The Art of Uncertainty: Narrative Strategies in the Fiction of Daphne du Maurier

Caroline S. Denhez

A Thesis

In the Department of

English

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

Master of Arts (English)

at Concordia University

Montréal, Québec, Canada

March 2025

CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY

SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES

This is to certify that the thesis prepared

By: Caroline S. Denhez

Entitled: The Art of Uncertainty: Narrative Strategies in the Fiction of Daphne du Maurier

and submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts (English)

complies with the regulations of the University and meets the accepted standards with respect to originality and quality.

Signed by the final examining committee:

_____ Chair
Dr.

_____ External examiner
Dr.

_____ Examiner
Dr.

_____ Examiner
Dr.

_____ Examiner
Dr. Cynthia Quarrie

_____ Thesis Supervisor
Dr. Marcie Frank

Approved by

_____
Dr. Nathan Brown, Graduate Program Director

_____
Dr. Pascale Sicotte, Dean of the Faculty

Abstract

The Art of Uncertainty: Narrative Strategies in the Fiction of Daphne du Maurier

Caroline S. Denhez

This research undertakes an analysis of Daphne du Maurier's novelistic achievements, challenging the standard genre classifications often assigned to her work and seeking to define the fundamental aspects of her narrative strategies. Moving beyond the constraints of genre conventions and biographical interpretations, the central aim is to illuminate the inherent literary power of her fiction. To this end, the study examines a carefully chosen selection of seven novels spanning her extensive literary career (nearly four decades): *Jamaica Inn* (1936), *Rebecca* (1938), *My Cousin Rachel* (1951), *The Scapegoat* (1957), *The Flight of the Falcon* (1965), *The House on the Strand* (1969), and *Rule Britannia* (1972), with the explicit exclusion of works based on factual or historical events.

The findings of this research reveal several key insights. Primarily, it argues that analyzing Daphne du Maurier's novels through the lens of genre conventions is not the most fruitful approach. Instead, it advocates for an analysis centered on the concept of *Uncertainty*. Furthermore, it identifies a discernible literary chronology, organized into three distinct cycles: *the Gothic Romance cycle*, *the Masculine cycle*, and the S*peculative cycle*. Finally, this thesis observes the author's dynamic relationship with genre conventions, emphasizing her consistent resistance to being bound by any single category and the proactive creation of her own writing conditions to sustain her exploration of uncertainty.

Acknowledgements

I am, of course, extremely grateful to my supervisor, Dr. Marcie Frank. Her resourcefulness, her limitless literary knowledge, her dedication and meticulous attention to detail made the writing process stimulating and enjoyable.

I am equally thankful to Dr. Cynthia Quarrie, the second reader of this thesis, whose valuable comments helped sharpen its main arguments.

Many thanks to the department and my professors.

Last but not least, I am indebted to my husband and my son, whose never-ending support, unconditional love and unwavering faith in my capacities will never cease to amaze me.

Merci.

Table of contents

INTRODUCTION

Despite Daphne du Maurier's status as a bestselling and now classic author, her work has not yet been subjected to a comprehensive scholarly analysis or a systematic exploration of her fictional universe. Several of her works, including her early novels *Jamaica Inn* (1936), *Rebecca* (1938), and *My Cousin Rachel* (1951), as well as short stories like "Don't Look Now" (1971) and "The Birds" (1952), have achieved widespread popularity and have been translated and adapted for film and television. However, to my knowledge, there are no specific studies of the four subsequent novels –*The Scapegoat* (1957), *The Flight of The Falcon* (1965)*, The House on The Strand* (1969)*,* and *Rule Britannia* (1972)– and no scholarly endeavour has yet investigated the potential literary connections among these works.

To understand this academic oversight, several factors must be considered. First of all, du Maurier's critical reception has been significantly shaped by the enduring popularity of her early Gothic romances, coupled with disproportionate attention to her personal life. Besides, unlike Woolf or de Beauvoir, du Maurier neither intellectualized her work nor engaged in explicit literary theorizing. She was concerned with narrative exploration rather than aesthetic pursuits. More significantly, du Maurier's fiction resists categorization and challenges the limitations of conventional genre classifications, thus limiting and discouraging any single critical approach to her novels. As Alison Light notes, "[du Maurier's] work must be a nightmare for the eager compiler of 'genre studies' compendia" (Light 159). Indeed, traditional genre codifications seem inadequate to fully capture the complexity of du Maurier's work. In addition, the immense popularity of her early Gothic Romances led to a critical misreading of her oeuvre. The few critics who explored her fiction erroneously categorized her as a genre writer, confining their analysis to her Gothic

works or examining the others from that angle, thus overlooking the diversity and innovation of her later fiction.

Consequently, critics often label du Maurier as a Middlebrow or genre fiction writer and thus refuse further critical engagement with her work. The use of such labels is doubly problematic: firstly, because they implicitly place works of fiction such as du Maurier's in a subaltern position. Secondly, these labels hinder serious scholarly examination. Moreover, while the terms are convenient, they are overly simplistic to capture the complexity of du Maurier's work. Scholars like Light, who have dedicated significant work to du Maurier, often categorize her bestsellers as "better class romance" (Light 158), even though the term romance is unsuitable. Du Maurier's fiction is hard to classify precisely because it does not fit one genre and one genre only. Consequently, a comprehensive understanding of her literary output necessitates a transversal approach. I propose to analyze her literary achievements through the prism of a concept rather than a genre, one that seems to capture the essence, both thematically and structurally.

To this end, it is appropriate to dwell on du Maurier's achievements as a novelist, excluding *de facto* her biographical works, family sagas, and Historical romances, all of which rely on factual events or historical episodes. This examination will, therefore, focus on seven novels written and published between 1936 and 1972: *Jamaica Inn* (1936), *Rebecca* (1938), *My Cousin Rachel* (1951), *The Scapegoat* (1957), *The Flight of The Falcon* (1965), *The House on The Strand* (1969), and *Rule Britannia* (1972). This corpus, which spans nearly four decades, will allow for an in-depth, comprehensive, and chronological study.

Collectively, these seven novels illuminate the concept of *Uncertainty*. The term seems all the more convenient in that it disregards genre conventions at the same time as it includes themes and narrative structure. In du Maurier's work, uncertainty manifests in various forms, drawing

upon a diverse array of genres and operating at multiple narrative levels. But what is *Uncertainty*? A fundamental premise is that the concept is intrinsically linked to knowledge. In essence, uncertainty is closely linked to doubt, unpredictability and indecision, both individual and collective. In addition, uncertainty can be epistemological, ontological or psychological in nature. In literary terms, uncertainty manifests in various genres, including gothic, supernatural, uncanny, thriller, fantastic, and even speculative fiction. Given the centrality of uncertainty to du Maurier's fiction, it is essential to examine how this concept influences narrative style and form. Additionally, exploring the interplay between uncertainty and genre, as well as its evolving manifestations throughout her career, can shed light on the distinctive chronology of du Maurier's oeuvre. Indeed, we can distinguish three cycles in this chronology, which, based on similar structures, themes and genres, exploit uncertainty distinctly. The first cycle, the *Gothic Romance cycle* (from 1936 to 1951), includes the first three novels –*Jamaica Inn, Rebecca* and *My Cousin Rachel*– and explores uncertainty through a diverse range of genres and themes, including the Gothic, the supernatural, and romance, while relying on a *bildungsroman* structure. The second cycle, the *Masculine cycle* (from 1957 to 1969), which contains *The Scapegoat*, *The Flight of the Falcon* and *The House on the Strand*, shows a change of perspective: it departs from the formulas of the first successes; it is more contemporary and invests uncertainty through solely masculine experiences by incorporating elements of fantastic and Modernism. Lastly, the *Speculative cycle* (1972), which comprises *Rule Britannia*, du Maurier's last novel, deepens the concept of uncertainty by transposing it into the near future. This chronological classification reveals the complexity of du Maurier's literary development, highlighting the evolution of her writing both across the different cycles and within each individual cycle. Additionally, this methodology underscores the thematic coherence that binds these seemingly disparate works around the concept of uncertainty.

The Gothic Romance Cycle: Uncertainty in the Mode of Romance

It is neither random nor anecdotal that du Maurier's early bestsellers are generally studied together: they invest in the same topics, subjects and themes, although at different levels, and rearrange the same motifs. Indeed, the three novels construct uncertainty within the constraints of the mode of Romance and develop around gothic themes such as the stranger in the house, domination, death and romance, thus creating Gothic Romances.

Nevertheless, this appellation of Gothic Romance, generally accepted by du Maurier's specialists, is shaky and does not suffice to determine or to grasp all the subtlety of the writer's work. Scholars such as Alison Light, April Horner and Sue Zlosnik, who have devoted several works to the author, succeed in connecting these three novels thematically while failing to recognize their structural and stylistic variations within the constraints of the Gothic. When appreciated as a whole, this cycle highlights the increasing sophistication with which uncertainty is deployed within the mode of romance and borders on genre conceptions. Furthermore, the three novels exhibit a clear progression not only stylistically and thematically but also structurally: the status of the female protagonist changes from the virginal Mary to the married second Mrs. de Winter and finally to the widowed Rachel.

What distinguishes *Jamaica Inn*, *Rebecca* and *My Cousin Rachel* from the rest of du Maurier's corpus is that they follow the same logic (what John Cawelti calls formula) and rely on the framework of the *bildungsroman*. The first uncertainty is then a structural tool centered around the origins of the main characters, their transition to adulthood and potential future, and ultimately, their identities and legitimacy. In essence, this uncertainty is ontological: the three plots depict orphaned characters who pass from young adult to full adulthood through a series of ordeals. Mary Yellan, after her mother's death, moves in with an estranged aunt dominated by her smuggler

husband; the narrator of *Rebecca* departs from Mrs. Van Hopper's comfortable safety to live with a dark husband in a haunted mansion; Philip Ashley welcomes an uncanny cousin whom he suspects to have killed his late benefactor. All of them orphaned; all of them portrayed as youngsters, inexperienced creatures who have to navigate through unusual circumstances. As Jane S. Bakerman puts it:

> In the traditional bildungsroman, a young person who has great faith in his own power and potential tests his mettle as a means of initiation into maturity. He often takes a journey, acquires mentors of varying levels of reliability and engages in dangerous adventures. (Bakerman 18)

However, du Maurier does not completely adhere to the conventional definition of the *bildungsroman* but instead pushes back the boundaries of the structure. For instance, the narrators or main characters from these three novels are not only young people but are often portrayed as childlike and easily manipulated, kept in a state of ignorance by their surroundings. Although Mary is 23, the new Mrs. de Winter is just over 21, and Philip Ashley is close to his 25th birthday, they are all infantilized. In addition, their experiences and degree of self-reliance vary as du Maurier reshuffles the deck and delves deeper into the Gothic genre. Indeed, despite Bakerman's observation, shared by Daphne Watson, that the formula used for *Jamaica Inn* or *Rebecca*, resembles Cinderella's, the story of Mary or the second Mrs. de Winter is far from the picaresque ideal. Bakerman observes that in *bildungsroman*-type stories, "Ultimately, [the heroes] emerge sadder but wiser, ready to take [their] place in adult society. [They] have compromised with the ideal and settled for pragmatism" (Bakerman 19). While this type of narrative structure typically ends with a rather satisfactory resolution or, as the word *bildung* suggests, progress, du Maurier subverts these expectations in her *Gothic Romance cycle*. Instead of ascending trajectories, her protagonists often face ambiguous and unsettling outcomes. Mary in *Jamaica Inn* risks repeating

the abusive patterns of her aunt's marriage. The second Mrs. de Winter in *Rebecca* finds herself exiled with a disabled husband. In *My Cousin Rachel*, Philip grapples with an indelible sense of guilt, haunted by the question of who is truly guilty: himself, Rachel, or both?

