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► **To cite this version:**

Armelle Parey. On the Afterlives of Daphne Du Maurier's Rebecca: Spinoffs and Transfictions. Revue LISA / LISA e-journal, 2021, vol. 19-n°52, 10.4000/lisa.13552 . hal-03603231

**HAL Id: hal-03603231**

**<https://normandie-univ.hal.science/hal-03603231>**

Submitted on 27 May 2024

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## Revue LISA / LISA e-journal

Littératures, Histoire des Idées, Images, Sociétés du  
Monde Anglophone – Literature, History of Ideas,  
Images and Societies of the English-speaking World

vol. 19-n°52 | 2021

The Enduring Appeal of Daphne Du Maurier's Fiction

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### Electronic version

URL: <https://journals.openedition.org/lisa/13552>

DOI: 10.4000/lisa.13552

ISSN: 1762-6153

### Publisher

Presses universitaires de Rennes

Brought to you by Université de Caen Normandie



### Electronic reference

Armelle Parey, "On the Afterlives of Daphne Du Maurier's *Rebecca*: Spinoffs and Transfictions", *Revue LISA/LISA e-journal* [Online], vol. 19-n°52 | 2021, Online since 29 November 2021, connection on 27 May 2024. URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/lisa/13552> ; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/lisa.13552>

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# On the Afterlives of Daphne Du Maurier's *Rebecca*: Spinoffs and Transfictions

*La postérité de Rebecca de Daphne du Maurier : réécritures et transfictions*

Armelle Parey

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- 1 “She had decamped to Cornwall, to a house on top of a cliff (‘like Manderley, terrifically wild and romantic, no Mrs. Danvers though, thank goodness’).”<sup>1</sup> Such a remark, made in passing by a character in Kate Atkinson’s *Life After Life* (2013), is just one illustration of the pervasive presence of Du Maurier’s novel since its publication in 1938. Like Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* or Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*, amongst others, *Rebecca* is one of these culturally central texts well known to the general public because they have been read, if only partly at school, or encountered through screen and TV adaptations.<sup>2</sup> Not only has it tellingly never been out of print and was voted the nation’s favourite book by W.H. Smith customers in 2017, but *Rebecca* is also regularly submitted to rewriting and expansion, leading to all kinds of rewritings, or “spinoffs”, and transfictions.
- 2 The appropriation, in one form or another, of characters and plots from a work of fiction is a phenomenon that has shown no sign of abating since Jean Rhys’s *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) famously gave a voice to the first Mrs. Rochester, *Jane Eyre*’s madwoman in the attic. In suggesting how and why she may have become the character in Charlotte Brontë’s novel, Rhys operates “decentering, recentering”<sup>3</sup> and offers an instance of Edward Said’s “contrapuntal reading”, often present in texts which pick up an existing literary plot:

We must therefore read the great canonical texts [...] with an effort to draw out, extend, give emphasis and voice to what is silent or marginally present or ideologically represented [...] in such works.<sup>4</sup>
- 3 *Wide Sargasso Sea* also illustrates the concept of transfictionality, defined by Richard Saint-Gelais as the phenomenon by which two texts relate to the same fictional universe, plot and characters.<sup>5</sup> Transfictionality accounts for all kinds of temporal and

narrative expansions, centred around identical and therefore recognizable characters, which neither endanger nor challenge the fictional world in which the characters evolve.<sup>6</sup> Such expansions thus include prequels, coquels and sequels which entertain different temporal relationships with the source text. The sequel is a type of writing that “continues a work not in order to bring it to a close but, on the contrary, in order to take it beyond what was initially considered to be its ending.”<sup>7</sup> A prequel situates itself before the story told in the source-text while a coquel is an allographic text that is set in the same diegetical time.

- 4 Within transfictionality, Saint-Gelais identifies as “version” the result of the process by which a story is revisited through the perspective of another character and given a new interpretation.<sup>8</sup> Rewriting appropriates a plot or characters but with much greater freedom by creating a different diegetic world that alters the narrative of the source text. For instance, while Susan Hill’s *Mrs. de Winter* (1993) is a transfiction that picks up the characters in *Rebecca*, Lisa Gabriele’s *The Winters* (2018) rewrites the story with contemporary American characters bearing slightly different names. Birgit Spengler refers to such rewrites as “spinoffs”, and defines them as “fictional texts that take their cues from famous, and often canonical, works of literature, which they revise, rewrite, adapt or appropriate as a whole or in parts, thus producing alternative voices and/or historical or geographical re-locations.”<sup>9</sup> Rewriting is thus often associated with “writing back”, implementing Adrienne Rich’s notion of “re-vision”:

Re-vision – the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction—is [...] an act of survival. Until we can understand the assumptions in which we are drenched we cannot know ourselves [...]. We need to know the writing of the past, and know it differently than we have ever known it; not to pass on a tradition but to break its hold over us.<sup>10</sup>

