THE HAUNTING OF GENDER AND SEXUALITY IN *REBECCA*

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores Daphne du Maurier's novel *Rebecca*, through Queer and Feminist frameworks. Using the Gothic's inherent framework of binaries (textually, sexually, and gender-based), *Rebecca* can be understood as a Queer Gothic text. The Narrator, Rebecca, and Mrs. Danvers will be characters of exploration, examining how each disrupts patriarchal conventions of gender and/or sexual conventions. Ultimately it will be suggested that the haunting of Rebecca's memory throughout the novel, allows for a transition away from traditional patriarchal conventions of gender.

INTRODUCTION

Despite being published in 1938, Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca* would become synonymous with Gothic literature in the Postmodern literary period that followed. Her utilization of Rebecca, who never appears corporeally in the novel, as the source of haunting, simultaneously contradicts and upholds previous traditions of Gothic literature. *Rebecca* provides a unique opportunity to examine the intersections of gender and sexuality with the Gothic genre. While previous interpretations have focused on these conventions separately, analyzing *Rebecca* through perspectives of gender and sexuality, as well as Gothic perceptions of haunting, provides a richness of material not previously encountered. Beginning with an overview of Gothic literature (including both its history, its tradition of disrupting binaries, and the Queer Gothic), before delving into viewing *Rebecca* as not just Gothic, but a *Queer* Gothic text. Unlike current scholarship on *Rebecca*, the application of the novel as a Queer Gothic will combine conversations of Gothic binary disruption and queerness within du Maurier's novel. Finally, an overview of Manderley, Rebecca, Mrs. Danvers, and the Narrator will be conducted to analyze how haunting (both by Rebecca's memory but by the strict gender and sexual binaries enforced on women), ultimately create a novel in which desire and haunting are inexplicably tied.

THE GOTHIC GENRE

Despite traditional Gothic literature being thought to exist as a genre since Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* in 1764 (a story that itself drew inspiration from previous works of fiction), it is only in the early twentieth century that scholars established what would become the gothic genre. Before Edith Birkhead, Eino Railo, and Montague Summer's work in the 1920s, gothic novels were categorized as " 'romance' or even [as] 'German' novels [referring to the German horror novels *Schauerroman]*" –already mimicking the deconstruction of binaries frequent in many Gothic texts (Ellis 12). While the establishment of Gothic literature's canonization primarily took place after the 1920s, it existed as distinct even in 1764. Walpole, commonly known as the originator of the Gothic genre, claimed his work (*The Castle of Otranto)* to be "an attempt to blend the two kinds of romance, the antient and the modern", with "the modern" referring to what is now categorized as Gothic literature (Ellis 20). While Gothic literature has evolved, a text is expected to be set in an antiquated or abandoned home with a dreamlike environment. The characters must face an internal moral conflict (in addition to a physical or supernatural one) and in a Female Gothic specifically, women are further trapped by generational patriarchal systems. Perhaps most recognizably, Gothic novels must possess "ghostly or monstrous figures", traditionally of a supernatural origin (Hogle 5). What is produced from such specificity results in Gothic fiction becoming a genre capable of transcending a particular literary period, and instead capable of limitless reproduction.

GOTHIC SETTING

As previously established, Gothic novels must take place in an "antiquated [setting]" like that of an abandoned castle or a countryside manor (Hogle 5). du Maurier, a fan of the Brontë sisters, uses *Wuthering Heights'* "Thornfield setting…[as a model] with the analogies it establishes between the house and its [secret]" (Brazzelli 143). For a predominance of *Rebecca,* du Maurier situates the novel on the de Winter's familial country estate of Manderley (located somewhere in Cornwall). The estate itself is phantom-like, its first introduction being in the Narrator's dream after Manderley has burned down. In her dream "[she] could not enter, for the way was barred to [her]. There was a padlock and a chain upon the gate" (du Maurier, *Rebecca* 1). It is clear that at least subconsciously, the Narrator is determined to keep herself from returning to Manderely, even if only in her dreams. While this could be simply an example of the Narrator's refusal to return to her patriarchally strict life at Manderley, it also serves to reinforce the estate as "quasi-realis[tic]" and therefore primed as a site of haunting (Hogle 5).

