Universidad de Oviedo
Universidá d'Uviéu
University of Oviedo

Revisiting *Rebecca*

Trabajo de Fin de Grado en Estudios Ingleses

Ángela Sánchez Suárez

Tutora: María del Carmen Pérez Riu

Facultad de Filosofía y Letras

Curso 2024/2025

Mayo 2025

Table of Contents Page

1. Introduction……... 2
2. Du Maurier's novel and its two adaptations.……..……..... 5
3. At Manderley……..……... 8
4. On marriage and oppression……..…….. 15
5. Power dynamics ……... 23
6. Conclusion……..... 31
7. Appendix…….. 34
8. References…… 35

1. Introduction

“Last night I dreamt I went to Manderley again”.

The beginning line of Daphne du Maurier’s *Rebecca* still resonates today, rendering the novel timeless almost ninety years later. *Rebecca* touches upon universal experiences in marriage and female relationships in a predominantly patriarchal society. Whether in written text or film, this bestseller story has captured audiences throughout the decades. As a classic novel, it has been revisited on TV, in theatres, and on the big screen several times, with one of its adaptations becoming a cult movie (See Appendix). Each of them seeks to emphasise specific elements of the narrative, while enriching the story with new approaches to shed light on universal themes, such as womanhood, gender roles, and power relations. As theorists such as Laura Mulvey have established, literature and film are cultural products that reflect societal structures, control, and reinforce sexual differences (1975, 6). Throughout the course of the paper, two of the most successful adaptations, separated by an 80-year gap, will be analysed to explore how the same narrative is represented while being shaped by the social influences that mark each period. The three primary sources are the original hypotext, *Rebecca*, by Daphne du Maurier, and its two hypertexts, Alfred Hitchcock’s, and Ben Wheatley’s adaptations.

The novel, written in 1938, introduces a young woman whose name is never mentioned, neither in the written work, nor in the adaptations, an aspect that will be analysed further on in this essay. However, despite her namelessness, the story is focalised through her perspective, which is reinforced in the films with the use of voice-over in the initial and final scenes. She explains how she met Maxim de Winter, the wealthy widower who owns one of the most famous homes in England: Manderley. When she meets him, she is the companion of an old woman called Mrs. Van Hopper. A few weeks later, they marry and move to the mansion, and she becomes the second Mrs. de Winter. The house, Manderley, functions in the text as if it were a character itself. This ties in with a whole tradition of gothic tales, where the house carries the traces of the sins of the past. There, she meets Mrs. Danvers, the housekeeper. She is attached to Manderley, which she deeply associated with its former owner, and therefore, her loyalty to Rebecca makes her hostile towards the narrator. It is through their relationship that the second Mrs. de Winter becomes aware of the powerful memory of the first wife.

The great mystery of the novel is the mysterious circumstances of her death, which remain unclear until the end. Manderley's secretive atmosphere and Maxim's reticence to speak about Rebecca's death thus become the source of 'I''s[1] anxieties and obsession with the first Mrs. de Winter as a superior figure. Through this memoir, the second Mrs. de Winter retells her life before, during, and after Manderley, showing how Rebecca's haunting severely impacted her marriage and persona. Her character is constructed by her attempt to occupy the place of a woman with a name but without a body.

Alfred Hitchcock brought *Rebecca* to the big screen for the first time in 1940 alongside producer David O. Selznick. It became a great success and the first Hitchcock film to ever win an Oscar award (Levy 2020). Rebecca's relevance made its way as "an altogether brilliant film, haunting, suspenseful, handsome and handsomely played" (Nugent 1940) from its release to this day, ranking in the 500 Greatest Movies of all time (Green 2008). Almost a century later, Ben Wheatley adapted the novel into a film again and provided a more detailed account of the events while adding elements that were absent in Hitchcock's adaptation (Shaw-Williams, 2020).

Patricia White (2021, 103) questions the reliability of the narrative by the second Mrs. de Winter and to what extent Rebecca and her story have definitely vanished along with Manderley. In Hitchcock's adaptation, Rebecca's ghostly presence dominates the narrative, strongly influencing the narrator's perception and actions, but most importantly, the marriage dynamics. My working hypothesis in this paper is that Hitchcock's film represents the relationship as one more authentically romantic between the main characters, which grants Rebecca a less direct role than in the most recent adaptation. In Wheatley's film Rebecca is materialised through hallucinations, therefore allowing her a more tangible presence. Rebecca is a haunting but voiceless figure, and important questions remain: What is it that happened and induced her to become the villain, if that is what she is? How does her narrative, shaped by societal factors, grow more powerful in her absence? Ben Wheatley found the need to go back to the novel and "side-step" Hitchcock's film, as he believed remaking the classic film would be a mistake (Van den Helm 2023, 7). Revisiting *Rebecca* as a Netflix production would

[1] Several scholarly papers refer to the narrator as 'I' due to the anonymity of the character. This designation was originally influenced by the screenplay for Alfred Hitchcock's adaptation, which reinforces the pronoun use in defining the narrator's identity.

bring the story back to a modernised audience who is likely to expect an updated interpretation with contemporary themes (Patta 2020).

In this paper, I will examine the contrasting ways in which the story is approached in both films. While Tania Modleski (2020) and Deborah Ross (2020) assert that the latest adaptation did not provide an innovative perspective on Rebecca, others find significant changes in how the narrative is approached. Lindenmayer (2021) and Van den Helm (2023) highlight the modern elements embedded in Wheatley's film, where the focus of the narrative is no longer on what happened to Rebecca, but on what goes on beyond it by delving into the narrator's inner self to understand her actions. I will analyse the second film's transformation by detaching it from Hitchcock's perspective, which contains more romantic elements than Wheatley's. One of the most prominent features is the new emphasis, as the psychology of the narrator becomes more relevant and the key to dismantling Rebecca's legacy. For Modleski, despite their efforts, the 2020 film fails to acknowledge fully empowered and complex women, reinforcing problematic and patriarchal dispositions, as she quotes: "Is there something so threatening about Rebecca that she terrorizes the filmmakers, who reduce female rebellion to a story about a woman who protects her husband the wife-killer?" (Modleski, 2020). However, this paper will also consider the outcomes of the updated adaptation of Rebecca in terms of feminism, women's rights, and their representation.

The first chapter contains a comparative analysis of the symbol of Manderley and its subjugating role in the story. The second chapter will examine marriage as an oppressive institution for Maxim and the second Mrs. de Winter. This chapter will also end with an examination of 'I''s transformation instigated by the matrimony. The third chapter will conclude by providing insight into how power dynamics between male and female characters, as well as just between female ones, are tackled in both films. This section will further explore how the two main power figures, Danvers and Maxim, particularly exert influence over the second Mrs. de Winter, building on previous observations.

2. DuMaurier’s novel and its two adaptations

Daphne Du Maurier began writing in the 1930s and became a prolific author in her 20s, continuously publishing novels and short stories. *Rebecca* was one of her most successful works after her first four novels, including bestsellers such as *Jamaica Inn* and posterior short stories, such as *The Birds*.

At the beginning of Du Maurier’s novel, 'I' is serving as a companion to Mrs. Van Hopper, an old American lady. She cares little for 'I', a young naïve woman in her twenties. While in Monte Carlo, 'I' meets Maxim de Winter, a 42-year-old widower whose wife, Rebecca, had died a year earlier (p. 11). During two weeks, the narrator learns about his mansion, Manderley, but gains little information about Rebecca. Maxim then proposes, and they move to Manderley as a married couple (p. 57).

At Manderley, 'I' must adjust to the luxurious lifestyle of being the new Mrs. de Winter. Mrs. Danvers, the housekeeper, intentionally discredits 'I' as a woman deserving of her role. This impacts her psyche and marriage, as soon her insecurities arise, which makes her believe Maxim regrets having married her: “Do you think it too, darling? It's not just me? We are happy, aren't we? Terribly happy?” (Du Maurier 2015/1938, 164). This tension eventually escalates to an obsession with Maxim's first wife.

The annual Manderley Ball, one of Manderley's traditions, is revived with 'I’’s arrival. Lacking inspiration, Danvers suggests she wear a costume inspired by Caroline de Winter, one of Maxim’s ancestors, whose painting hangs in the great hall (p. 227). She trusts Danvers and wears it, unaware that Rebecca had worn it before. This upsets Maxim deeply (p. 240). In chapter 18, after 'I' learns Danvers intentionally provoked the situation, Danvers tries to manipulate her into suicide. However, the discovery of the remains of Rebecca’s shipwreck interrupts them (p. 276).

After finding Rebecca’s boat, Maxim confesses to his wife the truth about Rebecca’s death. He comes clean about his first marriage and explains that it was a sham (p. 298). Four days after the honeymoon, Rebecca had a negative change of heart, but he could not divorce her due to his reputation, so they pretended to have a perfect marriage. He admitted to shooting her and sinking her body after Rebecca insinuated

her son might not be his: “Rebecca was not drowned at all. I killed her. I shot Rebecca in the cottage in the cove.” (Du Maurier 2015/1938, 298). The confession that he never loved her was a turning point in the main character's psychology (p. 319).

'I' becomes very supportive when suspicions of murder arise. Jack Favell, Rebecca’s cousin, claims Maxim sank the boat after discovering her affairs. They later find out Rebecca was in a late stage of cancer and would soon die (p. 413). Eventually, the investigation rules it a suicide, and Maxim believes Rebecca tried to frame him by provoking him into killing her. After hearing the news, Danvers disappears from Manderley. Maxim, feeling uneasy, drives through the night to return from London, only to find Manderley already on fire when they arrive (p. 428).

