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## Spaces, boundaries and mirages in Daphne du Maurier's short stories

Noémie Gautier

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**MEMOIRE DE MASTER 2 – ÉTUDES ANGLOPHONES**  
Domaine Arts, Lettres et Langues – Mentions langues et cultures étrangères

**SPACES, BOUNDARIES AND MIRAGES**  
**IN DAPHNE DU MAURIER'S SHORT STORIES**



Présenté et soutenu par Noémie Gautier

Sous la direction de Laurent Mellet, Professeur des  
Universités.

Cover illustration: Noémie Gautier, watercolour.

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1 Daphne du Maurier, “Adieu Sagesse”, in *The Rendezvous and other stories*, London, Virago, 2005, 74.

2 Daphne du Maurier, “Not After Midnight”, in *Don't Look Now*, London, Penguin, 2016, 59.

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## Editorial Note

All the short stories used are quoted from the following editions:

DU MAURIER, Daphne, *The Birds and Other Stories* (1952), London, Virago, 2012.

DU MAURIER, Daphne, *The Breaking Point. Short Stories* (1959), London, Virago, 2010.

DU MAURIER, Daphne, *The Rendezvous and Other Stories* (1980), London, Virago, 2005.

DU MAURIER, Daphne, *Don't Look Now and Other Stories* (1971), London, Penguin, 2016.

DU MAURIER, Daphne, *The Doll. Short Stories*, London, Virago, 2011.



## INTRODUCTION

*“One reason I remain loyal to this strange writer and unlikable woman is the injustice of her label as a writer of escapist women's romance”<sup>3</sup>*

Why read Daphne du Maurier in the twenty-first century? What can be found in studying her short stories? This “romantic” and a little old-fashioned English writer seems to have left to posterity only her novel *Rebecca* and her novella *The Birds*, largely thanks to Alfred Hitchcock's film adaptations. Her short stories are even more forgotten. However, republishing in English by London Virago and new editions translated into French of her novels and short stories indicate that there is a renewed interest in this long-neglected author. The entertaining aspect of her stories is still put forward, and some see Daphne du Maurier as a minor version of Agatha Christie, in a more psychological style. But critics such as Nina Auerbach and Helen Taylor actively work in rehabilitating the author's literary production, going as far as to claim that “she's a complex, powerful, unique writer, so unorthodox that no critical tradition, from formalism to feminism, can digest her.”<sup>4</sup>

The publishing – and more specifically, re-publishing – of her works by London Virago in the last fifteen years, is significant of new trends in literary criticism. Daphne du Maurier's original publisher was Victor Gollancz, from 1936, with the publication of *Jamaica Inn*, to his death in 1967. Thereafter, Daphne remained faithful to Gollancz edition, until the publication of her last book, *Classics from the Macabre* (1987), which is a collection of stories that had already been published in other collections. In the United States, her collections of short stories were published by Doubleday, often choosing a different title from the English edition. Daphne du Maurier's relations with her English publisher, Victor Gollancz, were good, and she remained loyal to him because he was the first to trust in her work and he took risks by publishing her works at a large scale, even during the war. But Victor Gollancz was also fussy at times, and sometimes required from Daphne to adapt her stories to make them more acceptable to the audience. For example, in Daphne du Maurier's first version of “Monte Verità”, Anna, the main character, turned into a boy when she joined the sect of women on a mountain called Monte Verità. But Gollancz didn't like this and asked her to change this element. So in the published version, Anna finally becomes a leper. Although the alteration was a significant one, Daphne du Maurier assented to it because it preserved her key idea of metamorphosis. In her collection *The Rendezvous and Other Stories* published in

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<sup>3</sup> Nina Auerbach, *Daphne du Maurier: Haunted Heiress*, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002, 2.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

1981, Daphne added three stories that Victor Gollancz had always refused to publish: “No Motive”, “Split Second”, and “The Rendezvous”. She was only able to do so because Victor Gollancz was dead at that time, and her daughter was then at the head of the publishing house. All in all, Daphne du Maurier had five collections of short stories published by Gollancz when she was alive: *The Apple Tree* (1952), *The Breaking Point* (1959), *Not After Midnight* (1971), *The Rendezvous and Other Stories* (1981) and *Classics from the Macabre* (1987). After these original publications, the stories were more or less forgotten, and it was only in the 2000s that they were reprinted by Virago, making them accessible again for the public. This recent re-publishing shows that there is a renewed interest for Daphne du Maurier's work, beyond *Rebecca*. Three of her main collections were thus republished: *The Birds* (originally *The Apple Tree*) in 2004, *The Rendezvous and Other Stories* in 2005 and *The Breaking Point* in 2009. A new collection, *The Doll: Short Stories* (2011), was also created from long lost short stories, mainly written when Daphne was very young, before her first novel, *The Loving Spirit* (1931). So there has been a real effort of conservation and renewal of this literary heritage. However, Virago Press has been meant to be a publishing house focusing on women writers, and more specifically on feminist issues since it was founded, in 1973. The very name of the publishing house, “Virago”, means a masculine domineering woman. Therefore, one may argue that this limits du Maurier's work to the sole exposure of patriarchal society and encourages a restrictive feminist reading of the writer's literary achievements. The hectic history of the publishing of Daphne du Maurier's short stories is already quite significant of their complexity: disturbing, unschooled, these stories confuse both reader and publishers, and they are still a puzzle for literary critics.

## APPROACHES, CRITICS & CRITICISM

Since the 1990s, two new key elements for reading have appeared – the so-called feminist dimension of her writings and the problem of space and atmosphere. The first aspect often seeks to abstract and extract Daphne du Maurier's characters to present them as gendered prototypes whose sole mission would be to expose or encourage one attitude or another, to accuse or exculpate one or another type of character. This sort of analysis does not take du Maurier's texts as complete wholes, but it satisfies itself with turning her writings into witnesses, into shreds of evidence of an

underlying feminist drive in the twentieth century. This sociological vision of texts necessarily puts in the background the essentially literary dimension of her works. This leads me to the second aspect in which Daphne du Maurier's contemporary critics are interested, which is space. Space is never a setting for Daphne du Maurier, it is always active and its characterisation is not unequivocal. Sometimes a shelter, sometimes a threat, space systematically escapes the characters' and the narrator's control, and it seems to defy the most logical reasoning. This arouses the question of ambiguity which is at the core of all her short stories. The tone is set by space, which even "resists mapping"<sup>5</sup> and therefore blurs its own boundaries, and creates mirages, as if to purposely mislead characters and readers. By this very dynamic, literary critics have seen, in Daphne du Maurier's work, a renewal and a rewriting of Gothic space. This interpretation provides a large field of interpretation for her short stories, that shall be used and maybe exceeded in this study.

- Daphne du Maurier's popular writing

During her life, Daphne du Maurier received a world-wide success, especially with her novel *Rebecca*, published in 1938, which is probably the reason why she was so rejected by the literary establishment. Popularity is always suspicious in the eyes of literary critics, and their underlying postulate is this: if anyone can read and enjoy a book, it is because it probably fills the low expectations of the madding crowd, and shall, therefore, be excluded of the shrine of literature. Literature, if one cares to follow this logic, should be essentially inaccessible, obscure, esoteric. Literary meaning should be indecipherable, and yet at the core of literary analysis. Most of all, reading literature should almost be an unpleasant experience, a painful enterprise. This notwithstanding, Daphne du Maurier's writings do not fit into these criteria. Her style is astonishingly clear and visual, and even critics who treat harshly her whole work recognise that "du Maurier is a master storyteller"<sup>6</sup>. Richard Kelly, an American professor and literary critic, is the only one who dedicated a whole essay to Daphne du Maurier's work when she was alive, soberly entitled *Daphne du Maurier* (1987). Nonetheless, it was merely to demonstrate why "the literary establishment clearly wants nothing to do with Daphne du Maurier"<sup>7</sup>. Interestingly, Richard Kelly is also one of the few critics to take a real interest in her short stories. This interest shall, however, be qualified, since it mainly consists of electing a few tales to better find fault in them. The main

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5 Gina Wisker, "Don't Look Now! The compulsions and revelations of Daphne du Maurier's horror writing", *Journal of Gender Studies* 8:1, 1999, 11.

6 Richard Kelly, *Daphne du Maurier*, Boston, Twayne, 1987, 142.

7 *Ibid.*, 142.

accusation that the writer has to endure is her lack of literary originality and risk-taking. Richard Kelly does not spare her pride when he writes that “in most of her short fiction du Maurier is primarily interested in conclusions and in the events that lead to those conclusions. Character, atmosphere, language, social commentary – all are of secondary interest to her as she plunges her undefined characters into a sequence of events that inextricably lead them to a predestined, usually surprising, fate. Her stories present life in neat, tidy little packages. Her characters are manipulated by their contrived future, their every gesture and word leading to a preconceived conclusion.”<sup>8</sup> In other words, Daphne du Maurier is mainly interested in commonplace plots, and even characters are outrageously used for this sole purpose. So follows the tragic consequence: “characteristically, du Maurier does not develop her characters to the point where we can have any strong feelings of empathy for them”<sup>9</sup>, so instead “we watch with curiosity what *happens* to them”<sup>10</sup>. The second accusation concerns her prose, which, “while straightforward and clear, is not especially interesting. There is little imagery, symbolism, or ambiguity in her writing”<sup>11</sup>. To make matters worse, Daphne du Maurier's works purposely address an undemanding readership, which is defined as the type of “sexually frustrated young woman”<sup>12</sup>. Shrewdly, and knowing “how to manipulate female fantasies”<sup>13</sup>, Daphne du Maurier “creates a world that is simple, romantic, usually unambiguous, adventuresome, mysterious, dangerous, erotic, picturesque, and satisfying, [...] a world that does not require the reader to suffer the pains of introspection and analysis”<sup>14</sup>. If anyone ever contributed to construe Daphne du Maurier as a writer of easy-reading sappy stories, Richard Kelly certainly did. And he was surely helped in his task by Paul Ableman, an English writer and fiction reviewer for the *Spectator*, who wrote about *The Rendezvous and Other Stories* that “the characters are wooden and unconvincing; the plots creak and depend upon outrageous coincidence; the prose is sloppy and chaotic, [...] and the whole volume hardly contains a shapely sentence”<sup>15</sup>. And then the *coup de grâce*, when Paul Ableman notes the absence of “exact observation, authority over language, convincing motivation, significant plot or, to be brief, any evidence whatsoever of true literary ability”<sup>16</sup>. When faced with this sort of criticism, one cannot but wonder whether their author has really read the texts, for the harsh content of the essays is unaccountable for, as shall be demonstrated. Nevertheless, Richard Kelly develops the concept of “dislocation”<sup>17</sup> in Daphne du

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8 *Ibid.*, 140.

9 *Ibid.*, 133.

10 *Ibid.*, 133.

11 *Ibid.*, 142.

12 *Ibid.*, 136.

13 *Ibid.*, 142.

14 *Ibid.*, 142.

15 Paul Ableman, “The Intruder”, *Spectator* 245, November 1980, 20.

16 *Ibid.*, 20.

17 Richard Kelly, *Daphne du Maurier, op. cit.*, 143.

Maurier's "The Birds" and "Don't Look Now" which proves highly useful in the study of these two tales and the rest of du Maurier's short stories. This notion of dislocation is central to analyse the construction of time and space in the author's writing. More than a sense of fracture, dislocation implies a wrong disposition of beings, who remain ill-placed. Although most of du Maurier's writing is judged as second-rate literature, R. Kelly grants "The Birds" and "Don't Look Now" the status of "landmarks in the development of the modern gothic tale."<sup>18</sup>

- A new trend: the feminist interpretation

Had literary criticism about Daphne du Maurier ended with Richard Kelly and his supporters, her work would have probably fallen into complete oblivion. However, her writings were exhumed in the 1990s and early 2000s to be put in the light of feminist interpretation. Margaret Forster's *Daphne du Maurier* (1994) and Nina Auerbach's *Daphne du Maurier, Haunted Heiress* (2000) both present the author's work as the emanation of her conflicted sexuality. In her biography, Margaret Forster lingers on Daphne du Maurier's possessive relationship with her father, and then on her homoerotic experiences with female friends, before and during her marriage with Major F. Browning. She also offers a few insights about du Maurier's work, but mostly analyses her writings as an outlet for pains due to a dual identity that could not be expressed otherwise. With a special emphasis on "the boy-in-the-box", as Daphne called her writing self, Margaret Forster explains that the narrative voice in du Maurier's stories is eminently masculine, and that this gender confusion is a powerful source of inspiration and creativity. Furthermore, she suggests that Daphne du Maurier actually uses writing in order to protest against the role assigned to women in society, and that is why she feels more at liberty to write "as a man", so to speak. From the reading of Daphne du Maurier's early short stories, M. Forster concludes that the young writer "was repelled by the way men used women, and women allowed themselves to be used. [...] in all her stories, girls suffered because of men's lust and always the men get away with it."<sup>19</sup> To put it more clearly, Daphne du Maurier would then be a fierce defender of the women cause, and this political aim would provide the main incentive for her writing. On the other hand, Margaret Forster shows how, more than women's rights, Daphne du Maurier's writings all hinge around sexuality, and more specifically the tensions and hatred that arise from sexuality. M. Forster thus summarises *The Apple Tree*, a short story collection published in 1952, as revolving around a single theme of "sex as

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<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 143.

<sup>19</sup> Margaret Forster, *Daphne du Maurier*, London, Arrow, 1994, 53.

trouble, in one way or another, of the sexual urge causing violence and even murder.”<sup>20</sup> In the same line, Nina Auerbach almost systematically looks for a biographical explanation in the genesis of du Maurier's novels and short stories, a transparent parallel between life and fiction. She even goes as far as to proclaim that the reason why her short stories were less popular was that the “characters embody an explicit feminist resentment foreign to the public of Daphne.”<sup>21</sup> So, to Nina Auerbach, the short stories are of somewhat greater interest than the novels because they convey more freely the author's preoccupations and political opinions. Paradoxically, if du Maurier is shown by the two critics as a fine observer of the “balance of power between the sexes”<sup>22</sup>, she is also completely absent from the various histories or dictionaries of feminist literature that have flourished in the past forty years. Even Elaine Showalter's most referential essay entitled *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing* (1977) does not make the slightest allusion to Daphne du Maurier. She is not even mentioned. *The Oxford Guide to British Women Writers* dedicates half a page to Daphne du Maurier, retaining only the popular dimension of her fiction and not raising the issue of her possible feminist and anti-conventional ideals.

Therefore this vision of du Maurier's writing, although enabling it to be still considered in the twenty-first century, is not universally shared, and may be interpreted as very restrictive and far too biographical. As I have been studying thoroughly the whole of Daphne du Maurier's short stories, I cannot but strongly oppose this limiting vision of her literary works.

- A literary stance: Daphne du Maurier and the Gothic legacy

It is only quite recently that some critics have taken an interest in the literariness of du Maurier's work. Among them, Avril Horner and Sue Zlosnik played a key role, by enhancing the Gothic dimension and heritage of Daphne du Maurier's writing. In doing so, they allow the writer for the first time to be granted a place in the history of literature. The term “Gothic” had already been used by Margaret Forster to characterise *Jamaica Inn* (1936), one of Daphne du Maurier's most successful novels, but the concept had not yet been extended to the whole of her literary production. The terms “macabre”<sup>23</sup> or “sinister”<sup>24</sup> were preferred, connoting a similar atmosphere but leaving no room to a full acknowledgement of literariness. It is only with A. Horner and S.

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20 *Ibid.*, 257.

21 Nina Auerbach, in Helen Taylor, *The Daphne du Maurier Companion*, London, Virago, 2007, 239.

22 M. Forster, *Daphne du Maurier*, *op. cit.*, 260.

23 *Ibid.*, 131, 258, 260, 376.

24 *Ibid.*, pp. 131, 253, 376.

Zlosnik's *Daphne du Maurier: Writing, Identity and the Gothic Imagination* (1997) that the writer fully received this new label. This essay, born out of a series of conferences, is a new assessment of du Maurier's work, based on the "belief that her best novels and short stories offer particularly interesting examples of how Gothic writing is inflected by both personal and broader cultural values and anxieties"<sup>25</sup>. According to the two critics, Daphne du Maurier is neither the romantic writer she is accused to be nor as isolated from her contemporaries as she had, so far, been judged. The writing of this English author is therefore influenced by her complicated family life, as well as by the war and the interwar context, and the already existing tradition of the novel and short story. These various influencing elements shall be more thoroughly examined in du Maurier's short stories later on. To summarise briefly, Avril Horner and Sue Zlosnik use Margaret Forster's contribution – in terms of personal letters and autobiographical elements – to shed light on Daphne du Maurier's work. What interests them most is the relationship between her identity anxieties and her literary production. A large emphasis is laid on the author's bisexuality and conflicted self. In the eyes of the two critics, the only way to solve the problem of split identity was to be found in the Gothic: "Rejection of embodiment itself (...) is accommodated only by the discourse of religious faith and the Gothic"<sup>26</sup> (13-14). So Gothic is seen as the solution to du Maurier's inner and outer fracture. Most of the essay's analysis is based on Freud's theories, and this psychoanalytic reading unveils femininity as "the Other" in du Maurier's writing. By doing so, the two critics show how Daphne du Maurier's work is both in the continuity of the traditional Gothic and at variance with it, since it refuses to offer satisfying closures and happy endings. Unfortunately, A. Horner and S. Zlosnik fail to go further than "Don't Look Now" in their review of short stories. Although recognising that "Daphne du Maurier's fiction destabilizes generic categorization"<sup>27</sup> of literary genres, they proclaim that all her work can be read in the light of Gothic standards and that only the Gothic could respond to her inner anxieties.

However, one could argue that Avril Horner and Sue Zlosnik's study about Daphne du Maurier is just one of many critical essays dedicated to Gothic Literature from the 1980s to the early 2000s. To mention but a few, David Punter<sup>28</sup>, Marie Mulvey-Roberts<sup>29</sup>, Kelly Hurley<sup>30</sup>,

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25 Avril Horner, Sue Zlosnik, *Daphne du Maurier: Writing, Identity and the Gothic Imagination*, Basingstoke, Macmillan, 1997, 2.

26 *Ibid.*, 13-14.

27 *Ibid.*, 188.

28 David Punter., *The Literature of Terror: a History of Gothic Fictions from 1765 to the present day*, 2 vols., London, Longman, 1980.

PUNTER, David, *A Companion to the Gothic*, Oxford, Blackwell, 2001.

29 Marie Mulvey-Roberts., *The Handbook to Gothic Literature*, Basingstoke, Macmillan, 1998.

30 Kelly Hurley, *The Gothic Body: Sexuality, Materialism, and Degeneration at the Fin de Siècle*, Cambridge, Cambridge UP, 2004.

Andrew Smith<sup>31</sup> and Sue Chaplin<sup>32</sup> all dedicated essays to the history and the significant features of Gothic literature. This could be interpreted as a recent interest in popular literature, and therefore, in what is now known as horror literature for instance. Knowing this, one could legitimately wonder whether *Daphne du Maurier: Writing, Identity and the Gothic Imagination* is not a fashionable study of the 1990s, which would maybe tend to “over-gothicise” the English writer's work.

## SPACES, BOUNDARIES AND MIRAGES

- “Grey seas, grey skies”<sup>33</sup>: Daphne du Maurier's atmospherics

The tradition dictates that short stories be studied in relation to the greater novels of a writer. In Daphne du Maurier's case, this exercise is made especially difficult by the lack of plain similitude between her bigger works and her short fiction. Although short story as a genre is usually dismissed as minor writing, it would seem that Daphne du Maurier's short stories encapsulate all her literary imagination, major themes and stylistic experiments in a condensed form. When reading the whole of Daphne du Maurier's short stories, it is obvious that the notion of space, with its ambiguity and its indistinguishable boundaries – both physical and metaphorical – is at the core of the writer's concern. So I decided to define my subject as it is now, “Spaces, boundaries, and mirages in Daphne du Maurier's short stories”, and to shape my restricted corpus accordingly.

In Daphne du Maurier's short stories, four types of space can be distinguished: the outdoor space, the domestic space, the urban space, and the inner space. The first is characterised by a sense of freedom, of lawlessness, often leading to violence in the wilderness. By contrast, the domestic space is perceived as a place of constraint, enclosure, and even death, as well as a paradoxical place of safety. The threatening outdoor space is menacing to break its way into the seemingly protective domestic space, and thereby to make it lose its essential homely nature. The urban space, and especially Venice in “Ganymede” and “Don't Look Now”, is built like a labyrinth, in which the entrapped character inevitably gets lost. The heart of the city, like a Minotaur, seems to be asking for a victim, which is eventually given with the accidental death of the young servant in “Ganymede” and the horrific murder of John in “Don't Look Now”. The inner space appears most

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31 Andrew Smith, *Gothic Literature*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh UP, 2007.

32 Susan Chaplin, *Gothic Literature*, London, Longman, 2011.

33 Daphne du Maurier, “Adieu Sagesse”, in *The Rendezvous and other stories*, London, Virago, 2005, 74.



of the time *implicitly*, and it is never offering any shelter. Either a place of dark nightmares and illusions or a space that contains the most frightful beasts threatening to go on the rampage, the characters are trying to contain it, for fear that a poisonous drop might leak out. No matter how open or closed these spaces are, all are made frightening and threatening through the interpretation of the characters who fantasize them, making them, rightly or wrongly, dream-like or nightmarish.

In their exploration of spaces, Daphne du Maurier's short stories especially question the limits of these spaces – grey zones, liminal places, areas that resist clear classifications, spaces where boundaries are blurred. A boundary is, to put it plainly, the limit, the end of a definite space or concept. Everything that is named or pointed out normally possesses boundaries, so that one does not even wonder at their position or nature. Without limits, it is impossible to define anything – to “define” meaning literally to bring to an end – and least of all space. But Daphne du Maurier's writing plays with this notion by both thinning the borders and setting them forth. As mentioned earlier, the problem of boundaries is a key question in the analysis of du Maurier's tales, because of their essential preoccupation with space. Metaphorically, the boundaries take many forms, but the main tension hinges around the distinction between natural, unnatural and supernatural. The stories provide no moral and no conclusive ending, but they distil a strong sense of unease due to their partial or complete loss of conventional bearings. Another recurrent confused limit is between human and animal. Either through indirect metaphor, hallucination or metamorphosis, the traditional border separating human beings from animals is dim. The scientific and conventional separation between life and death is also made slight. This leads me to the last kind of transgressed border, between madness and reason. Indeed, this is a recurrent motif in du Maurier's tales. The focaliser is very often imposing a biased point of view on the reader, so that one can never be quite sure whether the events are supernatural, or whether they are the result of a sick, paranoid or manic mind. All this shows how Daphne du Maurier causes her readers to become lost, to lead them beyond their preconceived landmarks, and to encourage them to make the effort of interpretation. In order to do so, the author uses space in its multiplicity to materially confuse reassuring limits and expectations.

The impression of having been tricked, of staring at an absence, is the direct consequence of this blurring of boundaries. Contrarily to what has often been said about her works, du Maurier does not give any straightforward meaning and her stories are not mere allegories. The symbolical elements that she uses are disturbing because one expects them to foreshadow elements that are never shown or confirmed. More than leaving room for ambiguity, du Maurier's writing deliberately creates illusions to guide readers into active interpretation. Hence the Gothic and postmodernist

approaches seem most suited to study these fractures in continuity.

- “The reader can make up his own mind”<sup>34</sup>: a selection of tales

Throughout her life, Daphne du Maurier has written no less than about fifty short stories, including those that were never published. Their length varies from a few pages to the size of a novella. Today, these short stories are gathered in five collections: *The Rendezvous* (2005, first published in 1980), *The Birds* (2004, first published as *The Apple Tree* in 1952), *The Breaking Point* (2009, first published in 1959), *Don't Look Now* (2006, first published in 1971) and *The Doll* (posthumously published in 2011). For obvious practical reasons, it was not possible to study the forty-five published short stories fully and in detail. The choice was not self-evident since the collections are not gathered chronologically or thematically. *The Rendezvous*, for instance, is composed of early writings as well as of more mature stories, because Daphne du Maurier wanted to show her development as a writer. *The Doll* gathers short stories that were written when Daphne du Maurier was nineteen and others written in the fifties. The sole unity of this collection is that it brings together stories that were “lost”. *Don't Look Now* includes a story entitled “The Breakthrough”, written six years before it was first published “in response to a request from Kingsley Amis, who was hoping to edit a collection of stories on a vaguely science-fiction theme”<sup>35</sup>. The collection never took shape because of the lack of support from a sufficient number of writers, and “The Breakthrough” was finally published in 1971 alongside other stories that have no connection whatsoever with it. *The Breaking Point* is the only collection that does not take its name from a short story, and that du Maurier really meant as a coherent whole. Therefore, I had to determine a selected corpus on more subtle and more subjective criteria than mere chronology. As implied earlier, what seems most interesting and deep in Daphne du Maurier's short story writing is the treatment of space. Although an infinite variety of spaces is present in each short story, I chose the ones which presented the most ambiguous, conflictual and paradoxical relationships with spaces. So I retained twenty-six short stories, for the sake of greater clarity and representativeness. Among these short stories, I shall consider seven of them as major and the rest as minor, although worth studying. From *The Doll* (2010), I will keep “East Wind”, “The Doll”, “Tame Cat” and “The Happy Valley”. In *The Birds* (1952), I will examine “The Birds”, “Monte Verità”, “The Apple Tree”, “Kiss Me Again, Stranger”, “The Little Photographer” and “The Old Man”. In *The Breaking Point*

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34 Daphne du Maurier, “Not After Midnight”, in *Don't Look Now*, London, Penguin, 2016, 59.

35 M. Forster, *Daphne du Maurier*, *op. cit.*, 376.

(1959), I will analyse “The Alibi”, “The Blue Lenses”, “Ganymede”, “The Pool”, “The Archduchess”, “The Chamois” and “The Lordly Ones”. In *Don't Look Now* (1971), I will study “Don't Look Now”, “Not After Midnight”, “A Border-Line Case” and “The Breakthrough”. And in *The Rendezvous* (1980), I will purposely leave out “The Rendezvous” – although approved by many contemporary critics of Daphne du Maurier, it deals mainly with metadramatic writing and popular fiction, and has little to do with space in its complexity – and retain “Panic”, “Adieu Sagesse”, “Fairy Tale”, “La Sainte Vierge”, “Escort”, “The Closing Door” and “Split Second” instead. The seven “major” stories retained go as follows: “The Doll”, “The Happy Valley”, “The Birds”, “The Apple Tree”, “The Blue Lenses”, “Don't Look Now” and “Split Second”. These seven short stories are very different in form and plot, and can, therefore, be considered to epitomise the characteristics of Daphne du Maurier's fine style and originality.

So I shall analyse to what extent Daphne du Maurier's short stories hinge around multiple spaces blurring the boundaries in a play of mirages, and how this contradiction between spaces puts forth the renewal of a modern Gothic atmosphere. Space shall be taken at different scales, from the size of a nation to the body of an individual, and I shall consider how spatial contradictions reflect and nourish inner and outer conflicts about identity, whose boundaries are constantly unsettled.

## I. THE GOTHIC ILLUSION TRANSFIGURING SPACES OF MODERNITY

*“Escapes from claustrophobic spaces, seeking out unattainable or mysterious locations, and yearning to be elsewhere are all central to this writer's concerns.”*<sup>36</sup>

Daphne du Maurier's short stories tend to use traditional Gothic tropes and spatial structures in a modern fashion. The haunted castle and the labyrinthine corridors undergo the metamorphosis of the twentieth century, to be turned into bunker-houses, hospital rooms, and sinuous cobbled streets. Daphne du Maurier's writing is suffused with the Gothic tradition from the structure of space down to the structure of the narrative. By following this tradition, Daphne du Maurier can update the tensions at the core of Gothic writing, to comprehend the anxieties of her contemporary time. Paradoxically, Gothic literature is a genre of the past for Daphne du Maurier's time since it had grown out of fashion at the beginning of the twentieth century, and was mostly concerned with the past. But on the other hand, one of Gothic literature's central aims is to challenge the present conceptions, and especially modernity and progress, be it philosophical or technical. By renewing this genre in the twentieth century, Daphne du Maurier's short stories reconcile this paradox by offering a vision of the world that is somehow distorted in a Gothic fashion, to better broach the tensions of modernity, on the surface and at depth. More than in novel writing, the short story, as a minor genre, can condense these narrative experiments and epitomise efficiently the essential tensions at the core of du Maurier's century.

### **A. Daphne du Maurier's Contemporary Gothic and current literary trends**

Daphne du Maurier's Gothic writing is at a crossroads with other literary trends of the mid-twentieth century, such as Magic Realism, Modernism and Postmodernism. Although critics never construed her as being part of these literary movements, one could argue that Daphne du Maurier was not as isolated as some would say she was from the literary trends of her time. Gothic writing no longer exists as such in the twentieth century, it is either reclassified as “horror writing”, or present in another literary genre.

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36 Helen Taylor, *in* Daphne du Maurier, *Myself When Young*, London, Virago, 2003, xiv.

## 1. Modernism and postmodernism

Modernism is first and foremost characterised by the fragmentation of points of view and the focus on subjectivity. In this sense, one could argue that Daphne du Maurier's work was highly influenced by this trend in the interwar years. "The Doll" and "The Happy Valley", written when Daphne du Maurier was in her early twenties, both reveal this tendency to split subjectivity and unreliability of discourse. If Daphne du Maurier's writings were never classified as "modernist", it is because they never strictly followed the principles of this literary movement. However, du Maurier could be said to make derivative use of modernism's standards. Andrew Smith, in *Gothic Literature* (2007), explores the links between modernism and Gothic, explaining that modernism "focused on the fragmented nature of subjectivity (and so exploited the Gothic fascination with fractured selves)"<sup>37</sup>. In other words, modernism uses Gothic tropes to express its central issues. In the case of Daphne du Maurier's short stories, fragmented points of view, unreliable narratives and manipulative narrators are frequent features. Typically, "The Doll" presents an emblematic example of the unreliability of narrators. This short story opens with this rhetorical question of the unnamed first-person narrator: "I want to know if men realise when they are insane" (14). This opening sentence raises several issues. First, the notion of insanity is put forward clearly, without verbal modality – hence the verb BE in the present tense – as if it were something perfectly knowable. Second, the paradox just evoked is reinforced by the ambiguous use of the verb "realise". To realise means both to be conscious of something, and to have an adequate vision of reality, derived from the same root word. So this verb denotes certainty and knowability of the outer world and the human mind, which is in total contradiction with madness itself. However, it is introduced by the subordinate conjunction "if", which casts doubt on the whole following statement. Finally, the narrator imposes his subjectivity on the reader by introducing the story by the personal pronoun "I", making this reflection of his an individual question, not a detached philosophical consideration. So from the very beginning of this short story, absolute knowledge is both sought and denied. The first-person narrator aims at rational knowledge but recognises at the same time that it is unattainable. Furthermore, the transition from the singular "I" to the plural "they", indicates fragmentation of subjectivity. The narrator, becoming mad, is split into pieces. And indeed the story that follows this first sentence gets more and more fragmented and incomplete, the very typography pointing at this shattered subjectivity, making truth an unknowable and relative concept. This short story written in 1927 when Daphne du Maurier was only twenty<sup>38</sup>, could thus be said to borrow significant

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37 Andrew Smith, *Gothic Literature, op. cit.*, 141.