- 5 As aptly put by Chantal Zabus, “[s]ince rewriting aims at redressing certain wrongs, it may be equated with its homophonic counterpart and be read as a re-righting gesture.”<sup>11</sup> But while Zabus dismisses sequels as “fail[ing] to dismantle narrative authorities and priorities in the circulation of knowledge”,<sup>12</sup> narrative expansions or transfictions, if less radical, may also change our perspective on a source text. Indeed, if both processes of rewriting and of transfiction preserve or reinforce the centrality of the source texts<sup>13</sup> by reactivating their memory and by fully acknowledging them, they can also participate in the critical reassessment of those source texts by throwing new light on them. Helen Taylor offered an overview of the aftermath of Du Maurier’s novel in a 2007 article entitled “*Rebecca*’s Afterlife: Sequels and Other Echoes” based on the premise that they set off the source text. Without necessarily challenging this idea, this essay returns to some of these texts with the addition of two others and considers them in the light of recent critical notions like transfictionality.
- 6 This paper will thus discuss very diverse appropriations of Du Maurier’s *Rebecca*, both as preservers of the centrality of the text and as critiques or reassessments. Texts under study will include two works commissioned by the Du Maurier estate, offering narrative and temporal expansions: Susan Hill’s *Mrs. de Winter* (1993) and Sally Beaman’s *Rebecca’s Tale* (2001); Antonia Fraser’s “Rebecca’s Story” (1976) and Rose Tremain’s “The Housekeeper” (2014), which both return to the story through a different character’s viewpoint; and finally Lisa Gabriele’s *The Winters* (2018), a rewriting which transposes the plot and its characters to contemporary America. Examining the workings of the various narrative strategies adopted in these stories and novels to reactivate the well-known novel will enable us to underline the elements,

traits or characteristics of *Rebecca* that are picked upon – thus ensuring Du Maurier's novel various afterlives – and how these various takes or revisions engage with the source text.

## Sequels: Susan Hill's *Mrs. de Winter* and Sally Beauman's *Rebecca's Tale*

- 7 The sequel, the oldest and most common form of narrative expansion, is a work that goes beyond the ending of a preceding and finished work.<sup>14</sup> Both commissioned and approved of by the Du Maurier estate,<sup>15</sup> Susan Hill's *Mrs. de Winter* and Sally Beauman's *Rebecca's Tale* are sequels in the sense that they pick up Du Maurier's narrative and characters in novels respectively set twelve and twenty years later. In 2007, Helen Taylor foregrounded a (rare) positive view of sequels on the basis that they maintain an interest in the source text: "The sequel helps give new life, dignity, indeed a classic status to a popular text."<sup>16</sup> A mercenary interest is often suspected to lie at the basis of sequel writing,<sup>17</sup> especially as sequels do not simply continue an unfinished novel but prise open a work deemed complete by its author. Another justification for writing a sequel is dissatisfaction of some sort with the ending of the source text. For Taylor, the reason for sequels to novels resides in the fact that "they end with extremely unsatisfying and incomplete closures"<sup>18</sup> and in a wish to reach the conclusion that the original writer could not write: "Recognising their predecessors' narrative compromises with the sexual and gender mores of the day, these [contemporary] writers tend to be suspicious of harmonious conclusions to disturbing narratives."<sup>19</sup> Marjorie Garber also observes the "desire not only for continuation but also for happy endings"<sup>20</sup> while John Banville accounts for his own *Mrs. Osmond* by stating that Henry James's *Portrait of a Lady* was not fully finished.
- 8 Most sequels to *Rebecca* seem to respond to the wish for the happy ending that Du Maurier did not write. Indeed, if Hitchcock and Selznick's adaptation has popularised the notion of a happy ending to *Rebecca* by foregrounding the couple's reunion while Manderley is burning, the ending to the novel is, in Du Maurier's own words, "a bit brief and a bit grim"<sup>21</sup>: the novel's last paragraph is restricted to the description of the couple's drive towards Manderley while the first chapter, set in the aftermath of its destruction, suggests little happiness.
- 9 The desire to give a happy ending is however not what motivates Hill's sequel, seeing that distrust develops between the de Winters and that guilt for Rebecca's murder eventually leads to Maxim's suicide. Hill's novel is a text-book sequel that moves forward in time but remains within the same diegetic world and picks up the same characters, even the same narrator, without transforming them. Such a faithful sequel is marked by slow progress, by reduplication of events from Du Maurier's novel – like the examination of Rebecca's clothes and the disastrous ball – and by a narrator who seems to have regressed to the young timorous character she was in Monte Carlo at the beginning of Du Maurier's novel but adopts a staunch moral stance that demands Maxim de Winter's punishment for his crime.<sup>22</sup>
- 10 *Rebecca's Tale* is another sequel that takes liberties, temporal and otherwise, with the source text. Set after the events told in *Rebecca*, it also adopts the few additions made by Hill in *Mrs. de Winter*, including Maxim's death and the scattering of his ashes by his

