

Manderley Reconsidered: Being and Building in Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca*

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Abstract

The 'problematic' which remains unsolved in Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca* (1938) is the lack of traditional onto-theological or metaphysical dimension to the novel, which is structured around the personified, or rather theologized, figure of Manderley. For some readers, it is a mere building, but it is not like other buildings. Manderley is the embodiment of the past, present, and future of its inhabitants. For them, it is what it *is* by 'standing there', not anywhere, but in a particular prominent place. The given place possesses a buried meaning revealed by housing long generations of the de Winters whose destiny is shaped by being related into their own place. Their house extends their *meaning/being*. This paper argues that the complex spatial/temporal relationships of its inhabitants with Manderley engenders an unfamiliar *reading/re-writing* of the novel. A new interpretation of Manderley, as a *building* which shapes the living experience of some human beings, is sought by relating the house to the *Dasein* of those who (un)peopled it.

Key Words: building philosophy, the spectre, pleasure, jouissance, poeticity



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إعادة النظر في ماندرلي: الوجود والبناء في رواية ريبيكا لدافني دو مورييه

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المستخلص:

تكمن الإشكالية التي لا تزال قائمة في رواية "ريبيكا" لدافني دو مورييه (١٩٣٨) في غياب البعد الأنطولوجي أو الميتافيزيقي التقليدي، إذ تتمحور الرواية حول شخصية ماندرلي المُجسدة، أو بالأحرى المؤطرة لاهوتياً. بالنسبة لبعض القراء، هي مجرد مبني، لكنها ليست كغيرها من المبني. ماندرلي هي تجسيد لماضي وحاضر ومستقبل سكانها. بالنسبة لهم، هي ما هي عليه بمجرد "وقوفها هناك"، ليس في أي مكان، بل في موقع بارز محدد. يحمل هذا الموقع معنىًّا دفينًا يتجلّى من خلال إيواء أجيال طويلة من عائلة دي وينترز، الذين يتشكّل مصيرهم من خلال ارتباطهم بمكانهم. منزلهم يُوسع نطاق وجودهم. تُجادل هذه الورقة البحثية بأن العلاقات المكانية والزمانية المُعقدة بين سكان ماندرلي تؤدي إلى قراءة/إعادة كتابة غير مألوفة للرواية. يتم البحث عن تفسير جديد لماندرلي، باعتباره مبني يشكل التجربة المعيشية لبعض البشر، من خلال ربط المنزل بوجود أولئك الذين سكنوه (أو لم يسكنوه).

الكلمات المفتاحية: فلسفة البناء، الشبح، المتعة، اللذة، الشعرية



Last night I dreamt I went to Manderley again. It seemed to me I stood by the iron gate leading to the drive, and for a while I could not enter, for the way was barred to me. There was a padlock and chain upon the gate. I called in my dream to the lodge-keeper, and had no answer, and peering closer through the rusted spokes of the gate I saw that the lodge was uninhabited.

Daphne de Maurier's *Rebecca*, opening words

The road to Manderley lay ahead. There was no moon. The sky above our heads was inky black. But the sky on the horizon was not dark at all. It was shot with crimson, like a splash of blood. And the ashes blew towards us with the salt wind from the sea.

Daphne de Maurier's *Rebecca*, closing words

1. The *Isness* of Manderley

In the beginning was Manderley, and Manderley was with the revenant, and Manderley was the revenant. It was with the revenant in the beginning and end of the novel.

Through Manderley the 'dwelling thinking' was made; without it nothing was made that has been made.

Adopted from the Book of John

In phenomenological philosophy, the act of 'dwelling' is four-folded in dichotomies: earth/sky and mortals/divinities, which are in a state of oneness, or *presence* to each other, but they do not interfere with each other: 'In saving the earth, in receiving the sky, in awaiting the divinities, in initiating mortals, dwelling occurs as the fourfold preservation of the fourfold' (Heidegger, 149). Dwelling is itself the building which preserves 'the fourfold in things'. Each of the four is what it *is* because it reflects the others: 'they all belong together in a "mirror-play" which constitutes the world' (Norberg-Schulz, 63). This mirror-game may be understood as an open inbetween-ness wherein things appear as what they are. The building is related to the act of dwelling because it enables the mortals to 'come and go' from generation to generation so as to regenerate earth while waiting for the good news of the divinities in the sky. It enables the four 'fouring' together or 'ring-around dance of being' together; thus, Manderley 'gathers to itself in *its own* way earth and sky, divinities and

mortals'. In itself, it is a *thing*, a mere house, but it is more than that, it is a 'symbol' expressing 'something that strictly speaking does not belong to it' (Pons, 71), it becomes an icon of a special social structure or a living system. The three main characters of the novel: Rebecca, Maxim and the second Mrs de Winter are all evolving around it, or they are linked by very special relationships to the Manderley gyre.

