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‘Places, houses whispered to me their secrets: Interior and Exterior settings in the works of
Daphne du Maurier’.

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Abstract

This dissertation examines the ways in which interior and exterior settings are portrayed by Daphne du Maurier in her three novels; *Rebecca*, *Jamaica Inn* and *Frenchman's Creek*. It also demonstrates the significance of settings in her writing. The introduction explains du Maurier's personal history and how she became enamoured with the Cornwall and the evocation of literary settings. The first chapter is concerned with du Maurier's representation of the natural world and her position as a regional writer. It engages with the implications of isolated settings on the autonomy of the characters within the narrative, and the presentation of female liberation in the natural world. Also, this chapter discusses Guy Debord's psychogeography theory, as in the inhabitants of a particular area being shaped by the environment around them and the symbolic personification of the landscape. The second chapter covers the interior world, relating to rooms, homes and related architecture. A principal concept in this chapter is that the private spaces of characters are used to foreshadow their hidden agenda, identity and sense of morality. A particular focus in this section is the usage of private rooms to subvert the expectations of a character's identity with the effect of humanising or villainising them. The second chapter also delves into gendered spaces within interior settings and employs Amanda J. Flather's mental maps theory, relating to subjugated female characters assessing the social cues of a patriarchal interior space to decipher the danger of transgressing the gender boundaries of particular rooms. The conclusion portrays how du Maurier employs both interior and exterior settings with the consonant purpose of firstly, shaping the identities and sense of freedom of the characters and secondly, in enacting a social commentary regarding unequal gendered autonomy.

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Introduction:

From the publication of *The Loving Spirit* in 1931 to the release of her final novel, *Rule Britannia* in 1972, Daphne du Maurier established herself as a writer of great skill, well versed in the genre of ‘gothic romance’¹ and is most remembered as a romantic novelist, a term she deplored. This prosaic remembrance of her work as firmly rooted in the realm of middle-brow romance is a flawed view that entirely misconstrues the highly intricate and profound depth of du Maurier as a regional writer. Thus, this dissertation shall argue her vindication as a regional writer and contending du Maurier’s settings to be the single most significant and defining feature of all her fiction.

The topic of settings in the work of Daphne du Maurier is a fascinating topic because it is often the core force that consolidates all other aspects of the narrative into a cohesive fusion. The settings of both interior (buildings, rooms) and exterior (landscape, sea) are the omnipresent, overarching presence that informs facets of the narrative, such as tone, mood and atmosphere. Her sense of place is especially notable as she intertwines setting and character, with the setting playing a vital role in shaping the identities and behaviours of the characters, and also the catalyst in portraying themes such as social mobility and gender inequality.

The view of du Maurier as a novelist intrinsically tied to Cornish regionality is not one that is innate for the writer, as she was not native to the West Country, being born and raised in the highly urban space of London: ‘Both Gerald and George du Maurier were metropolitan figures whose fame derived from the artistic life of the capital. Daphne’s decamping to Cornwall

¹ Llompart Auba Pons, “Patriarchal Hauntings: Re-Reading Villainy and Gender in Daphne Du Maurier’s ‘Rebecca’”, *Atlantis*, vol. 35, no. 1, 2013, (pp. 69–83). *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43486040>. [accessed 20 Jan. 2024]

may be seen as a positive embracing of [...] the regional rather than the metropolitan.² Du Maurier unlike her actor father and cartoonist grandfather, carried little inclination for the ostentation and bustle of city life. Instead, like the protagonist of *Frenchman's Creek*, she sought refuge in the solitude of rural Cornish life. Du Maurier's association with the region, despite not being from there is indicative of her great passion for Cornwall. As she suggests in her pictorial memoir, *Enchanted Cornwall* (1989), she was primarily attracted to Fowey and the Cornish region because it activated a sense of imagination and creativity to write her novels. This feeling of inspiration and attachment to being a Cornish regional writer is reflected in the rich settings of her fiction, in which a sense of place is the most meticulous and vividly designed feature of the narrative.

The link between Cornish isolation and literary imagination felt by du Maurier is a notion that is persistent throughout her life and works. This is demonstrated by Margaret Forster who states: 'Menabilly was always more than a house to Daphne du Maurier. It's chief attraction for her was its secrecy [...] Solitude not only made her happier but in some strange way excited her.'³ Her inability to write with the 'constant pressure to enjoy herself' (p. 45) in the London party scene was resolved in her relocation to the quiet holiday home of Ferryside in Fowey. It is evident that solitude and a connection to the natural world is a key component in the ability for du Maurier to write with a sense of imagination and freedom. This symbol of isolated settings

² Avril Horner, 'Cornish Gothic' in *Daphne du Maurier: Writing, Identity and Gothic Imagination* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1998) P. 65

³ Margaret Forster, 'The Golden Girl', in *Daphne du Maurier*, (London: Arrow Books, 2007), p. 58.

and an advancement of spiritual and mental invigoration shall be explored in the opening chapter, concerning *Jamaica Inn* and *Frenchman's Creek*.

A pivotal influence in du Maurier's setting-focussed style of writing is certainly the work of the Brontë siblings, this is conveyed by Martyn Shallcross: 'Historically and emotionally, Daphne has found great fascination in the Brontë family.'⁴ Du Maurier was an aficionado of the Brontës and likely held a further affection for them due to them having a maternal link to du Maurier's region through their 'Cornish mother, Maria Branwell.' (p. 21) She was undoubtedly inspired by their evocative sense of place, such as the woeful moorland of Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847), which bears relation to the sombre Penwith moors of *Jamaica Inn*. The regional fiction of the Brontës often portrays a deep connection with their native Yorkshire, their texts emphasise the culture, folklore and community dynamics as integral to the narrative. This is also apparent in the work of du Maurier, whose Cornish settings focus on the isolation of communities, local history and the wild culture of the region.

