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R is for Rebecca: A Consonant and Consummate Haunting

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In Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca* (1938), the narrator, a second wife, is haunted by her predecessor's first initial. A towering R is the signature mark of the infamous Rebecca, a woman presumed to have drowned, but revealed to have been murdered. The most visible manifestation of Rebecca's ghostly presence is her omnipresent initial. So impactful is the R on the narrator's psyche, that the initial consumes her own given name, of which not a single letter is revealed. Reasons for the narrator's concealed name are considered. These include her need for protection from a malevolent spirit, her desire for anonymity, and her obsession with her ethereal rival, who appears not as a disembodied haunting, but as the very tangible letter R.

KEYWORDS Daphne du Maurier, *Rebecca*, anonymity, concealed names, gender and naming, initials, marital names, obsession, paternal names

Apparent to readers of Daphne du Maurier's popular 1938 novel *Rebecca* is the narrator's curious onomastic status. The "I" that proclaims the memorable opening line: "Last night I dreamt I went to Manderley again" (du Maurier, 1938: 1) never identifies herself by name and neither do other characters who address her in conversation. In fact, the second Mrs Maximilian de Winter's maiden name remains the unsolvable mystery of *Rebecca*. By the novel's end we know who did it and why, but, despite tantalizing clues dropped by the author herself, the name of du Maurier's storyteller remains concealed, turning the traditional whodunit into an unanswerable whotoldit. In *Rebecca*, the unnamed narrator is haunted by an initial: the consonant R. This uppercase R signifies the first letter of the first name of the first wife of the protagonist's husband. Emblazoned on stationery and embroidered on linens, this R forms the signature mark of the infamous Rebecca — the first Mrs Maximilian de Winter — who is presumed to have drowned, but is revealed to have been murdered by her husband. Significantly, du Maurier borrowed the idea of a domineering initial from her own bout with marital jealousy. Her husband's previous *fiancée*, Jan Ricardo, signed her correspondence with a "wonderful great R" (House, 2013) that disturbed the author sufficiently for it to reappear in her fiction. Culled

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from the author's life, this single consonant becomes the most visible manifestation of Rebecca's ghostly presence at Manderley. This R's ability to disturb the narrator upon sight confirms that the haunting of the second Mrs Maximilian de Winter by the first is more psychological than ectoplasmic. So impactful is the letter R on the narrator's psyche, it essentially consumes her own name, of which not a single letter is revealed to readers. Thus the narrator's absent and consequently weightless name acts as a counterbalance to the omnipresent and weighty R of Rebecca.

While the mystery of Rebecca's death is eventually solved, effectively exorcising her menacing spirit from Manderley, her husband's ancestral estate, and the recent de Winter marriage, the onomastic mystery surrounding the second Mrs de Winter's maiden name remains. That du Maurier intended to pique the curiosity of readers through purposeful omission is evident. Although other characters refer to the narrator's given name, the name itself is never uttered; instead, relational terminology and endearments are substituted for it. During their courtship, Maxim de Winter remarks on the narrator's "unusual name" (du Maurier, 1938:27). The narrator herself acknowledges its uniqueness upon discovering her name "spelt correctly, an unusual thing" (1938: 23). Unfortunately, these clues are insufficient to guide readers to that "unusual" name. Once married, Maxim refers to his young bride possessively as either *my wife* or *my dear* or even *my lamb*. Other characters address her more formally as *Mrs de Winter*, a title so unfamiliar to the narrator when she first hears it pronounced over the phone at Manderley that she misconstrues it to be a reference to Rebecca: "I'm afraid you have made a mistake […] Mrs de Winter has been dead for over a year" (1938: 83). Additionally, the narrator's unrevealed name highlights her lack of status, another absence which reduces her stature when compared to Rebecca, who was a member of the highest echelon and whose name is still pronounced in polite society. The daughter of an undistinguished British landscape painter and his wife, both now deceased, the narrator is no one of importance or connection when she meets Maxim de Winter in Monte Carlo. Ostensibly, he is in mourning and travel is a balm to his grief. She is in service — paid companionship to the overbearing Mrs Van Hopper — her means of survival. During their awkward first date, Maxim tells the narrator: "You have a lovely and unusual name" (1938: 27). She responds: "My father was a lovely and unusual person" (1938: 27), suggesting she is her father's namesake. As their meal concludes, Maxim augments his compliment: "I shall go further, if you will forgive me, and say that it becomes you as well as it became your father" (1938: 27). Here the narrator's given name's gender is less a mystery than the name itself. In accordance with British custom, the narrator bears a patriarchal surname, but it is uncommon for a daughter to likewise receive a masculine given name. Thus the narrator's first name might sound "unusual" to Maxim's ears because it transgresses gender boundaries. He has met a girl with a boy's name and he likes it. Of this curious christening, Lisa Dresner observes: "She bears this Name-of-the-father not, as most do, solely in her last name, but in both her names. Being named for her father suggests that the narrator stands in relation to him as a substitute son" (2007: 155). This pattern of patriarchal substitution will be re-enacted upon her marriage to Mr de Winter. Literally, the narrator will trade her father's name for her husband's name, while figuratively she will continue to function as a boy to the man. The couple's age difference reinforces this role as well. When they are wed, Maxim is 42 and the narrator half his age. That Daphne du Maurier chose a male name, *Eric Avon*, "for her own boy-self" (Auerbach,

