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Strange Embraces: Queering the Botanical in Rebecca

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In her 1938 novel, *Rebecca*, Daphne du Maurier powerfully evokes a sense of place that brings Manderley, the stately home on the Cornish coast that stands at the heart of the novel like "a jewel in the hollow of a hand," into sparkling, vivid focus.[1] The grand house, its beautifully landscaped gardens, and the barely-controlled wilderness of the surrounding estate are not just a backdrop, but a central part of the drama and atmosphere of the novel. They become a key part of the dynamics of control and ownership that play out between Maxim de Winter, the owner of Manderley, the unnamed narrator who comes to Manderley as Maxim's new bride, and Maxim's dead first wife, Rebecca. In particular, the tamed wildness of the botanical at Manderley—the ever-menacing woods and the plants that seem to have an agency all their own—offer a parallel rendition of the sexual politics that animate the human narrative. When examined through the lenses of historical gardening practices and theories of queer ecology, the plant life of Manderley becomes a model for the issues of sexual deviance and queer futurity at play in *Rebecca*. The botanical elements of *Rebecca* articulate a dynamic of desire, reproduction, and control that mirrors and illuminates Rebecca's use of her own queer sexuality to undermine and eventually destroy the patriarchal system of governance that Maxim works to enforce.

From the opening of the novel, in which the Narrator returns to Manderley in a dream only to find that "nature [has] come into her own again," the botanical is a constant, and frequently threatening presence in *Rebecca*.[2] When the Narrator approaches the house, both in dreams and in reality, she must first travel "through the dark and silent woods" which are so imposing that on her initial arrival she begins to fear that there is "no space to hold a house" within them.[3] Even upon reaching the house, the woods are succeeded by a stand of rhododendrons "massed like a battalion" on either side of the driveway.[4] The imposing scale of both the woods and the rhododendrons creates the impression of a gathering army only just held at bay, which echoes the Narrator's dream of bastard plants "marching in unison" towards the once-manicured gardens of the house.[5] Even Maxim's description of the spring flowers at Manderley carries the suggestion of a sinister power manifested in the daffodils "massed like an army, shoulder to shoulder" and the bluebells that "[choke] the very bracken ... [and make] a challenge to the sky."[6] The botanical is not limited to outdoor spaces; the house itself is filled with plant life, albeit in the more benign form of cut and arranged flowers. Maxim has "special cultivated flowers, grown for the house alone" and mentions that "his earliest

[1] Daphne du Maurier, *Rebecca*, (New York: Virago Press, 2015), 2.
[2] du Maurier, *Rebecca*, 1.
[3] du Maurier, *Rebecca*, 72.
[4] du Maurier, *Rebecca*, 72.
[5] du Maurier, *Rebecca*, 3.
[6] du Maurier, *Rebecca*, 30.

recollection" is of lilacs in white jars.[7] Upon her own arrival at Manderley, the Narrator notes that "there were flowers in the dining-room, flowers in the library" and later recreates the memory Maxim mentions by arranging lilacs in "the alabaster vase ... always used for [them]."[8] Plant life rules the landscapes of Manderley, surrounds and pervades the house, and shapes the rhythms of the lives of the people who live there.

Maxim's extended description of the flowers at Manderley is marked by the impulse to separate, define, and control them. There is a clear delineation between flowers that are acceptable indoors—the "special cultivated flowers" from the walled garden—and wilder blooms that "he never would have ... in the house."[9] Maxim's monologue on gardening is partly reflective of the tradition of stately English gardens popular in the nineteenth century. Although *Rebecca* was written and set in the mid-twentieth century, it is marked by a nostalgia for the glory days of the landed gentry which coincided with the heyday of English gardening. In *Novel Cultivations*, Elizabeth Hope Chang notes that the vast, landscaped grounds of Manderley are laid out in accordance with popular nineteenth century garden design principles which united "exotic plantings and native species."[10] The enthusiasm for gardens that developed in the late nineteenth century necessitated a clear delineation between wild and cultivated, one that was complicated by the concept of a 'wild garden,' which was designed to mimic natural wilderness. Chang observes that "a garden and the plants it contained was a garden, unless it was a wilderness," and in doing so articulates one of the central tensions that plagues the gardens and woods of Manderley in *Rebecca*.[11] Drawing on Jack Halberstam's assertion that wildness "disorders desire and desires disorder," the drive to both recreate and restrain wildness in the controlled setting of a garden can be linked to structures that separate and categorize forms and expressions of desire in to acceptable and unacceptable.[12] In this reading, Maxim's decision to bar wildflowers from the house and keep the cultivated flowers hidden safely away "in the walled garden" resonates with his efforts to control Rebecca and the suffocating power he exerts over the Narrator.[13]