It is noteworthy that despite structural and thematical similarities, fluctuations exist from one novel to another as du Maurier expands her exploration of uncertainty. Structurally, du Maurier plays with the framework of the *bildungsroman*, which she deconstructs and reassembles differently in each novel. The plot unfolds linearly in *Jamaica Inn*: the reader discovers Mary's adventures as she experiences them from the beginning until the end. With neither analepses nor prolepses, the uncertainty of the story is experienced chronologically and continuously. Mary Yellan is an independent and determined young woman who must navigate the throes of a dysfunctional home and dangerous surroundings. Far removed from the sheltered environment of her childhood, she enters a world of violence, threats, thefts, and shipwrecks. This harsh reality forces her to prioritize survival, both for herself and for her Aunt Patience. For her, the uncertainties lie in her ability to extricate herself from this quagmire and find a more favourable outcome. After the discovery of the massacre at the inn and the band of thugs, Mary faces a critical choice: continue alone or take the risk of leaving with Jem. If not wiser, Mary is at least certainly more confident and ready to accept whatever future challenges may come.

Rebecca presents a starkly different structural approach as du Maurier dives deeper into the Gothic; the author rearranges her plot's framework and sets up a circular tale for her heroine. According to Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, the form of a Gothic story "is likely to be discontinuous and involuted, perhaps incorporating tales within tales, changes of narrators, and such framing devices as found manuscripts or interpolated histories" (Sedgwick 9). And indeed, *Rebecca* opens with the famous incipit: "Last night, I dreamed of Manderley." (*Rebecca* 1) The narrative

immediately establishes itself as a flashback, revealing past events to the readership. The introduction presents a heightened sense of uncertainty as the reader is left to anticipate the tragic events that have yet to be fully revealed. In addition, unlike Mary, the second Mrs. de Winter lacks self-reliance and is constantly plagued by doubt, overwhelmed by the pressures of her circumstances. She has no control over her destiny, and her submissive character announces an equally passive outcome. The choice is not hers, and she is stuck in the vicious circle of nostalgia for a world gone up in flames. Her journey granted her neither a name –she remains forever this unnamed narrator– nor a happy marriage –Maxim de Winter suffers irreversible injuries from his desperate attempt to save Manderley. Moreover, the heroine does not come out of it all wiser or more mature but desolate and nostalgic. The end, for her, is a perpetual beginning: the circular structure of the novel reveals the heroine's inability to escape a recurring pattern of suffering, for she is back to where it all started: she dreams of Manderley from the south of France. The structure of the coming-of-age novel collapses.

What she started in *Rebecca* du Maurier continues in the temporal structure of *My Cousin Rachel*. Philip's story does not really begin with the end but instead with a dark memory dating from his childhood with his cousin Ambrose, that of men hanging from a gibbet "at Four Turnings" (*My Cousin Rachel* 1). Like the harbinger of the fate reserved for men in this novel, this memory pushes Philip to question the story he is going to tell. He immediately asks two questions: "Was Rachel guilty or innocent?" and "Shall I be free of it one day?" (*My Cousin Rachel* 4). The uncertainty raised by this introspection plunges the reader into the same questioning, an uncertainty that will last until the end of the plot and beyond. The second uncertainty Philip expresses is the one standing for the "it." What does Philip mean by this obscure reference? Does "it" refer to the first question or to something else? Only at the end of the novel can it be discerned

that the "it" might be his own (sense of) guilt. However, for now, the whole question is what Rachel would be innocent or guilty of. In this framework, Philip is, in a way, the sum of the two previous heroines: although the final choice is granted to him, he does not assume its consequences.

Du Maurier's evolutionary approach in this *Gothic Romance cycle*, characterized by its evolving structural framework, allows her to address profound questions of identity and legitimacy. This cycle, predominantly feminine in its focus, depicts the evolving status of women in society, from the maiden Mary in *Jamaica Inn* to the widow Rachel via the married woman embodied by the second Mrs. de Winter. While *Jamaica Inn* merely alludes to themes of ignorance and identity, *Rebecca* and *My Cousin Rachel* delve deeper into these problems, culminating in a complex exploration of self and belonging. Within this framework, characters like Mary, the second Mrs. de Winter, and Philip all grapple with the challenges of adulthood, striving to forge their own distinct identities. Yet, the fundamental question persists: who will they ultimately become?

In Jamaica Inn, Mary Yellan questions her choices and ponders whether she should make one decision or another, but never doubts her own self (the recurring phrase "She had no doubt" supports the idea). Mary has, as Bakerman puts it, "great faith in [her] own power and potential;" she is a robust character to whom doubt is the immutable uncertainty she must come to terms with. Ultimately, she chooses to embark on another "adventure": "I'll take the risk, Jem, and I'll change your mood" (*Jamaica Inn* 301), the risk being reproducing the toxic scheme of Aunt Patience's marriage to Jem's brother, Joss.

On the other hand, in *Rebecca,* the narrator's uncertainty is primarily rooted in her own identity and sense of self. Her being unnamed is only the tip of the iceberg: apart from a brief evocation of her father, nothing from her past is known. Without a clear sense of origin or any tangible adults to model herself after, the character struggles to establish a coherent identity,

including a name and social status. Additionally, the female protagonist faces the daunting task of replacing her predecessor, constantly measuring herself against the idealized image of the deceased wife:

> I did not want to see her again. I did not want to see any of them again. They only came to call at Manderley because they were curious and prying... They came because they wanted to compare me to Rebecca. (*Rebecca* 141)

The heroine must fulfill the role of the second Mrs. de Winter, but her ambition is constantly undermined. Not only is Rebecca an impossible ideal to emulate, but she also faces discouragement from others who warn against becoming like her predecessor.

My Cousin Rachel further intensifies the exploration of identity crisis through a gender-bending narrative. This gender transposition is all the more interesting as it denotes to what extent du Maurier's intention is to play with and mock the codes of the Gothic, in addition to demonstrating that she masters them perfectly. More than a gender transposition, it is a genre transposition. Just like *Rebecca*'s unnamed narrator, the uncertainty for Philip is linked to his lack of experience, one that mutates into a crisis of identity or even legitimacy. Not only is he, like the second Mrs. de Winter, unsure of his choices and abilities, but he doubts his own authority, and his masculinity is called into question. In the novel, Philip occupies a place which is traditionally intended for a young female character, one previously inhabited in this Gothic Romance cycle by Mary and the second Mrs. de Winter. Although Philip claims he shares some traits with Byronic men – "I was (...) unpractical, reserved, full of great theories never put to test, and, like all dreamers, asleep to the waking world" (*My Cousin Rachel* 5)– he has nothing to do with stereotypical Gothic heroes:

> Had I been another man (...) the past year would have been no more than another twelve months come and gone. I should be settling down to a brisk contented future. To marriage, possibly, and to a young family. (*My Cousin Rachel* 5)

Rather than portraying a powerful and charismatic figure like Rochester, Heathcliff, or Maxim de Winter, du Maurier depicts Philip as a weak and easily influenced character, lacking agency and control over his own destiny. His fate is predetermined, with his guardians dictating his every move, from his education to his inheritance. His future is tightly controlled:

> Nick Kendall was appointed my guardian, because the estate did not become virtually mine until I was twenty-five. 'It was a belief of Ambrose's,' said my godfather, taking off his spectacles as he handed me the document to read for myself, "that no young man knows his own mind until he turns twenty-five. You might have grown up with a weakness for drink or gambling or women, and this twenty-five-year clause made a safeguard." (*My Cousin Rachel* 55)

This clause effectively strips Philip of his autonomy, denying him the rights and privileges associated with adulthood. By maintaining his dependence, his guardians perpetuate a state of infantilization, a condition often associated with femininity. When his cousin Ambrose dies, he does not own the estate (and the family jewels), just as he does not own his decisions. The incident involving the pearl necklace further underscores Philip's lack of agency. By prematurely gifting the family heirloom to Rachel, he acts impulsively, a behaviour often associated with youth and inexperience. The intervention of his guardian and the subsequent confiscation of the necklace reinforce Philip's subordinate position. He is literally dispossessed of his family jewels, which calls into question his masculinity, his identity and, therefore, his legitimacy.

Du Maurier's exploration of uncertainty evolves structurally across the *Gothic Romance cycle.* This evolution also exists in her treatment of Gothic conventions and themes. Dinah Birch and Jerrold E. Hogle have each pointed out that the Gothic narrative is an assemblage of common

characteristics: an environment of fear, supernatural elements, intrusions of the past into the present, claustrophobic atmosphere, themes of imprisonment, murder and vengeful persecution. And indeed, the three novels from this cycle are grounded on Gothic stereotypical characteristics and are based on the same formula: a young individual, fatherless and motherless, is the prisoner of a situation which exceeds them and is under the influence of another –older, darker– being, all in a gloomy atmosphere that seems to have no way out. In this context, themes such as death, murder, poisoning, threat and a few ghosts here and there are omnipresent. In addition, in all three novels, the point of view is limited, subjective, biased, and therefore irrational. The events surrounding the heroes are confined in a universe circumscribed: in *Jamaica Inn,* the point of view is that of the third person, but the narrator is close to Mary and thus diminished. In the next two novels, du Maurier reinforces this tunnel effect by directly using the 'I,' which reinforces the feeling of cloistering.

In this confined world, the heroine is perceived as a disturbance. Interestingly, in each one of the three novels from this cycle, the other, the outsider, is the feminine character. Bernadette Bertrandias notes:

> *[My Cousin Rachel],* published in 1951, takes up a major theme of *Rebecca* (1938), namely the endangerment of family property, the seat of the values established by patriarchal society, by a subversive figure, who in both cases is feminine. (Bertrandias 266)

Although they are part of the family that welcomes them –Mary is Aunt Patience's niece, *Rebecca*'s narrator is the new Mrs. de Winter, and Rachel is Ambrose's widow– the fact remains that they are perceived as foreigners. Their arrival in a new household creates an imbalance, a destabilization: they disrupt the previously established order and thereby become targets to be eliminated. Such a characterization allows the implementation of a dynamic that has all the hallmarks of a power

struggle. In an essay entitled "The Stranger in the House" (*l'Étranger dans la maison : Figures romanesque de l'hôte),* published in 2003, Bertrandias brings up the figure of the *hostis*. In that context, she remarks that the *hostis* figure represents as much the stranger as the enemy. She recalls Jacques Derrida, who stated that "The stranger (hostis) may be welcome as a guest or a foe. *Hospitality, hostility, hostipitality.*" *(*Bertrandias 265, my translation). This guest-host dynamic, with its inherent frictions, provides fertile ground for du Maurier to explore uncertainty within a wide range of narrative possibilities. *Jamaica Inn* presents a Manichean world in which these roles are gender-coded: only men are brutal, dark, oppressive, and the perpetrators of reprehensible acts, while the women are imprisoned guests at their mercy. The ultimate villain of the plot, the Vicar of Altarnun, Francis Davey, under rather feminine traits, hides an evil double. His appearance is just a facade: he is the one who is the instigator of the looting, the one responsible for the shipwrecks and consequent murders. Despite some attempts, du Maurier does not really play with gender codes: Although Francis Davey takes on some feminine traits to hide his intentions and Mary is resourceful, strong-minded, and independent, the control and balance of power are gender stereotypes.