2000: 40) perhaps cements the choice of a male first name for her heroine. In her memoir, du Maurier admits that "there were no psychological depths to Eric Avon. He just shone at everything" (1977: 55–56). Her nameless narrator appears to be the opposite, full of psychological depths and consistently outshone by Rebecca's lauded "breeding, brains, and beauty" (du Maurier, 1938: 256). The influence of her masculine maiden name is evident as the narrator admits to a "schoolboy" crush on Maxim, whom she terms her "prefect" (1938: 37), evoking boarding school hierarchies and shenanigans. Further, she notes that Maxim behaves towards her "like a mocking big brother" (1938: 39). Later, when marital discord impedes their intimacy, the narrator assures Maxim: "I'll be your friend and companion, a sort of boy" (1938: 250). Initially, the narrator's boyishness and masculine names charm Maxim. When the *naïf* laments she is not "a woman of about thirty-six dressed in black satin with a string of pearls," he responds sharply, "you would not be with me […] if you were" (1938: 39). Unbeknown to the narrator, her description of the ideal woman too closely resembles Maxim's belated, if not beloved, first wife, Rebecca.

Ultimately, the mystery of the narrator's namelessness is not solvable as her author chose not to bestow one on her. Of this omission, du Maurier admits: "I could not think of one, and it became a challenge in technique, the easier because I was writing in the first person" (1981: 3). Names were changed, however, as the author completed her manuscript: "The husband was no longer Henry but Max — […] Henry sounded dull. The sister and the cousin, they were different too. The narrator remained nameless" (1981: 6). Somewhat cryptically, Nina Auerbach notes: "Rebecca, the dead, bad wife, exists only as a hovering name; the good second wife, who tells the story, has no name and little energy" (2000: 1–2). Given the futility of ever discerning the narrator's name, one's critical energy must be expended then in exploring probable reasons for its concealment. The narrator's maiden name stays veiled behind her acquired marital name — ironically one she shares with the late Rebecca — for several psychologically valid reasons.

Upon her arrival at Manderley, the narrator encounters a residence where operations are still dictated by the protocols and tastes of the previous wife, channeled via the fanatical housekeeper, Mrs Danvers. Unable to expel Rebecca's lingering influence, the new bride opts for self-preservation. Her concealed name is reminiscent of a trope common to fairy tales, in which the *naïf* finds protection from a malevolent spirit through safeguarding her name. Thus Rebecca may haunt, but not harm, her unnamed replacement. Likewise, as a confessional tale, the narrator keeps her name unsullied from the scandals she reveals: Rebecca's wickedness and Maxim's role in Rebecca's death. As the narrator's fascination with her ethereal rival intensifies, Rebecca supersedes the narrator's own identity. So obsessed is the narrator with the woman behind the letter R that she twice transforms into a version of her, first channeling Rebecca as her double at the costume ball and later dreaming Rebecca into existence as Manderley burns. The narrator first encounters the name of her predecessor in a book lent to her by Mr de Winter early in their relationship. This volume of poems acts as the narrator's Pandora's Box; once opened, Rebecca's presence is unleashed and the psychological haunting of the narrator commences. As if by its own volition, the volume falls open at the title page. Whether this occurrence is accidental, the result of Maxim's frequent viewing of this particular page, or the machination of a poltergeist, it is on this page that the narrator discovers the inscription "Max — from Rebecca" (du Maurier, 1938: 35). Immediately, the narrator

offers a detailed analysis of Rebecca's handwriting, emphasizing the visual impact of words "written in a curious, slanting hand:"

