"*Je Reviens*"—Returning to *Jane Eyre* in Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca*

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Abstract

This paper takes as its starting point the body of feminist criticism that treats Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca* as merely a recapitulation of *Jane Eyre*, often dismissively, as evidenced in du Maurier scholar Nina Auerbach's uncharacteristically scathing indictment of the novel, and proposes instead to read it as a narratological continuation or expansion of Jane's epilogue. Through a close reading of the way that the novel disrupts boundaries between self and other, human and nature, beauty and the sublime, feminine and monstrous, and the domestic order itself, the paper argues that *Rebecca* is a site in which a certain narrative excess in the earlier novel makes an uncanny reappearance. This approach yields an analysis that highlights how the novel exposes the violence inherent in *Jane Eyre's* Gothic romance narrative, wherein a woman's security within the domestic order comes at the expense of another.

Keywords: *Rebecca*, *Jane Eyre*, monstrous feminine, feminist criticism, the uncanny

"Last night I dreamt I went to Manderley again" (du Maurier, 1938/2006, p. 1). To begin a paper about *Rebecca* with these words is an act of reduplication, for many critics writing about the novel have also chosen this well-paved entry point.[1] But I deliberately open with what may seem a cliché because this paper is essentially about repetition and the unsettling return of—as well as to—what was once familiar. In her dream, the nameless narrator of *Rebecca* revisits Manderley only to find, not a "thing of grace and beauty, exquisite and faultless" (du Maurier, 2006/1938, p. 73) as she expects, but "some choked wilderness" (du Maurier, 1938/2006, p. 2): "Nettles were everywhere, the vanguard of the army. They choked the terrace, they sprawled about the paths, they leaned, vulgar and

[1] Alison Light (1984) and Gina Wisker (2003) are two such examples of critics who chose to open their discussions of *Rebecca* by borrowing its opening line.

lanky, against the very windows of the house" (du Maurier, 1938/2006, p. 3). It would not be too wild of a conjecture to read the narrator's prologue as an invitation for a return to *Thorn*field. To read *Rebecca* is to engage in an interplay of returns: to the past, as we are ushered into by the narrative; of the repressed, as is presaged by that ever-ominous boat "*Je Reviens*"; and, most importantly, to an earlier text—Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*.

Literature Review and Methodology

The parallels between the two novels are well thumbed. However, most critics have treated the notion that *Rebecca* is *Jane Eyre* retold as a question of generic revision or derivation. Alison Light (1984) calls it "a rewrite of Jane Eyre amidst a nostalgia for the waning of the British Empire and the decline of its aristocracy" (p. 7). Nina Auerbach (2002), after discussing extensively how *not-Jane-Eyre Rebecca* is, goes no further than to call attention to the latter's feebleness in comparison: "As with her earlier novels, du Maurier resuscitates a Brontë sister to dash her hopes" (pp. 117). What I aim to do, in contrast, is to interrogate how exactly du Maurier (1938/2006) reworks—if that is indeed what she does—Brontë's novel and to what effect. In doing so, I want to begin with Auerbach's assertion that "*Rebecca* has no epithalamium like Jane Eyre's rhapsody" (p. 108), referring, of course, to the novel's almost-happy-if-not-for-that-infernally-persistent-St. John conclusion. I propose that we read *Rebecca* as a continuation or expansion of Jane's epilogue. Whether it remains an epithalamium is partly what I hope to uncover.

