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The Enduring Appeal of Daphne Du Maurier's Fiction

'Je Reviens', or the Eternal Return of *Rebecca*

## 'Other Books Like *Rebecca*? Are There Any?': The Singular Fate of a Novel

« Des livres comme *Rebecca*, y en a-t-il d'autres ? » : le destin singulier d'un roman

XAVIER LACHAZETTE

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### Résumés

English Français

Daphne Du Maurier's international bestseller, *Rebecca*, has always puzzled readers, reviewers, and critics alike. Often hard put to define why the novel has them in its thrall and what genre or category it can be said to fall under, they resort to explanations which are both numerically impressive and strikingly contradictory. To underline the exceptional singularity of such a work, the unique literary and historical status of Du Maurier's fifth novel will first be analysed. Du Maurier's surprisingly unperceptive assessment of her own work will then be studied, both before its publication and after it became a runaway bestseller. Finally, we will have a look at some of the critical attention it has recently received, in the press and in academic articles, to show that assessing or categorising *Rebecca* has always been a contentious issue, not just for its author but also for critics at large.

*Rebecca*, le phénomène international de librairie, a toujours mystifié lecteurs et critiques. Souvent bien désarmés au moment de définir l'emprise que ce célèbre roman de Daphne du Maurier exerce sur eux, ou quand il s'agit de déterminer à quel genre ou quelle catégorie il appartient, ils recourent à des explications au nombre impressionnant et aux arguments bien contradictoires. Afin de souligner la singularité exceptionnelle d'une telle œuvre, le statut littéraire et historique sans pareil du cinquième roman de du Maurier sera tout d'abord analysé. Le jugement étonnamment peu perspicace de l'auteure sur cette œuvre précise sera ensuite étudié, aussi bien avant sa publication qu'après son succès planétaire. Enfin, nous nous pencherons sur la critique littéraire qu'il a suscitée récemment, aussi bien dans la presse que dans les cercles universitaires, pour montrer que son évaluation et sa catégorisation ont



toujours été problématiques, non seulement pour son auteure mais aussi pour les critiques de tous bords.

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## Entrées d'index

**Index de mots-clés :** du Maurier Daphne, Rebecca, histoire littéraire, critique littéraire, genres, succès de librairie

**Index by keywords:** du Maurier Daphne, Rebecca, literary history, literary criticism, genres, bestseller

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## Texte intégral

- 1 Between 20 January and 1 March of an unspecified year, seventeen members of Goodreads, the self-styled “site for readers and book recommendations”,<sup>1</sup> exchanged a total of fifty-six messages on the following topic: “Other books like *Rebecca*? Are there any?”<sup>2</sup> “Meghna”, the initiator of this discussion thread, wrote, “Rebecca is my all time favourite. Are ther [sic] other books like that? So much in one book...” (message 1). Her virtual friend “Renee” advised her to read other Daphne Du Maurier books, but since Meghna had already read them all, Renee suggested that she try modern Gothic writers. As other Goodreads members joined in the discussion, writers like Paul Bowles, Jack Cady, Johanna Lindsey, Ruth Rendell, Catherine Gaskins, Victoria Holt, Charlotte Brontë or Wilkie Collins got mentioned, among others, for belonging to the same or to related genres, like horror and mystery. Meghna further explained, “When I first read *Rebecca* as a very young woman, I wanted to read other books like it. Well, I am no longer a young woman and I have never found another book quite like it. There are other genre novels but *Rebecca* is unique. None of DuMaurier’s [sic] other books are as good as this one” (message 36). To this, “Susan” wholeheartedly assented: “I totally agree, *Rebecca* is in a category all by itself” (message 53).
- 2 As these exchanges show, Du Maurier’s best-known work causes paradoxical reactions in its readers. On the one hand, they feel *Rebecca* to be similar to a number of other works in the Gothic romance, the thriller, or the psychological novel genres, for example, and they use it as a model against which to compare classics or more recent productions, fatally deemed inferior. On the other hand, they are of the opinion that it is unique, in a class of its own: a novel that has marked them for the rest of their lives and whose thrilling equivalent they have never been able to find. That they never stopped searching for such a treasure cannot be doubted, though. As Meghna further comments, “Warning: *Rebecca* is one of the best of this particular genre, so if you find something you feel is better, please let us all know!” (message 35).
- 3 This article analyses such a paradoxical impression and highlights the unique literary and historical status of Du Maurier’s fifth novel, of which only a very few equivalents must exist in Western history. Du Maurier surprisingly expressed unperceptive assessments of her own novel, both before its publication and after it became an instant bestseller. If some critics were mystified by *Rebecca*, others (including recent academics) have found much to praise in it, for cumulative reasons which are both complementary *and* contradictory, so much so that no clear consensus is easily reached as to why the novel has been such a success. Indeed, two reviews published in the general press in 1962 show that assessing and categorising *Rebecca* has always been a contentious issue for reviewers or critics at large, who rarely seem to see eye to eye on critical aspects of the novel, whether those relate to generic issues or to character interpretation. It is precisely these critics’ imperious desire *and* their unflinching inability to place Du Maurier’s bestseller under any viable



category that distinguishes it from other classics.


## Rebecca's Unique Place in Literary History

4 Even though one may not be quite aware of it, *Rebecca* holds a unique status in Western literature. Of which other novels (or novel, in the singular?) can it be said that they have inspired such an array not only of prequels, coquels and sequels,<sup>3</sup> but also of cinema, TV, radio and stage adaptations? Which other novel has made such a place for itself in popular culture that the mansion at the centre of it, like Manderley in the case of *Rebecca*, has acquired such a universal power of evocation – surpassing even Jane Austen's Pemberley (*Pride and Prejudice*) or E.M. Forster's eponymous Howards End? Which other opening line gets quoted for its hauntingly glum quality as often as “Last night I dreamed I went to Manderley again”, except perhaps Proust's “*Longtemps, je me suis couché de bonne heure*” or Camus' “*Aujourd'hui, maman est morte*”? Or which other novel can claim to include three female antagonists who have become not only household names but also fictional types? To highlight such a privileged status, I will focus on lesser-known facts and less often quoted sources of information than Margaret Forster's (still unparalleled) 1993 biography.

