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Candidate session number

Candidate name

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Examination session (May or November)

May

Year

2013

Diploma Programme subject in which this extended essay is registered: LITERATURE AND PERFORMANCE

(For an extended essay in the area of languages, state the language and whether it is group 1 or group 2.)

Title of the extended essay:

How has the character of the
second Mrs de Winter been portrayed in
literature and film?

Candidate's declaration

This declaration must be signed by the candidate; otherwise a grade may not be issued.

The extended essay I am submitting is my own work (apart from guidance allowed by the International Baccalaureate).

I have acknowledged each use of the words, graphics or ideas of another person, whether written, oral or visual.

I am aware that the word limit for all extended essays is 4000 words and that examiners are not required to read beyond this limit.

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Supervisor's report and declaration

The supervisor must complete this report, sign the declaration and then give the final version of the extended essay, with this cover attached, to the Diploma Programme coordinator.

Name of supervisor (CAPITAL letters)

Please comment, as appropriate, on the candidate's performance, the context in which the candidate undertook the research for the extended essay, any difficulties encountered and how these were overcome (see page 13 of the extended essay guide). The concluding interview (viva voce) may provide useful information. These comments can help the examiner award a level for criterion K (holistic judgment). Do not comment on any adverse personal circumstances that may have affected the candidate. If the amount of time spent with the candidate was zero, you must explain this, in particular how it was then possible to authenticate the essay as the candidate's own work. You may attach an additional sheet if there is insufficient space here.

originally came up with the idea of looking at "Rebecca" after selecting a practice prose commentary that contained an extract from the novel. She then read the novel and became interested in the main character. She led her on to watching the film version, directed by Hitchcock. She found it interesting the way that the main character was portrayed in both film and book. She had no former Media or Film background but felt that it would be good to branch away from the traditional Literature essay. She found it difficult to find resources for the film, and when writing the essay it was difficult for her to balance the analysis of the film and the book and give a neutral stance as she loved both and had quite strong opinions about them. She liked looking at the film as it gave a modern context and she could then see both interpretations from viewer's and reader's point of view. Her love of the novel came through the essay although her film technique knowledge was limited she did attempt to show the differences effectively.

This declaration must be signed by the supervisor; otherwise a grade may not be issued.

I have read the final version of the extended essay that will be submitted to the examiner.

To the best of my knowledge, the extended essay is the authentic work of the candidate.

I spent hours with the candidate discussing the progress of the extended essay.

Supervisor's signature:

Date

Assessment form (for examiner use only)

Achievement level

Criteria	Examiner 1		Examiner 2		Examiner 3	
	maximum		maximum		maximum	
A research question	2	<input type="text" value="0"/>	2	<input type="text"/>	2	<input type="text"/>
B introduction	2	<input type="text" value="0"/>	2	<input type="text"/>	2	<input type="text"/>
C investigation	4	<input type="text" value="2"/>	4	<input type="text"/>	4	<input type="text"/>
D knowledge and understanding	4	<input type="text" value="1"/>	4	<input type="text"/>	4	<input type="text"/>
E reasoned argument	4	<input type="text" value="1"/>	4	<input type="text"/>	4	<input type="text"/>
F analysis and evaluation	4	<input type="text" value="2"/>	4	<input type="text"/>	4	<input type="text"/>
G use of subject language	4	<input type="text" value="2"/>	4	<input type="text"/>	4	<input type="text"/>
H conclusion	2	<input type="text" value="1"/>	2	<input type="text"/>	2	<input type="text"/>
I formal presentation	4	<input type="text" value="1"/>	4	<input type="text"/>	4	<input type="text"/>
J abstract	2	<input type="text" value="0"/>	2	<input type="text"/>	2	<input type="text"/>
K holistic judgment	4	<input type="text" value="1"/>	4	<input type="text"/>	4	<input type="text"/>
Total out of 36		<input type="text" value="11"/>		<input type="text"/>		<input type="text"/>

International Baccalaureate Extended Essay

**An exploration of *Rebecca* written by
Daphne du Maurier and directed by
Alfred Hitchcock**

**How has the character of the second Mrs
de Winter been portrayed in literature
and film?**

Name:

Student Number:

Subject: Literature and Performance

Centre Number:

Date: 15.07.2012

Word Count: 3,788

Abstract

The following essay discusses the different uses of technique and plot in the psychological thriller, *Rebecca*. *Rebecca* was originally a novel by Daphne du Maurier, and was then converted into a film by Alfred Hitchcock and David O Selznick.