Despite its reception in its early days, marked by negative critique, as V.S. Prichett wrote in 1938: “[the novel] would be here today, gone tomorrow” (Modleski 2020), *Rebecca* defied the odds by becoming a classic of Gothic literature that has never gone out of print (Lusk 2020). While it is now considered one of the best books ever written, it was initially dismissed for its lack of complexity, as *The Times* stated after its publication (Hartley 2024). Two years after adapting *Jamaica Inn*, Alfred Hitchcock found inspiration in *Rebecca* as a period narrative that touched upon class and gender, and most importantly, it aligned with Hitchcock’s interests, including suspense and psychological exploration (Fedyk 2017).

Notwithstanding, several alterations had to be made due to regulations and censorship. The Hays Office established the “The Motion Picture Production Code”, a set of guidelines and prohibitions that would regulate the Hollywood motion picture industry until 1968. It was strongly driven by high moral standards, which led to the prohibition of criminality, violence, and promiscuity. As established by the code, under no circumstance should “evil” not be recognised as evil or not be punished (Rosenfeld, n.d.). In this regard, *Rebecca* was particularly problematic due to the nature of its mystery, as it featured unfaithfulness and murder perpetrated by the husband. Rebecca’s death, thus, had to be represented as an accident to overlook Maxim’s punishment, which in turn, also altered the portrayal of all the characters, leading to hateful responses towards Rebecca —as her death was somehow justified—, and a more affectionate one towards the second Mrs. de Winter and Maxim (Edwards 2006, 43).

According to the “Rebecca Preview Reports” (Selznick Collection, folder 4314, as cited in Edwards 2006, 44), once the changes and cuts were made, the film was well-received by the audience, who noted that the film closely followed the book despite the ending being the most obvious alteration.

Ben Wheatley declared that his passion for *Rebecca* was one of his motivations for adapting it again eighty years later. As established in an interview (Deckelmeier, 2020), Wheatley was fascinated by the different dimensions of veracity and how they were represented, as the events are exclusively told from the narrator’s perspective. While Hitchcock followed the classic linear structure, Ben Wheatley attempted to challenge its truthfulness by presenting it in a circular structure, where the events become “not just a memory, but a memory of a dream”[2] (Deckelmeier, 2020). Moreover, the 2020 adaptation was starred by Armie Hammer, who played the role of Maxim de Winter, and Lily James, who embodied the second Mrs. de Winter. The director stated that he found such the age gap in the novel unnecessary, which led to controversial opinions. He asserted that the power imbalance or 'I’s naivety remains the same as in the novel despite the closeness of the characters’ age (Deckelmeier 2020).

Ben Wheatley claimed he had found the perfect moment to readapt the gothic classic, presenting an updated interpretation for a new audience. The team had the book in mind throughout the whole process and never treated the 2020 adaptation as a remake of Hitchcock’s film. Adapting a classic like *Rebecca* in the 21st century meant an update of the themes for contemporary audiences. In an era of postfeminism[3], directors need to adjust to new waves of thought, and in this respect, challenge the traditional perspectives regarding marriage and relationships within patriarchy. Due to the specific context of the novel, adapting *Rebecca* while maintaining its gothic essence but updating its gender dynamics can present a significant obstacle. This essay will further explore these postfeminist echoes introduced in *Rebecca* (2020) to challenge traditional conceptions of marriage, negotiation, and self-discovery.

---

[2] It is important to note that although Wheatley suggests he portrays the events as a dream, certain parts of the story, as their marriage, are real. Therefore, in this paper, the adaptation will be addressed as the real memories of the second Mrs. de Winter.

[3] Postfeminism can be defined not as a “betrayal of a history of feminist struggle”, but as a continuation of feminist ideals while adapting them to contemporary contexts. It does not necessarily dismiss traditional conceptions of gender but it negotiates them, considering female independence as compatible with rejected conventional expectations (Schreiber 2015, 105).

3. At Manderley

Manderley is Maxim's historic property, located in Cornwall, southwest of England. It is a vast, daunting, castle-like place surrounded by the Celtic Sea. The narrator describes it in the novel as alive, as another character: "an enchanted house, every window aflame [...] A house bewitched." (Du Maurier 2015/1938, 254). This depiction provides a sense of oppression, of feeling alien to her home: "There was Manderley, our Manderley. Secretive and silent as it had always been" (Du Maurier 2015/1938, 2). Following the gothic tradition, Manderley will serve as a character that will reflect the house's buried secrets and the shadow of Rebecca's mystery.

Paul Marchbanks (2006, 126) argues that Manderley's oppressive energy gradually transforms into 'I''s symbolic confinement, which will ultimately determine her to flee the house. For Manderley is not merely a house—it is Rebecca herself. Manderley is a materialised shrine for Rebecca's untouched legacy, and to prevent any desecration, the house must keep any threat outside of the property's fences, therefore emerging as a living soul of its own: "I could swear that the house was not an empty shell but lived and breathed as it had lived before" (Du Maurier 2015/1938, 3).

The first time Manderley is mentioned is by Mrs. Van Hopper, who establishes the importance of the house as a symbol of Maxim's wealth and value. She elevates Manderley's beauty and grandeur through descriptions: "I've seen pictures of it and it looks perfectly enchanting [...] your ancestors entertained the royalty at Manderley" (Du Maurier 2015/1939, 16). However, 'I' had already seen Manderley in a postcard she bought when she was younger and explains how she felt this was "premonitory" (Du Maurier 2015/1939, 59). In the novel and adaptations, everyone speaks about Manderley as they do about Rebecca, idolising it. In *Rebecca* (1940), Van Hopper highlights its beauty and draws a comparison between Manderley (associated with Rebecca) and Monte Carlo (associated with 'I'), stating that if she had a home like Manderley, she would have never gone to "Monte". Here, the narrator presents a similar sense of overload as when they speak about Rebecca, as incomparable to other women as Manderley is to other houses. In *Rebecca* (2020), Maxim is introduced as a heartbroken man and the owner of the mansion, which builds an obvious connection between the two seemingly most important things for him: his first wife and the estate.

Both films commence with an initial monologue delivered by the narrator's voice-over and echoing the beginning of the novel also in retrospect. Adhering to the gothic tradition, both adaptations seek to highlight the decaying nature of the once-magnificent home, portraying its destruction through visual and auditive techniques. The resulting decrepit house represents its role as a witness to sins from the past, including adultery, betrayal, or murder.

In *Rebecca* (1940), the narrator recalls a dream she had about Manderley, now a ruined place. Her sense of invisibility and not belonging are perceptible, as her entrance seems forbidden to her, but at the same time, does not allow her to escape: "The way was barred to me". 'I' embodies a spirit that grants her superpowers, allowing her to enter the property, which portrays her unconscious appropriation of Rebecca to transcend her insignificance (Modleski, 2020). The monologue reflects the pervasive influence the first Mrs. de Winter had on everybody in connection to Manderley's daunting nature: "a dark hand before a face", which represents 'I' actively shadowed by her rival. The audience, as the narrator, remains unaware of 'I''s fate and Rebecca's impact due to Selznick's desire to make 'I''s obliviousness relatable, especially to women, so they would walk alongside 'I' in her journey towards discovery (McGilligan 2003, 241). The sea waves close the scene. They are a triggering element for the narrator, as it is associated with Rebecca's death: "I could not hear the restless sea, and because I could not hear it my thoughts would be peaceful" (Du Maurier 2015/1938, 134).

Rebecca (2020) opens with a more revealing tone. Before even showing the house, the director introduces the most important character, Rebecca, establishing the mystery of her death. One feature that characterises Rebecca in the novel is her hair, which is repeatedly described as "a cloud of dark hair[4]" (Du Maurier 2015/1938, 426). This attribute appears in the sea among sea noises and indistinct muttering, which establishes her as the apex between Maxim and 'I''s marriage. An establishing shot of Manderley follows, but the need for liberation is not as discernible. In hindsight, the narrator reflects on overlooked aspects and foreshadows events, contrasting with her unawareness in *Rebecca* (1940). The black-haired figure enters Manderley with a firm

[4] References to Rebecca's hair are also done in scenes that are crucial in shaping 'I''s psychological development. This happens when 'I' enters Rebecca's room or when Maxim confesses to her wife.

attitude, as if it was her home. The house is gradually illuminated in red while the sound of flames increases, auguring Manderley's destruction after the fire. Intercutting shots and tight close-ups of 'I''s eyes depict the nightmarish feeling that memories about Manderley evoke, relieved only after a gunshot.

In chapter 14, 'I' enters Rebecca's room. Danvers keeps the forbidden room as a shrine to hold Rebecca's memory alive and unspoiled: "My first impression was one of shock because the room was fully furnished, as though in use" (Du Maurier 2015/1938, 185). It was the most beautiful one, but secretive and dangerous, as it reflects Rebecca's control over Manderley, and especially, Danvers. She had insisted on showing 'I' the room, but the narrator is eventually drawn to it by a sudden desire.

'I''s emotional overload is presented in *Rebecca* (1940) through her demeanor, "trembling, weak as a straw" (Du Maurier 2015/1938, 187). Danvers suddenly penetrates the room as an omnipresent character and shows 'I' the place. Every element—the brushes, pillowcase, or dress—represents not only what Rebecca looked like, but her distinction from 'I'. She finds refuge behind some flowers to avoid being consumed by the memory of a woman she feels inferior to. While in *Rebecca* (1940) 'I' is visibly agitated about trespassing in forbidden territory, *Rebecca* (2020) portrays a more confident woman.