The first chapter shall analyse du Maurier's representations of isolated landscapes and their effects on the narrative. It shall highlight how the remote Cornish setting can be read as a source of tranquillity, in which one may find freedom in escaping the expectations of urban life. While an opposing reading of the decrepit landscape that is wild, foreign and dangerous, a place with no order or consequences, in which male criminality runs rife shall also be proposed. The second chapter will dissect the connection between interior settings and character construction. This will argue how the private spaces of characters are symbolic of their inherent traits, desires

⁴ Martyn Shallcross, 'Daphne du Maurier Country', (Ilkley: Bossiney Books, 1998), p. 21.

and identities. A core point of this chapter shall be gendered spaces and the representation of gender dynamics within the scope of the interior world.

Chapter One: Representations of Cornwall and Isolation:

Dame Daphne du Maurier is best remembered for her exciting and expeditious plots, brimming with melodrama and mystery. However, the core crux of her many great novels is the vivid and often psychologically charged portrayal of settings. These loci range from Ireland, Italy, and France, but du Maurier's beloved home of Cornwall is the single most significant and exhaustive muse in her crafting of atmosphere and sense of place.

Her brushstrokes in painting a picture of Cornwall are an often complex and elusive dichotomy. Throughout her oeuvre, Cornwall is consistently represented to be isolated, extensive, and inherently wild due to its detachment from the rest of England. In her more romantic writing, this portrayal of Cornwall emerges as a vacationist's sunny spot of serenity, quiet and tucked away from the suffocation of the modern, city space. On the other hand, in many of her gothic novels, the sparse Cornish landscape is a savage place of atavism, in which violence and destruction run rife in both indoor and outdoor spaces. This chapter shall argue that du Maurier uses the isolation of Cornwall to engage with themes such as female autonomy, male criminality and the gothic supernatural.

In *Frenchman's Creek* (1941), The remoteness of Cornwall is emphasised to transform it into a place of refuge, tranquillity, and liberation for Dona St Columb. In the austere city space,

Dona is inert; she is caged in by the ‘breathless vapid sky’⁵ and the ‘smell of exhaustion and decay’ (p. 10) that characterises the London gutters. The imagery created by Dona’s perception of the city is one of entrapment, as the sky is ‘breathless’ and the air full of ‘decay’, highlighting that Dona is rotting miserably in the prison-like interior city space.

This suffocating odour is contrasted with the natural Cornish scents at Navron: ‘Yes, there was apple blossom on the air, and the scent of gorse as well, and the tang of moss and peat from the moors away in the distance, and [...] a wet sea smell.’ (p. 14) Here, there is a variety of floral and fruit-infused scents, as opposed to the singular stifling smell of sweat in the city. Du Maurier represents a landscape that is rich, diverse, and untouched by the sweltering swarm of society. There is a juxtaposition between the city and the countryside that is demonstrative of Cornwall’s representation in the novel as a sweet sanctuary of repose for Dona. Jean Pasckhe states that ‘du Maurier deplored the increased tourism in Cornwall while being partly responsible for it.’⁶ Pasckhe’s article exposes a sense of irony in du Maurier’s evocation of Cornwall as a ‘sanctuary’ (p. 32) of peace and refuge from the alienating city space, as her writing is partly responsible for attracting crowds into the region and thus converting it into adopting the tumult and hectic nature of the city.

Du Maurier uses setting to illustrate gender norms and female autonomy. This is evident as London is portrayed as a place of suffocation, restriction and enforced femininity. It is here that Dona is required to play the part of an aristocratic wife, ‘a superficial, lovely creature’ (p. 9)

⁵ Daphne du Maurier, *Frenchman’s Creek* (London: Virago, 2003), p.12.

⁶ Jean Pasckhe, ‘The Cornwall of Daphne du Maurier’, *British Heritage*, 28 (2007), 20-26 (p. 25) <https://go.gale.com/ps/i.do?p=GPS.GRC&u=duruni&id=GALE|A213080452&v=2.1&it=r&sid=GPS.GRC&asid=15772207> [accessed 6 December 2023]

tortured to exist in a 'weary, dying world' (p. 10). Dona's frustration and desire for freedom resembles a 'dormant toothache [...] full of self-loathing and exasperation' (p. 9). This wish for freedom is satisfied in the secluded Cornish setting when she imagines how she would 'stand in the shallows bare-foot and let the water splash upon her, and smell the muddied river smell, pungent and sweet'. (p. 27) In Cornwall, Dona has the liberty to walk 'bare-foot', which suggests her rejection of the strict feminine conventions imposed on her in London. Similarly, the oxymoron of the mud being both 'pungent' and 'sweet' demonstrates Dona's unwavering acceptance and devotion to the wild and intense natural world.

Furthermore, the detachment of Cornwall from civilised England mirrors the detachment of Dona from seventeenth-century feminine conventions. In the city space, Dona expresses herself by wearing men's breeches and robbing on the highway, which leaves her with a 'wave of shame and degradation' (p. 19). This demonstrates that while under the restrictive grip of city society, Dona mentally punishes herself for breaking the feminine ideals expected of her. However, in the Cornish setting of disorder and piracy that brims with 'licence and lawlessness', (p. 72) Dona achieves her 'ridiculous longing to be a man' (p. 103) by becoming pirate Jean-Benoit Aubéry's 'cabin-boy'. (p. 109) In speaking of the pirate ship, Dona states 'I think she is bewitched, and is not a ship at all, for I feel as though I had never been alive before.' (p. 104) Dona's feeling that she had never lived truly before sailing onboard *La Mouette* suggests that she can shed her aristocratic exterior and embody her wild and masculine persona in the safety of the barren and sparse Cornish setting. This concept is further emphasised with 'the other Dona was dead too, and this woman who had taken her place was someone who lived with greater intensity, with greater depth'. (p. 98) Cornwall is used as a device to invigorate Dona with a feeling of freedom, masculinity, and new-found independence.

