



**HAL**  
open science

## Rediscovering Three Short Stories by Daphne du Maurier: “Terror,” “A Man of Straw,” and “Portrait of an Actress”

Xavier P. Lachazette

### ► To cite this version:

Xavier P. Lachazette. Rediscovering Three Short Stories by Daphne du Maurier: “Terror,” “A Man of Straw,” and “Portrait of an Actress”. *Journal of The Short Story in English / Les Cahiers de la nouvelle*, 2023, 78, pp.23-44. hal-04177077

HAL Id: hal-04177077

<https://univ-lemans.hal.science/hal-04177077v1>

Submitted on 16 Jan 2025

**HAL** is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L’archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d’enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.



Distributed under a Creative Commons Attribution - NonCommercial - NoDerivatives 4.0 International License



## Journal of the Short Story in English

Les cahiers de la nouvelle

78 | Spring 2022

Special Issue: Sundered Selves and Opaque Others

---

# Rediscovering Three Short Stories by Daphne du Maurier: “Terror,” “A Man of Straw,” and “Portrait of an Actress”

Xavier Lachazette

---



### Electronic version

URL: <https://journals.openedition.org/jsse/3761>

ISSN: 1969-6108

### Publisher

Presses universitaires de Rennes

### Printed version

Date of publication: April 1, 2022

Number of pages: 23-44

ISBN: 978-2-7535-9529-3

ISSN: 0294-0442

### Electronic reference

Xavier Lachazette, “Rediscovering Three Short Stories by Daphne du Maurier: “Terror,” “A Man of Straw,” and “Portrait of an Actress””, *Journal of the Short Story in English* [Online], 78 | Spring 2022, Online since 01 April 2024, connection on 06 April 2024. URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/jsse/3761>

---



The text only may be used under licence CC BY-NC-ND 4.0. All other elements (illustrations, imported files) are “All rights reserved”, unless otherwise stated.

## REDISCOVERING THREE SHORT STORIES BY DAPHNE DU MAURIER: “TERROR,” “A MAN OF STRAW,” AND “PORTRAIT OF AN ACTRESS”

In April of 2019, in the run-up to the auction sale of an exceptional number of lots related to her, Daphne du Maurier made national news once again when two unknown short poems by her were found on one sheet of paper, hidden at the back of a small framed picture of herself in a bathing costume—the very picture her father Gerald used as a model for the silver radiator mascot placed at the front of his car in December 1930.<sup>1</sup> Part of the interest aroused by this finding may have been caused by the title of one of the poems, “Song of the Happy Prostitute,” but that did not prevent the discoverer from explaining, “It’s always exciting when you come across something like this—it’s an auctioneer’s dream. The poems are not the juvenile ones of a child nor the polished products of her later years” (Roddy Lloyd, qtd. in Singh).

Likewise, it is a researcher’s dream to discover short stories which, originally published over ninety years ago (in 1928, 1929, and 1931 respectively), have never been anthologised or reprinted, and to be able to provide the first literary analysis of their content to du Maurier’s readers and critics alike. Similar in this regard to the two poems, the three stories are neither those of a child (du Maurier was twenty-one and a half at the time of the 1928 publication), nor the “polished products” of the mature writer of the original 1950s collections onward. Yet, they do provide readers with a remarkable insight into the young du Maurier’s preoccupations at the time,

---

1. See for instance the 16 December 1930 issue of *The Daily Mirror* (10).

especially as far as what she regarded as the cruelty, inanity, hypocrisy, and gender bias of the adult world in the interwar period.

First, an account will be given of the research that led to the rediscovery of the three stories, stemming from a comparison between du Maurier's own references to her short fiction in her autobiography—which she wrote in the 1970s based on the journals she had kept half a century before—and the content of one of her notebooks held by the University of Exeter. A brief summary of each story will be provided. As will then be seen, “A Man of Straw” already contains in embryo one of the recurring themes in du Maurier's later works, for not only does she pitilessly dissect the weak nature of her male protagonist, thereby deconstructing the lies at the base of a phallographic and patriarchal society, but she also conveys the idea that the victimisation of women goes callously unpunished. Finally, the simultaneous study of the two shorter tales, “Terror” and “Portrait of an Actress,” will make it possible to lay bare their remarkable, though surprising, closeness. Loneliness and artificiality—together with the fear of emotions, of bodily contact or of otherness in general—will be examined, adding to the remarkable palette of themes broached in these early fictions.

## EXPANDING THE DU MAURIER PUBLISHED CANON

### AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY AND A NOTEBOOK

That some of Daphne du Maurier's early short stories have been lost or are not currently in print is apparent to anyone perusing her 1977 autobiography, *Myself When Young: The Shaping of a Writer*,<sup>2</sup> which she wrote as she was approaching her seventieth birthday. Thus, unless new personal papers of hers come to light, readers will certainly never set eyes on the tale with which she should have won her teacher Miss Druce's short-story competition, had not her handwriting and her spelling been so atrocious (*Myself* 36)—nor the text entitled “Fog” which, she vaguely remembers, dealt with “a man and a woman leaning over the Thames embankment, who had loved each other once, and now met and talked without recognition” (*Myself* 68).

As concerns the next three noteworthy stories of which du Maurier finds the trace in her diaries—namely “The Old Woman,” “The Welcome” and “The Terror”—she merely mentions that her younger self began to plan them (83), then returned to them after a while, only to find them to be under

---

2. Originally entitled *Growing Pains: The Shaping of a Writer*.

par once finished. The near-septuagenarian writer summarises those literary attempts of early 1926, when she was not yet nineteen, in the following words:

I must start to work, I decided. I must get on with those short stories. But *The Terror*, about a child's nightmare, seemed so feeble when it was finished, and *The Old Woman*, a sketch about a French peasant, equally so. I should never be able to write like Katherine Mansfield. As for getting anything printed... (87-88)