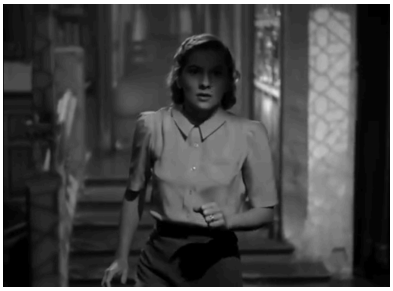

Image 1: *Rebecca* (1940) 'I' approaching the room

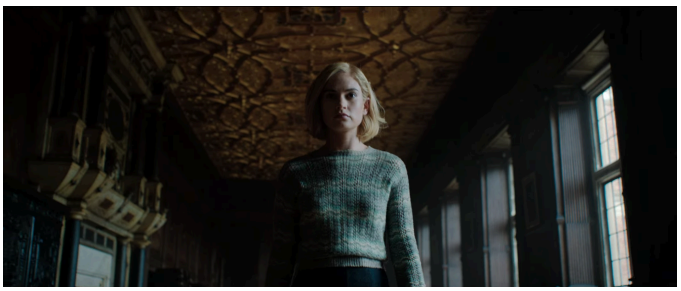

Image 2: *Rebecca* (2020) 'I' approaching the room.

The low angle presents 'I' as determined to confront the haunting presence. The drums and loud music depict this tension before fighting against Rebecca's dominance as she penetrates the room. 'I' is entranced by the situation, and though overwhelmed, she does not hide from Rebecca, but tries to understand her and decipher the key to Maxim's affection through the possessions left behind. But by using her perfume, being combed by Danvers, or touching her lingerie, 'I' does not shape her own identity, but is more consumed by her shadow. In *Rebecca* (2020) Danvers' words reinforce her lingering

dominance, as she states Rebecca is everywhere in the house and her presence haunts them:

> "I fancy I hear her just behind me. That quick, light footstep. I could not mistake it anywhere [...] I wonder if she comes back here to Manderley and watches you and Mr de Winter together. (Du Maurier 2015/1938, 194)

In *Rebecca* 2020, Danvers instills the idea it is Maxim who wants her memory left unspoiled. She reminds 'I' of her inferiority by comparing her to Rebecca, which strengthens that she has no name or identity apart from the one she seized, Mrs. de Winter. This affects her psyche and her perception of her marriage, as her insecurities arise when she gets no reassurance from Maxim:

> "He did not belong to me at all, he belonged to Rebecca. She was in the house still, as Mrs Danvers had said; she was in that room in the west wing, she was in the library [...] The servants obeyed her orders still [...] Rebecca was still mistress of Manderley. Rebecca was still Mrs de Winter." (Du Maurier 2015/1938, 261)

Through this encounter in her room, Danvers unconsciously reveals that it is Rebecca and her passion to care about Manderley, which eventually leads to its final destruction with her shattered memory.

Rebecca's presence is made evident through flowers, which add to the sense of seclusion and represent Manderley's oppressive force. Du Maurier emphasises their aura insofar as they feel invasive: "It was the only form of intoxication that appealed to him [...] filled the house with a wistful poignant smell" (Du Maurier 2015/1938, 33). Flowers serve as another way in which Rebecca's presence materialises in Manderley, as her preferences are still respected even after her death: "Her favorite flowers filled the rooms" (Du Maurier 2015/1938, 261).

Hitchcock does this conspicuously in *Rebecca* (1940), where the rhododendrons, which symbolise Rebecca's memory, surround the protagonist everywhere. The second time Mrs. Danvers appears is in 'I''s bedroom, 'I' is sitting restlessly, and Danvers is standing still by her side until she moves to the back and asks her about her opinion of the new decoration. The camera remains static, focusing on what is shown but concealed in the frontal area. The flowers on both sides of 'I' represent the entrapment and Rebecca's control over 'I''s decisions and actions. Later, the camera shows flowers

next to the window, in the curtain's pattern, and even projecting shadows on the wall, stretching as a haunting presence. Rebecca's unseen influence on the protagonist's mood is also exemplified in a scene after the married couple argues over the china cupid[5]. 'I' appears then crying after she receives a letter from Maxim announcing he will leave for London. Hitchcock separates from her and eventually shows flowers in the front, disclosing Rebecca's omnipresence and dominance over their marriage.

Conversely, Wheatley animates Manderley to the extent that the viewer perceives it as alive. In *Rebecca* (2020), the presence of flowers is not as noticeable. Instead, Wheatley included a scene where Rebecca's power is obvious by intruding on 'I''s dreams through vegetation. After visiting Rebecca's room, 'I' experiences an unsettling nightmare based on a scene in which Maxim sleepwalks. In this scene, Maxim suddenly wakes up while the couple is sleeping and walks through the corridor towards Rebecca's room. During the nightmare, 'I' is troubled by the female figure from the opening scene. Intercut shots of the submerged body overlap, foretelling what she will soon discover but remains mysterious. While 'I' follows Maxim, plants that seem to be alive cover the floor, hissing like snakes. A dim light emanating from the fireplace represents her limited vision of Manderley's aspects and her own life. 'I' calls for him unsuccessfully until the hostile vegetation absorbs her while Danvers closes the door, allowing Maxim to reunite with Rebecca. She then wakes up covered in a duvet patterned with branches and leaves. This parallel suggests how, both in the conscious and unconscious world, Rebecca's power undermines her.

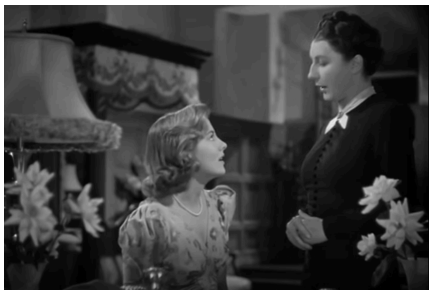

Image 3: *Rebecca* (1940 'I' surrounded by flowers

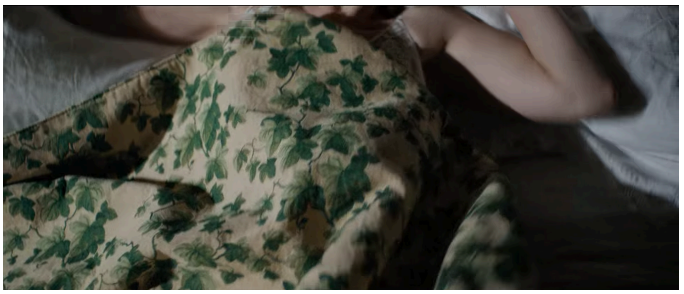

Image 4: *Rebecca* (2020) 'I' wakes up covered in a leaf-patterned duvet

Although Manderley is defined by having large picture windows, the atmosphere is always obscure. André Bazin (1967, 34) develops the role of lighting as an integral part of the creation of meanings in film. He related light with the visible and the visual

[5] In chapter 12, 'I' breaks a China cupid belonging to Rebecca. She hides it in a drawer and says nothing about it, triggering a misunderstanding with Danvers, who had blamed Robert for it.

world, that is, what is seen and what is constructed. Light is the medium that shows or conceals deeper readings of the characters' existence.

We will argue how, in *Rebecca* (1940), confinement is conveyed by covering the windows with bars, which project shadows. 'I''s powerless role is solidified through these scenes, where her incarceration leads to a progressive loss of agency at Manderley (Marchbanks 2006, 126). When Danvers and 'I' leave her room to visit the house for the first time, the protagonist finds herself as an "uninvited guest" (Du Maurier 2015/1938, 187). The windows on the landing before the stairs project great shadows on the wall, rendering the location unsettling. 'I' walks agitated before Danvers, her confidence progressively diminishing, whereas the housekeeper stands firmly by her side, her shadow projected on the walls, haunting 'I'. In another instance, after Maxim's and 'I''s first fight, she is in one room staring out of the barred window. The narrator is trapped in her condition, "caged" by the house's secrets (Marchbanks 2006, 126).

In *Rebecca* (2020), the director plays with lights to contrast knowledge and ignorance, as light symbolises order and truth. The exterior light is so faint that it does not traverse Manderley's rooms, and when the narrative takes a darker tone, so does the ambiance. One instance that effectively illustrates this is when Mrs. Danvers gets informed about the news of Rebecca's official death. Wheatley delivers a shot with a sense of farewell between Manderley and her as she prepares to leave the house. From a bird's-eye angle, Danvers is seen in the middle of a hall. She stands in front of the windows, in the pass-through area, undisturbed by the furniture, with only one-third of the room properly illuminated. The remaining thirds, where the light does not reach, remain obscure and cluttered, which represents difficulties for 'I' in navigating through Manderley to find the truth about Rebecca's death.