The role of the outsider and the subsequent relationship between them and their hosts change considerably in *Rebecca*. Firstly, the host-guest dynamic is more fluid and less rigidly determined by gender. Men and women are equally likely to embody both the victim, the villain, or both. The balance of power is more uncertain, and the relationships between the characters are continually out of balance. In addition, the threat seems to come from both the real and the ethereal world. The certainty expressed in *Jamaica Inn* that only men are villains is called into question in *Rebecca,* where most of the threatening suspense emanates from feminine figures. Interestingly, this perspective is conveyed by the nameless narrator, whose point of view is biased in a sexist

way, as she projects her fears onto other female characters in the house –dead or alive, Rebecca or Mrs. Danvers– as if there was only room in Manderley for one woman.

Scholars such as Light, Horner and Zlosnik interpret the figure of the disruptive outsider as a symbolic threat to traditional English values and identity. Mrs. Danvers, the long-time governess of Manderley, champion of traditions and established norms, is particularly disturbed by the presence of this second wife, going so far as to encourage her departure, even to the point of suggesting suicide:

> 'Why don't you go?' she said. 'We none of us want you. He doesn't want you, he never did. He can't forget her. He wants to be alone in the house again, with her. It's you that ought to be lying there in the church crypt, not her. It's you who ought to be dead, not Mrs de Winter.' She pushed me towards the open window. I could see the terrace below me grey and indistinct in the white wall of fog. 'Look down there,' she said. 'It's easy, isn't it? Why don't you jump? It wouldn't hurt, not to break your neck. It's a quick, kind way. It's not like drowning. Why don't you try it? Why don't you go?' (*Rebecca* 276)

Du Maurier in *Rebecca* further complicates the theme of the villainous double, introducing multiple layers of deception and creating an atmosphere of ambiguity surrounding the true nature of the antagonist. Besides, the emphasis on female threats obscures the figure of the real villain, that of Rebecca's murderer, Maxim de Winter. In turn, this brings to the surface uncertainties over Rebecca's death, particularly with the discovery of her body and the husband's subsequent trial. Although there is much uncertainty in the novel, there is one truth known to the narrator: her husband did kill his first wife. The final uncertainty then lies in the heroine’s motivations: despite the loss of Manderley and Maxim’s confession, she still decides to stay by his side and, in this way, becomes an accomplice of the lie.

Structurally and thematically, playing with gender codes offers multiple narrative possibilities. In *My Cousin Rachel*, the figure of the stranger is embodied by a female protagonist, Rachel, but the balance of power is reversed: she is not the main character; the masculine hero is. Left alone for a few months by his cousin Ambrose, who annually retreats to a warmer country for the sake of his health, Philip only discovers by letter the latter's marriage to a distant cousin. The new wife, "The Contessa Sangalletti, or, as she insists on calling herself, [...] Cousin Rachel," (*My Cousin Rachel* 14), is a distant acquaintance whose ancestors married into the Ashley family. The sudden death of the patriarch triggers a chain of events that destabilize Philip. Besides, Rachel's presence is all the stranger because it is sudden and unexpected:

> 'She has arrived by boat in Plymouth.'
>
> 'Who has arrived?' [Philip] asked. But I think I knew.
>
> He showed me a piece of paper in his hand.
>
> 'I have a letter here,' he said, 'from your cousin Rachel.' (*My Cousin Rachel* 61)

Philip, who is already shaken by the sudden death of his protector and who already harbours suspicions about the new cousin, is torn between his desire to confront the widow and the social conventions that require him to welcome her into the Ashley estate. Good manners oblige him to invite Rachel to visit him, and, on their first meeting, so impressed by her character, would insist on her staying. Unlike *Rebecca*'s heroine, Rachel quickly takes possession of the place and transforms, at great expense, the old bachelor's home, one that "isn't fit to receive anyone, (...), let alone a woman like the Contessa —like Mrs. Ashley." (*My Cousin Rachel* 65) Rachel is, therefore, a disruptive force who changes the game. Not only does she endanger the previously established order of succession –although no will designates her as Ambrose's heir– but she shakes up all of Philip's certainties (especially as we will see, his romantic feelings). Besides, du Maurier stretches

the limits of the figure of the stranger as Rachel is a foreigner in two ways: although she is connected to the Ashley family, she was raised in Italy and was formerly married to an Italian. Additionally, her status after Ambrose's death is uncertain: the whole issue of her presence crystallizes around Ambrose's potential will. Rachel remains this troubled character whose intentions seem hypocritical. Even though she ostentatiously performs her widowhood and reiterates that she expects nothing from Philip or Ambrose's inheritance, the repetition and her status as a foreigner create uncertainty. Moreover, when it comes to her, the uncertainty lies in the fact that her presence seems more and more definitive: the entire household and those around them soon recognize her as the legitimate mistress of the house (Seecombe, the servant, foreshadows this disruption: "A mistress in the house will have everything upside down," (*My Cousin Rachel* 20)). Rachel takes up more and more space in this household to the point where she becomes intrusive; just like the second Mrs. de Winter, her presence is a threat that has to be eliminated.

Interestingly, du Maurier shifts the gender-coded dichotomy of evil again in *My Cousin Rachel*. While in the first novel the few present women were innocent creatures, and men mischievous, and in *Rebecca*, some feminine characters (namely Rebecca and Mrs. Danvers) were suspicious personas, in *My Cousin Rachel*, Rachel is a potential poisoner. Once again, in this book, du Maurier pushes the boundaries of the genre by reshuffling the gender conventions of the Gothic. At the end of the story, the first uncertainty of the plot remains: there is no revelation from Rachel, who, unlike Maxim de Winter, will never confess if she is responsible for the death of her second husband. Moreover, the narrative introduces another layer of uncertainty: the question of Philip's culpability in Rachel's death. Unlike the narrator of *Rebecca*, Philip may be actively complicit in her demise, raising questions about his moral character and his understanding of his own actions.

Du Maurier shows how much she masters the structure and genre upon which she bases her narratives. She deconstructs the gothic and reconfigures its parameters to further invest in the writing of uncertainty. Examining how du Maurier experiments with Gothic standards would be incomplete without addressing the supernatural. This is a key theme of the genre whose nature harbours uncertainty: is what I see real, or is it a figment of the mind? The supernatural element is limited in *Jamaica Inn*, and centered around the figure of the Vicar, Francis Davey, whose appearance calls forth the literal sense of super-natural:

> [Mary] saw his eyes for the first time from beneath the brim of his hat. They were strange eyes, transparent like glass, and so pale in colour that they seemed near to white; a freak of nature she had never known before... His hair was white, too, under his black shovel hat, and Mary stared back at him in some perplexity, for his face was unlined, and his voice was not that of an elderly man. Then, with a little rush of embarrassment, she understood the reason for his abnormality, and she turned away her eyes. He was an albino. (*Jamaica Inn* 87)

His physique is unusual and uncanny, almost freakish in the eyes of a young English recluse woman. His appearance indicates that something is wrong with him. The Vicar's albinism is the sole supernatural element in the story, thereby drawing significant attention to this characteristic.

In contrast, in *Rebecca*, the supernatural lies in the fabric of the landscape and is typically gothic: there is a ghost in the attic. Although the ghost is not as *alive* as Mrs. Rochester, the second Mrs. de Winter perceives the spectral presence of Rebecca in the house:

> Rebecca, always Rebecca. I should never be rid of Rebecca. Perhaps I haunted her as she haunted me; she looked down on me from the gallery as Mrs. Danvers had said, she sat beside me when I wrote my letters at her desk. (*Rebecca* 262)

Even with the seemingly simple convention of the ghost, du Maurier masterfully manipulates uncertainty: the ghost may be alive for the corpse in the crypt may not be Rebecca's. Indeed, the narrative further complexifies the matter by introducing a "double death" –or rather, a "double corpse." In *Jamaica Inn*, death is frequently presented as a horror element, and its multiplicity reinforces the general Gothic atmosphere. In *Rebecca,* on the other hand, the Gothic presence of death is more disturbing. By the time Maxim de Winter remarries, Rebecca is already dead and buried. However, two-thirds of the way through the story, another body is found and believed to be –again– Rebecca's. Some coastguards and the Harbour Master find a boat at the bottom of the sea, one that appears to have belonged to the late Mrs. de Winter:

> 'There was a body in there, lying on the cabin floor,' he said quietly. 'It was dissolved of course, there was no flesh on it. But it was a body all right. He saw the head and the limbs. (*Rebecca* 294)

A major uncertainty then arises: whose body was buried the first time? Can we be sure now that this second body indeed belongs to the first Mrs. de Winter? If there is uncertainty about the identity of the two corpses, is it possible Rebecca is still alive? Despite these uncertainties, Rebecca, or rather her remains, are to be buried in the crypt on Manderley's grounds, but even in death, the first Mrs. de Winter will never settle.

In contrast, du Maurier's use of the supernatural in *My Cousin Rachel* is markedly different. There is no ghost, although Ambrose manifests himself indirectly and posthumously through a letter hidden in his jacket or through his forgotten hat, for instance. Yet, supernatural elements are developed both tangibly and nebulously through exuberant dreams and hallucinations. When Rachel moves into the Ashleys' manor, Philip experiences a particularly unusual episode, a kind

of meningitis, a pain he thinks Ambrose experienced before him, and one that further shakes up his person and mind:

> I remember in the morning that I dressed, but I have no recollection of John coming in to call me, nor that I breakfasted, nor of anything at all, but only the strange stiffness in my neck and the agonising pain in my head [...] I opened my eyes but I could not see her, the room was in darkness. The shape of it was different, not the bedroom that I knew. It was long and narrow, like a cell. The bedstead hard, like iron [...]. I was standing on a bridge, beside the Arno, making a vow to destroy a woman I had never seen. The swollen water passed under the bridge, bubbling, brown, and Rachel, the beggar girl, came up to me with empty hands. (*My Cousin Rachel* 285-287)

Philip will stay in this state for a few weeks, alternating between a half-awakening and a semi-coma in which everything mixes: the memories of his cousin, his trip to Italy to join him and his feelings towards Rachel. This physical and mental state erodes Philip's already fragile sense of certainties, exacerbating his unbalanced perception of reality and amplifying his insecurities.

Another aspect that conventionally constitutes the Gothic is that of incest. Once again, du Maurier invests in this theme to better distort it and reflect on its limits. The interplay between morality and immorality and the constant concealment of truths further reinforces the pervasive uncertainty that characterizes du Maurier's work. Regularly in *Jamaica Inn,* it is mentioned that her uncle Joss will not touch Mary, but the repetitiveness instills the opposite thought: she is never certain he will not try to molest her. In addition, Mary, by getting closer to Jem and repeating her aunt's pattern of marrying a Merlyn brother, creates an almost incestuous relationship, as Jem is her uncle's brother.

In *Rebecca*, incest is addressed via the relationship between Rebecca and her supposed cousin, Jack Favell. While no one in the household is even sure of the latter family ties, a doubt emerges: were he and Rebecca incestuous or not?