I sought to look into the hidden intricacies of the works, as I am hoping to study Psychology in higher education – and *Rebecca* explores deeply disturbing characters throughout the plot.

My question discusses Mrs de Winter meticulously, and although Mrs de Winter is the shyest character, she is also the most remarkable – having so many hidden depths, which without closer inspection could be completely overlooked.

I looked at as many sources as possible, and found a lot of information from Daphne du Maurier's biography which gave me a lot of insight into why she decided to write *Rebecca* – she understood Mrs de Winter's feelings of isolation in society, and these feelings are heightened throughout the novel, as are her constant thoughts of insecurity.



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Introduction

In this essay we will explore the gothic tale of *Rebecca* written by Daphne du Maurier and published by Victor Gollancz in April 1938. Alfred Hitchcock filmed *Rebecca* in 1940 in California, and although when he read the novel he believed it had promise, he thought it was too expensive for him to afford the rights. However David O Selznick later ensnared Hitchcock into directing the film with the promise of success. There are many intricacies within the storyline, and the protagonist has hidden depths that are kept under wraps by her dull exterior. Interestingly, *Rebecca* almost ruined du Maurier; she was accused of plagiarism by Carolina Nabuco who is the author of a very similar novel, *A Sucessora*, published in 1934. Nabuco never actually sued du Maurier, as her novel was written in Portuguese which makes it unlikely that it was stolen by du Maurier, however Nabuco did insinuate du Maurier's guilt in her memoirs, *Oito Decadas*, where she discusses how she translated it to English for the theatre production and how from there it could have reached du Maurier's hands.

Alfred Hitchcock

Alfred Hitchcock is famous for his stupendous films, including *Psycho*, *The Birds*, *Vertigo* and of course, *Rebecca*. Often described as the 'Master of Suspense', Hitchcock has enthralled audiences for decades with his various cinematic techniques.

Hitchcock was born in London, and always cultivated a love of film, despite training in electrical engineering and draughtsmanship. At the age of twenty, Hitchcock joined the London studios of famous Players-Lasky, and a few years later married his wife, Alma Reville.

A common theme within his works is the battle for power between men and women, and this is apparent in *Rebecca* between the dominant Maxim and weak, shy Mrs de Winter, *Rebecca* is widely credited with starting his American career.

Daphne du Maurier

Du Maurier's talents in *Rebecca* were discovered instantaneously. After reading the manuscript, Norman Collins described it as, 'sentimental... but in a haunting, melancholy way.'¹

Interestingly, despite du Maurier being a literary genius, her spelling has been reported as being abominable, which is unusual for someone so gifted in English.

Whilst growing up, du Maurier was described as the apple of her father's eye, and the two were supremely close and it is widely thought that she gained her creativity and freethinking personality from him.

Although *Rebecca* is arguably one of her greatest triumphs, du Maurier worried constantly about its success. She reportedly believed it was, "rather grim"² and was not the "exquisite love story"³ that her publisher described it as – and for these reasons it would flop. According to Margaret Forster's biography of du Maurier, du Maurier "wanted to write about the balance of power in a marriage, not love"⁴.

The books considered to be du Maurier's top five are: *Rebecca*, *Jamaica Inn*, *My Cousin Rachel*, *Frenchman's Creek* and *The House on the Strand*, although *Rebecca* is decidedly a firm favourite with readers and audiences.