The framework that I will apply to this effort is what I will term as excesses in the novel. One is the characterization of Rebecca as a sublime force, which, thus, threatens to overwhelm the happy domesticity of Manderley. The other is a certain narrative uncanniness. Here, I'm building from Freud's (1919/2003) definition of the uncanny as "that species of the frightening that goes back to what was once well known and had long been familiar," in other words "nothing new or strange but something that was long familiar to the psyche and was estranged from it only through being repressed… 'something that should have remained hidden and has come into the open'" (Freud, 1919/2003, p. 148). Uncanniness in *Rebecca* is present not just in the setting of a house that turns unhomely against the narrator but within the novel's narrative energy itself. The concept of the uncanny and narratology come together in Peter Brooks' (1984) monograph *Reading for Plot*. Brooks devotes a chapter to what he calls "Freud's Masterplot." Brooks (1984) sees Beyond the Pleasure Principle as an important intertext to fictional narratives when it comes to the question of narratology because it is "about the very possibility of talking about life—about its very 'narratability'" (p. 97). The very narratability of life, Brooks (1984) goes on to argue, is both dependent on and obstructed by repetition:

> Repetition creates a return in the text, a doubling back. We cannot say whether this is a return to or a return of: for instance, a return to the origins or a return of the repressed. Repetition through this ambiguity appears to suspend temporal process, or rather, to subject it to an indeterminate shuttling or oscillation that binds different moments together as a middle that might turn forward or back. This inescapable middle is suggestive of the demonic: repetition and return are perverse and difficult, interrupting simple movement forward. (p. 100)

Such an uncanny return haunts the novel from its very first words, structured as an intrusion of the past into the present, a narrative slide into memories that refuse to stay quiet. However, the path is "choked" (to borrow one of du Maurier's favorite modifiers) with obstructions, for the second chapter, as if in objection to the dreamt of return, opens with the unnamed narrator's declaration that "We can never go back again" (du Maurier, 1938/2006, p. 5). But the finality of such a statement has already been undermined by the first sentence and the symmetrical placement of both at the beginning of their respective chapters serves to further highlight this tension. If the first chapter is an involuntary and phantasmagorical revisiting of Manderley, the second chapter is presented as an antidote, a reassertion of the present, but one that succumbs to the past even as it tries to dispel dreams with its "glittering sun" (du Maurier, 1938/2006, p. 4), for while precluding a return, the narrator presses the past on to the present: "The past is still too close to us. The things we have tried to forget and put behind us would stir again, and that sense of fear, of furtive unrest... might in some manner unforeseen become a living companion, as it had been before" (du Maurier, 1938/2006, p. 5).

This sense of obstructed yet inevitable return is essential to a reading of the novel as something more than "THE CLASSIC TALE OF ROMANTIC SUSPENSE" that the HarperCollins edition announces itself to be. The problematics of the novel's reception among some as "an exquisite love story" that so plagued the author for the rest of her career (Forster, 1993, p. 138) is beyond the scope of this paper to tease out but what is clear is that it has resulted in *Rebecca*'s uneasy place within feminist criticism. Many critics have recognized the novel's subversive power, for example, Tania Modleski's (1982) seminal reading of it as a female Oedipal drama, Alison Light's (1984) and Gina Wisker's (2003) respective discussions of the class struggle embedded in the romance narrative, Maria Tatar's (2004) treatment of it as a de-mythification of the Bluebeard fairytale, Harriet Kramer Linkin's (2016) analysis of the unreliable narrator as a strategic device that reveals "the tenuous nature of… her self-conscious performances of femininity" (pp. 248-249) and, more recently, Navid Sinaki's (2020) inclusion of the Hitchcock film in his categorization of rebellious female laughter, vis-à-vis Cixous's Medusa. On the other hand, some scholars,

such as Nina Auerbach (2002), who is otherwise commending of du Maurier's body of work, regard this particular novel as "masochistic, derivative, and only quasi-coherent" (p. 2), the unfortunate product of a talented female author "simulating emotion in prostitute-like fashion" (Auerbach, 2002, p. 109) to accommodate the commercial appetite for romances. But even in her indictment of *Rebecca*, Auerbach oscillates when it comes to how self-aware she thinks the text is of its own contradictions, especially in her assertion that "du Maurier's own discomfort seems to seep through her luscious prose" (Auerbach, 2002, p. 105). Auerbach may dismiss this palpable uneasiness as a discerning author's guilty conscience but I believe it is essential to the experience of reading *Rebecca*. It crept beneath my own first encounter with the novel, formless at first but, to borrow from Auerbach's own uncanny image, eventually taking shape as the unforgettable "creeping wife in the hating house" (Auerbach, 2002, p. 105).