wife.<sup>23</sup> Beauman's novel is divided into four narratives: it is composed of an account by Rebecca, as promised in the title, but also narratives by new characters and minor characters in *Rebecca* (such as Colonel Julyan). All of them convey a peripheral vision of the drama while trying to come to terms with Rebecca's personality and the inconsistencies surrounding her death as narrated in Du Maurier's novel. As I argued elsewhere, Beauman's novel plays off those conflicting voices against one another: "In *Rebecca's Tale*, the narrators give their own approach and reaction to what they know or learn of Rebecca's story. The overall result is discordance and disagreement between the characters over who Rebecca was and what happened in the end. Each narrator's limitations are stressed and played against one another so that no version prevails."<sup>24</sup> Even though Beauman's novel gives a voice to Rebecca, it does not replace one story with another, one authority with another. It insists, as Rhys did,<sup>25</sup> that there are several versions to the same story and remains in keeping with Du Maurier's inconclusive ending.

- 11 The part written in Rebecca's voice (287-373) – in the guise of a newly found notebook – is set in October 1931, the day before Rebecca is to see her doctor. This narrative is therefore a *coquel* as it inserts itself into Du Maurier's narrative to fill in some blanks, without directly disturbing the outcome of the source narrative. Overall, Beauman does not contradict the portrait in the source text: indeed, Rebecca is still a *femme fatale* although the character sees herself as the avenging angel of generations of Mrs. de Winters: "I speak for a long line of dispossessed."<sup>26</sup> The rest of the novel being set in 1951, it can overall be considered as a sequel and if we return to the notion of the happy ending as motivation for sequel writing, it is significant that *Rebecca's Tale* does not end with the romance between the de Winters but with a nod to Rebecca herself, whose feminist stand is vindicated in the character of Ellie, Colonel Julyan's niece, who declines to get married and leaves for Cambridge to prepare a degree.

## Giving a voice to the villains in Antonia Fraser's "Rebecca's Story" and Rose Tremain's "The Housekeeper"

- 12 Antonia Fraser's "Rebecca's Story" and Rose Tremain's "The Housekeeper" are shorter fictions that both operate the "decentering, recentering" mentioned before, but in different ways. Fraser's story, a first-person account by Rebecca of her marriage, jars with Maxim's version in Du Maurier's novel while Tremain's narrative gives an account of the inspiration behind *Rebecca* by the (supposedly real-life) woman (mis)represented as Mrs. Danvers. Tremain's and Fraser's stories are close to what Jeremy Rosen calls "minor character elaborations," which consist in "seizing minor figures from the original texts in which they appeared and recasting them in leading roles."<sup>27</sup> Of course, how minor Rebecca and Mrs. Danvers are in the source novel is quite debatable since the plot revolves around the consequences of their actions, but it is undeniable that their voices are filtered through those of the narrator and of various surviving characters. In that respect we recognise in these short stories the desire to give a voice to the voiceless, so prevalent in twentieth- and twenty-first-century literature since the publication of *Wide Sargasso Sea*. In her foreword, Fraser directly acknowledges Rhys's novel as the inspiration for "Rebecca's Story": she realised that "we know nothing positive about Rebecca's 'vicious' past except as related by Max de Winter to his second

wife, and retold by her to us.”<sup>28</sup> On the basis of “positive evidence on the other side to her charm, graciousness, sweetness to tenants, old people, etc., etc.”<sup>29</sup>, her story thus gives the reader a different version not only of Rebecca but also of other characters: Danny (Mrs. Danvers) is a motherly figure and Jack is poor but loveable, while Max is a pervert who literally bought Rebecca off her impoverished father. As for Tremain’s “The Housekeeper”, the opening lines set the tone of the story:

Everybody believes I’m an invented person: Mrs. Danvers. They say I’m a creation: ‘Miss Du Maurier’s finest creation’, in the opinion of many. But I have my own story. I have a history and a soul. I’m a breathing woman.<sup>30</sup>