> A little blob of ink marred the white page opposite, as though the writer, in impatience, had shaken the pen to make the ink flow freely. And then, as it bubbled through the nib, it came a little thick, so that the name Rebecca stood out black and strong, the tall and sloping R dwarfing the other letters. (du Maurier, 1938: 35)

For the narrator, this slanted signature is tacit proof of the existence of Maxim's first wife. The slant suggests Rebecca was left-handed, a trait associated with the demonic in folklore, and references to Rebecca as a devil appear in the novel. As Maxim admits to his second wife about life with his first: "It doesn't make for sanity, does it, living with the devil" (du Maurier, 1938: 257). In Rebecca's devilish signature, the "tall and sloping R" dominates the remaining letters, reinforcing its image upon the mind of the narrator. Ostensibly, the narrator places the book with its inscription under her pillow as a token of her affection for Maxim and to safeguard it from the prying eyes of Mrs Van Hopper. However, the narrator's placement of the book upon her bed and her compulsive rereading of its inscription suggest an obsessive fixation. Significantly, before any thought of an engagement to Maxim, the narrator has embraced Rebecca as a strange bedfellow. The narrator even imagines the signatory moment:

> I could see her turning to that first white page, smiling as she wrote, and shaking the bent nib. Max from Rebecca […] She called him Max. It was familiar, gay, and easy on the tongue. The family could call him Maxim if they liked. Grandmothers and aunts. And people like myself, quiet and dull and youthful, who did not matter. Max was her choice, the word was her possession, and she had written it with so great a confidence on the fly-leaf of that book. That bold, slanting hand, stabbing the white paper, the symbol of herself, so certain, so assured. (du Maurier, 1938, 45)

Notably, it is Rebecca's "stabbing" signature that impales itself upon the narrator's psyche. As the narrator's thoughts in Monte Carlo reveal, Rebecca haunts the narrator even before she becomes Maxim's replacement bride. When Mr de Winter grants the narrator permission to address him as Maxim, she admits she "was still child enough to consider a Christian name like a plume in the hat, though from the first he had called me by mine" (1938: 43). The narrator's earlier happiness at establishing a first name relationship with Maxim, one suggestive of equality and intimacy, is ruined as Rebecca remains the exclusive proprietor of what the narrator assumes is an even more personal address, the further abbreviated *Max*. Thus the ghost of the first Mrs de Winter is channeled via and speaks through an object gifted to Max and only on loan —secondhand from Rebecca, in fact — to the narrator. Rebecca's piercing signature with its looming R becomes for the narrator the visible emblem of her nemesis, a woman with a prior claim to Max. Terming Rebecca a "phantom in [her] mind" (1938: 44), the narrator is possessed by the idea of Maxim's first wife. While "her [rival's] features were blurred, her colouring indistinct, the setting of her eyes and the texture of her hair […] still uncertain" (1938: 44), Rebecca's signature is indelible.

A strange love triangle forms involving a man, a woman, and a signature. Maxim announces their engagement to the clueless Mrs Van Hooper, while in an adjacent room the narrator removes Rebecca's signature from the volume of poems. These synchronous activities — engagement and disengagement — are both acts of termination. Maxim's revelation of the narrator's impending marriage is also notice that she will no longer be under the American's employ. Maxim takes a rational approach to handling the excitable Mrs Van Hopper, but the narrator's concurrent actions are irrational. A thought "whispered" to her by a "demon" propels her to reach for the book of poems. Once more the volume falls open to reveal the inscription, *Max from Rebecca*. The narrator muses upon this spectacle: "She was dead, and one must not have thoughts about the dead. They slept in peace, the grass blew over their graves. How alive was her writing though, how full of force. Those curious, sloping letters. The blob of ink. Done yesterday. It was as if it had been written yesterday" (1938: 57–58). As the narrator conflates past and present — "Done yesterday" — the chasm between the living and the dead is breached. Of this confluence, Janet Harbord observes: "It is a past that is glimpsed, made intangible yet desirable, present yet invisible. The figure of the ghost in literary texts represents this paradox of the effectiveness of the past on the present in terms of a trope" (1996: 100). Literally Rebecca may be dead, but metaphorically she is alive in her writing, which strikes the narrator as "full of force." As her betrothed makes arrangements mere steps away, the narrator, "looking over [her] shoulder like a criminal" (du Maurier 1938: 58), removes the signatory page from the book with nail scissors. Although she observes "the book looked white and clean when the page was gone" (1938: 58), the narrator is not satisfied. Shredding the excised page and placing the scraps in a trash bin, she strikes a match. Again Rebecca proves a stubborn ghost. The flames make "the slanted writing impossible to distinguish," with one exception: "The letter R was the last to go, it twisted in the flame, it curled outwards for a moment, becoming larger than ever. Then it crumpled too; the flame destroyed it" (1938: 58). Even in its consumption, the looming R feeds on the fire and fuels the paranoia of the narrator. Following the conflagration, the narrator washes her hands and reports feeling cleansed. But this feeling is short-lived as other Rs, too numerous to inventory and too inopportune to burn, await the narrator when she crosses the threshold of Manderley.