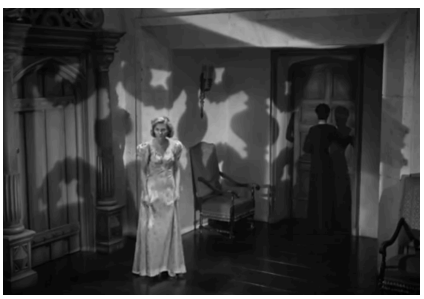

Image 5: *Rebecca* (1940) 'I' in the landing next to Danvers

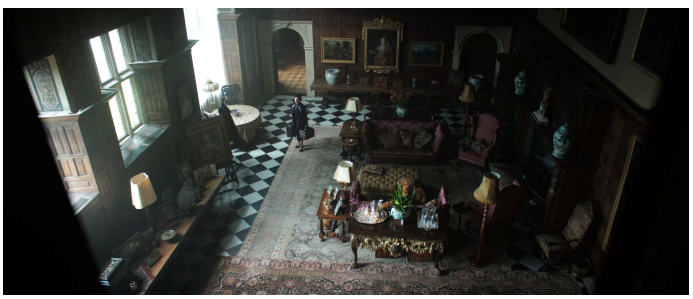

Image 6: *Rebecca* (2020) Danvers in the hall

The analysis of Manderley's representation from 'I''s perspective provides a deeper understanding of its oppressive nature, which is reinforced by the embedded presence of the first wife. As previously mentioned, this haunting is represented through visual elements that confine the second Mrs. de Winter, such as the flowers, the use of lights, and shadows, which limit her understanding and power for decisions. Manderley plays a restrictive role through the descriptions that people make about the house. Through them, both directors represent how, despite being dead, Rebecca is instilled in every room of the house, reflecting 'I''s impossibility to escape from her legacy. Having explored these aspects in both adaptations, I will proceed to the next section, which will analyse marriage as a repressive institution.

4. On marriage and oppression

In *Rebecca*, marriage serves as a complex and ambivalent institution for the characters, as each of them perceives marriage differently depending on their particular context. For Maxim, his first marriage was a source of anxiety and entrapment, while the second serves as a form of salvation from Rebecca. On the other hand, 'I' initially believes marriage is a fairy tale experience, which contrasts with the grim truth when she arrives at Manderley. After her arrival, her relationship with Maxim changes. She notices the house holds secrets that directly impact their marriage, but Maxim does not communicate with her, and neither does the staff. This tension results in an overwhelming situation for 'I', whose expectations do not match her idea about marriage.

The context of production from the novel and its adaptations strongly shapes how marriage is portrayed. As Bailey explains, the attitudes towards marriage changed after World War II, when the American population started celebrating marriage "for youth" instead of perceiving it as its end. Media were responsible for the standardisation of marriage as the ideal and the key to women's self-fulfillment. This perpetuated the idea that women belonged to the home and to the man, whose happiness was her ultimate purpose (Bailey 1989, 43). Nowadays, a rejection of marriage as an oppressive institution is more widespread. It is seen by some not as a guarantee of happiness but as a "lie designed to keep women in service to patriarchy and away from realising our full potential" (Ford 2023). Films belonging to "the postfeminist romance cycle" (Shreiber 2015, 2) are the space where women's anxieties and female-centered issues triggered by societal changes are mediated. These focus on women's alternatives to their condition and the struggles with their true expression of identity—repressed by expectations regarding sexuality, love or family life (Schreiber 2015, 3). However, as marriage is one main topic in *Rebecca*, we may expect a "double-entanglement" (Schreiber 2015, 19) in Wheatley's adaptation, where the need for liberation coexists with conservative norms related to gender, and are challenged according to the contemporary context.

In *Rebecca* (Du Maurier), Maxim proposes to 'I' after two weeks. 'I' rushes to his room as soon as she learns she will be leaving for New York with Van Hopper. Maxim reacts aggressively, throwing the clothes on the bathroom floor and slamming the door,

while 'I' waits for him nervously. Later, they have breakfast and Maxim says: “She to New York and I to Manderley. [...] Which one do you prefer?” (Du Maurier 2015/1938, 57). 'I' believes, because she is a companion, that he needs a secretary, establishing herself as a woman not worth marrying a man like him. This scene lacks romanticism, as he also actively undermines her through humiliating statements about her condition: “I’m asking you to marry me, little fool” (Du Maurier 2015/1938, 57). This attitude will be later analysed as essential for the creation of power dynamics.

In *Rebecca* (1940), Maxim sees 'I' is anxious about leaving for New York. He remains calm and indifferent. He then proposes to 'I' indirectly from the bathroom. He asks her, “Which one do you prefer? New York, or Manderley?”. She tells him not to joke about it, to which he repeats what he previously said, calling Manderley “home”. When he asks if he wanted a secretary, he replies with “I’m asking you to marry me, little fool”, ridiculing her unawareness. The coldness of the situation, which seems like a transaction rather than a declaration of love, reflects his anxiety about escaping from his first marriage. Without questioning, she accepts. Lovely music begins to play, and 'I', hypnotised, sits to maintain composure.

Rebecca (2020) breaks with the emotional distance in the novel and *Rebecca* (1940). There is a less paternalistic attitude, as he seems agitated and is trying to solve the situation. He is facing 'I', looking directly into her eyes when he invites her to go to Manderley with him. When she asks him if she would be his secretary, he affectionately grabs her face and tells her she would be his wife. Although the sentence “I’m asking you to marry me, little fool” is also included, there is tenderness, which contrasts with Olivier’s performance. He does not seek to undermine her, but to create an intimate and safe connection with 'I'. He presents this marriage as a way for 'I' to escape from her condition: “You told me you wanted to see the world. Manderley is the best part of it”.

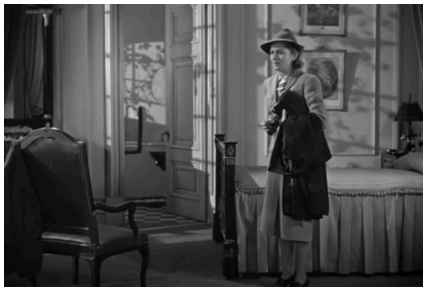

Image 7: *Rebecca* (1940) Proposal scene

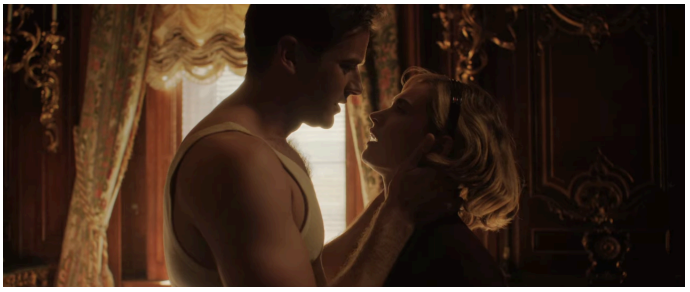

Image 8: *Rebecca* (2020) Proposal scene

Once there, the new Mrs. de Winter tries to convince herself of her importance at Manderley, but she is aware she has appropriated another woman's identity and name. In *Rebecca* (Du Maurier), the staff members, and specially Danvers, who had a special bond with Rebecca, still speak about her as if she were alive, and entice her to prove she can replace her: "Mrs de Winter always did all her correspondence and telephone in the morning room, after breakfast" (Du Maurier 2015/1938, 91). Once in the morning room, while sitting at Rebecca's desk, the phone rings. When they ask for Mrs. de Winter, she unconsciously replies: "I am afraid you have made a mistake, Mrs de Winter has been dead for over a year" (Du Maurier 2015/1938, 65). At that moment, she realises how this mistake will shape the staff's perception of her at Manderley. Being reminded as she is of everything Rebecca had and 'I' lacks, 'I' becomes obsessed with Rebecca to the extent that she is unable to enjoy her married life. But she cannot fight against the dead, and her fixation only overshadows her.

In *Rebecca* (1940), she realises her insignificance during her second day at Manderley. 'I' goes to the morning room to do the correspondence, where 'I' sees Rebecca's diaries, books, and letters still coming to her name. She acts like an intruder, anxious about being caught. When the phone rings, hesitating, she answers that Mrs. de Winter has been dead for over a year and hangs up. Her conviction is key to noting her imposter syndrome, as she provides that information naturally, convinced that she is occupying Rebecca's place. *Rebecca* (2020) did not include this telephone scene. However, her sense of insignificance is implied through other elements. Rebecca's agendas are carefully placed over the table, ready to use. The "R" is engraved everywhere, just like Rebecca's name is present in every conversation. The dogs, which were Rebecca's, growl at her. This underscores her inability to assume her role as the second Mrs. de Winter and to be accepted as a valuable wife for Maxim.

In chapter 16, the bishop's wife suggests reviving Manderley's Ball, and although Maxim is not excited about it, 'I' persuades him. However, she feels she will not be capable of arranging such an event, weakening her position: "She ran the house herself, too [...] I'm afraid I leave it to the housekeeper" (Du Maurier 2015/1938, 139). On the ball, as she is preparing to meet her guests, she looks into the mirror, staring at her reflection in her costume.

Rebecca (1940) does not show her reflection. Her white dress depicts her purity, innocence, and desire for a new beginning as the second Mrs. de Winter, features that align with the expectations imposed on the idea of the perfect woman at the time. *Rebecca* (2020) shows 'I' wearing a red dress, which represents her confidence, femininity, and sexuality, only perceptible in her persona when she wears *Rebecca's costume*. Both films reflect her unconscious desire to appropriate Rebecca as the only way to fit in Manderley. In this moment of introspection, 'I' reveals her internal struggle to assert her own identity while being overshadowed by Maxim's first wife.

