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Queer, Crazy, Cool:

The New Woman as Subject and Object in Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca*

First Reader: Dr N. N. W. Akkerman

Second Reader: Dr M. S. Newton

Myrthe Duin

Student ID 1315560

Leiden University

Faculty of Humanities

School of Literary Studies

English Literature and Culture

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Introduction

This thesis offers an insight into the emergence of the New Woman, who was initially largely a literary phenomenon, but grew out to become a self-identity for many women after World War I, which was enabled by their sudden social and economic freedoms. As such, a period of roughly a hundred years, namely from 1830, the beginning of the Victorian Period, to 1930, the aftermath of the Great War, will be studied, and the role of the New Woman in this period will be largely scrutinized through the literature of that era.

Specifically, Daphne du Maurier's 1938 novel *Rebecca* will be analysed, in particular the titular character – who, by being both the title character and the antagonist of the story, represents the unstable and volatile characteristics of what identity can be. By employing Queer Theory, this thesis will provide a closer understanding as to who exactly the New Woman, personified by Rebecca, was, what she wanted, and how she was perceived in her time – effectively exploring if Rebecca was not merely a woman defying social boundaries, but a Queer phenomenon.

Although the term 'new woman' might sometimes refer to several types such as the Gibson Girl and the Flapper, 'New Woman' is specifically used in this thesis to refer to educated, voluble career women who strived for autonomy, equality, and freedom of choice. As such, when the term is rendered in lower-case letters it serves as an umbrella term, when rendered in capitals one specific type is meant.

Since the New Woman was so radically different from the female ideals of her time, her arrival met with both applause and aversion. The New Woman boldly went where no woman had gone before: she not merely challenged feminine standards but

usurped masculine roles as well, such as engaging in public life and being sexually liberated. By adopting masculine attributes, she instigated a schism in the binary opposition of male and female identity. She sought to gain economic independence, a place in the workforce, freedom of speech, and the right to experiment sexually: the right, in short, to be (as free) as men can be.

In doing so, the New Woman did not merely upset social convections but created new possibilities for both genders as well, specifically the right to interact freely and publically with one another. While some contemporaries were supportive of this development, many others such as middle-class parents, religious workers, and anti-suffragists were not quite so positive.[1] As June West points out, the New Woman was considered to be particularly dangerous since she was "upsetting the conventions that [had previously] made society stable" (56). By painting her as depraved, vile, and even monstrous, her critics effectively put the New Woman into the category of Queer.

Queer theory, having originated as an academic field of study in the 1990s, is intrinsically connected with lesbian/gay studies but not limited to it. In fact, Calvin Thomas argues that one can be heterosexual and still be (interested in) 'queer' (19).[2] He quotes Michael Warner in saying that queer represents a "thorough resistance to regimes of the normal" (21). Queer theory seeks to destroy binary opposition, attempting to show that "the distinction between paired opposites is not absolute", as normativity dictates, but fluid, unstable and volatile, in that opposites do not possess mutually exclusive distinctions but can merge into one another (Barry 144).

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[1] Samuel Schmalhausen, for example, wrote in his essay called "Sex Among the Moderns" in the *Birth Control Review* (October 1928) optimistically about women's new sexual freedom in the 1920s. Source: http://ehistory.osu.edu/osu/mmh/clash/newwoman/Documents/sexamongmoderns.htm

[2] Thomas quotes Annette Schlichter as an example of a queer theorist who does not really appreciate the prospect of the "spectre of the queer heterosexual" and sees it a symptom of queer theory being invaded by the 'dominant sexuality' and becoming disassociated from gay and lesbian identity (Schlichter qtd. in Thomas 19-20).

One's identity, then, is not stable but can fluctuate. This fluidity is what embodies the New Woman as well. She upset the male/female conventions that had previously made society into a stable dichotomy, and effectively destroyed the social fabric that this gender-division consisted of. This made her a dangerous and simultaneously fascinating presence to her peers. Since the New Woman challenged gender standards, the question of 'who' or even 'what' she exactly represented surfaced. Was it possible to consider someone who so readily cast away her femininity and absorbed male aspects into her persona a woman? If not, what else could she be but a monster, someone not female but not male either?

This is where queer theory comes into play. While not necessarily gay, the New Woman was often depicted by her critics as morally depraved and (sexually) perverted due to her indulging in social and sexual freedoms that formerly belonged to men only. This is similar to the manner in which gays and lesbians were (and in some circles still are) viewed: by not being attracted to the opposite sex, which society dictates as 'normal', homosexuality is therefore cast out of the sphere of normativity and effectively made into something abnormal, morally corrupt and even monstrous. The word 'queer' in itself stands for strange, odd and suspicious.[3]

According to the principal spokesperson of queer theory, Judith Butler, the reason that one normally thinks of one's body and (sexual) identity as 'fixed', is that, inasmuch as for an "I" to exist "within the domain of cultural intelligibility", this requires identification with certain normative discourses (2-3). These narratives, she claims, are "heterosexual imperatives" (3). Bodies that fall outside of this norm, those that identify with the so-called "abject", will be rejected and excluded, "their very

[3] According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the word 'queer' as adjective meaning strange and peculiar was first used in 1513. 'Queer' in the sense of 'Homosexual' was first used (negatively) in 1894 (*OED*, "Queer, n2" & "Queer, adj. 1").

humanness" questioned (3-8). It is for this reason that the New Woman was considered to be 'abject', as she did not fit the (hetero)sexual standard.

The New Woman, then, was both an admirable figure in changing times and a danger to the traditional Victorian gender regulations: by consciously and publicly challenging gender standards and the polarity between men and women, she formed a 'self' that was free from these conventions but, at the same time, considered to be highly dangerous to the rest of society because of this. Although she should be rejected as an abject body, the New Woman remained a public appearance.

Consequently, it might be argued that the New Woman was the 'queer' of her time. Although queer theory as an academic discourse only developed in the 1990s, their spear points, the fluidity of gender and the destabilizing of dichotomies, are something which can be said to have been in existence for a long time already – the New Woman especially can be said to represent this. Queer theory attempts to call attention to these concealed, abject bodies, reveal them, and celebrate their rebellion against normalcy: the New Woman, too, celebrates not her femininity but the fact that she is able to have both female and male aspects, however deviant those may be.

Daphne du Maurier's novel *Rebecca* is such a covert celebration of deviancy. When it was published in 1938, it became an immediate bestseller according to Sally Beauman; 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). Yet, she argues, it is also much more than that, the good and the bad not necessarily being so black-and-white, but perhaps more like two sides of the same coin.

The body of work existing of literature written on the subject of *Rebecca* can be roughly divided into two parts. The first part discusses *Rebecca* primarily as being a Gothic novel, a story wherein Good (the nameless protagonist) is victorious over

Evil (the ghost of Rebecca). If the common 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 indeed seem to fall under the category of Gothic (147). The protagonist experiences many fears such as (potentially) losing her husband and thus her only family, questions her own identity as a woman, and seems to be out of place in Manderley. Furthermore, Christopher Yiannitsaros argues that the Gothic Romance, which he deems *Rebecca* to be a prime example of, is different from the typical romantic plot in that it turns “family unit and the domestic home from sites of love and protection into ones of anxiety and horror” (290).

The second part of critical reviews is dominated by a feminist view. The idea here is not one of Good versus Evil, but of the female voice (this principally being Rebecca, but the protagonist as well) ultimately being silenced by an oppressing patriarchy (Max de Winter). Many of the authors within this framework also seem to agree that Rebecca was a lesbian. Nicky Hallett, in her article “Did Mrs. Danvers Warm Rebecca’s Pearls?”, presents *Rebecca* as a highly sexualized, specifically homosexualized, text in which it is heavily implied that Rebecca has had a lesbian relationship with her servant. The manner in which Mrs Danvers fetishizes Rebecca’s bedroom, Hallett argues, implies a deep level of intimacy and erotic tension in their relationship, creating “lesbian spaces within normalized heterosexual domains” (43).

According to Janet Harbord this is important, for in order to make *Rebecca* succeed as romantic fiction, it is necessary to present normative choices (heterosexual relationship and marriage) within the narrative as both a “choice and destiny”: part of the pleasure of romance fiction is “transgression on the way to conformity” (96). 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" (100). Therefore, Rebecca "must be suppressed", although her appeal never recedes (102-103).

What seems to be a recurring theme in the framework of articles written on *Rebecca,* then, is Rebecca – representing either 'Evil' or 'the female voice' – being suppressed, but little is said on how far she actually succeeds to make her voice be heard. Although on surface level Rebecca's defeat is strongly implied, the fact that the narrator begins her story at the end of the narrative, with a highly sexualized dream, might reveal that, as a sexual spectre, Rebecca never truly can be suppressed. Therefore, she might be illustrative of the queer New Woman; simultaneously feminine and masculine, antagonistic and heroic, silenced yet vocal. As such, Rebecca might not merely be deviant of societal boundaries, but a queer phenomenon.