Certainly the narrator's namelessness provides her with a measure of anonymity as she conveys her shocking tale about the domineering R. Assessing social conventions relevant to du Maurier's works, Jane Bakerman notes first that: "Outside of marriage a young woman has almost no identity" (1985: 14); thus the narrator's pre-marital name would be of little value to the story and its omission unremarkable. As the narrator contemplates receiving her husband's venerable name through marriage, her excitement breeds repetition and grammatical variation: "Mrs de Winter. I would be Mrs de Winter […] I am going to be Mrs de Winter" (du Maurier, 1938: 55). A second social convention concerns "the importance of retaining one's good name" (Bakerman, 1985: 14), an act which the narrator undertakes through concealment of her own, although curiously she reveals her husband's name in this confessional tale. Undoubtedly, Maxim believes his family name merits protection. The reason he avoids divorce court after Rebecca reveals her love to be fraudulent is the thought of "mud flung at us in the newspapers, all the people who belong down here whispering when my name was mentioned" (du Maurier, 1938: 257). In the last moments of their marriage, Rebecca taunts: "If I had a child […]

neither you nor anyone in the world, would ever prove that it was not yours" (1938: 263). For even suggesting that a bastard child might one day inherit Manderley and bear his name, Maxim shoots Rebecca through her heart. Of the narrator's response to learning her husband murdered Rebecca, I believe Lisa Dresner is half right when she states her "only thoughts are of protecting [Maxim], not of protecting herself" (2007: 155). I contend the narrator's thoughts appear equally shared between spousal protection and self-preservation. Maxim's potential loss of status, wealth, and good name — which have become the narrator's through marriage — would engender her own triplicate loss. Well might the narrator fear a return to reduced circumstances, to servitude to the very class she has entered, however awkwardly, through marriage. As Mrs Van Hopper inquired of her paid companion upon learning of her engagement to Mr de Winter, "[W]hat in the name of Mike have you been doing?" (du Maurier, 1938: 56). Even here, Mike — apparently a euphemism for God — can be named, but not the narrator. What the narrator had "been doing," perhaps innocently, was ascending a few rungs on the social ladder via a proposal of marriage. Later, when the narrator learns to her relief that Maxim is obsessed with Rebecca not because he still loves her, but because he killed her, it is both their good names she aims to protect by harboring his crime, thus remaining not only Mrs Maximilian de Winter, but naming herself as her husband's accomplice after the fact. Strangely, the narrator exposes their shared marital name in her exposition of these two crimes of passion: Mr de Winter murdering the first unfaithful Mrs de Winter and the second loyal Mrs de Winter helping her husband to conceal his act. Yet the narrator does not reveal her maiden name even once. This omission suggests she holds the good name of her father, whose name she was given at birth, in higher esteem than the good name of her husband, whose name she inherited upon marriage. Perhaps, despite Maxim's avoidance of a murder charge, the name de Winter is sullied after all. In her first-person *exposé*, the narrator takes it upon herself to write the confessional tale her husband cannot or will not pen.

That the narrator fixates upon Rebecca and her signature letter R to the point of psychological debilitation is clear. She admits as much: "I had so identified with Rebecca that my own dull self did not exist, had never come to Manderley" (1938: 189). When the narrator merely thinks about Rebecca in the presence of her husband, Maxim witnesses a disturbing transformation: "I don't want you to look like you did just now. You had a twist to your mouth and a flash of knowledge in your eyes. Not the right sort of knowledge" (1938: 190–191). Often the narrator's identification with the previous Mrs de Winter involves self-deprecation. Rebecca as a ghostly double is everything the narrator aspires to be, but is not. Objects that bear the mark of the first Mrs de Winter, especially the dominant R, fuel the second Mrs de Winter's obsession. Frequently, the narrator latches onto an object and then visualizes a scene in which Rebecca appears with the object as her prop. In one act of self-torment, the narrator imagines Rebecca at her desk, answering correspondence: "She would tear off sheet after sheet of that smooth white paper, using it extravagantly, because of the long strokes she made when she wrote, and at the end of her personal letters she put her signature, 'Rebecca,' that tall sloping R dwarfing its fellows" (1938: 85). The conjured "long strokes" of Rebecca's penmanship reveal the narrator's insecurities about her nascent sexual skills as compared to her more practiced predecessor. Ostensibly, the narrator uses this invented scene to assess her penmanship against that of a superior hand. In contrast, she notes "how cramped and

