"Improbabilities abound": Daphne du Maurier's *Rule Britannia* and the Speculative Political Future

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Introduction: Daphne du Maurier and Literary Categories

In a 1973 review of *Rule Britannia,* Michele Murray surmised in the *Washington Post* that "Daphne du Maurier has imagined even more in her improbable tale of the future which is a sad falling-off from *Rebecca* or *The Scapegoat.* […] What we have here is tepid bath water for the mind" (Murray 3). It is regrettable that this is a conclusion drawn in the few reviews of du Maurier's final novel. Philippa Toomey, for instance, writing in *The Times* posited that "Improbabilities abound – the USUK is dissolving by the end, merely by the "little people" saying No again" (Toomey 10). Wilfred De'Ath suggested in the *Illustrated London News* that "Her new novel, *Rule Britannia,* is set vaguely in the future (1977 or thereabouts) and has the improbable theme of Britain, having failed to make a go of the Common Market, being forced into a union with the United States" (De'Ath 33). Much later, W.J. Weatherby, in an obituary of du Maurier in the *Guardian* in 1989 suggested that, "Lonely in old age, she tried to revive her interest in fiction, but novels like *Rule Britannia* in 1972 suggested she was out of touch with the post-Vietnam world" (Weatherby 39). The Vietnam War ended in 1975, three years after du Maurier wrote *Rule Britannia,* and so, referring to the novel as of the "post-Vietnam world" is inaccurate. Later still, du Maurier's biographer Margaret Forster postulated that "[t]he basic premise was ridiculous, the jokes feeble, the characterization hopeless and the dialogue limp" (Forster 383).

I would posit that these reviews are less reflective of the novel itself than they are of the reviewers' expectations of Daphne du Maurier to write another novel like *Rebecca*. For an author like du Maurier, who is so frequently categorised as a "romance novelist," to speculate on the prospective political situation in Britain as it could be in the mid-1970s was surprising for audiences. Indeed, as Ella Westland pointed out in the introduction to the 2004 Virago reprint of the novel, "[u]nderstandably, readers of *Rebecca* might fear that *Rule Britannia* will not transport them back to Manderley. [Du Maurier's] publishers were worried by the implausible plot, and many of her faithful readers were bemused" (Westland vii). Rejecting the authoritarian near-off future du Maurier imagines for Britain, these commentators take exception to *Rule Britannia* because it is not like *Rebecca.* But looking

more closely at these reviews, there is at work a conspicuous use of adjectives like "improbable," "implausible," "trivial" and "ridiculous," all of which refer to the "basic premise" of the novel. There is, then, a sense in which they reject this novel because they do not recognise "speculative" or "counter-factual" fictions as a legitimate literary category for a supposed "romantic novelist" to write.

And yet, why should du Maurier, an author who so fervently resisted literary categories, embrace the label speculative fiction for *Rule Britannia*? As Philip Oakes told us in his 1972 interview with du Maurier: 'It's what you might call "speculative fiction" (there's another label) and imagines what might happen if Britain withdrew from the Common Market and was taken over – economically and militarily – by the United States' (Oakes). Perhaps du Maurier's choice to accept the categorising of *Rule Britannia* as speculative fiction reflects the ambiguous nature of the expression itself. Since Robert A. Heinlein popularised the term 'speculative fiction' in a 1947 edition of *The Saturday Evening Post*, it is sometimes used synonymously with "science fiction." However, speculative fictions are frequently marked by their hybridity of genre and indebtedness to intertextuality, and therefore they resist any simple classification or association with a single genre. Speculative fiction is a hypernym under which many genres fall; to speak of speculative fiction is to reference genres and modes as wide-ranging as fantasy, magical realism, paranoid fiction, futuristic literatures, counter-factual histories, horror, utopian and dystopian fiction, the satiric and, most frequently, science fiction. I am in agreement with Raffaella Baccolini, who, in her study on dystopian fictions identified a practice that she called "genre blurring" (Baccolini 18). Baccolini suggested that dystopian fictions are often seen to borrow "specific conventions from other genres" which successfully develops their potential as "sites of resistance or oppositional texts" (Baccolini 18). I would argue the same for *Rule Britannia.* The novel is influenced by authors as dissimilar as Shakespeare and Wordsworth, and genres as disparate as the dystopia and the Western.

An attempt to define the famously broad and hybrid category of speculative fiction may, then, prove less successful than outlining what a particular work categorised under this umbrella term sets out to do. For du Maurier, there may have been an extent to which a loose term like "speculative fiction" could provide the freedom to distance herself from the more restrictive, homogenous label "romantic novelist." But more than this, the expression encapsulates the main crux of the novel; conceptualised in 1972 at a moment of concentrated

national anxiety and set in the mid-1970s, du Maurier's cautionary tale *Rule Britannia* hypothesises how the tense cultural climate in Britain may unfold.