Chapter 1 – From Angel to Monster, from Monster to Heroine: Historical Background of the Position of Women in 1830-1930

> Let me observe to you, that the position of women in society, is somewhat different from what it was a hundred years ago, or as it was sixty, or I will say thirty years since. Women are now so highly cultivated, and political subjects are at present of so much importance, … to all human beings who live together in society, you can hardly expect, Helen, that you, as a rational being, can go through the world as it now is, without forming any opinions on points of public importance. You cannot, I conceive, satisfy yourself with the common namby-pamby, little missy phrase, 'ladies have nothing to do with politics' … Female influence must, will, and ought to exist on political subjects as on all others; but this influence should always be domestic, not public – the customs of society have so ruled it.
>
> (Maria Edgeworth, *Helen*, 1834. Qtd. in O'Brien 1)

These words of fiction, uttered to the protagonist of the novel *Helen* by her protector Lady Davenant, illustrate to what extent the position of women can be redefined in only a short amount of time. The author, Maria Edgeworth (1767-1849), was one of the few writers of her time to assume what Joanne Altieri calls "the educator's role": her books, *Helen* being a prime example, were almost without exception "morally and socially didactic" (265). Lady Davenant might therefore be seen as a literary mouthpiece for Edgeworth's advanced views on women's education at that time. Yet, at the same time, Lady Davenant's words signify, for today's reader, the changes that were still to come. At the time Edgeworth was writing *Helen,* England was at the forefront of a new era: namely, the Victorian Age. Amongst women, there was, due to the rise of education, a growing sense of self-awareness. On

the other hand they were also pushed further back into the private sphere of the house, away from the public sphere. In just under a hundred years, as Lady Davenant so proudly mentions, women's role had significantly changed. However, in the upcoming hundred years, the period that this chapter will discuss, women's position underwent an even larger transformation. Women's economic, social and cultural role has been ever-changing throughout human history: yet, arguably, never as far-reaching and as dramatically as between the beginning of the Victorian period and the first years after World War I, the period of 1830-1930.

During this hundred-year period, a female writer was born who would grow out to become one of the most popular authors of her time, specifically because of one book by the title of *Rebecca.* This writer, Daphne du Maurier (1907-1989), was, perhaps without her consciously realizing it, living within a timespan during which her role as a woman in the public sphere was just starting to become accepted. Her novel *Rebecca* illustrates this as no other, as it not only shows the struggle of a woman to reach that very goal – to live freely, as men could, without dire social consequences – and who was consequently regarded with contempt and fear, it also illustrates the emptiness of a woman who lets others, specifically men, dictate her life. Although she is tempted to choose the same path as her predecessor, she is too afraid to show it and ends up living the way society dictates, and as a result has no true-self identity to speak of. This woman is the protagonist of *Rebecca,* but her non-identity shows as it is exactly the woman who was silenced due to her desire for freedom whose name is immortalized through the novel's title.

This first chapter is therefore illustrative of the long road the New Woman had to traverse in order for her sisters to have the freedom to live as one desires to, revealing the evolution of the ideal of femininity throughout the nineteenth and first

few decades of the twentieth century. To some extent, this struggle of the New Woman is reflected in du Maurier herself as well. Her letters to (female) friends reflect a clear aversion against homosexuality, yet she herself was, according to her biographer Margaret Forster, bisexual, and had hated to be a girl as a child, effectively taking on an alter ego by the name Eric Avon (14, 28). Her struggle with her own "Venetian tendencies" – her code word for lesbianism – and her difficulties with the ethics of her own gender is both reflected in *Rebecca* and makes du Maurier herself an example of the struggle many women had with society's expectations of what Woman should be (Forster 28).

It should be noted, however, that the Woman who is discussed throughout this thesis refers to the Woman as an ideal, existing of several ideas and normative values that differ from period to period and from person to person. Furthermore, in discussing the rise of the feminist movement and the role of the New Woman within this discourse, it is important to realize that this does not entail working-class women. To some extent, Sally Ledger 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). This was accepted to some extent. It was later, however, that women from the middle-class gained access to the more privileged sectors of employment, therefore becoming competitors on a previously all-male work floor, and as such, a threat. The New Woman is therefore almost exclusively a middleclass (and to some extent upperclass) phenomenon.

1.1. Victorian Period: Angel in the House

The Victorian Age had in many ways a far-reaching influence on many people's lives. Especially the rise of Industrialization had a many-fold impact, serving as catalyst to many other events, such as the expansion of the British world empire, the destabilization of religious thought, and mass migration to cities (Christ & Robson 979-980). Whilst formerly the vast majority of people had lived an agricultural life, with each member of a family having been designated a specific role within the household or in farming, Industrialization took many a task away from their hands, specifically the women (Easton 389-390).

Yet, while some argue that the Industrialization served as a way for male dominance to be further asserted and to exclude women from labour, it might also be said that it was the Industrial Revolution that brought women both regression and the means to rise above their allocated social position.[4] It may initially have forced women out of their original position as co-breadwinner, as Barbara Easton argues, but Industrialization brought, on the long term, the possibility and eventual realization of mass literacy, more education and as such a means to both further explore one's self-realization by gaining knowledge and the means to express this: namely, print media.

1.1.1. Victorian Feminine Ideals

The Victorian Age was one where England had done much to establish more rights for its citizens through several political and legal reforms. Women, however, were mostly excluded from this freedom: they were not allowed to vote, until 1870 they could not own property as a married woman or divorce their husband without

[4] For a discussion on this subject, see Judy Lown, *Women and Industrialization – Gender at Work in Nineteenth-Century England*. 1990.

evidence of extreme cruelty. These gender-based inequalities led to what Carol Christ and Catherine Robson label the "Woman Question" (990). Differences in treatment of both sexes have existed since the beginning of time, but, as Easton mentions, before the Industrialization the division of labour between man and woman was evenly divided and "practical rather than rigid" (390). Men mostly did hard labour whilst the women cared for the children and turned "raw agricultural material into usable goods" such as clothes, medicine and food (389). As such, whilst women might not be seen as equal to the man, they "needed each other's labor for survival" (Easton 394). Rapidly arising social changes shifted these gender standards, however. Machinery took on most of woman's productive tasks, while the men began to work in town, using their skills in farm labour to earn a living (Easton 393). Labour moved away from the home, and a middleclass began to form.

Not coincidentally, a growing number of anthropologists and politicians began to raise certain concerns about femininity around the same time, stating that certain labour could not be considered feminine or even morally correct. With this, the dichotomy of public and private spheres began to develop. While men occupied the public sphere of work and politics, women were restricted to the domestic private sphere, increasing the latter group's dependence on the first. 'Women guides', such as "*The Women of England* [1839] ...[and] *Book of Household Management* (1861)" fortified this newly-found ideal, proclaiming that a woman's place was in the home and that her primary task was taking care of the house and the children (Christ & Robson 1581). Gradually, Easton observes, "emphasis on motherhood" increased: women were urged to "subordinate their own needs and desires to those of their husbands" and children, and were assured that "they had special abilities for it … due to their innate warmth and morality" (393-396).

The impact of scientific discoveries served to further strengthen the new concerns and ideas on femininity (Christ & Robson 987). According to Lyn Pykett, biomedical discourse was not only used to define the Woman as solely a body for reproduction, it was claimed as evidence of women having an “inferior evolutionary development” in comparison to the man (79). Women were not only fundamentally different from men in every way – that is, physically, intellectually and emotionally – they were also less than them, infantile, irrational and simple-minded (Patterson 11). Even Darwin himself thought that, while women’s chief good point was altruism, the “evidence of the highest state of evolution”, they shared much more traits with people of the “lower races” from colonized countries than men ever would (Patterson 11-12). This classification placed the Woman on the evolutionary scale near “children, primitives, and animals”: altruism was defined as an overwhelming kind of “maternal instinct” since women were dominated by their reproductive system (Pykett 80-81).

What this entailed as well, Pykett continues, was the denial or marginalization of women’s pleasure during sexual intercourse. A woman was supposed to be pure, sexually passionless, and nurturing. So-called ‘deviant’ women were, according to Pykett, an often-seen figure in the media, specifically figures such as the prostitute, the “mad mother” and “the hysteric”: creatures who in all their reality were difficult to reconcile with the myth of woman’s “self-sacrificial maternal instinct” (82-83). In short, women simply could not be admitted into the public sphere, for it would be too taxing on women’s brains, “[using] up resources of energy which should be conserved for reproductive activity” (Pykett 79). A woman in public, then, was not merely immoral and unnatural; it would jeopardize her defining feature, motherhood.

Eventually, these new ideas of femininity formed the ideal of the ‘Angel in the House’. Named after the poem “Angel in the House” (published between 1854 and

1862) by Coventry Patmore (1823-1896), which describes the woman as a pure and delicate being, this woman was maternal and subservient to her husband or father. It was her task "to create a place of peace where man could take refuge from the difficulties of modern life": as such, it was more than a home, it was a "sacred place, a vestal temple" – as pure as Woman herself (Christ & Robson 993).

This ideology was not only employed by anti-suffragists but by some proto-feminists as well, who used it to justify the special position that Woman could hold:

> In devoting themselves to their husbands and children, their position would be enhanced; … their work… held families together and was the basis of society itself. They were told that they were secluded from the outside society because they might otherwise be tainted by it, and that they were superior to it and to the men who inhabited it. (Easton 398)

According to these proto-feminists, women should be treasured and deserving of "a more dependant role" within the family sphere (Christ & Robson 993, 1581). This formed a "seductive ideology" for many women, Easton notes (398).

Thus, with the little awareness they had about their rights, middleclass women were generally inclined to accept this ideology as a part of their nature and, as a self-fulfilling prophecy, conform to it. The lack of higher education was both a cause and an effect of this ideology and added to the dependence of women on their husbands. It was, above all, quite difficult to disprove something that was both scientifically 'proven' and supported by religious morals: a woman attempting to move beyond the domestic sphere would be deemed unfeminine at best, mentally unstable at worst.

This is not to say that there was no self-awareness amongst women at all, however. There are definite signs of change to be perceived from the second half of the nineteenth century. There was one particularly noteworthy emotion that aided this

change, and that was boredom. Christ and Robson claim that, as upper and middleclass wives and daughters had excessive leisure time, frustrations with the constraints of the home grew and a surplus of discontent surfaced. Literature was one of the most preeminent ways for this dissatisfaction to be expressed.