unformed was [her] own handwriting, without individuality, without style, uneducated even" (1938: 88). Of course, it is not purely the narrator's handwriting, one may infer, that is critiqued. These are blanket claims for the superiority of Rebecca in all matters regarding individuality, style, and sexual knowledge.

The narrator is not alone in her obsession. Clearly Mrs Danvers nurtures an unhealthy fascination for Rebecca and for objects that bear Rebecca's mark. Mrs Danvers' continued loyalty to her dead mistress may be attributed to a thwarted lesbian desire, but the narrator participates willingly in the housekeeper's kinky games of show and tell. In these scenes, Rebecca appears to serve as "a fantasy figure laced with same-sex flavour" (Hallett, 2003: 43) for both Mrs Danvers and the narrator. When Mrs Danvers offers the narrator a guided tour of Rebecca's west-wing suite, rooms maintained as a shrine to Rebecca replete with memorabilia, the narrator feels ill at ease. The solicitation reminds her of a childhood friend's offer to see "a book, locked in a cupboard, in my mother's bedroom" (du Maurier, 1938: 88). This book, likely secured because of sexual content, recalls the volume the narrator hid beneath her pillow in Monte Carlo. While the poems it contained were not erotic, the volume's flyleaf, bearing Rebecca's signature, both enticed and repulsed the narrator. For the narrator, the allure of seeing Rebecca's personal items links to the earlier taboo. Whereas the narrator's more wary child self refused to sneak a glance at a dirty book, her curious adult self not only views the dirty lingerie, but touches it in accordance with Mrs Danvers' request: "Feel it, hold it [...] how soft and light it is, isn't it? I haven't washed it since she wore it for the last time" (1938: 160). Social visits undertaken by the narrator become fishing expeditions for ever more intimate details about the first Mrs de Winter: "I would glean little snatches of information to add to my secret store. A word dropped here at random, a question, a passing phrase. And, if Maxim was not with me, the hearing of them would be a furtive, rather painful pleasure, guilty knowledge learnt in the dark" (1938: 117). Any new information about Rebecca becomes for the narrator highly eroticized as revealed in her descriptions of "secret store," "painful pleasure," and "guilty knowledge learnt in the dark." As Maxim's sister Beatrice reveals to her inquisitive sister-in-law: "She had an amazing gift, Rebecca I mean, of being attractive to people; men, women, children, dogs" (1938: 177). Not surprisingly, the narrator becomes one of Rebecca's admirers, although her admiration is problematized by Rebecca's status as the first Mrs de Winter and must remain for the narrator as secret as her name. The Rebecca attached to such relics and conversational tidbits plays dominatrix to the narrator's submissive role. The "tall and sloping" R of her indelible signature foreshadows future manifestations of the overpowering Rebecca, who looms larger in death than in life. Maximilian de Winter's statuesque and sexually experienced first wife dwarfs his slight and inexperienced second wife.

What was once an imagined image of the other manifests physically when the narrator borrows a raincoat to wear on a walk with Maxim. Following an argument with her husband, the distressed narrator extracts a handkerchief from a pocket of the garment to discover embroidered upon it the monogram of a "tall sloping R, with the letters de W interlaced. The R dwarfed the other letters" (1938: 114). In short succession, the narrator engages with the soiled hanky visually, tactilely, and olfactorally. Of its shape, she remarks it was "rolled in a ball" by Rebecca's own hands. The imprint of a lipstick kiss endows the cloth with the significance of a religious shroud. Her own hands greasy with butter from a crumpet, the narrator admits: "I wiped my fingers with the handkerchief,