Du Maurier's daughter, Flavia, sheds light on her mother's interest in masculinity: 'I think she was rather torn about her sexuality. I mean this always wanting to be a boy, and her father wanting a boy. In *Growing Pains* she talks about the boy in a box – so I think she was frightfully muddled about her sexuality, sometimes.'⁷ Du Maurier's belief that a male alter-ego resides within her mirrors the highwayman guise employed by Dona. It is evident that du Maurier, like her character Dona, searched for a means of self-expression, identity and escape from femininity. She found this space in Cornwall, in her biography she stated '[h]ere was the freedom I desired... [...] to wander, freedom to climb hills, to pull a boat.'⁸ In both text and context, Cornwall is a solace for the exploration of masculinity, adventure and a new-found agency. This liberation in landscape evidences why Cornwall is presented as such a laissez-faire and idealistic 'lotus-land' (p. 40) in *Frenchman's Creek*.

Just as the uninhabited and secluded Cornish setting grants freedom to Dona St Columb in *Frenchman's Creek*, so also does it benefit Mary Yellan's sense of autonomy in *Jamaica Inn* (1936):

However grim and hateful was this new country, however barren and untilled, with Jamaica Inn standing alone upon the hill as a buffer to the four winds, there was a challenge in the air that spurred Mary Yellan to adventure. It stung her, bringing colour to her cheeks and a sparkle to her eyes; it played with her hair, blowing it about her face and as she breathed deep she drew it through her nostrils and into her lungs, more quenching and sweeter than a draught of cider.⁹

In the passage, du Maurier contrasts the bleak atmosphere of the moorland with Mary's energetic and adventurous spirit. The setting, despite appearing odious, provides Mary with 'colour to her cheeks and a sparkle to her eyes'. Thus, emphasising the role of the isolated Cornish setting as a

⁷ Helen Taylor, *The Daphne du Maurier Companion* (London: Virago, 2007), p. 6.

⁸ Daphne du Maurier, 'Origins and Approaches', in *Vanishing Cornwall*, (London: Virago, 2012), p. 6.

⁹ Daphne du Maurier, *Jamaica Inn*, (London: Virago, 2015), p. 32.

means of spiritual invigoration and personal freedom, similar to Dona finding a passion for adventure while sailing onboard *La Mouette*. Avril Horner comments ‘landscape is best understood metaphorically; it represents a desire for psychosexual freedom.’ (p. 77) Both spectrums of the Cornish moor and sea equate to a transgression of gender boundaries for the characters, who use the openness of the setting to initiate their freedom from the domesticity of the interior space.

Furthermore, du Maurier presents the natural world as a symbol of freedom for Mary, away from the subjugation of the interior of Jamaica Inn, ‘oppressive and heavy with malice’ (p. 97). The interior is a masculine-dominated space, where Mary is vulnerable and captive in her cramped bedroom. While the exterior world is vast and devoid of such domineering masculine figures, thus becoming a place of liberation for Mary. The imagery of the wind ‘quenched’ Mary’s lungs with crisp air evokes this sense of new-found autonomy and exhilaration, which again is relative to Dona’s escape from the interior space, and subsequent re-birth into the exterior world of liberty, action, and adventure. In both texts, the protagonists are entrapped within the interior spaces of buildings and cities, in which masculine figures dominate, and then find liberation in the vast and desolate Cornish landscape.

By day, the isolated Penwith moors grant a degree of autonomy to Mary. However, by nightfall, they depict the setting as wild, violent and dangerous. This construction of a violent, gothic setting is illustrated by Joss Merlyn in his account of the shipwreck:

I’ve seen men like that; stuck in the rigging like a swarm of flies. They cling there for safety, shouting in terror at the sight of the surf. Just like flies they are, spread out on the yards, little black dots of men. I’ve seen the ship break up beneath them and the masts and yards snap like thread, and there they’ll be flung into the sea, to swim for their lives. But when they reach the shore they’re dead men, Mary. (p. 131)

Du Maurier evokes a tone of sublime terror in the description of the shipwreck. The description of the men as a ‘swarm of flies’ and ‘little black dots’ highlights their helpless insignificance in comparison to the vast greatness of the hostile waters that rip through their boat. Edmund Burke states, ‘when we know the full extent of any danger, when we can accustom our eyes to it, a great deal of the apprehension vanishes.’¹⁰ The Cornish Sea is a boundless, black behemoth, whose full extent is a mystery to the men, and thus a great gothic terror. The waves are shown to be equipped with monstrous strength as the masts and yards ‘snap like thread’ and the small, obscure figures are ‘flung into the sea’. Here, du Maurier evokes a backdrop that is untamed and violent, a setting whose isolation leads to turmoil, destruction, and the dominance of the natural world over mankind.

The aggression of the sea surf in decimating the ship allows the scavenging company of Joss Merlyn to pillage the survivors, as seen with ‘when they reach the shore they’re dead men’. This is demonstrative of how isolation in the setting is portrayed to have a negative effect as it allows smugglers, wreckers, and pillagers to go undetected by the law and enjoy free rein over the savage, lawless land. Phillip Dodd explores du Maurier’s settings: ‘The sea in [du Maurier’s] work is a place of terror, murder and criminality; it is a place prior to the modern world of decency and order.’¹¹ Dodd emphasises that du Maurier utilises seclusion as a tool to evoke a sense of atavism and barbarism in her settings. This wild and murderous sea demonstrates that the landscape, which is liberating to women, is dangerous to men in the novel. Men exploit the

¹⁰ Edmund Burke, ‘Obscurity’, in *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Sublime and Beautiful*, (London: Routledge, 2008), p. 76.

¹¹ Phillip Dodd, ‘Gender and Cornwall: Charles Kinglsey to Daphne Du Maurier’ in *The regional novel in Britain and Ireland, 1800-1990*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 128.

natural world, and thus face the brunt and brutal wrath of the natural world via the wild sea and raging winds.