¹ Forster M., (1994) *Daphne du Maurier*, Arrow, London Page 136

² *ibid*, Page 137

³ *ibid*, Page 137

⁴ *ibid*, Page 138

Mrs de Winter

Mrs. de Winter is a highly complex character, and despite her claims to be drab and boring she has an air of mystery surrounding her which is highlighted by her lack of forename, and this also makes clear that she is an impostor within Manderley – she never quite fits in, making the audience or reader extremely uncomfortable and sympathetic throughout. Maxim describes her name as, “lovely and unusual”⁵ but instead of gracefully receiving the compliment, her retort is “my father was a lovely and unusual person”⁶ thus evading any idea that she may not be as boring as she appears. It is possible that this lack of first name is an attempt to create curiosity to this otherwise dull and drab character. Due to this lack of first name, we do not know what to call Mrs. de Winter, and this problem is identified clearly when the staff of Manderley cannot differentiate between the present Mrs. de Winter, and the previous Mrs. de Winter, Rebecca – who the book revolves around.

Hitchcock used the ‘Big Close-Up’ on character’s faces to make the viewers uncomfortable, as we feel that we are invading the character’s personal space, thus adding to the awkwardness of the scenes. This is also used to allow the audience to read the character’s expressions easily, and so when Mrs de Winter is uncomfortable or awkward, it is even more palpable to us. In some scenes, instead of picking a shot where both Mr and Mrs. de Winter would be included, Hitchcock swaps between the two constantly, making the awkward gap between the two abundantly clear.

A constant personality trait of Mrs. de Winter is her exasperating timidity. As readers, we are almost beside ourselves with frustration at her lack of backbone. This paralysing shyness holds her back constantly, and makes all social situations she is involved in tense and uncomfortable. For example, when Mrs. de Winter first meets Mr de Winter in Monte Carlo, the entire scene is awkward because Mrs. De Winter does not know how to be confident and has no social grace. This gawkiness is repeated when she meets Maxim’s family, his sister Beatrice and her husband when she “blunders in”⁷ and immediately behaves like a child, and is treated so by her husband. Conversation does not flow from Mrs. de Winter, and she repetitively fights to say the right thing and be the social butterfly that her competitor, the previous Mrs de Winter, was. In the film, there are many awkward pauses where the characters fight to find something to say – making the audience uncomfortable whilst watching, whereas if Rebecca had been in that situation, she would have found something interesting and witty to say to put her companions at ease.

However, in total contradiction to her weak personality, the first time we meet Maxim de Winter in the film, she is the heroine who prevents Maxim’s death. It is one of the only moments within the film where she shows gumption and stops him from doing himself irreparable harm – she is the saviour for a short period of time.

In the book, the scene where they meet is very different to the film – Mrs de Winter meets Mr de Winter awkwardly at an uncomfortable luncheon with Mrs Van Hopper, to whom she is a companion. Mrs Van Hopper’s rudeness emphasises the timidity of Mrs de Winter, and this is where the initial attraction between the two future lovers begins. As we see that the two women are polar opposites, perhaps Maxim saw someone with a quieter personality; one that was so different from his previous wife whom he so despised. It is possible that the meeting scene was changed for the film, as it was too subtle for an audience to pick up on,

⁵ du Maurier D., (1962), *Rebecca*, Penguin Books, p26

⁶ *ibid*, p26

⁷ *ibid*, p93

whereas in the book there is far more depth to the characters and Du Maurier felt safe in the knowledge that readers would understand the reasons for Maxim's love of Mrs de Winter. This is more effective because it really pinpoints why Maxim fell in love with a young, shy girl, whereas in Hitchcock's *Rebecca* this remains unclear.

Mrs de Winter's appearance is probably the bane of her existence, and although we only see her opinion of herself we are given the impression she is plain, which mirrors her personality. In fact, Maxim's sister, Beatrice, even asks her: "I think you ought to do something to your hair. Why don't you have it waved? It's so very lanky, isn't it, like that? Must look awful under a hat. Why don't you sweep it back under your ears?"⁸ and then goes on to state "I can tell by the way you dress that you don't give a hoot what you wear"⁹. Mrs de Winter's hair personifies her personality – limp and boring. This insipidness thus juxtaposes the brightness of Rebecca's personality and her stunning beauty. Frank Crawley, a kind man who works for the Manderley Estate, states Rebecca was "the most beautiful creature I ever saw in my life"¹⁰ and this makes a painfully obvious contrast between the two competitors who are polar opposites. Rebecca was dark haired, tall, beautiful, confident, social, cruel and capable, whereas our protagonist is fair haired, small, plain, shy, kind and clumsy, just as Beatrice shrewdly observes, Mrs de Winter is "so different from Rebecca"¹¹. It is as if Maxim chose a new wife who would never remind him of Rebecca.