and as I did so I noticed that a dull scent clung about it still" (1938: 114). Kathleen Butterly Nigro proposes that the handkerchief's "perfume and characteristic monogram strengthen the psychic bond between the two women" (2000: 149). Undoubtedly, thoughts of the deceased Rebecca possess the narrator as she manipulates the object. Perhaps the second most important handkerchief in a literary work, after Othello's, the item establishes ownership of the ill-fitting mac and provides it with a spectral body: "She who had worn the coat then was tall, slim, broader than I about the shoulders, for I had found it big and over-long, and the sleeves had come down below my wrists" (du Maurier, 1938: 114). Physically and psychologically, the narrator is engulfed by Rebecca in the wearing of her garment. The narrator's conjectures about Rebecca's superior physical and social statures, previously based almost solely on the elongated R of her signature, are now confirmed. Appearing in books, on stationery, and on pocket hankies, Rebecca's towering Rs are omnipresent and omnipotent relics of the deceased. Once she is a resident of Manderley, the narrator becomes their seeker and not their destroyer. With its double potency to attract and to repel, Rebecca's signature letter enthralls the narrator. Snooping in Rebecca's bedroom under cover of darkness, the narrator beholds the consonant by moonlight. The romantic aura of the image she describes is palpable: "The gleam of light from the shutter still shone white and clear on the golden coverlet of the bed, picking out clearly and distinctly the tall sloping R of the monogram" (1938: 159). In a scene reminiscent of the narrator's earlier act of setting fire to paper to destroy a single menacing R, late in the novel flames will destroy the assemblage of Rs at Manderley and Manderley with them. But it is an enraged Mrs Danvers, and not an insecure unnamed narrator, who sets this final blaze. Yet even in the midst of this inferno, the letter R survives, albeit in the mind of the narrator. While Manderley burns in the distance, she dreams of handwriting superior to her own:

> I was writing letters in the morning-room. I was sending out invitations. I wrote them all myself with a thick black pen. But when I looked down to see what I had written it was not my small square hand-writing at all, it was long, and slanting, with curious pointed strokes. I pushed the cards away from the blotter and hid them. I got up and went to the looking glass. A face stared back at me that was not my own. It was very pale, very lovely, framed in a cloud of black hair. The eyes narrowed and smiled. The lips parted. The face in the glass stared back at me and laughed. (du Maurier, 1938: 355)

Concurrent with the purging of Rebecca's possessions from Manderley in the physical realm, the all-consuming idea of Rebecca takes possession of the narrator in the psychic realm. Tellingly, in the narrator's dream, Rebecca's initial manifestation is not as a beautiful face reflected in a mirror, but as a hand holding a pen, one capable of marking the curious slanted strokes essential for a distinctive cursive R. Such dream material suggests that the narrator's greatest envy may not be of the first Mrs de Winter's "breeding, brains, and beauty" (du Maurier, 1938: 256), but of her idiosyncratic and powerful penmanship, epitomized by Rebecca's indelible R.

With each of the unnamed narrator's successive encounters with the consonant R, Rebecca's ghostly self gradually takes shape, eventually revealing itself fully in the corporeal body of the narrator. Early in the novel, a singular initial discovered on a page in a book leaves the narrator few clues as to Rebecca's physical features; in her words, they are

"still uncertain" (1938: 44). Midway through the novel, the R stitched on a handkerchief found in the pocket of a mackintosh helps to reveal to the narrator the physical dimensions of her predecessor's body. As the novel nears its conclusion, the R that appears in the narrator's dreamt handwriting —seemingly conjured from the confluence of burning Rs at Manderley — indicates Rebecca's resurgence and her image is finally revealed to the narrator as the face in the looking glass. At this moment the narrator becomes, however briefly, the woman she envied, feared, and desired. That Rebecca's visage appears "in a cloud of black hair" (1938: 355) suggests the impermanence of this transformation. Like the dark smoke that issues from the burning Manderley, eventually the cloud will dissipate. The psychological haunting of the narrator intensifies as Rebecca moves from a two-dimensional letter on a page to a three-dimensional body inhabiting a raincoat to a four-dimensional spirit entering the living, albeit somnolent, body of the narrator. In this final state, Rebecca compels the narrator to write, in handwriting distinct from her own, perhaps this very confessional. That so abbreviated an object as the letter R conjures up both horrors and delights within the mind of the narrator suggests the consonant's powerful synecdochical forces. Initially representative of the first Mrs de Winter's power, glamour, and prestige — qualities the gauche second wife cannot replicate — eventually the R brands Rebecca's deceit, licentiousness, and cruelty. Clearly, when a mere consonant induces obsession so extreme that the haunted prefers to remain anonymous in the conveyance of her tale, a consummate haunting has been achieved.

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