Furthermore, Dodd categorises du Maurier's settings of the sea, and subsequently, Cornwall as excluded from the 'world of decency and order'. This concept of isolated landscapes being represented as treacherous, strange and barbaric is evident in many aspects of the novel, such as the title *Jamaica Inn* itself. The inn is aptly named after the Caribbean country, which demonstrates a metaphorical distance from England and its values. The contemporary connotations surrounding Jamaica are highlighted by Jamaican archivist Clinton V. Black: 'Many Britons of the Regency era, especially around the coast, would still associate the colony of Jamaica with its past of "runaway bondsmen, castaways, escaped criminals"' and the buccaneers, operating mainly from their base at Port Royal'.¹² This reputation of criminality associated with Jamaica is employed by du Maurier in crafting her setting that carries the same sense of exoticism, danger, and unpredictability.

The sense of exoticism and isolation from English society is further exhibited in the description of the landscape: 'The moors were even wilder than she had at first supposed. Like an immense desert they rolled from east to west'. (p. 38) The comparison of the Bodmin moors suggests the foreign atmosphere in Cornwall, disconnected from decorum as the 'wild' tail of England. The othering of the setting is apparent in the surname 'Merlyn' (p. 16), as it resembles Merlin, the great wizard of Arthurian legend. This link to folklore carries connotations of magic, oriental mysticism, and otherness from the ordered and civilised English society. Thus, du

¹² Clinton V. Black, 'The Buccaneers', in *A History of Jamaica* (London: Collins Clear-Type Press, 1965) p. 58

Maurier creates a setting that is the antithesis of English decorum and societal norms to illustrate a gothic atmosphere of terror, alienation and criminality.

In addition, du Maurier places emphasis on the role of psychogeography in her construction of isolated settings. Guy Debord, who coined the concept, defines it as: ‘The study of the specific effects of the geographical environment, consciously organised or not, on the emotions and behaviour of individuals.’¹³ This concept is encapsulated in *Jamaica Inn* when du Maurier states:

No human being could live in a wasted country thought Mary, and remain like other people; the very children would be born twisted, like the blackened shrubs of broom, bent by the force of a wind that never ceased, blow as it would from east and west, from north and south. Their minds would be twisted too, their thoughts evil, dwelling as they must amidst marshland and granite, harsh heather and crumbling stone. (p. 13)

Du Maurier contrives a natural world whose grim and hateful characteristics are ingrained into the spirit and behaviour of the moor people. The image of the children, typically associated with innocence, are predicted to be ‘born twisted’ with ‘thoughts evil’, if exposed to the ‘harsh heather’ of the moorland. She likens the children to ‘blackened shrubs’, which suggests that like the foliage, they could have grown strong under the health and harmony of the sun, but instead are ‘bent’ into becoming weak, dark and degenerate by the relenting aggression of the moor and its wind.

The landscape moulding the people into corruption is further portrayed by Joss Merlyn, who in a conversation with Mary, declares that ‘if you’d been born under its [Kilmar] shadow you’d take to drink, same as I did.’ (p. 25) This demonstrates that the Kilmar tor, which is

¹³ Guy-Ernest Debord, ‘Introduction to a Critique of Urban Geography’, in *Les Lèvres Nues*, (Brussels: Les Lèvres Nues, 1955), p. 17-20.

referred to as ‘a devil’s hand’ (p. 25), has a significant role in shaping the behaviour of the people below it. There is a fatalistic tone in the speech of Merlyn which implies the lack of agency of the people, as they are predetermined to succumb to vice, under the tyrannical influence of the malignant tor and surrounding landscape. Therefore, it becomes apparent that the natural world is not simply a background, but as Debord suggests, a vital determining factor in the actions and behaviours of a character. She deliberately evokes a remote setting, far from the man-made influence of the city, in which the natural world is the dominant figure carrying control over the narrative through psychogeography.

The natural world has a liberating effect on the protagonists of *Frenchman’s Creek* and *Jamaica Inn*, as du Maurier portrays both Dona and Mary as trapped within the domestic interior spaces and later achieve spiritual and physical invigoration in the landscape. Whereas for Mrs. De Winter, the outside world acts as a malevolent embodiment of her husband’s deceased wife; the landscape is characterised as a villainous proxy whose goal is to terrify and torment the protagonist of *Rebecca* (1938). This is illustrated when the newlywed De Winters arrive in Cornwall after their honeymoon:

We were amongst the rhododendrons. [...] They startled me with their crimson faces, massed one upon the other in incredible profusion, showing no leaf, no twig, nothing but the slaughterous red, luscious and fantastic, unlike any rhododendron plant I had seen before. [...] And these were monsters, rearing to the sky, massed like a battalion, too beautiful I thought, too powerful; they were not plants at all.¹⁴

In characterising the flowers with the simile ‘like a battalion’ and with a ‘slaughterous red’ colour, du Maurier evokes a tone of violence and antagonism from the natural world. They are personified as characters who oppose the arrival of the protagonist and thus stand ‘rearing to the

¹⁴ Daphne du Maurier, *Rebecca*, (London: Virago, 2018) p. 72.

sky', as if ready to pounce. The flowers are 'not plants at all', and 'unlike any rhododendron'; they are an uncanny personification of the deceased Rebecca. They are shown to be steadfast in their loyalty to Rebecca, as they hide their gentle calmness when they display 'no leaf, no twig' but only show the wild and blood-like red of their petals, implying the anger, savagery and warfare which will be inflicted upon the new Mrs. De Winter, who is surrounded by the natural enemy in a sequestered and wild Cornwall.