38 Polly Samson, in Daphne du Maurier du Maurier, *The Doll. Short Stories*, London, Virago, 2011, vii.

modernist features. In a different manner, “The Happy Valley” also echoes the modernist vision of subjectivity. The main character who is also the focaliser provides no coherent reflection or structured thought, but only flashes of unexplained knowledge, sudden realisations. She is obsessed with a recurrent dream about a house, but the dream itself makes no sense. It is just a vision of the edifice and the gardens surrounding, with no conclusion, no plot, no end. This dream becomes so obsessional that she ends up confusing awoken life and the dream, the latter gaining more consistency. She feels familiar with things and people that she has never seen, at least consciously. The cyclical way in which the narrative is constructed around this dream reveals a distancing from logical meaning, a refusal to order an irrational world. Instead, subjectivity is set forth, and especially in its fragmentary dimension. Subjectivity is also at the core of “The Lordly Ones”, a short story that focuses on a mentally disabled child called Ben who cannot communicate with his parents. The reader is plunged into his point of view and experiences the violence of the surrounding world, which seems to make no sense at all. Events are juxtaposed without logical connections, without order, causing overwhelming confusion. “Doors opened and clanged” (275) for no accountable reason. The hyperbolic style reinforces this state of chaos, as the main character feels that “all was confusion” (275), and “everything was pain” (281). The whole text is fraught with allusions to loss and uncertainty, filtered through Ben's utterly subjective point of view, who is only giving fragments of facts and meanings, following Modernism's line.

In later short stories, Daphne du Maurier could also be seen as influenced by postmodernism's concerns. Indirectly quoting Jean-François Lyotard<sup>39</sup>, Andrew Smith, defines postmodernism as characterised by “scepticism about the grand narratives (such as religion, for example), which once provided social and moral norms”<sup>40</sup>, and therefore building “a world (...) defined by the absence of absolute meaning.”<sup>41</sup> These beliefs are manifested stylistically by a medley of narrative forms that are intermingled to question representations, beyond moral considerations. In parallel, the Gothic is used to mutability in narrative forms and challenging of the common perceptions. This is why Andrew Smith claims that “Postmodernism seems to be peculiarly suited to the Gothic because it questions the notion that one inhabits a coherent or otherwise abstractly rational world.”<sup>42</sup> One could even go further and argue that Daphne du Maurier's Gothic is particularly suited to postmodernist standards. Indeed, she does not hesitate to explore the limits of religion and coercive orders. In “The Archduchess”, for instance, she questions

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39 “on tient pour « postmoderne » l'incrédulité à l'égard des métarécits.”, Jean-François Lyotard, *La Condition Postmoderne*, Paris, Les éditions de Minuit, 1979, 7.

40 Andrew Smith, *Gothic Literature*, *op. cit.*, 141.

41 *Ibid.*, 141.

42 *Ibid.*, 141.

the *bien-fondé* of both monarchy and democracy. The narrative is built as a journalist report of objective facts, but it borrows elements from the fairy tale – two narrative forms which are traditionally incompatible, but here reconciled under du Maurier's pen. The tale is about a contemporary kingdom called “Ronda”, presented as a modern El Dorado, and the story of its fall. The fall itself is neither presented as necessary nor shown as avoidable, it is simply told, by a pseudo-reliable narrator. The narrator gives the facts and quotes his sources, but always qualifies the certainty of his assumptions by opposing two or three interpretations of the very same facts, and thus concluding: “Opinions will always differ. No one will ever be sure” (191). His subjectivity, although denied on the surface, is strongly imposed by extravagant metaphors, apparently offered to make the story more lively, but mostly influencing the reader. He speaks, for example, of “the poison of discontent that finally infiltrated Ronda” (165). “The Archduchess” recounts how a piece of land that “had everything the heart could desire” (156) – the hyperbolic fairy-tale style is recognisable here – and which was ruled by the Archduke, a sort of semi-god, was ruined by two men, Markoi and Grandos. Both of them are born with a defect: the first is lame, and the second is greedy. Together, they foment a revolution, not out of faith in democratic principles, but out of converging egotistical interests. The old order, monarchy, is presented as the Golden Age, on the surface, when “the Rondese did not realize and did not care. They were happy” (172). This ignorance is seen on the one hand as a prelapsarian innocence, and as foolishness on the other. Yet this perfection is shadowed by slight allusions to interdictions, such as the law of marriage: “marriage outside the country was forbidden” (159). On the other hand, democracy is also, on the surface, presented as the good order, as epitomised by this statement at the beginning of the story: “It was the last country to throw off the chains of the monarchical system” (156). So in this story, ambiguity always prevails and even the wonders of the land are ambivalent. Narrative truth is denied but space also escapes a clear delineation and categorisation. The typically postmodern sense of uncertainty is first and foremost grounded in space in this short story. And the national space of Ronda is constructed as an agglomeration of different spaces, each of them bearing their lot of treacherous ambiguity. The waters of Ronda are said to have special properties, and even to give eternal life with a formula that the Archduke is the only one to know, but they can also be fatal in times of great flood. In other words, they have the ambivalent power to cure or to kill. Similarly, the flowers of Ronda, known as “rovlvula flowers” have an exquisite scent that is paradoxically described as “insidious” (160), leaving the visitor “a little intoxicated” (158). This constant ambiguity is reflected in the narrative which always remains equivocal. It is all a hearsay narrative and truth is ceaselessly modulated, making it indefinite. Knowing this, one can legitimately acknowledge the influence of postmodernism, although not conceptualised by Daphne du Maurier,

in its stylistic devices as well as in its political dimension and in its construction of spaces.

## 2. Magic Realism

*“Her realism was, and is, compelling to me because it is inseparable from her alienated magic”*<sup>43</sup>

Some of Daphne du Maurier's short stories could also be associated with Magic Realism since they very often stage supernatural happenings in a thoroughly realistic setting. Lucie Armitt, in her article entitled “The Magic Realism of the Contemporary Gothic” thus defines Magic Realism: it is “a disruptive, foreign, fantastic narrative style that fractures the flow of an otherwise seamlessly realist text.”<sup>44</sup> What makes Daphne du Maurier's stories chilling is the realistic style with which unnatural events are displayed. The short story “The Birds” may be one of the most telling instances of magic realist style. In this tale, set in Cornwall, birds begin to attack humans for no rational reason at all. They are not threatened, nor are they hungry, and their behaviour defies all logical explanation. Suddenly, with a turn of the tide, in a rough, windswept piece of land and used to Nature's show of force, something is disrupted in the natural order. The disruption is made even more brutal by the fact that nothing prepared this almost supernatural event, the text is not fantastic, but “from the spare elegance of its bleak opening lines, the mode is one of terse realism.”<sup>45</sup> The supernatural dimension of the text resides in the unexpected and unexplained violence of birds, who suddenly becomes organised and united beyond their variety. Some sort of monstrous intelligence has taken possession of them, for no apparent reason, and they eventually seem to triumph over human. The focaliser, Nat Hoken, reinforces the realistic dimension of the text by his down-to-earth perception of events, thereby giving them more credit. As underlined by Ella Westland, he is presented in “a single economical sentence”<sup>46</sup>: “Nat Hocken, because of war-time disability, had a pension and did not work full-time at the farm” (1). This short introduction foreshadows already the practical way in which he will face the “unnatural, queer” (10) battle with the birds. The whole story revolves around the deciphering of the birds' “pattern” (1), which is, in fact, one of the main concerns of magic realism which uses superimposition, mutual enfoldment of systems, and

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43 Nina Auerbach, *Daphne du Maurier, op. cit.*, 13.

44 Lucie Armitt, “The Magic Realism of the Contemporary Gothic”, in David Punter, *A Companion to the Gothic*, Oxford, Blackwell, 2001, 306.

45 Ella Westland, *Reading Daphne: a Guide to the Writing of Daphne du Maurier for Readers and Book Groups*, Truro, Cornwall, Truran, 2007, 131.

46 *Ibid.*, 131.



metonymic relations. In this tale, the parallel between the attack of birds and the raids of the bombing of Plymouth during the Second World War is constant, making meaning even more confusing and cryptic, in accordance with the magic realist style. Similarly, in “The Blue Lenses”, “The Happy Valley”, “Don't Look Now” and “Split Second”, supernatural happenings occur in a thoroughly realistic setting. The main character in “The Blue Lenses” has undergone an eye operation and mysteriously starts to see people around her in the hospital with animal heads. She first thinks that she is being tricked, but the realism of the vision prevents her from keeping this opinion. No rational explanation is provided at the end of the story, and the meaning of this sudden transformation remains unintelligible. In “The Happy Valley”, the dream overlaps reality, and multiple layers of time are confused at once until the main character is caught in the dream space as in a trap. Mysterious correspondences are unfolded and the apparition of the dreamed place in reality, although foreshadowed, is a violent supernatural disruption in the text's order. “Don't Look Now” allows one of the character's psychic vision to overstep rational actions and reasoning, and his denial of this vision leads him to death. He miserably fails in deciphering the meaning of what he sees and this failure proves fatal. The realistic and dry style carrying the vision is far from fantastical, and yet its happening is supernatural: “Then he saw her. Laura, in her scarlet coat, the twin sisters by her side, the active sister with her hand on Laura's arm, talking earnestly, and Laura herself, her hair blowing in the wind, gesticulating, on her face a look of distress” (29-30). The utterly visual dimension of these two sentences distils a sense of consistent reality. The -ING form of the three verbs creates a sort of pause, a frozen image, that leaves time for close observation. This time, no monster appears. It is the very fact that the main character, John, sees his wife at this particular time and place that makes no sense and is supernatural. At the end of the story, it becomes clear that what he saw was a vision of the future, of his wife coming back to Venice for his funeral. But the reason why he might have had this vision remains uncertain. Because of these supernatural fleeting sights, space becomes more and more condensed, superimposed, complex. Space defies the boundaries of time and thus contributes to a sense of insecurity. Space, because of its multilayered nature, cannot be relied on. In “Split Second” as well, there is no fore-warning to the sudden shift in time. The shift itself is not even clear, although it may be supposed that it is a shift into the future. Mrs. Ellis, once again a very down-to-earth and rather dull character, goes back to her home after a short walk to find it mysteriously changed, inhabited by strangers, without any clear transition from the present time to hallucination. The supernatural shift is not announced flamboyantly, but soberly, through seemingly insignificant details: “She arrived at her own gate. She pushed it open, and noticed with annoyance that it was nearly going off its hinges” (229). Thus, in these short stories by Daphne du Maurier, supernatural elements are set in such a realistic setting that the reader is

tempted to find a rational explanation for them. However, these supernatural happenings can offer no straightforward meaning or reason, and Daphne du Maurier keeps interweaving stories and layers in the magic realist style. The sense of confusion and uncertainty that arises from this confusion is deeply grounded in the construction of spaces, which inevitably escape dependable mapping and coherent cartography. Space, in du Maurier's short stories, follows Magic Realist standards in so far as it creates multiple patterns that defy the normal boundaries of places and time and therefore become undecipherable.

### 3. Politics and Subversiveness: a Gothic division of spaces and bodies

#### *Anti-modernity*

*“There is a place in men's lives where pictures do in fact bleed, ghost gibber and shriek, maidens run forever through mysterious landscapes from nameless foes; that place is, of course, the world of dreams and of the repressed guilts and fears that motivate them. This world the dogmatic optimism and shallow psychology of the Age of Reason has denied; and yet this world it is the final, perhaps the essential, purpose of the Gothic romance to assert.”*<sup>47</sup>

In the introduction of Bram Stoker's *Dracula*<sup>48</sup>, Roger Luckhurst explains that Gothic literature is first and foremost a reminder that man cannot control everything. Its supernatural elements are not gratuitous or fairy-tale like. They are not set to show a fantasy world but to cast doubt upon the efficiency of sole reason. This was already true at the Age of Enlightenment, and it still is in the twentieth century. Anti-modernity is at the core of Gothic writing because it asserts the world that the “Age of Reason” has denied, to quote Leslie Fiedler's *Love and Death in the American Novel*. In this tradition, Daphne du Maurier also expresses her contestation against modernity in her short stories. “The Birds” can be seen as a clear instance of Daphne du Maurier's anti-modernity. The story presents an easily detectable allegory between the birds and WW2 bombings over England. The lexicon used to refer to the birds is extremely reminiscent of war and military vocabulary. The birds are organised “in close formation, line upon line” (11). In both cases, birds or air raids, man is too proud to recognise that there are forces that exceed his strength. With his modern machines and technology, man feels – wrongly – almighty, and his hubris leads to

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47 Leslie A. Fiedler, *Love and Death in the American Novel*, New York, Dell, 1966, 140.

48 Roger Luckhurst, *in* Bram Stoker, *Dracula* (1897), New York, Oxford University Press, 2011.

complete chaos. Nat Hocken firmly believes in the power of the government to come and rescue them, and at the same time feels the powerlessness of their position: “Yet what could they do? What could anyone do?” (11). This distrust towards the power of institutions is also underlined by the use of inverted comas to speak about them. “Nat thought to himself that ‘they’ were no doubt considering the problem at that very moment” (14). Critics such as Richard Kelly, Helen Taylor, and Ella Westland have acknowledged this aspect of the famous short story. “The acceptable order of things and for no apparent reason is upset.”<sup>49</sup> It is this very disruption of order that unveils the anti-modern dimension of this story. This disorder is a refusal of the ordered world ruled by reason. Birds act in an unexplainable way, and reason repeatedly fails to comprehend the events and to offer any valuable solution. The main characters, and especially Nat Hocken, desperately try to rationalise what is happening and the birds’ behaviour. They first accuse the weather – “It will be a hard winter. That’s why the birds are restless” (2) – then they think that “the birds are hungry” (12). But “they gradually discover, however, that their life-long assumptions about reason and order do not apply, that their world has suddenly become absurd, a bad dream in which rules of logic and common sense no longer work.”<sup>50</sup> This disarray even goes down to the syntax in the narrative. Sentences are accumulated without any logical link, without subordinating or even coordinating conjunction. Here is an example of the absence of organisation in the narrative: “Only the gannet remained. One single gannet, above him in the sky. The wings folded suddenly to its body. It dropped like a stone. Nat screamed, and the door opened. He stumbled across the threshold, and his wife threw her weight against the door. They heard the gannet as it fell” (20). There seems to be no coherence at all in the succession of events. They are barely juxtaposed, and the actions of the two characters, Nat and his wife, do not appear to make more sense than the bird’s movements. The narrative is ruled, not by logical order, but by a reflexive succession of moves. Series of three dots are also gradually invading the text, exemplifying the impossibility to name things, that is to say, to put an order in the surrounding world. After the first massive attack, as characters realise it will soon be impossible to manage the crisis, the probable following of the events becomes unnamable: “There must go early to bed tonight. That was, if...” (15). At the end of the story, the trust in “scientists, naturalists, technicians, and all those chaps they called the back-room boys” (25) is completely shattered, to be replaced by the evidence that reason and science have failed. So this anti-modern story, firmly set in “contemporary Britain of council housing and post-war recovery”<sup>51</sup>, sets forth the limits of science and technical progress by showing how they fail to control Nature in all its destructive force. The Gothic space eludes rational predictability.

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49 Richard Kelly, *Daphne du Maurier*, op. cit., 143.

50 Richard Kelly, *Daphne du Maurier*, op. cit., 126.

51 Ella Westland, *Reading Daphne*, op. cit., 131.

“The Doll” illustrates a different case of anti-modernity. What is at stake in this short story is not the uncontrollability of Nature, but the nature of the human body. The title, first thought to refer to the main female character, Rebecca, actually describes a mechanical sex doll, called Julio. The main problem lies in the confusion between the human body and the artificial one, the latter paradoxically appearing as more fulfilling than the former. First described as a “filthy battered body” (14), Julio is then offered a full depiction by the first-person narrator which is human-like until he realises that “it was a doll. Human enough, damnably lifelike, with a foul distinctive personality, but a doll” (24). The full understanding of what this doll is, only comes to the end of the short story: “He was a machine – something worked by screws – he was not alive, not human – but terrible, ghastly” (29) allowing Rebecca to lose herself in “unholy rapture” (29). What is only indirectly hinted at is the purpose of this machine, which is, in fact, a life-size sex toy. This idea, in the 1920s, can be seen as quite prophetic and what is shown is a possible competition between man and machine in this story, and the dreadful consequences of this rivalry, in which human is bound to lose.

### *Exploring the anxieties of self*

Daphne du Maurier's writing can explore the anxieties of the twentieth-century self in her short story thanks to the legacies of the Gothic, especially through the use of doubles and split identities. Unsurprisingly, her political writing in her stories also extends to the problem of identity. This problem is explored from many perspectives, and three of her short stories seem to epitomise quite well the different directions that du Maurier's ethics take. “A Border-Line Case” is centred upon a story of incest between father and daughter, therefore questioning the notions of sameness and distinctiveness, as well as the split between the real self and the acting self. “The Alibi” hinges around a play of double identity, as a banal Englishman tries to escape his dull life by committing murder. “The Pool” explores the difficult metamorphosis from girlhood to womanhood and the coexistence of two inner selves. In “A Border Line Case”, the questioning of identity is central from the very beginning. After the death of her father, a traumatic event and a vision of horror, Shelagh Money decides to go and meet one of his old friends who lives in Ireland, Nick Barry. “She soon enjoys a sexual interlude with him in the back of a grocery truck as he and his men head towards a terrorist attack on the border of Northern Ireland”<sup>52</sup>. It is only afterwards that Shelagh realises that

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52 Richard Kelly, *Daphne du Maurier, op. cit.*, 135.

Nick was her father. The realisation comes not from a clear telling, but from the deciphering of photographs, which are a cause of disorientation throughout the story. Pictures are telling of one's false, or real identity, and sometimes both. The final picture is one of Nick Barry dressed up as Cesario for a theatrical production of Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*. In the original play, Cesario is in fact Viola in disguise, and this disguise causes an impossible love affair. Similarly, in "A Border Line Case", Shelagh falls in love with Nick because she does not know who he is. To complete these embedded identities, Shelagh is also a theatre actress and is about to play Cesario – like Nick, years before. Oddly enough, this artificial picture of Nick in disguise is more enlightening for Shelagh than to see him face to face: dressed up as Cesario, she recognises herself in his picture and understands that he is her biological father. In the same way, Shelagh discovers a picture of her parents' wedding in Nick's house, but it is a faked one: Nick stuck a picture of his head on the face of Shelagh's father. So the picture is faked, but paradoxically it is more truthful than the original one since it shows her biological parents together, as if they were married. So in this short story, Daphne du Maurier explores the multiple identities that constitute a self and shows how, far from being contradictory, all of them partake of the self, the most theatrical and artificial ones not omitted. The same idea can be found in "The Alibi", where the main character, Mr. Fenton, chooses painting as an alibi to commit murder. Gradually, his longing for crime is replaced by a true ambition for painting. What was fake and superficial becomes essential. But the original aim – "Faces smashed in. Sudden murder. Theft. Fire." (4) – violently comes back onto him. The woman and her son that Fenton was initially planning to kill die, and he is accused of having murdered them. Telling the truth is useless. The story ends on his false confession: "I was her lover, of course, and the child was mine. I turned on the gas this evening before I left the house. I killed them all" (43). Once again, fake and real identities are confused, and confessing the murder equates to actually committing it, accusing himself truly turns him in what he wanted to be at the beginning. As highlighted by Sally Beauman in her introduction to *The Breaking Point*, "instead of killing his chosen victims, [...] he *paints* them."<sup>53</sup> And "the unskilled fury he exhibits as he stabs oil on canvas"<sup>54</sup> can also be understood as a metatextual dimension of the story. Indeed, narrating the crime is another way of committing it, even for the author. In a different fashion in "The Pool", fragments of identity compose the self of Deborah, the main character who is a young girl, on holiday at her grandparents' house. The opposition takes place between Deborah's fading girlhood and growing womanhood. As a child, she has a secret ritual game of walking into the woods to the pool, to which she makes sacrifices of sorts, by throwing little objects into the water and reciting prayers. But

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53 Sally Beauman, in D. du Maurier, *The Breaking Point. Short Stories*, London, Virago, 2010, xiii.

54 *Ibid.*, xiii.

supernatural elements seem to take over her imagination, as she sees a woman calling her to the pool and making her enter the dark muddy waters, suddenly metamorphosed. In this magic realist vision, Deborah meets her two-years-old self, and this physical duality expresses the inner fragmentation of herself. Earlier in the short story, the split identity is also alluded to when Deborah stares at her reflection in the pool's water: the double is “a disturbed image, dark-skinned and ghostly” (130), her hair “a shroud” (130) foreshadowing an older, decaying self. Wanting to get rid of this image, Deborah throws a twig into the water and her reflection is significantly “broken into fragments, (...), a sort of monster” (130). The passage could be said to encapsulate the whole concern of the short story since it is about reconciling, hiding and choosing fragments of personality to construct a safe identity.

Thus, Daphne du Maurier's inspirations and concerns are mainly Gothic, but the way she treats them borrows a lot to the literary techniques of Modernism, Postmodernism and Magic Realism. None of her stories were ever categorised as such, and Daphne du Maurier was not classified as a modernist or a magic realist writer either – perhaps wrongly. Fragmentariness is a key element in the analysis of her work, as she rewrites Gothic space to adapt it to the twentieth-century sense of loss and dislocation.

## **B. Enclosure in Gothic spaces**

*“The heroine exposes the villain's usurpation and thus reclaims an enclosed space that should have been a refuge from evil but has become the very opposite, a prison.”<sup>55</sup>*

Beyond Daphne du Maurier's borrowings to other literary styles, her work is mainly influenced by the Gothic, one of its main features being the setting of a sense of oppression. In this subpart, I shall envision how du Maurier's short stories display an atmosphere of stuffiness through an enclosed space.

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<sup>55</sup> Kate Ferguson Ellis, *The Contested Castle: Gothic Novels and the Subversion of Domestic Ideology*, Chicago, University of Illinois Press, 1989, xiii.

## 1. Enclosed, shrinking spaces

In Daphne du Maurier's writing, space is not simply delineated and closed, it is closing. Space is not a fixed element but a dynamic entity that plays an essential part in the narrative. In "The Closing Door", the movement is a closing one, thereby creating a claustrophobic impression, and yet the door is still open, so the vertigo of outdoor space is still threatening. The story begins with the main character sitting in a waiting room, waiting for a medical specialist to receive him. The atmosphere is already stuffy, and the character is physically stuck between the closed door of the cabinet, the heavy furniture and the strange painting of a girl whose look seems to chase him. The closure motion is imposed on him as he senses what will be his diagnosis: "life was already a dead thing, waving a hand in farewell behind the closed door" (186). Although the adjective "closed" indicates a finished movement, the waving of the hand shows that this movement of closure is still actualised. This sense of space closing upon the character is reinforced by his desire to escape – to escape the painting, the room, his fate. As he walks out of the doctor's cabinet to meet his girlfriend, knowing that he is meant to become completely paralysed, he does not feel freed and less hemmed in, but he notes that "there was something breathless in the air, happy, intoxicating" (192). The pseudo positive quality of the outside air is qualified to convey a growing feeling of oppression. And the girlfriend, instead of bringing peace and comfort, "suddenly [...] looked like the girl in the picture" (192), showing how space is tightening around him, and he can no longer escape. In "The Birds", space is gradually shrinking from the whole coast to the house, and then to the kitchen only, and the reader is overwhelmed with a sense of narrowing. As the narrative progresses, the human territory is reduced and the birds gain ground. Significantly, the opening sentence focuses on outdoor elements, on the weather: "On December the third, the wind changed overnight and it was winter" (1), while the last sentence focuses on the fireplace, where Nat Hocken, after smocking his last cigarette, "threw the empty packet in the fire and watched it burn." (39). So there is a radical change from vast outdoor space to the confined space of domesticity, and this change applies gradually as the birds are "circling the fields, coming in toward the land" (17), "circling still above the fields" (18), "circling lower in the sky" (19). The verb "to circle" is repeated eight times throughout the short story, thereby illustrating the narrowing of the human world. In the categorisation of Gaston Bachelard, the final narrow space of the kitchen could be likened to what he calls the "nest."<sup>56</sup> The particular sort of shelter, with only one room, is both frightening because of its fragility and reassuring because it is easy to identify with it and feel at home in it. But as space is actively closing, characters are losing agency and becoming increasingly

<sup>56</sup> Gaston Bachelard, "Le nid", in *La Poétique de l'Espace*, Paris, PUF, 1986, 92.

isolated. In “Panic”, the third person narrator follows two lovers in the stuffiness of a Parisian street, then into a shabby hotel, to end up in a room where one of them meets death. In this particular story, narrowings are not only displayed to convey stuffiness but also to foreshadow death. From the beginning, hotness is associated with death: “the fierce, dead heat that descended on Paris like a white blanket in July” (46) can easily be likened to a shroud. Once arrived at the squalid hotel, they are led through a narrow “passage” (48) to a “small and incredibly hot” (48) room. Smallness, tightness, stuffiness, all seem to close upon the two lovers, until closure comes to a more metaphorical meaning, with the rise of panic “like the clutch of a clammy hand, closed upon his heart” (55), “seizing him by the throat” (53). So the tightening of space becomes so close that it even has physical consequences. Contrarily to Gaston Bachelard's main theory, according to which a confined space is essentially a welcoming shelter, it would seem that the narrowing of space rather provokes annihilation and prostration in Daphne du Maurier's writing. In the three stories just explored, the causes of the closing of space are different – a subjective sense of loss of agency, an exterior threat forcing characters inside, active steps into a doomed place. These various causes, more or less subjective, are transposed in space whose physical and visual openings are growing narrower, to finally disappear. Characters step into the story and the narrative's drawbridge is hauled up, locking them into a more and more tight space.

## 2. The narrative frame, an enclosure of the text

*“Gothic tends to foreground what other forms of writing (the realist novel, for example) often seek to conceal: that its narratives are not necessarily trustworthy, that literary conventions bear a slippery relationship to the “truths” they mean to communicate.”<sup>57</sup>*

The very shape of the narrative is adapted to this movement of spatial closure. The Gothic trope of the lost manuscript is recurrently used in Daphne du Maurier's short stories, thus creating an enclosure of the text too. In “The Doll”, the feature of the lost manuscript is explicitly used, with a frame narrative introducing the main text as the incomplete transcription of a diary found close to a river. In “Monte Verità”, “Ganymede” and “Not After Midnight”, this Gothic tradition is used less directly. These three short stories are not presented as lost manuscripts found in mysterious forlorn places. However, they all present a frame narrative, supposed to introduce the story, but which often

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<sup>57</sup> S. Chaplin, *Gothic Literature*, op. cit., 182.



makes things more confusing for the reader. This narrative feature, though quite innocent at first sight, may be construed as a show of force of the narrator over the text. The narrative, framed by his words of introduction and conclusion, is in his power. As underlined by Sue Chaplin, the frame narrative in a Gothic text is not only a “device whereby an author presents the reader with an initial, introductory scenario that leads into the main body of the text”<sup>58</sup>, it also allows a distancing between the reader and the narrative. In “The Doll”, the reader is clearly warned against the narrative, while in the other three stories narrators cast doubt upon their own reliability. In “Monte Verità”, the narrator begins with this ambiguous sentence: “They told me afterwards they had found nothing” (40). This statement sounds very much like a conclusion, but the narrator chooses to go against what everyone else has given up believing for want of proof. He offers three different theories about the events and conspicuously embraces the most incredible. So from the start, the reader knows that the narrative is defended by a strong believer, who refuses rational evidence. In “Ganymede” and “Not After Midnight”, both narrators are scholars on holiday who are mirroring each other. The first, in “Ganymede”, is so fanciful that there is hardly one sentence of his narrative that can be fully trusted, as exemplified by this bombastic sentence, where he shows himself very careful in his choice of words: “Unsavoury is a hideous word. [...] The savoury is the joy, the élan, the zest that goes with mind and body working in unison” (85). The second, in “Not After Midnight”, is so dull and uncreative that the reader expects him to miss elements. Afraid, he ignores the events and significantly “dr[aws] [his] shutters and [goes] inside” (72). His introduction resembles the form of an official identity statement, almost a police report. His self-introduction is preceded by short sentences, sometimes without a verb: “I am a bachelor. Age forty-nine. Parents dead. Educated at Sherborne and Brasenose, Oxford” (59). But this semblance of reliability is soon contradicted by his duplicity towards other characters. He lies about his profession for instance: “(my passport states my occupation as professor. It sounds better than schoolmaster or teacher, and usually arouses respect in the attitude of reception clerks)” (62). Like in “Monte Verità”, he presents obviously implausible events while insisting on the fact that “this paper will be found, and the reader can make up his own mind” (40), in the tradition of the Gothic lost manuscript. Similarly in “Escort”, the narrator provides a very realistic and self-conscious introduction, directly addressing the reader and retaining supposedly compromising information to avoid censorship: “I won't give you the name of the port – the censor might stop me” (156). But all these features, instead of confirming the truthfulness of the recounted events “undermine the credibility of the main body of narrative”<sup>59</sup>. The main body of the text is enclosed in the narrator's fancy, and these frame narratives

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58 *Ibid.*, 191.

59 S. Chaplin, *Gothic Literature*, *op. cit.*, 192.

“confuse the separation between storyteller and the listener/reader, between the producer and the consumer of narratives.”<sup>60</sup> So the narrative is both framed and broadened since its reader can become the narrator and participate in the story's construction by “mak[ing] up his own mind” (40). More than framed, the narratives are resolutely in the process of being closed by the narrators' voices. As the story progresses, space is more tightened in the narrator's vision and, following this cramped perspective, the whole text expresses a rising sense of oppression. Nothing comes to relieve this feeling in Daphne du Maurier's short stories, there is no reassuring ending and entrapment in space is left progressing as though it would only stop once space would annihilate everything in its fierce borders. By so doing, Daphne du Maurier oversteps the traditional conventions of the Gothic, according to which the hero or heroine finds a way out and the closure of space is a reassuring one since the horrors it shelters shall be thus contained. Du Maurier's Gothic space does not provide any exit, it keeps closing, even after the end of the narrative.

### 3. Labyrinthine space of a crumbling Venice

*“Rotting Venice, the labyrinthine city of pleasure, with its crumbling, leering gargoyles is obscurely, frighteningly sensual.”<sup>61</sup>*

“We may lose our way, it's not very well lit” (14), Laura says to her husband John in “Don't Look Now”. In this story as well as in “Ganymede”, Daphne du Maurier constructs a labyrinthine space in the interwoven streets of Venice, recalling the traditional intricate corridors of the Gothic castle where characters are led astray. Both stories distil a strong sense of enclosure and one may even note similar structures. In “Don't Look Now”, the depiction of the tight streets – “the canal was narrow, the houses on either side seemed to close upon it” (14) – echoes the constricted “narrow passage where the tall houses almost touched their neighbours opposite” (96) in “Ganymede”. The twisted perspective, therefore, gives the impression of an impasse from which characters cannot escape, a dead-end in the literal sense. Unsurprisingly, characters inevitably get lost in this city full of “twisting alley-way” (“Don't Look Now”, 15) and “old lanterns set in brackets on the corner of some crumbling palazzo” (“Ganymede”, 83). The streets all look alike, and as the main character senses a strange and vague recognition of the places, the reader feels as if he were re-reading earlier passages. Churches make a confusing network by their abundance in

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<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 195.