But I, unlike Auerbach, am not referring only to *Rebecca*. Auerbach's choice of participle in the quotation is curious because although *Rebecca* does involve the surreptitious negotiations of a cowering woman within an unhomely patriarchal estate, the text itself doesn't explicitly associate the wife with the act of "creeping." I propose that Auerbach is reading all the way back to Bertha Mason, purple and bloated, "grovell[ing] on all fours" (Brontë, 1847/2006, p. 330), perhaps with a detour through Charlotte Perkin Gilman's (1892/2014) short story "The Yellow Wallpaper," which closes hauntingly with the narrator's husband, presumably shocked by his wife's psychosis, falling insensate into the path of the creeping narrator, so that she has to "creep over him every time!". As the story's closing scene, it should function as a resolution. However, the final sentence—thrust into narratological perpetuity by the repetitious adverbial phrase "every time"—codes a challenge to linearity and completion, a transgressive repetition compulsion that exceeds the circumscribed scope of narrative. I believe these excesses of plot in earlier women's texts —Bertha's self-immolation and "The Yellow Wallpaper" narrator's strange circuit—seem to return in *Rebecca* because they were never truly resolved in their own narratives.

Discussion

Chronologically speaking, *Rebecca* begins where Jane's narrative ends. Like Jane, the narrator finds herself perfectly fused into an inextricable union with her husband: "I know we are together, we march in unison, no clash of thought or of opinion makes a barrier between us. We have no secrets now from one another. All things are shared" (du Maurier, 1938/2006, p. 5). The parallels are even stronger in *Rebecca*'s fledgling state, for before she arrived at the stately Maxim de Winter, du Maurier (1981) had conceived of him as Henry, a wasted, crippled man intended for an epilogue that later became the opening chapter (pp. 40-52). While to Jane, caring for her physically disabled husband is a blessing—"I hold myself supremely blest...because I am my husband's life as fully as he is mine.

No woman was ever nearer to her mate than I am: ever more absolutely bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh... we are ever together (Brontë, 1847/2006, p. 290).—for the unnamed narrator of *Rebecca*, her husband's mental fragility is work. If they "march in unison," it is with the devil at their heels and her supporting his weight: "How strange that an article on wood pigeons could so recall the past and make me falter as I read aloud. It was the gray look on his face that made me stop abruptly... I had learned my lesson... in the future keep the things that hurt to myself alone" (du Maurier, 1938/2006, p. 7).

Whether either protagonist finds or loses empowerment in her master-servant marriage is too sprawling a question than can be considered here but what I want to focus on here is *how* both women have been entered into the lawful domestic order, a question to which Gayatri Spivak (1985) reminds us to attend in her essay "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism." Spivak (1985) argues that "in terms of the narrative energy of the novel... Jane [is] moved from the place of the counter-family to the family-in-law" through the "active ideology of imperialism" (p. 246-247). Almost a century later, this same "discursive field" (Spivak, 1985, p. 247) is still at play but it has a different face, one with ravioli sauce running down her chin and an "inevitable lorgnette" held up by "fat bejeweled fingers" (du Maurier, 1938/2006, p. 10). Mrs. Van Hopper, the fat, toady American consumerist—hungry for ravioli, the luxuries of "Monte" (du Maurier, 1938/2006, p. 17) and the guarded society of the English elite—is the colonial enterprise come home—a Bertha in broad daylight. With her social aspirations and "ninety pounds a year" to purchase "a friend of the bosom" (du Maurier, 1938/2006, p. 24)—Mrs. Van Hopper has the narrator as much at the mercy of her fortune as Bertha does Rochester. Therefore, the threat she represents to the English upper-class is one of assimilation. As Homi Bhabha (1984) argues, "the discourse of mimicry is constructed around an ambivalence"—one he terms "almost the same, *but not quite*... so that mimicry is at once resemblance and menace" (p. 126-127).