> And I could not connect him with my idea of Rebecca. Rebecca, with her beauty, her charm, her breeding, why did she have a cousin like Jack Favell? It was wrong, out of all proportion. (*Rebecca* 223)

The ambiguous nature of Rebecca's relationship with Favell suggests not only marital infidelity but also the possibility of incest, a taboo that likely fuels Maxim's fury:

> "This is the end, do you understand? What you do in London does not concern me. You can live with Favell there, or with anyone you like. But not here. Not at Manderley."
>
> 'She said nothing for a moment. She stared at me, and then she smiled.
>
> "Suppose it suits me better to live here, what then?" she said.'
>
> "You know the conditions," I said. "I've kept my part of our dirty, damnable bargain, haven't I? But you've cheated." (*Rebecca* 311)

In *My Cousin Rachel*, du Maurier amplifies the topic of incest. The relationship between Philip and Rachel is not merely ambiguous but deeply unsettling. Like Favell, Rachel is identified as a cousin:

> A Coryn married an Ashley two generations ago, as you will find on the family tree. A descendant of that branch was born and brought up in Italy by an impecunious father and an Italian mother, (*My Cousin Rachel* 14)

In addition, like Mary, Philip desires to replace his relative, risking a repetition of dysfunctional patterns. Moreover, the underlying incestuous current is even more disturbing because the young man insists on taking the place of the father figure, Ambrose.

Incest touches upon a theme that usually unfolds in Gothic Romance and one that calls forth romance in the literal sense of the word: romantic affairs. Although du Maurier has often been regarded as a Romance writer,[1] Light remarks that the author disliked the label:

> Daphne du Maurier is perhaps thought of popularly as a woman's novelist, read mainly for her love stories. Yet what sense does it make to call *Rebecca* as one Meal and Boons author has the archetypal romantic novel when it ends not with conjugal bliss but middle-aged resignation and exile? Not one of her love stories has a happy ending. (Light 158)

The confusion between Romance and romantic stories has many sources. The word Romance is polysemous: it is a mode of writing (one that Northrop Frye or Scott Black conceptualized as a form depicting extraordinary stories "formed by the continual interplay between wild adventures and ordinary reality" (Black 20)), and, in the modern literary sense, it is a love story. Several scholars place Romance as an outdated form; for both Black and Frye, "Romance as a genre formed by its mediate, transitional position between archaic and modern forms." (Black 11). Therefore, because du Maurier set her *Gothic Romance cycle* in the past and is the author of many Historical works, she is usually considered an old-fashioned writer, thus reinforcing the idea of outdated Romance.

However, du Maurier still explores uncertainty through romantic love. Even though the love stories are more or less subplots, it would be wrong to deny their importance in the unfolding of the story and the construction of uncertainty. As Light remarks, "*Jamaica Inn* begins with a romance which has gone sour and warns us that when Mary decides to go with Jem at the end of the novel, it is a path leading to her own misery and disillusionment" (Light 158). Even though Light is incorrect about the early presence of Patience's dysfunctional marriage in the novel (as it

[1] That epithet differs from one scholar to the other, from one critique to the next. However, it is commonly asserted that du Maurier is a romance writer, a wrongful label reinforced by the permanent romanticization of her private life and one that still persists. Nina Auerbach adds that literary critics so often ignore du Maurier's writings and relegate her to the status of a writer of (Gothic) romance because of our propensity to use "readymade boilerplate" labels when it comes to popular/best-seller writers.

appears later), she correctly asserts that Mary faces a choice. In the novel, gender roles are distinctly separated, and the nature of men calls for the quasi-impossibility of romantic relationships: the Merlyn men are burglars and murderers; the Vicar is evil; the authority men are accomplices. Mary repeatedly asserts that she "had no illusions about romance. Falling in love was a pretty name for it, that was all," (*Jamaica Inn* 123) yet she still cannot resist love when the opportunity presents itself in the form of Jem:

> It would be easy enough to fall in love with Jem Merlyn. Men had not counted for much in her life up to the present... Once a neighbour had kissed her behind a hayrick after a glass of cider... Anyway, she would never marry; it was a long while since she had decided that... And there, in spite of herself, came Jem's face again with the growth of beard like a tramp, and his dirty shirt, and his bold offensive stare... He stood for everything she feared and hated and despised; but she knew she could love him. (*Jamaica Inn* 135)

The uncertainty then lies more in the choice that will be made at the end: will Mary stay close to her initial convictions, or will she take the risk of leaving with a man, thus recreating the family pattern of the abusive relationship?

In *Rebecca*, on the contrary, the love affair exists from the beginning, but it is a bizarre one. The romantic relationship du Maurier imagines between Maxim de Winter and his future wife is uncanny and it is never clearly stated that one is in love with the other. In a burst of English modesty, in an Austenean way, a *love* proposal is revealed:

> I repeat to you, the choice is open to you. Either you go to America with Mrs Van Hopper or you come home to Manderley with me.'
> 'Do you mean you want a secretary or something?'
> 'No, I'm asking you to marry me, you little fool. (*Rebecca* 57)

The romantic moment is rotten and sounds like a mere business contract. From the beginning, the marriage is unstable. First, because there is a great (almost paternalistic) imbalance between the two de Winters and then because the question of the veracity of the husband's feelings (with regard to both his first wife and the second) is always called into question. In addition, just like in *Jamaica Inn*, the first relationship in *Rebecca* (between Rebecca herself and Maxim) only led to ruin; the second marriage leads to exile.

In *My Cousin Rachel*, du Maurier further explores the uncertainty surrounding romantic feelings and this exploration is significantly enriched by the novel's gender transposition. The relationship between Rachel and Philip is then more complex and fueled by uncertainties: although we have strong feelings about Philip, we never have access to Rachel's perspective and, therefore, her intentions. One scene from the novel is symptomatic of this dynamic:

> "My promise?" she said. "What promise?"
> "To marry me, Rachel," I answered.
> She had her candlestick in her hand. She raised it, so that the naked flame showed on my face. "You dare to stand there, Philip," she said, " and bluster to me that I promised to marry you last night? (*My Cousin Rachel* 269)

At this point, Philip is convinced he has proposed to Rachel and that she has accepted. The reader, limited to Philip's perspective, shares this belief. However, du Maurier turns things around, refusing to let the certainty settle. In the early morning, Rachel's behaviour changes radically: the tone is no longer the same, and the promise is an illusion. The relationship between the two protagonists deteriorates rapidly, shifting from love to disdain. As the situation unravels, trust erodes, and Philip becomes increasingly uncertain about what or who to believe.

In her *Gothic Romance cycle*, du Maurier explores uncertainty both structurally, using the *bildungsroman,* and thematically, investing in typically Gothic themes such as control, the stranger,

the supernatural, violence, and death. However, although the three novels are grouped under the same formula, they are distinguished from each other as du Maurier remodels conventions of gender and genre. She pushes further, exemplifies, inverts, and transposes, which sustains the exploration of uncertainty and allows for a certain novelistic renewal.

The *Masculine Cycle*: Exploring Uncertainty Beyond the Gothic

With *My Cousin Rachel*, du Maurier completes a writing cycle, that of Gothic Romance. The novel also marks the end of du Maurier's commercially successful period and coincides with the post-war era[2]. In the introduction of her edition of the novel, Sally Beauman remarks that "although [du Maurier] would continue writing novels for another twenty years, this would be the last of her great bestsellers" (*My Cousin Rachel* v). Nevertheless, *My Cousin Rachel* does not signify, for the author, the end of her novelistic experience and her exploration of uncertainty, which she invests otherwise in her following novels, namely *The Scapegoat* (1957), *The Flight of the Falcon* (1965) and *The House on the Strand* (1969). Several factors contribute to considering these three novels as a distinct cycle. For too long, the few scholars who worked with these texts have based their examination on the analysis of the first successes, seeing in them only a remodelling of the Gothic. Although Horner and Zlosnik, who dedicated extensive work on du Maurier's novels, recognize some variations in *The Scapegoat* and *The Flight of the Falcon*, notably thanks to a "realist framework" (Horner & Zlosnik 164), they limit their analysis to the "Gothic dimension of the novel(s)" (164). They are right in acknowledging that du Maurier reuses specific themes and motifs, such as the identity, murdering, the stranger, and the Machiavellian double, but they miss her systematic departure from the conventions of the genre and her thematic and structural reorientation within new parameters. Indeed, in this second writing cycle, several things change: first, du Maurier exclusively uses a masculine first-person narrator and inaugurates a new narrative dynamic, the masculine duo. The three stories center on adult male pair: Jean de Gué and John in *The Scapegoat,* Armino and Aldo in *The Flight of the Falcon;* Dick and Magnus in *The House on the Strand.* Following the *Gothic Romance cycle*, du Maurier also departs from

[2] Although My Cousin Rachel was published in 1951, the idea for this story centered around a widow already appeared some years earlier (Forster, Margaret. *Daphne du Maurier*, Arrow Books, 1993. 250)

Romance by increasingly de-emphasizing the heteronormative couple dynamic, even in the short stories she writes in this period. Not only are love stories relegated to the background, but they also cease to play a significant role in driving the plot. Moreover, du Maurier further pushes uncertainty across new spatiotemporal territories and explores its epistemological and psychological facets within new genres, suspense and thriller.

It would be detrimental to reduce du Maurier's work to a biographical level and to base the analysis of her texts on her personal life. Many of the critics who approached her work mainly focused on her private life and poeticized it, which had the effect of obscuring her works. For instance, Richard Kelly, like Nina Auerbach, fails to separate du Maurier's literary achievements from the du Maurier family and legacy, resulting in close readings of the novels that frequently overlap with personal events. Treating du Maurier's life as another romance she could have written contributes to the romanticization of her career and moves away from a desire to intellectualize her work.

By the time *My Cousin Rachel* was published, du Maurier was already a successful writer and an author whose work was frequently adapted and translated. Furthermore, alternating with the novels, du Maurier wrote several books that are historically grounded. From her research, she developed family sagas (*Hungry Hill* (1943), for example, fictionalizes the story of du Maurier's friend Christopher Puxley's Irish ancestors) and historical romances such as *Frenchman's Creek* (1941) (whose narrative is embedded in Charles II's reign) and *The King's General* (1946) (set in Cornwall during the Civil War), to name but a few. Even if they did not receive as much attention as the Gothic novels, they nevertheless continued to feed her readership. This period, however, marks a significant shift in du Maurier's career, coinciding with several personal changes: the post-war era, the maturing of her children, and her own transition into middle age (she would be fifty

by 1957). The 1950s then presented themselves as the ideal opportunity for "the writer of *Rebecca*" to explore other territories and renew her writing, particularly by way of short stories. In the year after the publication of *My Cousin Rachel*, Victor Gollanz, her editor, published a collection of short stories named after the first novella of the book, *The Apple Tree*. In her biography, Margaret Forster notes:

> Not only were these new stories better written, they also showed a shift in the balance of power between the sexes which [du Maurier] had been working out for some twenty years now in her novels... This collection was highly important: it represented a change not only in Daphne's style but in her subject-matter – her 'macabre tastes' at last were acknowledged and given an outlet, reflecting the confusion of her inner self.
> (Forster 260).