<sup>61</sup> Pauline Kael, “Labyrinths”, *The New Yorker* 49:1, December 1973, 68.

“Don't Look Now”. Interestingly, visual landmarks are almost systematically introduced by indefinite articles: “a deserted campo behind a church, not a church he knew, [...] along another street and over a further bridge” (16). The localisation could not be made more confusing. Later in the story, John is again lost in “streets he did not know” (37) and once more comes across a “square with the inevitable church at one end” (54). This repetitive effect creates a circular structure from which it is impossible to escape. All this contributes to creating the “Gothic setting of a decaying Venice”<sup>62</sup>, a mysterious, enclosed, twisted city one longs to possess and to escape at once, a city which will not be pinned down on a map. The first-person narrator in *Ganymede*, a snobbish scholar, parodies *Hamlet* in scene one of Act three when he calls Venice “The uncelestial city from which no traveller returns” (87). Taken alone, this apostrophe could be interpreted as a tribute to Venice's ineffable attraction, but as an echo to *Hamlet*, it becomes a clear hint at Venice's deadly power. And indeed this Venician space is fatal: in “Don't Look Now”, John is murdered by a dwarf, and *Ganymede* dies too, crushed in the wheels of a boat sailing on the canal, and those lethal waters “colour crimson with his blood” (120). In both cases, the city space conveys a sense of death, especially through the water. In “Don't Look Now”, boats “looked like coffins” (15), while in “*Ganymede*”, the “stillness” (88) and the “stagnant sweetness of the canal” (93) are shrouding Venice in a gloomy veil. The city space in these two stories “resists mapping, nothing can be located, it keeps shifting”<sup>63</sup> – thereby leading to repeated misunderstandings. Gina Wisker, in her analysis, insists on the fact that the whole story is structured by constant misleading and misinterpretations. The main character, John, follows a series of false trails that are mirrored in the complexity of the city. “The place was like a maze. They might circle round and round forever, and then find themselves back again” (16). As John fails to direct himself, he also fails to see the right elements that could lead him to understand and avoid catastrophe. “The alleyway of interpretation John goes down is a dead end, literally”<sup>64</sup>. Instead, he circles around the obsessional idea to save the “little girl with the pixie-hood” (55), who turns out to be a murderous dwarf. It is as though Venice engulfed men in its womb, like a hungry tomb. Like the Minotaur, the city demands a victim and unfailingly obtains one. Thus, the classic Gothic of “the Venice that is past: dukes, and merchants, and lovers, and ravished maidens” (“*Ganymede*”, 88) is not abandoned, but reworked in favour of a twentieth-century sense of entrapment due to the failure of rational logic to escape a labyrinthine, almost mythological city.

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62 Richard Kelly, *Daphne du Maurier, op. cit.*, 133.

63 Gina Wisker, “Don't Look Now! The compulsions and revelations of Daphne du Maurier's horror writing”, *op. cit.*, 28.

64 *Ibid.*, 29.

#### 4. The Haunted Castle

The Gothic castle, though not directly used, is alluded to in many short stories, thus contributing to the sense of enclosure. Indoor and outdoor spaces are equally used to convey entrapment, which recreates a modern Gothic atmosphere in which spaces are confused, reversed, and conflicted. In “The Doll”, Rebecca's flat offers both the starkness of “a nun's cell, quite plain and bare” (21), and the excess of tapestries and hangings in Julio's secret room. This contradiction within the place, between the forlorn empty room and the overcharged atmosphere, is typical of the organisation of space in Gothic castles. Julio's room is characterised by deep secrecy: it is heavily furnished with “velvet hangings as if to deafen any sound” (23), removed from view by “long thick curtains [...] drawn across the window” (23), and deliberately kept in “a half darkness” (23). So this confined space, concealed from eyes and ears, draws both an irresistible attraction and a distasteful revulsion, in accordance with the unspeakable horror it shades. However, Daphne du Maurier distanciates the traditional Gothic castle by introducing prosaic elements such as the kitchen and the “poky bathroom” (20-21), so as to ground the Gothic sense of confinement into the twentieth-century cityscape. In “Monte Verità”, the hidden fortress in the mountain remains ambiguous throughout because of its inaccessibility, so that the reader never quite knows whether it is an evil place – as a Gothic castle should be – or a kingdom of peace. This fortress is seen as a sort of monastery inhabited by a community of women who supernaturally draw new adepts to them, mostly young girls. Its first quality is the impenetrability of those “forbidden walls, dreaded and shunned through countless years” (40). The motive of an old, even ancestral tradition of haunted castle imprisoning innocent maiden is clearly derived from “the imposing Gothic castles in which these young women are invariably imprisoned”<sup>65</sup>. However, Daphne du Maurier diverts this tradition of the female Gothic space by turning the haunted castle into a place where women, far from being captive, find freedom and escape male control. Anna, the wife of the narrator's friend, joins the *sacerdotesse* in Monte Verità and claims that “this place, to [her], is paradise.” (74) And a paradise that is threatened, too, by the outside world as the monastery's “days of security are numbered” (107). Thus the Gothic prison becomes an ambiguous shelter since it shuts women inside but does not protect them fully, either from disease nor destruction. In “The Happy Valley”, it is quite the reverse that happens as a place thought to be the shelter for peace becomes a doomed place. The main character is irresistibly drawn to this place, first in her recurrent dream and then in

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65 Marie Mulvey-Roberts, *The Handbook to Gothic Literature*, Basingstoke, Macmillan, 1998, 204.

reality, but instead of finding happiness, what she is faced with is her own grave – ironically the place where, indeed, she rests in peace. In her dreams, the house is always closed, inaccessible, but she feels familiar with it. When she does reach the place, the familiar house and gardens become uncanny and unwelcoming because they are too familiar. She finds the place full of her personal belongings and becomes frightened, to finally come across what she had been after, her tomb, where “she would find a resting place where they would not tease her” (155). So Daphne du Maurier plays with the codes of the Gothic castle to construct an ambiguous place, sometimes a place of “safety”, sometimes threatening, “with only shrubs about her [...] stretching tentacles across the pathway to imprison her” (147). In “Kiss Me Again, Stranger”, Daphne du Maurier plays more explicitly with the codes of the Gothic by staging a vampire-like woman in a graveyard, but adapted to contemporary time with no intervention of supernatural. In “The Breakthrough”, a strange scientific building, gloomy, lost in the middle of nowhere, shares the main characteristics of mystery and inaccessibility of the Gothic castle. These hints are not gratuitous, since the building indeed shelters unnamable experiences on human life, under the command of a mad scientist, MacLean. The building itself is described as “a giant oyster-shell” (261), and the area around is “bounded on all sides by this same fence, some ten feet in height, giving the place the look of a concentration camp” (262). Both comparisons, with the shell and the concentration camp, partake of the sense of imprisonment and strongly anchor the text into a twentieth-century context. The long road leading Stephen Saunders – an engineer who is sent there and who is also the narrator – to this most “forbidding place” (261) called Saxmere can be seen as clearly reminiscent of Jonathan Harker's drive to Castle Dracula. In “The Breakthrough”, sand is substituted to snow, as Saunders and his driver proceed with difficulty on “a sandy track across a heath” (260), contemplating “acre upon acre of waste land, marsh and reeds, bounded on the left by sand dunes with the open sea beyond” (260-261). As in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, the landscape distils a strange mixture of beauty and decay, closure and infiniteness. The narrator is inevitably following the sandy track, which is itself “bounded”. But paradoxically, this stuffy atmosphere is relieved – or perhaps enhanced – by the presence of the boundlessness of this land “stretching to infinity” (260). As in *Dracula*, infinity creates a sense of loss for the narrator, and therefore also contributes to his entrapment. So Daphne du Maurier's play with Gothic categorisation of space actualises the genre and adapts it to the twentieth century, but also creates expectations and mirages. Space is never quite what one thought it would be but it is not radically other. It remains manifold, with its contradictions and cartographical incoherences.

Thus, the Gothic traditional space finds echoes in Daphne du Maurier's short stories. As she masters this literary tradition and its codes, she is able to construct new claustrophobic spaces through which modernity is seen as in a distorted mirror. Technical progress and modern cityscapes are shaped in a twisted way which highlights the twentieth-century anxieties and conveys a new sense of enclosure.

### **C. Monstrosity and Metamorphosis: a conflicted fascination.**

*“Du Maurier uses Gothic tropes of the monstrous body, veiling, freakishness and masquerade in order to interrogate the uncanny nature of identity itself”<sup>66</sup>*

The Gothic body occupies a special place in this alarming space. Indeed, space is not only a setting for distorted bodies, but it is also the matrix that brings them into existence. In Daphne du Maurier's short stories, distorted and monstrous bodies are shown as an emanation of the landscape. Space contaminates everything, down to the bodies, which consequently become its gruesome outgrowths. From this abhorrent sight arises a mixed feeling of both admiration and revulsion, a classical paradox of the Gothic that Daphne du Maurier rewrites in her short stories to adapt it to the twentieth-century perception of the loathsome.

#### **1. Masquerade**

Daphne du Maurier definitely uses the aesthetic of masquerade, thus following and diverting the Gothic tradition, in two short stories, “Don't Look Now” and “The Blue Lenses”. In “Don't Look Now”, obviously enough, the apparition of the girl in the pixie-hood partakes of the tradition of Venice's Carnival. Instead of being an innocent and festive game, this costume becomes the disguise of a monstrous murderer, which John, the main character, first thought to be a little girl in distress. The gap between reality and interpretation is a grotesque illusion that contributes to the creating of a Gothic atmosphere. Horror arises from the mistaken identity. As John catches a glimpse of the “child” for the first time, he thinks he has just seen “a little girl, in what must have

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<sup>66</sup> Avril Horner, Sue Zlosnik, *Daphne du Maurier: Writing, Identity and the Gothic Imagination*, *op. cit.*, 186.

been near danger” (16). He associates this sight with the archetype of vulnerability and it conjures up the image of the little red riding hood in the minds of John and the readers. This swift vision calls to his instinct of paternity, as he and his wife have lost their little girl, Christine. The dwarf was first thought to be a little girl, a sort of double of the couple's dead daughter. But John is subjected to the mirage. This double turns out to be a beastly inversion and acts, therefore, as an inverted double of the innocent victim. But if “John plays out a patriarchal paternalistic fantasy of control, rescue, restoration of order, [...] intent on rescuing the vulnerable little girl in the pixie hood ostensibly fleeing a male attacker”<sup>67</sup>, his attempt at saving her lamentably fails. “This pixiehooded ‘child’ not only needs none of his fatherly protectiveness, she turns it against him, grinning, empowered, monstrosity in the disguise of vulnerability with the castrating knife, a single throw to the throat killing him.”<sup>68</sup> So the masquerade leads to a radical inversion of roles – hence the surprise and the final horror. Far from discovering a frail little girl, John is faced with the monstrous disproportion of a “great square adult head too big for her body.” The distancing is put forth by the way he calls her “the creature” (57) after he has seen her “grinning at him” (57) and displaying her “hideous strength” (57). The discrepancy between expectations and final unveiling in this short story rises “the subtle questioning of the nature of crime, whereby the victim and the perpetrator constantly switch roles”<sup>69</sup> in Daphne du Maurier's short stories. The carnivalesque is thus an essential element in Daphne du Maurier's Gothic, as it enhances the monstrosity of the body which becomes a real physical threat. The inversion of roles and identities sets forth the question of the stability of the self. In “The Blue Lenses”, the main character, a woman who had to go through an eye operation, starts seeing all the people around her wearing grotesque animal masks. First interpreted as a big joke – although a bad one – the woman becomes quite convinced that what she thought were “masks” (58) are the real faces of people's true selves. And the masquerade quickly becomes a vivid image of hell. The animal heads are increasingly threatening, starting with a cow, then a dog, a weasel, a lion, and finally a snake. The masks here, instead of hiding personalities, reveal them, as Marda West identifies people's appearances with their moral characteristics. Distorted vision is understood as “hypervision” (4) and so “divulge[s] a [...] hidden bestiality.”<sup>70</sup> However, the revealing of these monstrous disguised bodies is far from bringing the reassurance of rationality. On the contrary, be it a “creature” (57) or an animal, “the uncanny body that is not a body often signifies the breakdown of homeliness, rationality, and sanity.”<sup>71</sup> Both familiar and unfamiliar in a revolting way, these carnivalesque bodies bring chaos and definitely refuse to be

67 G. Wisker, “Don't Look Now! The compulsions and revelations of Daphne du Maurier's horror writing”, *op. cit.*, 29.

68 *Ibid.*, 29.

69 Sally Beauman, in D. du Maurier, *The Breaking Point*, *op. cit.*, p. xiii.

70 N. Auerbach, *Daphne du Maurier*, *op. cit.*, 120.

71 S. Chaplin, *Gothic Literature*, *op. cit.*, 243.

ordered.

## 2. Distorted bodies

The Gothic monster usually stands for the obnoxious self that one could potentially become. It disgusts, and yet, strangely, it also fascinates. Contemporary critics such as Sue Chaplin and David Punter focus on the notion of “mutability” in Gothic writing, and provide an interesting answer to the problem of paradoxical fascination: the monstrous body is fascinating because it has freed itself from boundaries. More than human bodies in disguise, Daphne du Maurier's short stories very often involve deformed, aching, revolting bodies, which encapsulate a confusing blend of fear and desire. More unsettling still: the monstrous body itself is not stable, it is constantly evolving and is, therefore, unpredictable and impossible to categorise. The desire to see is always accompanied by abhorrence. In “The Apple Tree”, a man becomes obsessed by an apple tree which, apparently dead for years, has begun to live again in his orchard. He is disgusted by the revolting sight of this tree suddenly growing monstrously, overflowing with an excessive life, because he becomes increasingly convinced that this tree is, in fact, the reincarnation of his dead wife. What makes this tree monstrous is its excess: with its “buds in plenty” (124), it is later “tortured by fruit, groaning under the weight of it.” (144) The repetition of the adverb “too” also reinforces this impression: “the blossom was too thick, too great, [...] as if the effort had been too much.” (137-138) And yet, no matter how “extraordinary the dislike he ha[s] taken to the tree” (144) may be, the widower's eyes are always irresistibly drawn to it, which is constantly compared to a human body, and more specifically his wife's. The branches on the trunk are “like narrow shoulders on a tall body, spread[ing] themselves in martyred resignation” (114), and “the roll of wire circling the tree [...] like a grey tweed skirt covering lean limbs” (114). The green colour of the wife's dress on a picture is echoed in the “greenish” (128) smoke of the smouldering logs. Whatever he does, the man cannot escape the tree's sight from his bedroom window, nor can he avoid his “filthy tasting” (142) fruits and the “queer, rather sickly smell” (127) of its wood burning. The physical disgust that the tree provokes is mixed with a sort of fascination, and awe becomes one with disproportionate hatred. The monstrous tree is detested because it is a constant reminder of the hated body of his wife. Hence his disproportionate and obsessional relentlessness in destroying the apple tree: the man needs to kill the tree because it destabilises his stability and threatens his identity by unsettling boundaries. As suggested by Avril Horner and Sue Zlosnik, “for him, the tree *becomes* the loathed



and abject older female body”<sup>72</sup>. The monstrous “other” in “Not After Midnight” undergoes a different mutation. In this short story, the narrator, on holiday in Crete, is disgusted by an American tourist's physical appearance, which is compellingly described as monstrous. As in “The Apple Tree”, monstrosity is conveyed through disproportion in the face of the American, called Mr. Stoll. His skin is made especially repulsive. It is “swollen, [...] as if stung by a million bees, [...] like the skin of a sausage about to burst” (68). By a strange turn of events that is only half-revealed, the narrator seems to catch a mysterious disease that leads to his metamorphosis into the same despicable being, which he comes to see as beautiful. The transformation is mediated through the gift of an antic jug in the shape of a creature that resembles Mr. Stoll's face. First disgusted, the narrator, as if infected, comes to think that “somehow the face no longer seemed so lewd” (68), until the once abhorred face is transcended, idealised, made sublime. So Daphne du Maurier unveils the paradox of the monster, which is both rejected and desired. The narrator's metamorphosis shows how the Gothic monster really acts as a despicable double of the self, and how this double can overcome the former self. Monstrosity is thus regarded in its relativity and one is led to wonder at its definition. At the end of “Monte Verità”, Anna – who was thought to be in a mystical monastery where women keep their beauty forever – unveils her leprosy-eaten face to the awe-stricken narrator. “Anna stands in the long tradition of draped figures in monastic settings who throw back their cloaks to reveal some ghastly transformation.”<sup>73</sup> The narrator's reaction is not sickness, but paralysis: “I could not move, I could not speak” (110). The horror is conveyed through its impossibility to be named, as shown by the three dots which create blanks on the page and in his thoughts. Here too, there is a strange blend of desire and disgust, which is typical of the Gothic unveiling scenes. Finally in “The Old Man”, Nina Auerbach shows how the final metamorphosis of the couple into swans triggers both admiration, at the sight of these beautiful figures, and outrage since this majestic flight is apparently permitted by the murder of their son. What is most unsettling in all these transformations is that, observed from the outside, is that “they are unnervingly arbitrary. They seem unearned, with no discernible purpose.”<sup>74</sup> Monsters do not embody a moral punishment of any sort, nor a logical, scientific metamorphosis. Their permanent mutability arises fear because it cannot be controlled, categorised, predictable. On the contrary, Daphne du Maurier uses the Gothic tradition of monsters and disgraceful beings to blur the boundaries of identity and interrogate the stability of the self. The term sublime could epitomise quite well the notion of monstrosity in the Gothic: it is both the extremely beautiful and the crossing of lines, the overcoming of borders.

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72 Avril Horner, Sue Zlosnik, in H. Taylor, *The Daphne du Maurier Companion*, op. cit., 244.

73 E. Westland, *Reading Daphne*, op. cit., 133.

74 N. Auerbach, in H. Taylor, *The Daphne du Maurier Companion*, op. cit., 238.

So Daphne du Maurier is once more borrowing from the Gothic tradition to mirror the anxieties of her time. In the traditional Gothic, physical monstrosity would represent immorality and an ostensible punishment for crime. Victims would be innocent and beautiful, while villains would be wicked and repulsive. The threat, in the past centuries, was eternal damnation. In the twentieth century, the threat concerns the integrity of the self and the stability of identity. Being monstrous – or sublime – supposes a breaking of reassuring boundaries. Thus, Gothic monsters are still used to embody and encapsulate the anxieties of their contemporary time, but these anxieties have changed and with them the function of distorted bodies. The monster becomes more ambiguous, it can raise a sort of compassion, and even appear as loveable in “Monte Verità”, as well as provoke chilling horror through the sight of its warped being. And yet, it still epitomises all the fears that cannot be named, but that take shape in its twisted limbs and its ravaged skin. The monster's function is to show what one could potentially become, inwardly and outwardly. Daphne du Maurier's monsters thus imperil the integrity of identity and threaten to disintegrate both bodies and minds.

#### **D. An illusion of Gothic? Mirages and hallucinations**

Gothic writing implies a play on truth. Whatever is seen, felt, or heard is always subject to doubt, be it reasonable or unreasonable. The pervading unreliability of the Gothic text constructs a network of mirages that verge on hallucinations sometimes. Deception is at the core of Gothic writing because the uncertainty it causes creates a permanent feeling of threat, of alarm.

##### **1. Uncanny visions and dreams**

The Gothic distils a “sense of mysterious danger, reinforced by the use of dreams, visions, and psychic phenomena.”<sup>75</sup> Faithful to this technique, Daphne du Maurier also uses dreams and uncanny visions as a means to plant seeds of doubt and thereby create a Gothic atmosphere of

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<sup>75</sup> M. Mulvey-Roberts, *The Handbook to Gothic Literature*, *op. cit.*, 28.

threat. The uncanny is defined by Freud as something unfamiliar, but that was once familiar, which intrudes into one's life and provokes an uneasy feeling of unexplained recognition. This psychoanalytical concept has been fruitfully applied to the study of Gothic texts to unravel the recurrent motives of uneasiness in this literary genre. "The Happy Valley" is a perfect example of uncanny. In this story, a woman's dream about a place strangely finds its echo in reality. The woman recognises this uncanny place, and at the same time, it looks strange to her because it is too familiar. She has known the place before in her dreams, but this supernatural recognition is doubled by the fact that she also finds the house inhabited by a family and sees her personal belongings through the window. With growing uneasiness, she recognises even her husband who "look[s] strange, too" (155). This uncanny feeling is encapsulated in the photograph of herself of which she catches a glimpse, "one she did not know, with her hair done differently" (154). Similarly, when she meets the little boy – whom the reader guesses must be her son, in a vision of the future – she feels that "he was dear for no reason" (154). But the vision is a fleeting one and the return to reality is blurred. The vision seems more real than the nightmarish sight of the house once more deserted, marked by an overwhelming sense of absence: "there were no curtains on the window of the room, and the room was empty, the walls unpapered, the floor bare boards" (157). And indeed, the main character dismisses the real deserted place altogether as "unreal, untrue, so desolate, forlorn" (157). So this vision is deeply disquieting for the main character, and it remains so for the reader who, contrarily to her, does not "forget what happened" (157). In "Don't Look Now", John has a vision of his wife on a boat which, at first might look completely insignificant, but which turns out to be a macabre sight since it foreshadows his death. As in "The Happy Valley", characters do not understand straight away the meaning of the fatal vision, but it remains strongly tinged with a sense of threat and death for the reader. In "The Apple Tree", the widower oddly thinks he recognises his dead wife in an apple tree of his orchard. The uncanny element is that the resemblance is made striking between the wife and the tree and that the main character seems to be the only one who notices it. The vision is not shared by anyone but the main character so that its validity is questioned. One would be tempted to interpret it as a fanciful mistake, a mirage. But the fact that this vision is brought with an insidious sense of threat tends to confirm the authority of the vision. The apple tree, as if in response to the widower's relentlessness in killing, finally entraps the man in its roots and leads him to death. So Daphne du Maurier constantly perturbs her reader with inexplicable visions and dreams, thus creating a Gothic atmosphere of tension due to an unknown threat. In du Maurier's short stories, the uncanny is a foreboding of the lethal power of the vision.

## 2. Madness or horrifying truth ?

*“Whether the wild improbabilities of the story are true or the whole is but the hysterical product of a diseased mind, we shall never know.”*<sup>76</sup>

Most of Daphne du Maurier's narrators are quintessentially unreliable. In the same logic as dreams and visions, manipulative narrators contribute to shed a confusing light over the nature of events. One never quite knows whether the narrator is telling horrible facts or whether he or she is making up a Gothic story out of plain truth. There are two categories of narrators in Daphne du Maurier's short stories, first-person narrators and third-person narrators with the main character as focaliser. Both types are unreliable, although they claim their sincerity. The narrators of “The Doll”, “Not After Midnight”, “Ganymede”, “Escort”, “The Old Man”, “Kiss Me Again, Stranger”, “The Breakthrough” and “The Chamois” are all first-person narrators, all affected by various sorts of pathos, ranging from fussiness to excessive pride and dementia. The narrator in “The Doll” introduces his narrative acknowledging that he is mad and by asserting that the events that he will recount are responsible for his insanity and accuses specifically Rebecca: “You have made me a madman” (15). Yet he wants to provide a clear account of what happened, “to make a plan – an orderly arrangement of dates” (15), but the whole narrative is fragmented and indefinite, even sporadic. What's more, his madness seems to come before his affair with Rebecca. When he meets her, his admiration goes along with an inordinate longing for violence: “Her throat was very long and thin, like a swan's. I remember thinking how easy it would be to tighten the scarf and strangle her. I imagined her face when dying – her lips parted, and the enquiring look in her eyes” (17). The accuracy of the details he gives about the agony reveals a sadistic imagination. So it becomes quite impossible to judge whether the narrative is the fruit of a sick imagination or the faithful account of dreadful facts. In “Not After Midnight”, madness is not claimed at all by the first-person narrator, but his fastidiousness could be akin to insanity. His lack of reflection is filled by hearsay, maxims or talk of his mother, which guide his actions: “remembering the maxim that one must humour madmen and drunks, I replied courteously enough” (69). His sense of propriety causes him to elude the nature of facts. He only refers very vaguely to a mysterious and shameful disease, somewhat comparable to an infection caught by a bug, and he rejects all responsibility in catching it when he introduces the narrative. He claims instead that “the bug [he] caught was picked in all innocence” (58). Eventually, his possible madness is exposed through the instability of his view and the

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76 D. du Maurier, *The Doll*, “The Doll”, *Ibid.*, 13.

implausibility of his conjectures as he implies that the gift of an antique jug would cause physical metamorphosis: “my downfall was caused by an age-old magic, insidious, evil, its origins lost in the dawn of history” (59). In “Ganymede”, the narrator would rather display an excess of imagination too, shown through his giving Greek mythology names to everyone around him. He always interprets events and people as part of a tale, a myth. Fantasy and reality are thus confusingly blurred. Thence he calls “Ganymede” a young waiter with whom he falls in love, and, therefore, thinks of himself as Zeus, in the third person: “Zeus, the giver of life, the immortal one, the lover; and that boy who came toward him was his own beloved, his cup-bearer, his slave, his Ganymede.” (90). Ganymede's uncle, seen as a threat to the success of the affair, is given the name of Poseidon. The reader never gets to know people's real names, so that he may legitimately wonder whether anything at all is reliable in this fanciful story, which might as well be the literary imagination of an extravagant scholar on holiday. The question of reliability is complicated in “The Old Man” since the first-person narrator should be more reliable, due to his neutrality in the story. Yet, he only observes events from a distance and only gives fragments of vision: “I thought I saw Tiny [...] but I couldn't be sure” (238). This very distance is ambiguous because it prevents him from understanding the situation fully and leaves room to illusion, but most of all because it places him in the position of a *voyeur*. This voyeuristic behaviour is emphasised by his constant confusion between reality and imagination. Failing to see, he keeps supposing what might have happened, and how the old man “would be lured by the thought, [...] and he would say to her” (233) things that the narrator cannot record. The female narrator of “The Chamois” also adopts this attitude and fills the gaps with her imagination. She conspicuously imposes her bias as she interrupts the narrative with interjections that undermine the validity of her interpretation. Talking about her husband's passion for hunting, she states that it is “a desire, so I told myself, to destroy something beautiful and rare” (240). Not knowing the real motives for her husband's obsession with the chamois, she tells herself a story to replenish the missing elements. A subcategory of these unreliable first-person narrators could be entitled the narrator as an average person, a “regular guy”, as in “Kiss Me Again, Stranger” and “The Breakthrough”. Their down-to-earth perception of events makes the story more believable than the fancy of the narrators previously evoked, thereby emphasising the Gothic aspect of facts themselves. Their own lack of imagination is filled by the reader's fancy. But all these first-person narrators provide a dubious account of past events for the obvious reason that memory itself “distorts the past into a narrative centred on the self.”<sup>77</sup> Horror arises from doubt. The whole narrative is thus subject to constant uncertainty and narrators can be suspected of “gothicising” the facts. The narrators of “Split Second”, “Don't Look Now”, “The Blue Lenses”, “Panic” and “The

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<sup>77</sup> David Punter, *The Literature of Terror*, vol. 2, *op. cit.*, 48.

Lordly Ones” are pseudo neutral, but in reality mimetic of the focaliser's fastidiousness, or even mental disorder. The opening sentence of “Split Second” offers good insight into the narrowness of the main character: “Mrs. Ellis was methodical and tidy” (220). What could be a virtue, quickly turns out to be a manic obsession. Her compulsive rationality and orderliness turn into a form of madness, making her point of view most untrustworthy. Coming back home from a walk, she finds strangers in her house and determines that they must be thieves and that it is all a big plot against her. This rational explanation becomes less and less likely since not only the house but the whole city and space around her is somewhat changed. The rational interpretation would then be that she is “suffering from a temporary loss of memory” (252), but this answer is not fully satisfactory either in light of her great meticulousness. The story suggests a complex network of contradictory resolutions but none of them seems completely acceptable, as the reader is caught into Mrs. Ellis's partial, even “hysterical” (239) views. In this case, twentieth-century Gothic would interiorise horror, whereas traditional Gothic tended to focus on outward horrors affecting sound minds. But indeed, “Gothic does not merely transcribe, perverse or horrifying worlds: its narrative structures and voices are interwoven with and intensify the madness they represent”<sup>78</sup>. Thus, space itself is distorted further by the point of view of unreliable narrators. Perspectives are twisted and it is not clear whether fragmentation is inscribed in space or whether it comes from the fractured view of characters. Likewise “The Blue Lenses” is centred on the extremely unstable focalisation of Marda West. Even before she starts seeing people with animal heads, her far-fetched inferences make her point of view undependable. She associates the smell of soap with reliability, using very logical connections which are not justified: “the hand smelling faintly of the Morny French fern soap with which she washed her, these things gave confidence and implied that she could not lie” (45). The verb “implied” is completely misplaced here. Indeed later, her hallucinations of animal-headed people are always subject to doubt, since she lets herself being overwhelmed by impressions and emotions. Her moral judgements about these people are even more questionable. Consequently, “We never know whether these insights are true or the result of the patient's paranoia – trapped as we are, du Maurier style, in one person's head.”<sup>79</sup> When Marda West, on the verge of paranoia, tries to escape the nursing home and runs through the streets in a completely nightmarish atmosphere. The reader never gets to know whether this vision was twisted by the focaliser or whether the world around her has indeed become hell. Her frightful imagination for the future – “the jungle would take over, multitudinous sounds and screams coming from a hundred throat” (70) – echoes the imagery of hell in the Gospel according to Saint Luke: “There shall be tears and gnashing of teeth” (Luke,

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78 Scott Brewster, “Seeing Things: Gothic and the Madness of Interpretation”, in David Punter, *A Companion to the Gothic, op. cit.*, 281.

79 E. Westland, *Reading Daphne, op. cit.*, 128.

18:23). The intertextual reference does not confirm her fears, but undermine them by showing how she is overpowered by her delusive imagination. In Daphne du Maurier's short stories, the Gothic battle then takes place in the unstable minds of the characters and especially the narrators'. The outer fight against dark purposes and threatening figures is displaced to become an inner conflict staged mainly within the characters. Their ghastly visions are the main Gothic element in the narrative, more than outer facts and people, no matter how terrifying. Twentieth-century Gothic hinges on the inner fight for sanity and safety, which are constantly threatened.