For Maxim, it is 'the only home' he has ever known. When married Rebecca, he could not remember his first bride's wedding oath of everlasting love and faithfulness (Austin's performative promise, 12), but he recalled her saying on the rocks of Monte Carlo, in their honeymoon, that she will take care of his house as it deserves to be. He had accepted to get married on this odd oath for long years and we do not know what makes them both accept this kind of marriage. As far as the second Mrs de Winter is concerned, she got a premonitional feelings towards Manderley long before she had lived in it, related to it emotionally through a postcard picture of Manderley she had bought when she was a child. She was so happy when Maxim proposed to her saying: 'Either you go to America with Mrs Van Hopper or you come home to Manderley with me'. The two words 'come' and 'home' in his uncommon marriage proposal imply, as in fairy tales, an invitation for her to enter a world that she does not belong and never dreamt of belonging to it. In this sense, what gives 'legitimacy' to the de Winters is Manderley itself. Outside it, its owners are tormented by the 'terrified desire to belong without belonging, the anger and suffering about being doomed to the dislocation of legitimacy, the question of the signature which does sign' (Cixous¹, 7). Without it, they do not have the right of the trace, the signature. Thus, in the second chapter, which is the after-the-end of the real events of the novel, we find Maxim almost a wrecked man and the second Mrs de Winter develops a habit of 'reading aloud' for him. Her orality is doing without the written signature that Rebecca is known of. The traces of the late Mrs de Winter maintain her 'spectral figuration', 'conceal yet leave traces of the keys, which have well-kept secrets' (Cixous², 3) in the wonderland of Manderley, which supplies identity to the de Winters. Outside it, they are not themselves any more. They are not sovereign subjects, but the objects of 'an interminable internal argument, the object and the place'. Maxim and the second Mrs de Winter are together, but not happy (pretending to be happy) because they are outside Manderley, so the new wife said: 'I am aware of sadness, of a sense of loss'. 'Happiness', she continued, 'is not a possession to be prized, it is quality of thought, a state of mind'. The burning of Manderley puts them outside the right place and time; 'a fateful belatedness precipitates each into a cruel ill-coming' (Cixous¹, 7). Maxim and his second wife

are almost buried in life, in a dull 'little hotel' avoiding people that might know them in big hotels. They live a routine life, hungry for mail which is the only connection they have with outside world as they are lagging behind real time. They are excited for the result of a cricket match played many days ago, and 'transported' with an old copy of an English magazine 'from this indifferent island to the realities of an English spring'. In both her reveries and night dreams, the second Mrs de Winter longs for Manderley with a strong sense of nostalgia. She retreats into her past time and place, to the secret 'memories of Manderley that will not be denied'.

2. From House to Hotel

According to Heidegger, not all 'buildings' are 'dwelling places' (143). Thus, the novel, which begins in a Monte Carlo hotel and ends in another smaller one, does not have 'that domain to which everything that *is* belongs' except in Manderley because hotels (big or small) do not have authenticity, or the sense of being/belonging. Home means 'to remain, to stay in a place'. It means also 'to remain in peace', 'preserved' and 'safeguarded'. It is 'the free sphere that safeguards each thing in its nature'. Mortals build places because 'dwelling is the manner in which mortals are on earth' (Ibid., 147). Dwelling and building motivate mortals to cultivate and grow up things, including their own children. Hence, one of the forgotten-ends in the novel (mentioned but not settled) is Mr de Winter's having children from his second wife. His sister prepares the readers to expect a child, but there is no mention at the end of the novel of having any. However, the possibility of having Rebecca's illegitimate child who will inherit Manderley one day, was the main reason behind his murdering her. According to his version of the crime episode, Mr de Winter attempted to maintain the pure ancestry of his noble family. But this is not true. What destructs Maxim, morally and spiritually speaking, is that Rebecca lied to him, she was not pregnant, she wanted to defeat her husband (for reasons that we do not know), by making a tool of him, as she always did, to have an ultimate victory over him and over death itself. She refused to wait passively the final unbearable pain of cancer that might diminish her beauty. She had the possibility of committing suicide, but she let Maxim kill her so that he will never get rid of her. She died on her own terms as any Sophoclean or Shakespearean tragic hero. This is not her only triumph, she succeeded to inhabit the house and the thoughts of its dwellers until its final destruction. She breaks their connection with the only 'dwelling place' that represents their being. They are disconnected

with real notions of time and place. Manderley's burning stopped the de Winters at a certain point of time because they cannot resume the old bright history of the family without the house. The line of growth, 'construction', or 'dwelling' is interrupted after Rebecca's death and the burning of Manderley; as if these two events left the family barren and impotent so there is no hope of its regeneration or procreation. Both Maxim and the second Mrs de Winter are no longer belonging. They are incapable of 'building buildings' in the realistic and metaphoric senses of the word; i.e., having children or a substituted home for Manderley. As such, they deserted their only house and continued living in hotels.