1.1.2. The Role of the Woman in British Literature

"Despite the difficulties of assessing literacy levels", Margaret Beetham writes, "we can be certain that in the last decade of the nineteenth century… the vast majority of women in Britain could read" and she asserts that "Middle-class women read more books and periodicals than any other group" (58-59). Aside from the soaring rate of literacy, there was also "an explosion of things to read" (Christ & Robson 993). Due to vastly improving technological improvements, printed material was produced quicker and cheaper than ever. This contributed to the popularity of the novel as well, which, Christ and Robson indicate, quickly became the "dominant form of Victorian literature" (994).

Novels caught on quickly because the genre was the first to depict life as it was for most people, portraying ordinary fictional characters struggling with everyday problems. This relatively new genre of literary realism not only depicted recognizable social situations, but identifiable protagonists as well. Particularly middle-class women could recognize themselves in the stories wherein characters held aspirations that were beyond their social standing. Christ and Robson reason that a female protagonist was therefore, "for both men and women writers", an ideal choice for a relatable character in search of the very human need of fulfilment in life (995).

Elizabeth Bennet and Jane Eyre, for example, are still two of the most iconic yet relatable female literary characters, even nowadays. They are not simply

middleclass women, they are human beings with feelings and troubles that most if not all women can relate to. Despite being thwarted by life on several occasions, they continue to work hard and are eventually rewarded. They are the heroines of their own story, something which, for the average female reader, must have seemed an attractive prospect. The Victorian Age, then, saw the emergence of the female literary heroine as a relatable role model. Reading was therefore a gratifying and primary source of amusement for women. It had become, according to Beetham, part of the domestic sphere and was an activity to be enjoyed both privately and with one's family, for instance by reading aloud. A reading woman was one who had the time to leisure, and was therefore "a signifier of the family's capital"; Beetham claims she regularly appeared on magazine covers and advertisements for this reason (63, 70).

This does not mean that reading was a universally accepted pastime for women. The same anxieties having surrounded women in previous decades now focused on the literature they were reading. Novels, despite or perhaps because being a popular medium, were antagonized as being the principal offenders of good taste, and women as their primary victim. Lacking rationality to begin with, female readers would supposedly only get more simpleminded from reading the emotional hogwash that was the romantic novel. Yet they were denied access to so-called 'higher' literature, such as philosophy, theology and history, for that was deemed 'unfeminine': any girl attempting or even desiring to pursue such knowledge would be deemed "a failure to be a good girl" (Beetham 67).

This did not stop women from actively pursuing the consumption of literature. Moreover, as books were now an established part of the domestic sphere, there was a rise in one of the few professions middle-class women were, to a certain extent, allowed to take part in (Shattock 3). Through writing, women could not only express

one's own perspective on their own social position, but also that of society. Many books written by female authors at the time dealt with women's "aspirations for… validation and self-fulfilment which was denied to them by conventional stereotypes of femininity": they have to sacrifice their own desires in the name of the selfless, maternal, pure-hearted creature they are supposed to represent (Pykett 89).

Women who do not maintain that image are often characterized as the aforementioned 'fallen women', used by female writers as painful examples some women can end up as after being betrayed by society, and by male authors as a warning. Lucy in Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897) is such a warning. Being described as "pure and sweet" before her death, Lucy transforms in a "voluptuous" and morally corrupt seductress after being bitten (287). The defining moment is when Lucy is found in a graveyard, sucking blood from a child. Once she is finished feeding, Lucy, now fully vampire, tosses the child aside, hereby symbolically refusing motherhood. Although it can be speculated that Stoker perhaps was satirizing society's perspective and conveying social commentary, the view of sexualized and unchaste women as evil, even monstrous, was definitely one that dominated the media.

Some women writers endorsed the female ideal of 'Angel In the House', both Easton and Pykett state, precisely because they believed in it or felt it held a certain power over men (Easton 398; Pykett 83-84). Others sought to dismantle this image: Mona Caird (1854-1932) writes that "Marriage and prostitution … are the two sides of the same shield, … the purchase of womanhood" (qtd. in Pykett 92). As such, throughout the entire Victorian Age many different voices spoke in this debate on The Woman Question. There appeared a new presence, though, becoming more consistent in the years to come, a spectre that was so definite yet so questioned in the media that she would emerge as both a heroine and a monstrous existence: The New Woman.

1.2. Fin de Siècle: Turning of the Tide

Whilst overlapping with the Victorian Period for roughly a decade, the fin de siècle (1890-1914) nonetheless proved to be a period notably different from its predecessor. As the name implies, the fin de siècle heralded the end of the Victorian era and its related culture, in many ways forming the start of many new phenomena. It was therefore an age, Gail Marshall mentions, "conscious of itself as an era of new beginnings, but also one whose movements are defined by the extent to which they developed away from their Victorian roots" (5). The Age of the New, of decadence, of degeneration – all of these are terms, according to Marshall, used to describe the fin de siècle by its contemporaries, depending on whom one asks (6).

One of the most important factors deciding the course of the fin de siècle was the continuation and culmination of two Victorian trends; the steady rise of literacy, and consequently mass consumption of print media, supported by technological advances in "printing, marketing and transportation" (Marshall 3). None other than print media served as both a witness to and an instigator of the cultural and social storm of change sweeping through society. On the eve of Evolution theory, scientific and technological developments, and psychoanalysis, former Victorian certainties of self, religion, and empire began to break down. There was no singular response to this, but all of them encapsulate fin de siècle attitudes. Some wished to return to 'simpler' Victorian times; many, too, were enthusiastic about the transformation society was undergoing and sought to further change it. One of the most significant areas in which discussions between these different crusaders of either Victorian or Modernist idea(l)s took place was the question of gender roles, specifically the position of Woman.

1.2.1. The Birth of the New Woman

Although, as Richard A. Kaye observes, the image that nowadays defines the perception of the fin de siècle is one of "a perilously risqué epoch in attitudes about sex, sexuality and sexual identity", wherein scandals like the Oscar Wilde trials of 1894-1895 were the talk of the day, it was not a period consisting solely of "sexual anarchy" (53). In what Marshall calls an "obsession with endings" many, especially artists, did indeed seek to tear down former pillars of an established (Victorian) society (2). Several 'New' movements such as New journalism, New drama and New Media sprouted, all of them bringing forth ideas that were not seen before (3-4).

Arguably, there was also a 'New sexuality', or rather a new way of looking at it. While many people continued to treat the subject of sexuality the 'Victorian' way in public – puritanical and largely repressive – Kaye notes, the 'Naughty Nineties' were also the stage of many conflicting theories on sexuality, gender and both women's and men's roles in this (54). One concept that came into existence during the fin de siècle was 'sexual inversion' (Bauer 85; Kaye 59). Originally a scientific term used when a group of atoms in a reaction form the "mirror image" of that specific group, Heike Bauer mentions that '(sexual) inversion' became an idiom for "same-sex sexuality": hereby implying a sexual deviance from what was considered normal – the behavioural opposite of what society expects of one's gender, including sexual preference (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*; Bauer 85). Where same-sex desire was before considered as "a temporary aberration", the homosexual was now considered to be a "new species"; and thus, no matter the public opinion, to be inherently different from the normal, heterosexual body – hence, a threat (Kaye 62). Although there was an on-going discussion between so-called sexologists, such as Havelock Ellis and Richard Krafft-Ebing, if homosexual desire was something that was inherent

or “acquired”, the public discourse treated it as something perverse and a threat to national health, marriage, and even childbirth (Kaye 63). [5]

Critics of the upcoming feminist movements made use of this fear and utilized the concept of sexual inversion to lambaste these women in the media, decrying their attempts to usurp the previously male public sphere. Most feminists attempted to undertake a form of damage control by openly criticizing homosexual behaviour. But it was difficult to defend themselves from claims of degeneration, Ledger mentions, as both feminists and sexual inverts were considered “a threat to the dominant moral, socio-sexual and aesthetic codes of the Victorian age” (95). Specifically one figure had risen amidst the battlefield to become the figurehead for the feminist movement, whether the different splinter groups liked it or not: the New Woman was born.

1.2.2. The Public Perception of the New Woman reflected in Literature

Although she was only officially baptized in 1894 – Ledger pinpointing a pair of articles by feminist writer Sarah Grand as the first instant the term was used – the New Woman, or, then, a prototype of her, had already been a frequent presence in the literary scene from the early 1880s on. It was the 1890s, however, that the New Woman had her halcyon days, appearing in a multitude of manifestations. The ‘wild woman’, the ‘glorified spinster’, the ‘shrieking sisterhood’: all of these are terms used to describe her, to praise her, and to attack her in the media, and with her the feminist movement that was closely related to her (Ledger 2-3). The ‘New’ in her name meant that the New Woman was labelled an indubitably Modern phenomenon, and this was indeed true in the sense that she was an active participant in public discourse, no longer solely a sit-at-home wife or loving mother.

[5] Ellis recounted a case wherein “a young ‘invert’ … had been advised by his doctor to marry”: the man did so but subsequently “fathered four clinically ill children” (64-65). It was for this reason that Ellis claimed ‘inverts’ should not be pressurized into marrying.

This does not mean, however, that she always presented a modern, advanced, non-Victorian view. The New Woman embodied many different things for many different people. Both her opponents and her supporters held different, sometimes conflicting views, even amongst people of the same camp. The New Woman was therefore also largely “a product of discourse” (Ledger 3). The manner in which she was depicted by her adversaries and by feminist writers, however, can reveal a great deal about the discourse on sexuality, gender and women’s role in society at the time.

For many of her critics, the New Woman represented an attack on Victorian values of marriage, sexuality and femininity, but her threat was depicted in different ways. One the one hand, Ledger observes, the New Woman was viewed as a “mannish, over-educated, humourless [bore]” (96). Often presented as a chain-smoking, strict-looking woman in the middle of a heated discussion, she was a woman who pretended to be a man. A woman who “offends against all the canons of good taste” … a “desexualized half-man” (17), the “UNSEXED WOMAN [sic]” (96): these are all terms used to describe this type of New Woman, and this caricature was often found in the media, such as cartoons in the famous satirical magazine *Punch* (See Figure 1). Aside from the fact that this New Woman desired higher education and a career, she was also oftentimes depicted as rejecting motherhood in favour of her own needs and desires, which is the exact opposite of the Victorian feminine ideal of the selfless mother as the greatest good.