Furthermore, this encroachment of Rebecca can be seen in the colossal size of the flowers as 'monsters' who stand tall in 'incredible profusion'. In describing their great and powerful nature, du Maurier highlights that the isolation of the setting is integral, as this sparsity allows the manifestation of Rebecca to spread throughout the natural world (without human interference) and thus evoke a feeling of claustrophobia and terror for the protagonist, like the giant waves that destroy the ship in *Jamaica Inn*. In his article, James M. Mellard states: 'landscapes serves as a metaphor of the human body – a [...] potential in the landscape to engulf the human'¹⁵ This encapsulates the idea that the grounds of Manderley are hauntologically¹⁶ tied to the deceased ex-wife, as her passion and boldness is personified in the bright crimson flower heads. Also, Mellard emphasises a landscape's ability to 'engulf the human' is portrayed in the new Mrs de Winter being mentally tortured by the unwelcoming exterior setting around her which seeks to destroy her.

¹⁵ James. M. Mellard, 'Reading Landscape in Literature', *The Centennial Review*, 40.1 (1996), 474-5 (p. 474) <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23740691> [accessed 16 December 2023]

¹⁶ Jacques Derrida, 'Apparition of the Inapparent: The phenomenological conjuring trick', in *Spectres of Marx*, ed. Bernd Mengers (New York: Routledge, 1994) p. 158.

In the three novels covered, it is apparent how important the theme of isolation was to du Maurier's construction of setting and sense of place. In *Frenchman's Creek*, and aspects of *Jamaica Inn*, Cornwall represents a fulfilment of freedom and desire. However, in *Rebecca*, the remoteness from society symbolises entrapment and insecurity for the protagonist. Du Maurier chooses not to pigeonhole Cornwall into a singular depiction, it is instead consistently seen to be a complex tapestry oscillating from a tranquil haven of liberty to a dangerous warzone of inhumanity. This dichotomy and its effects of character autonomy is precisely what makes her Cornish writing so vivid, mysterious, and fascinating to analyse.

Chapter Two: Representations of Interior Spaces and Gender:

Throughout the oeuvre of Daphne du Maurier, one of the most vital areas explored is the significance and symbolism of interior settings. In her 1977 biography, she declared: 'There is a plant, the mandrake, which bleeds and shrieks when it is pulled up, and that is how I felt on leaving Menabilly.'¹⁷ Du Maurier was devoted to her Cornish estate and dreaded the day she must leave her beloved Menabilly. Her home being one of the great loves of her life underpins the importance of interior settings in her novels. Thus, this chapter shall argue that du Maurier's attachment to homes and interior spaces are greatly significant in the development of themes such as gender autonomy, power dynamics and personal identity in her fiction.

¹⁷ Daphne du Maurier, 'Menabilly when we were living there, 1943-1967', in *Growing Pains: The Shaping of a Writer*, (London: Victor Gollancz, 1977), p. 160

The setting of a private room such as a bedroom or an office is used by du Maurier to symbolise the identity and foreshadow the desires of the characters who inhabit the space. This concept is demonstrated in the description of Jean-Benoit Aubéry's ship in *Frenchman's Creek*:

The cabin was not the dark hole she had imagined, full of empty bottles and cutlasses, but a room – like a room in a house – with chairs, and a polished table, and little paintings of birds upon the bulkheads. There was something restful about it, restful yet austere, the room of someone who was sufficient to himself. (p. 45)

Du Maurier subverts Dona's preconceived notions of what a pirate ship should look like. She initially imagines a dire atmosphere; a place filled with 'empty bottles', signifying debauchery and 'cutlasses' carrying a sense of piracy and violence. This preconception is subverted as the cabin is likened to 'a room in a house', it is therefore a place of order, domesticity and cleanliness. The cabin being the antithesis of Dona's negative expectations is used as a device to illustrate that Aubéry also subverts the presumption of savage violence assumed of him. She expects Aubéry to embody the 'stained and evil' (p. 44) stereotype of a pirate, but he is instead shown to be meticulous and level-headed in planning his piracy and this is reflected in the 'polished' and 'austere' cabin space. The interior setting is a tool used by du Maurier to reveal that Aubéry and his crewmates are not the villains they are supposed assumed to be.

Dominique Bauer states: 'The wide variety of interior spaces elicited in literature [...] reveal a common defining feature: these interiors can all be analysed as codes of a paradoxical, both assertive and fragile, subjectivity in its own unique time and history.'¹⁸ She suggests the imagery of private interior spaces, such as train compartments or bedrooms, reflect the identities and personal histories of the characters who inhabit them. This can be attributed to Aubéry, as

¹⁸ Dominique Bauer and Michael J. Kelly, *The Imagery of Interior Spaces*, Punctum Books, 2019, p. 26, *JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv19cwdj8>. [accessed 20 December 2023]

the private space reveals his heroic nature and identity of civility and order. She also suggests there is a conflict of the 'assertive and fragile', this is evident in du Maurier's evocation of the cabin. On the surface, the pirate ship is viewed as an authoritative and powerful space by Dona, but it becomes a place of vulnerability when she discovers the pirate's cabin, which demonstrates the hidden good-naturedness and sensitivity of the Pirate.

The use of interior spaces to indicate a sense of identity and personal desire in *Frenchman's Creek* is also seen through Francis Davey's home in *Jamaica Inn*:

It was like a house in an old tale, discovered by the hero one evening in midsummer; there should be a barrier of thorns around it through which he must cut his way with a knife, and then a galaxy of flowers growing in profusion, with monstrous blooms untended by human hand. In the tale there would be strands of ivy clustering the walls, barring the entrance, and the house itself would have slept for a thousand years. (p. 97)

In describing the Vicar's home, du Maurier elicits botanical imagery of the natural world encroaching upon man-made architecture. This fairytale-like imagery is used to symbolise Davey's hidden desires of escaping modern society and returning to the 'old magic' (p. 281) of pagan Cornwall. There is a 'barrier of thorns' guarding Davey's house, and this implies his violent rejection of the world around him. Similarly, the imagery of ivy shrouding the home's entrance represents a natural, pagan influence swamping the mind of the Vicar, altering him to resent the man-made and modern thinking of the nineteenth century. Du Maurier expertly uses a simple description of a building to demonstrate the complex mental state of Francis Davey.