The apparent necessity of controlling the plant life at Manderley extends beyond the conventions and aesthetics of landscaping to become emblematic of attempts to limit and define both desire and nature, which are linked by their fundamental resistance to control. Following Chang's observation that the boundary between a garden and a wilderness is essentially man-made, Maxim's desire to control the plant life in and around Manderley is an attempt to determine the very nature of nature. In his work on queer ecology, Timothy Morton

[7] du Maurier, *Rebecca*, 33.
[8] du Maurier, *Rebecca*, 94, 154.
[9] du Maurier, *Rebecca*, 33.
[10] Elizabeth Hope Chang. *Novel Cultivations: Plants in British Literature of the Global Nineteenth Century*. (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2019), 113.
[11] Chang, *Novel Cultivations*, 87.
[12] Jack Halberstam. *Wild Things: The Disorders of Desire*, (Duke University Press, 2020), 7.
[13] du Maurier, *Rebecca*, 33.

argues that the man-made concept of Nature (Morton's capitalization) is "founded on inside-outside structures" that define through exclusion—a garden is a garden because it is not a wilderness, for example.[14] The structures of exclusion and delineation that Morton identifies as methods for enforcing "ideologies of Nature" call to mind Maxim's rigorous categorization of plants as wild or cultivated, indoor or outdoor.[15] By controlling which plants are allowed in and around the house, to the point of growing some of them in a walled garden that keeps out their wilder cousins, Maxim seeks to force an artificial classification onto nature. His investment in defining and controlling plants takes on an additional dimension when he compares "roses in full bloom" to "women with untidy hair," which links it to the enforcement of patriarchal structures central to Manderley's existence.[16] In her essay on the patriarchal underpinnings of *Rebecca*, "Patriarchal Hauntings," Auba Llompart Pons links Maxim to "an old-fashioned, strict patriarchal system," which both relies on and seeks to perpetuate masculine control over women's lives, and particularly their sexuality.[17] Maxim's particular focus on the feminized category of flowers in his attempts to tame the wilderness—with all its connotations of unruly desire—of the botanical world betrays his anxiety about the desires of the women in his life.

Morton also points out the difference between the constructed ideology of Nature and the actual workings of the natural world, which are defined by "interrelations that blur and confound boundaries."[18] This blurring of boundaries, which is so central to Morton's theory of nature, appears again and again in *Rebecca* and directly opposes the systems of classification and restriction that Maxim puts in place. The woods that surround Manderley are a perpetual, ominous presence, in large part because they constantly threaten to extend their reach into the cultivated areas of the landscape. They "encroach upon [the drive]" and in the Narrator's dream, wild and cultivated plants are joined in "a strange embrace" that demolishes the man-made boundary between them.[19] In a similar instance of transgression, the overbearing, powerful, red rhododendrons break down the division between indoor and outdoor flowers that is otherwise so rigorously upheld by Maxim. Upon entering the morning-room for the first time, the Narrator is taken aback to find that, as well as growing outside the windows, the rhododendrons "had been permitted to the room itself."[20] Their presence on both sides of the divide, and the fact that rhododendrons are not found anywhere else indoors highlights the transgressive nature of their entry into the house. The intrusion of the red rhododendrons and the perpetual unruliness of the woods blatantly undermine Maxim's claim that he controls the natural landscape of Manderley and

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[14] Timothy Morton, "Queer Ecology," *PMLA* 125, no. 2 (March 2010): 274.
[15] Morton, "Queer Ecology," 274.
[16] du Maurier, *Rebecca*, 33.
[17] Auba Llompart Pons, "Patriarchal Hauntings: Re-Reading Villainy and Gender in Daphne Du Maurier's 'Rebecca,'" *Atlantis* 35, no. 1 (June 2013): 71.
[18] Morton, "Queer Ecology," 275.
[19] du Maurier, *Rebecca*, 211.
[20] du Maurier, *Rebecca*, 93.

emphasize the transgressive potential of the botanical in *Rebecca*.