Later, the Narrator and the audience are introduced to Manderley for the first time. The estate is described as "[a] thing of grace and beauty, exquisite and faultless, lovelier even than [the Narrator] had ever dreamed, built in its hollow of the smooth grassland and mossy awns, the terraces sloping to the gardens, and the gardens to the sea"(du Maurier, *Rebecca* 65). This illustration of Manderley as "exquisite and faultless" evokes an impossibility of real life, compounded by the Narrator's reference of the estate being "lovelier…than [she] had ever dreamed" (du Maurier, *Rebecca* 65). Manderley becomes a recreation of Eden, only turning sinister in the narrative after Rebecca's influence is revealed. The constant description of Manderley as dreamlike is purposeful. While du Maurier establishes the grandeur and beauty of Manderley, the descriptions also invoke Manderley as a "quasi-realis[tic]" setting with its dreamlike references (Hogle 5). In doing so, du Maurier establishes Manderley as a location of haunting before the Narrator even learns about Rebecca.

du Maurier also uses the estate of Manderley as a vehicle to challenge patriarchal norms. Ignoring for the time being, readings that view Rebecca or Maxim as the sole villain of *Rebecca* (the former for the behavior described by Maxim in the novel, the latter for murdering and perhaps lying about his wife's behaviors), Pons also suggests that Manderley is itself a villainous specter, "the haunting presence of an old-fashioned, strict patriarchal system" haunting its occupants from generations of male control (71). The name of the de Winter estate suggests this multigenerational domination as well— the estate is after all named *Man*derley. In this new reading, both masculine and feminine characters are put to examination, in which Manderley's (the Patriarchy's) strict enforcement of "gender roles…leads [the characters] towards, hysteria, and crime" that embodies the novel (Pons 71). Manderley's enforcement of gender roles reaffilates the conversation of Gothic literature's intrinsic link to binaries (both textual with terror and fear and related to gender and sexual binaries). The eventual destruction of Manderley reinforces the Female Gothic's culminating idea of texts ending on "optimism concerning the possibility of social advancement for women", since it had allowed the Narrator to experience an alternative to the cisgender heteronormal status quo (Smith 218). du Maurier establishes Manderley as dreamlike and painfully reflective of contemporary patriarchal structures, once again utilizing the Gothic tradition of binaries.

GOTHIC BINARIES

As a genre, the Gothic is defined by its binaries, perhaps even more so than its utilization of supernatural forces. The primary binary was established by Gothic writer Ann Radcliffe, who wrote:

> Terror and horror are so far opposite…that the first expands the soul, and awakens the faculties to a high degree of life; the other contracts, freezes, and nearly annihilates them' (149). Horror confuses and confounds while terror leaves something to the imagination, remains mysterious and obscure, and thereby lends itself to the experience of the Burkean sublime, a 'tranquility tinged with terror' (Radcliffe, 149) (Westengard 120).

This dichotomy, evoking the duality of Aristotle's pity and terror binary, frames how Gothic fiction is read and interpreted. *Rebecca,* while not physically employing a spirit, takes advantage of the mounting suspense and the presence of Rebecca at Manderley to evoke the horror that Radcliffe mentions. The binaries mentioned additionally provide a unique perspective through Queer theory, which already challenges binaries in the text. It is no surprise then that "Gothic fiction, the genre to which Radcliffe's binary has most frequently been applied, is characterized in part by its very disruption of binaries" (Westengard 120). To examine *Rebecca*, or any other Gothic text for that matter, through a queer perspective guarantees some disturbance of previously unnoticed or neglected dualities.

As previously alluded, Gothic narratives often adopt binaries as a way to penalize non-conformity to the cisgender heterosexual status quo. Criticizing Gothic literature through a queer framework "means to destabilize the settled and normative meaning (of a word, notion, or text)…to pervert that meaning…just as queer sexuality perverts or turns away from heterosexual norms" (Mccallum 71). Gothic literature is inherently queer under such a framework. While what is socially acceptable by these standards has changed since the Walpolean Gothic period, Gothic fiction of all periods must experience an inversion of the status quo. For it "[t]o truly be terrifying, and to be truly queer, inversion must continue to happen, or at least be always on the brink of happening", whether this is in the duality between characters or in a challenge to the liminality of time (Macculm 77). In *Rebecca,* this becomes an examination of how a queer perspective reflects in the character's obsession with the specter of Rebecca's memory, as well as focusing on the inversions of her character.