Furthermore, du Maurier uses the space of the vicarial office to indicate Davey's veiled identity of villainy and inhumanity. This is suggested when Mary Yellan, 'accepted without question the walls bare [...] the polished desk empty of papers and books that in her mind were associated with the living room of a rectory.' (p. 98) In public spaces, such as at church, Davey

can put on the facade of Christianity, however du Maurier uses the vulnerability of his private space to exploit his true feelings of apathy towards Christian faith and goodwill. With ‘walls bare’ and ‘desk empty’, his office is a void and emotionless setting, which is reflective of his ‘alien’ (p. 260) and ‘disturbing’ (p. 129) hidden identity.

In addition, Mary expects the Vicar’s walls to feature ‘the usual biblical themes’ (p. 98) and is surprised when they are in fact bare of religious imagery. His private quarters, thus subvert her idea of how a Vicar’s interior space should look. A Vicar is expected to be empathetic and pious, however Davey’s empty room illuminates his lack of humanity and establishes him as the novel’s villain. This bears relation to Aubéry of *Frenchman’s Creek*, who is stereotyped as a ‘filthy [...] and evil’ (p. 44) pirate but through the domestic imagery of his cabin, he is shown to be practical, strategic and a heroic figure who ‘gives away much of what he takes’ (p.57) to the poor people in Brittany. In both the Vicar and the Pirate, du Maurier utilises private rooms to subvert the societal expectations of the characters’ identities based on their professions. This demonstrates the importance of interior settings in du Maurier’s work, as they provide vital information about the status and agenda of the characters without explicitly stating them.

The portrayal of a character's identity through their private space, which is visible in the mentioned novels, is also consequential in the differing bedrooms of Mr de Winter’s wives in *Rebecca*. The new wife dwells in ‘a little ante-room’ (p. 79), which is too small to accommodate her wardrobe, as Mrs Danvers states: ‘[w]e could not get it through these narrow doorways.’ (p. 83) A wardrobe represents an individual's sense of identity, and Mrs de Winter not having one is suggestive of her lack of personal identity. She is shown to be a blank slate of a character through the plainness of her furniture, which consists of a simple ‘sofa, chairs, and writing desk.’ (p. 79) The basic furnishings of her room symbolise her immaturity, as she has yet to grow into

forming opinions and a stylistic point of view. This is contrasted by the elaborate ‘tapestry chairs’ (p. 83) and ‘carved mantelpiece’ (p. 83) of Rebecca’s bedroom. Despite Rebecca not being a living character in the novel, Du Maurier conjures an image of such meticulous design and grandeur to illustrate her complex and beguiling personality. The room of the nameless protagonist was ‘done up’ (p. 80) by her husband, demonstrating that he moulds her sense of identity. While Rebecca’s autonomy and attention to detail is reflected in the ornate decoration of her bedroom.

The contrast of the wives through their interior spaces is dissected further in their window placements. The view below from Mrs de Winter’s bedroom is ‘the rose-garden’ (p. 79), while Rebecca’s window ‘looks down [...] to the sea.’ (p. 83). A garden while being outdoors, is a domestic space as it is attached to a building. This implies that Mrs de Winter’s sense of identity and autonomy only goes as far as the home, whereas the sea is boundless and represents Rebecca’s wild and independent spirit, which extends far out of the home. Du Maurier suggests Mrs de Winter like a rose, as she is demure, fragile and conventionally pretty, she ‘fits the description of an Angel in the House’¹⁹, as she is easily malleable to the subdued gender roles expected of her. Conversely, du Maurier faces Rebecca’s room to the sea, signifying her sense of power, danger and sexual liberation.

In her introduction to *Rebecca*, Sally Beauman declared: ‘Rebecca is the story of two women, one man and a house. Of the four, as Hitchcock once observed, Manderley is the dominant presence.’²⁰ This notion of a house being the most significant aspect of the novel is

¹⁹ Steve Mark Cowen, ‘To be an Angel or not to be’, in *Domesticity, Identity and Mental Illness in Jane Eyre and Rebecca from a Feminist Perspective*, (Umea: Umea University Press, 2017) p. 12

²⁰ Sally Beauman, ‘Introduction’, in *Rebecca* (London: Virago, 2003), p. 5.

expressed throughout her many novels, none more so than *Rebecca*, in which Manderley is the core symbol. The purpose of this section is to examine the significance of interior spaces within the context of gender dynamics, power and class.

In her construction of Manderley, Du Maurier creates an intrinsically masculine space. The house is the longstanding seat of the patriarchal de Winter legacy and is thus portrayed as aloof, austere and antiquarian:

The great stone hall, the wide doors open to the library, the Peter Lelys and the Vandykes on the walls, the exquisite staircase leading to the minstrels' gallery. [...] How vast the great hall looked now that it was empty. My feet rang on the flagged stones, echoing to the ceiling, and I felt guilty at the sound, as one does in church, self-conscious, aware of the same constraint. (p. 74-78).

Du Maurier evokes a sense of expansiveness with the 'great stone wall' and 'wide doors' of the library. This sheer size of the rooms are used to overwhelm the protagonist, who is made to feel inadequate, like a low-class intruder or a 'guilty' criminal, violating upon the great wealth and heritage of the De Winter lineage. In evoking a locus of such stature, Du Maurier emphasises the class dynamics of the lower-class protagonist being engulfed by the grandeur of the home she is thrust into. This use of class and gender dynamics is also depicted in 'the Peter Lelys and the Vandykes'. Here, du Maurier references two artists who painted seventeenth century Stuart Kings and members of the aristocracy. The purpose of this Baroque imagery is to convey connotations of wealth, tradition, and privilege that is exuded within the interior space, therefore ostracising the protagonist for deviating from this precedent.

