined solely in relation to her aristocratic husband, whose status she is unable to match. Then, however, as a result of her growth as an individual, Mrs de Winter is *degothicised*. We witness a change in her attitude toward her tormentors: she no longer feels intimidated; she starts developing, in what we view as an identity-building process, her public and personal sense of a mature and independent individual.

Keywords: Daphne du Maurier, *Rebecca*, Gothic novel, damsel in distress, degothicisation

1. Introduction

The concept of identity has been used, as Steph Lawler (2014) observes, “in a wide-ranging and inclusive way to mean both its public manifestations – which might be called ‘roles’ or identity categories – and the more personal, ambivalent, reflective and reflexive sense that people have of who they are” (p.7). By adopting such a broad perspective we are able to analyse “the more conflictual, complex and cross-category processes by which a person or a self gets to be produced” – the procedure which focuses on one’s sense of oneself as well as on the perception of an individual by others, and the individual’s reaction to these perceptions (pp. 7-8). Seen in this light, identity is taken to be a construct, a result of the dynamic process of (self)-definition or identification carried out in a broader context (p. 10).

Defined in this way, the notion of identity can be applied to the analysis of a literary character. It will play a pivotal role in our analysis of Mrs de Winter, Daphne du Maurier’s Gothic protagonist of the novel *Rebecca*, whose identity

is constructed and defined in the course of her own retrospective narrative. The process of Mrs de Winter's self-definition is carried out primarily in relation to, and by her confrontation with, three characters in the novel: her husband, Mr de Winter; Mrs Danvers, the loyal servant to his dead wife Rebecca; and Rebecca herself, whose haunting presence in Mr de Winter's estate at Manderley exerts a powerful influence on his new wife.

This paper intends to show how the naïve, inexperienced nameless young woman, of whom we know very little – a perfect candidate for the Gothic “damsel in distress” – and who is initially “defined” in relation to her husband and the class he represents, develops and builds her own (female, class and personal) identity. It also demonstrates how, as the plot develops, this process of definition gains momentum, resulting in the reconfiguration of social relations on the one hand and in identity construction on the other. It is argued that this process of the search for identity goes through stages. In the first stage, the protagonist is “gothicised” and acquires traits of a Gothic heroine when she becomes Mrs de Winter and arrives at Manderley, a place which, as critics agree, has features of a Gothic abode.¹ In the course of the story, this process is reversed, resulting in the “degothicisation” of the heroine, who develops and builds her own identity no longer marked by the “damsel-in-distress” label.

Most of the studies devoted to du Maurier's *Rebecca* focus on the eponymous character, who, although never present in person, haunts the pages of the novel.² She has been intriguing enough to be compared by critics to Desdemona (Nigro, 2000); her status as a literary figure has also been likened to that of Dracula³ or Frankenstein (Horner & Zlosnik, 1998, p. 99). Mrs de Winter, in turn, has been considered to bear a similarity to Jane Eyre. Furthermore, the impact of fairy tales, “Cinderella” and “Bluebeard,” on du Maurier's novel, has been acknowledged by critics (cf. e.g., Beauman, 2006, p. x). With Catherine Morland from *Northanger Abbey*, the nameless heroine shares “social, intellectual and sexual naivety” (Horner & Zlosnik, 1998, p. 103). Thus, firmly rooted in the literary tradition, the creation of both Rebecca and her successor, Mrs de Winter, has attracted critical

¹ It can also be claimed that by adopting her husband's name the protagonist receives a kind of pseudo-identity as she does not recognize herself as Mrs de Winter. It is only later, at the end of the story that she begins to think of herself as Mrs de Winter.

² In her study, Marta Kőrösi (2002) enumerates different “layers of interpretation to construe Rebecca as a system of reference: Rebecca as a referential construction to interpret gender; Rebecca as a semiotic construction created by means of objects; Rebecca as the narrator's double; Rebecca as body; and Rebecca as writing and narrative. These layers do not appear separately in the text, as they all depend on one another in their methods and purpose of constructing Rebecca.”

³ Rebecca has been seen to have the features of a vampire: “Facial pallor, plentiful hair and voracious sexual appetite” (Horner & Zlosnik, 1998, p. 111). In a sense, it seems, she may be treated as “undead” – like a vampire, Horner and Zlosnik posit, “she has to be ‘killed’ more than once”. In fact, she represents “the Fatal Woman” (pp. 111-112).

attention. In particular, the impact of the Gothic convention has been widely recognised.