5 As it happens, two of the numerous adaptations which the novel has inspired span the years from the publication of the novel to the very recent past. Indeed, one might remember that on 9 December 1938, that is to say a mere four months after its publication, The Campbell Playhouse, sponsored by Campbell's Soup, aired the first adaptation of *Rebecca* – in that case, a live radioplay directed by Orson Welles, with a youthful Margaret Sullavan and Welles as the two protagonists, Maxim de Winter and his second wife. As a tongue-in-cheek, carefully scripted and technically brilliant finale to the show, Du Maurier herself placed a long-distance phone call from London. In an assured tone, she congratulated the cast before answering one of the two burning questions on the lips of many an American fan, namely “if there is anywhere in England a house or an estate like Manderley?”<sup>4</sup> Though she spoke on a jocular tone and mischievously shrouded the unnamed locale in vagueness, Du Maurier replied earnestly to that query by actually revealing to listeners how to get to Menabilly, the Cornish estate near Fowey with which she had been in love since the mid-1920s, but of which she would only become the tenant five years later, in 1943:

When you next come to London, Miss Sullavan, get into a train at Paddington Station, and travel West. When you've been 250 miles, get out of the train and walk southeast for half an hour. You'll come to an iron gate and lodge, and a narrow swifiting drive. If you ever find your way to the end of that drive, you may discover Manderley.<sup>5</sup>

6 But when Sullavan put her *second* question, taking up again the subject raised by Welles a few minutes before when he alluded to “the major literary mystery of the year”<sup>6</sup> – in other words, when Sullavan asked about the name of the young heroine, so intriguingly kept secret in the novel, Du Maurier pretended not to hear, and instead repeated her thanks to both actors before hanging up abruptly. It was thus left to a cryptogram, supposedly sent by carrier pigeon, to put a temporary end to the conundrum as the actress finally read the following message: “Inter-office memo from Daphne Du Maurier to Margaret Sullavan: “The name of the heroine of *Rebecca* is Mrs. Max de Winter.””<sup>7</sup>

7  At the opposite end of that span, in 2020, yet another feature-length adaptation, directed by Ben Wheatley this time, was aired on Netflix, the online streaming platform, a long time after various newspapers had eagerly reported the shooting of

the opening scenes of the film in Monaco's Exotic Garden, or at L'Excelsior Regina Palace, a luxury hotel in an exclusive neighbourhood of Nice, France.

- 8 In-between those two dates, the novel unwittingly found itself drawn into the Second World War, on *both* sides of the conflict. As biographer Jane Dunn informs us, Daphne's sister Angela was told by one of Neville Chamberlain's daughters that, on his way to Munich to meet Hitler and hopefully prevent a war, her father "had packed a copy of *Rebecca* in his luggage, to take his mind off the momentous business he had to conduct."<sup>8</sup> Later on in 1942, on the Axis powers side this time, a spy for the *Abwehr*, the German Secret Service, used the Gollancz edition – that is to say the original English-language edition of the novel – to try and infiltrate British Army Headquarters and thus discover the Eighth Army's movements and battle plans in North Africa. The Germans also had their eyes on any kind of information related to the Suez Canal. The *Abwehr* spy was supposed to send back coded reports of his findings, just as novelist Ken Follett shows in his 1980 spy novel *The Key to Rebecca*. As Mark Simmons explains in his historical study, *The Rebecca Code*:

*Rebecca* was to be used as a code book by the agents. Using the book, or any book, as a code was fairly straightforward. Sentences were made using single words in the book, referred to by page numbers, lines and position in the line. Page numbers changed every day. It was a secure method of communication so long as no one else knew the title of the de-code manual, or book.<sup>9</sup>

- 9 Back on the Allied front, *Rebecca* and two other Du Maurier novels (*Jamaica Inn* and *The King's General*) were published for the U.S. military as "Armed Services Editions", a colossal government-supplied provision of 120 million pocket-sized books handed out for free to American soldiers. These complete and unabridged versions of classics or best-sellers of the day sported an easily recognizable rectangular format, owing to the fact that they were designed to fit nicely into soldiers' uniform pockets. As Molly Guptill Manning comments in her study of those wartime publications, entitled *When Books Went to War: The Stories that Helped Us Win World War II*:

Whenever a soldier needed an escape, the antidote to anxiety, relief from freedom, a bit of laughter, inspiration, or hope, he cracked open a book and drank in the words that would transport him elsewhere. Every soldier and sailor abided by a strict policy of swapping and exchanging books, no matter how worn. [...] With books in their pockets, American GIs stormed the beaches of Normandy, trekked to the Rhine, and liberated Europe.<sup>10</sup>

- 10 In 1940 Du Maurier herself had dramatized her novel for the stage, this first play of hers enjoying a tremendously successful run during World War II, in no mean part thanks to the casting of a frightening Margaret Rutherford, of Miss Marple fame, as Mrs. Danvers. The Alfred Hitchcock film came out that same year, garnering two Academy Awards for Best Picture and Best Cinematography (Black-and-White) in 1941, out of a total of 11 nominations, unquestionably helping Du Maurier's bestseller to attain the modern classic status that it has carried for decades. Indeed, in quick succession, Du Maurier's bestseller went on to spawn a spate of mostly made-for-TV dramatizations, not only in the United States but also in England and Italy: in 1947 (for the BBC), 1948 (Philco Television Playhouse, US), 1950 (Robert Montgomery Presents, US), 1952 (Broadway Television Theater, US), 1954 (BBC Sunday Night Theatre), 1962 (NBC), 1969 (Rai, Italy), 1978 (BBC), 1997 (ITV), and 2008 (Rai 1), among others.

- 11 On the lighter side, on 12 September 1972, a two-part, fourteen-minute spoof of Hitchcock's 1940 film adaptation of Du Maurier's novel was aired in the United States in one of Carol Burnett's epoch-making variety shows, which combined film parodies, character pieces, songs, and dances. In that parody, entitled *Rebecky*, the name of the protagonist played by Burnett is "Daphne" while her suitor, "Mr. de



Wintry” (Harvey Korman), is introduced as the owner of “Roundelay”, a stately mansion. In Part 1, De Wintry falls in love with “a certain marvelous child-like quality” in Daphne – a quality that she is more than eager to demonstrate to him by seductively, so she thinks, sucking at her thumbs.<sup>11</sup> In Part 2 of the spoof, “Mrs. Davvers” (Vicki Lawrence), the housekeeper, hates Daphne from the word go, and even tries to strangle her after a minute or so, though Daphne’s husband comments, “I think she likes you!” The skeleton in the closet at Roundelay is also the first Mrs. de Wintry, though not the *femme fatale* one expects from reading Du Maurier’s novel, but rather Max’s own mother, played by Harvey Korman in drag, in a final twist reminiscent of “Norman Bates” (Anthony Perkins)’s schizoid impersonation of his dead mother in Hitchcock’s *Psycho* (1960).

