

**Finding Herself in Shadows:
The Unnamed Narrator of *Rebecca***

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Abstract

Critics such as Auba Llompart Pons analyze the novel's depiction of external gender constraints in patriarchal society, while Marta Miquel-Baldellou examines how societal expectations about aging shape the narrator's self-perception, reinforcing how her identity is negotiated through comparison and performance. While Pons focuses on external gender constraints, these pressures are internalized by the narrator, shaping her identity through self-surveillance, comparison, and performance, and guiding her actions and choices.

In *Rebecca*, the unnamed narrator is never given the chance to develop her own identity, constantly shaped by social expectations and the presence of her employer and husband's late wife. She measures herself against Rebecca, revealing how these pressures create her insecurities and her need to meet social standards while negotiating expected roles. The novel demonstrates that narratives do not merely reflect events, but shape perceptions of identity and social position.

This longing isn't just about clothes or appearances. The narrator attempts to act like a grown, elegant, sophisticated lady of Manderley, engaging in what Thorstein Veblen describes as conspicuous consumption and trying to wear confidence and class like a costume she doesn't yet know how to carry. These efforts reveal how her sense of self is shaped by social pressures and her desire to perform expected identities. They also highlight the conflict between who she is and who she feels she should be. Examining the narrator's identity under social pressures shows that Rebecca does more than reflect selfhood: it actively constructs it. Through the narrator's insecurities, performances, and comparisons, the novel illustrates social norms, relational expectations, and the shadow of an unattainable, idealized figure like Rebecca. In this way, du Maurier demonstrates the power of literature not only to mirror human experience, but to shape readers' understanding of themselves.