The novel has been read as a modern rewrite of the Bluebeard tale, as “a Gothic love story, in which a virtuous woman triumphs over an evil one by winning the love of a gentleman” (Llompart Pons, 2013, p. 70), as an example of “Female Gothic” and as a “psychological thriller” (Wisker, 2003, p. 86). Richard Kelly describes the novel as “a profound and fascinating study of an obsessive personality, of sexual dominance, of human identity, and of the liberation of the hidden self” (p. 54, quoted in Frank, 2005, p. 239). Horner and Zlosnik (1998, p. 99) have interpreted du Maurier’s novel as one in which “the narrator’s identity is haunted by an Other, and in which Manderley is seen, like all classic Gothic buildings, to be a house haunted by its secrets.” They also argue that “Rebecca, treated as a Gothic rendering of the Other Woman, becomes one of those ‘perfect figure(s) for negative identity’ which, according to Judith Halberstam, endow certain Gothic texts with the potential for multiple meaning” (p. 100). In particular, Horner and Zlosnik claim, du Maurier’s novel shows “female identity as complex and multifaceted” (p. 100).

There are also studies which challenge the more traditional approaches to *Rebecca*. For example, Gina Wisker (2003) sees du Maurier’s *Rebecca*, as well as some of her stories, as ones which, she argues, “destabilise romantic fiction foundations, disturb the trajectory of conventional narratives, and expose the oppressions and destructively held myths of romantic fiction” (p. 84).

As Horner and Zlosnik (1998, p. 103) assert, the novel charts Mrs de Winter’s quest from ignorance to knowledge and the reader is made to follow the quest, guided by the narrator who recounts this quest retrospectively. I would like to claim that this quest can be looked at in terms of identity-building process which is parallel to the heroine first acquiring the Gothic features of a damsel-in-distress and then freeing herself from them in the process of degothicisation, thereby shaping her independent personality. The narrative Mrs de Winter offers as the protagonist contributes to building her own identity. Significantly, Mrs de Winter’s first name remains unknown. As Armit (2000, p. 104) aptly puts it, *Rebecca* is a story of “the woman with no name and the woman who has nothing and is nothing *but* her name.” All we know about the name is that it is, according to Mr de Winter, “a lovely and unusual” one (*R.*, p. 25). The protagonist of du Maurier’s novel develops from the nonentity she is at the beginning (“prim, silent, and subdued” [*R.*, p. 25]) to becoming a full-fledged individual, no longer susceptible, it seems, to Gothic experiences and ready to challenge others instead of being challenged herself.

The story is narrated, as mentioned above, by the protagonist and the episodes which mould the personality of the heroine are shown from her perspective. These episodes relate primarily to the three important characters with whom Mrs de Winter interacts: her husband Maxim, Mrs Danvers, and Rebecca, whose ghostly presence

dogs the heroine. In the picture of Maxim she constructs, she sees him as a wonderman, a man she does not deserve. He is a remote figure, rarely present and rarely shown in interaction with his wife, which also impairs her sense of self-esteem. Rebecca is seen by Mrs de Winter as a model to follow, which she fails to match. Mrs Danvers, as the guardian of Rebecca's memory in *Manderley*, is her tormentor. It is through the interaction with these figures that Mrs de Winter develops her sense of self. They become important factors in creating her identity.

2. Mrs de Winter – her younger self

In the opening chapters of the novel, in her retrospective narration, Mrs de Winter presents her younger self as a lonely woman of twenty-one, shy, socially inexperienced, not very likely to change her life as a paid companion to Mrs Van Hopper. Her features can be looked at by the reader as conducive to becoming a Gothic heroine – one who is traditionally of “unexceptional appearance, [...] sexually innocent and highly romantic [...] [and] marked by [a] self-deprecatory tendency” (Radway, quoted in Haddad, 2012).

The protagonist of du Maurier's novel is strongly critical of herself, full of disbelief in her attractiveness as a young woman. Recollecting her stay at Monte Carlo as Mrs Van Hopper's companion, the narrator describes her own position as conspicuously “inferior and subservient” to her employer's (*R.*, p. 11),⁴ a feature easily noticed by the waiters and servants who, accordingly, treat her in a patronising way. She realises that, as befits a paid companion to an aristocratic lady, she is perceived as “a youthful *thing* and unimportant” (*R.*, p. 14; emphasis added) who is not included in a conversation, and who “could safely be ignored” (*R.*, p. 14). For this reason she is often distressed and blushes (“I felt the colour flood into my face” [*R.*, p. 16]) when she finds the circumstances embarrassing. She lacks experience of social codes and conventions, and speaks of herself at that time as “too young” (*R.*, p. 16), or “feeling like a child that had been smacked” (*R.*, p. 16). She is too shy – as “the raw ex-school girl, red-elbowed and lanky-haired” – to feel comfortable when involved by Mr de Winter in a conversation about Monte Carlo (*R.*, p. 17).