### **3. A reversal: metamorphosing the hideous truth**

In two short stories, "Fairy Tale" and "La Sainte Vierge", Daphne du Maurier draws an opposite movement. Instead of "gothicising" banal events, she operates a metamorphosis of a gloomy reality to transcend space. In "Fairy Tale", the damp shabby place of a poor couple is transformed into a warm palace by the man's words. It is an interesting instance of performative speech: discourse literally shapes reality, which, therefore, appears as a quite malleable entity. Space is doubled, mirroring two incompatible truths. Unsurprisingly enough, "Fairy Tale" displays a setting that reminds the room of a Cinderella of sorts. It is barren, cold, shabby, marked by absence and deprivation, as exemplified by the "fireplace where no fire was laid" (86). In this room, a woman is coughing and shivering – the very image of victimhood – as the landlord, obviously the villain, "passing his tongue over his lips" (87) in a predatory gesture, threatens to throw her and her husband out. In the tradition of the fairy tale, the supernatural intervenes to solve the problem and transform the space. What is made more ambiguous, is that the reader cannot fully believe this transformation. The metamorphosis is depicted in a very definite way, with no modality or qualifying statements – "the room was furnished" (93). And yet the illusion is shattered at the end when the woman acknowledges that she feels "as though [she]'d waken up from a lovely dream" (94). The alteration takes place because of and through the words: "While he was speaking the men, following his orders, [...] brought back with them, swiftly, as though by magic, the things he was describing to her" (92). Therefore one could also interpret this as a metadramatic dimension of this story since it draws attention to the creative power of words that can offer a substantial reality. However, the fragility of this illusion is also pointed out when the husband tells his wife: "there's never been such a room as this" (93). The adverb "never" carries an equivocal meaning. The statement could mean at once that the room is beautiful beyond compare or that the room as he

shows her actually never existed out of their imaginations. So once more, the consistency of truth and the substance of reality is questioned, shown as moldable. Imagined space takes over material space but they still co-exist. Space is split in two, fragmented between physical elements and mental representations. In “La Sainte Vierge”, Marie, the main character, interprets what she sees as a supernatural apparition of the Virgin Mary giving her blessing to her husband, whereas, in fact, the husband is seducing another woman right before Marie's eyes. Space, in this story, unmistakably expresses death. The opening paragraph distils a stuffy impression with “no air, no life” (130), “the trees were motionless, [...] their drooping leaves colourless” (130), and “ditches smelt of dead ferns” (130). The village is “dusty and lifeless” (131) and even the chapel where Marie goes to pray is depicted as a tomb, barren and dusty too. The statue of the “Sainte-Vierge” is described by the narrator in a derogatory way: “her face was round and expressionless, the face of a cheap doll.” (136). This is a far cry from the way Marie sees the statue since for her “the figure was the most beautiful and sacred thing in her life” (136). Therefore, Marie's admiration for the same statue is ironically disregarded and so is the so-called “sign” miraculously given by the Sainte-Vierge. The metamorphosis of the vision is less ambiguous this time because of the narrator's cynical distanciation. But still, it shows how reality is unreliably shaped by the character's vision. This short story, written earlier, before Daphne du Maurier fully mastered the art of writing, already contains the seeds of doubt that she will plant in many later stories.

Thus, Daphne du Maurier gothicises her character's visions in order to show that no truth is fully stable and reliable, which anchor fully her writing in the Gothic tradition. One can sense the context of modernism in literature as well, insofar as the full knowability of the outer world is put under close examination. Madness is never far, considering the twisted visions, or indeed appalling hallucinations, that are given to read. As a consequence, ambiguous narrators and focalisers contribute to – or even cause – the fragmentation of spaces.

To conclude this first part, I would say that Daphne du Maurier's writing draws on the Gothic literary tradition to convey a contemporary sense of threat and anxiety. At first sight, if the Gothic is defined by its elements, there is not much to be found of it in Daphne du Maurier's literature – villains, haunted castle and damsel in distress are very few. But if Gothic is considered by its original reason for being, it may be more coherent. Gothic literature, initiated by Horace



Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), was first and foremost a reaction against modernity and the Age of Enlightenment. It aimed at showing that, despite the modern sense of rationality and control of man over Nature, things remained precisely out of control and resisted mere reasoning. The Gothic is, by essence, anti-modern, and that is what makes it so modern – it always adapted its themes and purposes to the specific anxieties of its time, emerging from the ongoing progress of modernity. Daphne du Maurier thus explores contemporary anxieties about war, the traumatic shift in time due to it, the unpredictability of natural elements, and psychic powers. Traditional Gothic writing is not merely transposed by the author, it is fully renewed in the light of new literary trends such as Modernism, Postmodernism and Magic Realism. The medley of all these literary genres gives rise to a powerful writing that focuses on a modern sense of imprisonment. There is a double movement in du Maurier's writing – fragmentation and narrowing. From outward threats, concerns have moved to an inner fight for sanity, and from unified self to split consciousness. The danger of immorality has been replaced by the peril of amorality, in a writing that fragments spaces to such an extent that all conventional boundaries are disrupted.

## II. WITHIN AND WITHOUT: FRAGMENTATION AND DIS-LOCATION IN DAPHNE DU MAURIER'S SHORT STORIES

*“Dedans et dehors forment une dialectique d'écartèlement”*<sup>80</sup>

Space in Daphne du Maurier's short stories is structured according to an essential divide between inside and outside. This opposition actively shapes all the sorts of spaces that are displayed and contrasted in the stories. Very often, this apparently objective divide takes on a metaphorical dimension. Thus, the distinction between within and without becomes the expression of a breach between constraint and freedom, safety and danger, feminine and masculine, body and soul. All these divisions are common dichotomies that Daphne du Maurier “spatialises” to better examine and question them. In her short stories, no space escapes fragmentation, none of them can be taken as a coherent whole. Boundaries are not only the outward limits delineating the space but also the inevitable characteristic of these modern dislocated landscapes. Unity is desperately sought, but never achieved, as characters and readers thrive to find reassuring stability. Borders are altered, reversed, unpredictable, threatening. Nevertheless, the quest for identity is still made dependent on space, one's inner self is to be found in outer spatial elements. So the great divide in space can be both perilous because it prevents the self from finding integrity, and crucial in the sense that it allows one to observe, to distanciate one's self and, therefore, to attain and construct inner cohesion. In the interwar years and after the Second World War, Daphne du Maurier's aesthetics of fragmentation is not isolated, but it seems to be in the same line of thought as other literary movements, such as Modernism. So this part shall focus on how Daphne du Maurier's short stories set spaces that are conspicuously torn apart in order to interrogate the nature of identity and the twentieth-century sense of inner fracture.

### **A. Constraint and Freedom: a boundary to be overcome**

The most obvious reflection of the inside and outside conflict is the opposition between constraint and freedom. Comprehensibly, the inside, as a delineated space, is the place of constraint,

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80 G. Bachelard, *La Poétique de l'Espace*, *op. cit.*, 191.

while the outside, free from boundaries, is the place of liberty. This is what Daphne du Maurier confirms on the surface, while planting seeds of doubt concerning the stability of this border and the constancy of the spaces it opposes. Mirage of borders abound, seeing that the closer one comes to the boundary, the dimmer it becomes.

### 1. An apparent dichotomy

Daphne du Maurier certainly construes the outdoor space as a place of freedom, be it physical or psychological, in many of her short stories. One can notice the similarities between characters of “Monte Verità”, “East Wind”, “The Little Photographer” and “Adieu Sagesse” for example. They are all led by a terrible, almost supernatural drive to go out. All of them are escaping the stuffy atmosphere of confined home life. The closed indoor space can be simply the house, as in “Monte Verità” and “East Wind”, but it can extend to a whole village as an area of conventional constraint, as in “The Little Photographer” and “Adieu Sagesse”. In “The Little Photographer”, a young Marquise feels stuck in her daily life, and feels suddenly free to break away from her conventional life because she is out on the cliffs. The outdoor marine space gives her the liberty that she could not grasp indoors. The atmosphere of stuffiness is rendered by the emphasis laid on afternoon rest – a rest which is in fact like death. The repetitions in all situation and the cyclical dimension of this persistent order suggest a feeling of being stuck in an unwanted situation.

“Rest... But, thought the Marquise, I never do anything else. My life is one long rest. *Il faut reposer. Repose-toi, ma chérie, tu as mauvaise mine.* Winter and summer, those were the words she heard. From her husband, from the governess, from sisters-in-law, from all those aged, tedious friends. Life was a long sequence of resting, of getting up, and of resting again. [...] Heavens above, the hours of her married life she had spent resting, the bed turned down, the shutters closed. In the house in Paris, in the château in the country. Two to four, resting, always resting.” (167)

This imperative sounds unescapable. No matter the language used for the command, the place or the season, it implies being enclosed, shut off in her room. As to the château itself, it has “the mustiness of death” (181) and “silence fell upon the place like a great white pall.” (164) So all these indoor spaces distil a suffocating atmosphere, as the Marquise feels that she is being buried alive. By contrast, on the cliffs where she goes to meet her lover, a little photographer, she is “bound no longer to the tyranny of home” (161). The elected spot is marked by openness: “the clearing was

open, and this was wide to the cliff face, and the sea” (180). So the contrast between indoor enclosing space and outdoor freeing space is made very striking in this short story. In “Adieu Sagesse”, an old man called Richard Ferguson escapes from the stuffy atmosphere of a tiny village of narrow-minded, well-thinking people. Like the Marquise's château, the village of Maltby is strongly associated to death: “He was dead. They were all dead. Maltby was a dead city... worse than any visionary Pompeii” (69). The village houses are the mirror of society's constraints – with their “prim aspect, the narrow gardens with their stiff flowers” (79). Facing this, the sea is seen as the incarnation of freedom for Richard Ferguson, emphasised by the ternary rhythm of its epithets: “Something lay before him that was splendid, intoxicating, immense” (79). Even more powerfully here, the outdoor space of freedom calls him. In a sudden epiphany, “merely the siren of a ship [...] had sounded to him like a call from the dead” (68). Interestingly, the central parts of the narrative are set in the harbour, that is to say in a liminal space, both within and without. It suggests freedom but cannot give it in full. Both the harbour and the man, mirroring each other, stand “on the threshold of his dream” (79), until R. Ferguson finally succeeds in escaping, in crossing the line, thereby becoming “sublime” (83) in the literal sense. Quite accurately, Ina Habermann explains that “the sea becomes a symbolic space of freedom and movement beyond essentialism and the constrictions and rules of the community.”<sup>81</sup> In “The Chamois”, the first person narrator identifies the mountain refuge with a prison, “remembering Harrison Ainsworth's *Tower of London* and the chamber of torture.” (257) As opposed to it, the outdoor space once more offers a freedom from constraint, as the path is “clearing to the stream, [and] the sky looked wider than it did at home.” (253) The verb “clearing”, also employed as a noun in “The Little Photographer”, is significantly used in Daphne du Maurier's short stories to convey growing freedom and a shaking off of hindrance. So in these short stories, it appears that indoor coercive space is set in sharp contrast with outdoor lawless freeing space. These qualities of spaces are expressed through images of vastness and narrowness which, as shall be examined, deeply impact the characters that evolve in these antagonistic zones.

## 2. Space as a defining entity

In *Myth, Memory and the Middlebrow: Priestley, du Maurier and the Symbolic form of Englishness*, Ina Habermann explains her key idea that identity is shaped by the space, and more

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<sup>81</sup> Ina Habermann, *Myth, Memory and the Middlebrow. Priestley, du Maurier, and the Symbolic form of Englishness*, New York, Springer, 2010, 156.

specifically the English space. She argues that the notion of Englishness has known an increasing importance from the interwar period until the end of the Second World War. This notion implies a “mythical connection between the people and the land”<sup>82</sup>, and supposes that “identity is conceived as directly emerging from and shaped by the land and expressed in response to the landscape.”<sup>83</sup> The 1920s, 1930s and 1940s are a period of prolific novel writing for Daphne du Maurier, and short stories are a little set aside until the 1950s. However, the idea that space defines identity can be found in her later short stories. Two striking examples of this conception are “The Archduchess” and “East Wind”. In “The Archduchess”, a utopia about a fictional kingdom called Ronda, the land not only shapes the character of its people, but also triggers political events. Despite the drastic political and cultural change in Ronda after the revolution, “the only thing about Ronda that cannot be spoilt is the contour of the land” (160), and, as a consequence, “even now, when so much has been changed, the tourist leaves Ronda with regrets and nostalgia” (160). In other words, after all the surface political transformation, the identity of the land – and the people – remain untouched because they are derived not from abstract cultural notions but directly from the shape of the land. In this logic, one could analyse the power of national space in this short story as a reflection of the English myth about their own land, which is consubstantial with the English people's identity. Beyond shaping of identity, the land of Ronda even intervenes in the events and thus shapes memories and history: “This avalanche had all the weight of propaganda behind it. [...] it was almost as if the snow had some evil purpose” (188).

Similarly in “East Wind”, the inhabitants of the island are likened to it, both are untouched by modernity and live in a sort of pre-lapsarian era and area. The overwhelming dullness of life on the island is common to both people and landscape, as enhanced by this comparison: “They were peaceable folks, these natives of St Hilda's, born to a quiet, untroubled existence as monotonous as the waves that broke against their shores” (2). Thus, “outward similarities of shape are taken as evidence of an internal substantial identity”<sup>84</sup>. In a way, this rejoins the idea of Gaston Bachelard in *La Poétique de l'Espace*, who explains that a person ends up taking the shape of its shelter, of the building or land that he inhabits. Because of the consubstantiality between land and people, the divide between space of freedom and space of constraint implies indirect consequences on the individual. Indeed, the land shapes national identity, but this impact is also present at a smaller scale. Space is a mould for the spirit, and therefore a constricted space will give birth to a restrained mind, while a wide open space will allow a broad mind to develop. This is a recurrent theme in Daphne du Maurier's short stories. In “The Little Photographer”, spaces of freedom and enclosure

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82 *Ibid.*, 13.

83 *Ibid.*, 15.

84 *Ibid.*, 19.

are set in sharp contrast, but most importantly they have the capacity to modify the self they shelter. Consequently, the marquise finds herself changed when she is on the cliffs, to the point that she surprises herself: “‘Why don't you kiss me?’ Her own words shocked her” (182). She finds herself astonished by the metamorphosis that she observes within herself, which is due to outward elements of space. She cannot really point out what her new identity might be but she knows that it is a radically different from the one framed by the usual place of constraint that enclose her: “to be – what ? She was not sure. But something other than the self who now, for so long, was in truth a real lady, sipping tea in the salon at the château, surrounded by so many ancient things” (181). So identity in this story cannot be conceived out of its surroundings since space is the main actor in the forging of the self. Avril Horner and Sue Zlosnik, in *Daphne du Maurier, Writing, Identity and the Gothic Imagination*, also point out an analogy between space and spirit, but instead of analysing it from the inside of the defined space, they consider the analogy from the outdoor perspective. They argue that being outside not only sets you free physically, but that it also reflects metaphorically the broadening limits of the spirit. I would go even further and argue that spatial boundaries are not only metaphorical or symbolic but that these material borders are indeed true limits for the freedom of the mind. The fracture in spaces that emerges strikingly in Daphne du Maurier's short story reflects and shapes the fragmentation of the self. The indoor self undergoes a deep transformation as it steps outside, to become the outdoor self. The outdoor self is completely renewed insofar as it has freed itself from the constraining boundaries characterising the indoor space, and imposed by it. But this metamorphosis is made more ambiguous because this liberation, allowed by vast outdoor space, is destabilising for the self. Although the outdoor self is born, the indoor self is still present and claims its due. The two selves are now conflicting. Being outdoor only provides an illusion of freedom since the constrained self does not cease to exist and to demand security. This creates an inner clash that Daphne du Maurier also spatialises according to this main divide between within and without.

### **B. Safety and Danger: looking for a protecting limit**

The simple spatial dichotomy between restraint and freedom is complicated by its superimposition with another dichotomy between safety and danger, which uses the same confusing threshold. The limit between indoor and outdoor is still delineating the two sides of the opposition.

While the inside is presented negatively according to the first divide between constraint and freedom, it is seen in a positive light in the opposition between shelter and wilderness. So the outdoor space's positive quality is also qualified, to emphasise its perilous dimension. The two conflicting views on spaces are overlaying each other so that it would be quite impossible to conceive a plainly moralistic partition of spaces in Daphne du Maurier's short stories.

### 1. The house: a place of continuity and peace

As acknowledged by Helen Taylor in her introduction to du Maurier's *Myself When Young*, Daphne du Maurier believes in “the succour of four walls”<sup>85</sup>, that is to say in the safety of a house, sheltering one and protecting from the instability of outdoor spaces. Gaston Bachelard, in *La Poétique de l'Espace*, goes a little further in this reflection and defines the house as a “gîte de la rêverie”<sup>86</sup>. So the house not only protects your body but it is also the shelter of your thoughts and dreams. “La maison abrite la rêverie, la maison protège le rêveur”<sup>87</sup>. In “The Happy Valley”, the idea is taken quite literally, since the house is, first of all, a place of dream. What matters most is that the house is “above all a place of safety, nothing could harm her there” (147). It is a house of dream in the literal sense, before being a real house, that the main character eventually comes across. This is the reverse of what usually happens according to G. Bachelard, since “The Happy Valley” tells the recognition of a dream in real life, instead of evoking the day-dream memory of a lost house. Interestingly, the dreamed house, surrounded by what the main character calls the “happy valley”, is only accessible by a threatening path “narrow[ing] to a scrappy muddy footway, tangled and overgrown” (147). The recurrent dream always starts in the menacing outside, with the main character trying to find the house, to finally whisper “I'm here, I'm happy, I'm home” (148). To put it another way, the outdoor space is not at all sought for its liberating quality but fled, and the safety and the intimacy of domesticated space – namely the valley and the house – are favored over the wilderness. In “The Pool”, the house's sense of safety also extends to the gardens, which are somehow domesticated, civilised. “The garden had waited patiently all these months since last summer” (125), and “so did the summer house” (127), and the familiarity that arises from this quiet domestication is perceived as pleasing and reassuring. Each room in the house contains the seeds of intimacy, like “the bathroom [which] was a place of confidences” (135). The house is the place

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85 Introduction by H. Taylor, in D. du Maurier, *Myself When Young*, *op. cit.*, xiii.

86 G. Bachelard, *La Poétique de l'Espace*, *op. cit.*, 33.

87 *Ibid.*, 26.

where Deborah's grandparents sleep at peace, thus embodying the sense of rest and continuity. "Safety lay in the house behind the closed curtains, security was with the grandparents sleeping in their beds. [...] The slumbering solid house received her." (141) The safe dimension of the house is certainly enhanced in this passage, but its being closed is also underlined, though more discreetly. The house can offer a reassuring shelter because it is closed, with the curtains as an impenetrable barrier for the outside threatening elements. The house is comforting because it is "familiar" (142), and therefore reassures the character who recognises her inner self in this enclosed surrounding. The stability of the house is bestowed upon the individual.

In "Monte Verità", the monastery hidden in the mountain is seen as a home. Although it is not exactly a house, it resembles one because of the feeling of peace and ease that one receives when coming in. The home is the place where characters can "hide [them]selves from the world" (110), and therefore be truly at peace. More than the house, Daphne du Maurier's short stories focus on the sense of homeliness, which itself is associated with intimacy, safety, and familiarity. Seen as a threat to freedom from the outside, the home becomes a sweet homeland in the inside, once the borders are crossed. Even in "The Little Photographer", the Marquise enjoys seeing her lover freely on the cliffs, but she cannot give up her homely "nest" (180). In one of her letters, Daphne du Maurier herself emphasised this vision: "women are more primitive... for a time they wander...and play at love ... but instinct is too strong ... they must make their nest."<sup>88</sup> So the domestic space, usually taking the shape of a house, is seen as an essential refuge to shut one's self away from the outside world. The security it brings is presented as opposed to the dangerous outdoor space. The longing for freedom, it would seem, lost the battle against the primitive need for safety, and the fracture of the self remains unsolved. The feeling of safety is mainly caused by familiarity with things, objects, people. This familiarity allows a continuity with what is known, whereas the outdoor space demands a leap into the unknown, by nature frightening because of its unpredictability.

## **2. The dangerous outside**

As opposed to this safe place, the outside is presented as hazardous and menacing. In "East Wind", brutality comes from the wind outside, set in sharp contrast to the domestic safe space. This

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<sup>88</sup> Quoted by M. Forster, *Daphne du Maurier, op. cit.*, 162-163.



story hinges round “despoiling”<sup>89</sup> where “the unsullied Eden is an island, cut off from the world.”<sup>90</sup> As the outer world breaks in with the coming of the wind, “lust is awakened”<sup>91</sup> and, with it, eventually comes murder. Therefore this outdoor violent space, in which “all the while the sun beat down upon their heads and the East Wind blew, scorching the air like a breath from hell” (7), provokes an irreparable disruption and the breakdown of indoor order. The pseudo restoration of order when the wind goes away with the foreign sailors is not satisfying, and it would rather enhance the devastating power of the outdoor space of lawlessness and chaos. There is a constant identification between the land and its inhabitants, constructed by a network of parallels and metaphors. As Guthrie “felt restless, excited” (5), similarly “the very air was restless” (8). It is as though the outdoor space had been re-created and, with it, the islanders. An indirect reference to the Book of Genesis suggests this re-creation: “the day passed thus, and another night, and yet another day” (10). The binary rhythm of the sentence, created by the parallelism, could easily be likened to the biblical parallelism: “there was evening and there was morning, one day” (Genesis 1:5). The change comes from the outside, interestingly, so that it is the outdoor space that modifies the individual and brings chaos into their lives. The peace and quiet of their former indoor lives is lost because of the fatal attraction of the dangerous outside. Comparable events are told before and after the re-creation, thus emphasising the subtle change due to the intervention of the violent outdoor space. When Guthrie and his wife, Jane, lie together at the beginning, it is without desire: “he could feel the warmth of her body, but his heart was not with her.” (5). The same structure is reused later to show the change within Jane when she dances with a sailor, and this time desire is awakened: “she was aware of the warmth of his body against hers. [...] They smiled, reading in each other's thoughts.” (9) So characters are renewed, just as “the island was a new place now, broken of peace, swayed by suggestions and filled with strange desires” (8). The hypallage here creates a clear identification of the islanders with the island. The island is, syntactically, filled with desire, but, semantically, this precision applies to its human inhabitants. The inversion is reinforced by the metaphor about Jane which likens her to the island when she stands “like a white phantom, broken and swept by the wind” (11), as the island does. Once again, her description echoes the island's, compared at the beginning of the text to “a phantom creation of a sailor's brain” (3). Characters are depicted as a piece of land, and the island is displayed as a character. So Daphne du Maurier does not directly liken the characters in her short stories to the land they inhabit, but the confusion between the two is strongly suggested by a subtle network of metaphors and parallelism. The variation in space, in “East Wind”, causes the emergence of separate personalities fighting within

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89 Introduction by Polly Samson,, in D. du Maurier, *The Doll*, *op. cit.*, viii.

90 *Ibid.*, p. viii.

91 *Ibid.*, p. ix.

characters, and the “outdoor self” is shown as the most threatening to one's integrity.

In “The Closing Door”, it is made quite clear that the outside offers an illusion of freedom. The air is intoxicating and makes the main character believe that he is freed from his disease, to brutally bring him back to reality. There is even a sort of cruel cynicism in the outdoor space. The main character tries to reassure himself when he is out, thinking to himself that “maybe he had seen too darkly, and really it was better to paint pictures as she painted, to dream visions as she dreamed” (197). Yet the veil of illusions is ruthlessly torn by the ghastly sight of “the crumpled figure of a man, his legs twisted under him, his arms folded horribly, his limp fingers drooping from his white hand” (197). This paralysed man is a double of the main character, who uselessly tried to escape his fate. Interestingly, this figure is met outside, as if to show what other self – a distorted version of the actual self – one could become under the overpowering influence of the outdoor space. The outdoor space is thus presented as jeopardising for the integrity of the individual, presenting much too clearly what beast one could turn into. “That very freedom is dangerous in its evocation of an 'other' self that threatens the main character with psychic fragmentation”<sup>92</sup>. Therefore, the outdoor space could be analysed as an inverted indoor space, and the same division applies to the self that occupies those spaces. In the same way in “The Pool”, the pool and the forest promise freedom and full knowledge, but what they eventually give is close to drowning. So there is an ominous physical danger, already foreshadowed by “the monster tree, the hybrid whose naked arms were like a dead man's stumps, projecting at all angles.” (145) The “secret world” (140) – a name Deborah gives to the supernatural visions she has – is asking her out, and “haste was imperative” (152). Be it real or a delusion, the essential qualities of this world are to be undisciplined, exterior and alarming. When the illusion vanishes, Deborah finds herself caught as “the pool that claimed her now was not the pool of secrecy but dank, dark, brackish water chocked with scum” (154). It is as though the secret world, promising knowledge, freedom, and joy, was trying to engulf her. Deborah finds herself “caught up in the great demand” (138) of the pool, which appears as ambivalent and treacherous. More than physical danger, this outdoor space is a menace to psychic stability because it casts doubts upon one's dependable knowledge: “Which was real? The safety of the house or the secret world?” (142). The outdoor space would, therefore, contravene the freedom it promises, as it actually calls “like the pull of a magnet” (152) to finally entrap. This foreboding also stands out in “The Chamois”, as the female first-person narrator feels enclosed when “the dusk crept upon us” (250) and “forests of beech surrounded the cabin” (250). The attractive sense of freedom is constantly balanced by an awareness of the intrinsic threat that the outdoor space embodies. Therefore, it would be erroneous to claim that Daphne du Maurier is simply praising the freedom

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92 Avril Horner, Sue Zlosnik, *Daphne du Maurier: Writing, Identity, and the Gothic Imagination*, op. cit., 67.

outside and pleading to get her characters out of the safe place, to make them break free from conventional boundaries. The outside is shown as an ambivalent space, and the freedom it gives, physically and psychically, is illusory and often associated with chaos.

### 3. Foreignness

A specific sort of outside threat also emerges from du Maurier's short stories, with the notion of foreignness. As highlighted by Avril Horner and Sue Zlosnik's *Daphne du Maurier and the Gothic Imagination*, foreignness is "used to explore divisions within the subject."<sup>93</sup> In other words, the foreign is undecipherable because it embodies a sort of hybridisation. It is both alike and radically different. It evokes the "other". In "The Doll", Rebecca is coming from an eastern European country and apparently has Jewish parents, and her foreignness makes it impossible for the narrator to fully understand her. Illegibility is at the heart of the story and the first-person narrator is overwhelmed with a sense of loss and uncertainty. Rebecca remains equivocal, both sweet and wicked. Her geographical origins are unclear, she eludes the narrator's questions by saying that "she had travelled much, and especially in Hungary. [...] She did not care for London. She wanted to go back to Budapest" (17). Her rejection of the familiar world of the narrator – London – makes her unreadable and alarming, for she is unpredictable. Symbolic foreignness is represented by literal foreignness. Like a tourist, the narrator enjoys the beauty he contemplates but he cannot comprehend it nor feel familiar with it. Even the kiss is metonymic of the divide due to foreignness: this physical touch should be the sign of unity, but here, on the contrary, it emphasises the gap. "She lay cold and still in my arms. Her mouth was icy" (26). Failing to see her in all her strangeness, the narrator compares her with elements of his own culture that he can master. She is thence compared to "Mephistopheles" (22) – here the Christian paradigm is out of key with her Jewish culture – as well as to a "child" (19) in prayer, and an "elf" (16). All these comparisons suggest strangeness, but only within the narrator's cultural language since his mind cannot conceive a radical otherness. In the foreign "other", the narrator sees a threat to his integrity because he realises that it is both similar and unintelligible. And from this arises the fear of seeing one's own conception and sets of defining values destabilised. The unintelligibility of Rebecca for the narrator is stressed by the utter fragmentation of the text, underlined by the overflowing punctuation and the shattered typography. The favoured elements of punctuation are dashes and three dots, which are

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93 *Ibid.*, p. 128.

both visual ellipses. The narrator cannot bring his narrative to any coherence and pull together foreign elements that are impossible to comprehend, to unite. The narrative is so shattered that the fictional publisher, Dr. Strongman, interrupts the text with several notes emphasising the fracture: “You have never begun to image... (*Note*: Much of this seems completely unintelligibility, and the quarter page that follows consists of nothing but broken sentences and half-formed ideas. Then the narrative continues.) It was shattering.” (27) Beyond the ominous semantics of adjectives and verbs suggesting disintegration, the very interruption of the narrative is violently accentuating the fractures of the text, which are but the reflection of a splintered understanding of unknowable foreignness.

“Don't Look Now”, “Ganymede” and “Not After Midnight” are all marked by a feeling of uncertainty about the non-English. The three short stories are set in foreign countries, Italy and Crete, so the English tourists are the foreign beings in this environment and this quality prevents them from fully understanding the people that surround them. However, they also cultivate a certain distrust, and even a special hate, of foreign tourists they come across, especially Americans. In “Ganymede” and in “Not After Midnight”, the American accent is mocked. The prim narrator in “Not After Midnight” feels disgusted by the vulgarity of the way the American, Mr. Stoll, addresses him: “You're the fellow who paints all day on his God-damn porch” (80). The American accent in “Ganymede”, is even more accentuated: “Ah! You missa your way” (97). Both their mannerisms of speech – the adding of *-a* at the end of words and the scattered speech punctuated with incessant “God-damn” – blur the readability for narrators and readers. Their foreignness is here a permanent and conspicuous obstacle to full understanding. At the same time, the American language is frightfully similar to English. This rejection of foreignness as a symbol of a disconcerting blend could be construed as the fear of inner-self split. The foreign both repels and fascinates, and this motive could be interpreted as a certain fear to turn into this inverted, dangerous double. Fascination even exceeds revulsion in “Not After Midnight”: “A sudden temptation to peep at the unpleasant Mr. Stoll's chalet swept upon me.” (74) Mr. Stoll acts in fact as a double of the narrator, Timothy Grey, who gradually becomes a being that is foreign to himself. The split of personality is epitomised by the ancient jug that is given by Mr. Stoll to the narrator:

“The body of the jug had been shaped cunningly into a man's face, with upstanding ears like scallop-shells, while protruding eyes and bulbous nose stood out above the leering, open mouth, the moustache drooping to the rounded beard that formed the base. At the top, between the handles, were the upright figures of three strutting men, their faces similar to that upon the jug, but here human resemblance ended, for they had neither hands nor feet but hooves, and from each of their hairy rumps extended a horse's

The complexity of the syntax of these two long sentences confuses the image of the jug. It is both one and multiple, with the unique figure of satyr-like face, replicated three times on the jug. The paratactic construction of the two sentences blurs the lines of the jug and thence mirrors the intricacies of the selves competing within the individual. This foreign antique jug, both unfamiliar in time and space to the narrator, gives him tangible and alarming insights into his own self-fragmentation. This very dull and moderate character gradually becomes his invert, an embodiment of excess, at any rate, another self that he does not recognise when revealed in a dream: “the man who pranced in their midst and played with them was not myself, not the self I knew, but a demon shadow emerging from a jug, strutting in his conceit as Stoll had done” (96). In this dream, as in the description of the jug, three figures – the narrator, Mr. Stoll, and the satyr on the jug – are interwoven to form a paradoxical unity. Mr. Stoll and the jug only appear, therefore, as hidden facets of Timothy Grey's self. Both of them are part of his individuality and alien to it, hence the feeling of revulsion when contemplating foreignness: its sight evokes other inner-selves that could break through and go on a rampage. So it would seem that foreignness irresistibly attracts in Daphne du Maurier's short stories, but as though to seduce into a trap. Like the outdoor space, foreign national space stands for the unknown zone that threatens the individual with inner fragmentation because it displays destabilising doubles.