- 13 The very first sentence asserts that generally accepted beliefs will be contradicted. Moreover, “I have my own story” suggests a desire to rectify an untruth and to reclaim authority. Altogether, “Rebecca’s Story” and “The Housekeeper” aim to “re-right” the narrative and operate some serious “redistributive justice.”<sup>31</sup> The underlying idea in Tremain’s and Fraser’s stories is to apply what Rhys famously did in *Wide Sargasso Sea* and to show that “there is always the other side, always.”<sup>32</sup> All three point at the hierarchy of discourses. Rhys’s narrators are unstable enough to keep the story open, not replacing one truth by another, while Fraser and Tremain just pitch a new version, presented as the truth, against a previous version recognized as anterior, and try to redress supposed wrongs.
- 14 Fraser’s story is both a prequel<sup>33</sup> and a coquel, functioning as a sort of alternative narrative which is anterior to the source text. Set before Rebecca’s death, the text in which she is the narrator begins with “I am waiting now for Max. Here in the boathouse cottage which is so much dearer to me than all the state of Manderley.”<sup>34</sup> Readers already know about this encounter and its outcome, as told by Maxim to his second wife towards the end of Du Maurier’s novel. In the source text, Rebecca is fatally ill but hides the news from Maxim, taunting him so with the prospect of raising a bastard child as heir to Manderley that he kills her.<sup>35</sup> Rebecca is ill in Fraser’s story too but she wants to ask Max to let her spend her last months with Jack, her true love. Fraser however does not contradict what happens next: Maxim turns up and shoots Rebecca. This changes the perspective on the whole novel as Rebecca is now a victim and Maxim a consummate liar who disguises the truth from his second wife. Such an alternative version of events invites a retroactive reading<sup>36</sup> and “re-vision” of *Rebecca*.
- 15 Tremain’s “The Housekeeper” is also a prequel which develops events before the plot of *Rebecca* starts but it does so on an extradiegetic level. Like a metanarrative, it narrates events dating mostly from 1936, before the writing of the well-known narrative. As Peter Carey did in *Jack Maggs* for *Great Expectations*, the narrator in “The Housekeeper” gives background information on the making of *Rebecca* and contradicts Du Maurier’s representation of her in the novel, following the writer’s conscious “decision to make a villain out of me.”<sup>37</sup> The (dizzying) effect for the reader is that the narrative both destroys and builds upon the referential illusion: in a mock metalepsis, *Rebecca* is declared to be a fiction and is superseded by a supposedly real story. The culprit or guilty party in “The Housekeeper” is the novelist,<sup>38</sup> as stressed by the reference to Du Maurier as “the authoress” or “Miss Du Maurier”, which was her *nom de plume* after she married. It is therefore suggested that the writer feeds off, appropriates and distorts real people and events: “she stole these thoughts, just as she stole my life.”<sup>39</sup>
- 16 The use of Daphne Du Maurier as a character evokes two genres: the biographical novel, defined by David Lodge as “the novel which takes a real person and their real

history as the subject matter for imaginative exploration, using the novel's techniques for representing subjectivity rather than the objective, evidence-based discourse of biography", and biofiction, or "literature that names its protagonist after an actual biographical figure."<sup>40</sup> Indeed, the story combines what is known about Du Maurier and elements from the novel. For instance, in depicting an affair between Mrs. Danowski and the young novelist, "The Housekeeper" builds on Du Maurier's real-life "Venetian tendencies", a phrase she used to refer to her homosexual desires<sup>41</sup> with the direct reference to "the boy within her."<sup>42</sup> This element in "The Housekeeper" also expands on the sexual attraction exerted beyond the grave by Rebecca on both Mrs. Danvers and the narrator in Du Maurier's novel. "The Housekeeper" evokes an affair between Mrs. Danowski and "the authoress" and suggests it is the source of Mrs. Danvers's adoration for Rebecca in Du Maurier's novel. This presupposition posits a chronological inversion: although "The Housekeeper" is obviously derived from *Rebecca*, it pretends exactly the opposite.<sup>43</sup> This is notably conveyed through the paronomastic effect<sup>44</sup> of names like "Manderville", "Danowski" and "Lord de Withers", whose phonetic and visual similarity with names in *Rebecca* suggests or reinforces the idea that Du Maurier took inspiration from Tremain's novel. Another twist is the fact that the supposedly real character says she has "been physically affected" by the fictional description made of her: she has become "as ugly as she made me in the book."<sup>45</sup> The reader is thus unsettled as key scenes and elements from *Rebecca* reappear in a different light, filtered through a new point of view. For instance, when visiting the bedroom which belonged to the former mistress of the house, the housekeeper simply invites the young woman to admire the view,<sup>46</sup> instead of inducing her to kill herself.<sup>47</sup> Likewise, the beach house that features in *Rebecca* is now used for a different love tryst.

- 17 While Mrs. Danvers remains in thrall to Rebecca, the housekeeper in Tremain's story is partly empowered by her relationship with the novelist, seeing that it leads her to leave service<sup>48</sup> and start "an independent life."<sup>49</sup> Moreover, a marked concern for the lower classes<sup>50</sup> suggests contemporary "inclusive politics",<sup>51</sup> also visible in the depiction of this version of Mrs. Danvers as a lesbian of Polish origin. In Tremain's story, the antisemitism of the English upper classes is clearly denounced through Lord de Withers who suggests she should deny that side of herself.<sup>52</sup>
- 18 Finally, both stories focus on the villains in *Rebecca*, negative characters like Rebecca herself and Mrs. Danvers, through whom the first wife is still very much present in Du Maurier's novel. Fraser's and Tremain's stories show that these characters are not villains after all, but the victims of power and hierarchy – as opposed to Atwood's villains in her re-vision of fairy-tale characters in "Unpopular Gals", who remain gleefully unrepentant.