3. *Rebecca*: A Text of Pleasure or Jouissance?

Manderley creates 'the sight of a loss, the seam, the cut, the deflation' in the text itself, or 'the dissolve which seizes the subject in the midst of bliss' (Barthes¹, 7). It provides new detours to the readability of the narrative, or according to its dwellers' relation to the house, their bodies pursue their own ideas which are almost contradictory with the ideas of their words. In nobody this state is clear as in the discrepancy between the words of the second Mrs de Winter and her actions or her longings. In one occasion, she comments on her and Maxim's nature that both of them 'love simplicity'; however, few pages later, she longs for the rich table of half past four in front of the library fire at Manderley. This means that she loves the life of luxury but she cares more for how she is seen, for the 'gaze' of the others. There are two types of 'gaze', according to Helene Cixous; when 'you see', and when 'you see how you are seen'. Cixous' second 'gaze', or the sense of 'see-oneself-seen' is very important to the narrator who pretends even in front of us as readers of her narrative, but as Roland Barthes said, her 'body does not have the same ideas' that her words have. This makes *Rebecca* a 'writerly text' for the reader who can see strange facts about the characters, facts which were never written in words by the original writer. Gazing at the unseen, or forbidden to be seen, through gaps in the text makes it highly erotic, seducing the reader with an active process of reading. The second Mrs de Winter loves very much to be Rebecca (we don't know what might happen if Maxim encouraged her after changing her outside appearance by imitating the model of *Beauty* magazine), but since she cannot or dare not to be Rebecca, she pretends to be haunted by her ghost. Can the second Mrs. de Winter forget the moments in which she was totally unified with the ghost of an all powerful and unforgettable woman, her opposite, her Other? If she cannot, which is quite a possibility, the text would cross the historical,

cultural and linguistic boundaries. Despite discomfort and loss, the anxiety of destructing limits has its own *bliss*, or an un-cultural *jouissance* rather than cultural pleasure of the text (Ibid.). This kind of rupture/rapture occurs when the reader does not respect the narrative whole, its traditional happy end, and when certain moments of madness cling into his memory, when he is obsessed with linguistic and textual fragments as exciting material body of the text. Notice what du Maurier does not say or she forgets to say in the following words:

"*Je Reviens*" which, in French, means "I come back." That must be the name of Rebecca's boat.

It is so obvious that Rebecca returns from the dead. Her return-boat is the thoughts of the second Mrs de Winter which make her more than *present* in the novel from its very title, **Rebecca** to the last scene of Manderly burning and breathing with its unforgettable ghost. Derrida pronounces, in *Spectres of Marx* (5), this 'very coming of the revenant or the return of the specter'. The second Mrs de Winter does not know what is it, what makes it It, yet suddenly she becomes it, she finds herself Rebecca. She smiles like her, behaves like her, for one moment she is Rebecca herself. What astonishes us as readers and makes us believe in Rebecca's return is Maxim's comment as they were dinnning that his second wife is suddenly not herself, she loses her innocence and becomes part of an evil that he did not name, but he knows quite well what it *is*, he used to live with it when the first Mrs de Winter was still alive. He does not name it because it is 'this non-object, this non-present present, this being-there of an absent or departed one no longer belongs to knowledge' (Ibid.). Thus Maxim saw Rebecca reflected on the face and behaviour of the second Mrs de Winter. She is not dead, she comes back from death as a revenant or ghost. As Derrida was occupied with the return of the King's ghost to the European Hamlet, we find ourselves busy with the question why Rebecca's ghost, who herself was assassinated like the Danish King, returns back from the dead. If she seeks revenge as Hamlet's father, she will avenge who and by whom? If Maxim represents Claudius, and Manderly the corrupted Elsinore, it is quite possible that Rebecca's ghost searches for a Hamlet in the second Mrs de Winter. However, through her role in Maxim's escape from his crime, she acts more like Hamlet's mother than Hamlet himself.

Maxim, like Claudius, did not leave any trace of his crime, but Rebecca's traces fill up Manderly. However, what does it mean to follow a ghost? Its ineffability endows the text with eroticism which is 'not structurally situated'; not traced in the 'signifier-signified logic'. It is an 'obtuse' meaning', or a 'signifier without signified' (Barthes², 55). It 'is outside

(articulated) language, but still within interlocution.... We do without speech yet continue to understand each other'. It does not settle in 'the peace of nomination' (Ibid., 56). It operates in *presence/absence* alternation, 'appearing and disappearing'. It 'cannot be described, it is the representation that cannot be represented', at least not in common language, but in another language 'whose "science" cannot therefore be linguistics' (Ibid., 59). Thus the active reader experiences 'jouissance' in *Rebecca*, the erotic pleasure, the inexpressible, or ineffable erotics/poetics of *reading/writing* the text.