I cite Bhabha not to hijack his theory of new-culture-making—of the complex process by which the colonial subject reconstitutes subjectivity in the interstices of imperial discourse—and suggest that a colonizer figure like Mrs. Van Hopper has undergone a comparable process. One is much more comfortable with reading Bertha as a figure for the dispossessed Other despite her lineage, as Spivak does, than in perceiving Mrs. Van Hopper, ministering over her "plate heaped high with ravioli" (du Maurier, 1938/2006, p. 10), in the same light. However, it is provocative to think of Mrs. Van Hopper as the locus of imperialism in this novel. She is, after all, the narrative impetus: "I wonder what my life would be to-day, if Mrs. Van Hopper had not been a snob. Funny to think that the course of my existence hung like a thread upon that quality of hers" (du Maurier, 1938/2006, p. 12).

Mrs. Van Hopper's "quality"—her very nationalized intrusiveness—is both what the narrator credits as the catalyst for her marriage and what she thinks Maxim has rescued her from, imagining her hypothetical life in New York as a series of "young bank clerks" with frightful pick-up lines like "D'you like Hot music?" Maxim, however, brings the colonial discourse to the forefront in his comparison of the narrator's employment to slavery, castigating it as "a primitive idea. Rather like the Eastern slave market" (du Maurier, 1938/2006, p. 24). By saying Maxim encloses his marriage to the narrator within an imperial discourse, I am not referring only to the discourse of Orientalism here but also to his implicit equation of marriage and enslavement, for in his riveting proposal, he offers the girl what is essentially a change of employment:

> instead of being companion to Mrs. Van Hopper you become mine, and your duties will be almost exactly the same. I also like new library books, and flowers in the drawing room, and bezique after dinner. And someone to pour out my tea. The only difference is that I don't take Taxol, I prefer Eno's, and you must never let me run out of my particular brand of toothpaste. (du Maurier, 1938/2006, p. 58)

If only our narrator had read her *Middlemarch*, she might have learned the lesson of Dorothea that if a proposal sounds like a classified ad for a secretarial position, one should perhaps not accept it. But she does accept, and like Jane—or, at least, Spivak reading Jane—is entered into the lawful domestic order *and* the moneyed aristocracy through the narrative momentum of the imperial discourse.

Unfortunately for our hesitant and unsophisticated narrator, to enter into the domestic order is also to enter into the order of domestics, one run by the cadaverous and cantankerous Mrs. Danvers. I want to argue here that Mrs. Danvers is the equivalent of Jane's Grace Poole—"that living enigma, that mystery of mysteries" (Brontë, 1847/2006, p. 128)—that is, if Grace Poole *were* the owner of that mirthless laugher. For Jane, the most uncanny aspect of Grace Poole is a homeliness at odds with "her" thrilling laugh: "Her appearance always acted as a damper to the curiosity raised by her oral oddities: hard-featured and staid, she had no point to which interest could attach" (Brontë, 1847/2006, p. 70). Mrs. Danvers, on the other hand, with her "dead hand," "hollow eyes," and "a skull's face" (du Maurier, 1938/2006, p. 74), looks and plays the part, for while Grace, solid and stout, is charged with guarding the boundary between the Other wife and the virgin girl narrator, Mrs. Danvers is as porous as bones.