<sup>12</sup> Even as far as musical adaptations are concerned, the novel has inspired notable composers and librettists alike. In the 1980s Opera North, a national opera company based in Leeds, England, commissioned its very first work for the stage, to be composed by Wilfred Josephs. That work, *Rebecca*, was produced in October 1983, with Gillian Sullivan as “The Girl.” Moreover, a German-language musical called *Rebecca* was created by Michael Kunze (lyrics) and Sylvester Levay (music), the successful pair who had already produced *Elizabeth*, *Mozart!* and *Marie-Antoinette*. The musical was such a hit for three years from 2006 that the libretto was translated into Japanese, Korean, and a whole array of European languages (like Finnish, Hungarian, Swedish, Russian, Romanian and Czech), for productions in those other countries. An English-language translation of Kunze and Levay’s musical was months away from being staged on Broadway in 2012 when the show suddenly fell through: an FBI investigation revealed that four of the production’s alleged investors were actually fictitious, the middleman behind the fabrication of those investors being charged with fraud.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Nor was it the first time that a whiff of scandal had surrounded *Rebecca*. Indeed, between November 1941 and January 1948, Du Maurier had to live with hints or veiled accusations that her bestseller had been copied from, or inspired by, any of three works written by two women: Brazilian author Carolina Nabuco’s Portuguese-language novel *A Sucessora* (literally, “The Successor”, Rio de Janeiro: Olympio, 1934) and American Edwina Levin MacDonald’s story “I Planned to Kill My Husband” (*Hearst’s International Magazine*, October 1924), later expanded into a full-length novel titled *Blind Windows* (New York: Macauley, 1927). In a 16 November 1941 article, *The New York Times* Book Section was the first to underline similarities between Nabuco’s novel and Du Maurier’s, implying (though never claiming) that such “literary coincidence”<sup>13</sup> could constitute a case of downright plagiarism. Interestingly, before two weeks had elapsed, Harrison Smith, an editor at Doubleday, Doran & Co. (Du Maurier’s publisher in the United States), defended Du Maurier on the ground that “a creative writer” like her had no need “to steal a plot.”<sup>14</sup> He also argued that parallels are inevitable between works with similar plots, and that literature hinges on a small enough number of themes:

Human minds, even though separated by circumstance and distance, will insist on conceiving the same mechanical inventions, the same ideas for biographies or novels at the same moment. And when you reflect that there are only seven basic themes in all literature, the surprise is not that so many charges of plagiarism fill the air, but that, everything considered, there should be so few.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>14</sup> While Nabuco never went to court over such allegations, Du Maurier had no choice but to sail to New York City in November 1947 to deny the charges pressed by MacDonald, her other accuser, even though the latter had died in 1946, five years after the commencement of her action. Fortunately for Du Maurier, in spite of the forty-six “parallelisms” submitted by the plaintiff, District Judge Bright deemed the differences between the works under scrutiny to be greater than their similarities when he gave his verdict on 14 January 1948. Moreover, he saw eye to eye with the



opinion expressed by another judge during a previous appeal, which highlighted the singularities of Du Maurier's novel, both in terms of literary merit (readability, page-turning quality) and of technical know-how (plot progression, characterization, efficacy and focus):

In my opinion, not only is the handling of the plot or theme different, and the characters and incidents unlike, but also the readability of the two books inducing interest and a desire to finish, demonstrate the entire failure to show any literary piracy. Judge Clark has much more capably expressed what is in my mind. He comments in his dissenting opinion upon the sharp differences between the two stories in "intended objective and type of reader appeal, in fashioning of the plot and in its progression, in the inception and delineation of characters, in the climax of the story and denouement of the plot, and in the effectiveness and, certainly in part at least, in the literary skill with which the chosen objective is reached."<sup>16</sup>

## Du Maurier's Intriguing Imperception of Her Novel's Uniqueness

<sup>15</sup> This is praise indeed – from an unexpected quarter, too, and at an awkward moment in Du Maurier's life.<sup>17</sup> What's more, that a work of fiction should have continued to be appropriated transnationally and transposed over eight decades into such an impressive array of mediums clearly indicates it has become a part of our Western literary heritage.

<sup>16</sup> Nevertheless it seems that Du Maurier herself never saw the success of her fifth novel coming, and never quite understood the lasting favour it found with readers and critics alike. Several reasons might account for this surprising lack of insight. For one thing, though she started the novel in Egypt where she hated the barracks life of a soldier's spouse, it is in Hampshire that she completed it, in the midst of great "domestic disruption", as Forster remarks.<sup>18</sup> Being reunited with her young children unsettled her at first, not only because of their calls upon her precious time and her affection, but also because Greyfriars, near Fleet (Hampshire), was a new house to her, one in which she had had no time to establish the stable "routes"<sup>19</sup> which she required to write. Then, though she finally adapted and was able to write at great speed, she kept finding fault with her own work. In a letter to Victor Gollancz, her publisher and friend, she claimed she was afraid he would find it "stupid, overdone." She warned him that "It's a bit on the gloomy side" and that "the psychological side may not be understood."<sup>20</sup> Though flattered when Gollancz rolled out one of his signature advertising campaigns for the novel, she let her apprehension get the better of her and wrote him: "I am worried that you and Norman Collins are taking so much trouble over the book, and I only hope it's not an awful flop, because you'll all lose a lot of money."<sup>21</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Moreover, as shown by a 1962 letter written to her friend Oriel Malet, Du Maurier believed that the dreamy tone in the novel marked it as completely outmoded. In her eyes, the roles and functions fulfilled by the imagination in bygone days were irrelevant to twentieth-century men and women, a modern development which must have pained her and made her feel obsolete since, as she often claimed, her whole life had been spent in a world of make-believe.<sup>22</sup> In that letter to Oriel, she states:

Of course it was old-fashioned in 1938 when it was written—I remember critics saying it was a queer throwback to the 19<sup>th</sup>-century Gothic novel. But I shall never know quite *why* it seized upon everyone's imagination, not just teenagers and shop girls, like people try to say now, but *every* age, and *both* sexes. It certainly would not today, which shows how the world has gone ahead in the past twenty years, into a much more scientific, realistic sort of approach. I feel it myself. One terribly wants to get at the *truth*.<sup>23</sup>



18 It could also be that Du Maurier never anticipated the phenomenal reception of *Rebecca* because she knew quite well the novel might never have become the work we know today. As readers were thrilled to learn when *The Rebecca Notebook and Other Memories* was published in 1981, that is to say over three decades after its initial release, the characters and events cursorily planned out in Du Maurier's notebook seem to have acquired a life of their own in the actual writing stage of the novel. A few of the characters' names were modified, including that of the male protagonist, whose original appellation, Henry, may finally have struck her as overly dull.<sup>24</sup> Also, the name of Rebecca's boat was turned from the nomadic or free-spirited *Gypsy* to the more ghostly *Je Reviens*. More importantly, as Du Maurier reveals, "the housekeeper, Mrs. Danvers, had become more sinister. Why, I have no idea. The original epilogue somehow merged into the first chapter, and the ending was entirely changed."<sup>25</sup> No fire broke out at Manderley in the planning stage, and Henry was simply injured in a car crash. To cap it all, whatever the merits of this other idea for an opening line, it is unlikely that the sentence in the draft epilogue would have captured the imagination of millions of readers, going as it then did: "If you travel south you will come upon us in the end, staying in one of those innumerable little hotels that cling like limpets to the Mediterranean shore."<sup>26</sup>

19 There is therefore no reason to believe that Du Maurier's misgivings about her novel were anything but sincere, or mere fishing for compliments. This is further proved by a forgotten essay, entitled "A Writer is A Strange Creature",<sup>27</sup> which she wrote for the October 1938 number of *Wings* – an American monthly published by The Literary Guild – and which was designed to accompany the release of *Rebecca* in the United States. In it, she claims that though her family often beg her to "write something cheerful for a change", she does not actually choose her own subjects ("they choose themselves"), and they often turn out to have a gloomy streak to them. "What would I give to make people split their sides with mirth", she regretfully adds. "But it does not happen. The laughter will not come".<sup>28</sup> Interestingly, she blames her alleged moodiness on a heredity issue which she associates both with her grandfather George, who was "melancholy and gay by turn", and with an actor father, Gerald, who never was himself, she asserts, but rather "a thousand different people."<sup>29</sup> She concludes, "Small wonder the result is a little distorted."