On the other hand, a vastly different image was also prevalent. Zsófia Anna Tóth describes this type as “hyper-[feminine]”; these women were believed to be excessively ‘feeling’, and therefore hypersexual (256). Feminist writer Elaine Showalter refers to this vision of the New Woman as “a devouring Venus flytrap”: a sensuous, (overly) sexual woman (xi). A female having a sexual appetite was

PUNCH

Passenger (*rising politely*). "EXCUSE ME, MUM, BUT DO YOU BELIEVE IN WOMAN'S RIGHTS?"
New Woman. "MOST CERTAINLY I DO."
Passenger (*resuming seat*). "OH WELL, THEN STAND UP FOR 'EM!"

Fig. 1: Cartoon of a New Woman in the British weekly magazine Punch *by Phil May* (Punch Limited *1896*)

something that was virtually unthinkable in Victorian public discourse as the only passion a woman was supposed to feel was for domestic duties. This overtly sexual New Woman subverted the previously stable gender boundaries.

All these different female avatars were equally frightening and unsettling, because they all displayed 'masculine' attributes that had formerly belonged to men only. Moreover, the fact that she was seen as both wholly 'unfeminine' and sexually transgressive made the New Woman a classic example of sexual inversion. In all of her mannish, modernist glory, she posed a threat to the traditional Victorian *status quo* of marriage, femininity and even nationhood. Ledger claims that it is no coincidence that these fears about the New Woman surfaced around the same time people were worrying about Britain's imperial supremacy: in order to maintain this top-dog position, threatened by other world powers such as Germany, the British women should "raise up a strong British 'race'" (18). The repeated claims of the New Woman's sexual abnormality and her supposed refusal of marriage and motherhood were therefore highly unsettling.

The New Woman became increasingly associated with same-sex desire as well, especially in novels written by male authors. This further enhanced her sexual abnormality. As Ledger mentions, "There was a very real fear that she may not be at all interested in men, and could manage quite well without them", perhaps even desiring to overpower them (5). Many fictional New Women exhibiting lesbian tendencies in novels written by male authors indeed do not end up being married, such as Olive Chancellor in Henry James's *The Bostonians* (1886) and George Gissing's Rhoda Nunn in *The Odd Women* (1893) (mentioned in Ledger 125). As such, Ledger suggests that men perhaps felt "threatened by same-sex relationships between women"; same-sex desire between women was, she continues, right before

the birth of the New Woman, not even acknowledged as anything more than friendship, not harmless and not at all threatening (125).

The New Woman was thus initially used as a mouthpiece by her opponents, in an attempt to ridicule and silence feminism. However, by doing so, they gave her a platform, a space in public discourse which had never been there before, and which could also be used by feminist writers and other sympathizers. In a Foucauldian sense, the discourse of the dominant gave way for the 'Other' to speak up, too. As women being in the profession of writing was already somewhat accepted in earlier Victorian times, women writers of the fin de siècle did express themselves, through the New Woman. However, the fact that many of these women writers desired more rights for their own sex did not mean that they agreed on the path to get there. Despite what their opponents might have projected on them, these female novelists did not have a single stance of modern ideals, nor completely rejected Victorian ones, either.

On the one hand, there were many women writers who embraced thoroughly Modern concepts such as wearing men's clothes, moving in public circles and reforming the institution of marriage. Olive Schreiner (1855-1920) rallied in her treatise *Woman and Labour* (1911) not against the institution of marriage per se, but the fact that it is all too often used to oppress women: as such, the Victorian ideal of 'Angel in the House' was, according to Schreiner, a parasitical woman, one who "lives by the exercise of her sex functions [sic] alone" (qtd. in Ledger 42). Others, like Caird, were even more radical. In her famous novel *Daughters of Decadence* (1894), main character Hadria Fullerton reviles the sacred institutions of marriage and motherhood, exclaiming her disgust at seeing a woman with a new-born child despite being married and having children herself (Ledger 26). As such, Caird, who was married herself, dissects rather than celebrates marriage.

Although sexual freedom for women was not a subject shied away from, explicit same-sex desire, however – accredited to the New Woman by her critics – was not an openly discussed subject by women writers. Lesbianism, Ledger claims, was virtually non-existent in feminist discourse: same-sex desire continued to simply be "romantic friendship" (125). This is also noticeable in many New Woman novels, wherein characters express feelings which might nowadays be recognized as lesbian but end up in a conventional, heterosexual marriage. Edith Arnold's character Kit Drummond in her 1894 novel *Platonics*, for example, is initially described as a rather 'butch' individual: sporty, wearing men's clothes, and in an intimate relationship with another female. However, she ends up losing this masculine demeanour when she marries, perhaps most strongly symbolized by being suddenly referred to as 'Kitty'.

According to Ledger, this denial of the existence of lesbianism had to do with feminists' "reluctance to … construct themselves as sexual beings" as critics would again push them into certain categorizations to pathologize them (131). Many feminists were not against the traditional institution of marriage, only seeking to reform it and not to completely disband it. Despite this, they, and with them the New Woman, were often accused of being bad mothers and wives. Many feminists therefore, especially those from the bourgeoisie, turned towards an ideal altogether quite reminiscent of Victorian times. Although du Maurier wrote the book almost fifty years later, *Rebecca* is reminiscent of this ideal as the main character, too scared to identify herself as a sexual being, ends up in a conventional marriage – this was, even the more radical feminists admitted, the safest choice for a woman after all, as single women usually ended up as a social pariah in extreme poverty (Picard 326).

The Social Purity movement, whilst still being inherently feminist of character, was less concerned with women's rights to receive education and the right

of sexual liberty, and more with male sexuality being subjected to the same social purity imposed on women (Ledger 112-113). These feminists, Tóth observes, attacked the notorious Victorian double standard that legitimized male sexuality – men being polygamous – but insisted that respectable women possessed no sexual passion, otherwise she would be a prostitute (256). This Madonna/Whore paradox was also addressed by female writers. Sarah Grand's novel *The Heavenly Twins* (1893) exemplifies this. The main character Evadne Frayling is married at just 19 and, whilst being sexually attracted to her husband, refuses to consummate the marriage on the grounds of her husband's dubious sexual history. Grand then, turns the tables on the men in her novel: it is not female sexuality that "pollutes society, … [but] the male body which infects the wider social body" (Ledger 115). Whilst Evadne seemingly may not have the typical 'New Woman' masculine attributes and ends up in a conventional marriage, she does feel sexual desire, and educates herself by reading medical books, protecting her body from venereal disease by education.

As such, the New Woman was a person of many faces. She was by no means a stable phenomenon and therefore, Ledger claims, a threat to the "apparently homogeneous culture of Victorianism which could not find a consistent language by which she could be categorised and dealt with" (11). However, she gave voice to the many different opinions existing and debating each other in the fields of gender, sexuality, and morality. Although her critics used her to regulate the upcoming feminist movement, condemning her as abnormal, monstrous and queer, the New Woman allowed murmurs of dissent with this dominant discourse to be heard as well. Whilst largely a fictional presence in the fin de siècle, the New Woman gave way to new opportunities for very real women after World War I.

1.3. After WW I: A Longing to what Was VS a Desire for the New

The years after the Great War proved to bring a turning of the tide that plunged Western society into a state of confusion. The aftermath of the war had brought devastation to an unprecedented extent. Turmoil was the main element of the Interbellum, the period between both World Wars. There was, Deborah Parsons notes, a "disintegration of nineteenth-century assumptions of progress, order, and the stability of self and nationhood": whereas fin de siècle-England had been confident that society would renounce old-fashioned values and re-invent itself, the ruins of war now seemed the only outcome of this new future. (175-176). "In 1919" David Thomson starts his book *England in the Twentieth Century*,

> looking back across the chasm of the Great War at the England of pre-war days, men tended to see it as a golden age … to be as far as possible recaptured and restored save for those few fatal flaws which, they believed, had led to the disaster of general war. (15)

Yet, now that people had seen the full extent on what Modernity could bring, there was no turning back. The break with the past was irrevocable.

As such, many adopted a wholly different attitude, away from what was Victorian morality. Thomson suggests that "frivolity and self-indulgence [became] a natural, perhaps inevitable, post-war mood", as an attempt to make up for the total devastation (88). It was for this reason, Thomson continues, that Freudian psychology became a popular rationale: "To get rid of your repressions was taken to mean abandoning self-restraint" (88).

One of the most obvious ways in which public life had changed was the presence of women. The Great War had not only destroyed buildings and wiped out

entire generations, it had also demolished old gender stereotypes. Whereas during the fin de siècle the Woman debate had brought forward the possibility towards economic freedom, the war had forced many women into jobs that were previously considered off-limits for them, as most of the men were gone to the war front. Both the "social and economic freedoms that it enabled and the emotional losses that it demanded", revealed the extent of women's self-sufficiency and ability to fill the shoes of men (Parsons 183). Now used to this new equality and independency, which Parsons indicates "post-war society was keen to renege", women found themselves unable to turn back to old societal norms on gender (183). The "manly woman", lesbian novelist Radclyffe Hall (1880-1943) declares, "had [been] given a right to life [by] war and death, and life tasted sweet" (qtd. in Parsons 186).