I would add to this that these shorter works not only allowed du Maurier to explore uncertainty via new ideas and to challenge genre conventions but also served as a groundwork for the rest of her career. From this 1952 collection, "The Apple Tree" and "Kiss Me Again Stranger" allude to the suspense novel and the thriller, and border on Modernism. In the first one, a man is convinced that the spirit of his unloved and recently deceased wife is embodied in an apple tree, which he believes is tormenting him. In the second one, a lonely and bored young man reflects on his existence when he meets a strange young usherette with whom he makes love in a cemetery but who he discovers is a serial killer, a sort of female Jack the Ripper. Similarly, short stories published later in 1959 and 1966 reflect themes and genres comparable to those du Maurier explored in her novels. For instance, "The Breakthrough" nears science fiction as it tells the story of a small group of engineers whose goal is to capture the essence of the soul at the moment of death. Likewise, *The House on the Strand*, published three years later, addresses scientific research through the work of Magnus who develops a drug that allows time travel to the past.

This new writing cycle is as much a cycle of exploration of new genres and structures as it is a cycle of emancipation and rejection from the successful ones. Indeed, du Maurier moves away from the established formulas and thematic concerns of her earlier works, such as the *bildungsroman* structure and the Gothic; she also partly rejects topics of Englishness and English identity altogether with the fictional past, and, more importantly, she represses heteronormative romantic relationships.

The first notable change in this new cycle is the abandonment of the *bildungsroman* construction: du Maurier demonstrates that uncertainty is not limited to youth, for whom the future is open, but also exists for adults who question their existence and origins. In the *Gothic Romance cycle*, the protagonists –Mary, the unnamed narrator and Philip– were all in search of identity and a more favourable outcome. For the narrators of the subsequent novels, John, Armino and Dick, the question of identity is no longer addressed in its future construction but in its historical legitimacy. Their primary concern lies in understanding their past, in deciphering the events that shaped their existence and in determining their future. In *The Scapegoat*, not only does John have to build a knowledge of the past to fit in with his new identity, but he also has to solve an ancient grudge to restore order. In *The Flight of the Falcon*, the key to the plot is the revelation of Armino's brother Aldo's origins –a confession that reveals the truth about his murdering Marta, his birth mother. In a similar way in *The House on the Strand*, Dick explores Kilmarth's troubled past as a way to make up for the lack of legitimacy: since he will become Magnus' heir and the guardian of the family's estate, he has to learn the house's history and past grandeur.

At the same time as du Maurier departs from the *bildungsroman* structure, she renounces the romanticized past. *Jamaica Inn* and *My Cousin Rachel* are loosely set in the XIXth century, and although *Rebecca* feels more contemporary (electricity exists, cars and trains are used regularly),

du Maurier, to reinforce the Gothic aspect, avoided anchoring her narratives in a specific timeframe: unlike her historical romances, there is never any mention of precise dates or significant events. Similarly, du Maurier abandons the circular tale format that formerly characterized *Rebecca* and *My Cousin Rachel*.

Instead, she delocalizes her narratives in a contemporary timeframe. In fact, what distinguishes the three Gothic Romances –*Jamaica Inn, Rebecca* and *My Cousin Rachel*– from the following three –*The Scapegoat, The Flight of the Falcon* and *The House on the Strand*– is their relationship to reality. Zlosnik and Horner observe that *The Scapegoat* is "on realist mode," (Horner & Zlosnik 147), and indeed, if we consider some elements that characterize realism or realistic writing, we realize that the novel contains many of its properties, such as tangible spatiotemporal elements. The plots of the *Masculine cycle* novels take place in the post-World War II period, roughly at the same time du Maurier wrote them. Nothing is ambiguous, neither in the dates, which are numerous, nor in the clearly identified space: *The Scapegoat* occurs in France, in the *Région Centre* near Le Mans; *The Flight of the Falcon,* despite novel avant-propos' statement that "*The Flight of the Falcon* is a work of fiction... Ruffano was inspired by an existing Italian city the topography." Interestingly, the delocalization du Maurier sets in motion initially involved both temporal and spatial dimensions. However, the last novel of the cycle, *The House on the* Strand, although placed in a similar timeframe, marks a return to English territory: Cornwall. This may suggest that du Maurier has completed her narrative exploration abroad –in so doing, proved that she could write something other than Gothic Romances– and can now bring her writings home. More concretely, this return to familiar territories signifies the end of a writing cycle.

This delocalization is also a social one. The three main characters from this *Masculine cycle* lead ordinary lives and perform ordinary jobs as a teacher, a tour guide, and an editor,

respectively. They do not belong to high society, and their characters are, at first glance, down to earth. This effort of delocalization reveals du Maurier's effort to challenge her own conventions and depart from those of Romance. In this cycle, the attention is not focused on English bourgeois circles, the question of English identity or the decay of an idealized and romanticized England. On the contrary, the point of view is humbler and more individualistic.

This delocalization paves the way for other changes, notably a liberation from the constraints of Gothic. In *The Scapegoat*, du Maurier shows how much she rejects the Gothic genre. Horner & Zlosnik remark that in this novel, "du Maurier eschews the supernatural and demonic" (Horner & Zlosnik 147). Indeed, whenever du Maurier presents a situation that could have easily been explored as a Gothic element, she discards it. The religious child obsessed with death could have become a psychopath; the final confrontation between John and Jean, without the sudden intervention of the *Curé,* could have turned into a horror scene. Furthermore, so many scenes from the novel are Gothic *tableaux* in the making that are never fully realized: the grand hunt day at the *château* when one of the participants is shot in the foot; the old lady in the attic, the dowager *comtesse,* addicted to morphine, eventually proceeds downstairs and gets back to her former designated place; the ghostly presence is not a threat: John's situation is never jeopardized by a sudden unmasking or by Jean's blackmailing. Even the setting in *The Scapegoat* is not a troubling one, whereas every natural element at Manderley constitutes a menace. Time and again, the surroundings of the de Gué *château* are described as "peaceful" when at Manderley, "the gnarled roots looked like skeleton claws" (*Rebecca* 1); even the dog, which is the only member of the French household not to be duped by the inversion of masters, barks at first but is progressively tamed by John[3]. Zlosnik and Horner further remark that "The world that John enters has all the potential ingredients of a Gothic novel, yet the narrative remains resolutely 'realist'" (Horner &

Zlosnik 151). Indeed, although *The Scapegoat* is based on typically Gothic themes, such as *dédoublement*, dysfunctional family life, repressed desires, containment, death threats and uncanny events, there is, however, also a sense of order restoration that confirms the realistic form du Maurier deploys. It is not so much that the Gothic is rejected, but it is repelled in *The Scapegoat* and the other two novels, relegated to the background. The past belongs to another time or century and is confined there: the past events that make a foray into the present belong to the Middle Ages, in *The Flight of the Falcon* as well as in *The House on the Strand.* Ruffano's falcon lived around the middle of the XVth century; the Champernounes, Bodrugans and Carminowes in the XIVth century. In *The Scapegoat*, the origin of the problem lies in the years of the German occupation.

Nevertheless, the abandonment of the Gothic does not signify an abandonment of du Maurier's core themes. Instead, these themes are reimagined and repurposed to facilitate a further exploration of uncertainty. Indeed, while du Maurier draws inspiration from Gothic tradition, she explores the uncanny through more grounded, plausible events rather than relying solely on supernatural occurrences. Although Amanda Craig states that "du Maurier's plot can seem too gothic" and that *The Flight of the Falcon* "is essentially a gothic tale" (*The Flight of the Falcon* vi), these the strange events are presented as plausible occurrences rather than supernatural phenomena, resembling a psychological thriller more than a ghost story. In addition, the fact that the narrative point of view is masculine is not insignificant in creating this new uncertainty. The uncanny may have a gender-coded, rational and mature explanation and, therefore, no longer belongs to the Gothic. As such, there are no longer unexplained or supernatural phenomena, and none of the ghosts that generally constitute the genre. In *The Scapegoat,* the doubling phenomenon is something John had heard of: "I had heard of these things happening, of people who met casually and turned out to be long-lost cousins, or twins parted at birth." (*The Scapegoat* 10). Similarly, du

Maurier insists that Kilmarth is not a haunted house in *The House on the Strand*. Although the basement that serves as a laboratory is nicknamed "Bluebeard's chamber" (*The House on the Strand* 23), everyone who has come to the house agrees that it is not eerie:

> I remember asking Mrs. Lane whether the house was haunted. My question was an idle one, for certainly it did not have a haunted atmosphere– I asked simply because it was old...
>
> 'Good heavens, no! She exclaimed... 'Well, if there is one at Kilmarth we've never heard of it,' she said. 'The house has always seemed such a happy one to us' (*The House on the Strand* 25).

Finally, the drug Magnus concocts is scientifically made and is meant to trigger a part of the brain that contains memories, a phenomenon that is explained at length:

> The particular cell I have been working upon –which I will call the memory-box– store not only our own memories but habits of the earlier brain pattern we inherit. These habits, if released to consciousness, would enable us to see, hear, become cognoscent of things that happened in the past, not because any particular ancestor witnessed any particular scene, but because with the use of a medium –in this case a drug– the inherited, older brain pattern takes over and becomes dominant. (*The House on the Strand* 221)

The drug allows Dick to travel back in time to the XIVth century to witness events experienced by Roger –supposedly an ancestor– as in spectral form, invisible to others.

Although she explores some specific features of science-fiction —here, time travel via new medical technology —du Maurier refrains from completely immersing her story in a single genre. Instead, she brings in a multitude of conventions. This exploration of uncertainty through other modes and genres would not be possible without the rejection of romance –in the romantic sense of the word– and the feminine element. Instead of the romantic heteronormative duos that were in place in the first cycle, du Maurier establishes an exclusively masculine duo, discarding the feminine part. It is no longer about Aunt Patience-Joss or Mary-Jem, Maxim-the second Mrs. de

Winter or Philip-Rachel, but John-Jean de Gué, Aldo-Armino and Dick-Magnus. The feminine question is flatly rejected, and, interestingly, the few female characters from this cycle are only treated in a stereotypical way: physically weak creatures for whom vice is a way of living. Moreover, inevitably, in these stories, the maternal figure dies[3]. The first cycle's approach to the feminine issue already raised questions about du Maurier's portrayal of gender. Indeed, although early novels focused primarily on female protagonists, they portrayed them in caricatured and unflattering terms. Mary naively repeats her aunt's toxic family dynamics; the second Mrs. de Winter's passivity stifles clear judgment; and Rachel is perpetually portrayed as a potential manipulator and poisoner. However, du Maurier explores female identities by complexifying her heroines and playing with established feminine norms or, as Horner and Zlosnik note, a way for the author "to explore the anxieties of identity at their deepest level" (Horner & Zlosnik 3). Similarly, the two scholars remark that “a departure into new and varied masculine identities [...] constitutes what Alison Light has described as ‘a language of developing selfhood’. (Light 165)”.