Both Grace and Mrs. Danvers function partly as spaces on which the two narrators project their sexual and social insecurities. Jane projects a prescient sexual jealousy of the then-unknown Bertha on to Grace Poole—"What if a former caprice (a freak very possible to a nature so sudden and headstrong as his) has delivered him into her power" (Brontë, 1847/2006, p. 98)—only to reject that

possibility based on Grace's appearance, which, then triggers her realization that she herself is unattractive: "'Yet,' suggested the secret voice which talks to us in our own hearts, 'you are not beautiful either' (Brontë, 1847/2006, p. 99). However, Jane is able, ultimately, to disassociate herself from the perceived threat to her sexual superiority by asserting her social superiority, assuring herself, "I compared myself with her, and found we were different. Bessie Leaven had said I was quite a lady, and she spoke truth—I was a lady. And now I looked much better than I did when Bessie saw me; I had more colour and more flesh, more life, more vivacity, because I had brighter hopes and keener enjoyments" (Brontë, 1847/2006, p. 99). It is notable, here, how Jane's increased social prospects—if not yet, at this stage, by the possibility of marriage than by employment—reinforces her personal and sexual confidence. She is empowered by her position in the domestic order of Thornfield, even if it is bound by financial rather than matrimonial agreement.

For the *Rebecca* narrator, however, Mrs. Danvers renders the home unhomely through the uncanny spectralization of Rebecca, denying the narrator her "rightful" place in the matrimonial domestic sphere. "I am going to be Mrs. de Winter. I am going to live at Manderley. Manderley will belong to me" (du Maurier, 1938/2006, p. 61), the narrator tells herself in the optimism of her impending marriage. However, each of these short, steadying declarative sentences contains within it a personal tragedy for the narrator, for none will come true. The more the narrator attempts to ingratiate herself with Manderley, the more the house rejects her: "Unconsciously, I shivered as though someone had opened the door behind me and let a draft into the room. I was sitting in Rebecca's chair, I was leaning against Rebecca's cushion, and the dog had come to me and laid his head upon my knee because that had been his custom, and he remembered in the past, she had given sugar to him there" (du Maurier, 1938/2006, p. 86). For the narrator, Manderley is the very definition of unhomely—uncanny with the return of another who was once familiar but "estranged… through being repressed" (Freud, 1919/2003, p. 148) and brought again to light by Mrs. Danvers. In the first of the fraught "bedroom scenes," which depict a kind of mediated seduction of the girl by Rebecca via Mrs. Danvers—involving the caressing of nightgowns and the forced handling of slippers—the latter infuses the former's imagination with phantasms: "I feel her everywhere... I fancy I hear her just behind me. That quick, light footstep... It's almost as though I catch the sound of her dress sweeping the stairs as she comes down to dinner" (du Maurier, 1938/2006, p. 175). It is Mrs. Danvers who keeps Rebecca's bedroom just as she left it, she who continues to run Manderley according to Rebecca's liking and she who ensures that the narrator cannot escape the ghost of Rebecca.

Here, Mrs. Danvers functions, like Grace Poole, although not quite, as a mediator between legal and Other wife (whichever way one chooses to configure

that dyad in the case of *Rebecca*). However, whereas Grace Poole, with a liquid, reflective name that belies her solid opacity—allows Jane to reassert her position in the domestic order, the quasi-spectral Mrs. Danvers submits the narrator to a kind of uncanny relationship with "Rebecca," thus subjecting her to, as Lacan (1988) puts it "the discourse of the Other" (p. 32). By this I mean that the narrator constitutes herself as not-Rebecca through her intuition of Mrs. Danvers' scrutiny: "I think it was the expression on her face that gave me my first feeling of unrest. Instinctively, I thought, 'She is comparing me to Rebecca'; and sharp as a sword the shadow came between us" (du Maurier, 1938/2006, p. 8). However, in doing so, she also finds her identity dangerously conflated with that of the Other, as cemented by the incident at the fancy ball, in which the insidious Mrs. Danvers manipulates her into dressing like Rebecca.[2] Mrs. Danvers, then, invites speculations into Gilbert and Gubar's (1979) paradigm of reflective interiority: she functions as a mirror, "a sort of chamber, a mysterious enclosure in which images of self are trapped" (p. 340-341). Even as Mrs. Danvers draws the narrator along a ledge, one that cuts in its reminders that she is "so very different from Rebecca" (du Maurier, 1938/2006, p. 137), she threatens to push the narrator over the precarious divide. Unlike Grace Poole, Mrs. Danvers cannot be physically separated from the ghostly wife. Hence, her presence in the novel challenges the boundaries between past and present, the narrator's sanity and insanity, real and unreal, self and Other.