Although Chang warns against drawing too close a connection between the human and the botanical when reading *Rebecca*, the connections du Maurier establishes between Rebecca herself and the flowers and landscapes of Manderley are too clear to be overlooked. There is, of course, the powerful link between Rebecca and the red rhododendrons, which adorn the morning-room and lurk around the edges of the house, and the woods, through which the narrator imagines "someone tall and slim" walking.[21] In particular, Madeleine Davies suggests that the rhododendrons "indicate the abundance and anarchy of [Rebecca's] desire" and identifies them as a site of mediated connection between the Narrator and Rebecca.[22] On a larger scale, it was Rebecca who "made Manderley the thing it is ... the gardens, the shrubs ... the azaleas" are all manifestations of her taste.[23] The Happy Valley, which the Narrator describes as "the core of Manderley, the Manderley [she] would know and learn to love" and which she places in opposition to "the black herded woods, the glaring rhododendrons ... the uneasy stillness of the west wing" is inextricably bound to Rebecca.[24] Shortly after her first rapturous visit to the Happy Valley, the narrator discovers that the "scent of white azaleas" was Rebecca's signature scent and still holds the power to conjure up her presence.[25] Even the custom of displaying lilacs in white vases, a ritual that predates Rebecca's arrival and figures in Maxim's earliest childhood memories, becomes so powerfully associated with her that the Narrator considers them "Rebecca's vase ... [and] Rebecca's lilac."[26] The fact that Rebecca's omnipresence at Manderley extends far beyond the places usually associated with her recalls Morton's discussion of the transgression that is fundamental to the natural world.

Following Davies' analysis of the red rhododendrons as a manifestation of Rebecca's sexuality, it also reframes the entire landscape of Manderley as a space of potential queer connection between the Narrator and Rebecca. This queer reading of the gardens aligns with Nicky Hallett's location of queer intimacy in objects and the kinds of mediated touch they facilitate. Although Hallett does not specifically mention the botanical elements of the novel, her reading suggests that much of the queerness of *Rebecca* exists not in the interactions between characters but in the physical spaces they inhabit and the objects they interact with. Both Hallett and Davies focus more on the relationships between women, which cross boundaries of class, time, and mortality, but the transgressive nature of the desires they discuss is also manifested in the impersonal but equally disruptive queerness of the botanical. The gardens and woods of Manderley, like the objects and rooms that Hallett discusses, provide a marginal space where queerness,

[21] du Maurier, *Rebecca*, 305.
[22] Madeleine K. Davies, "Rebecca's Womb: Irony and Gynaecology in Rebecca," in *The Female Body in Medicine and Literature*, edited by Andrew Mangham and Greta Depledge, Liverpool University Press, 2011.
[23] du Maurier, *Rebecca*, 307.
[24] du Maurier, *Rebecca*, 122.
[25] du Maurier, *Rebecca*, 187.
[26] du Maurier, *Rebecca*, 155.

whether in the form of desire, reproduction, defiance, or intimacy, can take root and thrive.

It is fitting that the plants most linked with Rebecca, the rhododendrons and the azaleas of the Happy Valley, are non-native species "some varieties of which were ... already considered an aggressively invasive alien" at the time the novel was written and set.[27] Not only did Rebecca introduce rhododendrons and azaleas to the gardens of Manderley, they also become among the most powerful reminders of her lingering presence. The startling vitality of the red rhododendrons, particularly the ones in the morning-room, and the haunting scent of the white azaleas increase the Narrator's uneasy sense that she is "like a guest in Manderley ... waiting for the return of the hostess."[28] The invasive nature of the shrubs is another instance of the duality of beauty and malevolence that characterizes much of the plant life at Manderley. Unlike weeds, which are always unwanted and, according to some nineteenth-century gardeners, "do not have to be evil, but most likely are so," invasive plants are often intentionally introduced.[29] By linking Rebecca to exotic alien species like rhododendrons and azaleas, du Maurier sets up a narrative of invasion that plays out on both the human and the botanical level. Maxim brings Rebecca to Manderley as a seemingly perfect bride, only to find that her "breeding, brains, and beauty" hide an ungovernable nature.[30] Like the invasive species she is linked to, Rebecca quickly embeds herself into every area of life at Manderley, from the planning of the gardens to the running of the house. By the time Maxim murders her, Rebecca's influence is so deeply ingrained into the life and land of Manderley that her presence lingers long after her death.