As a matter of fact, in the second cycle, du Maurier shifts her focus to male protagonists whose pairs are characterized by an underlying sense of fraternal brotherhood. John and Jean de Gué are perfect *doppelgänger* as if they were monozygotic twins; Aldo and Armino are estranged brothers; the relationship of the duo in *The House on The Strand* is so intimate that Dick feels like a brother to Magnus (he knew the Lane parents, while nothing is known about his own family, and he is also the confident and heir of this family home, Kilmarth). In addition, although this new dynamic compensates for the loss of romantic couples from the first cycle, these duos' homosocial bonds could in no way be confused with ersatz homosexual relationships. The male protagonists'

[3] It is interesting to note that du Maurier regularly "kills" the maternal figure of her novels. They are either absent or already dead (*Rebecca, My Cousin Rachel, The Scapegoat, The Flight of the Falcon, The House on the Strand*) and/or die in the course of the story (Aunt Patience in *Jamaica Inn,* Françoise in *The* Scapegoat, Marta in *The Flight of the Falcon,* Isolda in *The House on the Strand*). Similarly, two maternal figures from du Maurier's last novel are absent or die.

sexual orientation is quite identified, and the few female characters in these novels serve as an alibi. Nevertheless, the use of the double structure allows for heightened tension and uncertainty. Within each pair, a power dynamic emerges, with one figure assuming a dominant role while the other assumes a more submissive one. This dynamic hinges on a delicate balance of power, reminiscent of a master manipulating a puppet. In *The Scapegoat*, the one who takes control of the situation is Jean de Gué:

> He was the first to break the silence. 'You don't happen to be the devil, by any chance?'
> 'I make it a rule never to be surprised by anything in life; there is no reason to make an exception now.' (*The Scapegoat* 10)

The same hold exists in *The Flight of the Falcon,* in which the older brother Aldo gets the upper hand over his baby brother Armino Repeatedly, Armino recalls some traumatic experiences his brother had him perform:

> This altar-piece haunted me at night, and Aldo knew it. On Sundays and feast-days, when we accompanied our parents and Marta to church, and instead of going to the Duomo worshipped at the parish-church of San Cipriano, it so happened that we stood on the left of the nave, nearest to the chapel. Unconscious, like all parents, of the dread that possessed their child, they never looked to see that my brother, clasping my hand in his, urged me ever nearer to the wide-flung gates of the side-chapel, until I was compelled to lift my head and stare. (*The Flight of the Falcon* ii)

A similar dynamic can be observed in *The House on the Strand*, in which Magnus uses his friend Richard –Dick– as "his human guinea pig." (*The House on the Strand* 50) Furthermore, Dick acts as Magnus' double: he moves into Kilmarth and is invited to use his friend's premises and continue his experiences for him.

In the second cycle, du Maurier further explores duality, utilizing masculinity and the underlying fraternal bonds between characters to introduce the concept of *dédoublement.* This is particularly the case for John, who is literally Jean de Gué's *döppelganger*. As Zlosnik & Horner note:

> Set entirely in modern-day France, the plot of *The Scapegoat* turns on one premise: that it is possible for one person to so resemble another that he may take the other's place without even his closest family suspecting the switch. Once this premise is accepted—and as Karl Miller has pointed out in his book on doubles, technically, the difficulties of managing the double are very daunting. (Horner & Zlosnik 147)

In the novel, then, du Maurier further pushes this idea of doubling similar to those of Robert Louis Stevenson's *Dr Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. Until the ultimate confrontation, there exists a looming doubt: are Jean and John two sides of the same character, like Jekyll and Hyde? Could it be that the meeting of John and Jean is only a projection of a mind to explain a sudden fit, amnesia and, therefore, the apparent (although hidden) change of identity? For the best part of the plot, one can indeed wonder if the masquerade is really one: how else could it be explained that John gets away with it so elegantly as Jean if not because he *is* him? Apart from the dog's reluctance, John passes perfectly for Jean: not a word is suspicious, a gesture too doubtful, an attitude slightly equivocal. The natural character of the other, Jean, is enough to explain a few misplaced details. However, some clues thwart this idea of the split self: the novel is not a Gothic one, as du Maurier implements everything she can to eschew the Gothic. As Nathalie Abi-Ezzi notes, "du Maurier had long exhibited an interest in the psychology of duality when (she) discovered the works of Jung and Adler on the subject in 1954" (Abi-Ezzi 239). While the *doppelgänger* motif is often associated with Gothic literature, du Maurier effectively employs it beyond the confines of the Gothic genre.

Careful to avoid genre confinement, she explores uncertainty through diverse literary devices, demonstrating a willingness to experiment with her style.

In *The House on the Strand*, the *dédoublement* also evokes the Stevensonian tale, particularly as the potion-induced transformation turns the protagonist into a spectral mental presence transported to another century. If initially reminiscent of *Jekyll and Hyde*, however, this "doubling" diverges as neither character, Dick or Magnus, undergoes a literal transformation into a separate entity. Furthermore, the experiment does not constitute uncertainties: Magnus explains how the drug works and why the two men witness some parts of Kilmarth's history.

In *The Flight of the Falcon*, the *dédoublement* is particularly intriguing due to a fraternal split in several, intricate ways. First, Armino reconnects with a brother he thought had died during WWII. Despite the astonishing reunion, a sense of *inquiétante étrangeté* –Unheimlich–persists as the relationship seems unnatural. And for good reason: although initially presented as biological siblings, Aldo and Armino are not genetically related. Aldo is the child of a single mother, Marta, who gets adopted by Armino 's family. Moreover, Aldo is himself a *dédoublement*: he is a substitute for the first Aldo. Armino 's real elder brother died in infancy and was replaced by the illegitimate child.

In an essay published in 2003 which highlights the figure of the double in Stevenson, Collins, and du Maurier, Abi-Ezzi defines the ins and outs of this doubling and observes that: "As a basis for her representation of the double, the fiction of du Maurier consistently expresses a desire to establish a form of harmony." (Abi-Ezzi 199) As Abi-Ezzi remarks, the establishment of the double is an attempt at harmony. Every head needs a tail, every self an alter ego. However, although the double initially creates a sense of narrative harmony, it does not engender unity. On the contrary, in every one of these duos, someone is extra. In fact, in this cycle, du Maurier

reinterprets a *trope* she previously explored in her *Gothic Romance cycle,* the stranger. Although Bernadette Bertrandias argues that the figure of the *Hostis* can be both guest and threat, the strangers from the *Masculine cycle* –John, Armino and Dick–initially function more as sidekicks than menacing figures. John takes the place of Jean who wants to escape his responsibilities; Armino is the perfect assistant in Aldo's insurrection plans; Dick is Magnus' tester. Despite this, the power dynamic inherent in this duality creates uncertainty, leaving us to question the true identity and intentions of the stranger, the one who does not belong. John acts perfectly like Jean de Gué and even embodies a better version of him. In a similar way, Armino discovers that he is the only legitimate child and as such, can reclaim his righteous place. Finally, there can only be one master in *The House on the Strand*. In du Maurier's novels, there is room for only one part of the duo. The character we usually identify as extra is ultimately banished from the premises, metaphorically or physically. In *Rebecca*, the second Mrs. de Winter lives in exile and her husband is heavily impaired; in *My Cousin Rachel,* the eponymous deceitful character is eliminated; in *The Scapegoat*, the legitimate Jean reinstates his dwellings; in *The Flight of The Falcon*, the illegitimate brother, Aldo, commits suicide; in *The House on the Strand*, lastly, interestingly, it is the former and legitimate proprietor of Kilmarth who dies accidentally and unexpectedly, leaving in his will, the family estate to his friend Dick. Consequently, the uncertainty remains regarding who truly deserves to keep the place.

What emerges from this second cycle is essentially a movement which is akin to delocalization, both in the literal sense –time and space– and the metaphorical one. Key themes such as the duo and the doubling, as well as that of the stranger in the house, are relocated in new parameters. In addition, du Maurier shifts the past to the present, the development of youth to the introspection of adulthood, and romantic relationships to fraternal dynamics. As she departs from

the successful formulas of her *Gothic Romance cycle*, du Maurier explores new narrative and structural possibilities, updating themes and enriching her texts with new dimensions. Moreover, she avoids restricting her writing to a single genre, instead experimenting with various conventions. In a way, the writer creates her own space and writing conditions. For instance, when she repurposes a supernatural feature in a contemporary timeframe and infuses realism, she either borders on science fiction or the fantastic. Tzvetan Todorov recalls that the fantastic "implies the existence of events of two orders, those of the natural and supernatural worlds (Todorov 27). Besides, he gives an overview of the genre at the same time as he defines it precisely:

> The Fantastic requires the fulfillment of three conditions. First, the text must oblige the reader to consider the world of the characters as a world of living persons and to hesitate between a natural and a supernatural explanation of the events described. Second, this hesitation may also be experienced by the character; thus the reader's role is so to speak entrusted to a character, and at the same time the hesitation is represented, it becomes one of the themes of the work... Third, the reader must adopt a certain attitude with regard to the text: he will reject allegorical as well as "poetic" interpretations. These three requirements do not have an equal value. The first and the third actually constitute the genre; the second may not be fulfilled. Nonetheless, most examples satisfy all three conditions. (Todorov 33)

However, the three novels from this cycle fail to fit that definition fully: neither the reader nor the narrator hesitates between the two distinct worlds in the novel. Moreover, some of their characteristics are poetic or approach allegory, notably in *The Flight of the Falcon,* where a mythical character is associated with the grandiose religious symbolism of the peregrine. Even when she draws inspiration from fantastic tales like Stevenson's *Jekyll and Hyde*, du Maurier avoids strictly adhering to its parameters. Magnus's drug does not unleash his or Dick's Machiavellian unconsciousness but instead projects his mind into the past. Furthermore, John and

Jean de Gué are not one and the same person. What matters to the author is not so much the investment of one genre; her priority is the exploration of uncertainty for its own sake. The constant investigation of the concept via a multitude of conventions creates a feeling of constant suspense that evokes the thriller. As the genre(s) remain ambiguous, the outcome is uncertain and remains so until the end.

In addition to playing with the conventions of specific genres, du Maurier engages with Modernism. Before the publication of the first novel of this cycle, du Maurier had already demonstrated an interest in its narrative potential in her short stories. "The Apple Tree" (1952) and "Kiss Me Again Stranger" (1952) examined inner questioning, the loneliness of being and the absurdity of existence. Du Maurier's interest in a literary movement that is contemporary to her demonstrates a need for renewal. In Peter Childs' words:

> Modernism is associated with attempts to render human subjectivity in ways real than realism: to represent consciousness, perception, emotion, meaning and the individual's relation to society through interior monologue, stream of consciousness [...], and irresolution. Modernist writers therefore struggled, in Ezra Pound's brief phrase, to 'make it new', to modify if not overturn existing modes of representation, [...] to express the new sensibilities of their time: in a compressed, condensed, complex literature of the city, [...] war, [...] mass markets and communication, of internationalism. (Childs 4)

Interestingly, these are elements that fit du Maurier's literary commitment: in this second cycle, she breaks with her own tradition, engages with her own contemporaneity, focuses on the individual, and adds a reflection on the past to figure out the present. Furthermore, du Maurier demonstrates an awareness of Modernist literary techniques, incorporating elements such as interior monologues and the exploration of existential crises and personal collapse. It is, therefore, to the terrain of personal uncertainty that du Maurier looks at. John, as well as Armino or Dick, experiences a collapse of their convictions and must go through a personal (and familial) crisis.

He has the uncertainties of Modern characters and, like his fellow narrators, is on an inner quest and in search of existential answers:

> As I drove out of Tours, on the last morning, my dissatisfaction with the lectures I should give in London, and realization that all I had ever done in life, not only in France but in England also, was to watch people, never to partake in their happiness or pain, brought such a sense of overwhelming depression, deepened by the rain stinging the windows of the car that, when I came to Le Mans, although I had not intended to stop there and lunch, I changed my mind, hoping to change my mood. (*The Scapegoat* 2)

As observed in this passage, du Maurier's writing is undeniably influenced by Modernism. However, she employs Modernist techniques selectively without fully adhering to the movement's conventions. Her *Masculine cycle'*s novels are not Modernist precis. Instead, they demonstrate a structural, thematic, and stylistic syncretism of genres and modes. This blending, though unconventional, reinforces the concept of uncertainty in her writing.