## Rebecca transposed and rewritten in Lisa Gabriele's *The Winters*

- 19 Though the book jacket of *The Winters* informs the potential reader that Lisa Gabriele's novel is "inspired by the classic novel *Rebecca*", the actual reader of both novels quickly realises that Gabriele actually picks up the plot and its characters quite meticulously, modifying the spelling of their names and transposing them into present-day Cayman Islands (instead of Monte Carlo) and Long Island, NY (instead of England). It is thus a case of "trans-contextualisation", when characters reappear in another context, such



as another period<sup>53</sup> but without any irony or parody as the plot is modernised, similarly to what was done in the Austen Project,<sup>54</sup> with the difference that the modernised versions of Austen's novels were all commissioned and scrupulously kept names and key elements unchanged. In the case of Lisa Gabriele's novel, one may wonder if *The Winters* manages to combine trans-contextualization with the usual "re-righting"<sup>55</sup> dimension of a rewrite.

- 20 Gabriele refers to that work as her "response" to *Rebecca*<sup>56</sup> while her literary agent presents it as "homage",<sup>57</sup> a word which seems to erase any challenging purpose. Indeed, the novel first focuses on the romance at the heart of the source novel and many elements in Du Maurier's novel are duplicated, not only the mystery about the unusual name of the second Mrs. de Winter, her self-deprecating attitude, the awe which she regards her new role, and her obsessive jealousy, but also the shrine to Rebecca in a part of the mansion, and key events such as the disturbance caused by the second wife's choice of dress for the Manderley ball.
- 21 Besides, the overall structure of *The Winters* and its beginning are similar to those in *Rebecca*. The opening chapter is set in the present and the closing paragraphs frame the narrative of preceding events. *The Winters* also begins with a dream set in a mansion that no longer exists, called Asherley. The opening line – "Last night Rebekah tried to murder me again" – actually sets the misleading tone that runs through the first chapter. The murder attempt only appears in a dream and the pronoun "we" used later on remains undefined, even if the reader assumes that it includes Max Winter and the narrator.
- 22 Gabriele's novel retains the deep social imbalance between the two protagonists, the emphasis being laid on the narrator's poor background while Rebekah and Max's adopted daughter enjoys a rich girl's education and is mostly left to her own devices. Yet, "update" and "updating" are words that recur in presentations of *The Winters* as the novel is definitely anchored in the contemporary world, due to the omnipresence of mobile phones and social media, and to the depiction of difficult relationships within a stepfamily. But Gabriele goes further and brings in changes that are not just a question of modernisation. Reader destabilisation comes from the fact that the novel features the negative force of the source text under nearly the same name, "Dani", which echoes the name "Danny" given to Mrs. Danver by Rebecca. However, Gabriele uses this name to refer to Max and Rebekah's teenage daughter, who goes from antagonist to ally in the course of the narrative. Gabriele thus brings a new slant to the story by giving it a different ending.
- 23 Endings are often key stages in rewritings because they carry the author's signature and are a sign of the Zeitgeist.<sup>58</sup> As in Du Maurier's novel, several conflicting images of the first wife are given in *The Winters*: for instance, the image of the socialite propounded by Mrs. Van Hopper and the magazines in *Rebecca*, now voiced by Dani and the social media in *The Winters*, is opposed to the real and negative portrait eventually made by Max (de) Winter in both novels. In this version it is the husband, not the first wife, who is the lying character. Indeed, Max Winter is still a representative of the ruling classes, now a Republican senator, but keen to use his influential position to serve his own interest, i.e. keep his property. He is eventually revealed to be a liar and a double murderer for the sake of keeping Asherley. In Du Maurier's *Rebecca*, Max is guilty of murder but nevertheless retains his wife's love and support – which may resonate strangely with modern-day readers.<sup>59</sup> While Hitchcock's 1940 adaptation

exonerates Maxim to abide by the Hays Code, Gabriele's novel takes the opposite stand: Max is a cold-blooded murderer who remarries in order to give Asherley an heir. Rebekah dies because of her "leaving the entirety of her fortune to Dani,"<sup>60</sup> her adopted daughter, in an attempt to establish a female lineage.

- 24 *Rebecca* has often been interpreted and marketed as a romance, yet it reverses the fairy-tale pattern that culminates in the poor girl marrying the prince, since the poor girl now finds herself in the grip of a gothic nightmare. With its overpowering, murderous husband, *Rebecca* can be read as a rewriting of the Bluebeard story – a point taken up and furthered by Gabriele. Her rewriting also dismisses another fairy-tale cliché: that of the wicked stepmother. Gabriele turns the ambiguous ending of *Rebecca* into a closed and happy one, not for the married couple but for the narrator and Dani, who eventually saves her step-mother from being murdered too. It is a feminist ending insofar as it depicts an all-supportive and positive female community: Laureen, the vulgar Australian, a new version of American-born Mrs. Van Hopper, turns out to be as caring as Max's sister; Max's lies about Rebekah and about Dani's birth mother are revealed, and the narrative ends on the expectation of the protagonist – now pregnant with a daughter – to meet her Cuban grandmother the following day. In the rewrite, Max Winter becomes an indictment of white money and power while all the men eventually lose their power and are punished for having been involved in Max's enterprise of spoliation of his adopted daughter.
- 25 Finally, Gabriele peppers her novel with self-reflexive comments when her narrator describes her story as "paperback romance" and as "a Grimms' fairy tale set in the Caribbean."<sup>61</sup> Later comes the reference to Jean Rhys's take on *Jane Eyre*, with Dani as "our little mad girl in the attic."<sup>62</sup> Finally, the Gothic dimension present in *Rebecca* (and in Hill's *Mrs. de Winter*) appears in *The Winters* through an echo of Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White* and its heiress committed to an asylum when the same fate is planned for Dani. Gabriele's retelling of du Maurier's story is far from innocent: it plays on the general assumption regarding *Rebecca* as romance but it actually highlights the novel's darkness before bringing it to a happy ending – quite unlike any by du Maurier –, as neat as it is political.