What du Maurier does not say is that these three tales can actually be read in a small black notebook, now held by the Special Collections at the University of Exeter,<sup>3</sup> first in the shape of three consecutive summaries, then—with other ideas, synopses or texts in between—in their full-text version, when the young du Maurier must have found it in her to complete them. Moreover, due to her negative assessment of her own talent at the time (comparing herself unfavourably with Katherine Mansfield, for instance) and to biographer Margaret Forster's assertion that "And Now to God the Father" was her first published story (60, 65-66), it is surprising—but thrilling—to find, while perusing various bound volumes of periodicals in one of the British Library's reading rooms in London, that "Terror," without a definite article, actually made it into print. Indeed, *The Bystander*, the fashionable magazine edited by du Maurier's uncle William Comyns Beaumont, carried it in its pages on 26 December 1928, that is to say about five months before it went on to print the other story mentioned by Forster.<sup>4</sup> "Terror" is one of the three rediscovered texts analysed below.<sup>5</sup>

After that, *Myself When Young* mentions three texts in particular: the well-known Breton story "La Sainte Vierge,"<sup>6</sup> written under the influence of Maupassant (98); "Lundy," available in the aforesaid notebook but never seemingly published, about a young woman with developmental challenges of rather simian appearance who frightens the inhabitants of her Cornish

---

3. Under the reference number EUL MS 144/1/1/1.

4. Daphne du Maurier herself caused Forster's mistake: she never mentions the publication of "Terror" but describes the pleasure and pride that her younger self felt when "And Now to God the Father" came out. She writes, "it was pleasant to see myself in print at last. I went self-consciously into W.H. Smith's in Fowey and bought a copy, hoping the girl behind the counter did not know why I was getting it" (*Myself* 155).

5. As far as I know, the two stories mentioned above—"The Old Woman" and "The Welcome"—have never been published. Nevertheless, as indicated, they can be read in manuscript form at the University of Exeter. I am extremely grateful to the Special Collections at the University of Exeter and to the British Library, without whose inestimable resources and helpful staff this article would not have been possible.

6. Usually hyphenated in English-language editions, but not in *Myself When Young*.

community until she is sent off to an asylum (100); and “The Doll,” written in 1928 but only published in 1937,<sup>7</sup> a “pretty extravagant and mad” production (127) due to its *risqué* subject matter of a beautiful woman who prefers to find sexual pleasure with a mechanical doll rather than with a flesh-and-blood man like the narrator. These and a few others, including “And Now to God the Father,” and possibly the provocative doll story, were gathered into an eleven-story folder and entrusted to literary agents for their expert opinion (132). Unfortunately, their reaction to specific stories remains unknown.<sup>8</sup>

Of the four texts mentioned next, which du Maurier copied out or wrote while waiting for feedback from potential publishers, readers will already be familiar with “East Wind” (150) and “Maisie” (163)—actually spelled “Mazie” in all editions—but “Salle d’Attente” and “Peace” (163), written in August 1929 according to internal evidence in the autobiography, can only be guessed at through the two one-page summaries that she jotted down in her notebook.

For some reason, however, du Maurier does not mention “The Story of a Weak Man,” which her younger self summarised on four pages of her notebook, in between “East Wind” and “Peace.” This is all the more surprising as the same bound volumes of *Bystander* magazines examined at the British Library excitingly prove that “Uncle Willie” also published it in the 27 November 1929 issue of *The Bystander* under the title “A Man of Straw.” In other words, this story has never been anthologised or reprinted since its first publication, and constitutes the second addition to the du Maurier published canon which this article discusses.

Finally, *Myself When Young* mentions one more story, “Portrait of an Actress” (164), of which the aforementioned notebook bears no trace, and which cannot currently be found in any collection or anthology. Because several of du Maurier’s stories centre on actors—like the early “Leading Lady” and “The Supreme Artist,” or the much later fictions “The Menace” and “A Border-Line Case”—readers may have been misled into believing that she was referring to a story they already knew, though under a different name. Nevertheless, a previous reference in her autobiography to “an actress story in several episodes,” which inspired her so much that she felt “it was like switching on an electric light in my brain and the hours absolutely fled” (148), can only set one thinking. Indeed, among her early stories, only “Leading Lady” focuses on a *female* thespian. Consequently, it was likely another such

---

7. Published again in Daphne du Maurier, *The Doll: Short Stories* (London: Virago, 2011).

8. It is not known whether Gerald du Maurier ever read “The Doll,” but he was familiar with some of his daughter’s short fiction. Daphne quotes him as exclaiming, “Why can’t you write me a play instead of scribbling short stories that will never pass the censor?” (*Gerald* 220).

story, or other such stories, existed—a likelihood that the digitised databases of the British Library confirm, showing as they do that “Portrait of an Actress” came out in the weekly *Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science and Art* (*Saturday Review*, for short) of 23 May 1931, although other stories of this kind have not yet come to light. It is the third rediscovered fiction studied here.

Daphne du Maurier provides slightly detailed background information on this piece, even briefly quoting her own diary in the process:

But first a quick visit to Michael Joseph of Curtis Brown [a leading literary agency] to hand over the stories written in Paris, and to hear his opinion of the others I had left with him. “He was very fair, but liked *Portrait of an Actress* best, which I think is strange. I’m sure he’s wrong.” Uncle Willie said the same. Yet I hadn’t felt the actress story in the way I had felt the others. Perhaps feelings didn’t come into it where agents and editors were concerned. (*Myself* 164-65)

Even though she could not apparently reconcile her assessment of the quality of her own works with that of her uncle and of Michael Joseph (who would later publish “The Doll”),<sup>9</sup> that both men praised “Portrait of an Actress” shows the twenty-two-year-old writer was making headway on her path to becoming a talented short-story writer. Also, the shadow of nepotism cannot be brought to bear on that sketch-like story this time, as it was not published in her uncle’s magazine but in a review which had previously carried three of her stories (“Frustration,” “Panic,” and “Mazie”) and would go on to publish “La Sainte-Vierge” one month later. By then, du Maurier’s first novel, *The Loving Spirit* (1931), had already met with some critical acclaim, so that her credit as a writer was being officially established.