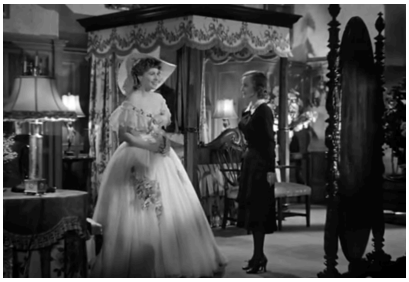

Image 9: *Rebecca* (1940) Mirror scene

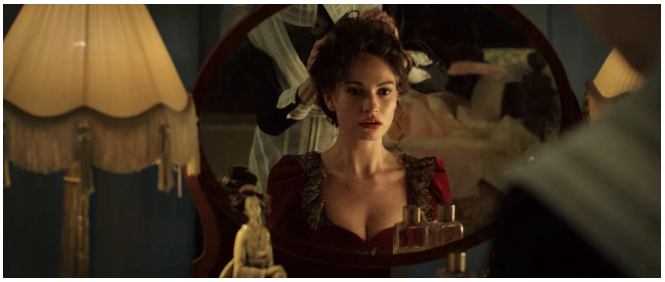

Image 10: *Rebecca* (1940) Mirror scene

In *Rebecca* (Du Maurier), 'I' is excited about being the centre of attention for once. When she goes downstairs, Maxim responds negatively as he sees she is wearing Rebecca's costume. He tells her to change her clothes without further explanation. Not finding support, 'I' leaves the room crying. Beatrice, her sister-in-law, follows her and tries to convince her to return to the ball, but 'I' rejects this idea. She then explains the situation to 'I': "It was what Rebecca did at the last fancy dress ball at Manderley. (Du Maurier 2015/1938, 242). Maxim does not speak to her after the incident, and they "act like two performers" (Du Maurier 2015/1938, 252). Her anxiety heightens as she internalises imagined external judgment of her marriage as a failure: "I've heard before the marriage is not a wild success [...] They say he's beginning to realise he's made a big mistake, she's nothing to look at" (Du Maurier 2015/1938, 247)

In *Rebecca* (1940), when 'I' goes downstairs, Maxim is facing away. She addresses him in a sensual tone: "Good evening, Mr. de Winter". He suddenly changes his expression and shouts at her, "What the devil do you think you are doing?" as Beatrice mutters "Rebecca". 'I' leaves desperately, and on her way, she sees Danvers entering Rebecca's room. She realises Danvers is the main obstacle to achieving her successful marriage, and she finds the opportunity to confront Rebecca's presence through her. Danvers portrays Rebecca as an integral part of their marriage as if she

were an unattainable, superior figure: “You can’t fight her [...] She was beaten in the end [...] it was the sea.” 'I' does not return to the ball, reflecting her conformity to a marriage that confines her as a passive character, and her agency limited by Rebecca.

In *Rebecca* (2020), we see Maxim’s face changing before we see 'I' in her costume. She does not notice his shock, and with a sensual, playful tone, she states: “How do you do, Mr. de Winter”. Maxim’s annoyance increases with her awareness, along with the eerie music. After ordering her to change her clothes, Clarice, her personal maid, confesses that wearing that costume was Danvers’ idea. This marks a turning point in her passivity where she aims to confront Danvers and challenge the power dynamics, an aspect to be analysed in Chapter 5. In the room, Beatrice convinces 'I' to rejoin the event. Once with Maxim, the coldness separates the couple, who seem strangers. After Maxim blames her for the events, her anxieties about marriage become perceptible, providing more psychological depth than in *Rebecca* (1940).

Wheatley does this through the emergence of the black-haired female figure in a red dress, who usually appears in overwhelming situations for 'I'. Du Maurier offers a hallucinatory episode during chapter 17, after the ball, where 'I' sees an unknown woman wearing an “old-fashioned salmon-coloured dress” who corresponds with the descriptions of Rebecca. The woman’s actions seem automatic, and she follows 'I' everywhere, to later never be seen again, as a ghostly presence. 'I' goes after her with urgency, which reflects not only her obsession with Rebecca but also her need for a solution to her marriage, which she believes lies in herself.

> “Every time she passed me it coincided with a sweeping bar of the waltz to which she dipped and swayed, smiling as she did so in my direction. It happened again and again until it became automatic”. (Du Maurier 2015/1938, 250)

Image 11: 'I' follows the black-haired woman during the ball

During her hallucinatory episode, she is encircled by the guests dancing and singing. She is overwhelmed but entranced by the noise of the fireworks. Suddenly, a red light illuminates the characters while they repeat “Rebecca”. Her expression portrays how 'I' is already losing her mind over her marriage. The guests embody the oppression and suffocation 'I' feels, having to conform to unrealistic expectations established by patriarchy. This final sequence illustrates the psychological impact of stereotypes of marriage on 'I', culminating with Rebecca’s corpse ascending from the seabed.

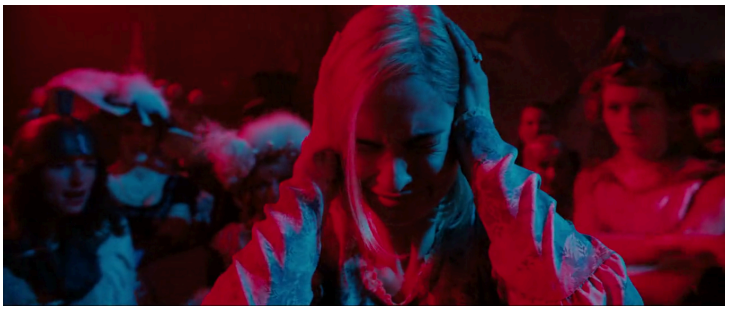

Image 12: 'I' encircled by the guests, covering her ears to stop hearing Rebecca’s name

The confession scene presents marriage as an oppressive institution for Maxim and 'I'. In *Rebecca* (Du Maurier), after Rebecca’s body is found, suspicions about murder arise, which directly implicate Maxim. 'I' is preoccupied with how the discovery would affect Maxim and tries to console him. She finds Maxim repeatedly saying “She has won” (Du Maurier 2015/1938, 297). He then confesses to killing Rebecca to 'I', but she thinks it was driven by jealousy. He explains his first marriage was suffocating, an unbearable fraud, as he felt pressured by expectations surrounding his reputation: “It doesn't make for sanity, living with the devil” (Du Maurier 2015/1938, 305). They agreed Rebecca would look after Manderley and pretend they were happy if she could continue with her libertine lifestyle. When Maxim reveals he hated her, 'I' undergoes a turning point, and the insecurities about their marriage vanish: “My heart was light like a feather [...] He never loved Rebecca” (Du Maurier 2015/1938, 307). Her growth, however, is tied to patriarchal structures and the internalisation of gender roles, which distance her from understanding Rebecca: “I too had killed Rebecca [...] now that I knew her to have been evil and vicious and rotten I did not hate her anymore. She could not hurt me.” (Du Maurier 2015/1938, 319)

In *Rebecca* (1940), 'I' goes to the beach cottage, which is in decay, reflecting their marriage—deteriorating and neglected. Maxim is relaxed. 'I' apologises for the dress incident and begs him to stay despite their problems. As she only finds happiness

through Maxim, she belittles herself to save her marriage: “I’ll be your companion [...] We must be together always”. When he confesses to accidentally killing her, he acts indifferently while 'I' is overwhelmed. 'I'’s expression suddenly changes from sadness to satisfactory surprise after he reveals he hated Rebecca, and she realises she is not the ideal woman she thought. He voiced his concerns about his reputation and how marriage was constraining: “She knew that I’d sacrifice everything rather than stand up in a divorce court and admit that our marriage was a rotten fraud”. She sympathises with Maxim without considering Rebecca’s experience, and after learning the truth, 'I' says “She hasn’t won”, proud to end the fight against her haunting. She does not love Maxim because he had killed Rebecca, but she loves him more because he despised her enemy.

In *Rebecca* (2020), 'I' finds Maxim drinking alcohol and saying Rebecca had won. 'I' is a more self-possessed character, and she demands the truth and confronts Maxim. He acts nervously, and irrationally as he speaks about his marriage and their bargain. After he confesses to hating her, calm piano music begins to play, and 'I'’s expression changes. Relieved, she sits in front of the light, which symbolises her newly acquired knowledge about Rebecca’s death. Maxim explains her manipulative schemes were an attack on his pride, which prevented him from living a calm life. Her death became his liberation, it was a relief from the oppression he felt under marriage. She does not act desperately and decides to support him. However, she does not express satisfaction, but a rather dismal acceptance.

Image 13: *Rebecca* (1940) 'I'’s reaction. 'I'’s upwards look at Maxim highlights her inferior position

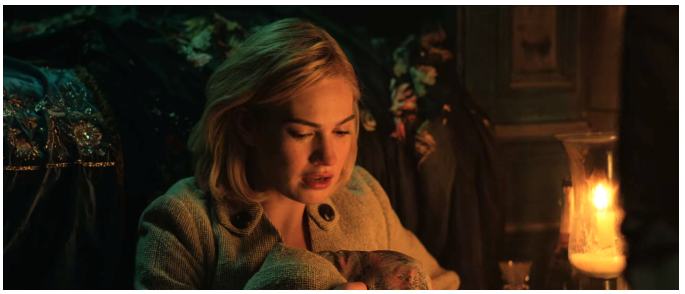

Image 14: *Rebecca* (2020) 'I'’s reaction. The light symbolises knowledge

In this chapter, we have discussed how marriage, although seen as a source of happiness, becomes an oppressive institution for Maxim and 'I'. Du Maurier presents marriage as an impediment to 'I'’s personal growth. 'I' is subdued by societal expectations of the ideal wife and Rebecca’s haunting, which reinforces conventional

stereotypes. Maxim’s experience proves that marriage can be a source of anxiety for men too, as reputation plays a relevant role for him, turning his life into an ordeal. In contrast, his second marriage to a demure, inexperienced girl becomes his salvation. While Hitchcock represents marriage as essential for her fulfillment, Wheatley partially breaks with this conception by providing 'I' with a less passive role. 'I' tries to confront her insecurities and her husband and becomes empowered to make her own decisions. Ultimately, marriage is no longer the key to happiness, and 'I' accepts it is not a fairy-tale-like experience but chooses to stay while rejecting traditional expectations. The impact of established power dynamics in 'I’s journey as second Mrs. de Winter will be analysed in the following chapter.