When invited to lunch with Mr de Winter, she is encouraged by him to talk about her family, her father, and the death of her parents – an experience which makes her feel she “had [...] risen in importance” (*R.*, p. 27). She recollects this episode as one which brought about “a total change from his usual attitude of indifference” (*R.*, p. 27). And even if for a moment she “found the change depressing” (*R.*, p. 27), she soon discovers that “she was a person of importance, [she] was grown up at last. That girl who, tortured by shyness, would stand outside

⁴ All quotations from *Rebecca* are taken from Du Maurier (2006/1938) and will henceforth be documented with *R* and page numbers in parentheses.

the sitting-room door twisting a handkerchief in her hands [...] – she had gone with the wind that afternoon" (*R.*, p. 30). While this change seemed to be welcome and was followed by a marriage proposal (although her immediate reaction was "I'm not the sort of person men marry. [...] I don't belong to your sort of world for one thing" [*R.*, p. 57]), its long-term consequences are much more serious and can be looked at in terms of an experience typical of Gothic fiction.

By accepting the marriage proposal from Maxim, a widower twice her age, who is recovering from the tragic death of his wife Rebecca, assumed to have died as a result of a sailing accident, the young woman embarks on the path to a life for which she has been completely unprepared. The remark that Mrs Van Hopper made when saying good bye to her sounds like a warning: "Naturally one wants you to be happy, and I grant you he's a very attractive creature but – well, I'm sorry; and personally I think you're making a big mistake – one you'll bitterly regret" (*R.*, p. 66). The warning is enhanced by her farewell words: "[Y]ou know why he's marrying you, don't you? You haven't flattered yourself he's in love with you? The fact is that empty house got on his nerves to such an extent he nearly went off his head. He admitted as much before you came into the room. He just can't go on living there alone..." (*R.*, p. 67). These words foreshadow the events that are going to take place later on.

Interestingly, Mr de Winter does not introduce changes to Manderley after Rebecca's death. By keeping the traces of his former wife, Maxim forces himself to experience her more immediately than he would if she were merely a memory (Körösi, 2002). This also results in forcing his current wife into confronting Rebecca as the "Other Woman," whose constant ghostly presence is perpetuated by the sinister housekeeper – Mrs Danvers.

3. Mrs de Winter – Maxim's wife in Manderley

The novel is described in the blurb on the back cover of its 2003 edition as "the haunting story of a young girl consumed by love and the struggle to find her identity." It is precisely this "struggle to find *identity*" that is most closely related to the Gothic character of the novel. The search for identity is also inseparable from the protagonist's experience of Manderley, the central setting in the novel. The second Mrs de Winter is introduced to Manderley (incidentally, the place she knows from a postcard she bought as a teenage girl and which she idealised in her imagination) seven weeks after her wedding to Maxim. Interestingly, Maxim wants to marry the young woman hurriedly, in an office, where "the whole thing can be so easily arranged in a few days" (*R.*, p. 61), without church bells or the choir boys the young bride would expect. In response to his bride's surprise, he answers: "You forget," he said, "I had that sort of wedding before" (*R.*, p. 61). This kind of "wedding context" may arouse suspicion and, as befits a Gothic tale, is likely to be followed by emotionally-laden events.

Mrs de Winter's marriage is indeed the starting point for her Gothic plight. There is a silver lining to her experience though, which, however bitter, will ultimately result in her growth to (self)-identity. To begin with, unlike in stereotypical Gothic novels, the young woman's marriage to the wealthy aristocrat does not conclude a Gothic plot with "they lived happily ever after." Rather, it initiates it. Although getting married to Mr de Winter provides an impulse for his wife to undergo the transformation which results in her identity building and achieving integrity as a character, this comes at a price. Without Mr de Winter, the nameless heroine would have probably remained a paid companion to Mrs Van Hopper. Coming to Maxim's aristocratic estate is a stage on her "road to building her identity" (Tóth, 2010, p. 30). Although at first glance her status as a wife to an aristocratic husband may seem to indicate social advancement and offer a guarantee of a stable social position, it becomes a threat to her, resulting in her victimisation, which is a typically Gothic course of events.