#### SUMMARY OF THE THREE STORIES

Since the three stories studied below are not currently available in print, a quick summary of each is called for. “Terror,” the earliest of them, is about Bridget, a six-year-old who wakes up early one evening. Her nanny must be downstairs, in the kitchen, because her bed is still unoccupied. As the child’s eyes become accustomed to the dark, panic takes possession of her because of the strange shapes she makes out and the unfamiliar noises she starts hearing. Fanning the flames of a frightening and vividly remembered animal picture book, her imagination makes monsters out of all the pieces of furniture around her. Becoming convinced that, once they have taken notice of her, “the Things” will start to close in on her, she has no choice but to hurl herself against

---

9. This was something of a recurring pattern with du Maurier. For an analysis of her assessment of the merits of *Rebecca*, see Lachazette.

the door and scream for help. Nanny soon steps into the bedroom to restore quiet and order. Refusing to put up with such shameful behaviour, she thrusts Bridget back into bed and plunges the room into the same darkness as before. Yet, the night shadows are already coming to get Bridget again...

At a little over three thousand and fifty words, "A Man of Straw" is the longest of the three stories, and deserves a longer abstract. In 1929, a chance meeting in London brings together the unnamed narrator and a former schoolmate. Over lunch, Marlow recounts the events which took place in his life since they last met in Le Havre, France in 1917. After being billeted in Le Havre during World War I, Marlow returned to England, where he mixed with blasé loafers whose lives essentially revolved around shallow pleasures and endless partying. Dissatisfied with such a lifestyle, he decided to marry a woman called Kate, whose loneliness and general unhappiness resembled his own. Needing the money, he got hired to run a sports centre in a new seaside resort on the East Coast, where a bungalow with a small garden was placed at his and his wife's disposal. Before a year was out, however, Marlow grew tired of such provincial living, and of the demands and tempers of his sports club and hotel patrons. He also formed an attachment to an eighteen-year-old beauty by the name of Nan, who eventually became his lover. Suspecting, then getting visual proof, that her husband was carrying on with another woman, Kate insisted on his breaking up the relationship and on their travelling back to London. For a time, Marlow's good looks secured him employment with a budding film company, which went bust precisely when his wife became pregnant. Using his wife's condition as an excuse to send her away to her mother, he took the first boat out to Canada, where he spent a few years as a film, then as a stage, actor. When Kate filed for divorce on the grounds of desertion, he agreed to let her go, feeling that he was about to turn a new page in his life. His luck did turn around when he won the lottery. Nevertheless, he entrusted all his fortune to the care of a man who claimed to have developed an innovative photographic process. Together, they bade farewell to Canada, but once in London, both his "partner" and his own assets disappeared for good. When the narrator meets Marlow, his former schoolmate is therefore at a low ebb.

Containing eleven hundred words or so (a hundred or so fewer than "Terror"), "Portrait of an Actress" is the shortest of the three tales. On opening night, one hour before curtains up, a famous actress lies prostrated on a couch in her dressing room, taking stock of her life. Her admiring fans believe not only that the range of her onstage art is unlimited, but also that she must be the most generous person in private life. The actress's own sentiment is quite different, however. Thinking of herself as a marionette, she deems her



acting to be mechanical and fossilised. As for the human qualities with which she is endowed in the eyes of her public, she knows for a fact that they are non-existent. She feels aloof, detached, artificial, and incapable of any real pleasure or emotion. She even suspects that she must have brought pain to various people around her. When the five mirrors in her room start showing her half-forgotten phantoms and figures, she understands she must confront her own past.

“A MAN OF STRAW” (*THE BYSTANDER*, 27 NOV. 1929)

SELF-DEFINITION AND SELF-PITY

Right from the first line of this story, du Maurier depicts a maladjusted protagonist poised “on the edge of the pavement” (482), in an off-balance or intermediary position. She simultaneously stands him against the backdrop of a cinema (the Empire) in Leicester Square, London’s famed film and stage-play district. This opening serves as a triple marker, not only contrasting the English capital’s vibrant modernity and Marlow’s unalluring personality, but also underlining his socially ill-adapted nature and the stagy quality of his personality.

The Empire had been a renowned variety theatre, or music hall and ballet venue, from its opening in 1884 until its closure on 22 January 1927, when the successful run of George and Ira Gershwin’s musical *Lady, Be Good*, starring Fred Astaire, came to an end. After a £700,000 demolition-and-rebuild project, the second Empire Theatre—a cinema, this time—opened on 8 November 1928, one year before “A Man of Straw” was published in *The Bystander*. The *Derby Daily Telegraph* hailed the new venue as “the largest in London and one of the largest and most palatial in the world,” boasting a sitting capacity of 3,500 people and “a restaurant capable of dealing with 400 people at a time,” not to mention a “23-ton organ, costing £18,000” and an orchestra “for which has been provided a special platform capable of being raised or lowered as required” (“New Theatre”). In that sense, du Maurier may have chosen this state-of-the-art film theatre as a marker of modernity, luxury and forward-thinking industry, in opposition to the regressive or backward-looking attitude which, as the reader is about to discover, characterises Marlow’s life. Likewise, when he later mentions his appointment as a sports centre manager in the (fictional) town of Beachcomb, on England’s East Coast, which some entrepreneur “tried to push as a fashionable seaside resort” (“Man of Straw” 484), it is not a promising position in an up-and-coming industry that readers are supposed to imagine, but rather

a second-rate employment in a failing economic sector. For instance, as F. G. Issott, the president of the British Federation of Hotel and Apartment Associations, reminded his audience at a 1929 conference in Morecambe (Lancashire), the press had taken to maligning the management of seaside resorts “[a]t the beginning of each season these past years,” even urging British holidaymakers to go abroad instead, because “the Curfew rang too early at British holiday resorts, particularly seaside resorts” (“Holidays’ Minister”). Further still, the same president’s answer to “the general question that more than one was asking”—namely *Are seaside resorts doomed?*—was as follows: “They are doomed unless the whole policy, outlook and structure of their activities are altered. Not simply brought up-to-date but moulded and fashioned with the material advance of the future kept well in the forefront” (“Holidays’ Minister”). Marlow’s fall from grace—when he had been “popular, with many friends” (“Man of Straw” 482) at his public school—is thus established from the start.

