

Rebecca: Lecture 2
Dismantling the Gothic/Affirming Freud's Paradigm

1. The Gothic paradigm meets the family romance

- a. Freud defined Oedipal conflict as the generator of male heterosexual identity, but had little to say about female psychosexual development even when he developed his parallel theory about female heterosexual development (which he called the Electra complex).
- b. The Gothic paradigm mirrors the Oedipal puzzle of female development - it tries to explain how women develop into heterosexual beings - but with a twist.
- c. What common elements do the two paradigms share?
 - i. girls, discovering their sexuality, turn to available opposite-sex figure: father
 - ii. desire for father is frustrated when access to father is frustrated - in Electra, the mother intervenes, while in the Gothic paradigm, Father turns out to be an inappropriate mate because he is a predator
 - iii. girl, after latency period, turns outside the family to find appropriate husband
- d. The Gothic paradigm alters the Oedipal pattern by making the father a criminal - a murderer of wives whom the daughter must destroy to survive. This changes the ideology of the pattern, transforming it into a cautionary tale about the dangers of heterosexual marriage.
- e. Du Maurier's changes to the two patterns shifts the blame to the Mother/Wife figures, who are perceived as guilty and deserving of murder because they are interlopers, inappropriately "masculine" in their orientation to the world.

2. Rebecca presents an altered version of the Electra paradigm.

- a. In this altered version, the Father/Daughter incestuous impulse is gratified instead of being thwarted; Mothers are successfully eliminated; the incestuous marriage is consummated.
 - i. The "daughter" (Narrator), after suffering the death of her biological father, confronts adulthood and desires a new figure who resembles her "father" (Max).
 - ii. The Father also desires her, explicitly because of her Daughter (not adult) status.
 - iii. The father "kills off" a series of symbolic mother-figures (Mrs. Van Hopper, Mrs. Danvers, Mrs. De Winter), eliminating them from his married life with the narrator.
 - iv. The Daughter's access to the Father having been cleared, they marry.
 - v. The Daughter discovers the Father's mother-murders, but feels relieved and complicit.
 - vi. All of the Mothers are exposed as cruel, unnatural, and evil, and thus deserving of punishment and elimination.
 - vii. The Daughter accepts that adulthood equals criminality, and continues to desire the Father and to have a now fully adult relationship with him.
 - viii. The marriage, because implicitly incestuous, is barren and the patrimony is lost.

3. Rebecca presents an altered version of the Gothic paradigm.

- a. In this altered version, the marriage between the heroine and Bluebeard is preserved and the murders of the previous wives are rationalized.
 - i. The narrator marries an older, sexually experienced man.
 - ii. They live in his large house, which has mysterious, off-limits rooms and spaces from which she is explicitly barred.

- iii. In the husband's absence, the narrator discovers the dead bodies of his former wives, whom he has murdered - women his own age whom he has rejected.
- iv. Instead of lying about her own curiosity and accusing him, she sympathizes with the murders - the wives deserved to be killed or eliminated - they were the agents of their own destruction. In this version, it is the wives, not the Bluebeard figure, who are criminals; he is "judge, jury, and executioner."
- v. The husband and the narrator successfully manage to cover up the crimes, and though their marriage is confirmed/enriched by the deception, they lose the house and have no children.

4. Rebecca as paradigm of overreaching woman: master of symbolic order.

- a. Symbolic order (Lacan): male adult realm of language, rules, laws laid down by patriarchs. Contrast to Imaginary, which is infant realm of sense perception; associated with inarticulation, chaos, the female world of mothers/infants.
- b. Rebecca designs a life that's a charade, a piece of artwork designed to deceive onlookers: Max calls it "The lie we lived, she and I. The shabby, sordid farce we played together" 274.
 - i. Handwriting, speaking: R writes letters, speaks and socializes flawlessly. Writing and speaking encode identity and will.
 - (1) contrast: morning room where R writes her social letters is scene of heroine's first humiliation.
 - (2) contrast: heroine's bad writing (87) "I noticed for the first time how cramped and unformed was my own hand-writing, without individuality, without style, uneducated even, the writing of an indifferent pupil taught in a second-rate school."
 - ii. Swears: when Max accuses her of bringing her London affairs to Manderley, he says "she flared up at once, cursing me, using every filthy word in her particular vocabulary" 275.
 - iii. Social rule-mastery: R understands how to handle servants, in-laws, bounders like Favell.
 - (1) contrast: narrator bungles most social episodes. China ornament; handling Favell;
 - iv. Decoration, "taste": Max confesses "the beauty of Manderley you see today, the Manderley that people talk about and photograph and paint, it's all due to her, to Rebecca" 275.
 - v. Androgyny/maleness: in spite of "beauty, brains, breeding" (272) ascription, she is described as male (Mrs. Danvers here) as having "all the courage and spirit of a boy." Sterile. Imputation of possible lesbian relationship with Mrs. Danvers. Sports like sailing and horseback riding. Also seizes privileges of men: sexual infidelity being the most important.
 - (1) contrast: narrator girlishly feminine.