The interior of Manderley is embellished with medieval imagery such as 'the minstrels' gallery', which refers to medieval musicians known for reciting poetry of masculine heroism in battle and glory. Du Maurier uses the minstrel's gallery to elicit the gendered atmosphere of the

house; it is a well-established domain of masculine history and heroism, and therefore Mrs de Winter is excluded and feels 'self-conscious' due to her sex.

Manderley is likened to a 'church', which signifies both the medieval history and the domineering masculine presence of the house, as a church is often a male-dominated setting, which figures such as priests, vicars and other clergymen. The lack of female authority within the church is used by Du Maurier to symbolise the lack of agency felt by Mrs de Winter. Also, a church carries connotations of formality and a sense of superiority, which is mirrored in Mrs. de Winter's impression of being an outsider in Manderley because of her inferior gender and lower class.

Furthermore, the inclusion of 'my feet rang on the flagged stones' implies how little she fits into the room; her feminine presence is incongruous in the masculine setting. While a space steeped in history like a church or a country estate, is often quiet and pensive, it becomes animated and loud at the unwelcome arrival of a stranger. Mrs de Winter represents the feminine, poor and modern trespassing upon the masculine, wealthy and archaic. Du Maurier evokes this wealthy masculine space filled with a legacy of royal portraits and buoyant minstrels raving from the gallery to alienate the protagonist as inherently un-worthy due to her gender and class, and thus 'guilty' of inhabiting the de Winter family home.

The sense of culpability felt by Mrs de Winter in being a woman intruding upon a masculine space is mirrored in Dona's presence on La Mouette in *Frenchman's Creek*: 'She felt an intruder, a silly woman amongst a lot of men who had work to do, and without a word she went and stood at a distance, against a rail, where she could not bother him.' (p. 101). Dona is shown to feel like an outsider; she has no established role or sense of purpose on the all-male ship. Like Mrs de Winter, Dona is 'an intruder' and carries a sense of guilt for occupying a

gendered space that is otherwise restricted from her. This tone of feminine inferiority is portrayed in Dona labelling herself ‘a silly woman’, thus emphasising her inhibited sense of unworthiness in participating within the hyper-masculine setting.

William, a comrade of Aubéry, concurs the notion that the ship is a masculine-exclusive space when he states: ‘Women are apt to obey the laws of nature and produce babies [...] and women who produce babies have a liking for their own fireside.’ (p. 57) He confirms to Dona the existence of gendered spaces. He declares the fireside to be the place of the woman, there she may find fulfilment in domesticity. The setting assigned to the woman is something inert, there is no sense of freedom or autonomy, it is thus a place to ‘obey’. Whereas the setting of a man is where he ‘escapes from the world.’ (p. 57) The masculine space of the ship, is one of the rare interior spaces that physically travels from place to place and thus provides agency to those within. In both novels, Du Maurier exhibits two female characters who transgress the boundaries of gendered environments and are struck with a feeling of inadequacy. In her presentation of male-dominated rooms, Du Maurier highlights the issues of gender roles and societal limitations imposed on women in both the seventeenth and nineteenth century contexts.

Just as the great hall in *Rebecca* or La Mouette in *Frenchman’s Creek* are gendered settings, the bar of Jem Merlyn in *Jamaica Inn* is likewise presented as a male-dominated space, in which the safety of the female outsider (Mary and Patience) is invariably precarious:

The air was so thick with smoke and breath that it was hard to see across the room, [...] the faces of the men loomed shapeless and distorted, all hair and teeth, their mouths much too large for their bodies, while those who had drunk their fill and could take no more lay on the benches or the floor like dead men, their faces in their hands. (p. 44)

In crafting the bar setting, Du Maurier evokes an atmosphere of danger, disorientation and monstrosity. The men are shrouded behind smoky air, which obstructs Mary from viewing and

being a part of the scene. This illustrates how the bar is a masculine-exclusive space, as the activities of intoxication and merriment are hidden behind smoke, thus excluding Mary as blind to viewing the action. The dangerous nature of the space is represented in the inhuman descriptions of the men, who are 'shapeless and distorted', thus removing them from humanity and transforming them into uncanny figures. Du Maurier places emphasises on 'hair and teeth' and 'mouths much too large for their bodies,' which presents the drunken men as grotesque, inhuman monsters. This brutish inhospitality in setting construction is used to alienate Mary as a rejected stranger and to accentuate the danger she faces within the hyper-masculine space.

Du Maurier's evocation of a male-exclusive space that poses a danger to female characters is further explored in the meek disposition of Aunt Patience: 'Mary was aware of her shadow behind the door at times, and a footstep in the passage, and once she caught sight of her frightened eyes peering through the crack in the door.' (p. 44) Du Maurier establishes gender boundaries within interior spaces as Patience skulks between liminal spaces, such as 'behind the door' and 'in the passage'. She is not admitted into the established male-dominated rooms and is thus a wandering 'shadow' who loiters without purpose or agency. She uses the liminal space of the passageway to imply Patience's lack of autonomy and power, as she is relegated to occupying a marginal role on the fringe of the interior space.

Furthermore, there is a tone of fear evoked in the description of Patience, who hides with 'frightened eyes' from the drunken men of the inn. Like Mary, the bar is hostile towards Patience, and there is an implication in her dread that if she were to emerge from the shadows and enter the bar, she would cross the gender boundaries of the rooms and face mortal danger. This notion of violence against women who transgress gender-restricted settings is alluded to

when Joss tells Mary that if he had not exerted his authority in containing the men, they would have assaulted her, and he states: ‘there wouldn’t be much left of you now!’ (p. 45)

Amanda J. Flather underscores the significance of power dynamics in shaping the contextual norms of interior settings:

Individual sense of space, and behaviour within it, is influenced by a host of cultural clues that enable people to create “mental maps” to help them use spaces and to let them know when spaces might be difficult or dangerous to enter. These different perceptions and experiences are determined in large measure by the different degrees of power wielded by individuals or groups over how the space is accessed, used and given social and cultural meanings.²¹

Joss Merlyn is the overarching figure of power in *Jamaica Inn*, his authority influences how the inn and bar spaces are shaped into their purpose of hyper-masculine, rowdy and violent spaces.