20 It is intriguing to see that by claiming to be *distorted*, that is to say by pretending to share an essential difference with the prestigious ancestors in whose artistic footsteps she gladly follows, Du Maurier contradicts the whole surface message that her essay is supposed to deliver. Indeed, as she contends in her opening remarks, her purport in those few pages is to show how wrong the layman is in believing that writers are any different from regular people:

Why should the artist, be he writer, actor, painter, composer, be considered as though he were a species apart from his fellow men, a rare being, dreamy and temperamental, who works when he chooses and when the spirit moves him, living in another world from road menders and plumbers? [...] We hear nothing of the temperamental plumber, though a twisted pipe must require very much more planning than a sentence gone awry. No, the fact is that the writer continues to be a "type" in the mind of the non-writer, in the same way as the stage person, the servant who drops her aitches, and the red-faced colonel from India.<sup>30</sup>

21 The need to be *unlike* the common run of human beings, to *not* belong to the uncreative or unimaginative portion of humanity, thus insinuates itself at the centre of an essay officially meant to put to rest widespread misrepresentations about the alleged superiority or difference of the artist. In other words, it could be argued that, consciously or not, de-categorising and re-categorising herself was a personal issue with which Du Maurier had to contend, in the sense that the hereditary argument she makes use of in this article (the imprint on her of her father's and her grandfather's legacies) really points to essential variances between herself and the world at large, or





to identity claims that do not get substantiated in the article.


22 As we know, *Rebecca* never ran the risk of flopping, though. In spite of its author's apprehensions, the novel was The Book Society's choice for August 1938<sup>31</sup> even before booksellers had received their first copies. Soon, it was expected to sell quite well in the first few weeks,<sup>32</sup> and it finally went on to become a runaway bestseller on both sides of the Atlantic and around the world. True, a few negative or strangely appreciative reviews will inevitably be found. For instance, one reviewer called the book "a glorified novelette" and explained this was meant as "a term of high praise" because "Miss du Maurier has taken a plot as sentimental and melodramatic as anything out of Shakespeare or Dickens and literally glorified it by a spontaneously lovely use of words and a high degree of story-telling craftsmanship."<sup>33</sup> Another critic blamed the work for the "unreal characters and stage situations" it allegedly contains, and asserted that "'human nature, at least in England, is not to be looked for [in it]'", before likening it to "one of those 'horrid' romances which Catherine and Isabelle Thorpe devoured", in reference to characters and sentences from Jane Austen's parodic *Northanger Abbey*.<sup>34</sup> In 1940, yet another reviewer wrote that the success of not only the novel, but also the play and the Hitchcock film totally mystified him and that the only explanations he could find were Du Maurier's "lush emotionalism" and her "creating the stock characters of Romance, with a capital 'R.'"<sup>35</sup>

23 But many other reviewers sensed that the romantic surface of the novel was a lure which the discerning critic had to overlook in order to get to more demanding depths. As one of them explained in her review:

I complained somewhat bitterly last week of the absurd and sensational outpourings of romantic women novelists, but I had not then begun to read *Rebecca*. Immediately I was confounded. For Miss du Maurier's book is romantic and sensational, and could quite easily have been absurd. Instead, it is a really brilliant piece of work: the most impressive novel of its kind which I have read for years. It is astounding, and very interesting to find a young writer with the courage to tackle a romance in the old-fashioned grand manner, and turn out not merely a best-seller, but a story which will be equally enjoyed by the discriminating and critical reader.<sup>36</sup>

24 Academics have obviously agreed with such a take on *Rebecca*, as amply proved by the sheer number of in-depth articles generated by the novel.<sup>37</sup> The task of going through them all is naturally of too vast proportions to be attempted here, but focusing instead on one particular instance will easily demonstrate some of the reasons for the critical appeal of the work.

25 When analysing Du Maurier's works as striking instances of popular fiction, critic Nicholas Rance starts by underlining the affinity of *Rebecca* with works by Bram Stoker, Arthur Conan Doyle and John Buchan in whose texts, he argues, the same "paranoid conservatism about women"<sup>38</sup> can be found. What he means is that one possible reading of the novel can be "relatively placid"<sup>39</sup> and be content to see the plot as the triumph of a demure, respectably monogamous young woman over her husband's malignant and oversexed first wife, in keeping with the moralising attitude prevalent in the 1930s. Such an interpretation, however, is blatantly contradicted by the palpable fascination which the allegedly evil first wife holds for her replacement, in whom "libidinous tendencies and the threat which they pose are repressed, to be merely obliquely acknowledged in an overtly gratuitous childlessness."<sup>40</sup> Whether in Genesis (the Eve episode), in Freudian psychoanalysis, or in the case of the nameless narrator in *Rebecca*, Rance reminds us that "the paradigm of curiosity is sexual curiosity", so that the second wife "does not re-emerge as a separate entity from Rebecca"<sup>41</sup> but potentially poses the same threat to the patriarchal order as did her predecessor.

2  No clearer or more consensual conclusion can be drawn from critical discussions about *Rebecca* and its portrayal of upper-class or "aristocratic" lifestyles – permitted by a third type of reading of the text. As Rance reminds us, the novel has been

construed as the demise of a world made archaic by modernity “within a historical context of aristocratic compromise and stooping to class alliances in the era from the National Government in the 1930s to the Conservative Government under Harold Macmillan in the late 1950s and early 1960s.”<sup>42</sup> But the protagonist’s childlessness directly echoes her enemy’s malformation of the uterus, thus pointing to a dead-end future for the kind of social compromise which the de Winters are supposed to embody.<sup>43</sup> A fourth entry into the novel, from the female Gothic perspective this time, does allow Rance to unequivocally state that the “presiding fear in gothic fiction [...] is of the return of a malign past”<sup>44</sup> and that Du Maurier takes her cue from Ann Radcliff’s kind of Gothic, which purports to offer rationalist explanations at the end but “barely dispels the mood of paranoia about a possibly intruding past.”<sup>45</sup> And certainly, Du Maurier’s narrator does seem to provide an unduly optimistic ending which readers can only disbelieve, haunted as the de Winters are by the infernal powers of the deceased first wife, by the arson which consumed Manderley, and by their exile from an Eden-like estate where an unnatural kind of vegetation has metaphorically been allowed to run riot.