In the couple of hours or so that the two former schoolmates spend over lunch at an Italian restaurant, the personal story Marlow relates is replete with illustrations of the misfit he has become. This he himself puts down to the selfish and unfeeling state of the world after the war:

“Something has happened to the world. People have become brutal, callous. No one is ready to lend a helping hand. If I were like the rest of them, hard, indifferent, thick-skinned—God, if I could only change my temperament. But I’m so appallingly sensitive—and it’s incurable, there’s nothing to be done. All my life it’s been the same—all my life mucked up because of it.” (483)

Whereas the narrator soon concludes to himself that “weakness, self-pity” (483) are the keys to his guest’s faulty personality, Marlow thus posits *temperament* and *sensitivity* as the sources of his social and emotional inadequacy. He equals the death of his mother with the moment when any interaction between himself and the world came to an end, but also argues that it was the war that killed something in him, “the want to ever do anything or to be anyone. . . . There didn’t seem very much purpose in anything” (483).

The whole of his life after that unravels under the sign of boredom and lack of direction. Anticipating the “Bright Young Things” who were to grace the 1920s, the “crowd of people, all a little jaded, and rather excited about nothing” (483) with whom he mixes just after the war fail to fill the inner void which torments him. As for the marriage to which he consents, he presents it only as a sort of chivalrous act of masculine bravery for the benefit of a woman looking for “safety in marriage” (484). Not only is that marriage loveless but Marlow’s marital expectations seem to lean more towards an

incestuous mother/son relationship than towards the sexual union between a wife and a husband, as one senses in the following quote on account of the specific stress laid on sympathy and understanding in a spouse:

“How can I explain to you? You see, I’m not really a very physical person, and unless I have someone who is sympathetic, who understands my countless changes of mood, it’s hopeless—hopeless. I suppose she was disappointed in me, it was natural. However, it is worse than useless to try to draw a picture of this to you.” (484)

Unsurprisingly, it is also at the door of boredom, and fate, that Marlow lays the failure of his marriage and the downward spiral that marked the last four years in his life. The alleged pettiness of the sports centre patrons, together with the sleepy atmosphere of the seaside resort in wintertime, rubbed on Marlow and brought him, he says, to the brink of insanity. It is in the summer, though, quite paradoxically, that “the inevitable happened” (484), and he started meeting in secret with “a lovely thing” of “only eighteen” (484) who came to the club for golf lessons:

“Everything seemed to combine to force us together,” he protested. “I assure you I made no definite move, but opportunities occurred—these things have to happen, it’s human nature. And I’m so damned sensitive to beauty.” (484)

Unlike the ever-optimistic Mr. Micawber in Charles Dickens’s *David Copperfield*, who makes the most of life and remains convinced that something will “turn up” (though he ends up in debtors’ prison), Marlow confesses that, jobless and penniless at thirty-seven, he believes himself to be “without the likelihood of anything turning up” (483). Nevertheless, contradicting himself in the same breath, he also confesses that he “goes on hoping, day after day, that something will come along, and that’s about all” (483). He thus wants his interlocutor to believe that “life” has got the better of him, that the best he can do is to bear up and save face (by never donning shabby clothes in public, for instance), but he really is a pathetic and apathetic loser, a self-unmade man with no one to blame but himself.

By stating that he “can’t cope” with the world around him (483), the protagonist in this short story, du Maurier’s fourth published fiction, thus stands as a prototype of the numerous weak male characters that would become the signature of her works. Indeed, such male weakness can be found in the sexually inexperienced youth in “Panic” (1931) who runs away from the shabby hotel room where his one-night lover has just died, or in the older vacationing scholars in “Ganymede” (1959) and “Not After Midnight” (1971)

who get into serious trouble in spite of their breadth of learning, or again in the married man who loses his life in “Don’t Look Now” (1971) because he holds on to conventional gendered roles when the supernatural situation in which he finds himself rather calls for his relying on instinct and irrationality—to say nothing of novels like *I Will Never Be Young Again* (1932), *The Scapegoat* (1957) or *The Flight of the Falcon* (1965). Interestingly, those same words (“I can’t cope”) conclude “The Doll,” first published in 1937 in a volume of literary rejects, when the young narrator explains he prefers to take his own life rather than continue to dwell on the moral and sexual turpitude of the young woman with whom he has hopelessly fallen in love:

Days will come, and nights, and nothing—they will haunt me—I shall never sleep—I’m cursed. I don’t know what I’m saying, what I’m writing. What am I going to do? Oh! God, what am I going to do? I can’t live—I can’t cope... (“The Doll” 30)

As far as Marlow is concerned, du Maurier thus meticulously and ruthlessly deconstructs the trappings of tragedy with which her character may originally appear to her readers by underlining the fact that he is not only a quitter, a coward, and a whiner, but also a cad, an egotist and a sponger. The pity he initially inspires is therefore trampled upon by his own first-person account of the various mishaps he has encountered in the last twelve years. Once more, the dispassionate and ironic bent of the frame narrative puts the reader in mind of Dickens’s Mr. Micawber, a genial man also, it may well be, but one to whom a good kick in the proverbial pants would certainly have been more beneficial than a shoulder to cry on. Indeed, as Mrs. Micawber finally realises, “Now I am convinced, myself, and this I have pointed out to Mr. Micawber several times of late, that things cannot be expected to turn up of themselves. We must, in a measure, assist to turn them up. I may be wrong, but I have formed that opinion” (Dickens, chapter 28).

Marlow’s problem is precisely that he never “assists to turn things up.” Yet more than by his general apathy, which his statement that “it didn’t make much difference to me what I did” (“Man of Straw” 484) amply illustrates, the reader is intrigued by the insincerity which underpins his somewhat enigmatic psychology. In that sense, his (candid?) confession that his “heart was never in it for a moment” (484) only serves to create an image of him as a man with no access to his own wishes or desires, a square peg in a round hole, an empty shell. Unformulated longings being by definition unsatisfiable, he can only go through life pretending to want to start life afresh, but sensing all the while that he will make a bungle of any new attempt at *self*-expression, precisely because that self has not yet been defined. This explains the narrator’s

impression that his former schoolmate has been (unconsciously) acting a part all his life, playing not to the gallery but to “a shadow on a wall,” actually a projection of himself:

He drank his coffee slowly, thoughtfully. It occurred to me that he was acting a little, that he was watching himself as it were, with me, and creating for his own benefit a shadow on a wall.