The Speculative Novel: Navigating Uncertainty

Similarly to *My Cousin Rachel*, *The House on the Strand* functions as a closing cycle novel. Its being set back in England had already signalled the end of an era. The novel completes a phase that marked a significant departure from du Maurier's earlier work, characterized by an exploration of new literary territories and an expansion of the concept of uncertainty beyond the confines of established formulas and genres. In the *Masculine cycle,* she consciously broke with her own traditions by discarding what had made her Gothic Romances bestsellers: the *Bildungsroman* structure, the Gothic, the heteronormative yet wicked love relationships, all set in a fictionalized English past. Additionally, du Maurier repurposed familiar themes within new genres, reconfiguring them to expand her exploration of uncertainty. Structurally and thematically, this expansion went from the supernatural to the confines of the fantastic with a hint of thriller and science fiction. The shift also facilitated the emergence of modernist concerns. This second phase was then an opportunity for du Maurier to demonstrate her narrative expertise to the extent that she continued to reinvent and reinvest her own writing traditions and conventions.

Finally, the third phase of her novelistic experience consists of a single work, *Rule Britannia*, the last novel she published in 1972. At first glance, the text seems like an anomaly within du Maurier's oeuvre as it forays into the realm of speculative fiction. However, *Rule Britannia* is not entirely unprecedented. It represents the culmination of an examination the English writer had previously undertaken, notably in one of her short stories. Published in 1952, "The Birds" serves as a compelling example of how Speculative fiction can anticipate and reflect contemporary political and societal anxieties. The story features a humble countryside couple and their two children experiencing the repeated and unexplained violent attacks of thousands of birds. These avian raids, as the couple quickly understand, are correlated with the neighbouring coastal

tides. Similarly to what happens in *Rule Britannia*, all means of communication are shut down, the BBC broadcasting has stopped, and there is no sign of any governmental intervention; the population is left to their own devices.

Set again in Cornwall, *Rule Britannia* showcases the household of a former theatre actress, Mad (short for Madam) and her six adopted boys: Ben, Colin, Andy, Sam, Joe and Terry, her granddaughter Emma, and her servant and long-time dresser, Dottie. The novel opens with a scene of chaos: many planes are heard; radio, television, and telephone lines are cut, as are the roads; a US Navy ship is in sight. It is a semi-post-apocalyptic scenario in which the British government has withdrawn from the European alliance in favour of a union with the United States. But what has been announced as a great opportunity turns out to be a proper invasion.

Rule Britannia has never been the subject of extended academic attention. Although, once again, Horner and Zlosnik include this final novel in their study of the author, they only make a partial thematic analysis for which they rely on biographical elements. Nevertheless, the 2016 Brexit referendum sparked renewed interest in *Rule Britannia*, which eerily presaged Britain's withdrawal from the European Union. Several articles subsequently emerged, drawing parallels between the fictional events depicted and the real-life Brexit scenario [4]. In an essay titled "*Rule Britannia*, Brexit and Cornish Identity," scholar and du Maurier's specialist Ella Westland states that "*Rule Britannia's* experimental moulding of serious concerns in the form of hammed-up fiction has repelled serious analysis, but the novel deserves a more attentive reading than it has generally received." (Westland 1). Beyond its historical and political aspects, *Rule Britannia* warrants critical analysis in terms of its genre, narrative mode, and its exploration of uncertainty.

[4] A new kind of literature then emerged and was called "Brexlit," A double contraction between British and Exit (Brexit) and Literature.

This analysis will help to determine the novel's significance within the broader context of du Maurier's literary output.

Although the author did little to explore the political potential of her stories, a certain number of scholars (among which Zlosnik & Horner, Light or Ina Haberman) previously noted that there are narrative elements in du Maurier's novels which can be perceived as political. Still, themes like the decline of English bourgeois society and the British gentry's influence, as well as feminist issues, were concealed behind a symbolic or metaphorical veil. On the contrary, in *Rule Britannia*, the political sphere is present, and the criticism is in plain sight: the triggering factor is political. As Westland reminds us:

> The headline story that provided Daphne with the mainspring of her new plot was the UK's imminent entry into the European Community (known as the Common Market), which Parliament had endorsed in October 1971 despite bitter opposition from many politicians. *Rule Britannia* fast-forwards a few years to imagine the chaotic aftermath of Britain's sudden withdrawal from Europe following a referendum later in the decade. (Westland 11)

In addition, the narrative is influenced by another significant event: the aftermath of WWII, during which the Cornish coast was under severe threats of German invasion. Du Maurier previously explored the impact of World War II in novels like *The Scapegoat* and *The Flight of the Falcon*, where the war significantly influences the narrative structure and the implementation of uncertainty. The nightmarish memory of the conflict is present in both stories and is the source of omnipresent tensions. Ina Haberman refers to such a construction as "Memodramas." In her book titled *Myth, Memory and Middlebrow,* she explains that such events "combine an attention to time with both an awareness of aesthetic shape and the situatedness of memory, and thus narrative

performances of identity." (Haberman 42) As such, *Rule Britannia* demonstrates how the trauma of World War II continues to shape the characters' identities and responses to the current crisis.

For the first time, du Maurier not only brings a contemporary political event to the center of a narrative but enlarges her considerations on the scale of a whole community. And, expansion is the crux of this novel. Daphne du Maurier's cyclical writing is part of a general and permanent movement. Even within her own conventions, the writer constantly changes thematic and structural parameters to extend her exploration of uncertainty. The same goes for *Rule Britannia* whose themes are familiar but are invested differently and more broadly. The identity and existentialism of one individual turn into matters of community survival and interrogation of national belonging; the stranger in the house becomes an international incursion; suspense metamorphoses into a permanent menace; the Gothic and fantastic changes into a *what-if* scenario. Uncertainty generalizes: it is both ontological (who are we?), epistemological (what do we know?) and psychological (who is the enemy?).

Such an expansion demands a robust anchor point. For *Rule Britannia,* du Maurier relies on what is closest to her: her home country, Cornwall. She continues and expands the return she initiated in the last *Masculine cycle*'s novel, *The House on the Strand.* This time, England does not just stand as a setting but as a narrative opportunity: what is at stake is the collective national identity of England as a whole and Cornwall in particular. It is noteworthy that before she wrote her last novel, du Maurier published a travel book entitled *Vanishing Cornwall,* "which drew on images associated with the Cornish revival movement which have been linked to the post-war expansion of tourism" (Westland 3). These anxieties about the autonomy of Cornwall were also pointed out by Horner & Zlosnik who further remark that the British region always held a special place in du Maurier's work. In addition, du Maurier was concerned about her impact as a famous

figure, on Cornwall. Westland argues that "In *Rule Britannia,* du Maurier tries hard to give her Cornwall back to the Cornish and let them defend their own land." (Westland, *Rule Britannia* xii). Indeed, through fiction, du Maurier effectively offers Cornish people the (fantasized) possibility of defending and reaffirming their regional identity, allowing them to shine on a national stage.

To achieve that, du Maurier uses several narrative techniques: the point of view shifts from a male first-person to a collective "they," and although the narrator is close to the character of Emma, the focus is no longer on a particular individual but, instead, on a household. The integrity of this household, their community and, more broadly, their nation, is in peril and the outcome of their hardships is uncertain. Overnight, they find themselves under the heels of foreign soldiers. Once again, du Maurier repurposes a theme she previously explored: the figure of the stranger and the power struggle. However, this time, she enlarges it internationally: the threat comes from the U.S.A. with the complicity of the British State and the Commonwealth. Physically and intellectually, these foreigners try to take possession of the land and culture of Cornwall to make it an American satellite, like reverse colonization. Culturally, too, the American authorities in place try to impose their own lifestyles:

> We've been learning the Star-Spangled Banner' and Miss Birkett read us history stories about America... Mrs. Hubbard was there... She gave us a Jesus talk. We're going to have one every week. (*Rule Britannia* 213)
>
> Preparations for a general thanksgiving at the end of the week hogged most of the programme, and because the United Kingdom would be joined after nearly two hundred years with her former colony, the celebrations were to be on a magnificent scale, with a public holiday for all. (*Rule Britannia* 215)

This forced acculturation goes badly because it is brutal, sudden and massive, and the people of Cornwall are ready to retaliate.

Du Maurier's plots consistently developed uncertainty around the figure of the other, the stranger in the house, in a dyadic dynamic. Whether it concerns the *Gothic Romance* or the *Masculine cycle*, the outsider is the disruptive element who must be discarded and eliminated from the household, for there can only be one survivor for the order to be restored. The expulsion of the "other" in these stories can suggest xenophobic undertones, as seen in the portrayals of Rachel through her Italian heritage and John through his Englishness. However, in many instances, this foreignness seems more related to class distinctions. The second Mrs. de Winter's modest background sets her apart in aristocratic England, much like John, a middle-class teacher. Similarly, Rachel is only a *Contessa* through marriage, Dick is an editor, and Armino was raised as a commoner.

What happens in *Rule Britannia* is not different; it is just more expansive. In the first cycle, the other was embodied by a feminine figure whose situation was jeopardized by a male counterpart. In the next cycle, du Maurier shifts that persona into an exclusively masculine realm and sets the encounter with otherness in others' times and spaces. On the other hand, in *Rule Britannia*, the idea of the foreigner is no longer one individual but one people, the invaders –the Americans– and, in return, the counterforce is a whole community.

Mad's immediate neighbours and those in the surrounding villages must once again find ways to collectively survive and experience the same horrors they lived through twenty years earlier: deprivation –"no petrol" signs flourish at gas stations (*Rule Britannia* 218)– cut-off telecommunications, and restrictions: "'Water to be cut in the Poldrea district except for one hour every day. No reason given. The order to the Water Board came from the port authorities.'" (*Rule Britannia* 228). In a fun way, there is one event from the book that resonates in our 2020 pandemic context. When Mad goes shopping and buys disparate items in disproportionate quantities, her

Dottie tries to reason with her: "'No one is going to eat all these sausages, you'll have to take them back, and although all the toilet paper will come in handy you can't eat them, can you?'" (*Rule Britannia* 217).

Overall, the expansion of menace does not only concern the foreigners: du Maurier also locates it among the people who constitute the community; the stranger can be an enemy within. In this tense context, a wide spectrum of personalities and behaviours emerge, and the challenge is to sweep away the uncertainties and distinguish friends from foes. For example, the uncanny neighbour who lives at the community's fringe, in a hut, someone Mad pejoratively called *Taffy*, which one is he? When Mad and Emma visit him to use his radio, his behaviour is disconcerting:

> Then he bowed and gave a little laugh
> 'Will you come into my parlour said the spider to the fly? But in this case, there are two flies to one spider, isn't that so? Walk in ladies, walk in.
> He stood aside and let them pass before him into the hut, and then he shut the door and bolted it behind him. (*Rule Britannia* 292)

Although *Taffy* helps Mad and the resistance, du Maurier still instills uncertainty about which camp he endorses. With the arrival of American Marines, the community soon grapples with internal divisions and the emergence of pockets of resistance. A societal divide emerges between those willing to embrace American influence and those resisting it. This division threatens the political future and territorial integrity:

> 'That's what the French said when the Germans occupied their country in the Second World War. We don't want trouble, they said. We'll do as we're told. Some of them didn't, did they? They blew up railway lines and junctions and prepared the way for the second front.' (*Rule Britannia* 197)

The entire community is under mutual surveillance, and the collaborationist game is ongoing. With them, an old uncertainty re-emerges, the fear of otherness.