27 Finally, the Gothic leading seamlessly to psychological considerations, Rance draws a parallel between *Rebecca* and Freud’s reading of Ibsen’s play *Rosmersholm*. In his essay titled “Some Character-Types Met with in Psycho-Analytic Work”, Freud argues that, in certain cases, a patient’s neurosis or illness can be psychosomatic and stem not from failure, but from what is felt to be an unjustifiable degree of success, thus causing an acute sense of guilt. In the play, “Rebecca West” has not only succeeded in supplanting Rosmer’s first wife (who committed suicide) but also her own mother, many years before, by sleeping with her father at a time when she only believed herself to have been adopted by him. Rance then concludes: “Moved to a half-confession by guilt, she [Rebecca West] is also prevented from displacing the dead Beata as the wife of Rosmer, sufficiently her senior to be a father-figure, as Maxim is sufficiently senior to the heroine of *Rebecca*.”<sup>46</sup> By centre-staging the mature adult/immature child relationship at the core of the novel instead of seeing it as an anodyne quirk of Du Maurier’s narrative, Rance thus paves the way for an interpretation in which incest,<sup>47</sup> or taboo more generally, actuates the characters and could really account for their expulsion from the Happy Valley or the Manderley of their dreams.

## The Problematic Categorising of a Unique Novel

28 Undoubtedly, one can only be impressed by the fact that a novel should lend itself to such a wide spectrum of interpretations. What is also striking in the case of this highly popular work of fiction is that some reviewers or critics keep on calling it a *novelle* or a *romance*, as we have seen, or also, perhaps more creatively, “not exactly a classic of literature” but a “Cornish thriller” with “a rattling good story.”<sup>48</sup> Nevertheless, some thirty years ago already, Alison Light powerfully demonstrated why such a moniker as “romantic novelist” – or even “the last of the great romantic writers” – does not fit Du Maurier at all. In her study of the Cornish writer’s fiction, Light convincingly asserted that “If *Rebecca* is a novel about the perfidious nature of romantic projection, then it is not so much anti-romantic as post-romantic, no longer trusting that the freedom to imagine will bring an escape from self.”<sup>49</sup> Three decades ago, therefore, Light already insisted on the kind of modernity which Du Maurier staringly evinces when, not content to skim the textual surface of her works, one truly fathoms their depths. She even went so far as to assert:

Du Maurier, like Agatha Christie, made entertainment out of modernist



anxieties; *Rebecca* is not *Nausea*, though arguably du Maurier's novel shares more than the year of publication with Sartre's, and to suggest that an existential 'anguish' at the instability of subjectivity is at the heart of *Rebecca* is not as preposterous as it might first sound.<sup>50</sup>

29 In her eyes, Du Maurier is modern, or a modernist, in a number of ways: she is post-Freudian because she portrays "sexual desire as an overpowering unconscious force in all humans, but one necessarily repressed by convention."<sup>51</sup> In spite of the mournful nostalgia in which *Rebecca* bathes, Light describes her imagination as modernist in its "unequivocally evoking a sense of exile as an irremediable condition of subjective life."<sup>52</sup> And though, as we have seen, the make-believe world in which Du Maurier liked to live – some would say take refuge – has sometimes been construed as artificially disconnected from both social and worldly realities, Light sees such daydreaming as a fount of intimate and potentially tormented knowledge when she writes: "Such an interior life of fantasy is a kind of modern oracle, seeming to tell us what we want to hear but delivering us unwittingly to more buried, often dangerous desires."<sup>53</sup> In other words, the lazy stereotyping at work when critics occasionally classify Du Maurier as a romantic writer misses the mark by not realising that, while satisfying the reader's needs or expectations in terms of generic pleasure, a parodic counter-discourse inscribed in the text negates or subverts that self-same pleasure.

30 What's more, as Light reminds us, the totality of Du Maurier's writings cover an impressive number of different genres, so that summarising her as the spearhead of a mere couple of them (the Gothic tale or the romantic novel, for instance) is necessarily sketchy, not to say inadequate. Indeed, when one thinks for instance that *Frenchman's Creek* can count as a swashbuckling tale; that *Hungry Hill*, *Mary Anne* and *The Glass-Blowers* are family sagas or fictionalised family biographies while *Rule Britannia* is set in a dystopian near future; or that "The Breakthrough" stands as a science fiction short story while "The Archduchess" is written in the Ruritanian vein in vogue in the late 19th- and early 20th centuries, one can but agree with Light when she writes:

certainly her work must be a nightmare for the eager compiler of 'genre studies' compendia, containing as it does (according to one authority) the already blurred categories of 'gothics, romances and family sagas', to which we might cheerfully add 'mysteries', science fiction and ghost stories (leaving aside her 'non-fiction').<sup>54</sup>

31 Finally, one intriguing case of critical divergence about Du Maurier's works and the generic assumptions to which they give rise is provided by two articles printed a mere few months apart. In the first of these articles, dated 20 April 1962, a critic called Ronald Bryden openly lashes and laughs at Du Maurier's fiction in *The Spectator* on the occasion of the release of her latest opus, *Castle Dor*. More than that, he argues that her whole family "have purveyed for a century a glossy brand of entertaining nonsense, because that is all they and their huge audiences have ever found literature to be."<sup>55</sup> Though such a remark clearly demonstrates a marked prejudice by equating superficiality with the less affluent or educated classes of British society, Bryden sneers at Du Maurier for supposedly showing exactly the same kind of preconceptions in all her novels. He writes:

She gratifies one's most secret social ambitions. Each novel is a country-house weekend in fancy dress, in which you are ushered understandingly into the world of crenellated façades and minstrel galleries. Gently, you are initiated and calmed: shown that the servants will not bite, told where to go after breakfast (the morning-room, to write letters), tutored in ordering meals or firing housemaids, warned who in the county hunts or has mad aunts. Mildly, the aristocratic discomforts and formalities of the house are mocked, together with the gaffes that they may lead to—you are instructed while made at home and equal. [...] And what she holds out is social redemption, forgiveness even for



our prawning nets and spurious origins, if we will recognise our own vulgarity and change sides.<sup>56</sup>

32 Bryden thus blames *Rebecca* for being comparable, as he sees it, to one of those fashionable or “silver fork” novels of yore, a genre which flourished especially in the second quarter of the 19th century. He also claims that the novel simply copies *Jane Eyre*, “even to the fire necessary to liberate the gloomy hero and his mousy beloved from the dead hand of the wife in the west wing.”<sup>57</sup> Finally, he is irritated by what he calls the novel’s “pre-war gimmicks”, which, he says, include “that nameless heroine, the hints of lesbianism, the middle-aged couple mysteriously exiled on the Riviera, so like the Windsors.”<sup>58</sup>