## Conclusion

- 26 To conclude, it has been suggested that one reason for the enduring popular success of Du Maurier's work is that "[s]he wanted the novels to continue to haunt us beyond their endings."<sup>63</sup> This is obviously true of *Rebecca*, which has led to all kinds of thematic and temporal expansions: transfictions (prequels, coquels, sequels) and rewrites (or spinoffs).
- 27 Formally speaking, all are first-person narratives. As David Lodge puts it, this way of rendering consciousness "is just as artful, or artificial, a method as writing about a character in the third person; but it creates an illusion of reality, it commands the willing suspension of the reader's disbelief, by modelling itself on the discourses of personal witness: the confession, the diary, autobiography, the memoir, the deposition."<sup>64</sup> This attests to the writers' desire to describe the interiority of characters deemed to be equally worthy of interest. Whether pursuing the same narrative illusion (*Mrs. de Winter*), developing secondary characters and giving them a voice (*Rebecca's Tale*, "Rebecca's Story" and "The Housekeeper"), or rewriting the plot to different times

and ends (*The Winters*), these narratives all throw light on different aspects of the source text and invite a retroactive reading of *Rebecca* or make it resonant with our own times, notably with the addition of feminist and minority concerns. Apart from Susan Hill's sequel, the expansions and the rewrite of *Rebecca* studied here share the desire to rewrite/re-right some point, often highlighting the power distribution underlying Du Maurier's novel. However, this does not refract negatively on the original: the "symbolic desecration of a hallowed literary monument" noted by Rosen in some recent texts<sup>65</sup> is indeed not to be found in any of these transfictions and spinoffs.

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## NOTES

1. Kate Atkinson, *Life After Life*, London: Doubleday, 2013, 399.
2. Hitchcock famously adapted the novel to the screen in 1940, while British TV adaptations were aired in 1979 and 1997. A new adaptation directed by Ben Wheatley was released on Netflix in 2020.
3. Richard Saint-Gelais, *Fictions transfuges, La transfictionnalité et ses enjeux*, Paris: Seuil, 2011, 148.
4. Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* [1993], London: Vintage, 1994, 78.
5. Richard Saint-Gelais, *op. cit.*, 1.
6. *Ibid.*, 55.
7. Gérard Genette, *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree*, trans. Channa Newman and Claude Doubinsky, Lincoln and London: U of Nebraska P, 1997, 206.
8. Richard Saint-Gelais, *op. cit.*, 139-140.
9. Birgit Spengler, *Literary Spin-offs, Rewriting the Classics—Re-Imagining the Community*, Frankfurt: New York/Campus Verlag, 2015, 11. The distinction Spengler makes between rewritings and spinoffs is that for the latter "the requirements to recognize the fundamental relation to a given pre-text tend towards a more widely shared cultural competence." *Ibid.*, 51.
10. Adrienne Rich, "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision" [1971], *On Lies, Secrets, and Silence: Selected Prose, 1966-1978*, New York: Norton, 35-49, 35. This is a key element in Christian Moraru's 2001 pioneering study, which attempts to "locate, theorize and assess a rewriting model involving predominantly, albeit not exclusively, critique, revision, and dissent." Christian Moraru, *Rewriting: Postmodern Narrative and Cultural Critique in the Age of Cloning*, Albany: SUNY Press, 2001, 23. Julie Sanders confirms that "[m]any appropriations have a joint political and literary investment in giving voice to these characters or subject-positions they perceive to have been oppressed or repressed in the original." Julie Sanders, *Adaptation and Appropriation*. London: Routledge, 2006, 98. Looking at more recent productions, Jeremy Rosen argues that "a great many intertextual works do not launch a critique of the canon." Jeremy Rosen, *Minor Characters Have Their Day, Genre and the Contemporary Literary Marketplace*, New York: Columbia UP, 2016, 4.
11. Chantal Zabus, "Subversive Scribes: Rewriting in the Twentieth Century," *Anglistica* 5:1-2 (2001), 191-207, 191.
12. *Ibid.*, 205.
13. For Sanders, adaptation and appropriation "reinforce that canon by ensuring a continuing interest in the original or source text, albeit in revised circumstances of

understanding.” Julie Sanders, *op. cit.*, 97-98. For Rosen, minor character elaborations “preserve the traditional canon’s centrality.” Jeremy Rosen, *op. cit.*, 5.

