First Thursday Book Group Discussion Questions

Rebecca

by Daphne du Maurier

November 7, 2019, 2pm. Barb Selis hosts. Nancy Stepsis leads the discussion

1. 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?

2. What kind of character is our heroine—as she presents herself at the beginning of her flashback? Describe her and her companion, Mrs. Hopper.

3. 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?

4. The heroine describes Maxim thus: "His face...was arresting, sensitive, medieval in some strange inexplicable way...rob him of his English tweeds, and put him in black, with lace at his throat and wrists, he would stare down at us in our new world from a long distant past—a past where men walked cloaked at night, and stood in the shadow of old doorways, a past of narrow stairways and dim dungeons, a past of whispers in the dark, of shimmering rapier blades, of silent, exquisite courtesy." Why is this an apt description? In other words, how does it set the tone and foretell the events of the novel?

5. In what way does the relationship between the young heroine and Maxim change during the months after their arrival to Manderley?

6. 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?

7. What is the heroine led to believe about Rebecca? In what way does the dead woman exert power over Manderley? At this point, what are your feelings about the new Ms. de Winter? Are you sympathetic toward her plight...or impatient with her lack of assertion? Or are you confused and frightened along with her?

8. What is the heroine's relationship with Maxim's sister Beatrice and her husband Giles? What about the advice Beatrice offers the heroine?

9. Both Beatrice and Frank Crawley talk to the heroine about Rebecca. Beatrice tells the heroine, "you are so very different from Rebecca." Frank Crawley says that "kindliness, and sincerity, and...modesty...are worth far more to a man, to a husband, than all the wit and beauty in the world." What are both characters trying to convey to the heroine...and how does she interpret their words?

10. What are some of the other clues about Rebecca's true nature that the author carefully plants along the way?

11. 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?

12. 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?

13. How, if at all, do Maxim's revelations change your attitude toward him? Did you feel relief upon first reading his confessions? Can you sympathize 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?

14. How does this new knowledge alter the heroine's behavior and her sense of herself?

15. After Favell threatens to blackmail him, Maxim calls on Colonel Julyan. Why? Why does Maxim act in a way that seems opposed to his own best interests?

16. 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?

17. 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?

18. 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? (You might think about a spiritual as well as physical exile.)