33 Published in *The Times Literary Supplement* of 19 October of the same year, another review takes direct issue with the previous article, and basically contradicts every major argument Bryden had made six months before. Refusing to brush aside popular novels because of the low-browed readership for which they are supposedly reserved, Marghanita Laski begins her review as follows:

All literature of great popularity is worth examining, even if the results prove of psychological or sociological rather than of literary interest. It is however the contention of this review that two of Miss Daphne du Maurier’s immensely popular novels do provide great literary interest, and that these, together with others recently published in Penguin editions, form part of an interesting stream of English-language fiction.<sup>59</sup>

34 Concerning the narrator’s painful discovery of upper-class etiquette at Manderley, this second reviewer does not refute Bryden’s charge that Du Maurier’s novel is fascinated with upscale manners and mores, and therefore is meant to shame us for the vulgarity of our own upbringing – though, as has already been shown, this runs counter to other interpretations of *Rebecca* (like Rance’s) which conversely see the novel as upholding the need for social compromise (albeit faulty), not aristocratic contempt. Rather, Laski argues – somewhat surprisingly – that Bryden is wrong in mocking descriptions of upper-class social practices because “social insecurity is not necessarily trivial and may be the proper stuff of nightmares”<sup>60</sup> for those who find themselves inadequate in social contexts other than their own. Moreover, she claims that “[t]he use of the social matter in *Rebecca* is, in fact, deliberately anti-romantic” and “very clever.” Finally, the idea that the destruction of Manderley liberates the protagonists is refuted, and it is implied that Bryden is guilty of the “common error to assume that popular novels invariably have happy endings.”<sup>61</sup>

35 In the eyes of the *Times Literary Supplement* reviewer, *Rebecca* belongs to a different category, related to the Gothic genre, for which Laski coins the phrase “demoniac novels” and provides the following definition:

Their characteristic, for the purpose of this classification, is that the protagonist is possessed of almost preterhuman forcefulness in seeking his or her own ends, both the ends, and the means taken to achieve them, being, if not positively evil, at least in conflict with those conventionally considered good and proper. He or she possesses great powers of attraction, often, though not necessarily, including sexual attraction, and dominates all others encountered, often against their reasonable wills.<sup>62</sup>

36 Whether or not one finds helpful Laski’s creation of this new subcategory, her inclusion of the character of Rebecca in a genre she defines as revolving around protagonists who are “possessed of almost preterhuman forcefulness” is naturally supported by the Gothic atmosphere of the novel, partly created for instance by the ghostly reappearance of Rebecca’s boat just in time to wreck the second wife’s marriage to Maxim, or by the final destruction of Manderley. Likewise, in Du Maurier’s later story “The Apple Tree” (1952), the dead wife seems to find supernatural (or “preterhuman”) ways of wreaking revenge on a grumpy, ne’er-do-



well husband who made her life miserable through constant depreciation. But even though Laski's generic considerations prompt her to place some of Du Maurier's works under her "demonic novel" category, one may wish to underline that such a melodramatic interpretation of these stories will mostly appeal to readers receptive to tales of paranormal happenings or of revenge from beyond the grave. More rational readers might prefer to construe these "happenings" as the self-inflicted pangs of guilty consciences unable to shake off the burden of their blameworthy, immoral, or even downright criminal past. In that sense, Maxim and his second wife are only the victims of their own wrongdoing. As for Rebecca, instead of standing as a modern avatar of the goddess Nemesis "demoniacally" punishing her husband beyond death, she can be seen more pitifully as the outpowered victim not only of her husband, but also of the Greek deity who enacted retribution against those who succumbed to *hubris*, that is to say overconfidence and arrogance. Such a reading is bolstered by Madeleine Keane's tongue-in-cheek eighty-four-word summary of the novel, published in Dublin's *Sunday Independent*:

Last night I dreamt I read *Rebecca* again. It seemed to me that the shadow of that bitch lingered stronger than ever over my strange but sexy husband. But how could plain, quiet, mousy no-name me compete with the memory of that promiscuous creature? And as for that dyke Danvers—a spooky presence in every corner of this brooding house. Manderley. Someone should burn it and all its ghosts down.

"And the ashes blew towards us with the salt wind from the sea."<sup>63</sup>

37 The same complexity or ambivalence at work in Du Maurier's handling of genres and categories is therefore visible in her treatment of her trio of female protagonists, thereby leading readers in different (hardly reconcilable) directions. Indeed, as has just been said, Rebecca's protean powers can be construed at will as those of a goddess righting wrongs in supernatural fashion or as those of a mere "bitch" whose ambitions for worldly and sexual success are pitilessly dashed for daringly flying in the face of social, moral, or patriarchal expectations. Moreover, as noted earlier by the *TLS* reviewer, her "great powers of attraction" are indeed central to the novel – and of an unmistakably sexual nature in this case, though not limited to the sexual appeal that she had over her husband and her male lovers. By referring to Rebecca as "that promiscuous creature" and to her housekeeper as "that dyke Danvers", Keane underlines the titillating ambiguity that has intrigued readers and critics alike, namely the powerful lesbian subtext that constantly emerges from the triangular network of desire at play between the three female protagonists, thereby casting a different light on Maxim's pronouncement that his wife was "not even normal."<sup>64</sup> As Light explains, the meaning of the word *romance* grew "more narrowly specialised between the wars" and came to define "only those love-stories, aimed ostensibly at a wholly female readership, which deal primarily with the trials and tribulations of heterosexual desire, and end happily in marriage",<sup>65</sup> so much so that the shades of lesbianism of the novel and its far-from-happy ending not only ran counter to 1930s mainstream ideology but were also ill-suited to Du Maurier's alleged target audience, who nevertheless went out in droves to purchase the novel – and relished it.

38 Du Maurier's novel is therefore a borderline case in the sense that seemingly irreconcilable readings are permitted, or even encouraged, by the text. As Light puts it,

Rebecca's Manderley may be a Tory symbol of an older, grander England, the little Eden from which the new Mrs de Winter and her husband are expelled, but it is also a place in the imagination where a freer and a more independent sexuality might have been possible.<sup>66</sup>



As far as the narrator is concerned, feminist or queer studies have stressed her patent fascination with Rebecca's phallic femininity and her deviant sexuality. For

instance, Jaime Hovey has argued that one can regard the novel as an attempt to teach the tantalised protagonist “to feel horror at sexual perversity” in order to “initiat[e] her re-education as a proper wife.”<sup>67</sup> In that sense, “the text’s careful refusal to speak the sexuality that the narrator herself cannot know”<sup>68</sup> comes across as a lesbophobic attempt to crush forbidden desires. On the other hand, the pitiful lethargy surrounding the exiled couple at both ends of the novel hardly gestures towards the victory of “normality” at all. As Hovey concludes,

However, because the narrator’s desire for Rebecca eventually becomes not only a desire for Manderley but a recurring and insistent desire for Britain itself, the novel ultimately suggests that ideological belief can never completely write over the promise of inclusion that the nation offers to all its subjects, nor can it completely control the terms of that inclusion.<sup>69</sup>

- 40 In that sense, if *Rebecca* is “a study in jealousy”, as Du Maurier herself famously called her novel,<sup>70</sup> and if one must assume that she meant “a study in *heterosexual* jealousy”, it is *also* much more than that. Indeed, the novel may well show how one’s own sense of inadequacy – be it social, intellectual, aesthetic, psychological, or other – allows monsters of “almost preternatural forcefulness” to exist and to continue to exert their power beyond death, either directly or vicariously, for instance through the agency of some vestal who makes it her lifelong mission to keep her (same-sex) idol’s sacred fire burning. But it is also a study in homosexual longing, one in which heteronormative dictates are simultaneously supported and subverted.