5. Rebecca must be destroyed because she is an interloper into the symbolic order - she acts like a man, abuses her knowledge of the rules of the symbolic order. The scene in which Max confesses his murder of Rebecca provides all explanations of how she knew too much - and did too much, was too masterful.

- a. Duplicity with Max:
 - i. lies about her chastity before they are married
 - ii. exchanges tolerance of her infidelities for making Manderley the best-known of the English manor houses (273).
 - iii. goads Max into murdering her by lying about her pregnancy (she actually has cancer). She threatens to bring Mrs. Danvers and Favell into the plot - deliberately to humiliate Maxim - and wants to torture him even after her death.
- b. Rebecca rejected traditional femininity/heterosexuality:
 - i. her charade of "mistress of Manderley" is discovered to have covered a lesbian orientation
 - ii. "she was incapable of love, of tenderness, of decency. She was not even normal" (implying lesbianism, 271). Mrs Danvers also claims (340) that she hated all men.
- c. Max as contrast: he believes in the symbolic order of primogeniture, as encoded in Manderley with its old-order feudal structure. "I thought about Manderley too much. . . I put Manderley first, before anything else" (274 - this is after Rebecca goads him with the lie about her pregnancy and he murders her).
- d. Rebecca, by violating these rules and exploiting her knowledge, must be killed. Symbolically, she is trying to take over the property that according to the rules of fathers should belong to Max - and so she cannot be allowed to triumph. Compare to the duplicitous heroine who lies to Bluebeard to avert her own death. Rebecca provokes her own murder.

6. Heroine has tried to imitate the bad "Mommy" but punished by Daddy.

- a. Tries on "role" periodically, imitating Rebecca:
 - i. Echoes R's choices for servants, decorating, etc.
 - ii. Makes social calls, tries to adopt role, even when others (Beatrice and Giles, Favell) treat her rudely
 - iii. Imitates Max's ancestress, Lady Caroline De Winter, in an attempt to usurp the position of Lady of the Manor. Ironically, of course, this is what Rebecca did, literally and figuratively.
 - iv. Tries on R's clothes, wears fancy outfit that displeases Max, because she lacks confidence in her own girlish style.

7. Heroine is saved by helping to conspire to cover up "Daddy's" murder of bad Mommy.

- a. Narrator becomes more assertive after Rebecca's murder is revealed.
 - i. On 289, Narrator corrects Mrs. Danvers for not keeping the room nice and orders a new lunch (rather than the leftovers Mrs. Danvers has provided) and rejects her assertion of old rules about who orders what and whom.

- b. After Maxim confesses to murder, their marriage is symbolically and literally consummated:
“I was free now to be with M, to touch him, and hold him, and love him. I would never be a child again. It would not be I, I, I any longer, it would be we, it would be us. We would be together. We would face this trouble together. All [list of people from family and inquest] could not break us now. Our happiness had not come too late. I was not young any more. I was not shy. I was not afraid. I would fight for M. I would lie and perjure and swear, I would blaspheme and pray. Rebecca had not won. Rebecca had lost” (285).

- c. But the narrator's attractive childishness is gone: on 299, Maxim confesses:
"I'm glad I killed R, I shall never have any remorse for that, never, never. But you. I can't forget what it has done to you. . . It's gone forever, that funny, young, lost look that I loved. It won't come back again. I killed that too, when I told you about Rebecca. It's gone, in twenty-four hours. You are so much older."

- d. The punishment is that their marriage is barren and they are cast out of Manderley; they can be married, but they have lost everything that is important to them. Thus, though they are allowed to flout the Oedipal paradigm by fulfilling their "incestuous" desires, they lose, and we, along with them, are punished for cheering for the murderer and supporting an essentially unnatural and inappropriate relationship.