Thus, it appears that the individual in Daphne du Maurier's short stories is torn between two imperatives: the longing for freedom and the need for safety. Daphne du Maurier never draws a clear line nor does she indicate the right path to follow. The two dimensions remain in conflict and the self remains fragmented. The two imperatives correspond to the two selves that are fighting within the individual. This inner conflict is mirrored and triggered by space, which has the true capacity of defining the individual. As underlined by Margaret Forster in her biography, Daphne du Maurier was fascinated with C. G. Jung's work in psychoanalysis, and especially in his theory of the two competing selves, like to separate personalities that come to light in different moments in life – and, I would argue, in different spaces in her writing. This double distribution of spaces – freedom and constraint, danger and safety – provokes multiple mirages because of the superimposition of contradictory boundaries. This conflict of superimposed boundaries does not annihilate them but makes them impossible to grasp. Spaces are, therefore, fragmented by elusive borders.

### **C. A gendered fragmentation of spaces: feminine indoor space and masculine outdoor space**

This fragmentation between freedom and safety is doubled up by a gendered fracture of spaces, structured, once more, according to the same divide between within and without. Traditionally, the feminine space is defined by indoor domestic intimacy, whereas the masculine space is characterised by outdoor action. Daphne du Maurier reworks this geographical partition of spaces in her short stories, showing the link between space fracture and split identity. The author positions borders according to this within/without line in some of her short stories, but she also diverts it by blurring the line or reversing it. A lot of contemporary criticism has been dedicated to the study of this notion of gendered space, including Avril Horner and Sue Zlosnik's *Landscape of Desire*, on which my analysis is mostly based. Daphne du Maurier's writing is not studied in this essay, but some key concepts can be used to shed light on her work.

#### **1. A paradoxical space fracture...**

The traditional space fracture between feminine indoor space and masculine outdoor space is no more than a reworking of the book of Genesis. Adam was created in the wilderness, while Eve created in the garden. Man and woman do not belong to the same space. The garden is not exactly a house, but it is still a domesticated space, and it has doors – that are eventually shut after the Fall. Therefore, Western literature – not only Daphne du Maurier's – has to position itself according to this divide presented by the most founding text of Western culture. It is either accepted or subverted. The most representative short story in terms of gender-fractured space is “The Pool”. The story recounts two days of a young girl's holidays at her grandparents' house. The divide between house and garden on the one hand, and forest and pool on the other is made quite striking. The obvious contrast lies in the difference between civilisation and cruelty, order and chaos, and the opposition between feminine and masculine is only inferred but unequivocal. Nevertheless, this state of things is not accepted by the main character, Deborah, who is also the focaliser. This traditional boundary between feminine and masculine is questioned. Interestingly, recent critics have provided an interpretation of the Gothic cloistering of women. Andrew Smith's *Gothic Literature* (2007) and Sue Chaplin's *Gothic Literature* (2011) argue that Female Gothic – that is to say Gothic literature by women authors – exposes the women's containment into domesticity. Women who try to extricate themselves from this dynamic are labelled as mad. There is a need to

contain the so-called madwoman inside, otherwise, she might disrupt patriarchal order. In “The Pool”, the taboo of menstruation is alluded to at the end of the story. So when re-reading in the light of this event, the whole story can be interpreted as a rite of passage from childhood to womanhood. Before her first menstruation, Deborah is free to go in and out as she pleases. After it, she has to stay confined indoors, in the feminine space where she now belongs. The coercive dimension of this belonging appears in this sentence: “Deborah had been ordered two days in bed” (154). The choice of the verb suggests an intimidating constraint and the passive structure betrays that it is not a personal but a general order, emanating from a broader entity than just family. The law speaks for itself. As underlined by A. Horner and S. Zlosnik, “an implicit recognition of the power of discursive formations to constrain and restrict is expressed in metaphors of enclosure.”<sup>94</sup> The pool is to be “fenced round” (154), and so is Deborah. The passage from girlhood to womanhood is perceived as a tremendous loss due to her spatial constraint. Deborah deplores the fact that “the hidden world [...] was out of her reach for ever.” (155) And it is out of reach precisely because it belongs to a space which she can no longer access.

The partition of masculine and feminine spaces is also alluded to in “The Chamois” when the female first-person narrator hears the goatherd give a strange whistle which she describes in this manner: “It was the hissing whistle blown between tooth and lip heard on the pavement of a garish city, and the woman who hears it quickens her step instinctively. I paused” (253). In this comparison of the whistle, the narrator hints at the partition of contemporary urban space. The street, the modern outdoor space, is essentially a masculine world that is threatening for women. Yet, in “The Chamois”, the parallelism between the woman and the narrator's “I” sets forth the rejection of this partition. By pausing, the narrator is opposing. But this does not mean that the so-called battle of spaces is won since she keeps feeling the threat of outer space for her as a woman. In “The Apple Tree”, Daphne du Maurier reverses the spatial assignation of genders. The outdoor space is ruled by the feminine – by the wife when she was alive and then by the apple tree which stands for the dead wife – while the indoor space is the refuge of the masculine. Thus, the widower recalls how he used “to hide, to feel the snug security of four safe walls that were his alone” (116). Like the archetypal afraid woman described by the narrator in “The Chamois”, the widower feels the need to protect himself from a space that is denied to him, on which he has no power. Nina Auerbach reads this story as a revenge of the feminine over the masculine for “a past of domestic murder”<sup>95</sup>. Without going as far, it can be acknowledged that this story sets an inversion of gendered spaces, and consequently a reversal in the balance of power. So Daphne du Maurier's stories

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94 Avril Horner, Sue Zlosnik, *Landscape of Desire: Metaphors in Modern Women Fiction*, London, Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990, 13.

95 N. Auerbach, *Daphne du Maurier, op. cit.*, 64.

position themselves ambiguously about this gender-fractured space in so far as the allocated roles are changing instead of being fixed in well-defined positions. The feminine characters are not invariably locked inside, nor are they systematically longing to go out. Nevertheless, what seems to interest du Maurier, once again, is the consequence of spatialising gender and the impact on the construction of identity.

## 2. ...reflected on identity

But Daphne du Maurier's "The Pool" does not read as easily as the story of a girl who struggles against the restraints of a so-called patriarchal society that would be imposed on her. The spatial fracture is reflected in identity in this story so that there is a sort of confusion between space characteristics and personal attributes. This story is really about the painful coming of age from girlhood to womanhood. Interestingly, Deborah accepts to be a girl as she accepts to remain indoor, at the end of the story. As long as her identity is conflicted, she escapes outside. As already examined, the outdoor space is not only a reflection of identity, it shapes it. Following this principle, the outdoor "masculine" space would free Deborah of the constraints imposed on her femininity. At the same time, the central outdoor element is the pool and it is seen as a feminine element, to which Deborah is denied the way once she has grown up into a woman. So the spatialisation of gender remains a paradox, and the story keeps an ambivalent significance. In Avril Horner and Sue Zlosnik's interpretation, the pool, as a liquid element, could symbolise a longing for freedom: "a sense of the self as existing beyond those constraints is expressed in metaphors of fluidity"<sup>96</sup>. But the key to this world apparently freed from boundaries is finally lost, "it was like Adam and Eve being locked out of Paradise. The Garden of Eden was no more." (144) Paradoxically, Deborah is locked out of a specific feminine space once she went through the rite of passage to womanhood. So the identity that is constructed in space is more ambiguous than it would first appear. The feminine is not simply confined indoors to become a "proper" woman in the social sense. The outdoor space too bears fragments of that femininity which is mysteriously denied – not renounced – with the coming of age. Sue Chaplin's *Gothic Literature* offers a useful analysis of the twentieth-century literature's interest in gender identity, which throws light on Daphne du Maurier's work. According to this critic, Gothic writing in the 1970s takes a growing interest in "the painful transition from childhood to sexual maturity"<sup>97</sup>. Daphne du Maurier's "The Pool" indeed explores the suffering

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96 A. Horner, S. Zlosnik, *Landscapes of Desire*, op. cit, 13.

97 S. Chaplin, *Gothic Literature*, op. cit, 169.



caused by this harsh rite of passage, but looks more concerned about the questioning of gendered spaces than the exposure of gendered roles. This story suggests that the feminine spaces are not solely domestic but also found outside four walls, in the wilderness, where other facets of feminine identity are grounded. More indirectly in “Don't Look Now”, the labyrinthine space of Venice causes John, the husband, to get lost and to lose his identity as well. As already analysed, the protecting father figure he tries to be, escapes him at the end, as the little girl he seeks to shield turns out to be a murderous female dwarf who clearly rejects his fatherly instinct, as shown by Gina Wisker's article. According to G. Wisker, John literally and metaphorically goes to a dead-end, because he rejects his feminine side, that is to say, his intuition. I would go even further and argue that John gets lost in his normally allotted space, the outdoor space. Metaphorically, this means that his quest is mainly an identity quest which he lamentably fails to achieve. So both these short stories exemplify the links drawn between identity and gendered space in Daphne du Maurier's writing.

Thus, the gendered fragmentation of spaces in du Maurier's writing complexifies the already existing fractures between inside and outside. And yet, this gendered division is not as binary as the conflicts between freedom and constraint, danger and safety. It takes a kaleidoscopic form, so that ranging spaces according to a feminist or non-feminist line would not make much sense in Daphne du Maurier's short stories. Spaces remain ambiguous, contradictory. However, these multiple shattered pieces of conflicted spaces disintegrate the unity of the individual. To put it plainly, space fragmentation causes a split of self. Characters, especially female characters, in Daphne du Maurier's short stories are not one and whole but complex and diffuse. The typical feminine character in du Maurier is “neither a feminist nor a rebel”<sup>98</sup>, Nina Auerbach notes. Similarly, space in her short story does not embody an elated freedom nor a full-fledged patriarchal constraint. It escapes all simplistic categorisation. In line with the twentieth-century world depicted in du Maurier's short stories, space escapes reassuring definition and delineating, its outward boundaries are blurred and its inward borders are multiplied.

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98 N. Auerbach, *Daphne du Maurier*, *op. cit.*, 7.

#### **D. Soul and Body: where does safety lie?**

If one cares to look at a smaller scale, there is also a split between the inner self and the outer self, or, to put it more clearly, between body and soul. The fragmented identity of the individual is also experienced in the duality between matter and spirit. This dualist distinction is not very original in itself, but Daphne du Maurier renews it by considering it in two different lights. Along the lines of psychoanalysis, the inner self is seen as fundamentally contradictory and is not a place where one should linger, or else the self may endure irreparable fragmentation. On the other hand, the inner self is set forth as a soul trapped in a body. In this case, Daphne du Maurier uses biblical semantics and pagan traditions as well as scientific theories. In both situations, the division between within and without remains problematic, considering that no union is ever achieved.

##### **1. A psychoanalytic approach: the inner-self, a land of uncertainties**

David Punter's *The Literature of Terror* gives a quite succinct definition of the self in psychoanalytical terms, saying that the unconscious can only be known through its exterior manifestations. In his view, what interests most Gothic authors is the relationship between the “surface and hinterland”<sup>99</sup> of things. Daphne du Maurier can be related to this observation since many of her short stories are concerned with what happens within the self, more than the exterior expression of it. The contradiction between the two – the calm surface and the unstable mind – highlights the fragmentation of the self: there is no unity in pain nor joy between body and mind. In “The Closing Door”, the main character, who discovers that he suffers from a rare disease, stays very calm on the surface but fears what is inside of him. He pictures his inner self as a beast eating his soul. The reader is not given any depiction of physical pain or distortion that would be due to the disease just diagnosed. The psychological pain is however displayed with great physical violence as he hears the diagnosis: “every word was a fresh torture thrusting itself deeper, twisting and turning like a knife” (193). Paradoxically, the main character looks more afraid about his rotting mind than about his decaying body. The threat to his integrity concerns his spirit, not his body. He cannot figure himself in pain, but he can foresee his being “absolutely helpless” (190). As explained by Julia Kristeva in *Powers of Horror*, Christianity set a new paradigm for the divide between inside and outside, and Daphne du Maurier seems to go along these lines. After Christ, defilement no

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<sup>99</sup> D. Punter, *The Literature of Terror*, *op. cit.*, 48.

longer comes from outer bodily impurities – such as food or leprosy – but it is interiorised, it comes from the heart of man. The threat to identity, formerly characterised in the Old Testament's vision by a physical “intermixture, erasing of differences”<sup>100</sup>, is displaced in the inside. In the Christian paradigm, identity is threatened by the inside, by the division of the heart. The spiritual land in “Ganymede” is complexified because it integrates exterior space – and this integration does not go without distortions. In this story, the main character, an English scholar on holiday in Venice, internalises the city space within himself. He likes Venice as a place, but he is most fascinated by what he calls “the Venice within ourselves” (88), which is really the one that causes trouble, more than the actual city. As explained by Sue Chaplin in *Gothic Literature*, “textual and spatial distortions are thus mirrored by (and possibly are a product of) the distorted imagination of the narrator”<sup>101</sup> in Postmodern Gothic. This spiritual Venice could, in fact, be the image of a labyrinthine mind where one should not linger too long for fear of getting lost. As reminded by the narrator himself, the actual Venice is no longer the dangerous Gothic city: “No, we have a different key. A different secret. It is what I said before, the Venice within ourselves” (88). In other words, the threat is no longer exterior but interiorised. The fragmented, labyrinthine inner self has become the menacing space. The enclosure is not physical but psychological. The soul, “from having been an assurance of immortality, [...] becomes the uncanny harbinger of death”<sup>102</sup>. So the inner self is essentially something that one should be wary of, because it is intrinsically unreliable and uncertain – whereas the body, therefore, appears as a reassuring limit that recalls an apparent unity of the individual. But reconciliation between body and mind is unachievable, thus reinforcing the divisions of the self, induced by spatial disintegration.

## 2. An old myth: the soul entrapped in the body

Conversely, the inner self can be presented by some stories as a volatile entity waiting to be freed from the constraint of the body – instead of a dangerous zone. From a scientific point of view, “The Breakthrough” and “The Lordly Ones” both present the body as a limit containing the spirit. “The Breakthrough”, which could be classified as a science-fiction short story, follows an obscure group of scientists whose secret aim is to release and capture “all that energy escaping as we die” (274) and to “imprison the life-force” (275). MacLean, the head scientist, refuses the futility of

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100J. Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, Columbia UP, 1982, 101.

101S. Chaplin, *Gothic Literature*, *op. cit.*, 201.

102Sigmund Freud, *Writings on Art and Literature*, Stanford, Stanford UP, 1997, 210.

death and rejects death as nothingness. The notion of spirit is somewhat degraded into what the scientist calls “the Sixth sense” (271) or “Force Six” (271), which can be tapped and stocked as a powerful electrical signal. The spirit, in this modern Gothic tale, is no longer a spectre but a sum of measurable scientific data. The traditional theme of ghosts is, therefore, debunked: “‘Ghoulies and ghosties?’ he queried. ‘Good Lord, no! There is no more left of poor Penny but electric energy’” (283). The whole point of their dubious experience is to catch the energy that was once contained into the body to avoid its disappearing into thin air, and thus prove “the survival of intelligence after death.” (301) But the electric signal which “seem[s] to contain, in its confident movement, the whole of life” (294), still awaits to be released. From one imprisonment to another, the spirit longs for the freedom of boundaries. Daphne du Maurier defines what she calls the “sixth sense” in her essay entitled *Enchanted Cornwall*: “There is a faculty amongst the myriad threads of our inheritance that, unlike the chemicals in our bodies and in our brains, has not yet been pinpointed by science, or even fully examined. I like to call it “the sixth sense”. It is a sort of seeing, a sort of hearing, something between perception and intuition, an undefinable grasp of things unknown”<sup>103</sup>. Daphne du Maurier acknowledges here her belief in something that science can merely touch upon but that fundamentally escapes the world of sole physicality. This “sixth sense” is described here as physically imprisoned into the body. So at the scale of the individual, the notion of constraint and freedom still affects the perception of spaces and their opposition.

“The Lordly Ones” tells a radically different story but could be likened to this idea of spirit entrapped into the body. It is the story of a young disabled boy, who is also the focaliser, and who cannot speak. Everything he feels remains stuck inside or breaks through violently by harrowing screams. The cries that come and go out of his body seem to be completely alien to him, as if his self resided really in his spirit, detached from his constraining body. His body is so detached that it has become utterly out of the control of his mind: “The noise would not be quelled. It did not belong to him. [...] Later, [...] he would hear the noise die away” (273). The body is seen as the quintessence of the limit, enclosing the spirit, a true obstacle to communication. Whenever he tries to communicate his fear or misunderstanding, his body forbids it: “he began to cry. Explanation was beyond him” (280). The frequent passive structures suggest that his body is commanding over his self, thereby accentuating the gap between himself and his body, as if the latter was an exterior entity: “Fatigue seized him [...]; only the gasp for breath, the stifling sobs, told him that the pain was with him, but for what reason he could not tell” (275). The passive structure enhances the powerlessness of Ben when confronted with physical sensations that do not even seem to belong to him. As indicated by the definite article “the” – where normally the possessive pronoun “his” would

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103D. du Maurier, *Enchanted Cornwall: Her Pictorial Memoir*, London, Penguin, 1992, 162.

be expected – the sensations are familiar, but outside of himself. As a consequence, his own body language is undecipherable even to himself. The dead metaphor of the “tongue-tied” (273) boy is taken quite literally and revived to display the body as an alien element, a place which limits the self.

From a more Christian perspective, “Monte Verità” presents an ideal of happiness where people, living in a hidden monastery lost in the mountains, people seem to be freed of their bodies. They no longer feel the need to speak, they communicate from spirit to spirit instead. As in the Christian religion, the body can be decaying, but the soul remains intact. The same idea is found in “Monte Verità”, since Anna has contracted leprosy but it does not in the least affect her achievement of peace and happiness because she has freed herself from bodily concerns. The other members of the community in Monte Verità have also succeeded in freeing themselves from the body boundaries, since they can now see through it, and are thus no longer shocked by physical decay: “there was no horror there, no fear and no revulsion. One and all they looked at Anna with triumph, with exultation, with all knowledge and all understanding” (111). The barrier formed by the body has been crossed over. The disunion between body and mind remains, but this time spirit has surpassed matter. Andrew Smith acknowledges “the horror of physicality”<sup>104</sup> and “distrust of the body”<sup>105</sup> as typical of the twentieth-century Gothic, which seems to put forth the superiority of the soul. On top of the scientific stance and the Christian view, Daphne du Maurier provides a third basis to the idea of the soul trapped in the body. Using old pagan beliefs, she puts forth the dualist contradiction with the notion of reincarnation and disembodied spirits. In “The Apple Tree”, the dead wife is interpreted as re-incarnated in one of the orchard's apple trees. So she is still the prisoner of a material body, and her very materiality makes her vulnerable to the attacks of the husband against this abject tree. At the same time, this remains ambiguous since possessing materiality gives her power, the power to eventually entrap and kill the husband. “Ultimately, the female nemesis triumphs, however, as the wife forces him to join her in death and he becomes the victim in this tale of a woman who is dead but will not go away”<sup>106</sup>. The annihilation of death is once more refused, and the disunion between spirit and matter is shown by the possibility of reincarnation. If a spirit can reincarnate, it supposes that the body is just an envelope in which spirit can take shelter or be imprisoned. In “Don't Look Now”, Daphne du Maurier plays on the topic fear of spirits, as the twin sisters claim that they can see the couple's dead daughter, Christine. Although John dreads this psychic message, spirits here are not only harmless, they are also benevolent and try to prevent the catastrophe. Horror and abomination come with the monstrous body of the dwarf,

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104A. Smith, *Gothic Literature*, *op. cit.*, 131.

105 *Ibid.*, 131.

106 In H. Taylor, *The Daphne du Maurier Companion*, *op. cit.*, 244.

not from the spiritual part of the self. In other words, the superiority of spirit over matter is claimed in these short stories, while the limiting power of the body as a boundary is fought, though sometimes in vain.

Therefore, freedom is caught between within and without, between the outdoor space, the outer self and the inner self. Daphne du Maurier's characters are often in quest of this freedom, but most of all they are trying to escape the enslavement of either their body or their mind. Melanie Heeley explains in plain terms the existing tensions that exist in du Maurier's writing between two systems of thought, Christianity and Paganism. Daphne du Maurier's attitude towards Christianity is ambiguous, and “she is both mindful of its codes and also defiant of any orthodox stance”<sup>107</sup>. This ambivalence allows Daphne du Maurier to consider the fragmentation of self at the small scale of the individual. Both body and mind are treated as spaces, with their potential vastness, narrowings and obscure corners. These lands that constitute the individual are however never in unison. The divide between within and without remains, and the twentieth-century sense of dislocation is thus thoroughly explored.

#### **E. Dislocation and absence of closure: an illusory border**

Although Richard Kelly is not a fervent admirer of Daphne du Maurier's work, he puts forth the notion of dislocation to comprehend some of her short stories. The literal meaning of dislocation is to throw out of order, to upset, to put out of place. This definition could indeed apply to many of du Maurier's short stories, especially “The Birds” and “Don't Look Now”, if one follows Richard Kelly's argument. What actually defines Daphne du Maurier's short stories is this sense of dislocation of space. Nothing seems to quite fit into space. Lands are fragmented, characters are inevitably out of place, and no limit is clearly drawn. After the study of the various contradictions that split spaces into pieces – and, with them, the construction of identity – it is necessary to explore the foundations of the constant impossibility of achieving unity, be it spatial or individual.

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<sup>107</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 132.

## 1. Ambivalence of the Sea: encountering the “Other”

*“The sea remains a constant challenge to the English, protecting their island fortress but also eating away at it, serving as a bulwark against, but also as a contact zone for encounters with the ‘other’.”*<sup>108</sup>

An element which has so far be slightly underexamined in du Maurier's short story writing is the sea. The sea is a primal element of disruption. In *Myth, Memory and the Middlebrow*, Ina Habermann casts light on the ambivalence of the sea for England: it protects the English, but at the same time it establishes a contact with the “other” – usually the French – and it threatens to engulf the island. In “The Birds”, the sea carries hords of murderous birds, and in “Escort”, the sea abounds in enemy ships and submarines. Paradoxically in “The Birds”, the sea is the cause of the disruption in order, but it is also guaranteeing a minimal orderliness with the regular coming of the tide: “there was some law the birds obeyed and it was to do with the east wind and the tide” (26). However vague this interpretation may be, it still provides a law of predictability which unables the space to be rationalised. But at the same time, the sea, “fiercer now with the turning tide” (5), is partly responsible for the disorder. In many stories, the sea is also perceived as an ambiguous element, sheltering treasures, as in “Not After Midnight” and at the same time “lapping against the rocks” (73) and “sucking at the dragging stones” (The Breakthrough, 260) as a monster ready to engulf. In “East Wind”, the sea creates a direct contact between the inhabitants of St Hilda and the foreign sailors. Indeed the sea, suddenly violent, accidentally brings these sailors, and with them comes a yearning for destruction. So far, the sea had protected the islanders and preserved their peaceful lives. From this change in tide, the landscape, like the characters, starts to act destructively, as shown by the semantics of the verbs chosen: “the dawn had broken” (6) and “the sunt beat down upon their heads and the East Wind blew, scorching the air like a breath of hell” (7). The sudden brutality of the landscape is one with the unforeseen madness of the islanders. The bulwark has become a besieger. As pointed by Ella Westland, “the livelihood of the inhabitants is at the mercy of the waves”<sup>109</sup> and these waves are dangerous in their potential to create contact with “‘culture's other’.”<sup>110</sup> The sea, in Daphne du Maurier's short stories, is truly culture's 'other' insofar as it opposes orderly civilisation by its intrinsic lawlessness, infinity and uncontrollability.

In “The Little Photographer”, the sea is playing an even more ambiguous part. As the

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108I. Habermann, *Myth, Memory and the Middlebrow*, *op. cit.*, 156.

109E. Westland, *Reading Daphne*, *op. cit.*, 151.

110I. Habermann, *Myth, Memory and the Middlebrow*, *op. cit.*, 156.

beautiful marquise throws her holiday lover off a cliff – in order to ensure a return to order – the sea is used as a protection and an alibi. The killing itself is striking in the simplicity of its telling: “Leaning forward, her hand outstretched, she pushed his stooping body. He did not utter a single cry. He fell, and was gone” (193). Movements that follow one another are plainly described without any comment, suggesting a self-conscious murder. The absence of comment is mirrored in the silence of the victim. The events seem to succeed in natural order, as if the sea was claiming its due victim, far beyond the Marquise's will to commit murder. The sea therefore provides a right alibi, it bears the responsibility and also gives an excuse for the Marquise in the eyes of the world: she will say that she went swimming at that time, so that she cannot be accused of murder. In accordance with this logic, the Marquise feels no sense of guilt but only various physical sensations that she carefully notes: “it seemed suddenly cold. She shivered” (193); “suddenly her knees began to tremble and she sat down” (193); “she remembered with relief that today she had brought her mirror in her bag. She glanced at it, fearfully. Her face was chalk white, blotched and strange” (194). Still indifferent to any feeling of remorse, she goes down to the beach. But as she swims she comes to the horrible realisation that “had she gone on swimming she would have touched him with her feet, as his body came floating in towards her on the water” (195). So the protecting sea has also the ambivalent power of creating a contact with the abject “other” – here the man's corps. The sea also has a symbolic power of evoking corrosion, which is once more brilliantly set forth by Ina Habermann. “The coast as a liminal space reflects the erosion of self-evident moral standards in its blurred boundaries.”<sup>111</sup> The “other” is thus not merely the dead body or the foreign, it is also the unknown land that stretches beyond the conventional limits of moral. In “The Little Photographer”, the Marquise is fully confronted to the vertigo of this liminal space. Confusion in this in-between space is caused by the sea's power to dis-locate everything, to put things out of their natural place. From this, as in “Escort”, arise multiple illusions and delusions. The sea becomes a mirror for phantomatic visions and mirages. Its relentless monotony offers no guarantee of peace and reliability. The sea, in Daphne du Maurier's writing, remains a threatening comfort.

## 2. A sense of being out of place

*“I was lost between two worlds. Mine was gone, and I was not of theirs”*<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>111</sup>*Ibid.*, 173.

<sup>112</sup>Daphne du Maurier, “Monte Verità”, *The Birds*, *op. cit.*, 97.



The sense of dislocation implies a feeling of being ill-placed, of fracture, and therefore indicates a space fragmentation. The various parts of an unseen whole are separated. In “The Birds”, it is the natural chain of beings that is suddenly broken for no apparent reason, to the great dismay of Nat, the focaliser. He seeks to rationalise these unexplainable events and his logic fails to bring any light on the growing chaos. The narrative is “relentless as the movements of the birds.”<sup>113</sup> At the very beginning of the story, there is a sense of unity between the man and the land, that gradually disappears to be finally completely fractured, as Nat can no longer interpret and comprehend the Nature that surrounds him. When the story opens, the preterit, sometimes enhanced with adverbs, is used to express the monotony of a long seasonal habit of the birds: “Always, in autumn, they followed the plough” (2). But then comes the disruption when the birds start attacking men, and “the world is abandoned to movements that follow a pattern but disclose no meaning”<sup>114</sup>. The regularity in the birds' raids is disconcerting for the reader because it makes birds somehow predictable but does not provide any accountable reason for their strange fury. The unity between Nat and his natural environment is shattered and he, therefore, feels out of place. This interpretation finds an echo in the BBC transmission that Nat and his family listen to on the radio: “The flocks of birds have caused dislocation in all areas” (13). The inversion of master of the land is made striking by the reversed used of the verb “to watch”. In the beginning, “Nat watched them and he watched the sea-birds too” (2). He is the one in control, looking after his own territory. Then, the birds are in the position of guardians of their own land. The binary rhythm of two couples of similar sentences enhances the feeling of inverted balance, of antagonism: “The birds did not move. They went on watching him.” (33) / “They were quite still. They watched him” (34). Humans, replaced by birds, only appear as a mirage and out of the place where they should be. Nat, for instance, thinks he sees the Navy coming to rescue whereas in fact, “it was not ships. The Navy was not there. The gulls were rising from the sea” (37). Nat, himself disunited from his land, is no longer capable of interpreting what he sees without a first moment of illusion. The understanding and identification between man and his place is no longer possible, even when the mirage dissolves. To quote from Avril Horner and Sue Zlosnik's *Daphne du Maurier and the Gothic Imagination*, Daphne du Maurier's male characters are “dislocated from [their] environment”<sup>115</sup>. In “Monte Verità” as well, the narrator is split between several places, his work in London, his friends' house in the countryside, and Monte Verità where he thinks he finds peace. But his personal dis-location prevents him from really entering Monte Verità's community because he cannot achieve unity. Wherever he goes, he remains out of place because part of him belongs somewhere else. Mirroring

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113H. Taylor, *The Daphne du Maurier Companion*, *op. cit.*, 328.

114*Ibid.*, 328.

115A. Horner, S. Zlosnik, *Daphne du Maurier, Writing Identity and the Gothic Imagination*, *op. cit.*, 12.

this, the narrative structure is also dislocated. It is introduced by the first-person narrator who produces three theories about the nature of events, each of them the reflection of a different facet of the narrator. Then the story is unfolded, twice interrupted by letters – one by Victor (78), the other written by the narrator (97-98) who thus doubles his own voice. The main disruption of the narrative is caused by Victor's account of the disappearance of Anna. This long passage alternates between Victor's direct speech telling his story and the narrator's indirect speech. The two voices overlap each other, as the narrator assimilates Victor's story like his own. These change of voices, highlighted by the fragmented typography, create confusion at the same time as fractures in the wholeness of the narrative. In such a fragmented construction of space and narrative, the narrator cannot escape dislocation.

In “Don't Look Now”, Gina Wiskers shows how the constant misreadings and misinterpretations create a “network of terrifying and unpleasant possibilities hidden in each person and each event”<sup>116</sup>. In other words, John's fragmented vision of things creates a space fracture and always sets him in an ill-placed position. He is never where he should be, and that is what proves fatal to him in the end. Richard Kelly hence claims that “‘The Birds' and 'Don't Look Now' establish the twentieth-century sense of dislocation”<sup>117</sup>, which is characterised by a loss of landmarks and sense of belonging, as well as by a loss of meaning and causality. The twentieth-century individual is lost in a land that is strange to him, that should but does not confirm his identity, and the events growing out of the place are no longer decipherable. Another telling example of this sense of dislocation is the main character of “Split Second”. The story is about an average widow who, after a short walk, finds her house all upset with strangers living in it. Everything she sees is out of place, for apparently no reason. However, one gradually understands that she might be the displaced one. Suffering from amnesia, she may be walking in a postwar world as a sort of spectre from the past. And it really is a nightmare for the ghost herself. But space is fractured anyhow, caught between two times, consequently provoking a sense of uncanny recognition for the main character. Presenting the spatial consequences of war without war itself could be interpreted as a means to show the meaninglessness of war, which is an abundant source for the loss of meaning in twentieth-century literature. The narrator drops hints, but gives no clear interpretation of the story, even at the end, so that one never knows whether the widow was mad and suffering from amnesia, or whether she has stepped ephemerally into a post-war future before getting crushed by a car. Minette Walter, in her succinct introduction to the plot of the story, puts forth a central element: “a pleasant but not overly bright woman, who can only function in a structured environment, comes home from an

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116G. Wisker, “Don't Look Now! The compulsions and revelations of Daphne du Maurier's horror writing”, *op. cit.*, 26.