So far, I have argued that two of the threats represented by Bertha in *Jane Eyre*—of the overgrown imperial offspring returned and of the madness that loosens the narrator's grip on the real—have in *Rebecca* been dispersed into secondary female characters. There remains, then, the question of what is left behind. Who is Rebecca? For Spivak (1985), Bertha Mason "renders the human/animal frontier as acceptably indeterminate, so that a good greater than the letter of the Law can be broached" (p. 247). The Law that is breached in *Rebecca* is, of course, not just the sanctity of matrimony, but of human life, and the "greater good" broached is that of being a good wife. So if beastliness displaces Bertha from the rightful order of law, what boundaries does Rebecca threaten? I propose a few.

I have already discussed the fluid dynamics of self/Other between the narrator and Rebecca, but I want now to link it with another perversion of boundaries: that of nature. Rebecca is not only associated with general nature through her affinity with animals and her love of the ocean. She is specifically and emphatically cast as the natural sublime:

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[2] Alison Light reads this as a scene in which, "The boundaries which shored up the girl's identity have now been dissolved. The projection of her desire which the imaginary Rebecca represents now threatens to undermine not just the basis of her marriage but also to jeopardize the girl's only known route into acceptable middle-class womanhood and into being a person a self" (14).

> On either side of us was a wall of colour, blood-red, reaching far above our heads. We were amongst the rhododendrons. There was something bewildering, even shocking... They startled me with their crimson faces, massed one upon the other in incredible profusion, showing no leaf, no twig, nothing but the slaughterous red, luscious and fantastic, unlike any rhododendron plant I had seen before. (du Maurier, 1938/2006, p. 66)[3]

These flowers are not the orderly, "homely," and "strictly conventional" "domestic thing"—a description oddly reminiscent of the narrator's self-characterization—that she associates with rhododendrons; "these [are] monsters, rearing to the sky... too beautiful... too powerful... not plants at all" (du Maurier, 1938/2006, p. 66). We later learn that these blooms, which should recall the "bloated features," with "lips swelled and dark," of Bertha's "purple face" (Brontë, 1847/2006, pp. 182, 189), are Rebecca's favorite, for they fill her personal space, the morning room, "in profusion," hence entwining Rebecca with her predecessor Bertha *and* sublime rather than beautiful nature.

In light of these associations, the opening dream sequence becomes even more troubled, for sublime nature, unrestrained, threatening, fraught with sexual tension is what threatens the symmetric beauty of Manderley:

> Nature had come into her own again and, little by little, in her stealthy, insidious way had encroached upon the drive with long tenacious fingers. The woods, always a menace even in the past, had triumphed in the end. They crowded, dark and uncontrolled, to the borders of the drive. The beeches with white, naked limbs leant close to one another, their branches intermingled in a strange embrace." (du Maurier, 1938/2006, p. 1)

"Tall" (du Maurier, 1938/2006, p. 157), "dark" (du Maurier, 1938/2006, p. 276), "white" (du Maurier, 1938/2006, pp. 127-128) and snake-like (du Maurier, 1938/2006, pp. 157, 276, 385) are operative words in the various physical descriptions of Rebecca. Here, they are presaged by phrases like "long tenacious fingers," "white naked limbs," "stealthy, [and] insidious" (an association with the Biblical sense of "snake"). Not only does this passage foreshadow the revelation of Rebecca's "true" character, but it also primes the readers to identify Rebecca as the culprit behind the decay of Manderley.