Rebecca's enduring influence on the plant life at Manderley, inside and out of the house, links her to the botanical elements of the novel in a continuous cycle of production and reproduction. Her haunting presence throughout both the house and the narrative is partly effected through her enduring influence on the plant life in and around Manderley. According to Chang, the idea that "plants were a lady's children was an inescapable trope" in nineteenth century gardening manuals aimed at upper-class women.[31] Although such a sentimental image seems ill-suited to Rebecca, the suggestion that the creator of a garden becomes a kind of parental figure is apt in many ways. The gardens of Manderley may be Maxim's property, but he "would not have thought of [redesigning them] but for Rebecca," which effectively situates her in a generative role.[32] Her influence on the botanical is evident elsewhere as well, for example, in the habitual placement of flowers inside of the house, which leaves the Narrator with the uneasy sense that "Rebecca did this" as she arranges flowers in the morning-room.[33] The sense of repetition that the Narrator experiences in that moment points to a cyclical element of the connection between Rebecca and the botanical, in which Rebecca not only created the garden, but is also

[27] Chang, *Novel Cultivations*, 118.
[28] du Maurier, *Rebecca*, 154.
[29] Chang, *Novel Cultivations*, 98.
[30] du Maurier, *Rebecca*, 304.
[31] Chang, *Novel Cultivations*, 95.
[32] du Maurier, *Rebecca*, 307.
[33] du Maurier, *Rebecca*, 155.

perpetually recreated by it. While Rebecca is an inescapable presence throughout the house and grounds of Manderley, she is most present in the morning-room and in what was, and really still is, her bedroom. It is perhaps no coincidence that one of the things that most strikes the Narrator upon first entering both spaces is the presence of flowers. The morning-room "[is] filled with" Rebecca's signature red rhododendrons and there are "flowers on the dressing table and ... beside the bed [and] on the carved mantelpiece" of her bedroom.[34] The flowers bring an incongruous vitality to the rooms once occupied by a woman who is now dead. Rebecca may be gone, but her memory and influence persist, embodied by the landscape she designed and the flowers she arranged.

Botanical reproduction is not limited to conjuring Rebecca's haunting presence; the gardens and woods of Manderley possess generative powers all their own. During their walk in the Happy Valley, Maxim gives the Narrator a "fallen petal," which, despite being "crushed and bruised" produces a scent as "vivid as the living tree from which it came."[35] The wording of the description suggests a conjuring or resurrection—the dying fragment is endowed with the capacity to reproduce the whole, which presages the way that Rebecca's scent haunts the Narrator. This kind of botanical reproduction is relatively benign and contained when compared with the more sinister reproductivity hinted at elsewhere. The wild, uncontrolled plants that the Narrator dreams of are described in a way that emphasizes their non-normative generative capabilities. The once-familiar woods are overrun by "unnatural growth" and strange trees have "thrust themselves out of the quiet earth."[36] The "host of nameless shrubs" that have sprung up among the rhododendrons are "bastard things" that the Narrator imagines are "conscious of their spurious origin," and the lawns are threatened by a "half-breed from the woods."[37] Unlike the delicate, intangible reproduction of the fallen azalea petals, which can only recall what once was, the plants in the Narrator's dream are the products and the progenitors of a bastard futurity. This futurity apparently springs from what can best be described as botanical sexual perversion and suggests that Halberstam's connection between wildness and unrestrained desire could be extended to include equally unruly reproduction and growth.

The explicit sexuality and reproductive capacity of the trees and shrubs in the Narrator's dream suggest that the natural world serves as a model for an alternative sexuality that exists beyond the boundaries of heterosexual marriage and reproduction. Morton locates the erotic potential of nature in intimacies that "are not heteronormative, not genital, not geared to ideologies about where the body stops and starts."[38] He goes on to point out that "plants and animals are hermaphroditic before they are bisexual and are bisexual before they are heterosexual" and furthermore that "processes of sexuality are not confined within species."[39] Likewise, Halberstam describes the wild as not

[34] du Maurier, *Rebecca*, 93, 185.
[35] du Maurier, *Rebecca*, 122.
[36] du Maurier, *Rebecca*, 1.
[37] du Maurier, *Rebecca*, 2, 3.
[38] du Maurier, *Rebecca*, 280.
[39] Morton, "Queer Ecology," 276.