117R. Kelly, *Daphne du Maurier*, *op. cit.*, 143.

hour-long walk to find her house inhabited by strangers”<sup>118</sup>. The fact that her environment becomes de-structured is what causes dislocation of space in the story. The main character's vision of “the whole of [her] house turned upside down, the most terrible disorder everywhere” (240) triggers a deep sense of loss and self fracture. She is lost out of her natural place. Dislocation is thus an essential element in Daphne du Maurier's writing “for it identifies the fundamental disruption in the natural order of things”<sup>119</sup>. Du Maurier's characters are separated from their natural space which can no longer be a homeland. This disruption is due to “the experience of dislocation after the First World War”<sup>120</sup> that is widely sensed in English literature, beyond Daphne du Maurier's literary imagination, and it still finds strong echoes in her post Second World War writings. Being fragmented in a dislocated space, Daphne du Maurier's characters could be said to find themselves somewhat dis-membered, as coherent unity becomes increasingly unattainable.

### 3. On a threshold: the absence of closure

The notion of closure is essential to any horror story, as explained by Gina Wisker in her article. Traditionally, there can be closure thanks to the final punishing and killing of the monster or the disturbing entity. The reassuring boundary is thus drawn again. The literary critic lays emphasis on the fact that horror writing is usually not a female genre since it presents only “degraded images of femininity – victims or femme fatale. Of ultimate terror then is the figure of the transgressive sexually voracious woman who cannot be contained and the castratrix, a devouring embodiment of the ‘vagina dentata’ myth”<sup>121</sup>. Traditional horror would, consequently, embody male fears of being engulfed and “overpowered”<sup>122</sup> by a female monster. Gina Wisker then analyses the traditional structure of a horror plot – from which Daphne du Maurier's short stories distance themselves, as shall be examined. “The typical narrative trajectory of a horror tale proceeds from disturbance and transgression, to comfortable resolution and closure”<sup>123</sup>. But Daphne du Maurier's short stories offer no such reassuring closure. They play on the fear of the monstrous body but do not comply in the resolution by the destruction of the abject, usually a female “other”. The fact that these stories remain unclosed echoes the impossibility of (re)constructing a stable identity, as already

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118Introduction by M. Walters, in D. du Maurier, *The Rendezvous*, *op. cit.*, x-xi.

119R. Kelly, *Daphne du Maurier*, *op. cit.*, 124.

120Alison Light, *Forever England: Femininity, Literature and Conservatism between the Wars*, London, Routledge, 1991, 25.

121G. Wisker, “Don't Look Now! The compulsions and revelations of Daphne du Maurier's horror writing”, *op. cit.*, 20.

122*Ibid.*, 20.

123*Ibid.*, 20.

demonstrated through the study of spatial and inner fragmentation. The order is not restored, fractures are left widening. In “The Blue Lenses” for instance, the main character's last vision of herself as a doe, “wary before sacrifice” (82), remains quite problematic. After the second operation, she no longer sees others with animal heads, so natural balance appears to be restored. But she now sees herself with “a timid deer's head, [...] meek, already bowed” (82). The question of whether she has paranoid hallucinations or technical problems with the contact lenses is never solved, and the nightmare of doubt starts again. The monster that she has become continues to threaten her identity. The story seems to follow strictly the principle of horror which emerges from familiar elements – here, the hospital room, the doctors and nurses, the husband – that suddenly reveal “what is concealed, alternative versions of self”<sup>124</sup>. Horror comes for the fear of “potential disruption to our security of self, and of place”<sup>125</sup>. “The Blue Lenses” exemplifies quite well this script, with the unveiling of new, threatening identities in the familiar environment of the focaliser. And this new identity at the end, which is both repelling and fascinating, feared and desired, is apparently accepted instead of being destroyed. Daphne du Maurier does not reassure her readers with well-defined closures, contrarily to Richard Kelly's claim that “in most of her short fiction du Maurier is primarily interested in conclusions and in the events that lead to those conclusions”<sup>126</sup>. In “The Birds”, “the familiar turns into the monstrous and mankind is powerless”<sup>127</sup> while facing this invasion of space by birds. Nat and his family – despite all his attempts at fatherly protection – remain entrapped in the bunker-house, with shrinking resources, waiting for the next attack of birds, until their makeshift fences collapse. The enemy is not destroyed, and man is not given back his power over things. “In *The Birds* (1952) the people will be destroyed, not rescued”<sup>128</sup>. At the end of “The Apple Tree”, the widower is trapped in the snow by a root of the old apple tree which he sees as a reincarnation of his wife. He grows fainter and tries to call for help but receives no answer. He will probably die, and the monstrous tree will win.

While “horror tends to spatialise woman as absence or lack”<sup>129</sup>, the dead wife in “The Apple Tree” is fatally powerful in her absence. Alive, she had been “a joyless person who had revelled in martyrdom”<sup>130</sup>. Now that she is dead, her apparent meekness has turned into the abject 'other', the dejected female body whose power is beyond male control. But already before her death, “he felt himself engulfed” (119) in her disapproval, her resentment. This feeling foreshadows the end when

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124*Ibid.*, 21.

125*Ibid.*, 21.

126R. Kelly, *Daphne du Maurier, op. cit.*, 140.

127G. Wisker, “Don't Look Now! The compulsions and revelations of Daphne du Maurier's horror writing”, *op. cit.*, 24.

128*Ibid.*, 22.

129*Ibid.*, 22.

130H. Taylor, *The Daphne du Maurier Companion, op. cit.*, 243.

he is “held fast in the clutch of the old apple tree” (159). His wife's death has not freed him from her unwanted body. Conversely to the expected horror ending, the wife-tree, dead a second time under the blows of the husband's axe, is gaining more power. The moment when he finishes cutting the tree is extremely violent, and the tree resembles more a dismembered body than a pruned tree: “That's it, kick her, kick her again, one final blow, she's over, she's falling... she's down... damn her, blast her... she's down, splitting the air with sound, and all her branches spread about her on the ground.” (152). The sentence shortly following – “It began to snow” (152) – could be defined as a preclosure point in Susan Lohafer's interpretation<sup>131</sup>. This critic defines a preclosure point as a sentence which could potentially end the story. There can be many preclosure points in a story, and they create a particular rhythm in the narrative. In “The Apple Tree”, Daphne du Maurier self-consciously provides an expected form of ending with this sentence which is also the last of a paragraph. But she goes beyond the renewed killing of the monstrous female body. Evil is, therefore, not fought, it eventually triumphs and this potential ending does not throw back the abject out of the familiar ground. The widower is meant to rejoin his wife in a horrible death. The story remains unclosed and there is no return to order. As Gina Wisker explained, “woman is equated with engulfment and death”<sup>132</sup> and Daphne du Maurier plays with this code but her stories “refuse a simplistic confirmation of the kinds of negative representations of women so often necessary to horror's closure”<sup>133</sup>.

Thus, Daphne du Maurier's short stories put forward an original sense of anxiety towards primal fears. The individual is ceaselessly faced with a disorderly world, a fractured space in which his integrity is inevitably lost. The abject “other” takes multiple forms, such as the sea, the monstrous body or the unleashed violence of Nature, and threatens the construction of identity. The absence of closure in du Maurier's short stories provokes a further splintering in the narrative space. There is no room for meaning in the succession of events, and “precision usurps the place of explanation”<sup>134</sup> so that the unintelligibility of dislocated spaces and dismembered bodies is thickened by the lack of wholeness and continuity in the narrative. There seems to be no solution to bring the split pieces together and to find orderly unity.

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131 Susan Lohafer, *Reading for Storyness: Preclosure Theory, Empirical Poetics, and Culture in the Short Story*, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins UP, 2003.

132 G. Wisker, “Don't Look Now! The compulsions and revelations of Daphne du Maurier's horror writing”, *op. cit.*, 22.

133 *Ibid.*, 21.

134 H. Taylor, *The Daphne du Maurier Companion*, *op. cit.*, 328.

To conclude this second part, I would say that there is a very strong opposition between within and without on the surface of spaces, which deeply impacts the individual. There is no safe place defined by Daphne du Maurier's short stories. Characters are always in a dynamic either of sheltering themselves or escaping. But, more than a shelter or a dangerous zone, space acts as a defining entity. Sue Zlosnik and Avril Horner in *Daphne du Maurier, Writing, Identity and the Gothic Imagination* claimed that “boundaries in the landscape give metaphorical expression to boundaries in the psyche and generic boundaries are destabilized”<sup>135</sup>. One could go even further and argue that Daphne du Maurier's landscape is not a mere reflection of the soul-scape, but that characters and space are one, the former being shaped by the latter. The obvious boundary separating indoor space from outdoor space and spiritual inner-self from bodily outer-self is however not a single drawn line. The bigger fracture between within and without is reinforced by multiple fragmentations in each of these spaces. So it is impossible to oppose clearly two spaces as antagonistic coherent wholes. What appears, when studying Daphne du Maurier's short stories, is a kaleidoscopic fragmentation of space, composed of multiple shreds that do not always match. The individual, defined by such an environment, can but be fragmented himself and reconciliation looks unachievable. This type of writing enhances the sense of loss of the twentieth century following the First World War. The discontinuities and dislocations could be likened to the modernist literary technique – although, as already stated, Daphne du Maurier's writing was never defined as modernist, nor did she ever claim such a belonging. Yet her short stories, perhaps more than her best-selling novels, embody a sense of anxiety due to the post-war impossibility to guarantee absolute knowledge and to rely on perception. Perception, when it does not blur the spatial boundaries on every level, at least enhances the contrast between fragmented spaces and even creates further discontinuities. All these inner and outer splittings contribute to creating a modern sense of alienation that can be mended but through artificial reassembling.

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135 A. Horner, S. Zlosnik, *Daphne du Maurier, Writing, Identity and the Gothic Imagination, op. cit.*, 71.

### III. TRANSGRESSION AND TRESPASS: BOUNDARIES QUERIED IN DAPHNE DU MAURIER'S SHORT STORIES

Considering the blurring and the trespassing of boundaries requires a redefinition of the notions of space, boundary, and illusion. Space is considered as something more metaphorical in this part, though it still possesses a very physical dimension. "Space" is taken not only in the literal meaning of a piece of land, enscribed within a certain frame, but also understood at a smaller scale, such as the body. Space is also regarded in its relation to time. If boundaries of chronology are broken or unclear, so are boundaries of space. Nevertheless, space as a geographical entity is not set aside either, and very often serves as a reflection of the metaphorical boundaries. A boundary is normally the line that is traced out to separate two distinct spaces or entities. It is usually expected to be clearly drawn. Boundaries can define space in its broadest sense, as well as more abstract notions that are commonly opposed, such as animals and humans, life and death, or what is moral and immoral. Conversely, Daphne du Maurier, instead of respecting these apparently natural borders, keeps unsettling them, crossing them forward and backward in her narratives, and putting them under close examination. Far from denying the existence of borders, Daphne du Maurier's writing shows a deep interest in their outline, in the natural search for a reassuring end. The closer one gets to the boundary, the harder it becomes to see it, so that one can never make sure that the line has or has not been crossed, or whether there is a line at all. One is disconcerted by the mirage effect. The reality of these liminal spaces is ceaselessly questioned. Daphne du Maurier purposely plays on this ever-haunting ambiguity in order to emphasize the instability of space and the unreliability of senses. Inspired by modern and postmodern conceptions of spaces, du Maurier's literary cartography "resists readers' effort to imagine a totality"<sup>136</sup>. Indeed, "if space was objective in the nineteenth century, twentieth-century novelists emphasized its subjective nature"<sup>137</sup>. Whereas the Realists "used extensive physical description to unify characters with their worlds"<sup>138</sup>, Modernists and Postmodernists alike aim at disorienting readers, either by anticartographic or cartographic description. Daphne du Maurier's mapping is rather anticartographic because of the mutability and the proliferation of boundaries in her spatial representation, which directly affects more metaphorical boundaries of conventions and identity. This questioning of boundaries is part of the response to anxiety about modernity. In this modern, utterly fragmented world, the solution to overcome the boundaries is to trespass them or to hybridise spaces in order to re-constitute a

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<sup>136</sup>Eric J. Bulson, "Space", *The Oxford Encyclopedia of British Literature*, Oxford UP, 2006.

<sup>137</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>138</sup>*Ibid.*

semblance of unity. The characters in Daphne du Maurier's short stories, are most of the time a conglomeration of fragments that is somewhat reassembled into a whole by means of collage. Unity is achieved only artificially since, in Daphne du Maurier's writing, reality is presented as a juxtaposition of parts that need to be stuck together to produce meaning. Therefore, this part shall focus on how transgression and hybridisation are used to solve the problem of fragmentation in time, spaces, and, consequently, individuals.

### **A. Forbidden Love**

*“Any crime, because it draws attention to the fragility of the law, is abject, but premeditated crime (...) are even more so because they heighten the display of such fragility. (...) Abjection (...) is immoral, sinister, scheming and shady”<sup>139</sup>*

Daphne du Maurier's short stories are very often concerned with transgressive sexuality since they confuse the natural and the unnatural according to the standards of society. She is not afraid to broach taboo subjects such as adultery and even incest. This is most probably the reason why many critics have wondered whether to construe her work as liberal or conservative. Alison Light and Richard Kelly claim that Daphne du Maurier's works “represent Englishness in both its most modern and reactionary forms”<sup>140</sup> and offer escapist fantasy for middle-class women. On the other hand, Nina Auerbach and Margaret Forster see du Maurier as a revolutionary woman who sought to free herself from the social restraints of her time. Nina Auerbach lays a special emphasis on du Maurier's feminism, analysing the main character of “The Blue Lenses” as “one of Du Maurier's many victimised wives”<sup>141</sup>. Indeed, the writer's work transgresses the boundaries of the morally accepted, more or less openly, but without explaining clearly to what end. It is neither an attack nor a defense of transgressive sexuality. Contrary to what has been retained about Daphne du Maurier, especially because of Margaret Forster's biography, Daphne du Maurier seems to have a timely conception of sexuality. It is not as revolutionary or unusual as some would have it. In *Writing, Identity and the Gothic Imagination* Avril Horner and Sue Zlosnik explain that, since the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the father-daughter romance has not been unusual, in real life as in fiction. Fathers are extremely possessive with their daughters, like Gerald du Maurier with

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<sup>139</sup>Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror, op. cit.*, 4.

<sup>140</sup>A. Light, *Forever England, op. cit.*, 10-11.

<sup>141</sup>N. Auerbach, in H. Taylor, *The Daphne du Maurier Companion, op. cit.*, 234.



Daphne. So Daphne du Maurier's writing about forbidden love is representative of the familial culture of her time, but it also renews the transgression of boundaries. I shall, therefore, try to show how the crossing of lines in the writer's short stories reveals a deep questioning of these lines, and to what extent moral transgression is inseparable from spatial trespassing.

## 1. A study of incest

Incest is the social taboo *par excellence*. At its core lies a fundamental paradox that should be disclosed. Usually, a boundary is drawn between two things or beings that are radically incompatible. In the case of incest, the line is drawn not between two things that are completely opposed – such as spirit and body, life and death, inside and outside – but between two fundamentally similar things, that is to say, two people that share the same blood. Incest is alluded to more or less directly in two short stories, “Tame Cat” and “A Border-Line Case”. It is neither an exposure nor a justification for it. Du Maurier just plunges her reader within the intricacies of this taboo. Alison Light argued in her essay that Daphne du Maurier's writing was essentially a “romance with the past”<sup>142</sup>, the conservative expression of a middle-class woman writer. This maybe simplistic categorisation has been criticised by Ina Habermann who explains that “according to Alison Light's study, *Forever England*, du Maurier is a conservative exponent of a smug and domesticated middle class who sought to escape its suburban, circumscribed lives through flights of fancy”<sup>143</sup>. One can sense the irony of this succinct summary. On the contrary, I. Habermann argues that “the gothic quality of much of her writing rebels against this surface respectability”<sup>144</sup>. Ella Westland seems to go along these lines when she claims that Daphne du Maurier is “unafraid to explore sexual deviance, murderous desires, and the dysfunctional family”<sup>145</sup>. In “Tame Cat”, incest is only hinted at, between the daughter and the mother's lover, who stands as a father-figure. The daughter is naive, barely grown up. On the train on her way home, she is thrilled at the thought and keeps thinking “I'm grown up! I'm grown up!” (92). And yet this statement is contradicted by the childish way in which she thinks of her mother as “Mummy” (92) and realises that “this was, perhaps, the thing to which she had looked forward most in her life – being with Mummy” (92). In an equally candid way, she thinks of her mother's lover as “Uncle John” (92) without realising the nature of their relationship. The reader understands what is happening while the daughter remains

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142A. Light, *Forever England*, *op. cit.*, 156.

143I. Habermann, *Myth, Memory and the Middlebrow*, *op. cit.*, 38.

144*Ibid.*, 38.

145E. Westland, *Reading Daphne*, *op. cit.*, 56.

unaware of the meaning of the change in her “uncle's” looks. She senses the change and it provokes an inexplicable discomfort. “Uncle John's” allusions to Paris – “They've taught you a thing or two in Paris, haven't they?” And this was what he kept hinting all the evening, suggesting she knew so much” (98) – create a parallel between the foreign sensuality of France and the new, so far unknown, seductions of the girl. Her realisation of her “uncle's” intention at the end provokes a deep disgust, and even abjection, feeling “physically sick with horror and shame” (103). Interestingly, the realisation comes when they have come back home, in the familiar drawing room, that is to say in the sphere of intimacy, not in the outdoor neutral space. The horror is not placed without, but symbolically within. So in this case, the short story could appear as a denunciation of incest, but also as a criticism of jealous, unprotecting mothers. Incest is never performed but it finds room in the ellipses and interstices offered by the punctuation of unfinished sentences, such as “You know, we'll have to be damn careful, Baby – if she suspects there's anything between us...” (100). Not naming the relationship emphasises its unthinkable dimension. On the other hand, in “A Border-Line Case”, incest is referred to quite explicitly, although retrospectively. It is only after the intercourse has taken place that Shelagh realises who Nick was – her biological father. But already before it happened, there are many hints at his being a father figure. The quest of the short story itself can be thus outlined: Shelagh, having lost her father, goes to find one of his old friends, as if to replace her own father. The reader cannot help noticing the uncanny similitudes between Nick and Shelagh's father. First, the spaces that Nick and his father are disturbingly alike: “Lay-out, furnishings were identical. The familiar surroundings were uncanny, it was like stepping in the past” (138). This strange feeling of recognition pervades the text until the final revelation. The wedding picture, both “fake and truth-telling”<sup>146</sup> partakes of “a tissue of deceptions cleverly represented through the tropes of performance and representation – the stage and the photograph”<sup>147</sup> which confuse this vague recognition. While Richard Kelly qualified this story as “a curious story of romantic incest”<sup>148</sup>, I would rather argue that the blend of revulsion and attraction is a questioning of the boundaries of this taboo. As she talks with Nick, Shelagh realises that “she might have been talking to her father after Sunday diner” (156), enhancing the feeling of familiarity between them. The forbidden sexual intercourse finally takes place between Shelagh and Nick, whom she discovers to be her father only too late, at the end of the short story. Significantly, the act takes place in a liminal space, the border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. The physical crossing of the border is a metaphor for moral transgression. “The instability of boundaries

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146A. Horner, S. Zlosnik, *Daphne du Maurier and the Gothic Imagination*, *op. cit.*, 246.

147 *Ibid.*, 246.

148R. Kelly, *Daphne du Maurier*; *op. cit.*, 135.

indicated by this [the liminal space] and by the story's title refers to licit and illicit desire"<sup>149</sup>. However, Daphne du Maurier does not provide any moral judgement. The boundary, once crossed, is confused, and the incestuous act remains in a grey zone. The intercourse itself is thought by the heroine to be the most fulfilling she ever had: "it's body's chemistry, she told herself, that's what does it. People's skin. They either blend or they don't. They either merge and melt into the same texture, dissolve and become renewed, or nothing happens, like faulty plugs, blown fuses, switchboard jams" (167). The binary rhythm creates an antagonism, but not one that is expected. It does not distinguish between moral and immoral sexuality, but between union and disjunction. Union, a positive quality, is achieved here thanks to their sharing the same blood – which is the utmost scandal. By means of reference to Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*, innocent and guilty love are also confused. Once she has left Nick, Shelagh quotes the play in her head, and though without inverted commas, it is very recognisable: "Come away, come away, death, and in sad cypress let me be laid" (175). This is a quote from scene 4 of Act 2 of *Twelfth Night*, when the Fool sings. The song tells about of a lover who dies from the cruelty of his beloved maid – so the gender roles are reversed in the short story – and is, significantly, introduced in this way by Orsino in the play: "It is silly sooth, / And dallies with the innocence of love, / Like the old age" (Act 2, scene 4, lines 45-47). So beyond the gender inversion, the second inversion in the short story is about the innocence of this love. The cruel maid stands for Nick, and his relationship with Shelagh, far from innocent in the conventional sense, is incestuous. But the ambiguous use of this quote allows Daphne du Maurier to question and confuse the boundary between the morally accepted and the morally forbidden.

## 2. Adultery

Concerning adultery, it is often considered as a minor transgression because of its banality in literature. It has even become a norm. However, Daphne du Maurier renews this tradition by associating this kind of forbidden love to death. Transgression is revived in her writing. More than a moral judgment of the author, it may nevertheless be seen as du Maurier's broader vision of love, as a destroying power. The chaos associated with sexuality seems inevitable, as if the two were intrinsically connected. In "The Little Photographer", a marquise takes a lover out of boredom, but it ends up in chaos and this pleasant adventure threatens her domestic safe space. She kills her lover to get rid of him, but it does not suffice, and she is blackmailed by the dead lover's sister, possibly

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149A. Horner, S. Zlosnik, *Daphne du Maurier and the Gothic Imagination*, op. cit., 246.

for a life-time. Adultery is therefore not seen as something harmless and inconsequential, and sexual freedom from constraints is not glorified either. As pointed out by Alison Light, “the heaviest of du Maurier's debts to the Brontës was to a romantic tradition which centered on feeling and which claimed the importance of romantic love as a potentially dangerous place where the individual, especially the woman, might get taken 'beyond herself', uncover hidden desires and often destructive wants”<sup>150</sup>. In “The Little Photographer”, the Marquise is not at all interested in romantic love, but in carnal pleasure. Still, the link between sensuality and crime is established from the very beginning of the short story. The beautiful Marquise is painting her nails – a quite innocent activity, at first sight – and, contemplating the result on her delicate hand, notices that the varnish looks “almost as if a spot of blood had fallen from a fresh cut wound” (160). This sadistic perspective is confirmed as the Marquise seems to take less pleasure in carnal love than in her power to wound her lover, to crush him. The chiasmic structure in “she sensed a struggle within him, and it gave her pleasure” (175) could be interpreted as an enclosed system which unites pleasure and pain in equal measure. Sensuality and violence are thus equated. “A Border-Line Case” also presents sexuality as a deeply violent and domineering act, when Shelagh asserts that “the only reason one does it is to claim a scalp, like playing Red Indians” (156). She could have chosen the word “trophy” but the noun “scalp” denotes an extreme violence since it describes the tearing off of skin. The playful dimension of the comparison, juxtaposed to this, is thematically coherent but is logically set in contrast. The Indians and the scalping are commonly associated, but the discrepancy between an actual skinning and the game is immeasurable. This contrast however assimilates sexuality both with an innocent game and sadistic pleasure. Sexuality out of marriage is not presented as a fulfilling opening but as a destructive act that brings no unity whatsoever. Daphne du Maurier's characters are not moved by love but by a fatal attraction to the violence of sexuality. Shelagh in “A Border-Line Case”, even when she refers to the pleasing intercourse with Nick, uses paradoxical metaphors of destruction: “when the thing goes right, [...] then it's arrows splintering the sky, it's forest fires, it's Agincourt” (167).

“Kiss Me Again, Stranger” displays an “even more brutal view of sex”<sup>151</sup>. The usherette whom the narrator falls in love with seduces Airforce men in order to kill them. Seduction and love are therefore mostly fatal. As highlighted by Nina Auerbach in *Daphne du Maurier, Haunted Heiress*, for the Marquise and the usherette, “killing is their climax of love”<sup>152</sup>. The narrator in “Kiss Me Again, Stranger” follows the usherette, who leads him to a cemetery and the analogy between the tomb and the bed is disturbing, even to the narrator: “‘tombstones are flat', she said, 'sometimes'.

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150A. Light, *Forever England*, *op. cit.*, 165.

151M. Forster, *Daphne du Maurier*, *op. cit.*, 258.

152N. Auerbach, *Daphne du Maurier*, *op. cit.*, 82.

'What if they are?', I asked, bewildered-like. 'You can lie down on them'" (218). The woman is thereby likened to a sort of vampire, who "condenses various contemporary anxieties concerning unregulated female sexuality"<sup>153</sup>. She describes herself as "restless" (220), as though she were a lost soul. The description of her unholy beauty is also reminiscent of the vampire tradition: "her face was queer, in the murky old light there, whiter than before, but it was beautiful, Jesus Christ, it was beautiful. That's blasphemy. But I can't say it no other way" (223). The narrator, in his clumsy guessing, is right without knowing it, only by misuse of language when he considers an attempt at kissing her, "only a kiss you know, she couldn't kill me" (215). And yet she could, and she would have, had he been an Airforce man. The association between sexuality and violence, suggested all along the story, is reinforced by the narrator's employer who summarises the events in like fashion: "Sliced up the belly, poor sod. [...] It's the third one in three weeks, done identical, all Airforce fellows, and each time they've found 'em near a graveyard or a cemetery. I was saying just now that chap who came in for petrol, it's not only men who go off their rockers and turn sex maniacs, but women too." (230). So, unregulated sexuality is shown as leading only to chaos and even murder in Daphne du Maurier's short story. The cliff edge, the Irish border, the graveyard are all liminal spaces that play dangerously between safety and danger, spatially showing the risks of crossing the line of moral laws.

In the same way, "Panic" sets the encounter of two lovers in the stuffiness of a Parisian summer. The sense of death is overwhelming from the very beginning, and indeed the woman dies. The rational reason why is unclear, but the whole atmosphere and the lover's sense of guilt seem to imply that it is love itself that brought death. Minette Walters summarises the plot along these lines: the story "tells a first attempt at sex which ends in rape and death when a young woman enters into a tryst out of bravado and realises, too late, that she can't change her mind"<sup>154</sup>. The ellipsis on sex is indicated by three dots and an ominous line break "He shook her arm angrily, his face scarlet. 'If you think you are going to fool me...'" (51). When the narrative starts again, the girl is dying: "she was breathing strangely, quickly, as if suffocating [...]. Suddenly the breathing stopped. Not a sound came from the bed. [...] She was dead of course. He knew that. She was dead" (51-52). The man cannot account for the girl's death and weakly wonders if he has anything to do with it: "No, of course it was not his fault. Had he killed her? He did not know enough about women. He had not realised" (53). The vagueness of the adverb "enough" and of the plural noun "women" leave sufficient room for ambiguity, and the reader is left to wonder about this unexplained death, which is chronologically – and thereby logically, for lack of better reason – presented as the consequence

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153S. Chaplin, *Gothic Literature, op. cit.*, 251.

154M. Walters, in H. Taylor, *The Daphne du Maurier Companion, op. cit.*, 228

of this disorderly sexuality.

So Daphne du Maurier's writing crosses the lines of conventional sexuality, but whether she condemns it or values this crossing remains unclear. Alison Light construed her writing as conservative and middle-class, but her analysis was solely based on du Maurier's *Rebecca* (1938). Nina Auerbach, on the other hand, understands Daphne du Maurier's short stories as self-conscious transgressions aiming at freedom from social constraints. Both their analyses, tinged with feminism in their own ways, tend to caricature du Maurier's writing, making her stand for one extreme or another – a rebellious defender of the women's right cause, or a conventional middle-class female writer seeking to preserve her bourgeois standards. Yet Daphne du Maurier's short stories and her writing about forbidden love does not seem to fit in either of these categories. The author certainly writes about transgression but without moral judgement. Confusion remains floating around the boundaries of sexuality, as those acts remain spatially and metaphorically in a grey zone. However, the question of unity emerges from this confusion. As it apparently cannot be achieved along the lines of conventional sexuality, transgression looks like a way to bridge the gulf between subjects. A form of junction is achieved thanks to transgression, to some extent, but it is essentially associated with chaos, which prevents true union. Sexuality, in Daphne du Maurier's writing, cannot be mended and subjects cannot be united either. Only disjunct pieces can be brutally brought together.

## **B. Deluding topology and chronology**

*“Le temps se distord, rompant l’axe chronologique et linéaire, devient multiple et simultané, fragmentaire; l’espace éclate également en lieux superposés, ouverts, fermés ou labyrinthiques, divisés entre le réel et le fictionnel.”<sup>155</sup>*

In such a fragmented world, chronological and spatial boundaries are not only blurred but divided and superimposed. Time is not linear but the present is infiltrated by pieces of the past and fragments of the future with a confusing fluidity. Space too, along this line, does not respect borders and the boundary between inside and outside is disputed. Outdoor space invades indoor space,

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<sup>155</sup>Nicolas Balutet, “Du postmodernisme au post-humanisme: présent et futur du concept d’hybridité”, Université du Sud Toulon-Var, Babel, 1er Juillet 2016, 7.

while indoor space leaks out. These confusions, or rather this crossing of boundaries, do not bring unity but ensure a certain continuity between incompatible elements, incoherent spaces, and conflicting times.

### **1. Conflicted spaces: inside out**

The line between inside and outside, previously presented as a solid boundary, is no longer a sufficient protection, and space is splintered into a dangerous whole. The indoor space is infiltrated with the outdoor space in “The Birds”, “The Archduchess”, “East Wind” and “The Apple Tree” for instance. In “The Birds”, there is a dynamic of simultaneous thinning and thickening of the boundary between inside and outside, as the birds repeatedly attack the bunker-house that Nat has consolidated in consequence. The more they attack and the more he tries to reinforce the protecting line made by the house's walls, door, and windows. Several times, the birds manage to break in, showing that the boundary is not as impermeable and reassuring as it should be. In the end, the fragile boundary is still holding, but not for long. The invasion of the birds is progressive and methodical. They first manage to get inside because Nat opens to them: “he opened it [the window], and as he did so something brushed his hand, jabbing at his knuckles, grazing the skin” (3). The invasion is violent already, but Nat is the subject of the sentence, he initiates the action. A second time, “when he opened it there was not one bird upon the sill but half a dozen; they flew straight into his face, attacking him” (4). Not only he is outnumbered but he slips significantly from subject to object. The third time, there is a larger attack in the children's bedroom with the birds taking advantage of an open window, which was, however, not opened on purpose this time. The birds use the existing breach to penetrate into the house – the supposedly safe space. From then on, the birds' space is no longer restricted to the outdoor space, as epitomised by this chiasmic structure: “dawn, and the open window, had called the living birds; the dead lay on the floor” (5). Now the birds have broken in, and they are in control of both spaces. Their presence is inescapable. The protections displayed to protect the domestic space from the outdoor space are growing more and more sophisticated, but they are always proving too weak. The first action taken is the closing of windows and curtains, as Nat recommends to his wife: “keep all the windows closed, and the doors too. Just to be on the safe side” (7). The fixed expression is taken literally here, but there is no such thing as a safe side now that the boundary has been transgressed. The next step in case the birds would “break in, with windows shut” (12), is the boarding of windows and chimney's bases, until “every gap was closed” (21). But these illusory barriers successively fall, first the windows as Nat

notices “the splinter of cracked glass” (21), then the wood. The whole point is that the buildings, “with due care, should be impenetrable” (23), following the BBC's instructions. But the reader can quickly see the uselessness of such an assertion when, finally, “the birds have broken through” (31). Once the breach is opened by them, the indoor space is no longer safe and therefore loses its essential quality. The dangerousness of outdoor space, when breaking in the indoor space, wipes out the difference between the two. The boundary, once crossed, is lost. The reassuring distinction and differentiation yield to pressure and are replaced by an alarming spatial continuity.