REBECCA'S SPECTRAL PRESENCE

In the same way that Manderley becomes a source of haunting, Rebecca's presence throughout the novel is a specter in itself. She invades the minds of the staff and tenants of the Manderley estate and the de Winter family while continuing to have a physical presence in the house through her unchanged rooms and habits. Beginning perhaps with the most visually striking as the Narrator arrives—Manderley's landscape of rhododendrons. Like everything else in Manderley, Rebecca is responsible for the planting of the "blood-red" rhododendrons with "crimson faces…unlike any rhododendron plant [the Narrator] had seen before" upon coming into view (du Maurier, *Rebecca* 65). The "slaughterous red [flowers], luscious and fantastic" (du Maurier, *Rebecca* 65). They occupy Rebecca's office, "not content" with existing outside Manderley, instead "obtrud[ing]" into the room (du Maurier, *Rebecca* 83). In a way the rhododendrons become symbolic of Rebecca's interference, her "obtru[sion]" into the heterosexual union of Maxim and the Narrator (du Maurier, *Rebecca* 83). Not only is Rebecca "unlike any" that the Narrator had seen before (in fact it is this exceptionalism that causes the Narrator to become obsessed), but the correlation between her memory and the striking plants leaves the Narrator "uncertain" of how she feels (*Rebecca* 65). The rhododendrons, like Rebecca, "seem to defy traditional expectations through their…bold appearance" (Sivinski 865). The rhododendrons become, both an example of Rebecca's presence and of her inability to properly perform "traditional expectations" relating to gender and sexuality, like the rhododendrons (Sivinski 865).

Similar to the rhododendrons, Rebecca's handwriting also serves to invoke her memory in the Narrator's mind. Before she even considers Maxim to be of romantic interest, the Narrator becomes fascinated with Rebecca's dedication, "written in a curious, slanting hand" within a book of poetry for Maxim (du Maurier, *Rebecca* 33). The Narrator notes that "[a] little blob of ink marred the white page opposite, as though the writer, in impatience, had shaken her pen to make the ink flow freely. 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 and sloping R dwarfing the other letters" (du Maurier, *Rebecca* 33). Not only does this highlight the Narrator's budding fascination with Rebecca (and her insistence in recreating in her mind past events), but establishes Rebecca as a "strong" dominant figure much like her first initial (du Maurier, *Rebecca* 33). Her signature, both femininely ("a curious, slanting hand") and masculinely ("black and strong") coded, further serves as evidence of Rebecca's gender nonconformity (du Maurier, *Rebecca* 33). The book, or more importantly Rebecca's signature within "becomes for the narrator the visible emblem

of her nemesis, a woman with a prior claim to Max" (Robbins 72). As the novel progresses, Rebecca's "tall and sloping R" comes back to haunt the Narrator as she finds it throughout Manderley (du Maurier, *Rebecca* 33). In that way, Rebecca continues to insert herself through her possessions even after death.

In addition to rhododendrons and her handwriting, Rebecca's influence throughout Manderley (carefully maintained by Mrs. Danver) inflicts the Narrator with her presence. Particularly in the West Wing, Rebecca's influence remains as Mrs. Danver continues to maintain her mistresses' former apartments. The Narrator describes that:

> [She] had expected to see chairs and tables swathed in dust-sheets, and dust-sheets too over the great double bed against the wall. Nothing was covered up. There were brushes and combs on the dressing-table, scent, and powder. The bed was made up, [she] saw the gleam of white linen on the pillow-case, and the tip of a blanket beneath the quilted coverlet. There were flowers on the dressing table and on the table besides the bed. Flowers too on the curved mantelpiece. A satin dressing gown lay on a chair, and a pair of bedroom slippers beneath (du Maurier, *Rebecca* 164-5).

While the Narrator eventually realizes that she "was [not] seeing back into Time," the room possesses an eerie sense of use (du Maurier, *Rebecca* 164). The flowers suggest frequent attention to the room, as does the lack of dust. The Narrator "starts to trespass on her predecessor's glamorous life" as Brazzelli explains, when she enters the West Wing (152). The West Wing is Rebecca's property, which forces Maxim to move into the smaller East Wing, rather than remain in the symbolic tomb of his dead wife. And yet, the West Wing is not the only domain Rebecca possesses at Manderley. All of Manderley still feels the effects of Rebecca, because Rebecca continues to haunt them as a result of her deviation from patriarchal norms. As Maxim says later, "The beauty of Manderley…the Manderley that people talk about and photograph and paint, it's all due…to Rebecca" (du Maurier, *Rebecca* 274-5). Rebecca's divergence from patriarchal norms allows for the estate to flourish, and, ironically, continue to inflict traditional gender and sexual expectations when she strays too far. Manderley then becomes both a tomb and a shrine to her memory, reflecting once again the many binaries at play in the novel.