Mrs de Winter's journey to Manderley foreshadows the Gothic experiences she is going to encounter there. First of all, she has a feeling of getting entrapped (a characteristic feature of the Gothic convention and a typically Gothic experience) as soon as she passes the gate to her husband's estate. Every detail of the description below contributes to the creation of the strange, of the numinous:

The gates had shut to with a crash behind us, the dusty road was out of sight, and I became aware that this was not the drive I had imagined would be the Manderley's, this was not a broad and spacious thing of gravel, flanked with neat turf at either side, kept smooth with rake and brush.

This drive twisted and turned as a serpent, scarce wider in places than a path, and above our heads was a great colonnade of trees, whose branches nodded and intermingled with one another, making an archway for us, like the roof of a church. Even the midday sun would not penetrate the interlacing of those green leaves, they were too thickly entwined, one with another, and only little flickering patches of warm light would come in intermittent waves to dapple the drive with gold. It was very silent, very still. On the high road there had been a gay west wind blowing in my face, making the grass on the hedges dance in unison, but here there was no wind. (*R.*, p. 71)

The border is drawn between the ordinary, everyday world and the numinous world: "the world of the sublime, terrifying, chaotic" (cf. Aguirre, 2002, p. 3). The narrator gets the feeling of being entrapped not only in the physical sense but also, and more importantly, in the psychological. Her liberation from this custody (cf. *R.*, p. 102) will be a pivotal part of the identity building process. Indeed, Mrs de Winter finds her new environment of Manderley hostile and she cannot adjust to her new position as a wife to Maxim, whose former aristocratic wife, Rebecca, was considered to be an exceptional person in many ways.⁵ The narrator

⁵ Incidentally, the reader's image of Rebecca is constructed, to a great extent, on the basis of

describes her daily experience in Gothic terms: the estate, although modernised, is mysterious to her; the west wing including Rebecca's bedroom is locked and Mrs de Winter is not encouraged to enter it.⁶ The estate is old indeed and "has been in his family's possession since the Conquest" (*R.*, p. 16). Rebecca's ghost hovers over the estate, rendering Manderley Gothic. This is one of the reasons why the threatened and scared Mrs de Winter feels uncomfortable in the luxurious surroundings of Manderley: "You would not think she [Rebecca] had just gone out for a little while and would back in the evening.' [...] 'It's not only this room,' she [Mrs Danvers] said. 'It's in many rooms in the house. [...] I feel her everywhere. You do too, don't you?'" (*R.*, p. 194) (cf. Kędra-Kardela, 2015, p. 175). The quotation is also an illustration of the role Mrs Danvers fulfils as a "living extension" of Rebecca, whose presence as a ghost she perpetuates.

The presence of Mrs Danvers, whose appearance has the features of a Gothic villain, almost like a vampire, enhances the sense of horror experienced by Mrs de Winter. Her first encounter with her makes her notice the housekeeper's "lifeless" voice and hands (*R.*, p. 74), "a little smile of scorn upon her lips." As she says, "[s]omething in the expression of her face, gave me a feeling of unrest" (*R.*, p. 75). This feeling of unrest is going to define the heroine and her relationship with Mrs Danvers, who, although socially inferior to Mrs de Winter, refuses to recognise this and thus constantly weakens the protagonist's self-esteem.

Mr de Winter's ancient Manderley estate does not become a real home to his wife: she feels like a stranger there. For her it is a haunted place, with a room she is not supposed to enter, and a labyrinth of corridors and staircases. Mrs de Winter feels constantly dogged by the feeling of inability to match Rebecca in her aristocratic manners, in her social skills. She does not think of herself as Mrs de Winter. For instance, in a telephone conversation, when addressed as "Mrs de Winter," she automatically responds that "Mrs de Winter has been dead for over a year" (*R.*, p. 95).

At the earlier stages of plot development Mrs de Winter cannot get rid of the persistent feeling of Rebecca's presence: "Rebecca, always Rebecca. Wherever I walked in Manderley, wherever I sat, even in my thoughts and in my dreams, I met Rebecca. I knew her figure now [...]. I knew the scent she wore, I could guess her laughter and her smile. [...] Rebecca, always Rebecca. I should never be rid of Rebecca. [...] And I could not fight. She was too strong for me" (*R.*, pp. 261-262). The repetition of Rebecca's name in this passage confirms the narrator's

what Mr de Winter says and what we learn from Mrs Danvers' description of Rebecca as a paragon of virtue and beauty (cf. Körösi, 2002).