Yet he seemed unconscious of this, and I decided that he had acted a part so long that he had therefore lost all insincerity, and had become one with the character he had drawn for himself. (483)

That the (hopefully) better version of himself which Marlow tries to create in his uninterrupted monologue comes across to the frame narrator as a *shadow*—i.e. a dark and somewhat ill-defined human shape distorted by the play of light—underscores the ominousness of his attempts at self-definition. For that reason, his various associations with the world of the (stage and film) theatre are not meant to foreground any personal charisma or power of attraction on his part—though he claims he has “always photographed fairly well” (484). True, he bears nearly the same family name as (Christopher) Marlowe, the preeminent Elizabethan playwright who is thought to have influenced Shakespeare. Also, in spite of his total lack of training, he was hired “for small-part work” (484) by a budding London film company and he graced the Canadian stage “for a while,” an experience he summarises briefly in the following fashion: “I used to play the leading man in third-rate tours! One-night stands, and repertory stuff. What a crowd!” (484). Needless to say, the narrator only has Marlow’s word for such a success, and the unusual animation in the latter man’s speech, indicated by the use of two suspicious exclamation marks, rather seems to signal the uttering of an exaggeration or an elaborate lie in a story which equates theatricality with a form of artificiality or ambiguity.

#### HUMAN NATURE AND THE WRITER’S ART

This rediscovered short story confirms, and expands on, two assertions Margaret Forster made in her 1993 biography, about du Maurier’s style and subject matter in the late 1920s. First, as she explains,

[a]lthough she frequently acknowledged the influence of Katherine Mansfield and Guy de Maupassant there was no sign of this influence in Daphne’s own stories. Her style was slightly more akin to Somerset

Maugham, and she shared some of Maugham's preoccupations, but even then nothing was recognizably derivative. (55)

Leaving aside the issue of the mark which Mansfield and Maupassant made on du Maurier's early fiction, it can be said that, more than in any of the published stories to which Forster alludes in this quotation, Maugham's influence on "A Man of Straw" and the "preoccupations" which both writers shared are palpable. We feel this first in the tolerant, man-of-the-world attitude which characterises the male narrator and central consciousness around which du Maurier organises her narrative, a set-up which Maugham used again and again throughout his writing career. Maugham's narrator in "Raw Material," for instance, reveals he had always been eager to meet card-sharpers, with a view to making them the protagonists of a future novel: the reader could thus imagine "with what enthusiasm" he made the acquaintance of two of them "who seemed likely to add appreciably to [his] little store of information" (211). Far from being morally critical of such cheaters, Maugham is content to try and appraise the "pattern" which they, like all individuals, follow—i.e. the set of beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours with which they view the world or around which they organise their existence—while learning always more about the variety of forms which human nature can take. The "infirmities of human nature" (Maugham 94) are thus of utmost interest to Maugham's narrators, in the unshakable belief that "he is a fool who tells himself that he knows what a man is capable of" (175). Such a belief is certainly best expressed by George Moon, the protagonist of "The Back of Beyond," who nearly brings the story to a close with the following declaration:

if to look truth in the face and not resent it when it's unpalatable, and take human nature as you find it, smiling when it's absurd and grieved without exaggeration when it's pitiful, is to be cynical, then I suppose I'm a cynic. Mostly human nature is both absurd and pitiful, but if life has taught you tolerance you find in it more to smile at than to weep. (297)

The same dispassionate and benign attitude to life and people is perceptible in the words of du Maurier's narrator. As explained at the start of the story, Marlow had been "rather arrogant, inclined to show off" as a schoolboy, a trait which still clung to him in 1917 when both men met in wartime France, certainly because he was older and/or of a higher social standing. Yet, instead of gloating on Marlow's humbling, or of cutting him twelve years later, the narrator explains that he "felt curious to know how he had lived" ("Man of Straw" 482) and decided to treat him to lunch because he looked half-starved. Once seated, the narrator simply listens to his acquaintance for two hours,

never interrupting him, keeping his comments to himself—and to the reader in his act of ulterior narration. In that sense, Marlow faces a silent tribunal throughout this scene and can only read his interlocutor’s poker face for signs of empathy or rejection.

The narrator sits out this monologue in quite a cool-headed fashion. He does not see why Marlow should have suffered more than “most of us who came through the War” (483), and he believes that some defect in his psychological makeup prevented him from detecting “that small grain of beauty that lies in all of us, even in the most weary, the most forsaken” (483). He also mistrusts the “note of injury” which creeps into Marlow’s voice at times and the “impotent stock-phrases” (484) with which he attempts to exonerate himself from the ignoble and despicable acts he committed. Nevertheless, what matters more to him is to understand the key to Marlow’s personality, in other words the “pattern” he follows (to use Maugham’s term) or “the code” he obeys, to use the phraseology of du Maurier’s narrator in the following quote:

“I had just enough money to pay my passage to Canada, first-class.”

Yes, he would travel first-class. He would arrive in the Colonies without the prospect of a job, with no money in his pockets; but at least, according to his code, he would have kept his self-respect. He would travel first-class. (484)

As shown by the four-tier series of *woulds* in this passage, the narrator is satisfied he has pinned down Marlow’s type to perfection. For du Maurier, who was twenty-two when the story came out, coming to grips with such a character may have felt like going some way towards establishing her power of observation (or of imagination) and demonstrating her gradual exploration of the writer’s art.

The second assertion made by Forster about du Maurier’s late 1920s writings, which “A Man of Straw” corroborates, is the following:

All the stories she wrote at that time, as earlier, were fuelled by disgust. She was repelled by the way men used women, and women allowed themselves to be used. She wrote not about the society, and its manners, which she knew, but what she suspected went on, what she heard talked about. In all of her stories, girls suffered because of men’s lust and always the men got away with it. (54)

Indeed, this story can be regarded not only as an illustration of du Maurier’s Maugham-like irony and bite, or as the expression of her cynical outlook on the (mostly upper-middle-class) world around her, but also as an instance

of her “disgust,” to use Forster’s word, with male-female relationships. This is substantiated by the second page of a three-page typescript preface held by the Special Collections at the University of Exeter, written for a (certainly unpublished) collection of five of her 1950s stories,<sup>10</sup> in which du Maurier recalls:

My early stories, written when I was a young woman in my twenties, and which I have been re-reading lately—having found them in a forgotten drawer in a desk—were very different. I seem to remember that they shocked my parents, not so much for their content but for a certain mockery of established things, and a premature knowledge of the ways of the world which I could not possibly have experienced for myself. Observation? Listening to the conversation of adults ignoring or unaware of my presence? (Foreword)