just a space for, but a manifestation of, queerness and particularly queer desire. These description of queer nature are remarkably reflective of the untamed plants that overtake Manderley in the Narrator's dream. In her recollection of the dream, the Narrator dwells on the image of "a lilac [that has] mated with a copper beech," which are bound closer together by "the malevolent ivy."[40] To the Narrator's eyes, this interspecies *ménage à trois* is further evidence of the perverse growth that plants are capable of when "no hand [checks] their progress."[41] From Morton's perspective the "strange embrace" of the trees and the "monster shrubs and plants" that spring up are not unnatural; they are the truest expressions of nature.[42] The Narrator's distress at the sight of the unruly plants and Maxim's desire to control them also point to the fear that underlies the drive to tame the wild: that what Halberstam calls "unrestrained forms of embodiment" cannot be truly thwarted by systems of control; they linger at the margins, waiting to reemerge and proliferate.[43]

The rules and regulations that define the gardens of Manderley are no exception to Morton's observation that common modes of categorizing nature into acceptable and unacceptable, indoor and outdoor, and so on, "resemble the boundaries of heterosexist policies."[44] When left unchecked by the cultivation and regulation imposed by Maxim, the woods and gardens of Manderley come alive and embody the queer intimacies and hybrid futurity theorized by Morton. Maxim's efforts to control the landscape and plants of Manderley not only constitute an attempt to force nature into man-made systems of categorization, they also restrict the sexual and reproductive capacities of nature. The Narrator's shock and dismay at the "poor bastard [plants]" of "spurious origin" is rooted in an ideology that ludicrously applies human social and sexual mores to the botanical.[45] Like the delineation between a plant and a weed or a garden and a wilderness, the difference between a bastard plant and legitimate one is purely man-made. This anthropomorphic view of the botanical, one that imposes human morality, and in this case a very specific kind of patriarchal, heterosexist, morality, onto plant life, creates a common set of standards that ties together the human and botanical elements of *Rebecca*. When transposed to human relationships, the rampant sexuality and alternative reproduction modelled by the uncultivated plants would wholly undermine the system of patrilineal inheritance that underpinned estates like Manderley. The tension between the "half-breed[s] from the woods" and Maxim's carefully cultivated flower gardens is driven by the patriarchal need to control reproduction, and by extension women's sexuality, in order to consolidate and preserve men's power.

In a novel as curiously sexless as *Rebecca*—the Narrator's only specific reference to sexual intimacy between herself and Maxim is her prim statement that she "knew him as a lover"—the sexually charged description of the monstrous

40 du Maurier, *Rebecca*, 3.
41 du Maurier, *Rebecca*, 2.
42 du Maurier, *Rebecca*, 1.
43 Halberstam, *Wild Things*, 3.
44 Morton, "Queer Ecology," 274.
45 du Maurier, *Rebecca*, 2–3.

plants seems to be an incongruous beginning.[46] Although the Narrator's relationship with Maxim, and indeed much of her interiority, is notably lacking in eroticism, rampant sexuality pervades the novel. Janet Harbord observes that the novel's "representations of passion and erotic charge are confined to Rebecca," who turns that eroticism into a source of power.[47] When Maxim tells the Narrator the truth about Rebecca, the scraps of information she had gleaned previously "[come] together piece by piece" to form the image of a vicious, sexually voracious woman.[48] In the moment that the Narrator understands Rebecca's true nature, she imagines the dead woman as "someone who walked through the woods at night," thus locating Rebecca's ungovernable sexuality within the realm of the botanical.[49] From the "slaughterous red" rhododendrons "massed like a battalion" around the drive and outside the morning-room, to the woods that are "always a menace" and overrun the gardens in the Narrator's dream, the botanical is invested with a latent power that, like Rebecca's, springs from uncontrolled sexuality.[50] The alternate reproductivity embodied by the untamed trees and shrubs is manifested in Rebecca as well: sex is "like a game to her," one that she plays well and without consideration for any outside authority.[51] Eventually, Rebecca's sexuality becomes a weapon that she successfully uses to engineer her own death at Maxim's hands and set in motion the destruction of Manderley.