14. A number of scholars use “sequel” as an umbrella term. Armelle Parey (ed.), *Prequels, Coquels and Sequels in Contemporary Anglophone Fiction*, London and New York: Routledge, 2019, 3.

15. Helen Taylor (ed.), *The Daphne Du Maurier Companion*, London: Virago, 2007, 84.

16. *Ibid.*, 76.

17. See Gérard Genette, *op. cit.*, 206.

18. Helen Taylor, *op. cit.*, 79.

19. *Ibid.*

20. Marjorie Garber, *Quotation Marks*, London: Routledge, 2003, 75.

21. Margaret Forster, *Daphne Du Maurier* [1993], London: Arrow, 1994, 135.

22. See Armelle Parey “Susan Hill’s *Mrs. de Winter* and Sally Beaman’s *Rebecca’s Tale*: ‘re-visions’ of Daphne Du Maurier’s *Rebecca*?” *Odisea, Revista de estudios ingleses*, 2016:17. 7-17, 12.

23. Sally Beaman, *Rebecca’s Tale*, London: Little, Brown and Company, 2001, 22.

24. Armelle Parey “Susan Hill’s *Mrs. de Winter* and Sally Beaman’s *Rebecca’s Tale*”, *op. cit.*, 14.

25. “Rhys’s novel employs a tripartite narrative structure [...]. Rhys creates narrators who are not fully coherent, reliable, or sympathetic tellers of their tales. She thus invites readers to approach skeptically these formerly minor figures rather than be seduced into straightforward sympathetic identification with or sentimental attachment to them” (Jeremy Rosen, *op. cit.*, 13).

26. Sally Beaman, *op. cit.*, 327.

27. Jeremy Rosen, *op. cit.*, 1.

28. Antonia Fraser, “Rebecca’s Story” [1976], in *The Daphne Du Maurier Companion*, London: Virago, 2007, 92-101, 92.

29. *Ibid.*, 92.

30. Rose Tremain, “The Housekeeper”, *The American Lover*, London: Chatto and Windus, 2014, 121-148, 121.

31. Jeremy Rosen, *op. cit.*, 27.

32. Jean Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea* [1966], London: Penguin, 1968, 106.

33. As Helen Taylor says when she refers to it as “a tantalising outline of what might have been a wonderful prequel novel.” Helen Taylor, *op. cit.*, 83).

34. Antoine Fraser, *op. cit.*, 92.

35. Daphne Du Maurier, *Rebecca* [1938], New York: Avon, 1971, 279-280.

36. Michael Riffaterre evokes the concept of “retroactive reading” (“lecture rétroactive”), which is the process of revising one’s view of former material in the same text: “Au fur et à mesure de son avancée au fil du texte, le lecteur se souvient de ce qu’il vient de lire et modifie la compréhension qu’il en a eue en fonction de ce qu’il est en train de décoder. Tout au long de sa lecture il réexamine et révisé, par comparaison avec ce qui précède.” Michael Riffaterre, *Sémiotique de la poésie*, Paris: Seuil, 1983, 17.

37. Rose Tremain, *op. cit.*, 147.

38. A similarly unflattering portrait of Charles Dickens is drawn in Peter Carey's *Jack Maggs* (1997) and in Joseph O'Connor's *Star of the Sea* (2003), in which the novelist is shown feeding off, and distorting, other people's stories (see Armelle Parey, "Peter Carey's *Jack Maggs*: The True Story of the Convict?" in Georges Letissier (ed.), *Rewriting/ Reprising: Plural Intertextualities*, Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009, 126-137.
39. Rose Tremain, *op. cit.*, 123; see also 147.
40. Michael Lackey, "Locating and Defining the Bio in Biofiction," *a/b: Auto/Biography Studies*, 2016:31, 3-10, 3.
41. Margaret Forster, *op. cit.*, 28.
42. Rose Tremain, *op. cit.*, 138. Paraphrasing Du Maurier in a letter, Forster says "she had forced herself to lock up in a box." Margaret Forster, *op. cit.*, 28.
43. See Richard Saint-Gelais, *op. cit.*, 256, 260 for a similar process in *Madame Homais*, which builds on *Madame Bovary*.
44. "The point of paronomasia," says Wolfgang G. Müller, "is that a mere accidental phonetic relationship assumes the appearance of a semantic relationship." Wolfgang G. Müller, "Iconicity and Rhetoric," in Olga Fischer and Max Nänny (eds), *The Motivated Sign*, Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2001, 305-322, 316.
45. Rose Tremain, *op. cit.*, 147.
46. *Ibid.*, 127.
47. Daphne Du Maurier, *Rebecca*, *op. cit.*, 246.
48. Rose Tremain, *op. cit.*, 141-142.
49. *Ibid.*, 143.
50. *Ibid.*, 123-124.
51. Jeremy Rosen, *op. cit.*, 4.
52. We may draw a quick parallel here with Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day* that similarly points at anti-semitism and extreme-right views amongst the upper-class.
53. Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody* [1985], Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000, 7-12.
54. Retellings of Austen's six novels were written by contemporary authors, including Joanna Trollope (*Sense and Sensibility*) and Val McDermid (*Northanger Abbey*).
55. Chantal Zabus, *op. cit.*
56. In a 2018 interview with NPR, Gabriele says, "I often call *The Winters* a response to *Rebecca*." "*The Winters* is a Modern Update of 1938 Best-Seller *Rebecca*." Interview on NPR, 30 Dec, 2018.
57. Christy Fletcher, in a personal email, dated 3 June 2019.
58. In Guy Larroux's words, "S'il est vrai que la convention gouverne les dénouements romanesques, il n'en reste pas moins que c'est probablement aussi la partie du livre où l'on aperçoit le mieux le travail de contestation (des modèles convenus précisément), et où l'on saisit le mieux le signe des temps." Guy Larroux, *Le Mot de la fin, la clôture romanesque en question*, Paris: Nathan, 1995, 9.
59. As Laura Varnam notes, "In the context of the #MeToo movement, his treatment of his first wife—who had the audacity not merely to betray him but to laugh at him—triggers a stomach-churning recognition of misogyny that modern readers are chilled