5. Power dynamics

Power structures are constructed and deconstructed through knowledge, gender roles, and naming. These dynamics contribute to the narrator's persistent imbalance as opposed to the other characters. Michel Foucault analysed this in *Discipline and Punish*, and established that "power produces knowledge" and "power and knowledge directly imply one another" (1995, 27). The powerful figures in *Rebecca*─Danvers and Maxim─are privileged by having the authority to acquire, control, and produce knowledge. They shape and reinforce these dynamics, thereby maintaining dominance over 'I''s perception of her role as a wife and at Manderley. Maxim and 'I''s age gap and social status establish him as the superior figure in the marriage. Conversely, Danvers subjugates 'I' through Rebecca, whose legacy and memory are all-encompassing in Manderley. As for 'I', her inferiority is reinforced by her namelessness. She conforms to the role of the obedient wife who attempts to imitate Rebecca instead of claiming her own identity.

In *Rebecca* (Du Maurier), Maxim and 'I' meet in Monte Carlo and date for two weeks. The first time they meet, 'I' feels insignificant beside him: "I was a youthful thing and unimportant" (Du Maurier 2015/1938, 14). Their social position, stressed by Van Hopper, creates a sense of power imbalance, where Maxim is the wealthy, experienced man and 'I' is poor and naïve. Her self-perception limits her actions:

> "I felt the colour flood into my face. I was too young, that was the trouble. Had I been older I would have caught his eye and smiled [...] as it was I was stricken into shame, and endured one of the frequent agonies of youth". (Du Maurier 2015/1938, 16)

In *Rebecca* (1940), 'I' sees Maxim for the first time on the edge of a cliff. She thinks he is about to commit suicide and tries to stop him. He is annoyed by her interruption, and when she apologises, he treats her like a child, telling her off with a paternalistic attitude: "What the hell are you shouting about? [...] Get on with the walking".

Later, Van Hopper introduces Maxim to 'I', but she does not introduce her to him, which renders 'I' insignificant. Maxim approaches them while they are having coffee. 'I' remembers the cliff scene and looks up to him, nervously. He notices her anxiety and teases her, addressing 'I' in a playful way, which catches her off guard: "What do you think of Monte Carlo?", and then "Or don't you think about it at all?".

The second question, accompanied by a condescending attitude, reflects that Maxim assumes she is incapable of engaging in a conversation with a personal opinion. She lacks experience, which contrasts with Maxim's maturity.

In *Rebecca* (2020), Van Hopper initially establishes a social distinction between 'I', who owns nothing, and Maxim, who owns the famous Manderley. She sends 'I' to sway the *maître d'* to have Maxim sit with them at breakfast, but he tells her, "It is the choice of Mr. de Winter where he wishes to be seated", which presents Maxim as unattainable. Maxim, who is behind her, tries to minimise her embarrassment while acknowledging she will likely feel derided. Later, Van Hopper appears and speaks to Maxim, who remains indifferent to what she is saying. She belittles 'I' by emphasising she is nobody, "just staff". Maxim remains distant, without sympathising with 'I' and therefore, he preserves the hierarchy.

Image 15: *Rebecca* (1940). 'I' looking upwards to Maxim, nervously

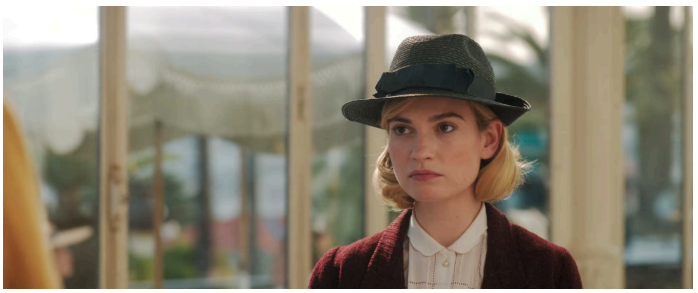

Image 16: *Rebecca* (2020). 'I' seeking sympathy from Maxim

After Maxim and 'I' marry, they arrive at Manderley, where 'I' meets Danvers. The narrator describes her in *Rebecca* (Du Maurier) as a woman with "hollow eyes that gave her a skull face, parchment white [...] skeleton's frame" (Du Maurier 2015/1938, 74). She perceives her as lifeless and uninterested in building a connection. She intimidates 'I', making her uneasy as she realises she already exerts control over her: "I knew her eye to be upon me" (Du Maurier 2015/1938, 75). She accidentally drops her glove, and both women stoop to pick it up. Her anxiety increases as she analyses her clumsy attitude with Danvers' response, which conveys satisfaction as Danvers understands she is nothing like *her* mistress, Rebecca.

In *Rebecca* (1940), when the married couple arrives at Manderley, 'I' is visibly overwhelmed by the house's grandeur. Mrs. Danvers appears without warning, with a serious expression. The camera zooms in abruptly, representing 'I''s increasing agitation. Initially, they are shown as equals, with an eye-level shot, but 'I' then notices her inferior

position when they speak. While Danvers remains still, expressionless, 'I'’s nervousness is perceptible when she drops her glove. Danvers gives her a condescending look, which indicates that she sees 'I' as weak.

Image 17: 'I' before speaking to Danvers. She is wet after it started raining during their arrival.

Image 18: 'I' after realising her inferiority looking upwards at Danvers

In *Rebecca* (2020), Danvers has formed her perception of 'I' before she is introduced to her. Annoyed, she sighs when she sees Maxim and 'I' approaching the home, him carrying her on his shoulders. In the hall, the camera zooms in on Danvers’s face, which emphasises 'I'’s feeling of being judged and observed. 'I' advances determinedly towards Danvers and offers her a handshake, which she seems to reject. Then, she drops her gloves, and they both pick them up while keeping eye contact with her. She leaves for tea with a subtle, satisfactory grin that confirms 'I' is unworthy of her position.

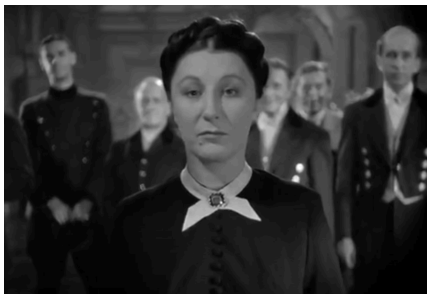

Image 19: *Rebecca* (1940). First image of Danvers

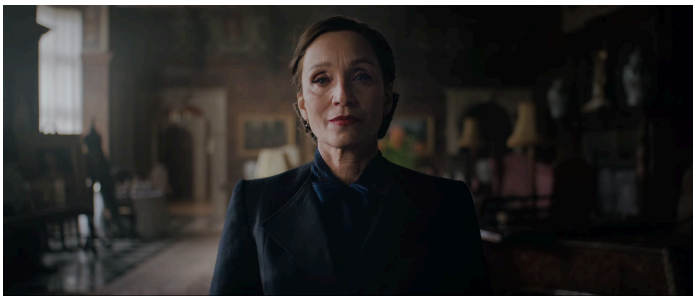

Image 20: *Rebecca* (2020). First time 'I' sees Danvers

Danvers’ power over 'I' is reinforced through naming. 'I' has no name, while Rebecca’s is pervasive, which results in an absent identity, yet to be constructed. 'I' struggles to assert her role in an environment where she is not recognised as mistress of Manderley. Foucault’s theory in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* illustrates that discursive relations shape not only how individuals are defined but also their categorisation within hierarchies (1972, 46).

In chapter 8 of *Rebecca* (Du Maurier), after the telephone scene, Danvers asks 'I' which sauce she would like for the menu. When she does not get a useful response,

Danvers says “Mrs de Winter was most particular about her sauces”, to which 'I' replies “I think we had better have what you usually have, whatever you think Mrs de Winter would have ordered” (Du Maurier 2015/1938, 96). By referring to Rebecca as Mrs. de Winter, 'I' internalises her inferiority within the power structures, submitting not only to Danvers but also to Rebecca.

In *Rebecca* (1940), Danvers appears in the room after the call finishes, as an omnipresent character. 'I' is startled, clutching the chair as if some force were to seize her as Danvers approaches her. 'I'’s body language reveals she is not comfortable with Danvers’ presence, as she tries to keep her distance. Danvers asks her about the menu, and 'I' tells her it is fine. Danvers says that Mrs. de Winter was most particular about her sauces, and 'I' answers, forgetting her own name, that she will be fine having whatever Mrs. de Winter would have had. This reflects her unconscious internalisation of her insignificance, which, at the same time, is her source of anxiety.

On the other hand, in *Rebecca* (2020), after 'I' breaks the cupid, she goes to the kitchen to ask the staff for help. She enters saying “I’m sorry to disturb you all…” but receives no response. Her presence is not as powerful or authoritative as Rebecca’s had been, and the staff members keep doing their chores without regard for her. Clarice is the only one who pays attention to her, as she sees 'I' as an equal: “She says, it's not like being with a lady, mom, it's like being with one of ourselves” (Du Maurier 2015/1938, 161). Danvers approaches 'I' and asks her about the menu, revealing that *Mrs. de Winter* was most particular about the sauces. The second Mrs. de Winter convincingly replies that they would have whatever Mrs. de Winter would have had. While Danvers leaves, she looks back to 'I' with a satisfied expression after having reinforced 'I'’s inferiority in this interaction.