The fatal confrontation between Rebecca and Maxim throws light on the threat presented by the uncontrolled sexuality linked to both Rebecca and the undomesticated plant life at Manderley. During their fight in the boathouse, Rebecca makes it perfectly clear that the control Maxim exerted over her through "[their] dirty, damnable bargain" is nothing but an illusion because "no one would believe [Maxim]" if he tried to expose her promiscuity.[52] Once she has revealed Maxim's powerlessness, Rebecca taunts him further by musing about what might happen "if [she] had a child."[53] Rebecca's use of her own reproductive capacity as a weapon is transgressive in itself, but the child she describes is rendered more queer by the suggestion of a kind of asexual reproduction. She refers to the hypothetical child as "[her] son," and hers alone, because although nobody could "prove that it was not [Maxim's]," the child's only true parent would be Rebecca.[54] It is perhaps no coincidence that in the scene when Rebecca is at her most sexually deviant, she looks not like the picture of blooming womanhood depicted elsewhere, but "like a boy."[55] The queering of Rebecca's gender and sexuality recalls Morton's observations about the hermaphroditism and forms of queer reproduction found in many plants. Rebecca's turn towards an alternate form of reproduction, one in which she is both father and mother, aligns her with the sinister plants of the

[46] du Maurier, *Rebecca*, 76.
[47] Janet Harbord, "Between Identification and Desire: Rereading *Rebecca*," *Feminist Review*, no. 53 (1996): 102.
[48] du Maurier, *Rebecca*, 304.
[49] du Maurier, *Rebecca*, 305.
[50] du Maurier, *Rebecca*, 72, 1.
[51] du Maurier, *Rebecca*, 275.
[52] du Maurier, *Rebecca*, 311, 312–3.
[53] du Maurier, *Rebecca*, 313.
[54] du Maurier, *Rebecca*, 313.
[55] du Maurier, *Rebecca*, 312.

Narrator's dream as both a generative body and as a threat to the patriarchal structures of Manderley.

The tension surrounding the gardens and woods of Manderley is close kin to Rebecca's open challenge to Maxim's authority over her, her sexuality, and, ultimately, Manderley. The blurring of the boundary between human and botanical that du Maurier engages in discourages a clear-cut allegorical reading of the plant life as a representation of Rebecca and the threat she poses to the future of Manderley. What du Maurier produces is far more subtle: two parallel versions of the same story of subversive sexuality and the threat it poses to the structures set up to control and confine it, which play out on different narrative levels. With her threat of producing "an heir ... for [Maxim's] beloved Manderley" outside of the patriarchal structures of heterosexual reproduction, Rebecca seeks to undermine the patrilineal control over the estate that Maxim strives to preserve.[56] Although Maxim struggles to maintain control over Manderley, the fact that the estate is entailed means that Rebecca, as Maxim's lawful wife and the potential mother of his heir, who would automatically inherit regardless of Maxim's wishes, holds the power. Harbord's description of Rebecca as "[refusing] the terms of this restriction, to be contained by the structure" can also be applied to the landscapes that she designed.[57] The descriptions of the woods and the carefully cultivated gardens of Manderley throughout the novel play out a parallel story of power and control. For all the restrictions governing which flowers belong where, down to which vases should be used for different varieties, "the woods ... encroach upon [the drive]" and even the spring flowers are "massed like an army."[58] The dream sequence that opens the novel offers a glimpse of Manderley overrun by that botanical army "marching in unison" across the once-manicured lawns.[59] The possible futures of Manderley devolved into "some choked wilderness" or in the hands of Rebecca's bastard child are kept at bay through rigorous control.[60] When that control fails, Maxim chooses to kill Rebecca rather than face the consequences of her unbridled sexuality in the mistaken hope that death could halt the unregulated reproduction she threatens him with.

In a final twist, du Maurier reveals that the reason Rebecca "[looks] ill, queer" and boyish the night of her murder is the "deep-rooted" cancer growing in place of the child she threatens Maxim with.[61] The description of the cancer as an organic growth complicates the connection between Rebecca and the botanical by associating her not with the invading army of plant life, as she previously is, but with the quiet lawns destroyed by the encroaching forest. Her body, which was once the source of her power, has become the breeding ground for the malevolent growth that would have killed her. The cancer developing in place of the imagined child sheds light on a darker facet of the dynamics of growth and reproduction at the heart of *Rebecca*. Cancer is yet another form of

[56] du Maurier, *Rebecca*, 313.
[57] Harbord, "Between Identification and Desire," 102.
[58] du Maurier, *Rebecca*, 211, 33.
[59] du Maurier, *Rebecca*, 3.
[60] du Maurier, *Rebecca*, 2.
[61] du Maurier, *Rebecca*, 311, 412.

uncontrolled growth, one that eventually overwhelms its host in the same way that the encroaching woods overrun Manderley in the Narrator's dream or invasive species like Rebecca's rhododendrons displace native plants. As the cycle of production and reproduction continues, the old must die to support new life; all plants take life from the remnants of their predecessors. When the Narrator finally feels she is free of Rebecca's power, she finds that the flowers in the morning room, which were associated with Rebecca's continued presence, are dead. The Narrator orders the dead flowers to be changed in a moment that marks her accession to Rebecca's role as lady of the house and further demonstrates the inevitable replacement of the dead with the living.