With that in mind, the comic elements in the story take on a disturbing quality that may have been downplayed, if not overlooked, otherwise. True, Marlow’s weakness, his apparent self-delusion and the whining quality of his monologue raise eyebrows and an occasional laugh. For instance, the “rush of feeling” in which he wishes he could have lost himself if only “something terrific” (“Man of Straw” 483) had happened—the war not being “terrific” enough, apparently—simply underlines his utter emotional atrophy. He is also ridiculously ill-suited for the “job of peace-making” (484) which fell on him when hotel clients were rude or refused to pay, seeing that he himself was unable to stand the “scenes of jealousy” which his wife made, “row after row” (484), when she sensed her husband was seeing some other woman. As for the cushy jobs he occupied—whether in the army, never seeing any fighting, or later as a sports centre manager, “when you can get through all your work in the morning, and then idle away the rest of the day playing billiards with chaps” (484)—they are unlikely to evoke pity in his audience. Yet some of Marlow’s pronouncements deserve more than an amused, not quite ironic, reaction on the narrator’s part. A more hot-headed man than he may have punched Marlow in the face on hearing that, with only red-tape work to do in Le Havre, he wishes he had been “in the thick of it like you” to see “men die round me” (483) for a change. Moreover, the following passage triggers no immediate narratorial comment in relation to Marlow’s attitude to women:

“I’ve always adored anyone young, anyone gay. I couldn’t help realising that Kate was older than I, that she had never been particularly attractive. I can’t

---

10. These five stories were “The Birds,” “The Old Man,” “The Pool,” “The Lordly Ones,” and “The Blue Lenses.”



see that I was a cad in making love to Nan, any man would have done the same, she was so young, so lovely. "Besides, I never meant it to become serious, I thought it would merely be a relaxation." (484)

Both men thus collude in the brushing aside of the victimised woman in the story, though later on the narrator does picture the distress she must have felt on breaking the news to her husband of her expecting a baby, "perhaps daring to hope for a word of sympathy, a smile—a suspicion of tenderness" (484). In that sense, the story is a tentative investigation into the meaning of "masculinity" through the creation of both a pathetic (yet predatory) protagonist and a somewhat detached narrator who never actually utters a word of reproach but is content to keep his censorious remarks to himself. It is also one of the first literary expressions of what Nina Auerbach calls the "central paradigm" in du Maurier's stories, which she summarises as "intimacy between men, murderousness between men and women" (140), and of du Maurier's "fundamental horror," namely "the violence, dormant or active, between women and men" (134). So central is that paradigm, the critic claims, that it clinically informs most of the writer's works, down to her last three male-centred novels, which

question not only the bases of guilt and innocence, but the foundations of male identity; the narrators of all three lose the boundaries of their own being, so possessed are they by an engulfing male double. . . . they too imbed a woman's murder in an indelible bond between men. (144)

No woman actually dies in this story, but the suppressing of Marlow's wife's desires and her wordless dismissal through desertion are heartless acts that go unremarked and unpunished, thus heralding in the budding writer the form of "rarity among women novelists" which Auerbach detects in du Maurier for being "a creator of male characters who are not projections of female desire or resentment, but who exist on their own terms" (139). By highlighting how incapable men are of defining themselves; by underlining their physical, moral, emotional, and sexual weaknesses; by showing how they fail as schoolmates, husbands, fathers, and lovers, she questions the very basis of phallocracy and patriarchy, for what can men do that entitles them to power and dominance?

“TERROR” (*THE BYSTANDER*, 26 DEC. 1928) AND “PORTRAIT OF AN ACTRESS” (*THE SATURDAY REVIEW*, 23 MAY 1931)

In contrast, each of the other two rediscovered texts focuses on a female protagonist. As will become clear, though they apparently have nothing else in common, comparing those stories reveals noteworthy thematic idiosyncrasies in du Maurier’s literary production around 1928-1929.

Each protagonist is alone in her room, whether this situation is forced upon her—as for the child who eagerly wishes her nanny would come up from the kitchen—or self-imposed, as is the case with the actress who has made it “her custom to be alone before an opening, quite alone” (“Portrait” 753). More than that, this loneliness is the only prime mover behind the dramas, which slowly intensify up to the moment when they reach an unbearable climax—prompting Bridget to sob and scream hysterically before throwing her body against the door, while the nameless actress finally rises from her couch to look into a mirror. Both stories therefore shine a spotlight on human loneliness at dramatic (though ultimately unexceptional) moments in the characters’ lives.

It is useful at this point to remember that, in *The Lonely Voice*, Frank O’Connor suggests it is precisely a function of the short story as a genre to do so. For him, the short story often portrays not a hero, but a “submerged population group,” such as “Gogol’s officials, Turgenev’s serfs, Maupassant’s prostitutes, Chekhov’s doctors and teachers, Sherwood Anderson’s provincials” (17) or “tramps, artists, lonely idealists, dreamers, and spoiled priests” (20). As he sees it, this submersion can be related to “material considerations” or to “the absence of spiritual ones” (18), and even if it is associated with a particular “group” in the story in question, it attains universal scope because it is “a voice from other worlds, like that of the little copying clerk in Gogol’s ‘Overcoat’ crying, ‘I am your brother’” (O’Connor 40).