In the same way that *Rebecca*, and by extension Gothic literature, is capable of Queer interpretation, literary criticism related to gender is embedded within Gothic texts. Feminist scholars Judith Butler and Simone de Beauvoir have revolutionized the field of gender study, with the former suggesting gender is "the stylized repetition of acts" and is societally constructed (Butler 520). Furthermore, Butler argues that new conceptions of gender are found "in the possibility of a different sort of repeating, in the breaking and subversive repetition of that style" (520). In the case of *Rebecca*, this idea is directly paralleled in the construction of the haunting. The haunting allows for the space of "gender transformation" by destabilizing traditional patriarchal assumptions of behavior while allowing for new gender performances (Butler 520). Both Rebecca and the Narrator perform, and then in varying cases, fail gender-related checks in Manderley's patriarchal microcosm according to traditional notions of femininity.

Similarly, Simone de Beauvoir suggests that "in patriarchal societies, the 'self' is constructed as male, with the female—representing all that is not known and understood—seen as a mysterious and threatening 'Other'" (Horner and Zlosnik 58). The idea of the 'Other' in Gothic fiction is not novel; Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and Stevenson's *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, for example, both possessed this type of gender doubling (Horner and Zlosnik 58). *Rebecca* too is no different. du Maurier presents her two main characters (Rebecca and the Narrator) as not fully feminine, with Rebecca as a masculine figure performing femininity and the Narrator as originally boyish who attempts to model the acted femininity that she believes Maxim desires from her. Adopting a gender-critical perspective of *Rebecca* provides a richness present, but until recently, ignored in most Gothic texts.

The Narrator's haunting by Rebecca's memory comes in part because of de Beauvoir's conception of the 'Other' figure (Horner and Zlosnik 58). While both the Narrator and Rebecca are women, Rebecca "is monstrous because everything she signifies is a diabolic threat to the…established traditional male

values and ideology" and comes to represent the 'Other' figure de Beauvoir mentions (Petersen 63, Horner and Zlosnik 58). This is particularly noticeable in the pair's naming; Rebecca is named, and the Narrator is not. Despite du Maurier's claim that she did not name the Narrator because "[she] could not think of one", the decision to remain unnamed is significant (du Maurier, *The* Rebecca *Notebook* 3). The Narrator's lack of name establishes her as the other half of Rebecca's feminine 'Other'; the masculine 'self' (Horner and Zlosnik 58). This is further reflected in an early conversation about the Narrator's name between Maxim and herself. Maxim remarks that the Narrator "ha[s] a very lovely and unusual name" (in which some scholars accredit her name to be doubly masculine as it "becomes [her] as well as it became [her] father", thus its abnormality), but it is never revealed to the audience (du Maurier, *Rebecca* 24, 25). Instead, the Narrator becomes Mrs. de Winter (though she does not feel as such) or is referred to by a pet name by Maxim. In this way, she "trade[s] her father's name for her husband's name", never allowed to exist unattached to a masculine figure in her life (Robbins 70). In addition, in her role as the 'self', the Narrator does not *need* a name, she is representative of everyone and no one simultaneously (Horner and Zlosnik 58). As a result, despite the Narrator's gender, it is Rebecca's status as the 'Other', and not the masculinely coded Narrator, that comes to represent the disruption of cisgender and heterornormative behavior at Manderley (Horner and Zlosnik 58).

