



Rebecca

By Daphne Du Maurier

First published in 1938

Genre & subject

Romantic suspense fiction

Historical fiction

Synopsis

The reader is ushered into an isolated grey stone mansion on the windswept Cornish coast, as the second Mrs. Maxim de Winter recalls the chilling events that transpired as she began her new life as the young bride of a husband she barely knew. For in every corner of every room were phantoms of a time dead but not forgotten -- a past devotedly preserved by the sinister housekeeper, Mrs. Danvers: a suite immaculate and untouched, clothing laid out and ready to be worn, but not by any of the great house's current occupants. With an eerie presentiment of evil tightening her heart, the second Mrs. de Winter walks in the shadow of her mysterious predecessor, determined to uncover the darkest secrets and shattering truths about Maxim's first wife -- the late and hauntingly beautiful Rebecca.

Author biography

Daphne du Maurier was born in London, the middle child of three daughters of the prominent actor-manager Sir Gerald du Maurier and actress Muriel Beaumont (maternal niece of journalist, author, and lecturer William Comyns Beaumont). Her grandfather was the author and Punch cartoonist George du Maurier, who created the character of Svengali in the novel *Trilby*. Her elder sister Angela also became a writer, and her younger sister Jeanne was a painter.

Her family connections helped her in establishing her literary career, and du Maurier published some of her early work in Beaumont's *Bystander* magazine. Her first novel, *The Loving Spirit*, was published in 1931. Du Maurier was also the cousin of the Llewelyn Davies boys, who served as J.M. Barrie's inspiration for the characters in the play *Peter Pan, or The Boy Who Wouldn't Grow Up*.

Discussion starters

- Du Maurier admitted that her heroine has no name because she could never think of an appropriate one—which in itself is a telling comment. What effect does it have on the novel that the heroine has no first name?
- What kind of character is our heroine—as she presents herself at the beginning of her flashback? Describe her and her companion, Mrs. Hopper.

- What kind of character is Maxim de Winter, and why does a man of his stature fall in love with the young heroine? What draws him to her?
- In what way does the relationship between the young heroine and Maxim change during the months after their arrival to Manderley?
- What role does Mrs. Danvers play in this story—in her relationships to the characters (dead and alive) and also in relation to the suspense within the novel?
- What is the heroine's relationship with Maxim's sister Beatrice and her husband Giles? What about the advice Beatrice offers the heroine?
- What are some of the other clues about Rebecca's true nature that the author carefully plants along the way?
- How might the costume ball—and the heroine's appearance in Rebecca's gown—stand as a symbol for young Mrs. de Winter's situation at Manderley?
- Were you surprised by the twist the plot takes when Rebecca's body is found...and when Maxim finally tells the truth about his and Rebecca's marriage? Did the strange details of plot fall into place for you?
- How, if at all, do Maxim's revelations change your attitude toward him? Did you feel relief upon first reading his confessions? Can you sympathise with his predicament, or do you censure his actions? What do you think of the heroine's reaction? In her place, how might you have reacted?
- How does this new knowledge alter the heroine's behaviour and her sense of herself?
- In the end, what really happened to Rebecca? What is the full story of her death? Is it right that Maxim is absolved of any crime? Was he caught in an untenable position? Was Rebecca simply too evil—did she end up getting what she deserved?
- How do you view the destruction of Manderley? Is it horrific, or freeing, or justified vengeance on Rebecca's part? Would the de Winters have had a fulfilling life at Manderley had it not burned?
- Now return to the beginning of the book. How would you put into words, or explain, the sense of loss and exile that permeates tone of the opening?

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