The director of *Rebecca*, Alfred Hitchcock, used many different filming techniques to craft different impressions for the characters. Mrs de Winter's character, played by Joan Fontaine, is always tiny against the huge scenery of the house, which alludes to Alice in *Alice in Wonderland*, and this is interesting as Maxim remarks that Mrs de Winter should dress up as Alice for the Manderley fancy dress ball.

In the film production, we are never shown a picture of Rebecca, and the film plot follows the book very closely in how she is described. This is possibly to allow the reader to use their imagination – meaning nobody can ever say Rebecca is unattractive as we draw her in our minds as our personal idea of beauty.

However, one of the colossal differences between the book and the film is that the book is in first person, and all films are in third person and because of this the book is biased, and thus not trustworthy. This is because Mrs de Winter was always going to be threatened by Rebecca as she was the first Mrs de Winter – in the film there cannot be this prejudice as the audience do not view it from Mrs de Winter's eyes - we are omniscient.

Possibly one of the first times we witness these insecurities rise is when she enters her personal office which was previously Rebecca's office, and all of the stationery is monogrammed with Rebecca's initials, which makes it so painfully obvious what a large presence Rebecca had been in Manderley, and shows how tactless the staff were in not removing it, almost as if it was deliberate and they want to get rid of her – for the first time we see a shadow of doubt cross Mrs de Winter's face; had she made a horrible mistake in thinking she could fill Rebecca's place? Mrs de Winter goes on to break a statue of a cupid, and acts so clumsily and guiltily by shoving it in a drawer because she feels that with one mistake Maxim will realise that her made a mistake in marrying her. This is a metaphor for

⁸ *ibid*, p100

⁹ *ibid*, p100

¹⁰ *ibid*, p135

¹¹ *ibid*, p106

their marriage; it is so fragile and breakable, and nobody wants to talk about the problem, in a way it is also shoved in the back of a draw and hidden.

The camera seems to trail Mrs de Winter, in a stealthy predatory way, again adding to the feelings of eeriness, paranoia and more predominantly the claustrophobia that lingers through the entire film.

The Electra Complex

Possibly the most significant characteristic of Mrs de Winter is that she has an Electra Complex. The Electra Complex is the theory that is the opposite of the Freudian Oedipus Complex, where the son competes for his mother's affections against his father. The main example of the Oedipus Complex is Sophocles' Oedipus Rex, where the son, Oedipus, is cursed with killing his father and marrying his mother. Therefore, the Electra Complex is the theory of a daughter having desire for her father and jealousy of her mother, and in order to overcome the mother she must kill her. In *Rebecca*, Maxim de Winter plays the father role, Rebecca plays the mother and Mrs de Winter plays the daughter who must overcome Rebecca to win Maxim's heart. What makes this such a challenge is that Rebecca is already dead, and how can you fight the memory of the perfect image?

Hitchcock revealed the Electra Complex in a cinematic way within the film too, using comparison throughout the film to make it more obvious. Maxim de Winter is considered to be a white knight almost entirely in the film, however when Mrs de Winter is discovered to have broken the statuette he towers over her in an exceedingly threatening way and declares her silly for hiding it, and this, despite being hostile, also alludes to the Electra Complex again with its patronising tones.

There are constant subtle reminders throughout the novel and film of the Electra Complex. For starters, Mrs de Winter has a deep love for her biological father, and makes no mention of loving her mother: "the vibrant personality that had been my father's, and something too of the love that my mother had for him"¹², showing that she has a pre-emptive likelihood of having the complex, but this complex is highlighted when Maxim repeatedly belittles her and treats her like an infant, which adds to the strangeness of their relationship due to her youth and his age – in fact he even goes so far to say that the reason he likes to spend time with her is because she is so immature; when Mrs de Winter asks him why he chooses to be with her, he states "because you are not dressed in black satin, with a string of pearls, nor are you thirty-six"¹³. This statement reflects his love of her youth, and thus his love of her being the absolute opposite of Rebecca. The issue, as I previously mentioned, is that Mrs de Winter is fighting the memory of Rebecca, not the actual person – and as everybody adored Rebecca when she died, she seems invincible because when someone dies great, they can never be anything other than this.