Rebecca's contagious sublimity seems to infect even the unsuspecting nature of the beautiful, for the hydrangeas, formerly "things of culture and grace" have, without a "hand [to check] their progress", "gone native... black and ugly as

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[3] "For sublime objects are vast in their dimensions, beautiful ones comparatively small: beauty should be smooth and polished; the great, rugged and negligent" (Burke, 1757/2008, p. 113).

the nameless parasites that grew beside them" (du Maurier, 1938/2006, p. 1). The rhododendron's "alien marriage" with weeds, "bastard things" of "spurious origins" and "half breed" that sprout from "seed... scattered long ago" prefigures both the bastard threat of Rebecca's womb and the cancerous growth it is revealed to be in the end. However, this association of Rebecca with nature's version of "women with untidy hair" (du Maurier, 1938/2006, p. 33), as Maxim would say, is undermined by its very own insinuations. For one, the description "gone native," although troubling in its racial inflection, speaks to a threat foreign in its very indigeneity: it is the unbridled nature of Manderley itself. In a crumbling of the binary set up between the sublime and beautiful, we discover in Maxim's confession—of both lovelessness and murder—that Rebecca's "blasted taste made Manderley the thing it is today." She is, in fact not the uncontainable force of nature that ravages Maxim's estate as she first appears to be, but also the person responsible for reigning in its "wilderness" with "the gardens, the shrubs, even the azaleas in the Happy Valley." Because Rebecca is responsible for "The beauty of Manderley... the Manderley that people talk about and photograph and paint" (du Maurier, 1938/2006, p. 307), Rebecca *is* Manderley.

The boundaries that Rebecca renders indeterminate, then, are not only of self/ Other, human/nature, beautiful/sublime, but also the very boundaries of the domestic order itself. In other words, she renders *un*acceptably visible the Symbolic order that governs such distinctions. Rebecca enters into what is functionally a contract with Maxim, whereby she exchanges part of her identity by splitting her life into mistress of Manderley and slut of London (du Maurier, 1938/2006, p. 278) in exchange for, we can presume, a comfortable socioeconomic position. Simultaneously, she reciprocates Maxim's offer of "social place" by promising to make Manderley "the most famous show-place in all the country" (du Maurier, 1938/2006, p. 277). Rebecca is, therefore, a shrewd businesswoman, and Alison Light (1984) argues that the true threat is her "[refusal] to obey the law whereby women exchange their bodies for social place" (p. 15). I would take it even further, however, and suggest she does exactly that, but without sacrificing her sexual freedom, and, in doing so, renders visible the machinery of the marriage plot.

Therefore, if *Rebecca* prostitutes itself as a love story, it is only to create a haunting sense of uncanniness through what is repressed and what resurfaces. In fact, the tagline cited in the introduction is self-contradictory. *Rebecca* cannot simultaneously be a "classic tale" and one "of romantic suspense," for the romance and suspense in this novel can be witnessed only once. It is not a novel that can be remembered, cherished or returned to as romance or suspense because by the time we part with the narrator at the end of the novel, the suspense generated by the seemingly uncanny return of the murdered wife is spent and the illusion of romance has gone up in flames along with the ill-fated Manderley. What is left behind and can be returned to is a gendered struggle between "a man

who was powerful and a woman who was not" (Forster, 1993, p. 138), one that derives its power from how uneasily the narrative sits in its own skin.

Ultimately, the locus of the uncanny in this novel proves not to be Rebecca but *Rebecca* —that is, this "classic tale of romantic suspense" of a novel. When Rebecca's body is discovered in her aptly named boat, *Je Reviens*, what returns is not the specter of a woman whose unruly sexuality threatens the purity of the Symbolic Order but the specter of murder. Because Rebecca threatens to transcend social and sexual boundaries, she is cast as Bluebeard's wife, a figure which critic Maria Tatar (2004) terms "a monster of ingratitude" marred by "duplicitous behavior and predatory sexuality" (p. 136). Furthermore, Rebecca and Maxim's domestic agreement is nullified and poetic justice given for her murder precisely because she threatens to bastardize Maxim's patriarchal lineage with "a non-productive sexuality" that "exhausts and wastes and exists prior to and outside of the marriage contract" (Halberstam, 1995, pp. 16-17). The revenant of this novel is, therefore, *not* the monstrous woman herself but the mechanisms by which she is cast as such in order to justify the violence inflicted upon her. The "something familiar and old... estranged only by the process of repression"(Freud, 1919/2003, p. 12-13) —the "primitive beliefs that have been surmounted" (Freud, 1919/2003, p. 155)—that come back to haunt us in this novel is the logic by which the sublime is evoked "as a way of rendering acceptable the deaths of women" (Heiland, 2004, p. 34), a logic which applies not only to Rebecca but to Bertha Mason before her.