## By Way of Conclusion

- 41 In 1938, in an attempt to come to terms with “this very unusual book”, so full of “unusualnesses”, contemporary reviewer Alan Seymour added one of the first bricks to the mystery of *Rebecca*’s power when he laid stress on a sort of paradox. Indeed, he felt on the one hand that the novel qualified as “a most *distinguished* piece of writing” and that it demonstrated “a complete mastery over the characters and atmosphere which comprise its ingredients.” On the other hand, he saw its “deliberately *undistinguished* phraseology”<sup>71</sup> as a truly potent characteristic because the reader, he claimed, remains unaware that all the “wit, pathos, insight, and compassion [displayed] on every page” stems from Du Maurier’s deliberately unassuming prose.
- 42 One might therefore argue that *Rebecca*’s sway over readers arises in part from the discrepancy between its low-key narrator and the high stakes she has to face in the midst of disturbing events. That discrepancy might be of a different nature where critics are concerned: some of them might feel jolted out of their generic assumptions that popular novels are perforce monolithic, that they cannot possibly lead to such a variety of discourse/counter-discourse or text/subtext analyses, with potential ramifications into philosophy or queer studies, as previously noted. Also, as indicated in the general introduction to this issue, three main factors played against Du Maurier all her writing life. Critics never forgave her for the success of *Rebecca* (as prophesied by Arthur Quiller-Couch), so that her books were often reviewed with “sniffy contempt.”<sup>72</sup> Moreover, the publication of her novels and short stories in various women’s journals seemed to confirm their negative opinion of her literary output on account of the superficiality too readily associated with such publications. Lastly, Du Maurier’s reputation suffered somewhat from the revolution introduced by Gollancz into the world of English publishing, a revolution which many must have regarded as vulgarly ostentatious. As Fredric Warburg explains:



With the foundation of his firm [...] the revolution may be said to have begun. Then we saw the shape of things to come. Instead of the dignified advertisement list of twenty titles set out primly in a modest space, there was

the double or triple column, with the title of one book screaming across it in letters three inches high. The forces of modernity had been loosed, the age of shouting, the period of the colossal and the sensational had arrived.<sup>73</sup>

43 So much so that on one occasion at least, Du Maurier is recorded as asking Gollancz to please go easy on the publicity: "It's awfully funny, really," she wrote, "how the attitude to books has changed. Imagine fifty years ago, or even twenty-five, an author writing to her publisher and saying, 'Please don't advertise my book as selling well!' Or 'Don't suggest my book may be a popular success!'"<sup>74</sup>

44 Besides, not only did Seymour see a deceptive simplicity at work in Du Maurier's bestseller, but he also confessed his own confusion after reading it, seeing that he now felt incapable of deciding to which category a novel had better belong:

I have yet to make up my mind whether extraordinary ideas expressed in ordinary language or ordinary ideas expressed in extraordinary language make the better book. *Rebecca* comes uncompromisingly into the former category, but so original are the many twists which distinguish this little masterpiece —particularly in the second half of the book—that one does not realise how much of her effect Miss du Maurier creates by the use of deliberately undistinguished phraseology.<sup>75</sup>

45 Many critics and readers have undoubtedly seen eye to eye with Seymour on *Rebecca's* ability to express "extraordinary ideas [...] in ordinary language", though quite a few also have described Du Maurier's prose as powerful or even haunting, which certainly does not concur well with the assertion that the language used in the novel is simply "ordinary." Be that as it may, as shown in the foregoing pages, most readers *have* enjoyed it and its mysterious quality ever since its publication, while Du Maurier herself never quite understood the uniqueness of her own novel. For the rest of her life, she had to politely answer letters sent by people asking for her permission to write a sequel to *Rebecca*, or from readers who wanted to know why the female protagonist remained nameless to the end – even Agatha Christie penned a message to ask.<sup>76</sup> For that reason, there is something poignant in the fact that, among the lots sold during the April 2019 auction of items that belonged to the late Maureen Baker-Munton, a family friend to Du Maurier and her husband, was a single sheet of paper on which, just two years before her death and at a time when she had become a mere shadow of her former self, Du Maurier had enigmatically written down the opening line of the novel which had mystified her and escaped her control all those years. That single sheet of paper went for £2,200.

46 One thing is for sure, though: the novel's appeal is unabated over thirty years on, and the inspiration that writers and artists of all kinds draw from *Rebecca* is in no danger of running dry. A book of poems by Rebecca Wolff, entitled *Manderley*, with an epigraph from the first chapter of the novel, even brought it wonderfully into the next millennium, demonstrating some of the symbolism now potentially attached to it in Western culture. Indeed, in one of those poems, the blood-red rhododendrons in the path leading to the grand house are construed as images of a writer's fecund imagination while *Rebecca's* transgressive nature is portrayed as an emblem of triumphant womanhood. As for *Manderley* itself, it is synonymous with the "poetry world"<sup>77</sup> of love, permanence and security that the poet hopes to create in the face of possible loss and destruction. In a poem titled "The world is my cloister", Wolff writes:

Is it not meet  
that you should make of my home a home  
for you and yours? It transforms unduly the deck, the flower  
garden, the peach  
tree, my god, the peach tree becomes  
you. You have grown to reach its height  
and are never alone now, in due process. The cat beats  
her tail in time with your attention, your two



feet extend off the edge of the bed. At home  
last night I dreamt I went to Manderley again.<sup>78</sup>

- 47 One might thus argue that the themes developed in *Rebecca* tap into universal fears and desires, or into unconscious patterns of thought that are collectively inherited. For that reason, fitting the novel nicely into one category can never work. Simultaneously a conservative *Bildungsroman*, a daring psychological thriller, a whodunit, a Gothic romance, an anti-romantic fantasy, a post-romantic coming-of-age narrative, a rewrite of popular fairy tales, a radically modernised version of a 19th-century literary classic, a demoniacal novel, and a study in sexual (dis)orientation, it transforms and subverts all the characteristics of the categories or genres that it makes use of, but under which it eventually refuses to fall.
- 48 All things considered, we may as well come to the conclusion that *Rebecca* belongs to simply one category: that of Literary Masterpieces.