As Mrs. de Winter, Rebecca is expected to perform femininity. She "masquerade[s] femininity", creating the perfect illusion to fool everyone that she is performing femininity correctly, despite her cruelty to animals, her masculine dress, and her independent lifestyle (Harbord 101). As a result of her nature, she must perform her femininity "faultless[ly]" (du Maurier, *Rebecca* 276). In exchange for her sexual freedom, Rebecca promises to showcase Manderley and present herself and Maxim as "the luckiest, happiest, handsomest couple in all of England" (du Maurier, *Rebecca* 273). Not only does her deal with Maxim provide Rebecca with financial security, but it allows her to visually fulfill her most important obligation as a woman in a patriarchal culture—that of a wife and mother. In an ironic twist, it is Rebecca's lie of pregnancy, rather than her gender failure, that ultimately causes her death. Furthermore, her relationship with Maxim allows her to manipulate this perspective, using it to trap him into remaining married while convincing all of England that she was the gracious wife and host of Manderley, and therefore, avoid societal punishment for gender failure. In doing so, Rebecca "masquerade[s] femininity", creating the perfect illusion of gender conformance (Harbord 101).

THE BLURRING OF GENDER NORMS

In contrast, the masculine-coded Narrator does not "masquerade femininity" like Rebecca, but instead overcomes her insecurity over her lack of femininity, or rather is reassured in her androgyny by Maxim (Harbord 101). The Narrator, a "raw-ex-schoolgirl, red-elbowed and lanky-haired", possessed none of the elegance associated with Rebecca (du Maurier, *Rebecca* 16). She "tear[s] at [her] nails", possesses a hairstyle that Beatrice tells her she "ought to do something with", and cares little about jewelry or clothes (du Maurier, *Rebecca* 37, 99). The Narrator is described as unfeminine, a direct parallel to the feminine performing Rebecca. Keeping in mind the Narrator's position as the masculine 'self' and her immense discomfort of not fulfilling femininity, her rejection of the gender binary becomes clear. She does not correctly fulfill masculine or feminine gender conventions, which only worsens when she arrives to the patriarchal estate of Manderley. Instead, the Narrator attempts to become hyper-feminine (like Rebecca). Her deepest desire becomes "[to be] a woman of about thirty-six dressed in black satin with a string of pearls", representing a visual example of femininity (du Maurier, *Rebecca* 37). While the audience later learns that the Narrator has unknowingly described Rebecca, Maxim rebukes her wish at the moment, telling her that "[She] would not be in this car with [him] if [she] w[as]" (du Maurier, *Rebecca* 37). Maxim's preference for the unfeminine and androgynous Narrator creates internal turmoil within the patriarchal walls of Manderley until she is reassured that Maxim "had never loved Rebecca" (du Maurier, *Rebecca* 274). His lack of attraction to the feminine Rebecca (as is expected under heterosexual conventions) is what ultimately allows the Narrator to become confident in her androgyny, accept the mantle of Mrs. de Winter, and become an active participant in Rebecca's former domain. Through Rebecca's haunting, the Narrator experiences patriarchal pressure to conform to traditional feminine

gender conventions. With Maxim's support, the Narrator can disregard masculine and feminine gender roles and create a new space for "gender transformation" that survives Manderley (Butler 520) .

Similarly, Gothic literature frequently utilizes the supernatural as a way to combat anxieties relating to female desire, or perhaps more popularly, female homosexual desire. Vampires, like those present in Le Fanu's *Carmilla* or Stoker's *Dracula* become allegories for sexual perversity, invoking the uncanny in their descriptions of beastlike behavior in their inability to control their thirsts (symbolic of their sexual desires). The lesbian therefore is othered, becoming bestial and morally bankrupt, with their corruption of virginal naive young women ultimately being thwarted by the end of the novel by patriarchal young male protectors. While the lesbian vampire still exists in modern Gothic fiction, the key tenets of the trope (unrestrained sexual desire, preying on innocent young women, villainous) have morphed into the treatment of non-supernatural lesbians as "unhinged, obsessive, (often vampiric) fiends", frequently possessing "icy, calculating demeanor[s]" (Westengard 130). The lesbian in the Gothic context appears as an abnormal extension of the narrative of homosexuality as perverse, in which their open sexuality poses a threat of desire for the protagonist to overcome to achieve heteronormative happiness.

If the lesbian does not appear as a vampiric-coded antagonist, they exist as a specter within the narrative. Terry Castle, a scholar of lesbian history, argues that the lesbian "has been 'ghosted'—or made seem invisible—by culture itself" (4). In contrast to male homosexual desire, which has been canonized, female homosexual desire exists on the edge, present but never existing in the physical. It is not *allowed* to become corporeal. To this Castle questions "What better way to exorcise the threat of female homosexuality than by treating it as ghostly?", a theme frequently visible in Gothic fiction (34). In treating lesbianism in culture as akin to the supernatural, authors, artists, and filmmakers can utilize lesbianism as a plot device without anxieties surrounding the implication of lesbian desire made physical. As such, lesbianism can appear to be portrayed as either vampiric or ghostly, but rarely as realistic tangible representations of sapphic couples. The allegory of the "[apparitional]" lesbian is particularly suitable for the Gothic, as it provides both a haunting specter to villainize and a warning to the defenseless female protagonist to correct her homosexual questioning tendencies (Castle 7). As *Rebecca* will show, the lesbian becomes the greatest form of haunting capable in a Gothic novel.