The darkness in which both stories are plunged creates unsettling shapes. The child’s dressing table thus becomes “a square, hunchbacked animal, with thin, queer-shaped legs” while the curtains are soon mistaken for “two evil women with long black hair” (“Terror” 678). Nor is the adult in the other story more adept at keeping irrational fears at bay, since the reflections of her body in five different mirrors now seem disquietingly distorted to her, having taken on “giant proportions,” “flattened themselves against the wall, and stretched their finger to the ceiling” (“Portrait” 753-54). Soon, they do not reflect her figure anymore, but a scene—or scenes—from the past in a pentaptych of “phantoms and memories” (754) over which she is unable to exert any control. Simultaneously familiar and eerie, they turn monstrous

at a moment's notice because of the power of the protagonist's imagination or of her guilt-ridden conscience. In the child's case, remembered images from frightening picture books, repressed at the time but re-emerging in the unfamiliarity of the night, create a growing sense of panic. Gothic presences invade her bedroom. Little by little, more striking even than a Henry Fuseli painting showing hairy creatures with grotesque features and bulbous eyes, the vividness of the child's visions powerfully impacts the reader at the mentions of "long, black, wriggling snakes," of "thousands of headless mice," and of "a pool of blood" ("Terror" 678-79) because those are images one does not associate with such a tender age. Conversely, in the other story, though the actress is startled by "far-faded images, long-buried incidents, that she had pushed aside and trampled down" ("Portrait" 754), the tricks of the fading light falling on the mirrors to which she has become artificially enslaved sound quite tame compared with Bridget's terror. In that sense, although nanny calls her charge's nightmare "nonsense" and something of which to be "ashamed" ("Terror" 679), the narrative validates the child's emotions, thereby foregrounding both their unnecessary intensity and the cruel lack of empathy on the part of her so-called caregiver. If a child's fears are brutally real to her, what good does it do to tell her she is being silly?

Furthermore, a clear opposition is perceptible in the presentation of the two protagonists as sentient beings. The child pays dearly for her faulty understanding of the world around her: her every nerve is on edge, her heart thumps, "her body burned, but her feet were icy cold!" (678). Due to their instinctive and physiological origin, however, such instances of body language are understood to speak highly in her favour, especially when compared with the monstrously disembodied spirit which the thespian has become, a "polished" statue of effortless grace on a pedestal among a company of extras "sweating under their make-up" ("Portrait" 753).

As in "The Doll," in spite of this difference, both characters demonstrate a fear of contact, a haphophobic form of disgust with the physicality of human interactions. This one of them manifests by living her life at the top of an ivory tower. As for the other, she is obsessed by the "great white hands with thin, hollow fingers" ("Terror" 678) of her night visitors, by the "great gaping mouths" and "large crooked hands [that] thrust themselves forward to grasp her" (679). Even the "clammy, wet fingers" (679) with which she clings to her nurse for help have a revolting quality to them. We are thus reminded of the link which O'Connor establishes between loneliness, fear of contact, and a famous short story sequence, published in 1919 by Sherwood Anderson, underscoring the idea that short stories as a genre are a powerful medium for

conveying the deep intertwining of dread and desire at the base of all human interactions:

Those two terrible words, *alone* and *lonely*, ring out in almost every story in *Winesburg, Ohio*, and with them the word *hands*—hands reaching out for a human contact that is not there. Yet contact itself is the principal danger. (O'Connor 39)

The actress is a conundrum to the third-person narrator... and to herself. True, in daylight, the shape of her body is awe-inspiringly multiplied by the five mirrors in her room—certainly one for front view, two for left and right three-quarter views, and another two for left and right profile views—but those images of “her incredible beauty” (“Portrait” 753) are nothing but a lure. Hers is a self-aggrandizing dream of universality and perfection, in which each gesture of her left hand, each expression on her face, each “arrogant tilt of her chin” (753) is supposed to bring all her worshipping fans to their knees. In spite of herself, however, she has become “a dummy figure, a mask without a soul, a sham thing” (754), one of those “living marionettes” whose “regular mechanical gestures” (753) only deceive a world that feeds on fake idols and simulacra.

“Aloof and infinitely remote” (753), she cannot even acknowledge “them,” the “prisoners awaiting execution” (753), to be fellow *actors* at all—they could be stagehands or lighting operators for aught the reader knows—except for a slightly contemptuous reference to “that eager girl who had but one line to say” (753). Like that “eager girl,” at once a reverse image of the stage luminary she has become and the very picture of the dull extra she may have remained, had chance not knocked on her door, she therefore does not share in the general feverishness of opening night, in complete indifference to the “element of danger, a spark of uncertainty that made the whole thing an adventure, an unbeatable thrill” which du Maurier evokes in *Gerald* (180).

In the same biography, du Maurier explains her father’s naturalistic school of acting, based on the idea that “[t]o act is to portray an emotion, to show the feelings aroused by some sensation, whether joyous or tragic; to make the man in the audience feel, either uncomfortably or happily, ‘That might have been me’” (91). The problem with the actress in this story is that her professional role-playing conceals the paradoxical personal emotionlessness at the (hollow) centre of her being, together with the emptiness she herself has created by wanting to be everything to all—ending up being nothing to anybody. In that sense, to use O’Connor’s phrases, she is the perfect illustration of the absence of spiritual considerations which

“submerged” characters can evince in short fiction, and poles apart from Gogol’s touching clerk whose unspoken words, “I am your brother,” reminds us of our shared humanity.

Her artificiality also calls to mind of the theme of hypocrisy which runs through so many of du Maurier’s early tales—be it the hypocrisy of the man who refuses to lose face (as in “A Man of Straw” or “The Supreme Artist”), or that of self-righteous clergymen and smug prigs who use religion to climb the social ladder or sing their own praises (“And Now to God the Father,” “Angels and Archangels,” “Happy Christmas,” and “The Way of the Cross”), or that of men and women whose sex lives had better remain steeped in mystery (“The Lover,” “Leading Lady,” “The Little Photographer”). Nevertheless, whereas hypocrites project a false image of themselves in order to cloak in secrecy the person they really are, thereby using lies as a form of power, the lonely thespian in this story has no identity of her own to fall back on. She is “none of these things” which her fans imagine her to be; she does not exist “save in their imaginations” (“Portrait” 753).

Worse still, in just the same way as Marlow “creat[ed] for his own benefit a shadow on a wall” (“Man of Straw” 483), she is said to become “two people” at the same time when standing before a mirror, “one watching the other, one correcting the other’s faults” (“Portrait” 753). The same dissociative delusion overwhelms her onstage, as if her superego, or self-critical conscience, were attempting to rectify her socially unacceptable impulses, suggesting that she should adopt other “attitudes” and different “movements” in the following excerpt:

Sometimes in the middle of a scene, she was conscious of her voice running on and on, like a wound-up doll, and she would listen to it, wondering when it would stop. She would see her hands move, she would find herself walking across the stage, and all the while she was thinking of nothing, she was feeling nothing. She found herself wondering if it were possible to make a different movement, to strike another attitude, but always the senseless words came from her mouth. Inevitably she placed her arms thus, her shoulder thus. It would be the same to-night. (753)

It thus takes a mere dark room and a momentary feeling of lassitude for the actress, a celebrated non-entity, to lose her self-control and become guilt-ridden, just as waking up too early in the night suffices to distress a child and make her fear for her life. And in true du Maurier fashion already, the ending of both early stories brings no sense of closure to the reader, nor any consolation to the protagonists, convinced as they are that what is coming next will prove even more unbearable. “Then came realisation—she was alone. Long shadows crept across the floor...” is how Bridget is left to envisage the

rest of the night, now that nanny, in order to show how cross she is, has turned off the light and closed the door behind her. As for the phantoms of the past that the thespian is forced to watch in the mirrors of her dressing room, they “were calling to her to remember. To look back, to realise the waste and desolation” (“Portrait” 754).