In “The Apple Tree”, the monstrous tree is also sneaking in indirectly, through its distasteful fruits and its sickening wood burning in the fireplace. The widower thinks that he is safe in his house, that only the garden is spoiled by the horrible tree, but it pervades the whole space, and there is no escaping it. Inferences can be drawn from the choice of an apple tree rather than any other sort of tree in the short story. The tree in the garden of Eden is generally considered as an apple tree. In the Book of Genesis, this tree is the tree of Knowledge, eating its fruit gives the power to know Good from Evil. But most interestingly, this tree is the most beautiful in the garden. In the short story, the inversion is quite striking: the old apple tree is the most hideous of the garden and is, thereby, not tempting at all. It can only be fascinating in a repulsive way. In the story, the man is not trying to approach the forbidden tree, on the contrary, he is constantly trying to escape its distasteful fruits. The widower is not trying to regain his lost Eden but to escape its pursuit. As in “The Birds” when Nat's family takes shelter in the kitchen, the widower has to “take refuge in the study” (129) to elude the “queer, rather sickly smell” (127) of the tree's logs smouldering. But in this short story too, there is no escape. Smoke – standing for the apple tree – gradually pervades the whole space, “creeping up from the cellar, finding its way to the passage above” (131). There is an ominous sense of danger due to this breaking of the boundary. The outdoor space can no longer be contained outside, so much that the widower feels growing panic: “What if the smell filled the whole house through the night, came up from the kitchen quarters to the floor above, and while he slept found its way into his bedroom, choking him, stifling him, so that he could not breathe?” (131). The paratactic construction of this long sentence enhances the fluidity of the invasion and creates a sense of breathlessness. Outdoor space is quietly breaking in, and there is no stopping it.

At a broader scale in “The Archduchess” and “East Wind”, disorder comes from without like a poison pouring in. In “The Archduchess”, chaos is initiated by two frustrated greedy men who engage in spreading rancour and indignation in a formerly peaceful kingdom, a sort of modern El Dorado. The metaphor of fluidity is equally striking: “it was the poison of discontent that finally infiltrated Ronda” (165). Not only it emphasises the continuity between the inside and the outside, but it also insists on the materiality of the border crossed. The change is not merely spiritual, but



something breaks in, physically. The same motive of the spoiled Garden of Eden and the Fall is found in “East Wind”. This time, however, disarray is not triggered by men but by the wind. With a turn of the tide, violence is suddenly breaking in the pre-lapsarian island. The outer world is initiating a brutal contact with the “unsullied island”<sup>156</sup> and transgresses its inside space.

## 2. A glimpse of the future

One can sense the influence of the cinematic technique of cutting in Daphne du Maurier's short stories, which leads to the fragmentation of time. Time is no longer fluidly passing by, it is a succession of moments that can be juxtaposed, even without respecting chronology – just as spaces no longer respect topography. As highlighted by Budd Hopkins, “one's past is easily caught and held and thereby made to co-exist with one's present”<sup>157</sup>. In “Don't Look Now”, “The Happy Valley”, “Split Second”, “The Doll” and “The Alibi”, different times are juxtaposed to the present as if they were simultaneous. Daphne du Maurier herself explains her vision in her memoirs: “So Time did not exist, for the aged, for the young, for those of us who sometimes see it open and fold up of a sudden, like a telescope.”<sup>158</sup> In some of her short stories, time is not inverted, it is mixed up, and so is space. In “Don't Look Now”, John's premonitory vision of his wife coming to his own funeral is interwoven with the present time. Painfully, “future bleeds into the present”<sup>159</sup> and various layers of time are superimposed. Budd Hopkins also analyses the influence of modern travelling upon this juxtaposition of times and spaces: “We fly from one airport to another in a few hours so that our experience is more that of an immediate juxtaposition of locations than a slow, arduous moving towards a distant destination. Travel has become more a collage of places than a process”<sup>160</sup>. Indeed, in “Don't Look Now”, John's fleeting vision of his wife is a collage of a fragment of the future in the present. His wife is yet flying safely home when he “sees” her in Venice, but the swiftness of the moves from one place to another allows this confusion. The telephone too creates a confusion of time and place, because it makes Laura present to John in Venice, but this presence is half-real. It is “as though the voice speaking from England had not been Laura's after all but a fake, and she was still in Venice” (45). The telephone is cutting the voice from the body, the sound from the image, the present from the future; they can hear each other now, but it would take hours before they can see each other. The telephone creates a breach in chronological

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156Polly Samson, in D. du Maurier, *The Doll*, *op. cit.*, 1.

157Budd Hopkins, “Modernism and the Collage Aesthetic”, *New England Review* 18:2, 1997, 9.

158D. du Maurier, *Myself When Young*, *op. cit.*, 45.

159Richard Kelly, *Daphne du Maurier*, *op. cit.*, 6.

160B. Hopkins, “Modernism and the Collage Aesthetic”, *op. cit.*, 12.

time. In “The Happy Valley”, the main character repeatedly sees a house in her dreams, and the house turns out to be her future house, but she realises it as she comes across the place as though by magic. She sees the house and gardens for real, no longer in her dreams, but as they will be in the future, when she is dead. She is literally stepping into the future, through an unknown and unseen door, and then back into the present without noticeable transition. It is as though the two times were co-existing, juxtaposed, only waiting to be crossed forward and backward. The reader finds himself “experiencing the past and future as ghostly layers of the present”<sup>161</sup>.

In “Split Second”, the very title of the tale indicates a ramification of time. The whole story is based on the superimposition of two layers of time. The main character gets lost in a future time at the exact same place, and although she recognises everything, the whole place – and mostly her house – is upside down. The reader wonders whether she has become mad or whether she is right to think that it is all a large plot against her, to finally realise that she might have mysteriously stepped into a threatening post-war future. Several hints are dropped throughout the narrative, with the mention of “ration book” (246), of a house “destroyed by a fire bomb” (256) some time ago, and finally the calendar's “printing error. It said 1952 instead of 1932. How careless...” (272). An insignificant detail – Mrs. Ellis coming across a laundry van – mentioned at the beginning, is echoed at the end of the story and there only it makes sense. The similarity of the sentence structure and the event suggests a repetition of the event, and the fragmentation of chronology. It may have happened twice or only once, as if this event was the key to the transgression in chronology. The first time, “she saw the laundry van was swinging down towards her, much too fast. She saw it swerve, heard the screech of its brakes. She saw the look of surprise on the face of the laundry boy” (229). In the end, the similarity is quite striking, noticeable for the reader as well as for Mrs. Ellis: “and here was the heath once again. This was where she had stood before crossing the road. [...] Why though, for the second time, that screech of brakes when she crossed the road, and the vacant face of the laundry boy looking down at her?” (273). Interestingly, this meeting – repeated or doubled in time – happens at “the junction of two roads” (229). It seems that this place and moment create a split in time and space, allowing two directions to be followed, two times to be lived simultaneously. Time and space are so intrinsically connected that Mrs. Ellis' “cross[ing] to the opposite side” (229) of the road equates to a transgression of the chronological boundaries.

In “The Doll”, time is also fragmented and multiple but for another reason: the complex chronology of the narrative is challenged by the first-person narrator's failing memory. As underlined by Julia Kristeva in *Powers of Horror*, the impact of suffering on the narrative is the shattered linearity, composed of flashes, enigmas, short cuts, and incompletions. “When narrative

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161P. Samson, in D. du Maurier, *The Doll*, *op. cit.*, xi.

identity is unbearable, when the boundary between subject and object is shaken, and when even the limit between inside and outside becomes uncertain, the narrative is what is challenged first”<sup>162</sup>. The narrator's wish to “make a plan – an orderly arrangement of dates” (15) is thwarted. Although the beginning of the narrative seems structured enough, dates and time markers gradually disappear and the chronological succession of events becomes completely blurred. The narrator himself gives up his attempt at orderliness and his narrative resembles more a rumination, a cyclical meditation: “I'm forgetting days and weeks as I write this, nothing seems to have any sequence to me [...], it's like being reincarnated from dust and ashes to live it again, to live my whole cursed life again” (22). From then on, events are recounted according to their relative importance to the narrator, no longer in chronological order: “I had better write that Sunday now, Sunday that was really the end” (22). But the very end, in fact, is told on the first page of the narrator's incoherent narrative – Rebecca's flight, her loathing for the narrator, her deviant love for the sex doll. Actual chronology is delusive in this short story, as it is in “The Alibi” when present, future, and potential events are blurred in a single moment. In “The Alibi”, chronological boundaries are more ambiguous because future plans are successively made, abandoned, and realised – but too late, when they are unwanted. The scenes of murder planned by the main character are shown with great acuity and directness at the beginning of the tale: “faces smashed in. Sudden murder. Theft. Fire. It was as simple as that” (4). The strong punctuation and the absence verbs and determiners in these successive elliptic nominal sentences enhances the brutality of the act, as well as their lack of chronological order. All these violent actions are juxtaposed, almost superimposed. Eventually, the potential murderer becomes a painter and is perfectly blameless – apart from his little secret studio of painting. He becomes the victim of a misunderstanding. He is finally convicted for a crime he never committed, but that he had desperately wished for. So, layers of past and present are blended, and future potentialities rejoin in confusing coincidences as he falsely confesses: “I was her lover, of course, and the child was mine. I turned on the gas this evening before I left the house. I killed them all. I was going to kill my wife too when we got to Scotland” (43). Intriguingly, time is fractured just as in “Split Second” for Mr. Fenton, the main character. From the moment he thinks of escaping his dull life and using his free will, he enters another dimension of time: “time had ceased; or rather it had continued for [his wife] [...]; but for him everything had changed. [...] he had stepped out of bondage into a new dimension” (3). Thanks to the split of time, Mr. Fenton has the opportunity to double the layers of time in his life. Once again, the image of the crossroads is found, hinting at co-existing levels of time. Daphne du Maurier's image of the kaleidoscopic time is confirmed in these short stories, where the boundary of chronology is broken, and thence irretrievably lost, causing the

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162J. Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, *op. cit.*, 141.

undoing of spatial coherence.

Thus, Daphne du Maurier's short stories convey a strong sense of fracture which is due to the transgression of spatial and temporal boundaries. This transgression may be caused by anxiety concerning modernity. The war, modern inventions such as the telephone and travels by plane disrupt the continuity of time and space. There is a sense of unspeakable trauma that can only be told through ellipses, in the interstices. Time and space are no longer linear but ramified and superimposed. Moments and places are juxtaposed incoherently, even brutally, in a disjointed collage. This loss of landmarks and the breaking of continuity is utterly distressing for the character whose world has become multidimensional. However, the shift from coherent to dislocated chronology and topography is smooth and fluid. Daphne du Maurier's writing does not enhance a magical and radical change, it rather unveils the imperceptible alteration of spatial and chronological integrity.

### **C. Human, inhuman, abhuman: the abject other**

Mid-twentieth-century literature is “marked by the absence of a unified and global vision of the world”<sup>163</sup>, which provokes the split of the self whose identity depended on space. His fracture is the consequence of spatial and temporal disintegration. As an answer to this fragmentariness, literature offers hybridisation, a substitute for true unity. This concept, whose primary sense is biological, has found its way through literary criticism and was partly used in post-colonial studies. Daphne du Maurier's writing has nothing to do with post-colonialism or creolism, but hybridity is frequently used in her short stories to express the death of the subject as a coherent whole since there is a strong connection between hybridity and the construction of identity. In the fractured lines of space and time just analysed, hybridity applies, therefore, mostly to characters. Hybrid characters are defined by Nicolas Balutet as “all those who transgress the boundaries of class, ethnicity, gender, as well as those separating the human from the animal, the living from the dead”<sup>164</sup>. Daphne du Maurier's stories do not seem much concerned with political issues of class or gender struggle, but the confusion they establish between the human and the non-human expresses a deep interest in

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163N. Balutet, “Du postmodernisme au post-humanisme : présent et futur du concept d’hybridité”, *op. cit.*, 3. (my translation)

164*Ibid.*, 7. (my translation)

the definition of the twentieth-century subject. Lines are blurred to form hybrid beings and “these 'in-between' people [...] occupy a displaced position which can provoke a sense of fragmentation, dislocation and discontinuity”<sup>165</sup>. Du Maurier's writing does not appear to aim at contesting hierarchies but still it “challenge[s] the existing [...] polarities, binarisms and symmetries”<sup>166</sup>, especially regarding the subject's identity and thence the opposition between self and other.

## 1. Life and death

### *The Undead*

As defined by Sue Chaplin, “the spectre is a gothic body that blurs the boundaries between life and death, between mater and spirit”<sup>167</sup>. Unlike Henry James' *The Turn of the Screw*, Daphne du Maurier's short stories do not present spectres as magical evil apparitions. In “Split Second” and “The Breakthrough”, some characters are however floating between life and death but their presence is real and material enough. No literary criticism has been dedicated to “Split Second” so far, which is nevertheless a very rich story which subtly questions the boundaries between life and death and provides no satisfactory distinction between reality and illusion. Only Minette Walters, in her introduction to the collection *The Rendezvous and Other Stories*, mentions “Split Second” but only to offer an inadequate summary of the plot: “a pleasant but not overly bright woman, who can only function in a structured environment, comes home from an hour-long walk to find her house inhabited by strangers”<sup>168</sup>. Besides distorting the plot, this weak review completely sets aside the mysterious shift in time that causes the main character to be a sort of ghost, coming in her former home from the past, in a postwar era. The ending suggests that she has been crushed by a car and that, just before dying, she experiences a flash-forward to 1952, twenty years ahead. So, strictly speaking, she is a ghost in 1952, a spectre. But instead of causing terror, she is the one who lives a nightmare. Daphne du Maurier reverses the traditional perspective of the spectre by choosing her as the focaliser, thereby giving her more consistency. The consequences of the apparition of the spectre are yet unchanged: “the uncanny body that is not a body often signifies the breakdown of homeliness, rationality and sanity”<sup>169</sup>. And indeed, Mrs. Ellis, who is “out of place in the familiar

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165V. Guignery, C. Pessô, F. Specq, *Hybridity: Forms and Figures in Literature and the Visual Arts*, Cambridge Scholar Publishings, 2011, 5.

166*Ibid.*, 3.

167S. Chaplin, *Gothic Literature op. cit.*, 242.

168M. Walters, in H. Taylor, *The Daphne du Maurier Companion, op. cit.*, 230.

169S. Chaplin, *Gothic Literature, op. cit.*, 243.

context of domestic family life”<sup>170</sup>, is on the verge of paranoia. She is ready to think that everyone is mad except herself, that they may be the ghosts and she the real body, as she anxiously queries: “Is there some sort of conspiracy?” she said. ‘Why are you all against me?’” (256). As in “The Blue Lenses”, there is always a doubt about the sanity of the main character. But the main confusion lays with her in-between state, strangely hesitating between life and death, as Mrs. Ellis does. One cannot imagine a spectre having a cup of tea or feeling ashamed of its having no comb to arrange its hair. And yet the narrative gradually accumulates evidence for the impossibility of her being here in 1952, she is inevitably out of place. If, as the doctor who examines her supposes, she is “suffering from a temporary loss of memory” (252), it would mean that twenty years would have indeed gone by and that she had forgotten. But she still looks like a woman of thirty-five which makes this hypothesis impossible. The only conclusion that can be drawn is the uncomfortable idea that she must have indeed stepped into the future, 1952, twenty years after her death “in a street accident” (270). Her physicality and consciousness prevent dismissing her to the realm of illusions of the past and she remains disturbingly in-between life and death. As underlined by Ann B. Tracy, the twentieth-century Gothic is “taking the monster to its collective bosom”<sup>171</sup> instead of being regarded at a distance, which induces the possibility that a “sane world [...] be disrupted”<sup>172</sup>.

As already stated, the plot of “The Breakthrough” is based on “experimental work in a laboratory in Suffolk and the idea that when people die there must be an untapped source of energy”<sup>173</sup>. So the body – Ken's body – is dead but the life force remains, stored in a machine. This machine thus comes alive as a new, in-between being, half-dead, half-alive. Its strange life is flowing continuously, “there was no break in the rhythm of the signal, as it moved up and down, up and down, like a heartbeat, like a pulse” (294). The couple of parallelisms creates fluidity and regularity in the sentence, thereby enhancing the steadiness of this half-life. This hybrid born of man and technology destabilises the natural boundary between life and death. Instead of breathing life into a reassembled body, like Mary Shelley's Dr. Frankenstein, Daphne du Maurier's MacLean gives life to an inanimate object, a machine, that turns into a monster of technology. It is not a mere electric signal, but it seems to have kept a form of human intelligence and emotionality. Under hypnosis, a little girl called Niki, who is part of the experience from the beginning, can still make contact with Ken. She begs to let him go as if his essence was in the machine still. When she is in contact with it, the machine's signal grows disturbed and distressed: “the rhythm was getting faster,

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170 *Ibid.*, 242.

171 A. B. Tracy, “Contemporary Gothic”, in M. Mulvey-Roberts, *The Handbook to Gothic Literature*, *op. cit.*, 39.

172 *Ibid.*, 39.

173 M. Forster, *Daphne du Maurier*, *op. cit.*, 376.

the signal moving in quick jerks” (300). So the machine has truly become a hybrid, a sort of cyborg (cybernetic organism). In the end, MacLean kills his own beast: “it's dismantled. I've disconnected everything. The force is lost” (303). The monstrous hybrid is expelled, but the discomfort at the possibility for its existence remains.

So, despite the huge differences between “Split Second” and “The Breakthrough” – one being a postwar story, the other a science-fiction narrative – the central issue is comparable. Both of the short stories are concerned with the problem of transgressing the limit between life and death and, therefore, present alarming in-between beings. What the traditional Gothic called spectre has become more ambiguous because of its tangibility. No more fleeting visions, but half-dead bodies that “articulate deep-seated cultural anxieties and psychological traumas that emanate out of certain historical circumstances”<sup>174</sup>, and especially the trauma of the Second World War in this case.

### *Nightmares*

Nightmares are also a form of living death in so far as they epitomise a state of in-betweenness, between sleeping and waking, between life and death. Daphne du Maurier uses this Gothic feature to create a confused sense of alarm, but also to suggest the fragility of the boundary between life and death. In “The Happy Valley”, the main character is deceived as her recurrent dream turns into a living nightmare. Death is, in fact, the true significance of the dream, but it is hardly possible to tell whether the episode is a nightmarish vision or a flash-forward after her death. In the vision, like in her usual dreams, she can move and watch but she cannot touch anything or anyone, and she cannot control the duration of the vision. The fleeting moment invariably escapes her as if she lost consciousness. The more she holds on to the dream, the more it escapes her, “the image dissolved, and she was staring with wide-awake eyes at the door of her own bedroom” (151). Similarly, with the final nightmarish vision, the boy and the place fade away: “she [...] looked down at her feet, but there was only moss beneath her [...]. 'Whose grave?' she said, raising her head. Only he was not there any more: there was no boy, he was gone and his voice was an echo” (156). The ternary rhythm painfully insists on the sudden disappearance. This “momentary state beyond heaven and earth, suspended in time between two strokes of a clock” (148) is disquieting because it numbs the limit between sleep and death. The self is fragmented because of its temporary ubiquity. It is both present and absent, here and elsewhere, dead to the former, conscious in the latter.

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174S. Chaplin, *Gothic Literature*, *op. cit.*, 242.

A similar idea of a murderous nightmare is found in “The Apple Tree” and “Panic”. The widower's anticipation of the nightmare suggests its fatal powers: “What if the smell filled the whole house through the night, came up from the kitchen quarters to the floor above, and while he slept found its way into his bedroom, choking him, stifling him, so that he could not breathe?” (131). Interestingly, in the folklore's origins, the bad dream is “accompanied by a stifling feeling in the sleeper's chest”<sup>175</sup>. This suffocating feeling is found in “The Apple Tree” as in “Panic” as if the nightmare was causing physical agony, a fight between life and death. Marie Mulvey-Roberts explains that the discomfort of the nightmare was originally thought to be caused by a male or female sexual monster riding on a mare, squatting on the chest of the sleeper – hence the pressure – and conjuring distressing dreams in the sleeper's mind. The girl in “Panic” seems to be drawn nearer to the original folkloric definition of the nightmare. The sexual dimension of the incubus is found in the context of the rape that has happened before she starts “her terrible choking breathing, inevitable, persistent” (52), and finally dies. It is as though the man had killed her during her sleep, like an incubus, and the power of the nightmare is so strong that it succeeds in causing her death. But during her agony, the girl remains in a disquieting state, in “a sleep that was like death” (51).

So nightmares contribute to dim the boundary between the quick and the dead, since they occur during the sleep, which is already an in-between state of consciousness, and have the power to bring a sort of death of the subject. The sleeper having a nightmare is not in control of the situation, he is still alive but already his awareness of the living world is obscured.

## **2. Animals and Humans: alarming hybrids**

As stated earlier, space is always closely associated with identity. Identity is first human, but Daphne du Maurier does not hesitate over planting seeds of doubt as to its stability, even in the bodily space, by repeatedly confusing humans and animals. The body lines themselves are confusingly blurred. Daphne du Maurier makes an ambiguous use of animals, for their purpose is not clearly defined, they are not mere allegories. She stages unsettling hybrids, both repulsive and arousing. In the continuity of the previous analysis, Daphne du Maurier's short stories transgress natural boundaries so that her subjects, by their material hybridity, are beyond categorisation.

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<sup>175</sup>M. Mulvey-Roberts, *The Handbook to Gothic Literature*, *op. cit.*, 164.



## *Hybrids*

Julia Kristeva claims that “all literature is probably a version of the apocalypse that seems [...] rooted [...] on the fragile border (borderline cases) where identities (subject/object, etc.) do not exist or only barely so – double, fuzzy, heterogeneous, animal, metamorphosed, altered, abject”<sup>176</sup>. Daphne du Maurier's writing in her short stories fully embraces this definition by refusing to clearly distinguish between human and animal being. Du Maurier's animals “are not quite animals, but neither are they humans in satiric guise”<sup>177</sup>. Their shape is unhuman, and so are their other qualities, but they keep shifting and thereby remain in the confusing grey zone. “The Blue Lenses” is understood as a “morality play”<sup>178</sup> by Ella Westland, where animal-headed humans would unveil their true identity. However there is no certainty about the truthfulness of this vision, “the eyes through which she [Marda West] sees human fading into animals are either terminally diseased or fatally clear”<sup>179</sup>. This disturbing vision could be interpreted as the revelation of the people's true face, as well as the paranoid vision of a sick mind. However this vision cannot be reduced to a simple masquerade, the animal-headed subjects are confusingly blending their animal characteristics with their human body. Thus, the depiction of Nurse Ansel, seen with a snake's head is made horrid by the accuracy of its verbs and adverbs: “It slid slowly into view, the long snake's head, the twisting neck, the pointed barbed tongue swiftly thrusting and swiftly withdrawn” (63). Sibilant sounds in this sentence also mimic the sound of the snake, making the description both visually and orally striking. One cannot see the limit where the body starts being human again, the line is blurred: “Nurse Brand stood watching her, with folded arms. The broad uniformed figure was much as Marda West had imagined it, but that cow's head tilted, the ridiculous frill of the cap perched on the horns... where did the head join the body, if mask it in fact was?” (52). The line is so confused that the animality surreptitiously extends to the whole body, so that Nurse Ansel, appearing with a snake's head, leaves the room “with a gliding motion” (67), reminiscent of the reptile's crawling. Nina Auerbach, in her article entitled “Tales of Awe and Arousal: Animals Invade”, explains that Angela Carter's animals may be more shocking at first sight, but less disturbing than Daphne du Maurier's, because A. Carter tells us exactly what they are: a symbol of erotic hunger. Du Maurier's animals remain mysterious. “Animals in du Maurier's tales have nothing clear to teach us. They assume human forms only to embarrass humanity”<sup>180</sup>, to disrupt the coherence of the human subject, which therefore becomes a strange hybrid. In “The Chamois” as

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176J. Kristeva, *Powers of Horror, op. cit.*, 207.

177N. Auerbach, in H. Taylor, *The Daphne du Maurier Companion, op. cit.*, 236.

178E. Westland, *Reading Daphne, op. cit.*, 128.

179N. Auerbach, in H. Taylor, *The Daphne du Maurier Companion, op. cit.*, 234.

180*Ibid.*, 238.

well, the goatherd called Zus appears as “an enigmatic emanation of the landscape”<sup>181</sup>, always confused with the chamois until the end. The goatherd seems to be an embodiment of blurred boundaries. He looks about forty but his voice is “oddly soft, and pitched a little high, like the voice of a child” (260). He is a living being and yet, at times, becomes “frozen, petrified” (261), “motionless” (263) like a statue. His senses perceive with great acuity, but inadequately: “these eyes did not only see, but appeared to listen as well” (259). The whole man is “disconcerting” (260), etymologically meaning that it sets pieces apart, it de-harmonises. There can be no unity achieved in this hybrid being. But mostly, he appears to be a blend of human and chamois. The depiction of his eyes matches more the eyes of a chamois than a human look: “golden brown in colour, large and widely set, they stared from his narrow face” (254). The similarity of their whistling is equally disquieting. The first occurrence of whistling is clearly attributed to the goatherd by the narrator (253), but the second is more ambiguous in the first reading: “a whistle. That same lewd whistle to attract attention, coming from fifty feet above my head, from the jutting ledge, the overhanging rock. I saw his horns, his questing eyes, his satyr's face staring down at me, suspicious, curious, and he whistled again, a hiss, a mockery, and stamped his hoofs, releasing a crumbling stone. Then he was gone – the chamois was gone” (264). The use of the pronoun “he” is equivocal and suggests more a human presence, but the distinction between animal and human is lost at this point. The epithet “lewd” applies more to the goatherd than to the chamois, and so do the epithets “curious” and “suspicious”. Only the hoofs and the horns seem to confirm the chamois' nature. The goatherd stands in exactly the same manner so that it reads almost like a repetition of the same event: “I saw the goatherd, staring down at us from a rock above our heads.[...] he disappeared. A loose stone crumbled and fell” (265). The chamois is so humanised and the goatherd so animalised that the two become one. They finally merge in “a black speck” (269) that remains indefinite; “the picture was indistinct: one second it looked like the chamois, and the next like our goatherd.” (269). The parallelism enhances the mutability and interchangeable nature of the chamois and the goatherd, which provoke “neither scorn nor exaltation, but some wavering unease in between”<sup>182</sup>. Through the figure of the chamois-goatherd, it is the unicity of human nature that becomes hybridised and thereby destabilised.

Although in a less striking manner, “Tame Cat”, “The Lordly Ones” and the “The Breakthrough” suggest a confusion between humans and animals that weakens the unicity of human nature. In “Tame Cat”, Uncle John is always compared with some sort of cat. Similes abound, and he is thus successively likened to a “tame cat” (93), a “tabby-cat” (95, 98), and finally a “sly,

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181 *Ibid.*, 236.

182 *Ibid.*, 236.

slinking tom-cat, crouching in its own shadow against a dark, damp wall” (101). The denotations evolve from domesticity and servility with the tame cat to the sexual predator with the tom-cat. Uncle John is not just reminiscent of a cat, he is a cat, in a way, and acts like one all along: “he positively purred in satisfaction, tugging at his little moustache” (98). The comparison helps to disclose his vicious, dishonest, calculating character. In “The Lordly Ones”, Ben, the disabled boy, runs away from home with “a band of robbers wandering at night” (277), whom he calls “the moors” (275). This “band of brothers, powerful and friendly” (276), finally turn out to be a herd of horses, not a group of humans. Paradoxically, this herd of horses seems to bear more humanity than Ben's own family. The segment that unveils their true nature highlights the confusion between animality and humanity thanks to a parallelism: “his mother, the chestnut mare” (289). Horse and mother are put on the same level. The narrative conveys Ben's sense of belonging with the herd of horses that was non-existent in his own home, with his real parents. Comparisons between himself and the horses such as “they did not speak, like Ben” (282), create a bond between them. As opposed to Ben's parents who were but “monstrous shadows” (280), the herd of horses bears more consistency and seems to epitomise goodness. Therefore, in this short story, Daphne du Maurier once again blurs the boundary between humans and animals by making their qualities indistinct, not even worth mentioning, except marginally at the end, by a non-essential apposition that clarifies the nature of the “mother”. In “The Breakthrough”, the confusion is even more subtle because it is acknowledged and denied at the same time. Children and animals are studied together to prove the similarities between them, from a scientific stance. Part of the secret experiment is about studying the “high-frequency response between individuals, and between people and animals” (270). In Saxmere, interestingly, people do not have dinner but they “feed at eight” (263), they do not answer with a smile but “with a grunt” (267). The metaphors are easily detectable. If there were any doubt, the parallel is confirmed by comparisons such as “children, like dogs, are particularly easy to train” (271). And indeed the analogy is made salient by the similarity of structure when the dog and the child hear the signal, each in turn: “suddenly Cerberus [...] turned and stood motionless, ears pricked, head to wind.” (280) and “at this moment the child stiffened. She stood rigid a moment, her eyes closed” (282). The same sudden paralysis is mentioned, along with a more detailed observation of the head, be it the eyes or the ears. The traditional hierarchy between human beings and animals is denied and they seem to share the same essence, in the philosophical sense. Daphne du Maurier does not blend incompatible “breeds” in this short story, but she makes the difference between the two so insignificant that they merge into one undefined category of beings. The reader's landmarks, like the narrator's, are thus destabilised and the representation of human nature is put under close examination.