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2 See "Rebecca discussion: Other books like Rebecca? Are there any?", *Goodreads*. <<https://www.goodreads.com/topic/show/2174729-other-books-like-rebecca-are-there-any>>, accessed 20 September 2021.

3 One can quote Susan Hill's *Mrs. de Winter* (1993), Maureen Freely's *The Other Rebecca* (2000), and Sally Beauman's *Rebecca's Tale* (2001), for instance. For a detailed analysis of some of those prequels, coquels and sequels, see Armelle Parey's discussion in this issue (Chapter 4).

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18 Forster, *Daphne Du Maurier*, 135.

19 Forster writes for instance: “All her life Daphne had liked her days to be structured, to have her ‘routes’. Stability was as important to her writing as inspiration.” (Ibid., 319-20)

20 Daphne Du Maurier, *The Rebecca Notebook and Other Memories*, London: Arrow, 1994, 11.

21 *Ibid.*, 136.

22 This mantra of Du Maurier’s even gave its title to her son’s documentary about her. See Christian Browning, *The Make-Believe World of Daphne Du Maurier*, presented by Cliff Michaelmore, Banner Pictures Ltd/Westward TV, Beaconsfield, 1977, DVD, 38 mins.

23 Letter of 3 January 1962. See Oriel Malet (ed.), *Daphne du Maurier: Letters from Menabilly, Portrait of a Friendship*, London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1992, 131.

24 Du Maurier, *The Rebecca Notebook*, 11.

25 *Ibid.*, 11.

26 *Ibid.*, 11.

27 Daphne Du Maurier, “A Writer is a Strange Creature”, *Wings*, October 1938, 4-8.

28 *Ibid.*, 8.

29 *Ibid.*, 8.

30 *Ibid.*, 4.

31 See Alan Seymour, “Between the Book-Ends” (Book Section), *Britannia and Eve*, October 1938, 90.

32 An unsigned contemporary review states that “Miss Du Maurier’s *Rebecca*, now being serialized by a London newspaper, is expected to sell at least 100,000 copies” (*The Cornishman and Cornish Telegraph*, 15 September 1938, 3).

33 “S.F.”, “Ghost Goes West” (Books of the Week), *The Daily Herald*, 11 August 1938, 15.

34 Lettice Cooper, “Holiday Fare: Grave and Gay” (Book Review), *The Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, 10 August 1938, 6.

35 George Campbell, “Films of the Day: What is there About *Rebecca*?”, *The Bystander*, 10 July 1940, 41. Campbell’s mystification expresses itself in the following manner: “The obvious conclusion is that, whatever her technical merits as a writer, Daphne du Maurier must have something. / But what? [...] And the question is not rhetorical. I have no idea of the answer, and I really would like to know.” As one will note, that Du Maurier’s maternal uncle William Comyns Beaumont edited *The Bystander* in 1903, its foundation year, and again in 1928-32, did not muzzle Campbell’s review in the least.

36 Helen Cockburn, “Daphne du Maurier’s Brilliant Novel”, *The Burton Observer*, 18 August 1938, 9.

37 The first full-length bibliography of Du Maurier criticism will be found at the end of the present series of articles.

38 Nicholas Rance, “Not Like Men in Books, Murdering Women: Daphne Du Maurier and the Infernal World of Popular Fiction”, in Clive Bloom (ed.), *Creepers: British Horror and Fantasy in the 20th Century*, London: Pluto Press, 1993, 86.

39 *Ibid.*, 86

40 *Ibid.*, 87.

41 *Ibid.*, 91.

42 *Ibid.*, 88.

43 As Rance observes, “the confounding of distinctions of rank in *Rebecca* is not suggestive of a new dawn” (88).

44 Rance, “Not Like Men in Books, Murdering Women”, 89.

45 *Ibid.*, 89.

46 *Ibid.*, 93.

47 For a recent attempt at understanding the thematic importance of incest in Du Maurier’s



work, see Teresa Petersen, *Daphne Du Maurier: Looking Inward*, London: Austin Macauley, 2017.

48 Paul Whittington, "Great Film, shame about the book" (Weekend Review), *The Irish Independent*, 21 April 2007, 21.

49 Alison Light, *Forever England: Femininity, Literature and Conservatism between the Wars*, Oxon: Routledge, 1991, 190.

50 *Ibid.*, 191.

51 *Ibid.*, 176.

52 *Ibid.*, 185.

53 *Ibid.*, 190.

54 *Ibid.*, 159.

55 Ronald Bryden, "Queen of the Wild Mullions", *The Spectator*, 20 April 1962, 515.

56 *Ibid.*, 514.

57 *Ibid.*, 515.

58 *Ibid.*

59 Marghanita Laski, "Archangels Ruined", *Times Literary Supplement*, 19 October 1962, 808.

60 *Ibid.*, 808.

61 *Ibid.*

62 *Ibid.*

63 Madeleine Keane, "The 100-Word Novel: Madeleine Keane encapsulates Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca*", *The Sunday Independent*, 16 July 1995, 8L. (The Irish newspaper carried this feature over a number of issues, with Aine O'Connor "encapsulating" V. Nabokov's *Lolita*, or Mary Ellen Synon summarising R. Chandler's *Farewell, My Lovely* that same month.)

64 Daphne Du Maurier, *Rebecca*, London: Gollancz, 1962, 216.

65 Light, *Forever England*, 160.

66 *Ibid.*, 178.

67 Jaime Hovey, "In Rebecca's Shoes: Lesbian Fetishism in Daphne Du Maurier's *Rebecca*", in Shari Benstock and Suzanne Ferriss (eds.), *Footnotes: On Shoes*, New Brunswick, New Jersey and London: Rutgers UP, 2001, 170.

68 *Ibid.*, 171.

69 *Ibid.*, 174.

70 Christian House, "Daphne Du Maurier always said her novel *Rebecca* was a study in jealousy", *The Telegraph*, 17 August 2013 <<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/books/10248724/Daphne-du-Maurier-always-said-her-novel-Rebecca-was-a-study-in-jealousy.html>>. Accessed 20 September 2021.

71 All the quotes in this paragraph are from Alan Seymour, "Between the Book-Ends", *Britannia and Eve*, October 1938, 90. The italics are mine.

72 Sheila Hodges, *Gollancz: The Story of a Publishing House, 1928-1978*, London: Gollancz, 1978, 94.

73 Warburg is quoted in Ruth Dudley Edwards, *Victor Gollancz: A Biography*, London: Gollancz, 1987, 168.

74 Sheila Hodges, *op. cit.*, 95.

75 Alan Seymour, *op. cit.*, 90.

76 Christie's letter to Du Maurier is held in the Special Collections Archives of the University of Exeter, under the following reference: EUL MS 207/6/4/5.

77 Rebecca Wolff, *Manderley*, Urbana and Chicago: U of Illinois P, 2001, 35.

78 *Ibid.*, 34.

## Pour citer cet article



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