to find that the second Mrs. de Winter cheerfully ignores. Maxim de Winter is far more menacing than the ghost of his first wife.” Laura Varnam, “Du Maurier’s *Rebecca* at 80: why we will always return to Manderley,” *The Conversation*, 28 February 2018. <<https://theconversation.com/du-mauriers-rebecca-at-80-why-we-will-always-return-to-manderley-92519>>, accessed on 3 September 2021.)

60. Lisa Gabriele, *The Winters*, London: Harvill Secker, 2018, 313.

61. *Ibid.*, 29-30.

62. *Ibid.*, 260.

63. See Kate Kellaway, “Daphne’s unruly passions,” *The Guardian*, Sunday 15 April 2007. <<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2007/apr/15/fiction.features1>>, accessed 5 September, 2019.

64. David Lodge, *Consciousness and the Novel* [2002], London: Penguin, 2003, 87-88.

65. Jeremy Rosen, *op. cit.*, 1.

## ABSTRACTS

Daphne Du Maurier’s *Rebecca* is one of these novels that are regularly submitted to rewriting and expansion. If the process “preserves the traditional canon’s centrality” (as Jeremy Rosen says about minor character elaborations), it also participates in the critical reassessment of the source text as it throws a new light on it. This article discusses very diverse transfictions based on Du Maurier’s novel and examines the workings of the various narrative strategies adopted to reactivate the well-known novel. This will enable us to underline the elements, traits or characteristics of *Rebecca* that are picked upon – and which ensure Du Maurier’s novel an afterlife – and how these various revisions and/or expansions engage with the source text. While Antonia Fraser’s “Rebecca’s Story” (1976) is a coquel enabling a first-person account by Rebecca of her marriage, Rose Tremain’s “The Housekeeper” (2014) changes diegetic level as it portrays the young Du Maurier and gives an account of the inspiration behind *Rebecca* by the character misrepresented as Mrs. Danvers. Other texts under study are Susan Hill’s *Mrs. de Winter* (1993) and Sally Beauman’s *Rebecca’s Tale* (2001), which offer narrative and temporal expansions, and finally Lisa Gabriele’s *The Winters* (2018), a transposition of the plot and its characters to contemporary America.

*Rebecca* de Daphne du Maurier est l’un de ces romans régulièrement soumis à la réécriture et à l’expansion narrative. Si ceci garantit la centralité du canon traditionnel (comme le dit Jeremy Rosen des développements de personnages mineurs), cela contribue également à une réévaluation critique du texte-source en jetant un nouvel éclairage sur celui-ci. Cet article s’intéresse donc à des transfictions diverses élaborées à partir du roman de du Maurier et étudie le fonctionnement des différentes stratégies narratives adoptées pour réactiver ce célèbre roman. Ceci nous permettra de souligner pourquoi et comment certains éléments, traits et caractéristiques de *Rebecca* sont repris, révélant comment ces différentes révisions et/ou expansions se positionnent par rapport au texte-source. Alors que “Rebecca’s Story” (1976) de Margaret Fraser est une expansion narrative latérale qui permet un récit de son mariage par



Rebecca elle-même, “The Housekeeper” (2014) de Rose Tremain change de niveau diégétique et s'intéresse à la jeune du Maurier comme personnage, racontant l'inspiration derrière *Rebecca* par la voix du personnage qui se déclare représenté sous un faux jour dans le récit, sous les traits de Mrs. Danvers. Les autres textes étudiés sont *Mrs. de Winter* (1993) de Susan Hill et *Rebecca's Tale* (2001) de Sally Beauman qui offrent tous deux des expansions temporelles et narratives et enfin, *The Winters* (2018) de Lisa Gabriele qui transpose l'intrigue et les personnages dans l'Amérique contemporaine.

## INDEX

**Mots-clés:** du Maurier Daphne, Rebecca, transfictionnalité, réécriture, suite, expansion narrative latérale

**Keywords:** du Maurier Daphne, Rebecca, transfictionality, rewriting, sequel, coquel

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