As observed, du Maurier was not an author of inventions; she repurposes the same themes, formulas, situations and stereotypical characters to produce fiction. In this, she does what all writers do, she creates literature from literature. Todorov, who quotes Frye, observes:

> Literature is created from literature... Poetry can only be made out of other poems and novels out of other novels. Literature shapes itself and is not shaped externally... everything that is new in literature is a reworking of something that is old (Todorov 10)

Du Maurier not only uses pre-existing conventions but primarily builds from her sets of tools. She develops her novels from previous writings, either novels or short stories, to further explore ideas of uncertainty and push the boundaries of genre codes. To that extent, Horner & Zlosnik note:

> Du Maurier's fiction also destabilizes generic categorization. The novels variously draw upon the family saga, boys' adventure stories, the psychological novels, realist fiction, the picaresque, women's romantic fiction and historical romance. (Horner & Zlosnik 188)

In addition, du Maurier also drew on *bildungsroman*, romance, Gothic and ghost stories, the uncanny, the Fantastic, Science-fiction and time-travel, suspense, thriller and psychological novel, as Modernism. Each time, she endeavoured to limit their effects and was careful not to limit her oeuvre to a single genre. In doing so, she granted her writing as much space as necessary to explore uncertainty and the limits of narrative conventions. This innovative approach, combined with her consistent exploration of uncertainty, highlights the sophistication of her writing. She creates her own writing conditions and deconstructs them to reassemble them, always following, it seems to me, a guiding line: Uncertainty.

In the same way, du Maurier does not invent a new genre or mode of writing with *Rule Britannia. S*he brings her writing to a new territory: Speculative fiction, an umbrella term encompassing many (sub)genres. In 2007, Marek Oziewicz published a study that attempted to give Speculative fiction a definition:

> Speculative fiction includes fantasy, science fiction, and horror, but also their derivatives, hybrids, and cognate genres like the gothic, dystopia, weird fiction, post-apocalyptic fiction, ghost stories, superhero tales, alternate history, steampunk, slipstream, magic realism, fractured fairy tales, and more. Rather than seeking a rigorous definition, a better approach is to theorize "speculative fiction" expand. (Oziewicz)

It is important to note that speculative fiction is generally understood by its distance from realism or realistic writing: the setting is accurate, the places exist, the dates cohere, the elements and the relationships tangible, and the world "looks authentic." The speculative part has to do with a probable problematic future. Unlike typical science-fiction stories, the *what-if* scenario of speculative fiction explores not technological advancements but rather the possible consequences of political and social probabilities. However, the novel is not a dystopia but rather focuses on the gradual emergence of conditions that could potentially lead to one.

Du Maurier is familiar with locating her stories in different temporal frameworks. Her *Gothic Romance cycle* novels were set in the past, either in the early 1800 or in the interwar period; on the other hand, the *Masculine cycle* produced contemporary novels. Again, the Cornish author works in circles: the first cycle was "before," the second "while," and the third "after." Indeed, as if she had exhausted the other periods, du Maurier needed another era and, consequently, another literary territory to continue her exploration of uncertainty; and Speculative fiction is the ideal terrain to achieve this.

Although there is a sense of familiarity in *Rule Britannia* as du Maurier re-uses elements, there is also something new in the novel: humour. In her introduction of the story, Ella Westland notes that du Maurier's biographer "Margaret Forster, shows from her letters that she deliberately tried to write a lighter work than usual, one which 'takes the mickey out of everything." (Westland RB intro vii) Indeed, although humour is not the dominant tone, there are a couple of funny

elements. For instance, the name of the new union formed by the United Kingdom and the United States is acronymically called USUK.

The other novelty du Maurier brings into her last novel is an ending that offers hope for a more favourable outcome. The Yankees are withdrawing from England as the rest of the country begins to emulate the Cornish people's acts of resistance. Although there remains some uncertainty about what will happen next, for the first time in this corpus, the conclusion is neither bitter nor tragic. Additionally, it is important to acknowledge the fact that being her last published novel, *Rule Britannia* demonstrates a sense of culmination, as if du Maurier was synthesizing elements from her previous works while simultaneously exploring new literary ground. Moreover, one cannot help but perceive a sense of finality, of the ultimate conclusion that pervades the text. First of all, instead of using a masculine figure as the dominant character, du Maurier chooses a woman, Mad, who could pass for her fictional alter-ego. She shares some of her characteristics, such as her age, her frankness, and a recognizable everyday uniform. This time, the duo is exclusively feminine and the *dédoublement* has to do with ubiquity. On the one hand, one who writes, Daphne du Maurier; on the other, her fictional double, Mad. It is interesting to note that, because inevitably a woman must die in du Maurier's novels, the author kills her imaginary double and in the most du Maurieresque way possible. The last tableau of *Rule Britannia* is that of a phantasmagorical vision, the "ghost" of Mad, waving at the threshold of her house, that only Emma can see.

> Mad was standing at the top of the steps by the porch. She was holding out her arms to both the boys. They were laughing and talking together, they didn't see her. They went straight past her and into the hall. Had they done it on purpose, was it a joke? Mad was still standing there with her arms open, smiling at Emma. Then she wasn't there anymore.
> 'What's the matter? Asked Bevil Summers.

> Emma did not answer for a moment. What was it her grandmother had said last night...? 'We're all together. What a good time to go.' Now, it was true... When she spoke, her voice was calm. (*Rule Britannia* 321-322)

This time, and for the last time, a ghost appears, no longer as a threat or a disturbing element but as a good omen.

CONCLUSION

Despite a flourishing literary career spanning four decades, hundreds of translations, re-editions, millions of copies sold and several television and film adaptations, Daphne du Maurier has not yet undergone comprehensive scholarly scrutiny or a systematic investigation of her fictional work. While some scholarly studies exist, they often show significant limitations. Some scholars frequently focus narrowly on some of the most popular novels and short stories, while others primarily draw parallels between her personal life and her literary works. Furthermore, a common misconception persists: because studies have primarily relied on the author's popular Gothic Romances, critics wrongly labelled du Maurier as a romance writer, and academics have wrongly classified the entire corpus into this genre, failing to see in the later novels the full complexity of her achievements. Consequently, such prejudices hinder any attempt to precisely categorize du Maurier's novels. Overall, my goal was to examine a larger and more coherent selection of du Maurier's literature to challenge existing genre classifications. To this end, I chose to exclusively analyze her fiction novels, spanning her entire career, through the lens of Uncertainty.

In doing that, I could identify cycles in du Marier's work: *The Gothic Romance*, *The Masculine* and *The Speculative*. Moreover, I can conclude that although she relies on a foundation of similar themes and elements, du Maurier's writing evolves not only from one cycle to another but from one book to another. I was also able to observe to what extent the author plays with genre conventions and that she has always been careful not to remain constrained by a single genre. Instead, she reshuffles the deck and creates her own writing conditions to sustain her search for uncertainty.

It was crucial to assess du Maurier's fictional achievements without relying on previous methodologies, such as ready-made genre categorization, overfocusing on her family and heritage, or getting stuck in a preconception that a popular author is an average author. The methodology employed in this research could be readily applied to studies of other popular writers who defy easy categorization. Furthermore, exploring the literary careers of other writers through the lens of cyclical patterns and drawing inspiration from the approach used in art history presents a promising avenue for future research.

Despite its conclusions, this research still proves to be limiting in a couple of ways. For instance, it could not encompass du Maurier's entire bibliography. She wrote over twenty novels, around thirty short stories, three plays, numerous biographies and non-fiction books. However, it might be interesting to see if the novelistic cycles I identified and the concept by which I have strived to understand her oeuvre, that is, Uncertainty, also apply to the whole corpus. Similarly, it would also be interesting to re-examine the work of others –who, like du Maurier, are labelled as Middlebrow– through a concept rather than genres.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Abi-Ezzi, Nathalie. *The Double in the Fiction of R.L. Stevenson, Wilkie Collins, and Daphne Du Maurier*. Peter Lang, 2003.

Auerbach, Nina. *Daphne Du Maurier: Haunted Heiress*. University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002.

Bakerman, Jane S. *And Then There Were Nine-- More Women of Mystery*. Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1985.

Bertrandias, Bernadette. *L'étranger Dans La Maison: Figures Romanesques de l'hôte*. Presses Universitaires Blaise Pascal : Centre de Recherches Sur Les Littératures Modernes et Contemporaines, 2003.

Birch, Dinah. *The Oxford Companion to English Literature over 7000 Entries*. Oxford Univ. Press, 2009.

Black, Scott. *Without the Novel: Romance and the History of Prose Fiction*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2019.

Cawelti, John G. *Adventure, Mystery, and Romance: Formula Stories as Art and Popular Culture*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1976.

Childs, Peter. *Modernism*. 2nd ed, Routledge, 2008.

Du Maurier, Daphne. "Don't Look Now," "Not After Midnight," "The Breakthrough." *Don't Look Now: And Other Stories*. Penguin Books, 2017.

---. *Frenchman's Creek*. Virago, 2015

---. *Hungry Hill*. Virago, 2008

---. *Jamaica Inn*. Virago, 2019.

---. *My Cousin Rachel*. Virago, 2003

---. *Rebecca*. Virago, 2015

---. *Rule Britannia*. Virago, 2004

---. "Kiss Me Again Stranger," "The Apple Tree," "The Birds." *The Birds and Other Stories.* Virago, 2004

---. "The Doll." *The Doll: Short Stories*. Virago, 2011.

---. *The Flight of the Falcon*. Virago, 2004

---. *The House on the Strand*. Virago, 2003

---. *The King's General*. Virago, 2004

---. *The Scapegoat*. Virago, 2004.

Forster, Margaret. *Daphne Du Maurier*. Arrow, 2007.

Frye, Northrop, and David Damrosch. *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays*. Princeton Classics edition. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020.

Habermann, Ina. *Myth, Memory and the Middlebrow: Priestley, Du Maurier and the Symbolic Form of Englishness*. Basingstoke [U.K.]: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.

Hogle, Jerrold E. *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction*. Cambridge University Press, 2002.

Horner, Avril, and Sue Zlosnik. *Daphne Du Maurier: Writing Identity and the Gothic Imagination*. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998.

Kelly, Richard. *Daphne Du Maurier*. Boston: Twayne Publishers, a division of G.K. Hall & Co., 1987.

Light, Alison. "Forever England: Femininity, Literature, and Conservatism between the Wars." Dissertation, Routledge, 1991.

Light, Alison. 1984. "'Returning to Manderley': Romance Fiction, Female Sexuality and Class." *Feminist Review*, no. 16: 7–25. https://doi.org/10.2307/1394954.

Oziewicz, Marek. "Speculative Fiction." Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Literature. March 29, 2017. Oxford University Press.

Pound, Ezra. *Make It New; Essays by Ezra Pound. New Haven, Yale University Press, 1935*. Scholarly Press, 1971.

Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. *The Coherence of Gothic Conventions*. Methuen, 1986.

Todorov, Tzvetan. *The Fantastic; a Structural Approach to a Literary Genre by Tzvetan Todorov. Translated from the French by Richard Howard*. Press of Case Western Reserve University, 1973.

Watson, Daphne. *Their Own Worst Enemies: Women Writers of Women's Fiction*. London: Pluto Press, 1995.