Increasingly in the post-war years, Kenneth A. Yellis indicates, "women, whether married or single, were working to support themselves or to supplement their families' incomes" (51). As such, it was now grudgingly accepted by society that women, whether out of an economic need or a personal desire for fulfilment outside the home, increasingly found jobs, competed with men, and moved in public life. Yellis emphasizes this, saying that financial independence and opportunities to find "personal satisfaction" also served to change their perspective on women's role in general, "both [being] consequences and reinforcing causes of the social and sexual independence women were now beginning to exercise" (51). "From lighter clothing and shorter hair … to more open indulgence in drink, tobacco, and cosmetics, from insistence on smaller families to easier facilities for divorce", women's lives had significantly changed, Thomson indicates, and with them society (87).

It was this time that Daphne du Maurier grew up in; as a writer she was not decidedly feminist, but she did enjoy the freedoms of her time, something which

women of a previous generation had had very little access to. She had, for example, no qualms in rejecting male suitors in order to nurture her ambition as a writer (Forster 97). Yet, the Victorian values of home, marriage and motherhood had not entirely faded. Du Maurier's father, Forster writes, had an open aversion against homosexuals, which made it quite difficult for a teenage Daphne to cope with her bisexual feelings (28). As such, du Maurier continues to struggle with both her freedom, her suppressed feelings, and societal expectations: in a letter to a female friend in 1947, she writes that she was "not a lesbian but 'a 'half-breed', someone internally male and externally female" (222). Having largely reconciled her two sides, Daphne believed that her male energy was the driving force behind her artistic abilities as a writer, never once admitting to any lesbian tendencies, very much like the feminists of the Social Purity movement had done a few decades earlier.

As such, whilst du Maurier might not be a typically New Woman as represented in literature as she was not politically active, she epitomizes the struggle that many women of her time, New or not, went through. Newly-acquired freedoms and a slow but steady acceptance of female presence in the public realm, did not mean that women were entirely freed of their womanly obligations; namely, to marry and to have children. Any stereotypes about the New Woman that had existed during the fin de siècle continued to haunt them. Although it was now generally accepted that women could feel sexual pleasure as well, this did not mean that lesbianism, refusing to have children or remaining single were equally favourably received.

1.3.1. Out of the House, into Society

The New Woman actively strived for more basic rights for women, and as such not only tended to be more politically active but sexually active as well. This

was made easier, Tóth mentions, by the fact that women's sexuality had been acknowledged and popularized, gracing the covers of magazines and starring in the new media of film, and by the emerging birth control movement (259). This greater freedom, West theorizes, led the New Woman to experiment within a wide range of socio-cultural aspects: fashion, sports, and entertainment but above all, she engaged in sexual recreation – making sexual advances, sex before marriage, several sexual partners, same-sex partners, and a growing expression of sexuality in public. Although this was not limited to the New Woman only, she differed from other women in that she actively made use of this new, sexualized and urbanized environment to further blur the gender distinctions still present in society.

Demonstrative of perhaps one of the most important changes in a woman's life, Patterson suggests, the New Woman was a much more visible presence in the paid workforce (8). Leaving her house and the domestic sphere was a step to independency previously unknown. Freeman agrees, adding that the "urban industrial work system, along with growing secondary school attendance" greatly contributed to this development (eHistory: "Work, Education and Reform"). Increasing urbanization of society contributed to men and women interacting freely and a general easy-going attitude between the two, which was previously only possible within married life. What made this environment popular and sexual, Freeman suggests, was that it was no longer gender-segregated, there was minimal supervision, alcohol and tobacco were consumed freely, and cinema made "public's growing acceptance of heterosexual flirtation and imagery [possible]" (eHistory: "Sexual Revolution").

The New Woman therefore, made use of the growing acceptance of her presence in the public realm in order to make herself heard. She was often a suffragist, desiring economic independence, freedom of speech, and the right to

experiment sexually: the right, in short, to usurp formerly masculine attributes and use them as she like. Although the fin de siècle-New Woman was already deeply involved in feminist ideals, it was the Great War that, whilst being inconceivably destructive in general, had created a gateway to more economic and social opportunities.

The New Woman, like her predecessors, was lambasted by her critics as being savage and regressive, a "feeble imitation of [her] brothers" as critic Sheila Kaye-Smith (1887-1956) put it in 1921 (355). She was considered as particularly dangerous, West mentions, as she was "upsetting the conventions that made society stable" (56). It was not merely a financial independence that was unnerving, but the additional social and sexual freedoms that formerly belonged to men only and that women now permitted themselves to indulge in which were considered to be abominable.

As such, the New Woman was not only an admirable figure, but a perverted and sometimes even monstrous one as well. The New Woman who demands more rights and gives in to her immoral desires is often depicted by her critics as depraved, vile, 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 frightening New Woman is used to ridicule, control and eventually silence women of her kind – therefore she, herself, is often silenced. One such example is du Maurier's *Rebecca*, a novel in which the titular character is already dead before the plot starts off. She haunts the main character and her husband, but is finally reduced to nothing more than a faint whisper. At least, she is on the surface. Deep under the surface of this troubling sea, Rebecca continues to exert her power. What she does not and cannot say is, as is often the case, much more interesting than that which she can. The following chapter, an analysis of *Rebecca,* will delve deeper into what is not said and shed light on the novel's titular and arguably most important character.

Chapter 2 – The Sexual Spectre called Woman Adrift: Literary Analysis *Rebecca*

> I could not hear the restless sea [here], and because I could not hear it my thoughts would be peaceful too. They would not carry me down that steep path through the woods to the grey cove and the deserted cottage. I did not want to think about the cottage. … These [memories] disturbed me, I was not happy about them. I wanted to forget them but at the same time I wanted to know why they disturbed me, why they made me uneasy and unhappy. Somewhere, at the back of my mind, there was a frightened furtive seed of curiosity that grew slowly and stealthily, for all my denial of it, and I knew all the doubt and anxiety of the child who has been told, 'these things are not discussed, they are forbidden'. (*Rebecca* 134-135)

The sea is a pervasive presence in Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca*. Often a background noise, ever-persisting and nagging, both harbouring and bringing secrets to light, this body of water might be more than it seems, in the end always being the companion of the titular character of the novel, the first Mrs de Winter. The sea has many meanings – it can be calm but also wild, dangerous and unpredictable. The smooth surface may host a range of unknown mysteries underneath. In Carl Jung's theories, the sea functions as a symbol for the unconscious.[6] One might wonder, then,

[6] See Carl Jung, *Psychology of the Unconscious.* "We may mention here the supposition that there are connected with the sea … particularly impressive and strong memories which … give an especially strong character to the surface memories through unconscious harmony (46).

whose unconscious the sea in *Rebecca* represents: that of the nameless main character, her predecessor, the first Mrs de Winter, or perhaps both?

On the surface, *Rebecca* seems to many readers a typically romantic plot of a good female character who victors over another, villainous female character and ends up with the man she loves. Yet, in the novel no one is who they seem to be and seemingly explained events turn out rather differently. The plot of *Rebecca*, firstly, is related to the reader by an unnamed protagonist from a first-person perspective. This immediately sets the tone for the unreliability of the narrator, as there is no objective truth; the 'truth' is only that which is told by her, and that which is told to her by the persons she trusts, specifically her husband Maxim. The narrator thus presents the story, her story as a matter of fact, in a way that allows her own, good ending to triumph, the way it is 'supposed' to be. Yet, the question remains in how far we can trust a character of which the name remains unknown.

Uncertainty is thus what colours the entire novel. This is doubly implied by the fact that especially the main character is affected by it; she is so unsure of herself that she implicitly mistrusts others as well when they are kind to her, to a paranoid extent. She often laments her youthfulness, a characteristic she equates to foolishness – several times likening herself to "a little scrubby schoolboy", she feels that she is still a child, not a woman, and thus has no femininity – that is, normative femininity (38). Impressed by her neighbours' impressions of Rebecca, the narrator turns her husband's first wife into such a fairy tale-creature of femininity that she herself comes to resent her, wanting to become the perfect wife but feeling that Rebecca keeps hold of that title. She seems to hate Rebecca, tearing the page with her name from a book and burning it almost ritualistically. Yet simultaneously there seems to be more to her emotions regarding Rebecca than she wishes to admit.

The dream that the protagonist relates to the reader at the very beginning of the novel, almost entirely entailing the first chapter, might reveal more of her psyche than she ordinarily lets on. She describes how she has returned to Manderley, her former home, which at first sight seems “inviolate, untouched” but rather turns out to be encroached by a highly sexualized and overpowering vision of nature (2).

> The beeches with white, naked limbs leant close to one another, their branches intermingled in a strange embrace … The rhododendrons stood fifty feet high, twisted and entwined with bracken, and they had entered into an alien marriage with a host of nameless shrubs … A lilac had mated with a copper beech, and to bind them yet more closely to one another the malevolent ivy, always an enemy to grace, had thrown her tendrils about the pair and made them prisoners. … There was another plant too, some half-breed from the woods, whose seed had been scattered long ago … and now … thrust its ugly form like a giant rhubarb towards the soft grass (*Rebecca* 1-3).

This is the first look into the narrator’s psyche. Her vision is full of sexual imagery, not only referring to the act of intercourse (“intermingled in a strange embrace”, “entwined”, “mated”) and the sexual organs (the “soft grass” likely referring to the vagina and the “half-breed…thrusting its ugly form” to the penis), but might also be foreboding the title character’s forbidden love affairs with several males – and perhaps females - which later come to light. The “alien marriage [of the rhododendron] with a host of nameless shrubs, poor bastard things that clung about their roots as though conscious of their spurious origin”, signals the ‘alien’ (and thus utterly contrasting to a ‘normal’ matrimony) aspect of Rebecca’s affairs. The rhododendron, specifically a blood-red species, is a plant intimately connected with

her throughout the story: again and again it seems to surround and overpower the entire house, at one point even having trespassed its borders from nature to civilization (93).