4. **Rebecca's Poeticity**

We know very few authentic details about Rebecca. One essential thing that we know about her comes from a simple detail in the novel, related to the book she gave as a present to Maxim with her famous signature 'to Max from Rebecca'. We only know that it is a book of poetry, but who is the poet and what is the main theme of its poetry remain a mystery. From this simple fact, we can draw a sharp contrast between the two Mrs de Winter according to the 'thingly character' of the arts they prefer and what is beyond it. While Rebecca's interest is in poetry, the 'speech of genuine thinking', according to Heidegger, the second Mrs de Winter's hobby is painting sketches that imitate real men and natural scenes. She inherited this hobby, which she described as second-level art, from her father who told her to stay stick into something when she discovers its authenticity. Thus, he spent years painting (imitating) one and the same tree. This makes the second Mrs de Winter a copying-from-reality character rather than genuine or authentic creator; i.e., she cannot be herself. She perceives the semantic meaning of the real world and its figures from postcards and dictionaries rather than from real experience, as when she quotes her description of Mrs Van Hopper as 'friend of the bosom' from the dictionary. She builds patiently, as Derrida's 'silkworm' the textile of a veil to protect herself. She tries to know Rebecca from the descriptions of Maxim, his sister, Frank, Mrs Danvers and the other servants of Manderley: every one of them *re-presents* Rebecca from his/her point of view. But who is Rebecca?

Rebecca's *being* is directly related to the fourfold space of Manderley with which she is always associated: earth, sky, mortals and gods. She *presents* the myth of *being* (the Dasein), which results from the kind of thinking in relation to *building* and *poetic dwelling*. She is the work of art itself, Rilke's or Holdren's poetry more specifically, a poem whose author is *dead*,

but it has an everlasting life. Her spectral life is textual, but anti-bookish awaiting relief by *reading/writing* beyond the book. She does not belong to the familiar book-culture because she implies a completely different book from the book we know. She is a book of undefined tension, expectation, and provocative attention, a book of brilliant poetic impulse, which although silent throughout the novel, is very seductive and destructive like the 'Sirens' songs'. Rebecca is the incarnation of Heidegger's saying: 'poetically man dwells', she signifies the many sidedness of poetry. Like poetry, she goes 'outside being', to 'the beyond', and 'the becoming'. Blanchot gave us some light to speculate about her character by speculating on the kind of poets she might be admiring. The modernist poets should not be her favourite type, they are 'modest, turned not towards themselves but toward an obscure quest, toward an essential concern whose importance is not linked to the affirmation of their person' (Blanchot, 197). Since her ultimate concern, dead and alive, is proud subjective transcendence, she is quite probably a fan of ancient poets who celebrated the creative artist, the powerful individual, and the exaltation of the genius. They support our need for the absolute as they declare: 'It is not I who speak, it is the god who speaks in me'. Centred around Rebecca, the whole novel can be re-read as a fictional dramatization of romantic poetic theory. Like some kind of Faust, Prometheus, or Manfred, her spectre is meant to aspire to 'the pure point of inspiration', which can be reached only by 'disappearing'. She has an unfinished past and impossible future, so the meaning of her *being* is concentrated in the poetic absence/presence of her everlasting present. She haunts a world that is not there, 'present in the single coincidence with what is always beyond' (Ibid).

5. Conclusions

The difference between the two Mrs de Winters is the same as the difference between poetic and non-poetic *beings*. While the second Mrs de Winter is prosaic and bookish, Rebecca de Winter holds an extreme capacity for rupture, limitless anxiety, and absolute freedom that the traditional concept of the *book* cannot contain. Her literary space is widened by her *spectral* being which granted her an everlasting revenant *absence/presence*, making her the focal concern of all the other characters in Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca*. Consequently, if we think of the two Mrs de Winter as some sort of *Self* and *Other*, Rebecca absorbed her *other* entirely, depriving her of having even a name. Although the main narrator of the novel, the

second Mrs de Winter speaks all about Rebecca, or her lost identity in relation to the domineering *presence* of Rebecca. She strives to integrate with her *selfhood*, to *be* her.

Manderley plays a major role in featuring the characters who (un)people it. It develops the moral, mental, and ontological state of the people who are related to it. This menacing and ominous country estate represents the beginning and end of their life. It is the *building* which defines their *being/meaning*.

Conflict of interest

The authors whose names are listed above certify that they have NO conflict of interest with anyone.

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