In chapter 10 in *Rebecca* (Du Maurier), Maxim and 'I' go to the beach with Jasper, the dog, which escapes. Maxim insists that she leave it alone, but she does not listen to him and follows the dog. She finds *Rebecca’s cottage*, where she used to meet her lovers, and she ties Jasper with a rope. Once back with Maxim, he reprimands 'I' for not listening to him: “If you had listened to me instead of rushing wildly over those rocks we would have been home by now” (Du Maurier 2015/1938, 129). She asks for an explanation of his anger, but he dodges the questions. He deflects the conversation

onto her, which upsets her as he questions everything she says: “Why do you think I did not want to cross the beach? [...] See what in my face?” (Du Maurier 2015/1938, 129). 'I' desperately ends the conversation, to which Maxim replies: “All women say that when they’ve lost an argument [...] If you had my memories you would not want to go there [...] I hope it satisfies you” (Du Maurier 2015/1938, 129). His attitude only confuses 'I', who is made responsible yet receives no explanation for his behaviour. She is the one who apologises to make Maxim feel happier, and this way, Maxim downplays the situation and invalidates 'I'’s emotions.

Rebecca (1940) follows the events from the novel, portraying a traditional approach to the situation. Once 'I' returns with Jasper, Maxim ignores her, only speaking rudely to the dog. Like a father and his daughter, Maxim tells 'I' off for going to the cottage, and 'I', passively, accepts his order: “Don’t you go there again, you hear!”. She asks him about the reason for his anger, to which he keeps answering angrily and blaming 'I': “We should have stayed away, we should have never come to Manderley”. 'I' sees this argument as a threat to her idealised view of marriage and takes the blame. Her happiness is tied to Maxim, and her emotional dependence forces her to apologise, and only then does Maxim get calmer. His condescending and paternalistic attitude leads to unsolved misunderstandings and fights between the couple, after which 'I' feels guilty because of her unavoidable ignorance.

On the other hand, *Rebecca* (2020) grants 'I' an increased agency. She acquires the knowledge about the cottage by herself and confronts Maxim afterwards. Maxim tries to prevent 'I' from going there: “I said leave him!”, but she laughs and runs after the dog. Once outside, 'I' realises the reason for Maxim’s frustration and demands him the truth. In contrast to *Rebecca* (1940), 'I' rejects Maxim’s dominance over the situation and acknowledges she is not responsible for his anger: “How am I supposed to know anything if you don’t tell me?”. However, Maxim’s reticence to speak about Rebecca reinforces the imbalance between him and 'I'.

One key scene in *Rebecca* (Du Maurier) illustrates 'I'’s internalised inferiority. The day after the ball, 'I' reflects on Danvers’ betrayal with the costume. Rebecca becomes her object of obsession, and closure seems unattainable:

> "I should never be rid of Rebecca [...] Jasper had been her dog, and he ran at my heels now. The roses were hers and I cut them [...] I could fight the living, but I could not fight the dead [...] Rebecca would always be the same. She was too strong for me". (Du Maurier 2015/1938, 262)

'I' goes to Rebecca's room to confront Danvers, who is crying. However, 'I' finds the courage to address the issue. 'I' attempts to explain that Maxim and her married out of love, but Danvers insists it is a farce. She reveals her passion for Rebecca, which culminates in her collapsing in grief. However, Danvers manipulates 'I' emotionally by using her marriage. She speaks about Rebecca convinced that her presence is haunting the house, which gives a gothic tinge to the situation: "He's not forgotten to be jealous [...] She's the real Mrs. de Winter, not you. Why don't you leave Manderley to her?" (Du Maurier 2015/1938, 276). Danvers is her only source of knowledge about Rebecca and the only person who speaks about her, so 'I' is easily convinced by Danvers' statements: "Maxim did not love me. Maxim wanted to be alone with Rebecca" (Du Maurier 2015/1938, 277). This makes Danvers' attempt to induce 'I' to commit suicide almost successful. She opens the window and in a whisper she encourages 'I' to jump. She even presents suicide as attractive: "It's a quick, kind way" (Du Maurier 2015/1938, 276). 'I', entranced, realises this is her only escape from her stressful life at Manderley:

> "It was stifling like an anaesthetic. I was beginning to forget about being unhappy and about loving Maxim. I was beginning to forget about Rebecca. Soon I would not have to think about Rebecca anymore…" (Du Maurier 2015/1938, 277)

This event happens in *Rebecca* (1940) after Maxim orders 'I' to change her clothes. She sees Danvers entering Rebecca's room and confronts her. Tension increases along the fast violins as she approaches the door. 'I' asks her why she hates her, and Danvers explains that she has tried to replace Rebecca. 'I' starts crying, desperately refusing to hear what Danvers says. Danvers destroys any hope 'I' has of finding happiness with Maxim and finding closure: "You cannot fight her. No one ever got to beat her". Danvers opens the window, and with no intention of pretending sympathy, she invites her to breathe fresh air. But she just aims to convince 'I' to jump: "He's got his memories. You have nothing to stay for, you have nothing to live for." 'I' seems hypnotised by Danvers, convinced. This reveals how Danvers exerts control over 'I' through the haunting presence of Rebecca.

Image 21: Close up of 'I''s eyes, void of life after considering suicide

Image 22: Danvers' eyes full of malice trying to convince 'I' of committing suicide

In *Rebecca* (2020), 'I' calls for Maxim as she approaches Rebecca's room. However, it is Danvers whom she finds in the darkness. 'I''s intention was not to confront the housekeeper, but Danvers begins the conversation saying "You'll never replace her". Only then does 'I' realise that Danvers was responsible for the dress incident. Danvers tries to convince her that Maxim does not love her. As Danvers speaks about Rebecca, 'I' cries and writhes in distress, but she eventually finds the courage to challenge Danvers by screaming "Rebecca is dead!". By stating this, she is trying to reassure herself that Rebecca cannot exert power over her, challenging her insecurities and instilled thoughts. 'I' opens the window to breathe fresh air; Danvers follows her and changes her loud tone into a soft whisper. She pretends to sympathise with 'I' and grabs her shoulder, a symbol of support: "I know how you feel, it's not as bad as all that".

It is worth considering that Danvers and 'I''s relationship has gone through different stages throughout the film. Previously, Danvers invited Jack Favell, Rebecca's cousin and Maxim's enemy, to Manderley, which triggered an argument between 'I' and Maxim. After this event, 'I' decides to dismiss Danvers for being responsible for the fight, but 'I' eventually decides to hire Danvers again out of pity. Danvers becomes an apparently supportive character and friend to 'I' until the argument after the ball. This is why her expression in this scene resembles that of a mother comforting her daughter, as she tries to appeal to their former friendship, but 'I' seems convinced of committing suicide. Although Danvers does not directly invite 'I' to jump, this performance only serves as a way to manipulate 'I' and maintain Rebecca's legacy untouched.

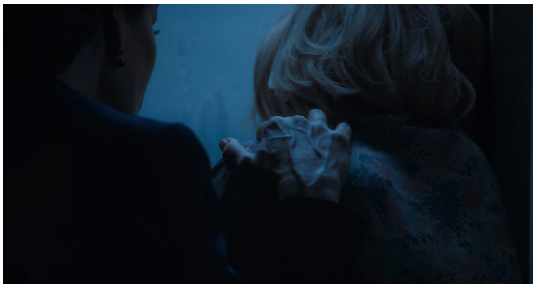

Image 23: Close-up of Danvers' hand on 'I''s shoulder, showing support.

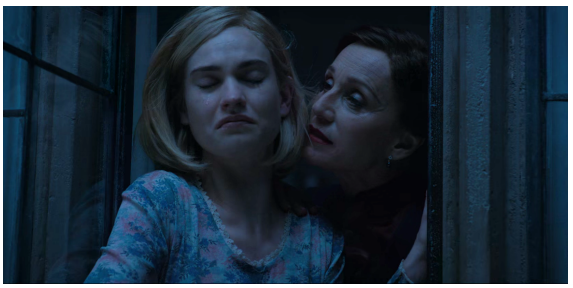

Image 24: Danvers indirectly inducing her to commit suicide.

This chapter has explored how power dynamics are created through naming, gender roles, and ignorance. Du Maurier's *Rebecca* establishes Danvers and Maxim as power figures from the beginning, which allows them to control not only 'I''s acquisition of knowledge but also her decisions. *Rebecca* (1940) presents Danvers as openly hostile towards 'I' to the extent 'I' is intimidated by her. The fact that 'I' has taken her name creates a rivalry between both characters for Maxim's love, and 'I' ends up unconsciously submitting to Rebecca through Danvers. *Rebecca* (2020) provides a more psychological reading on the impact of names. Although she tries to confront Danvers and claim her identity, she fails to construct hers due to the constant reminder of "the other woman" she is replacing. Regarding the creation of power dynamics within the marriage, in Hitchcock's *Rebecca*, Maxim's dominance is more obvious than in Wheatley's. Maxim actively undermines 'I', treating her like a child not only in private but also in the public sphere, and manipulation is present in both due to the absence of communication between the two characters. It is true that, despite this, 'I' seems to have more agency in *Rebecca* (2020) once Maxim confesses her to killing Rebecca. As a new holder of knowledge, she gains certain control of Maxim, but her internalised inferiority remains perceptible and does not let her abandon him. Thereby, the new adaptation fails to provide a modernised reading of the story.