⁶ This Gothic convention of a closed wing was established as early as Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* and by Clara Reeve who, in her *Old English Baron*, introduces "a vacant wing" (Spector, 1990, p. 1047). Later on, this motif featured in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* and in "The Old Nurse's Story" by Elizabeth Gaskell, to name but a few instances.

obsession with her husband's previous wife. Mrs de Winter constructs an image of Rebecca in her mind as a picture of perfection. Even her handwriting was perfect: when comparing her own handwriting with Rebecca's she notices her own inadequacy. Rebecca's handwriting is perceived by her successor as showing a strong personality. As Horner and Zlosnik (1998) aptly assert, "[t]he household documents written by her signify both acceptance of a certain social role and the ability to carry it out with verve and sophistication" (p. 114), features which Mrs de Winter lacks. By trying to emulate Rebecca, Mrs de Winter creates, as Beauman (2006) puts it, "a chimera," a monster that she has to fight with psychologically up to the moment when the monster is "destroyed" by her: "Patching together a portrait of Rebecca in her mind, she creates a chimera – and an icon of womanhood. Rebecca, she comes to believe, was everything she herself is not: she was a perfect hostess, a perfect sexual partner, a perfect chatelaine and a perfect wife" (pp. x-xi).

However, Mrs de Winter's self-perception changes and Manderley loses its quality of a haunted Gothic space once Maxim reveals to his present wife the terrifying truth that he had murdered Rebecca.⁷ Once he confides in her, he treats her, for the first time, as a wife, partner and as a person capable of supporting him. This moment marks the turning point in Mrs de Winter's identity-building process. Manderley, where this process takes place, becomes an "identity building space," whose perception by Mrs de Winter corresponds to her perception of her own self. It becomes therefore "an objective correlative" of Mrs de Winter's experience including her emotions.⁸

The previous hierarchy in the family which underprivileged Mrs de Winter and prevented her from building her mature sense of self is now subverted. In Chapter 19, when the boat with Rebecca's dead body is discovered at the bottom of the bay, Mrs de Winter's reaction shows her as a woman capable of facing a truly critical situation and sharing her husband's concern. Her earlier tendency to react with anxiety disappears:

⁷ Llompart Pons (2013, p. 74) convincingly argues Mr de Winter is actually a manipulator, who "demonizes Rebecca and blames *her* for *his* crime" (emphasis original). He presents himself as a victim of Rebecca's machinations.

⁸ Tóth (2010) comments on this aspect of the Gothic in fiction in the following way: in Radcliffe's novels, for example, "transformation and development find their objective correlative in physical spaces; in the polarisation of the safe, harmonious pastoral world as opposed to a frightening, urban gothic world. The tender, delicate pastoral world is not only associated with the past, but also with the female sphere, whereas the modern gothic world with its castles and ruins exists in the present and demonstrates restricting male power. The complexity of this pattern is made even more complicated by the introduction of the aesthetic principles of the sublime and the beautiful: as in Burke, these two principles have clear-cut gender associations; the sublime with the male, the beautiful with the female" (p. 23).

‘I’m so sorry,’ I whispered, ‘so terribly, terribly sorry.’ He did not answer. His hand was icy cold. I kissed the back of it, and then the fingers, one by one. ‘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.*’ [emphasis added] (R., p. 296)

The conversation which follows the above exchange between Maxim and his wife reveals his sense of Rebecca being a hindrance in the marital relations with his current wife: “‘Rebecca has won’ he said. [...] ‘her shadow between us all the time,’ he said. ‘Her damned shadow keeping us from one another’” (R., p. 297).

The discovery of the truth about Rebecca, the circumstances of her death on the one hand and of her corruption, disloyalty and marital infidelity as a wife, on the other,⁹ has a profound impact on Mrs de Winter as a psychologically liberating experience. It turns out that a change in her sense of who she is and what she is capable of is possible. Mrs de Winter will no longer be defined “through Rebecca” or “against Rebecca” as her inferior counterpart:

[S]omething new had come upon me that had not been before. My heart, for all its anxiety and doubt, was light and free. I knew then that I *was no longer afraid* of Rebecca. I *did not hate her* any more. Now that I knew her to have been evil and vicious and rotten I did not hate her any more. [...] I could go to the morning-room and sit down at her desk and touch her pen [...]. I could go to her room in the west wing [...] and I should not be afraid. [...] She would never haunt me again. [...] Maxim had never loved her. I did not hate her any more. Her body had come back, her boat had been found [...], but I was *free of her* forever.