Furthermore, the “malevolent ivy” which has twisted itself around a copper beech and a lilac, seems to reminisce the hold Rebecca continues to have over the de Winters – ivy sometimes being used as a symbol for immortality, it being an ever-green plant, and therefore reflecting Rebecca’s own imperishableness. As will later become clear, this dream actually occurs at the very end of the actual story – which makes it hauntingly real in that the reader realizes that the protagonist has not, in fact, conquered her “particular devil” at all but is still tormented by Rebecca’s image, which haunts her almost like a true spectre would (5).

This fear for Rebecca and what she represents forms a red line running through the plot. Initially the narrator assumes Rebecca was the perfect wife, lover, and woman, and she herself nothing in comparison, likening herself to “a guest in Manderley” (154). She feels threatened 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 therefore her successor, in all her shyness, cannot help but follow these footsteps. Rebecca, then, is so strongly present throughout the novel that the protagonist feels her breathe down her neck with every step she takes. Although the main character despises Rebecca, she is simultaneously deeply jealous of everything that she stood for, wanting to become her and simultaneously wanting to kill her memory (by burning the page with her name on it, for example).

This is symbolized in the way the protagonist is called throughout the novel; her own name being unknown, the narrator is only known 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 simultaneously she kept her self-identity as Rebecca, having individual thoughts and needs separated from her wifely duties. The narrator herself seems to realize this difference in self-assertion when comparing her own handwriting to that of Rebecca's. The penmanship of that of her predecessor stands out from the paper, specifically her own name; "Rebecca stood out black and strong, the tall and sloping R dwarfing the other letters" (36). 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" (98). 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 refuses to give up her self-identity in order to conform.

The fact that the narrator feels negatively towards Rebecca is largely due to her devotion to her husband Maxim, who also keeps Rebecca among the living by obsessing over her – although not for the reasons his second wife assumes. Even after he admits that he killed Rebecca, the protagonist continues to love him and completely devotes herself to him – symbolized by the fact that her name remains unknown: she is only 'Mrs de Winter'. Through Maxim, she learns that Rebecca was not the 'ideal' woman that everyone thought she was. In fact, he avows that she was cruel, egoistic 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" (304). The fact that Maxim calls her 'not normal' is telling of what his expectations 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: however, 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 this haunting of the narrator by Rebecca's image and that what it stands for, namely a certain seized sexual freedom, which makes the narrator unconsciously worry about her own sexuality and self-identity. This is symbolized in the little statue of the satyr, which stands outside the morning room and had been Rebecca's decoration. Satyrs are referred to as creatures with little self-control and an insatiable, almost animalistic sexual appetite; seeing as Rebecca herself had several licentious, adulterous affairs, it is an apt symbol for her. Therefore, it is no surprise that the main character, assuming she has 'defeated' Rebecca, wishes to get rid of it near the end of the novel ("I did not like it. We would give the satyr away" (423)), just like she wishes to distance herself from Rebecca's sexuality.

The reason for this fear of the sexual spectre that is Rebecca seems to stem from a deep desire to conform to heteronormative society. Judith Butler argues that any divergence 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 the perfect wife, hostess and employer, explicitly 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 (304).

Rebecca's 'abnormality' may not seem that strange to the modern reader. However, the novel is set in a time where traditional values were on the verge of being taken over by modern ones. The Manderley estate, which stands so central in

the plot, and the lives of its occupants illustrate this. Maxim de Winter is the prototype of a traditional, virile, Victorian man. The protagonist describes him as “unreal[-looking]” for their time, rather “[belonging] to a walled city of the fifteenth century” (13). Manderley is no different, never having changed in all its years, to the narrator still resembling “the Manderley of my picture post-card long ago” (73). Life there has been the same for the last few hundred years, as if time does not exist within. However, times have changed. Manderley is open once a week for the public to look around, to admire these ‘times gone by’. One woman comments to the protagonist that she “wouldn’t mind a nice little bungalow up here facing the sea” as “big estates [like Manderley] will be chopped up in time” (287-288). Time flies, within Manderley it seems to have stopped. Modernity is not allowed inside.

Nothing illustrates this more clearly than the married life of the de Winters. Maxim is mostly gone, away for work or managing the estate. The narrator, as a married woman, is expected to run the household and the servants, to uphold social contacts; in short, to be a perfect hostess whilst staying within the boundaries of the domestic sphere. Although she initially feels misplaced, the protagonist grows into her role (but only after having ‘defeated’ Rebecca). 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” (8). The narrator seems to be the ideal housewife, aside from her only other hobby of studying the English countryside having “developed a genius for reading aloud”: the ultimate pastime in Victorian homes (6). They continue to adhere, then, to the Victorian standard of married life.

Rebecca’s choices were the total opposite of this principle. She, too, was expected to live by Manderley standards. In contrast to the second Mrs de Winter,

however, she did not want to. Little is known about her motives, as we only get to know her through the recollection of other characters. She is no longer there but is still idolized by seemingly everyone, a thought that the nameless main character cannot overcome. Yet, du Maurier drops subtle hints that Rebecca might not have been what she seemed. The simple Ben refers to a mysterious 'She' who "won't come back no more" (127). Maxim voices his disgust over her several times through the novel, admitting even that he is "glad [he] killed Rebecca" (335). The image of Rebecca he conjures up, however, the reader only gets to know through him. The 'real' Rebecca might very well be someone else entirely, someone who did not hold up to his expectations but not altogether evil. 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 stable identity but a fluid one.

This fluidity seems to be Rebecca's very core. Putting up a farce for people as the respectable Mrs de Winter, she apparently had a wholly different side to her which she revealed only in London. However, all of these different personas "had an amazing gift", according to Maxim's sister Beatrice, to be "attractive to people" and even animals (210). Although it is hard to estimate what part of Rebecca's personality was artificial and what was sincere, genuine charisma seems to be a definite characteristic that Rebecca possessed, and was likely her most dangerous quality: being simultaneously 'abject' and charming. Frank Crawley answers the protagonist's question if Rebecca might have used her cottage a great deal in a rather diffident manner: "Yes, she did. Moonlight picnics, and – and one thing and another" (144). To her inquiry if he ever went to one of those he reluctantly admits "Once or twice" (144). This response might seem rather specific and, if one takes the heavily feminized symbolism of the moon into account, it being the source of the sea tides, a

cyclic transformation and thus linked to the female cycle of fertility, it emphasizes Rebecca's feminine power and irresistible attraction, as well as hints to the fluidity of her identity as the sea is also intrinsically connected to her.

This fluidity within Rebecca's character is also that which characterizes the New Woman. Not adhering 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 clearly be defined. Was she a manly woman, was she an over-sexualized woman, was she a woman at all? This was what made the New Woman so dangerous – she did not merely break the rules, she upset 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.

However, although she is dead at the time the story is told, Rebecca seems to be very much alive throughout the plot. The name of her boat, *Je Reviens* or 'I will return', turns out to be prophetic in several ways: her name is kept alive in her successor, 'the second' Mrs de Winter, and the fact that her name and initials turn up everywhere; the flowers she is so fundamentally linked to, the "blood-red… slaughterous, luscious and fantastic" rhododendrons and azaleas (72), grow everywhere, their scent penetrating every room of Manderley; the sea, which she had loved so much, is an omni-present sound; her real body that eventually is found; and finally, and most devotedly, she is kept alive by her faithful servant Mrs Danvers, who almost obsessively keeps her room a shrine.

Although it is implied from the beginning that Rebecca was an independent, methodical, strong-willed woman who took care of her own business and liked to run the show herself, bit by bit it is revealed that she might have been a bit too free-

spirited for conventional tastes. Her many affairs, some of which may or may not have involved other women, would have made Rebecca a typical example of 'sexual inversion', that is, having characteristics that 'belong' to the opposite gender. Maxim characterizes her as cunning, expertly hiding her 'true', vicious nature and making people fall for her. Their marriage was simply a contract, according to him – she would take care of the declining Manderley and in return could do as she pleased with whom she pleased in London. The fact that it was Rebecca who turned Manderley into a profitable business signifies not only her savvy side, but also that she apparently had enough money to be able to accomplish this – a radically different image from that of the demure housewife.

In Mrs Danvers' portrayal of Rebecca the latter is almost depicted like an angel, someone who is above mere humanity. She claims several times that Rebecca was never in love with anyone and even "despised all men, … was above all that" (382). This independency from men was, according to Victorian scholar Sally Ledger, a very real fear 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 (5). The fact that Rebecca and Maxim's marriage, although on the surface being ideal, was nothing more than a contract between two parties seems to come close to realizing this fear: two equals who come to an arrangement of which both will profit implies that both parties need each other instead of one person needing to be taken care of by the other.

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. 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" (272). June West ascribes to the New

Woman the tendency to "[ape] the dress, manners, customs, occupations, amusements, and habits – good or bad – of the so-called superior [male] group" in desiring the same rights as men possessed (59). The New 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 allegedly did most of this, as Mrs Danvers names many examples of Rebecca's masculine side, her wearing trousers for example, and she proudly remembers that when Rebecca cut off her long, beautiful 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" (190).

These are all characteristics of the New Woman, and it is exactly the more 'masculine' side of Rebecca – her being free-spirited, non-conforming, and highly sexual – that does not seem to be to Maxim's liking. "She told me about herself", he divulges to the protagonist, "told me things I shall never repeat to a living soul. I knew then … what I had married" (305). The fact that Maxim does not refer to his former wife as 'who' but as 'what', hereby, as it were, de-humanizing her, signifies Rebecca's situation as an abject body of which, as Butler anticipates will happen in such a case, the 'human-ness' is disputed (8). The 'horrible things' Rebecca supposedly did Maxim does not disclose to his wife, letting her and the reader assume the worst – yet, what is the worst a well-to-do married woman could do? Was it simply committing adultery, or was it something more sinful, something queer?