While Rebecca certainly blurs gendered conventions with her performance of femininity, her sexuality deviates from the acceptable. Similar to the vampires of Gothic yore, Rebecca's sexuality is insatiable. For Rebecca, sex is "like a game", one which she played often, and, thanks to her faux marriage with Maxim, one she could indulge in without the risk of being ostracized (du Maurier, *Rebecca* 245). However, Mrs. Danvers reveals that sex was about more than just engaging Rebecca's sexual appetite—it became an expression of domination. Rebecca only made love "because it made her laugh" and would "rock with laughter at the lot of you" after her escapades (du Maurier, *Rebecca* 340). According to Mrs. Danvers, Rebecca "despised all men" (du Maurier, *Rebecca* 340). Rebecca's sexual escapades then become an exercise in power, leveraging her performance of feminity for control. The transition then from embodying femininity to performing it for power, causes Maxim to feel "feminised an 'otherised' by [Rebecca]", which lends itself to his decision to murder her (Pons 77). In a patriarchal society, this deviation from the submissive and sexually chaste idea of womanhood villanizes Rebecca, both as a result of her own behavior and how her behavior emasculates Maxim. While much is unknown about Rebecca, her decision to perform femininity, rather than embody femininity, ultimately leads to her murder by Maxim.

In contrast, Mrs. Danvers deviates sexually, rather than through her gender performance. Mrs. Danvers is forthwith with her obsession of Rebecca. When alive, Mrs. Danvers served as Rebecca's confidante, a keeper of Manderley's precious items, and overseer of Manderley. Her relationship with Rebecca, both as a friend and in her position as her bed-maid, gave her unique access to the nuances of her life, including her sexual liaisons. Mrs. Danvers expresses jealousy at the men Rebecca slept with, claiming that "Of course [Maxim] was jealous [of her relationship with Mr. Jack]" , adding "So was I" (du Maurier, *Rebecca* 245). She adds later that "They [the men] made love to her of course, who would not?" while discussing Rebecca's affairs (du Maurier, *Rebecca* 245). Instead of concern, Mrs. Danvers is openly

jealous of Rebecca's former relationships whilst idolizing Rebecca for her sexuality. While never explicitly engaging in a sexual relationship with Rebecca, Mrs Danvers is both voyeur and devotee of Rebecca. She is above the "despised men" that frequent her conversations with Rebecca and instead is given the privilege of a nickname (Danny) (du Maurier, *Rebecca* 340). The nickname implies intimacy–to Rebecca, it is unknown what type, but to Mrs. Danvers, it is a tie to her beloved Rebecca. This intimacy also clarifies her haunting of the Narrator throughout the novel—why should the Narrator exist outside of femininity when Rebecca could not.

In addition to Rebecca's deviation from sexual and gender norms, Mrs. Danvers (Rebecca's constant companion and nurse) assists in deviating from heteronormative sexual behavior. Mrs. Danvers is the apparitional lesbian that Terry Castle discusses, camouflaging her desire for Rebecca under the guise of obsession and care. Mrs. Danvers embodies the part of the lesbian supernatural figure. She is "malevolent, full of hatred" and "loathsome", frequently dresses in black, and is described as possessing the face of a "white skull's face" and "an exulting devil" on two different occasions (du Maurier, *Rebecca* 172, 214, 172, 214). From the beginning, Mrs. Danvers is characterized by her connection with the supernatural, with du Maurier describing her as "a ghoul scenting disaster" in her notes for *Rebecca* (*The* Rebecca *Notebooks* 12). While Mrs. Danvers is understandably upset to serve the Narrator, her excessive hatred and connection to the supernatural create the impression that she is like a spirit seeking revenge for Rebecca. While her first attempt, coaxing the Narrator to suicide, is unsuccessful, Mrs. Danvers ultimately achieves revenge for Rebecca with the destruction of Manderley, "the horizon …shot with crimson, like a splash of blood" (du Maurier, *Rebecca* 380). While Rebecca's death is punishment for the defiance of Manderley's patriarchal codes, Manderley's destruction in turn seems to be a vindication for Rebecca. The destruction of Manderley therefore, serves to destroy traditional patriarchal gender expectations through the threat of homosexuality and ultimately allows the Narrator to create and operate under a new androgynous gender convention.