6. Conclusions

This paper has examined how the two adaptations of *Rebecca* represent the same story as the novel in different ways under the influence of their production contexts. Our analysis focused on the experience of revisiting a classic story, trying to determine to what extent it actualises it to 21st-century values. The 1940 adaptation of *Rebecca* reflects the influence of the implementation of the Motion Picture Production Code, which greatly shaped how the story would be told. The suppression of this code meant directors could revisit the story without censorship, which provided Wheatley the opportunity to adapt *Rebecca* with a contemporary perspective. However, it is essential to acknowledge that the newest adaptation was influenced not only by the context of reception but also by the socio-cultural context of the production of the novel and the cult film. Therefore, traditional gender roles and ideologies remain present, although subtly challenged to preserve the narrative.

As it has been discussed in chapter one, Manderley operates as a gothic mansion and becomes a space of seclusion for the narrator. The directors have constructed Manderley as an active character, as through the home, Rebecca's power is materialised and reinforced. This analysis has shown how the house acts as a metaphor for the struggles women might face under patriarchal structures. Both films represent the house as secretive and oppressive. Hitchcock's *Rebecca* aimed to represent Manderley as a prison for 'I', which she is unable to escape due to Rebecca's legacy instilled in the house. Lights and shadows become crucial to represent this limited vision of her future with Maxim and the truth about Rebecca's death. Wheatley goes beyond this by providing the house with a soul. 'I''s experience and psychology are given a more tangible approach in the shape of hallucinations, which allows the audience to perceive her anxieties at Manderley in greater depth. As explored in this paper, meanings are also mediated through the presence or absence of light. It is through the presence of light that the second Mrs. de Winter is granted more agency and acquires knowledge in this adaptation, which provides a more optimistic reading of her complex situation.

Despite the past belief that marriage was the ultimate step for women to achieve happiness, both adaptations fail to depict it as a fairy-tale experience. It is undoubtedly an oppressive institution for 'I', but she still finds herself unable to leave Maxim.

Rebecca (1940) stressed the social, economic, and gender differences between Maxim and 'I', rendering marriage as the only escape from her inferior condition. In *Rebecca* (2020), 'I' and Rebecca's confrontation for Maxim's love is seen as more achievable due to her hallucinations, which encourage 'I' to fight against imposed stereotypes and comparisons with her rival, who materialises in them.

On the other hand, it is important to recognise the innovative approach towards the confession scene, where 'I' learns about Maxim's feelings. In Daphne Du Maurier's and Hitchcock's *Rebecca*, 'I' finds satisfaction in learning that Rebecca did not align with expectations surrounding women at the time and relishes her punishment. Rebecca was a transgressive woman, 'I''s object of obsession, and this moment had a turning point in her psychology, which showed her acceptance of patriarchal structures. In Wheatley's *Rebecca,* 'I' tries to understand Rebecca and confronts Maxim for the truth in search of a better future with him. Even though her development is still tied to societal expectations that hinder her true personal growth, she subtly challenges them, showing a more confident and self-possessed woman that aligns more with (post)feminist values. But this unmodernised representation continues to perpetuate traditional discourses that limit women's freedom.

'I''s identity construction is impacted not only by Rebecca's unseen power, but also by Danvers' and Maxim's dominance. Both characters take advantage of their superior condition and control 'I''s decisions and thoughts. Although Whealtey aimed to break with Danvers' hostility, as seen in Du Maurier's and Hitchcock's *Rebecca*, by offering a more psychological portrayal of the characters, it still highlights the rivalry between women rooted in patriarchy. Danvers in both films actively manipulates 'I' for hers and Rebecca's interests. 'I' unconsciously tries to construct her own identity through Rebecca, an unattainable woman, which renders her inferior. As holders of knowledge, in *Rebecca* (1940), Maxim and Danvers control 'I''s acquisition of information through manipulation and withholding data, which makes her more vulnerable to to them. *Rebecca* (2020) shows a more resilient 'I' who will confront the power structures to obtain knowledge and reassure herself as Mrs. de Winter.

Considering all this, the current postfeminist era might have expected a more updated reading of the events and the roles of the characters. Alfred Hitchcock's and

Ben Wheatley's adaptations both represent women's struggles, which are shaped by two different contexts. Adapting *Rebecca* again to align with current feminist ideologies would mean telling a divergent story to its predecessors, which would break with the classic gothic undertone and mystery. Even though Ben Wheatley's adaptation was more transgressive concerning female agency, it still fails to acknowledge fully empowered women. Rebecca remains as a threat to women and men within patriarchal structures, which only reinforces 'I''s sense of powerlessness in comparison to Maxim's dominance.

7. Appendix

Film and TV Adaptations of Rebecca

1. Rebecca (1940), directed by Alfred Hitchcock – Film

2. Rebecca (1979), BBC miniseries, directed by Simon Langton

3. Rebecca: La Prima Moglie (1980), directed by Richard Milani – Italian TV Movie

4. Rebecca (1997), directed by Jim Brien – ITV Miniseries

5. Anamika (2008), directed by Anant Mahadevan – Bollywood adaptation

6. Rebecca (2020), directed by Ben Wheatley – Netflix Film

8. References

Bailey, Beth L. 1988. *From front porch to back seat: courtship in twentieth-century America.* Baltimore.: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Bazin, André. 1967. *What is Cinema?* Los Angeles: University of California Press.

Deckelmeier, Joe, Sean Morrison, Ollie Bradley, Felipe Rangel, Lewis Glazebrook, Colin McCormick, and Brennan Klein. 2020. "Ben Wheatley Interview: Rebecca." *Screen Rant*. Ben Wheatley Interview. Accessed January 14, 2025.

Du Maurier, Daphne. [1938] 2015. *Rebecca*. Great Britain: Virago Press.

Edwards, Kyle Dawson. 2006. "Brand-Name Literature: Film Adaptation and Selznick International Pictures' Rebecca (1940)." *Cinema Journal* 45 (3): 32–58. Brand Name Literature. Accessed January 12, 2025.

Fedyk, Max. 2017. "Rebecca." *Medium*, (June). Rebecca. Accessed January 13, 2025

Ford, Clementine. 2023. "Marriage is an inherently misogynistic institution – so why do women agree to it?" The Guardian, (October). Marriage. Accessed March 11, 2025.

Foucault, Michel. 1995. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, 3-31. 2nd ed. New York: Vintage Books.

Foucault, Michel. 1972. The Archaeology of Knowledge & The Discourse on Language. New York: Pantheon Books.

Green, Willow (October 3, 2008). "The 500 Greatest Movies of All Time". *Empire*. The 500 Greatest Movies of All Time. Accessed January 14, 2025.

Hartley, Miranda. 2024. "Gothic Realism in Daphne du Maurier's 'Rebecca' (1938)." *The Cultural Me*, (July). Gothic Realism. Accessed January 13, 2025.

Hitchcock, Alfred, director. 1940. *Rebecca*. Selznick International Pictures. 2 hr., 10 min. Rebecca (1940 Film Noir) Archive

Levy, Emanuel. 2020. "Rebecca (1940): Hitchcock's First American Thriller at 80." *Golden Globes*. Rebecca, Golden Globes. Accessed January 14, 2025.

Lindenmayer, Juli. The Mother of All Mysteries: How Mothers Are Disavowed and Undermined in Alfred Hitchcock's Rebecca (1940). Undergraduate Honors Thesis, Otterbein University, 2021. The Mother of All Mysteries. Accessed December 23, 2024.

Lusk, Dara. 2020. "'Rebecca': a haunting tale across many mediums." *The Utah Statesman*. Rebecca. Accessed January 13, 2025.

Marchbanks, Paul. 2006. "Jane Air: The Heroine as Caged Bird in Charlotte Brontë's Jane Eyre and Alfred Hitchcock's Rebecca." Revue LISA 4 (4): 118-130. L'héroïne. Accessed February 26, 2025.

McGilligan, Patrick. 2003. *Alfred Hitchcock: A Life In Darkness And Light*. Chichester, United Kingdom: Harper Collins Publishers.

Modleski, Tania. 2020. "Call Me By No Name: On "Rebecca."" *Los Angeles Review of Books*, (December). Call Me By No Name: On "Rebecca". Accessed December 27, 2024.

Mulvey, Laura. 1975. "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." *Screen* 16 (3): 6–18. Visual Pleasure. Accessed January 10, 2025.

Nugent, Frank. 1940. "Movie Review - Rebecca." *The New York Times*, March 29. Archived from the original on December 30, 2020. Movie Review Accessed January 14, 2025

Patta, Gig. 2020. "Ben Wheatley Talks Adaptation of Rebecca From The Book For Netflix." LRMOnline. Ben Wheatley Talks. Accessed February 15, 2025.

Rosenfeld, Jordana. n.d. "Hays Code" *Britannica*. Accessed January 12, 2025. Hays Code. Accessed January 12, 2025.

Ross, Deborah. "Rebecca." *Spectator*. October 2020. Gale Literature Resource Center. Rebecca. Accessed December 19, 2024.

Shaw-Williams, Hannah. 2020. "Rebecca 2020's Biggest Differences To The Book & Hitchcock Movie." Screen Rant. Rebecca 2020's Biggest Differences. Accessed February 27, 2025.

Shreiber, Michele. 2015. *American Postfeminist Cinema: Women, Romance, and Contemporary Culture.* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press LTD.

Van den Helm, Lisa. 2023 *A More Intense Rebecca: A Comparative Textual Analysis of Female Representation in Rebecca (1940) and Rebecca (2020)*. Master's thesis, Utrecht University. A More Intense Rebecca. Accessed December 22, 2024.

Wheatley, Ben, director. 2020. *Rebecca*. Working Title Films. 2 hr., 1 min. Watch Rebecca | Netflix Official Site

White, Patricia. 2021. *Rebecca*. London, United Kingdom: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc.