

**She tells the story but is she reliable?**

The above question might seem rather strange if you are new to AS/A2 or IB level Literature study but it is something you need to consider carefully. Earlier on in your school career you will have been told at some point:

'You can't believe everything you read in the papers.'

'People re-write history depending on their viewpoint.'

You now need to apply this to your study of *Rebecca*: why after all should we believe the narrator? She has been created, just as the other characters have, by Daphne du Maurier: beyond the novel she does not exist.

The narrator of *Rebecca* is an unreliable narrator: she can not 'see' everything (omniscient); she does not have the ability to be everywhere (omnipresent) and she does not have great power (omnipotent). In other words, she tells everything from her point of view. Think carefully about how events unfold in the novel; how we learn about characters; how the mystery at the centre of the book is revealed: it is all through the narrator.

- Look back through the novel and find some of the descriptions of the following characters and discuss why the narrator's depiction of them might be 'unfair' or biased in some way:

Maxim	Mrs Van Hopper	Mrs Danvers	Rebecca
Frank Crawley	Frith	Favell	Ben
Beatrice	Lady Crowan	Robert	Giles

- A lot of what we read in the novel is the narrator imagining certain situations; for example, after Maxim's proposal she imagines herself at Manderley:

'I would be his wife, we would walk in the garden together, we would stroll down that path in the valley to the shingle beach. I knew how I would stand on the steps after breakfast, looking at the day, throwing crumbs to the birds, and later wander out in a shady hat with long scissors in my hand, and cut flowers for the house.'  
(p.58-59)

We later learn that her imagined life at Manderley is nothing like the 'reality'. How might these comments from the narrator affect the way that we interpret the later events?

- Some of what we read in the novel is told to the narrator by other characters who then passes it on to us. Think of some examples where this happens: what other information does the narrator include which might affect our judgement of events? What do you think the narrator might have omitted in the re-telling? Do you think her opinion of the character might affect how she relays the story?
- How do you think the passage of time affects the narration? Remember, at the beginning of the novel Manderley has already burnt down, the narrator knows Maxim murdered Rebecca and she and Maxim are nomadic.