Mrs. Danvers's obsession with Rebecca drastically increases after her death. When Rebecca was alive, such obsession might be linked to love, but with her death, it becomes mania for the impossibility of her desire. Mrs. Danvers's desire for Rebecca causes her to keep the same routines as if she could, and would, return one day. While Mrs. Danvers knows this to be impossible (she frequently discusses Rebecca's death and former habits in a way that leaves little doubt), her care in maintaining Rebecca's possessions creates the impression of a shrine. She guides the Narrator, telling her:

> This was her bed. It's a beautiful bed, isn't it? I keep that golden coverlet on it always, it was her favorite. Here is her 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' She took the nightdress from the case and held it before me. 'Feel it, hold it,' she said, 'how soft and light it is, isn't it? I haven't washed it since she wore it for the last time. I put it out like this, and the dressing-gown and slippers, just as I put them out for her the night she never came back, the night she was drowned' She folded up the nightgown and put it back in the case. 'I did everything for her, you know,' she said, taking my arm again, leading me to the dressing-gown and slippers. 'We tried maid after maid but not one of them suited. 'You made me better than anyone, Danny,' she used to say, 'I won't have anyone but you' (du Maurier, *Rebecca* 168).

The scene continues with Mrs. Danvers leading the Narrator through the rest of the room feverishly remarking about Rebecca's life while suggesting a pervasive understanding of how her former mistress operated. The above scene demonstrates further evidence of the intimate relationship the pair possessed, with Mrs. Danver's fervent obsession with keeping the past alive akin to her paying penance for leaving. Mrs. Danvers "blames [her]self for the accident" viewing it as "[her] fault for being out that evening" (du Maurier, *Rebecca* 170). Her idolatry then is double fold, it is representative of her homoerotic desires for Rebecca, but also atonement for leaving Rebecca's side in the first place. The scene also reveals to the Narrator (although she does not realize it yet) that "Mrs Danvers'power is all in the past and the passion between women (potential, covert, overt) in the novel is ostensibly dissolved to reinforce the heterosexual

hegemony" (Hallett 45). In this perspective, Mrs. Danvers is haunted by Rebecca for the impossibility of same-sex desire.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, *Rebecca* serves as a testament to the complex societal standards that exist in Manderley, and to some extent, society in general. Rebecca is punished for her inability to perform femininity convincingly for Maxim, in addition to her sexually open behavior. Her feminine performance (outside of Maxim) is so convincing that it creates a sense of mysticism around her, which is actively encouraged by the sapphic-coded Mrs. Danvers in keeping her room and habits alive, and the curiosity of the Narrator. As the specter of Manderley, Rebecca enforces the Narrator's gender conformity, generating insecurity about her failure to perform femininely. When Rebecca is exorcised from Manderley, the Narrator is finally able to achieve a sexual relationship with Maxim, and comfortability with her feminine shortcomings. Rather than become a source of insecurity, the Narrator's androgyny and genderqueerness becomes acceptable and enabled by Maxim by the end of the novel, with Rebecca's memorial death and Manderley's destruction. Not only does Rebecca's vanquishing mark the end of queerness in the text (since the object of Mrs. Danvers's affections is no more and the Narrator is no longer haunted by Rebecca), but it also marks the conclusion of the heteronormative pairing. While Manderley eventually burns to the ground leaving the lovers in exile, it serves to remove the stain of homosexuality, while freeing the Narrator to embody a new gendered performance created during Rebecca's haunting. In essence, the novel seems to suggest that it takes Manderley's, as the symbolic patriarchal system within *Rebecca*, fiery destruction to fully allow a changing of gendered conventions. The Narrator, Mrs. Danvers, and Rebecca are allowed to embody these anti-heteronormative cisgender ways of being, because their story exists within the framework of a Gothic narrative. As a result, the ending becomes a final disruption of gender and sexual binaries rather than just the burning of Manderley.

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