The Narrator's dream of Manderley, which marks both the beginning of the novel and the chronological end of the narrative, further emphasizes the continuity between Rebecca and the Narrator. The real Manderley stands in ruins and the Narrator and Maxim are "hundreds of miles away in an alien land," living in hotels that are "comforting in [their] very lack of atmosphere."[62] In spite of the distance that the couple have put between themselves and Manderley, and all the ghosts that reside there, the Narrator continues to develop an affinity with woods and gardens. She becomes "a mine of information on the English countryside" and longs to "pick foxgloves and pale campion from a wet, streaking hedge."[63] In contrast to the bare, barren landscape of "scrubby vineyards and crumbling stones" that she inhabits now, the Narrator's memories of Manderley are alive with "color and scent and sound" that make them seem more real than her present surroundings.[64]

While the Narrator's new hobby seems benign enough, delving too deep into her memories of Manderley conjures up the same sense of danger that haunted the woods and gardens. An article on wood pigeons brings her back to "the deep woods of Manderley," but the idyllic scene quickly clouds and she becomes "uneasy for no known reason" under the dark and silent trees.[65] In her dreams, she wanders through the woods and the overrun gardens with all their perverse futurity, while the house remains "a desolate shell, soulless at last" despite the momentary illusion that it "lived and breathed."[66] The connections that du Maurier draws between the wild plant life of Manderley and deviant sexuality affirms Davies' observation that the Narrator is "actually [aligned] with the lushly excessive Rebecca: the only difference lies in the level of denial and repression achieved."[67] In spite of her barrenness and sexless presentation, the Narrator's affinity for the botanical, and specifically wild scenes like woods and hedgerows, suggests that the deviant desire that characterizes Rebecca lurks just beneath the Narrator's prim exterior. Rebecca is gone, but still "there [is] someone who [walks] through the woods by night," if only in her dreams.[68] The Narrator's gravitation towards the wilder aspects

[62] du Maurier, *Rebecca*, 4.
[63] du Maurier, *Rebecca*, 7, 8.
[64] du Maurier, *Rebecca*, 8, 7.
[65] du Maurier, *Rebecca*, 7.
[66] du Maurier, *Rebecca*, 4, 3.
[67] Davies, "Rebecca's Womb," 184.
[68] du Maurier, *Rebecca*, 305.

of the botanical presents a new turn in the cycle of alternative production and reproduction that creates and recreates the rampant sexuality embodied by Rebecca and the woods and gardens of Manderley.

The plant life that surrounds and permeates Manderley exemplifies Morton's statement that nature "does not constitute a world [because] worlds have horizons" and thus "queer ecology would undermine worlds."[69] Nature exists outside of and beyond the boundaries and delineations created and enforced by humans, including moral classifications. From Maxim's separation of cultivated and wildflowers to the Narrator's insistence on the maliciousness of the plants in her dream, *Rebecca* is filled with attempts to enforce artificial classifications onto the natural world and limit its tendency towards unruly desire and growth. However, the persistent vitality of the botanical repeatedly undermines human attempts to control and define nature. Like Rebecca revealing to Maxim that their bargain was as much a sham as their marriage and laying bare his consequent lack of power over her, the woods and gardens of Manderley ultimately demonstrate the illusory nature of the man-made boundaries and definitions imposed upon them. Although du Maurier allows Maxim to exercise the ultimate act of patriarchal control in extinguishing Rebecca's mortal life, the resilience and vitality of the botanical in *Rebecca* present an alternate ending—one where deviance survives and thrives. The greatest threat presented by the botanical is not that it defies human efforts to control it, but that it reveals, through its complete non-compliance and disregard, just how futile it is to regulate a force that does not, and indeed cannot, recognize any authority outside itself.

[69] Morton, "Queer Ecology," 278.