It is interesting that Daphne du Maurier chose to explore the Electra Complex in her work, given her family history. Du Maurier's father and herself were very close with her being his favourite of his children, and it is reported that he burst into tears with jealousy when she announced her engagement to Frederick Browning.

¹² *ibid*, p26

¹³ *ibid*, p39

Mrs Danvers

As Rebecca is dead, she cannot defend herself in person, and so her defence is Mrs Danvers, the housekeeper of Manderley who was and still is infatuated with Rebecca. Mrs Danvers constantly attempts to hinder and ruin Maxim and Mrs de Winters' marriage by playing Rebecca's memory against them. For example, on the night of the de Winter's annual fancy dress ball, she intentionally encourages Mrs de Winter to unwittingly dress up in a similar costume to the one Rebecca wore to the same event, in a bid to cause problems in their marriage due to the memory of Rebecca. However, Mrs Danvers is unaware that Maxim never loved Rebecca, and her forcing these painful memories into his mind makes him hate Rebecca more and more. When these situations arise, we as the reader ask frustratedly why she does not stand up for herself, but it is again because she is so afraid, as she was with the cupid statue, that with one false move her fairy tale will come crashing down around her – making it clear that Mrs de Winter is not used to anyone truly loving her.

Mrs Danvers is perhaps the darkest character in *Rebecca* for several reasons. Firstly, she is only ever seen to glide throughout the film – footsteps are a rarity and this adds to the illusion that Mrs Danvers is a supernatural character, and in the book Mrs de Winter never describes her without mentioning her white skull's face. Secondly, there are distinct lesbian undertones to her deep obsession with Rebecca, which are added to by her masculine exterior with her hair scraped back, "tall and gaunt, dressed in deep black, whose prominent cheekbones and great, hollow eyes gave her a skull's face, parchment-white, set on a skeleton's frame"¹⁴. All of these descriptions give the impression of oddness, and Mrs Danvers' personality is identical to her appearance. Mrs Danvers' fixation with Rebecca is so deep set, it is truly disturbing – and this is enunciated when she describes Rebecca's bed, "That was her bed. It's a beautiful bed, isn't it? I keep the golden coverlet on it always, it was her favourite. Here is her nightdress inside the case. You've been touching it, haven't you? This was the nightdress she was wearing the last time, before she died. Would you like to touch it again?"¹⁵. Mrs Danvers' sheer delight in reminiscing Rebecca's memory is deeply alarming – and it is interesting to note that she only shows animation when she is speaking of Rebecca; as if she died alongside Rebecca and only comes back to life when she discusses her.

Whenever Mrs Danvers speaks to Mrs de Winter, she seems to close into her personal space and widen her eyes – this is made even more apparent in the famous bedroom scene when Mrs de Winter enters Rebecca's room, and Mrs Danvers stands dangerously close to her, so to make the audience cringe with the unease of the situation, and the claustrophobia of Mrs Danvers being so close and inappropriate. This is obvious when Mrs Danvers mimes brushing Rebecca's hair – although she never touches Mrs de Winter's hair, she rests her hand on her shoulder, unnerving both the audience and Mrs de Winter because of her close proximity.

Hitchcock also uses a lot of music to emphasise dramatic moments such as these, and plays this music loud at the climax of the scene.

At the time of filming, it was possible to create films in colour – however Hitchcock chose to put it in black and white to add eeriness to the ambience.

¹⁴ *ibid*, p68

¹⁵ *ibid*, p167

Danvers repetitively psychologically undermines Mrs de Winter, and always lets her know that she will never be as good as Rebecca. That said, a lot of people are also responsible for making her feel this way –people consistently mention how beautiful, intelligent and witty Rebecca was. For example, Giles, Mrs de Winter's brother-in-law, grills her on what skills she possesses, and when he discovers that she is an unexciting person, there is an awkward silence. These interludes happen throughout the novel and cause great discomfort as they yet again highlight the differences between Rebecca and Mrs de Winter.