It is uncertain whether “Portrait of an Actress” was really meant to conclude on the sentence, “She rose from the couch and looked into the first of the five mirrors” (754). As mentioned earlier, du Maurier refers to “an actress story in several episodes” (*Myself* 148) which truly fired her imagination, and she may have had in mind the writing of five more stories, or at least five more parts to her story—one for the visions evoked by each of the five mirrors in her dressing room. Such an idea could have been inspired to her by the opening of the three caskets in Shakespeare’s *The Merchant of Venice*, for example, or by the Ghosts of Christmas Past, Present, and Yet to Come in Dickens’s *A Christmas Carol*. After all, the impressionistic ending of the story can read like a series of five vignettes, with a young man waiting for his beloved, a mother frightened by her daughter’s feelings for him, her crying daughter, a blind man “waiting in vain” (to sell flowers to the young couple?), and the girl’s plea to her unlistening mother. This may remain a mystery forever but, as it is, in the three rediscovered stories analysed here, by broaching themes such as social and emotional inadequacy, the phallocratic basis of society, and the victimisation of women, or the artificiality of human relationships, the young du Maurier was already trying to work through powerful preoccupations that would also inform much of her later fiction.

Xavier Lachazette  
*Le Mans Université*

## WORKS CITED

- Auerbach, Nina. "Daphne du Maurier." *British Writers Series, Supplement III*. Eds. George Stade and Carol Howard. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1996. 133-49. Print.
- Dickens, Charles. *David Copperfield*. 1850. *Project Gutenberg*, 1996. Web. 1 Feb. 2023.
- Du Maurier, Daphne. "A Man of Straw." *The Bystander* 27 Nov. 1929: 482-84, 488. Print.
- . Foreword. N.d. TS EUL MS 462/1/5/7. University of Exeter Special Collections: Maureen Baker-Munton collection of papers relating to Daphne du Maurier.
- . *Gerald: A Portrait*. 1934. London: Virago, 2004. Print.
- . *Myself When Young: The Shaping of a Writer [originally Growing Pains]*. 1977. London: Virago, 2004. Print.
- . "Portrait of an Actress." *The Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science and Art* 23 May 1931: 753-54. Print.
- . "Terror." *The Bystander* 26 Dec. 1928: 678-79. Print.
- . "The Doll." 1937. *The Doll: Short Stories*. London: Virago: 2011. 13-30. Print.
- Forster, Margaret. *Daphne du Maurier*. 1993. London: Arrow, 2007. Print.
- "Holidays' Minister. Suggestion for New Health Department. Seaside Resorts' Need." *Morecambe Guardian* 12 Oct. 1929: 2. Print.
- Lachazette, Xavier. "Other Books Like *Rebecca*? Are There Any?': The Singular Fate of a Novel." *The Enduring Appeal of Daphne du Maurier's Fiction—New Critical Perspectives*. Eds. Nicole Cloarec, Anne Hall, and Xavier Lachazette. *Revue LISA/LISA e-journal* 20.52 (Nov. 2021): n. pag. Web. 1 Feb. 2023.
- Maugham, William Somerset. *More Far Eastern Tales*. London: Vintage, 2000. Print.
- "New £700,000 Theatre: Largest Cinema in the World." *Derby Daily Telegraph* 8 Nov. 1928: 6. Print.

O'Connor, Frank. *The Lonely Voice: A Study of the Short Story*. 1963. Hoboken, NJ: Melville House, 2004. Print.

Singh, Anita. "Daphne du Maurier's 'Song of the Happy Prostitute' found hidden in a photo frame." *The Telegraph* 16 Apr. 2019. Web. 1 Feb. 2023.

*Trois des nouvelles de jeunesse de Daphne du Maurier, publiées dans The Bystander (1928-1929) et The Saturday Review (1931) mais jamais rééditées ni publiées dans un recueil, sont étudiées pour la première fois dans cet article. Tout d'abord, en comparant l'autobiographie de du Maurier à l'un de ses carnets, il est établi que le titre de deux d'entre elles ("Terror" et "Portrait of an Actress") était déjà connu des lecteurs tandis que la troisième n'est mentionnée, sous un nom différent, que dans ledit carnet. Bien que rédigée tôt dans la carrière de l'écrivaine, "A Man of Straw" est alors présentée comme une déconstruction sans concession de la masculinité, dans le but de montrer le vide incompréhensible servant de base à une société phallocrate et patriarcale. Enfin, "Terror" et "Portrait of an Actress" sont analysées comme des nouvelles dans lesquelles du Maurier témoigne non seulement d'une vision sans fard de l'artificialité des interactions humaines, mais également de la difficulté de l'expression des émotions et du rapport intime au corps.*

Three of Daphne du Maurier's early stories, published in *The Bystander* (1928-1929) and in *The Saturday Review* (1931) but never anthologised or reprinted ever since, are discussed for the first time in this article. First, by comparing du Maurier's autobiography and one of her notebooks, this article establishes that the titles of two of them ("Terror" and "Portrait of an Actress") were already known to the general public whereas the third is only mentioned in du Maurier's notebook, under a different name. It is then argued that, although penned early on in her career, "A Man of Straw" pitilessly deconstructs masculinity to lay bare the senseless vacuum on which a phallocratic and patriarchal society is built. Finally, "Terror" and "Portrait of an Actress" are presented as stories in which du Maurier is able not only to express unsentimental views on the artificiality of human interactions but also to show the difficulty of relating to one's body and of voicing one's emotions.