I was free now to be with Maxim, to touch him, 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* [emphasis added]. (R., p. 319-320)

Apparently, at this critical moment, Mrs de Winter sees herself as a mature person, no longer a *child*. Her personality, previously defined in relation to Rebecca, whom she believed she could never equal, now acquires new features. Maxim’s second wife is no longer a vulnerable woman, a “Gothic damsel in distress” with the mentality of a child. She develops a “complex and multifaceted” identity as a woman (Horner & Zlosnik 1998:100). Horner and Zlosnik (1998, p. 122) rightly claim that in reaching her full-fledged personality, the change in Mrs de Winter’s attitude to Rebecca, “unlocking the door to Rebecca,” is more important than the change in her relationship with Maxim. However, it is vital to note here that once the relationship of intimacy with her husband is mentioned, an element previously missing in the narrator’s account of her experience as a wife, Mrs de

⁹ It has to be borne in mind that Mrs de Winter received the information concerning Rebecca’s death and its circumstances from Mr de Winter. She takes the information at face value, though there have been reasons to regard Mr de Winter as a manipulator, who aimed at presenting himself in a favourable light, as Llompard Pons indicates (cf. footnote 9).

Winter's femininity is confirmed. As a result of obtaining knowledge about her aristocratic predecessor, Mrs de Winter is liberated and thus is degothicised. Her perception of her environment, of people and places changes and is degothicised too (cf. Kędra-Kardela, 2015). Consequently, she no longer feels threatened by Rebecca, she no longer fears Mrs Danvers as the guardian of Rebecca's memory in Manderley, nor will the ghost of Rebecca haunt her anymore.¹⁰ She is ready to dismiss Mrs Danvers and take over running the house (*R.*, p. 422). Her attitude to her husband changes, too – she can start taking care of Maxim.¹¹ Very much in the manner of the female Gothic, she begins to speak on her own behalf – both as a character and as a narrator. As she narrates her own story, Mrs de Winter is wholly responsible for the picture of herself she conveys. She gains the courage to make her voice audible. The portrait of Mrs de Winter as a literary figure gains considerable psychological complexity.

As mentioned above, the artistic space of Manderley and its perception by Mrs de Winter in Gothic terms and what happens to this perception is an objective correlative (cf. Tóth, 2010, p. 23) of the heroine's development which goes through stages – from being a victim of Rebecca's haunting presence and a passive object of Mrs Danvers' vicious actions to being an active person capable of acting on her own and facing the challenges. Only by acknowledging her difference from Rebecca, which was possible after the discovery of the secret and (not uncontroversial) circumstances of her death, does Mrs de Winter achieve a sense of identity and certain independence. As aptly put by Benwell & Stokoe (2006), “[t]he ‘recognition’ process which is crucial to identity [...] arises through participation in social life,” and they add, by quoting Donald E. Hall (2004, p. 51): “[A]n individual's self-consciousness never exists in isolation [...] it always exists in relationship to an ‘other’ or ‘others’ who serve to validate its existence” (p. 24). In the case of du Maurier's novel, Rebecca, no doubt, is “the Other” who “validates” Mrs de Winter's existence. As a “chimera,” as a monster, Rebecca proved to be “both threatening and liberating” (Horner and Zlosnik, 1998, p. 125) to her successor at Manderley.

The Gothic heroine, whose first “lovely and unusual” name we never get to know and who initially does not identify with her husband's name, at the end

¹⁰ It is worth mentioning that the connection between Rebecca and Mrs Danvers is stronger than one might think: when visiting Doctor Baker, the physician who diagnosed Rebecca with cancer, she “called herself Mrs Danvers” (*R.*, p. 412), apparently to conceal her identity. It is only later, during the investigation into the circumstances of Rebecca's death, that Doctor Baker realised that “Mrs de Winter and Mrs Danvers [was] the same person” (*R.*, p. 413). This seemingly minor detail may account for Mrs Danvers's close attachment to Rebecca, even after her death.

¹¹ Llompart Pons (2013, p. 74) goes as far as to argue that, at this point, “Maxim becomes childish, Mrs de Winter becomes more like a mother figure – a protector” (see also Horner & Zlosnik, 1998, p. 106).

of her narrative, as a result of the “identity building process” combined with the process of degothicisation, becomes a confident individual as Mrs de Winter, capable of performing her role. However, a part of her life remains a (Gothic) mystery: her first and maiden name are never revealed to the reader, consistently concealing a part of her identity.

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