It is interesting how Mrs Danvers is pictured in the film – her gaunt face is so sinister and her character so dark that it is possible that Hitchcock's homophobia made him decide to make her even more ominous because of her lesbian connotations.

Rebecca

Other characters within the work frequently and tactlessly describe to Mrs de Winter how spell-binding Rebecca was, for example the Bishop's wife describes a garden party she attended of Rebecca's: "Everything was always so beautifully done. The flowers at their best. A glorious day, I remember. Tea was served at little tables in the rose-garden; such an attractive original idea. Of course she was so clever..."¹⁶ these small comments have an enormous impact on Mrs de Winter's self-esteem, and are probably the main reason that she feels so pale in comparison to Rebecca.

The moment where the differences between the first and second Mrs de Winters are most obvious is when the second Mrs de Winter and Beatrice visit Maxim's grandmother, who "was so fond of Rebecca"¹⁷. The old lady becomes very confused, and forgets about Rebecca's death – going on to demand "I want Rebecca"¹⁸ and "where is dear Rebecca?"¹⁹, causing the atmosphere to become so fraught, it is unbearable. The old woman emphasizes the reaction that every other character besides Maxim and Beatrice feel when they meet Mrs de Winter: disappointment. However, the only person to fully voice their feelings is a muddled elderly woman.

The incredible thing about *Rebecca* is that its main character, the focus of the entire book, is never actually present in body – solely in memory and spirit. Yet the whole novel revolves around her, from beyond the grave. It says something about Rebecca's magnetic personality that she somehow manages to dominate life when she is dead. Mrs Danvers describes it perfectly when she raves "You'll never get the better of her. She's still the mistress here, even if she's dead."²⁰ This brings us back to the Electra Complex, where it is impossible to overcome a memory, as that person is already dead. Mrs de Winter herself says "Rebecca, always Rebecca"²¹, her personal acknowledgement that she can never win, that Rebecca will always be dominant in their home.

The moment when Rebecca comes to life again is when Mrs de Winter discovers a handkerchief in an old raincoat that belonged to Rebecca. The handkerchief is stained with Rebecca's lipstick and carries her perfume, but more importantly is embroidered with her initials, RdW. The "R dwarfed the other letters"²², signalling Rebecca's dominant personality, forcing the other letters into submission.

Nevertheless, Mrs de Winter does win in the end – Maxim pronounces that he never loved Rebecca, "Rebecca was incapable of love, of tenderness, of decency. She was not even normal."²³ This is the most cataclysmic quote of the entire novel; Mrs de Winter has won, Maxim never loved Rebecca. It is also the first time we hear something negative about Rebecca, it completely contrasts other characters' reports of her positive attributes: beauty, wit and charm. This profession of hatred for Rebecca proves why Maxim chose to marry the second Mrs de Winter – she is the opposite of Rebecca, and so for all of her irritating

¹⁶ *ibid*, p124

¹⁷ *ibid*, p185

¹⁸ *ibid*, p184

¹⁹ *ibid*, p184

²⁰ *ibid*, p244

²¹ *ibid*, p231

²² *ibid*, p119

²³ *ibid*, p269



shyness and dull personality, we discover that these are the reasons for why Maxim loves her.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Mrs de Winter's characteristics are both her greatest strengths and her greatest weaknesses. Her inhibitions and lack of charisma are why people so wish she was more like Rebecca, however if she was not so different from Rebecca - the woman who her husband hated so much he killed her - Maxim would not love her. Her timidity and unassuming personality are why he chose her out of everyone else. That said, we cannot be sure how much of the jibes against her are truly offensive - it could be that after discovering Rebecca existed Mrs de Winter became hypersensitive and paranoid about what everybody thought, which brings us back to my earlier point of the bias within the book as it is from Mrs de Winter's viewpoint. This is probably why *Rebecca* is a deeply psychological drama - we cannot be sure of anything in the book, is Rebecca haunting Manderley? Is Maxim grieving for his dead wife? There is also a deep feeling of isolation within the storyline, none of the characters confide in one another, Mrs de Winter has nobody whom she can trust from Manderley, nor any family she could call. For these reasons, *Rebecca* is an astoundingly thought provoking novel and film.

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