Her relationship with Mrs Danvers seems to imply exactly that. Although this is never directly stated in the novel, the lesbian undertones in the relationship between Rebecca and her servant underscore the queerness of Rebecca's interactions with people. Mrs Danvers appears to be in love with Rebecca, attesting her total adoration

for her in an unusually extraverted manner, stating that she has never washed her clothes, thus preserving her scent, compulsively showing Rebecca's possessions and finally even fetishizing these:

> You could almost imagine she had only just taken [her clothes] off. I would always know when she had been before me in a room. There would be a little whiff of her scent in the room. These are her underclothes, in this drawer. This pink set she had never worn. (191).

By revealing so much intimate detail and obsessive, even perverted behaviour, Mrs Danvers is a clearly queer character in that she openly identifies with feelings of homosexuality – and therefore willingly gives up her body's place in what Butler calls "the heterosexual matrix", the place which is ordinarily that which makes bodies 'human' (51).

Mrs Danvers' state of abjectness seems to be emphasized by the way she is described throughout the novel. Upon her introduction the reader learns that she can be likened to Death incarnated: she is "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" (74). Everything about Mrs Danvers seems to be depraved of life, her handshake being "limp and heavy, deathly cold", her voice "cold and lifeless" and her clothes always black as if she is in a permanent state of mourning (74). At one point, the narrator notices "little patches of yellow beneath [Mrs Danvers'] ears" (192). Death, decay, and decomposition seem to cling to Mrs Danvers, her body therefore seemingly having rejected (by) life itself, and therefore humanity: her place is apparently not in normative society, amongst the living.

Keeping the abject in mind, it is therefore all the more surprising that there are instances where Mrs Danvers becomes alive again – she seems to become reanimated

when talking about Rebecca: “her voice … was harsh now with unexpected animation, with life and meaning” (81). Upon showing the narrator Rebecca’s bedroom Mrs Danvers even smiles, and later on, once again in Rebecca’s room, the protagonist finds her crying (270). It is seemingly only in the vicinity of Rebecca that Mrs Danvers can exhibit any form of emotion, which demonstrates how close she had been and still is to Rebecca. As such, her love for Rebecca, which has originally placed her among the abject, is the only thing that can make Mrs Danvers lifelike.

Mrs Danvers’ insistence to show Rebecca’s room to the protagonist, which in a sense reveals her exhibitionism, her need for her and Rebecca’s love to be seen, makes the narrator deeply uncomfortable and reminds her of a visit to a friend’s house when she was a child, where the friend, “older than me, took my arm and whispered in my ear, ‘I know where there’s a book, locked in a cupboard, in my mother’s bedroom. Shall we go look at it?’” (102). Mrs Danvers’ need to display her own lesbian feelings seems to remind the narrator of the way one was curious as a child to ‘forbidden’ books, in all likelihood pornography, and the fact that it makes her uncomfortable shows that she might be afraid of her own sexual feelings. When Mrs Danvers is pressing her, asking: “You've’ been touching [her nightdress], haven’t you? … Would you like to touch it again?” the protagonist cannot resist her, feeling like a puppet. “The touch of her hand”, she says, “made me shudder. And her voice was low and intimate, a voice I hated and feared” (189). The fact that she quite literally feels sick but seemingly enchanted attests to both her fear of and curiosity about finding out about her own sexuality; Mrs Danvers, who, in her exhibitionism, has no qualms to openly express her romantic obsession with her late mistress, might be a highly uncomfortable presence to someone who is actively attempting to suppress similar feelings. The initial quote at the beginning of this chapter seems to be

the only time the narrator realizes the extent of these feelings, but is fearful to press deeper.

Although the protagonist continues to reject Rebecca, she does seem to identify with her in her daydreaming. Although her fantasies are often romantic and dramatic in character, they seem to gain a darker edge that manifests itself in real life as well as the plot develops. During one such particular reverie, in which the narrator fantasizes about how Rebecca must have won over a jealous Maxim and where, "for one second, … I had been Rebecca", she displays 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" (225-226). When his wife presses him to tell why he did not like her look, he explains that she seemed to have momentarily gained knowledge, "not the right sort of knowledge" (226). When further compelled 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'. (226-227)

Again, knowledge of 'forbidden' books is mentioned, and being brought in connection with certain sexual enlightenment that fathers do not wish for their daughters to have, nor husbands for their wives, for it would make them, in Victorian terms, "a failure to be a good girl" (Beetham 67). This is reminiscent of Victorian fears about women reading novels, in which, Margaret Beetham mentions, it was believed that reading would give young, impressionable girls the wrong ideas about

romance, marriage and family life – including sexual relationships. Maxim, as well, seems to want his wife devoid of such thoughts. Her youthfulness is, apparently, 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 (336).

This also seems to be emphasized by how Maxim continues to treat his wife throughout the novel. Apparently, he associates her with his mother, as he puts her in a room which overlooks the rose garden, a flower intrinsically connected to memories of his childhood and his mother: this connection with motherhood implies the role he wants his own wife to take (84). Her wing lies also opposite of where Rebecca's wing was located, and she notices that the sea cannot be heard from there. This might signify that Maxim is attempting to keep his young, naïve second wife away from Rebecca's dangerous influence, the sea symbolizing the latter's fluidity as a sexual spectre. Furthermore, Maxim continuously refers to the narrator as 'child' ("My good child" (129), "My sweet child" (160)), sometimes even treating her like one would a pet, kissing the top of her head: "He pats me now and again, when he remembers" (114). Although their age difference might have played a role as well, it seems more likely that Maxim is deliberately keeping his wife 'young', that is, innocent, wifely, motherly and pure, as a good Victorian wife would be.

That is the manner in which the entirety of her identity is defined by the other (male) characters. The narrator has no name, although it is known that it is "very lovely and unusual" (25). 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, always calling her 'Mrs de Winter', albeit some do so mockingly – Jack Favell continuously refers to her as "bride", hereby sometimes implicating his doubt about her virginal purity ("I wonder what you have been doing. Leading Frank Crawley up

the garden-path?" (362)). As such, the narrator is alternately known as 'child', 'bride', and 'Mrs de Winter'. All of the terms epitomize her status as an 'Angel in the House'; idealized, pure, 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 apparently content with this, she herself referring to her husband as being "my father and my brother and my son" (163). As she had no living relatives at time she had a job as a paid companion to the wealthy and snobbish Mrs Van Hopper, it might have been the case that the narrator was in search of a father figure, a role which Maxim seems to have no qualms about to fulfil. In this light it seems fitting and simultaneously ironic that Maxim suggests she dresses up as Alice in Wonderland for the ball: the tale of an innocent girl discovering a strange yet enticing world seems 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 want to.

Once she hears that the overpowering force that was the first Mrs de Winter was actually murdered, the narrator is glad, declaring: "Rebecca is dead. She can't speak" (316). Thus, it seems, Rebecca remains the twisted, egocentric figure in the reader's mind, and the protagonist remains blissfully unaware of her own (sexual) feelings. Yet, from the two most vivid dreams that the narrator experiences in the novel, we already know that this last bit might not be the case for very long.

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 interesting to note that where the narrator before continuously attempted to 'kill' Rebecca, she now identifies with her. Maxim, who is also present 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" (426). Although 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 perhaps her own unconscious being allowed further into repressed feelings. In psychoanalytical term, an ordinary Oedipus complex would have eventually evolved in the girl fixating her sexual desire on other men than her father. Yet, Maxim, a father figure to the narrator, being strangled by the ultimate symbol of femininity, long hair, seems to imply both the narrator's own overpowering sexuality, and perhaps even lesbian feelings, the male fear of being overpowered and eventually replaced. The second dream, which occurs at the beginning of the novel and is full of sexual imagery, illustrates this descending path – away from Victorian purity and motherhood, and towards the 'abject' pit of unrestrained sexuality. Although it is demanded of a woman in her time to react with horror to any form of promiscuity, the narrator, though she might never admit it, has not gotten rid of Rebecca's ghost at all.

The protagonist's own (unconscious) identification with Rebecca further probes the question as to this necessarily being a bad thing. Rebecca might seem, on the surface, the antagonist who needs to be defeated; it needs to present normative choices (that is, a heterosexual relationship and marriage) as both a "choice and destiny", Harbord argues, for the novel to succeed as romantic fiction (96). However, Rebecca seems to have won at the very end, as it is heavily implied that she the supernatural force behind the fire. Although it is unknown who set the actual fire, Mrs Danvers' disappearance makes it likely that she had something to do with it, and with her intimate connection to Rebecca, her being the 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 (428). To Maxim, this is his ultimate fear come true, the loss of his family estate. However, it might also be read

as Rebecca wreaking revenge, which raises the question if she is justified in her vengeance.

As both the protagonist's dreams imply a further descend into the abject state of unrestrained sexual desire, it might even be implied that both Rebecca and the protagonist are two sides of the same coin: both sides deal with the aftermath of being married in radically different ways, one the respectable, traditional way, the way it is 'supposed' to be and therefore the proper, public choice to identify with; the other as an aversion against the former, a disinclination. Although the narrator may never admit it, her dreams do reveal an unconscious tendency to identify with the latter. Even if never expressed, it does not mean that it is not present. The narrator's true feelings are aptly hidden by her own narrative.

It might be wondered then, if Rebecca's 'true' face is once again not what it seems either. Although Mrs Danvers is obsessed with Rebecca in such a way that her judgement might be clouded, she seems to be the only one who knew Rebecca intimately, and the only one who Rebecca did not laugh at behind her back and whom she even had a pet name for. Maxim reveals to the narrator that Rebecca, right before he killed her, had whispered to him that "We could make you look very foolish, Danny and I", when he threatened to make her 'London life' public. From Maxim's perspective, Rebecca seems almost psychopathic, having no empathy and no sense of guilt. Mrs Danvers' account of Rebecca, however, is rather different.