## *Metamorphosis*

In “The Old Man” and “Not After Midnight”, some characters undergo a transformation by which they seem to lose their human qualities. The two natures – human and animal – do not overlap, but the facility with which characters turn from one into the other suggests a permeability. In “The Old Man”, the couple observed by the voyeuristic narrator from the beginning of the story abruptly turns into a couple of swans as “suddenly [...] the old man stretch[ed] his neck and beat[ed] his wings, and he took off from water, full of power, and she followed him” (242). As underlined by Nina Auerbach, “such transformations are unnervingly arbitrary. They seem unearned, with no discernible purpose”<sup>183</sup>. The sight of “the two swans flying there, alone, in winter” (242) comes unforeseen in the story and this symbol of beauty is in contradiction with the evil just committed – the old man's murder of his son, nicknamed “Boy”. There is no logical continuity in this metamorphosis, and yet the transformation is perfectly fluid. The sentence that reveals the unexpected transformation is, paradoxically, noticeable by its sweeping, soft rhythm. Somehow, “Boy's death transfigures his parents into swans”<sup>184</sup>, but “why they become bestial is far from clear”<sup>185</sup>. Once again, N. Auerbach insists: “only in short tales like “The Old Man” did [du Maurier] plumb a prismatic and sinister world where identities mutate and murder has no narrative rationale”<sup>186</sup>. It is precisely the absence of motive for this metamorphosis that suggests the mutability of human nature and its permeability with animals. In like manner, the metamorphosis experienced by the narrator of “Not After Midnight” is never quite fathomable. When he looks into the sea and thinks he sees the eyes of a drowned man staring up at him, Ella Westland infers that it may be “a premonition of his own future when he will look in a mirror and see that the drink-sodden face has become his own”<sup>187</sup>. This new identity that he foresees is multiple and, therefore, monstrous. The eyes he contemplates are “not only those of Silenos the satyr tutor, and of the drowned Stoll, but my own as well, as I should see them soon reflected in a mirror” (110). If these transformations in “Not After Midnight” and “The Old Man” are “observed from a distance rather than experienced” (237), they are nonetheless destabilising for the observer who witnesses the blurring of boundaries and the abject metamorphosis into an animal being. In “Not After Midnight”, however, the transformation happens more in the eyes of the narrator than in reality. When he is

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183 *Ibid.*, 238.

184N. Auerbach, *Daphne du Maurier, op. cit.*, 42.

185N. Auerbach, in H. Taylor, *The Daphne du Maurier Companion, op. cit.*, 233.

186N. Auerbach, *Daphne du Maurier, op. cit.*, 48.

187E. Westland, *Reading Daphne, op. cit.*, 48.

first given the jar, he cannot help feeling revulsion and disgust. But as he grows contaminated, his vision is completely reversed: “I don't know how it was, but somehow the leering face no longer seemed so lewd. It had a certain dignity that had escaped me before” (106). His admiration for the crafting of this antiquity even verges on awareness of sensuality. In the renewed description of the jar, touch surpasses sight and the pleasure that the narrator feels is eminently sensuous:

“I felt the scalloped ears, the rounded nose, the full soft lips of the tutor Silenos upon the jar, the eyes no longer protruding but questioning, appealing, and even the naked horsemen on the top had grown in grace. It seemed to me now they were not strutting in conceit but dancing with linked hands, filled with a gay abandon, a pleasing, wanton joy” (106).

Therefore, the narrator's hybridisation is triggered by his change of point of view, it would seem. But still, one cannot account for this sudden reversal nor this foreshadowed physical metamorphosis. The beast he thinks he is becoming is a hybrid in itself, “part man, part horse, a satyr...” (98). The narrator's admiration for the jar shows that he sees it no longer as “foreign to [his] nature” (98) but, on the contrary, willingly identifies himself with it. This desire for identification and hybridisation puts forward the dimness of the limit between human and animal natures. The easy shift unsettles the reader's expectation since animals do not come as mere allegories or fairy-tale punishment. “In these stories, what happens next blots what came before without revealing its pattern. Their animals bring perplexity. They are not the creatures we thought we knew”<sup>188</sup>.

Thus, Daphne du Maurier's bestial humans and humanised beasts are deeply perplexing because they are not mere allegories. Characters also float in an in-between state, half dead and half alive, so their human nature shrinks to an “abhuman”<sup>189</sup> nature, complex and splintered. Humanity is de-natured by “the abhuman subject, continually in danger of becoming not-itself, becoming other”<sup>190</sup>. In the same manner, as they are not just ghosts coming to haunt the living but material beings lost in-between, characters that bear animal qualities are not simply under an allegorical cover. Even in “The Blue Lenses”, the main character sees the hybrids around her as the revelation of their true evil selves, but this supposition is contradicted by her insanity. This story is not a plain morality play and nor are the other stories that involve hybrid figures. These figures are not human

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188N. Auerbach, in H. Taylor, *The Daphne du Maurier Companion*, *op. cit.*, 239.

189Kelly Hurley, *The Gothic Body: Sexuality, Materialism and Degeneration at the Fin de Siècle*, *op. cit.*, 3.

190*Ibid.*, 3.

in disguise but a disquieting blend of humanity and animality. The boundary between the two natures is so much transgressed that it is dimmed. Daphne du Maurier conveys this ambiguity through a complex network of parallelisms that evoke the double identity. Intratextual echoes are multiplied to mirror the fragmentation of identity that can be mended but through hybridisation.

## **D. De-humanisation**

Characters are not only mixed with animals but also hybridised into semi-gods and fragmented to the point of losing their human quality. One could see a form of de-humanisation in this manipulation of characters. The disjunctions are even more conspicuous in that matter. Instead of restoring unity, these hybridisations of the subject contribute to dislocate it even further. This confusion of boundaries at the same time as the multiplication of barriers is the final step to the irreparable split of identity.

### **1. Mythologies**

Melanie Heeley, in *The Daphne du Maurier Companion*, dedicates a full essay to Daphne du Maurier's mythologies, entitled "Christianity versus Paganism: Daphne du Maurier's divided Mind". Although brought up into a very Christian culture, Daphne du Maurier has developed a fascination for pagan mythologies, especially Greek mythology. She was very intrigued by the polymorphism of Greek gods and this interest shows through her short stories. Daphne du Maurier's writing, according to Melanie Heeley, is often an expression of both Christianity and Paganism, and the two systems are constantly kept in tension. The most telling instance of confusion between Christianity and Paganism in her short stories is probably "The Chamois". The figure of Zus, the goatherd/chamois, is not only a hybrid blending animal and human but also a transgressive figure in-between deity and humanity. His name is highly significant, like in the other stories, it is even performative. Subjects blend with their nicknames as if it transformed them. In "The Chamois", the goatherd is thus presented by Stephen: "his name is Jesus, by the way, but he answers to Zus" (257). One cannot help noticing the similarity of the nickname with the Greek god Zeus. As underlined by Melanie Heeley, "no doubt [du Maurier] was well aware of the disquieting effect that potentially

heretical formulation would have on the orthodox mind”<sup>191</sup>. Merging the two figures of Jesus Christ and Zeus may seem incoherent at first sight but the hybrid Zus is visibly shaped by this ambiguous name. His capacity to appear successively as man, animal, and god, his very mutability is destabilising but the direct consequence of his hybrid name. Zeus, to begin with, is known for his ability to assume various delusory shapes in order to lure women. Like Zeus with Alcmena, the goatherd mesmerises the female narrator who is also a married woman. Although there are hardly any contacts between them, the narrator feels both the threat and the erotic attraction of this man-god who is “always strange and familiar, arousing and shaming”<sup>192</sup>. The telling of her dream unveils both aspects: “The goatherd had stripped off his burnous, and it was not Stephen that he carried in his arms but myself. I put out my hand to feel the shock of hair. It rose from his head like a black crest” (267-268). The dream is ambiguous because it is not clear whether the goatherd is rescuing or abducting her. The erotic connotations in the details of the stripped off clothes and the mass of dark hair rising are counterbalanced by the mention of Stephen's rescue by “the goatherd and his saviour” (267). The figure of the saviour is thus also hinted at, and Jesus Christ and Zeus are therefore perfectly confused in the dream and throughout the narrative in the character of Zus. He is both the abductor, like Zeus, and the saviour, like Jesus Christ. Interestingly, the blurred killing of the chamois-goatherd brings a form of restoration of order in the married couple. His death, like Jesus', brings redemption, but his polymorphous life, like Zeus', brings chaos and disarray. Similarly in “Not After Midnight”, as already stated, Mr. Stoll embodies a strange hybrid: half man, half horse, and also partly god, “an incarnation of the half-equine Silenus, satyr-tutor of the ancient god Dionysus”<sup>193</sup>. The interference of deity within human subjects partakes of their de-humanisation. They are no longer human but half-breeds, “animal, god and monster”<sup>194</sup>.

The power of names to de-humanise characters is even stronger in “Ganymede” and “The Breakthrough” since the characters undergo no spectacular physical transformation and possess no hybrid bodies, but their conduct seems dictated by their names. Thereby, in a way, they are truly turned into mythological figures. In “Ganymede”, the reader is never told the real names of characters, they are simply known by the nicknames that the narrator uses to refer to them. Thus the young waiter is nicknamed “Ganymede” in relation to the bewitched narrator who thinks of himself as a sort of Zeus. As a consequence, Ganymede's American uncle, who is seen as an obstacle to the pursuit of his beloved, is nicknamed Poseidon. To avoid any doubt, the narrator reminds his reader that “Poseidon, the brother of Zeus, was also his rival” (94), in mythology as well as in du Maurier's

191M. Heeley, “Christianity versus Paganism: Daphne du Maurier's divided Mind”, in H. Taylor, *The Daphne du Maurier Companion*, op. cit., 132.

192N. Auerbach, in H. Taylor, *The Daphne du Maurier Companion*, op. cit., 237.

193Ibid., 237.

194Ibid., 237.

narrative. As a classic scholar, the narrator is well aware of the implications of his nicknames. When he meets Ganymede, the narrator senses the fragmentation of his identity as he uses the third person to speak of his new self: “this self who was non-existent knew with every nerve fibre, every brain-cell, every blood corpuscle that he was indeed Zeus, the giver of life and death, the immortal one, the lover; and that the boy who came towards him was his own beloved, his cup-bearer, his slave, his Ganymede” (90). The ternary rhythm of the bodily impressions, linked to this knowledge, insists on the hybrid identity. Indeed, it is not only in his mind that he imagines a similarity between himself and Zeus, he also feels it in his very bones. Both selves are indistinguishably mixed. This knowledge affects not only his vision but also his actions as he becomes a sort of Zeus and follows Ganymede in “a strange and mad pursuit” (96). As for the uncle Poseidon, the narrator brings imagination to a level of precision that makes the vision extremely realistic. To recount how Poseidon breaks inadvertently his bottle of water at the bar, the narrator provides a quite epic depiction: “the smoke [of my cigar] made rings before my eyes, and I saw his hideous, grinning face subside into what seemed to be a trough of sea and foam. I could even feel the spray” (95). To confuse – or rather to confirm – these identities even more, the narrator recounts his fanciful dream. This technique, as in “the Chamois”, is used to emphasise the impressions of blurred boundaries and composite identities: “I saw Poseidon, the god Poseidon, rising from an angry sea, and he shook his trident at me, and the sea became the canal, and then Poseidon himself mounted a bronze horse, the bronze horse of Colleoni, and rode away, with the limp body of Ganymede on the saddle before him” (100). The dream is summarised in a single sentence in which everything is juxtaposed instead of ordered and hierarchised. The intricacies of the multiple identities, divine and human, are mirrored in the parataxis. The dream is partly realised at the end of the story with the death of Ganymede caused not by Poseidon but by the narrator. As they are on a boat in the Canal, the narrator lets the rope holding Ganymede slip from his hands and leads the boy to be crushed by the propeller of the boat. Therefore, these hints at the deification of characters are not the mere divagation of a fanciful classic scholar, but they happen to have actual consequences as if their mythological nicknames had suffused their whole hybrid identities.

“The Breakthrough” is also fraught with allusions to Greek mythologies, and characters receive nicknames according to the part they play in the scientific experiment. In this logic, the dog which is taught to answer the signal is named Cerberus. In Greek mythology, Cerberus is a dog whose role is to guard hell and to prevent the living from coming in and the dead from leaving. In “The Breakthrough”, Cerberus is not really keeping any secret treasure but his presence at the entrance of Saxmere gives hints concerning the nature of the experiments and adds to the forbidding aspect of the place. The narrator ironically observes that “this agreeable vista was



enhanced by the sudden appearance of an Alsatian dog, who loped out of the marshes to the left, and stood wagging its tail at young Ken as he unlocked the gate” (262). Cerberus, in du Maurier's story, is indeed placed at the entrance of some *inferno*. Along these lines, the narrator interprets Ken's part in MacLean's experiment and asks him: “And what [...] is your position on the staff? Ganymede to the professor Jove?” [...] 'How smart of you to guess,' he answered. 'That's roughly the idea ... to snatch me from this earth to doubtful heaven” (265). So Ken too is given a double identity, in-between the young and weak leukaemic boy of eighteen and the stunningly beautiful mortal raised to heaven by Zeus – here, MacLean. MacLean incidentally thinks of himself as a sort of god, capable of overcoming death and preserving life, thanks to his machines appropriately called Charon I, Charon 2, and Charon 3. Once again the narrator dispels doubt as he notes that “Charon, if I remember rightly, was the ferryman who conveyed the spirits of the dead across the Styx” (269). Finally Janus, Niki's father, also partakes in this mythology in the story. Janus is normally the god of beginning and ends, of choices, passages, and doors. One can easily draw inferences from this nickname, as Janus works in MacLean's project and accepts to create a passage between life and death and assist the doctor in his work as “a trained orderly” (289). All these Greek names express a close relationship to death in the function that they refer too. Every one of them is partly responsible in this story and thence acquire the capacity to transgress the line between life and death thanks to their semi-god nature. Although these nicknames are evoked almost like a joke or a simple code, they are in fact truth-telling and confuse the identity of the characters who thus become double, fragmented, hybridised. Characters are blended with mythological types, they are turned into semi-gods, into strange hybrids. No unity achieved for the subject who has lost his identity to become multiple and de-humanised.

## 2. Collage and dismembering

More visually this time, Daphne du Maurier uses collage aesthetics to suggest the dismembering of the subject. One can sense the influence of modernity and progress in this technique, in so far as “the smooth, continuous, unruffled space of older representational art is not appropriate to the disjunctions of our typical life experience”<sup>195</sup>. The subject, thus fractured and dismantled, is de-humanised. This process equates to a sort of death of the subject, and Daphne du Maurier's short story “The Alibi” seems to take this statement in the literal sense. In this story, Mr.

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195B. Hopkins, “Modernism and the Collage Aesthetic”, *op. cit.*, 7.

Fenton plans to kill a woman and her child and claims that he is a painter as his alibi. Gradually the alibi of painting becomes his real purpose, and yet one could argue that his painting is really a form of killing. Fenton is not dabbing colours delicately but, as if his brush had turned into a knife, he is “stabb[ing] the result on to the canvas” (20), aware of “a tremendous sense of power to put the woman upon canvas” (23). The crimson painting thence takes a new shade; “the Venitian red was not the Dodge's palace but little drops of blood that burst in the brain and did not have to be shed” (21). The first session of painting is described as a murder, even at the end when he realises that “there was paint on his hands, on his coat” (21), giving evidence of his guilt. More to the point, the way Mr. Fenton paints is fragmenting the model because he splits it into pieces instead of creating a unified portrait. The face of the little boy, Johnny, is not a face but an accumulation of disjointed lines and juxtaposed dots: “two little dots for the nose, and a small slit for the mouth ... two lines for the neck, and two more, rather squared like a coat hanger, for the shoulders” (20). Mr. Fenton rejects the type of “chocolate-box representation” (23) for his painting and claims: “I'm of my time. I see what I see” – and what he sees is a divided reality. This vision completely echoes the explanation of Budd Hopkins about modern art and the collage aesthetics: “Today the archetypal modern creator is not the traditional storyteller or playwright but rather the filmmaker, cutting, editing, transposing reality and fantasy, close-up and panorama, present and past, into a collage whose parts, seen together, metaphorically recreate the complex reality in which we actually live”<sup>196</sup>. Thus, the painting of Johnny and the one of the mother appear as a collection of disassembled elements of the face. Fenton paints the mother's “mouth like a big fish ready to swallow” (24), as she observes. Johnny's portrait is curiously presented as “a head of Johnny” (33), as if it were, not a painting, but a part of his dead body. Even his self-portrait escapes him as some elements cannot be seized and pinned on the canvas: “he found he couldn't paint his own eyes. They had to be closed, which gave him the appearance of a sleeping man. A sick man. It was rather uncanny” (28). Eventually, when the self-portrait is finished, he realises that “the whole thing look[s] dead” (30) as if he had taken away his life by painting his face. The depiction of the paintings is, in fact, the ekphrasis of a blazon. By describing not the whole but the parts one by one, the painting and the ekphrasis result in the split of self into multiple fragments. No wholeness is given on the canvas nor the page, and expectations of unity yield to an aesthetics of disparity. In this short story, painting means killing because it fragments the individual into pieces than cannot be stuck together. Hybridisation is achieved through painting, but it brings no coherence or integrity. The blazon equates to a dismembering of the body and, therefore, of the individual. As already explained, characters in Daphne du Maurier's stories are repeatedly split into pieces. Their body is

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196B. Hopkins, “Modernism and the Collage Aesthetic”, *op. cit.*, 9.

alienated from their spirit and their inner self is torn between contradictory aspirations and divided into several selves that compose their being. Furthermore, the division is reinforced by a division of the body which can no longer retain unity. As space is fractured, the material body is fragmented. Members are not part of a whole but disjointed elements stuck incoherently. Characters are visually dismembered, and this final step into the split of the self leads a dehumanisation of the subject. The dismemberment does not consist in a plain description of the members apart but it is dynamic and aestheticised. Daphne du Maurier's writing constantly denotes the violence of this dismemberment to the extent that she makes it a real politics of her literature.

This aesthetic of dismemberment can also be found in an earlier short story, "The Closing Door". The doctor, who announces to the main character that he is going to be paralysed, is dehumanised through the fracture of his self in three parts: his figure, his voice, and his inner self. Throughout the interview when he breaks the news to his patient, the doctor is referred to as "the voice" (188). The voice is the subject of the sentences as if it had a will of its own, independent from the doctor's. The doctor also shrinks in the eyes of the patient as he appears as an empty figure. First a "great figure" (188), "he shrank perceptibly, he dwindled to a sorry figure" (188). The patient can only grasp the sound of his voice and the shape of his body, unclearly distinguished, separated from one another. When referring to the doctor's inner self, the narrator calls him "the doctor" (191), as though it was a third entity detached from the two other physical elements: "the doctor was [...] relieved that he had taken the news so well" (191). Until the end of the medical interview, the split remains: "the door closed, the voice was silent. The great figure would relax now" (191). The fracture of the doctor's self is enhanced here by the breach in the punctuation. The voice and the figure are divided by a full stop. This segmentation of the self creates a composite, hybrid subject that cannot be unified. The subject is but the result of an artificial collage that does break up instead of mending. In this case, boundaries are so multiplied within the subject that the limits that define the individual become blurred.

To conclude, I would say that Daphne du Maurier's short stories dynamically question the boundaries that define the human subject. Moral values, physical limits, traumas and scientific progress are all explored and partake in this blurring of human nature. Reassuring boundaries are repeatedly transgressed and Daphne du Maurier mixes up our traditional spaces within the narrative so as to destabilise the reader and make him question the very notions of stability and meaning. In

order to do so, Daphne du Maurier also blurs the boundaries of literary genres, borrowing the needed effect from each of them. Thus, the Gothic, the fairy tale, the detective story and the realist style are all deftly intertwined to create a rich, complex and compelling writing. As highlighted by Avril Horner and Sue Zlosnik in *Daphne du Maurier and the Gothic Imagination*, Daphne du Maurier “was not an innovator in terms of style, or structure”<sup>197</sup> but by “using recognizable popular forms, she was able to explore through Gothic writing the anxieties of modernity in the kind of fiction many people find accessible”<sup>198</sup> and to produce a powerful narrative drive. Her frequent use of long-distance patterning leads the reader to question and connect the associations drawn from these repetitions. The question of identity is at the core of most of her short stories, especially the notion of self in relation to the “other”, whatever form it may assume. She incorporates hybrids in her short stories to scrutinise the human nature and its potential permeability with other foreign natures, such as spectres, animals, and deities. Space being utterly fragmented, the subject needs to find a new rock on which he can anchor his identity. He seeks the limits of his nature by crossing the boundaries that separate him from other beings. The mirage of unity and unicity dissolves in this quest for identity. As a result, the human subject acquires a distressing mutability which also intensifies his inner fractures. Characters are not coherent wholes but disjointed pieces instably brought together, constantly menacing to lose their fragile nature to become an abject hybridised being.

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197A. Horner, S. Zlosnik, *Daphne du Maurier and the Gothic Imagination*, *op. cit.*, 188.

198 *Ibid.*, 188.

## CONCLUSION

Daphne du Maurier's short fiction disconcerts because its deep preoccupations seem at odds with her fluid visual style. The classification of her work as Gothic helps to decipher the structure of spaces, which are always conflicted and constantly disordered. Daphne du Maurier's writing is unsettling in her short stories because it creates illusions and mirages. The reader usually expects a few horizons of development in the stories but these horizons are either deceived or completely exceeded, trespassing the boundaries of plain realism. Traditionally opposed spaces are seemingly used but only to be better transgressed, their boundaries being both blurred and multiplied, as if observed in a broken mirror. The illusion of fragmentation or unity thus surreptitiously appears, and spaces remain elusive. This sense of deception is enhanced by the usual unreliability of point of view, causing the reader to feel at loss in the intricacies of her complex construction of spaces.

Although “it is often suggested that the writer went to live in the deepest Cornwall to escape from a contemporary world she dubbed as one of 'meagre mediocrity'<sup>199</sup>”<sup>200</sup>, Daphne du Maurier's writing is fully committed to deeply contemporary issues such as the trauma of war, the transformations of society, scientific progress, and most importantly the construction of identity in a mutable world. She was considered as a very “English” writer but it is also true that “du Maurier had a broadly European sensibility that is manifest in her fiction's many European settings and characters”<sup>201</sup>, and particularly in short stories such as “Don't Look Now”, “Ganymede”, and “Not After Midnight”. Despite the accusations concerning the role of characters' psychology in her stories, what makes them most remarkable is “Du Maurier's powers of observation [and] her ability to capture the essence of particular places”<sup>202</sup>. More than capturing, du Maurier applies her skills to the questioning of boundaries that define those spaces, and incidentally partake of the structuring of identity.

All sorts of preconceived ideas have been applied more or less wrongly to du Maurier's writing, the most ambiguous being the interpretation of her work as a sort of protuberance of her tortured being, a tumor that needs to bleed out. Surprisingly enough, no critic so far has succeeded in studying her works as independent wholes, completely out of the biographical perspective. Nina

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199D. du Maurier, *The Rebecca Notebook and Other Memories*, London, Virago, 2004, 55.

200H. Taylor, *The Daphne du Maurier Companion*, *op. cit.*, xv.

201*Ibid.*, xv.

202*Ibid.*, xvii.

Auerbach, Ina Habermann, Helen Taylor, Avril Horner and Sue Zlosnik, Alison Light – none of them, indeed, seems to have even had any thought of it. They all appear to assume that author and work are one, and that her literary production is a somewhat monstrous protrusion that would only give insights to read the writer's mind. A vast array of essays has been dedicated to the interpretation of Daphne du Maurier's gender identity and has treated it as symptomatic of her writing. Regrettably, in comparison, few or no critic has yet explored the density of her fragmented spatial organisation. One of the reasons for this could be the impossibility to classify her work in any properly defined literary movement. Daphne du Maurier does not fit satisfyingly into any of them. Critics like Richard Kelly despise her work because she did not comply with the standards of her time, and especially modernism. Some features of modernism may however be distinguished, because du Maurier's work emerges from the same context of oppressing modernity and war – hence the fragmented vision of truth, for instance. Far from being “content to stoke the home fires of family and patriotism”<sup>203</sup>, she broaches taboo subjects in order to subvert traditional categorisation and question the nature of the human subject. In this regard, she is in phase with the tradition of transgression in Gothic Romance, “seducing readers away from the proprieties and responsibilities of daily life, which transgresses the notion of civil order”<sup>204</sup>. Her short stories stage murder, violence, incest, and openly transgress the codes of morality. Seeing her as a Gothic author is reassuring for literary critics because it compresses her work into something well defined, academically delineated. At the same time, her writing flows out of well-established boundaries, which is precisely allowed by Gothic writing. “Gothic writing frequently challenges literary and aesthetic conventions, in so far as it dissolves differences between Romanticism and realism, history and romance, high and low culture”<sup>205</sup>. As defended by David Punter in *A Companion to the Gothic*, Gothic writing offers no conclusion nor answer but only moral ambiguity. Gothic writing, because of its ability to reinvent itself through transgression, is the perfect tool for Daphne du Maurier and she uses brilliantly its possibilities to open new spaces of reflection for modern writing.

On the other hand, her writing can be valued – or dismissed – according to her readership. Ina Habermann defines her work positively as “middlebrow” literature, which would be an in-between style between highbrow, intellectual, elitist literature, and lowbrow, formulaic, entertaining writing. In the middle of this “battle of the brows”<sup>206</sup>, caricaturally opposing literature and mass culture, the middlebrow emerges, claiming accessibility and simplicity of writing as a virtue, not a

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203R. Kelly, *Daphne du Maurier*, *op. cit.*, 141.

204A. Horner, in M. Mulvey-Roberts, *The Handbook to Gothic Literature*, *op. cit.*, 287.

205 *Ibid.*, 287.

206I. Habermann, *Myth, Memory and the Middlebrow*, *op. cit.*, 34.

fault. Daphne du Maurier causes problems in categorisation precisely because her fiction wavers between “lowbrow” genres – crime fiction, horror stories, historical romance, science fiction, spy fiction – and high literary standards. The very fact that she does not dismiss short fiction as minor but uses it to make her literary skills blossom, reveals her ability to blend high and low culture disconcertingly, thus challenging the border that splits the two. The accessibility of her short stories is equal to their literary quality and, therefore, makes the reader think and criticise. Daphne du Maurier is most interested in the process of identity construction and this preoccupation is reflected in the combination of literary traditions that can be found in her writing. This concern is properly modern and shows that Daphne du Maurier is not insulated from the problems of her time. On the contrary, she fully embraces them. The hybridity of styles is symptomatic of the crisis of identity in the twentieth century, thus forcing the writer to “draw the forms of his art [...] from this store of theatrical costumes that the past has become for him”<sup>207</sup>. Daphne du Maurier thus recycles the Gothic and horror traditions and borrows elements of many styles, including modernism and postmodernism. In the twentieth century, one is faced with a “splintering of genre that erases all the boundaries”<sup>208</sup> and, consequently, “the writer, lacking a voice of his own, must resort to the texts of the past.”<sup>209</sup> The death of the subject causes the death of personal stylistics and aesthetics. Not despite, but because of this “textual hybridity”<sup>210</sup>, Daphne du Maurier's short stories are not absolutely beyond labelling. “Modernist Horror” might be a new possible label for her work. Instead of playing on traditional fears – entrapment, erosion, destruction, monsters – her short stories distill a new fear of not being able to identify the surrounding beings and spaces. Illegibility is the key element in her horror. The fragmented perception of all the elements and the loss of identity and meaning is the source of terror for characters and readers. Du Maurier thence borrows techniques from modernism and postmodernism such as the absence of definite statements, multiple voices, the unreliability of grand truths, the destabilisation of spaces and individual identities. But these strategies are not displayed just for the sake of instructing readers about modernity. All this converges to creating a modernist terror, where the loss of intelligibility is what is most frightening and disturbing. Characters fight monsters that are not radically other than themselves and whose nature is never completely clarified. Her short-story writing is marked by a form of confusing blindness.

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207“puiser les formes de son art [...] dans ce grand dépôt de costumes théâtraux qu’est devenu pour lui le passé” (my translation), Gianni Vattimo, *La fin de la modernité. Nihilisme et herméneutique dans la culture post-moderne*, Barcelone : Paidós, 1990, 170.

208“éclatement des genres qui efface toutes les frontières” (my translation), N. Balutet, “Du postmodernisme au post-humanisme: présent et futur du concept d’hybridité”, *op. cit.*, 5.

209 “l’écrivain, qui manque d’une voix propre, doit recourir aux textes du passé.” (my translation), *Ibid.*, 5.

210Laurent Lepaludier, “Hybridité textuelle et flou générique”, in *La Nouvelle de langue anglaise. Croisements et Marges*, Angers, PU d’Angers, 2005, 39.

This logically leads to examining the nature of Daphne du Maurier's politics in her short fiction. The chosen genre is particularly suited to it because of “the tradition of negotiating borders and edges in the short story”<sup>211</sup>. Jacques Rancière defines the politics of aesthetics as a reconfiguration of the “distribution of the sensible”<sup>212</sup>, which means, more precisely, “the distribution of spaces and times, places and identities, speaking and noise, the visible and the invisible”<sup>213</sup>. Literature intervenes in the process by offering new distribution of the world. Daphne du Maurier, as a consequence, by breaking boundaries of time, space, and subject, actualises a politics of literature. Her writing is a writing of disunion, her language is one of fracture. She constructs a new order separating subjects from their natural spaces, dislocating them from their times and splitting them from their bodies. In the process of identity construction, spaces are the main ground. Boundaries are the heart of the subject in so far as they are decisive in the development of identity: the boundary defines what is alien to the self, and thereby what the self is. In Daphne du Maurier's short stories, boundaries of spaces are determining for the boundaries of the subject, and they are replicated to such an extent that identity itself becomes evasive. Mirages, as a consequence, allow a half-reassuring illusion of unity that balances the lack of integrity in spaces – and, therefore, in the subject. Mirages are the result of the madness that emerges from the impossibility to define, to draw objective and stable lines. Daphne du Maurier thus establishes an aesthetics of disunity which is in tune with the fragmented perception of the twentieth century.

Her short stories, thanks to the marginality of the genre, are able to fully embrace the issues of her contemporary time, such as war, postwar society, traumas, modern family, and scientific progress. As one observes in the majority of her short stories, these issues are expressed through multiple breaches and fractures. The modern subject is spared no dislocation. Through the wide variety of her short stories, one can perceive the unity: what brings these stories together is, paradoxically, their sense of disunion. To compensate for the complete splintering of the subject, Daphne du Maurier's writing offers a disjunct hybridisation. Unity and coherence are not achieved but hybridity allows a mirage of integrity, a precarious form of wholeness that adds to the fragility of the subject. Henceforth, the individual is not only self-divided, it is both itself and other. This new composite identity is destabilising for the characters in her stories as well as for the reader. This

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211N. Sellei, “20th—21st Century ‘British’ Literature: Recent Critical Trends. Concluding panel of the SEAC workshop (2013 SAES conference)”, *Études britanniques contemporaines. Revue de la Société d’études anglaises contemporaines* 46:1, June 2014, 19.

212 J. Rancière, *Politique de la Littérature*, Paris, Galilée, 2007, 12.

213« distribution des espaces et des temps, des places et des identités, de la parole et du bruit, du visible et de l'invisible » (my translation), *Ibid.*, 12.



feature could liken Daphne du Maurier's writing to Postmodernism, although no critic ventured to assign her such a place so far. Her place in the history of literature remains confused because she is still considered out of it. Her development and achievements as a short-story writer follow a direction that is parallel to the mainstream classifications without ever fully satisfying their standards. Her parallel evolution provides a rich source for her writing and also allows her some freedom from the formal constraints of academic literary movements. Richard Kelly predicted no great future for Daphne du Maurier's sort of fiction "with [its] straightforward narratives that appealed to a conventional audience's love of fantasy, adventure, sexuality, and mystery"<sup>214</sup>. However, what he considered "her failure as a thinker and as a stylist"<sup>215</sup> may very well be her strength or, to put it more plainly, the expression of her ability to confound her readers by thwarting their literary expectations and subverting their deep-seated notions of stability and meaning.

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214R. Kelly, *Daphne du Maurier; op. cit.*, 141.

215 *Ibid.*, 141.

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