The female characters (Mary and Patience) are powerless in inhabiting and deciding the social meanings of the interior space, and therefore are marginalised into gender boundaries, as seen with Patience being entrapped within the bedroom with ‘a blanket drawn over her head.’ (p. 45).

Both female characters must use social and cultural cues, such as Patience peering through the bar door, as a guide to assess any danger they may face inside.

This unequal distribution of interior space is emphasised by Moreira and Hugo, who state: ‘Homes were designed and conceived having masculine spaces for socializing and allocating the noblest rooms to male gender activities.’²² There is an established hierarchy of rooms in *Jamaica*

²¹ Amanda J. Flather, Space, Place, and Gender: The Sexual and Spatial Division of Labour in The Early Modern Household. *History and Theory*, 52(3) (2013), 340-354, (p. 346). <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24542990> [accessed 12 December 2023]

²² Moreira, Ana and Farias, Hugo, ‘Gendered Spaces at Home Feminine and Masculine Traits in Domestic Interiors’, *International Journal of Social Science Studies*. 10 (2022), 91-96 (p. 95) <https://ideas.repec.org/a/rfa/journal/v10y2022i6p91104.html> [accessed 29 December 2023]

Inn, with the bar being the summit of masculine domination. It is the only public space in the house wherein Joss can arrange his means of gaining power and wealth through smuggling and wrecking. This opportunity for autonomy is not granted to Mary and Patience, who are instead shunned to the inferior spaces of their bedrooms. These private spaces restrict their access to socialisation, personal income or even an awareness of the events of the bar.

Similarly, Mrs de Winter of *Rebecca* is situated within an interior space moulded by the powerful de Winter family to exert their social class, wealth and pedigree. Like cowering Patience hiding behind the door, Mrs de Winter treads meekly in the hall because she is aware of her lack of power in the room and the potential peril if she mis-reads the social and cultural norms of the house. The 'mental maps' theory of Flather further emphasises Du Maurier's impressive construction of the interior world. In the texts, she masterfully evokes an atmosphere of ultra-masculine rooms which are alienating and thus ostracise female characters as inferior and unworthy of occupying the spaces. Her interior settings are devices to accentuate the issues of unequal gender and class dynamics.

Conclusion:

A key finding of the dissertation is the link between setting and character construction. Du Maurier's powerful sense of place is the defining feature of her fiction, as she weaves a fictional world in which setting and character identity are intrinsically entwined. Interior spaces are utilised to reflect the hidden desires of the characters, who must conceal their true natures in

public spaces. For *The Pirate of Frenchman's Creek*, his neatly decorated cabin humanises him, while The Vicar's plain office hints at his lack of humanity and aversion to Christian society. While in the exterior world, Du Maurier evokes theories such as psychogeography and personification to illuminate the characteristics, traits and personal desires of the characters. The bleak and desolate moorland of *Jamaica Inn* mirrors the degenerate, violent and debauched spirit of the inhabitants and thus is a tool in suggesting the moral decay of the characters in the novel, such as Jem Merlyn. While in *Rebecca*, the natural world acts as an apostle working in favour of the deceased wife. The aggressive imagery of the landscape reflects the wish for vengeance exerted by Rebecca, who relies on the setting to interpret her desires. It is apparent in the three texts that du Maurier does not simply use her environments as mere backdrops of inconsequential value, but instead, they occupy a vital role in the depth of character creation. The settings, both interior and exterior, inform the behaviour, identity and aspirations of the characters who occupy them, and thus play an integral role in the evocation of the narrative.

A significant discovery in this dissertation is the relationship between setting and gender dynamics. Du Maurier uses both the interior and exterior world to delve into a social commentary of female agency and androcentric gendered spaces. Throughout the three novels, there is a consistent tone of female restriction within male-dominated interior spaces, this is demonstrated with Mary facing entrapment and persecution from her uncle in *Jamaica Inn*, Mrs de Winter being controlled within the confines of her husband's Manderley estate and Dona St Columb being contorted into Stuart age domesticity in her London townhouse. Thus, the home becomes a symbol of limitation imposed on women who are deprived of their agency and personal independence. Despite du Maurier's devotion to her own home of Menabilly, her fiction elicits an interior world which introduces female limitations and a reinforcement of patriarchal

domination over subjugated women, who must flee from the home to achieve any sense of personal power and autonomy, as seen with Mary seeking asylum in Altarnun and Dona vacating London in favour countryside freedom.

Conversely, the exterior world is presented as the antithesis of the interior because it represents emerging liberation and self-discovery for the female protagonists. The natural world in both *Jamaica Inn* and *Frenchman's Creek* are deliberately characterised as vast and desolate to act as the foil to the constricting gender boundaries of the interior. Both Mary and Dona seek a temporary escape from their oppressive home and find a sense of salvation and mental invigoration in the open spaces of the Moorland and Cornish coast respectively.

Within the realm of academia, there has been a deficient amount of research into the role of Daphne du Maurier as a master of setting construction and regionalism, as opposed to the consensus of her literary legacy as a cursory romance writer. The symbolism of place is the single most fundamental aspect of a du Maurier text and those who delve deeper into her interior and exterior world-building shall reap the fruits of imagination, as her settings are branches that reveal the ever-expanding roots of personal identity, criminality, class, gender dynamics and spiritual liberation.

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