Rebecca's moral stance was already described by Maxim as 'not normal', and if Mrs Danvers's account is to be believed, Rebecca's sexual escapades certainly were quite unrestrained. The lovemaking with the many men was all a game for Rebecca, Mrs Danvers claims, and she did it because it made her laugh: "No one got the better of her, never, never" (272). Although manipulating people is generally not a positive

trait, Rebecca might, to a certain extent, be excused from her behaviour when doing it in rebellion against the traditional institution of marriage, which she was assumedly forced into, and all the conventions of class values and societal norms it brought with it. According to Maxim, Rebecca would ridicule 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, specifically in the form of Mrs Van Hopper, who is ridiculed by them on almost every occasion.

The fact that Rebecca overtly adhered to this traditional, Victorian environment she was brought into as a wife, but ridiculed it at the same time does not necessarily make her a morally depraved person, but perhaps more so a rebel who fights the established order because she does not agree with it, and above all unmasks 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" (382). Rebecca, then, seems to have found it, above all else, infinitely funny to expose people's hypocrisy and use it against them. But, Mrs Danvers is a woman herself, and also one who openly expressed her homoerotic feelings for her former mistress and is hereby condemned to the limbo of the 'abject', the 'non-human'. This also entails losing one's status within 'normal' society, for which one, according to Butler, will be ostracized (98). Mrs Danvers, as an abject body, will not be taken seriously by those that are part of normative society, and she is thus effectively silenced, as Rebecca was for not adhering to the heterosexual normativity either.

Bobby Noble, like Judith Butler discussing the position of 'abject' bodies that do not fit society's heteronormative norms and values, argues that, as opposed to society's enforcement of a certain fixedness of self-identity, "becoming a self is a

socially and discursively overdetermined 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 challenge normalcy, and are therefore a threat to society's generally stable pillars of gender divisions. The New Woman, then, can be seen as such a 'self' who was dissatisfied with the status quo and proposed to challenge it by means of usurping masculine attributes and seizing the freedom to move in public spheres. She was both an admirable figure in changing times and a danger to the traditional Victorian gender regulations: Rebecca illustrates this, as Rebecca is both the titular heroine and the antagonist of the novel. Like Queer Theory, Rebecca calls attention to herself as a concealed, abject body, revealing herself as both a New Woman and a queer, and therefore as a rebellion against normalcy, while simultaneously appearing as the 'perfect woman'.

Both marriage and motherhood, the two pillars of the feminine ideal in the Victorian period, are chipped away at by Rebecca. She has realized the extent of their reach and uses it against itself. In order for her to continue carrying on with her affairs, she marries Maxim. Maxim, in turn, is prepared to marry Rebecca, a woman whom he clearly loathes, in order to be able to uphold the traditional image of respectability. He, as much as Rebecca, desecrates the holy union of marriage for his own gain, yet he does not seem to be able to admit this, instead projecting all of his negative thoughts on Rebecca, who does not really care either way. Marriage, to Rebecca, is a farce, nothing more than a game. If Maxim is to be believed, she exclaimed her joy over this: "They'll say we are the luckiest, happiest, handsomest couple in all England. What a leg-pull, Max! … What a God-damn triumph!" (305). The sanctimony of marriage is therefore ridiculed and turned into a tool to condone the sin of committing adultery.

Furthermore, it is later learned that Rebecca could not have children due to a malforming 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 awakens 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 illness and subsequent death are in many ways illustrative of the warning that Butler issues when one does not conform to the conventional model of what she deems "heterosexual imperatives" (3). She quotes Freud's *The Ego and the Id* in saying that sometimes, "sexuality [is figured] as illness", this illness being "symptomatic of the structuring presence of a moralistic framework of guilt" (63). By constantly being described 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 threatened, by means of psychosis, ostracism, and "psychic unlivability" – the latter implying that it is impossible to live normally as an abject body (15). Breaking 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 ostracized from 'normal' society (98). Rebecca is deemed as "not normal" by her husband, who goes on to describe her as a devil, with characteristics that can easily be attributed to a psychopath – being cunning and manipulative, possessing no empathy, remorse or guilt, incapability to love (304).

Furthermore, the ‘psychic unlivability’ which Butler mentioned as a threat against those suspected of ‘queer’ behaviour, is manifested as physical unlivability in Rebecca since she had a deformation of the womb which prohibited her from ever producing children. Following Butler, who claims 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). That which biologically defines one as a woman, then, the aspect of reproductivity, was absent from Rebecca. Again, she is defined as a non-human 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, normally reserved for men, into her own female identity, unrestricted by guilt.

Rebecca’s illness, of which it is strongly implied that it was cancer of the uterus, further symbolizes the abjection of her masculinized femininity. Cancer, a malignant, 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 signify a growth of negative feelings – those of frustration about and rebellion against the restrictive corset that society forces women to wear. If it was indeed cancer of the uterus, the uterus representing the base of womanhood, where life grows, it is also the base of Rebecca’s problems, namely her identity as a woman which was forced by ‘the law of sex’ to fit into certain categories, specifically that of motherhood, and be excluded from others, namely that of sexual fervency.

Rebecca, in turn, rejected these 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" (273). 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 New Woman was referred to as a woman who was "adrift": not merely, as Freeman 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 (eHistory: "Image and Lifestyle"). Rebecca, being linked to the sea on several occasions and finally having merged with the sea, is the ultimate woman adrift.

That Rebecca chose her own death rather than dying of an illness that heavily implicates her own inability to live as a confined woman might be an ultimate act of vengeance. Although Maxim believes she taunted 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 provoking 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 reinforcing 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 queer, and a true New Woman.

Conclusion

Women's lives have changed immensely in the past centuries. The nineteenth century, especially, proved to be the catalyst of both negative and positive developments. Industrialization, literacy, print media, emergent homosexuality, and war all had their effect. In just a period of a hundred years, women's role within the family and society varied from co-breadwinner, to domestic Angel, to independent participant of the public realm. The ideal of femininity transformed to that of Good Wife, Wise Mother into one where individuality and independency became more appreciated.

This evolution of Woman's role can, especially in the literature of the time, be scrutinized through one figure in particular. Although initially largely fictional, specifically in the fin de siècle-years, she was a visible presence nonetheless. The arrival of the New Woman generated many different responses. She had a clear voice, which was used as a mouthpiece both by her opponents and by her supporters; one attempted to ridicule and control her, the other let her rampant. This does not mean, however, that responses from both sides were uniform in nature. Represented as a heroine, a monster, a sexual deviant, an a-sexual body, the response to her was multi-fold. Very much like her gender, her identity was fluid.

The New Woman was the first woman to usurp formerly purely masculine attributes and claim them as hers, too. By doing this, she tore apart the social fabric of which gender conventions existed, hereby upsetting 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 adversary to Convention.

For her opponents, she was an abomination of what a ‘real’ woman should be. Deviant, insane, perverted – all terms that were applied to the New Woman, and all terms that imply an inversion of societal norms. In all her fluidity, possessing both male and female characteristics, she was deemed to be neither, an incomplete human being. As a consequence, many New Women struggled with their newly obtained social freedom, and most of all with the concept of what it meant to be a ‘woman’.

In *Rebecca,* this struggle is centralized in the two main female characters. The nameless main character represents the inability to (directly) confront one’s own sexuality, and Rebecca symbolizes 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 denouncing it, denying and supressing its existence, but inwardly, unconsciously, also seeking it, identifying with this spectre of sexuality. The narrator’s dreams symbolize this descent into the strange, uncontrollable and unrestrained world that is called sexuality.

Although Rebecca, being the avatar of this exact world, is ‘silenced’ en public she refuses to, as Mrs Danvers so proudly puts it, “stand mute and still and be wronged”: she will see them in hell first (272). She never truly goes away, although officially banished from normative society. The fact that the narrator feels so haunted and threatened by this spectre of sexuality, signifies the battle that the New Woman found herself in on a daily basis as well: what was then named ‘queer’ for a woman to possess, namely, masculine attributes in the physical, symbolical and psychical sense, they took in as part of their identity.

As a result, they became ‘queer’ themselves, and it likely did affect them in every possible way. Being queer not merely implies the leaning towards same-sex

desire but being abnormal, inversed, deviant, and thus something to be feared by those who reside in the sphere of normalcy. As Judith Butler argues, openly identifying with that which society condemns, so refusing to adhere to the normative standards of that particular time and place, means being ostracized 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 generally not completely integrated in society; if they attempt to do so, they are generally regarded with fear, contempt and apprehension.[7]

This is how Rebecca can be viewed as well. Since she is dead, the reader will never know her own thoughts and feelings but can only make assumptions from what is known – and that is from the heavily prejudiced perspective of Maxim, the very person who silenced her. Maxim paints her as sexually and morally depraved; according to him, Rebecca "was not even normal", likening to a sociopath who had no feelings of remorse about her own acts of adultery whatsoever, was cunning, and artificial (304). He hereby takes Rebecca's humanity away from her, even referring to her as 'what' (304). She is de-humanized, and subsequently killed, presumably never to be heard from again.

However, Rebecca's spirit returns, and with a vengeance. 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" (275). In order to function normally within one's society, one needs to identify with the normative discourses of that society (Butler 2). In order

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[7] With this, I do not mean to say that life is impossible for these people. Especially in Western societies, it has become increasingly more easy and acceptable to openly identify as being homosexual, for example. Yet, gay people do not always have access to otherwise 'universal' rights, such as marriage, and their environment is generally still a bit removed from 'ordinary' society, such as clubs catering only to gay people might indicate.

for her to remain in the sphere of normativity, and thus within life in Manderley, this is what the narrator does. Mrs Danvers' words, however, do come true. Rebecca's spirit resonates within every part of the plot, in the end taking over everything, including the title of the novel: the narrator might have gotten her so-desired husband, but Rebecca got the final word. In this sense, Rebecca does not merely defy the social standards of her time, but can rightfully be called a Queer phenomenon.

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