Of the uncanny, Royle (2003) says, "Something comes back because in some sense it was never properly there in the first place" (p. 5). In some ways, Bertha was never properly a part of Jane Eyre's story. According to Spivak (1985), although Bertha is ultimately abject for the sake of marital felicity, her narrative impulse transcends her death. Because the novel ends with St. John Rivers's mission to India, which erupts so jarringly out of Jane's would-be epithalamium, Spivak sees the colonial narrative—and, essentially, Bertha's narrative—as "a tangent that escapes the closed circle of the narrative conclusion" (p. 248). If Gilbert and Gubar's (1979) reading of Bertha as Jane's "dangerous double" is problematic, as most compellingly argued by Spivak (1985), because it derealizes Bertha and consigns her to the immolation that is part and parcel with Jane's lawful entry into the domestic order and resulting self-empowerment, du Maurier is able to challenge the logic by which one woman's rise requires the displacement and abjection of another through her spectralization of Rebecca. Unlike Bertha, whose purple and bloated animalized body, in its overexposed visceral solidity, establishes all too real a presence in the text to be comfortably read as a function, Rebecca, even as she emerges from the sunk boat in the uncanny fulfillment of its name—*Je Reviens*—is a spectral presence, a skeleton on to which the narrator is able to project her sexual and social anxieties and reject them, by virtue of difference, in order to consolidate her union with Maxim

as accomplice. By dispersing the different discursive fields that drive "Plain Jane's Progress," du Maurier exposes the discourse of romance itself as one in which violence is committed by one woman upon another, by virtue of complicity, in order to enter into a place of security within its domestic order.

Conclusion

Ultimately, it is precisely the way in which *Rebecca*" exudes worship" even in its "essential lovelessness" (Auerbach, 2002, p. 108)—its uncanny ability to pass itself off as popular romance—that allows it to offer such a potent and unsettling critique of a discourse in which violence is committed by one woman upon another, by virtue of complicity, in order to enter into a place of security within its domestic order. The readers themselves are almost, if not completely manipulated into adopting the vision of Rebecca as a partly sublime, partly uncanny monster who is culpable for her own murder. However, this seductive narrative is betrayed by the uneasiness of a romance built upon violence, an uncanny revenant which returns, resurfaces, breaches the felicity of romantic interpretation and pursues us like the unquiet rustling of a "woman in evening dress" and the "patter of a woman's hurrying footsteps" (du Maurier, 1938/2006, p. 9). Here, perhaps, we can end with Auerbach's (2002) scathing yet insightful comment that "[c]omparison with the Brontë sisters clings to [du Maurier's] romances as tenaciously as cancer clings to the wombs of her rebellious women" (p. 112) inside out. While Auerbach sees disease and debility in du Maurier's women as punishment inflicted upon them for their transgressions, I see these bodies as sites that function as discursive fields. Disease, then, is uneasiness, "a seed... scattered long ago" (du Maurier, 1938/2006, p. 2) that grows and creeps under the "hating house," biding its time until—like Rebecca who died with "that slow smile on her face" (du Maurier, 1938/2006, p. 313)—it can emerge for a final, triumphant "ha! ha!" in the form of Bertha Mason's "goblin" (Brontë, 1847/2006, p. 241) laugh.

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