Cultural and Literary Contexts

Towards the end of 1972, when du Maurier imagined the novel, British national identity was at a crossroads. Left bankrupt in the aftermath of World War II, the British Empire had all but disintegrated and, by the mid-1960s, previous colonial territories as far-reaching as India, Jamaica, Malta, the Republic of Ireland, and South Africa had sought independence. Clichés surrounding the status of Britain as the "sick man of Europe" (Edgerton 192) contrasted sharply with Prime Minister Harold Macmillan's sanguine 1957 comment "most of our people have never had it so good" (Matthijs 74). Inconvenient policies such as "The Three-Day Week," which placed limitations on commercial electricity consumption from 1970-1974 grew out of a succession of economic crises. Keynesian economic policies adopted by leaders of "the Post-War Consensus" were on the brink of abandonment and high inflation coincided with industrial strife. Internal relations within the United Kingdom were becoming increasingly strained. In Northern Ireland "Bloody Sunday" of January 1972 became one of the most significant moments of "The Troubles." British relations globally, too, became progressively tenser. For instance, the United Kingdom's requests to enter the European Community were vetoed by Charles de Gaulle, who viewed the United Kingdom as a "Trojan horse for American interests" (Dorey 76).

In *Rule Britannia,* du Maurier expresses apprehension that the United States is the only ally of the United Kingdom, imagining the country's political future as an invasion by the United States, thinly-veiled as an alliance of reciprocity. Striking here is du Maurier's speculating upon the British coloniser turned colonised. As well as this, she voices exasperation with many crises within the United Kingdom, most notably in the novel's consistent anxiety about the government's failure to combat unemployment. *Rule Britannia* could be said, in this way, to have anticipated the mood that led to industrial conflicts of that climaxed with the "Winter of Discontent" and the eventual move towards Thatcherism. It could then be argued that Oakes' summarising *Rule Britannia* as a novel that "imagines what might happen if Britain withdrew from the Common Market and was taken over," though perfectly true, is a somewhat dry and mono-faceted approach to an anxious and culturally-informed novel. In this sense, the unenthusiastic reception of *Rule Britannia* calls to mind

some of the novels in Kate MacDonald's excellent series *Political Future Fiction.* MacDonald analyses a selection of Edwardian novels that speculate on the future at a moment of cultural and political instability. As MacDonald puts it:

> None of these novels can be said to have a lasting influence on the readers of their day. […] By reading these texts, and enjoying them too, one hopes, we can gain access to the hearts and minds of the readers they originally written for: we read their concerns, and we hear their exasperation. As a palimpsest of political future fiction, these novels are valuable for what they tell us and how they show us the concerns of their authors, and, ultimately, the readers for whom they were written (Kate MacDonald xiii-xiv).

As we have seen, *Rule Britannia* could not be described as a significantly influential novel. Those few critics who reviewed it did so only tepidly, while du Maurier devotees expecting another *Rebecca* (1938), *Frenchman's Creek* (1942), or even *The Loving Spirit* (1930), were disappointed. But this does not diminish the many complexities at work in *Rule Britannia*, not least of which are in its vocalising of frustration with the political climate and its unease surrounding Britain's fraught status within a post-war world.

Tom Moylan argued that, "[d]ystopian narrative is largely the product of the terrors of the twentieth century" (Moylan xi). Moylan is quite right. Though speculative fictions more broadly often take a hypothetical futuristic setting, anxiety that stirs the dystopian impulse tends to be firmly anchored in the present. Looking at du Maurier's *Rule Britannia* in the context in which it was written, post-war Anglophone literatures saw boom in literatures speculating on political futures. Conceivably most famously, George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949) conceptualised a future where the elusive government of the supranational Oceania suppressed the people through surveillance, manipulation and threats of war. But works as contrasting as Anthony Burgess' *A Clockwork Orange* (1962), Harry Harrison's *Make Room! Make Room!* (1966), Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Dispossessed* (1974) and Joanna Russ's *The Female Man* (1975) all made use, in very different ways, of the hypothetical near or far-off dystopia in taking a hard look at the perceived failings of their present contexts. So, too, does Daphne du Maurier in *Rule Britannia.* I find myself in agreement with M. Keith Booker, who posits that:

> In short, speculative genres such as science fiction, fantasy, and horror, far from being escapist forms that simply allow their consumers to avoid engagement with reality, are in fact themselves vehicles for new forms of critical engagement, and often quite self-consciously so (Booker no pag.).

Time and Disruption in *Rule Britannia*

Unlike more celebrated and more influential futuristic speculative fictions such as Aldous Huxley's earlier *Brave New World* (1932) or George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949), which are both set in the relatively distant future, du Maurier's envisages the speculative future for Britain in an uncomfortably close time setting; du Maurier once described it as "a mock-up of what this country may be like in the mid-seventies" (Forster 382). Given the futuristic setting of the novel, it is perhaps appropriate that it opens with reflections on time. In the opening scene, Emma, one of the protagonists, awakens to subtle, yet portentous changes to Britain:

> Emma looked at her bedside clock – it was a few minutes after seven – and then switched on her radio to the local station. But there was no time signal, no announcer with the news, nothing but an interminable hum that must mean there was a fault somewhere, and it wasn't any better when she tried the national programme (du Maurier 1-2).

In this opening scene du Maurier is concerned with pinpointing Emma's every movement temporally; the explicit reference to the "beside clock" is underpinned by the clause "– it was a few minutes after seven –." This clause is both off-set from, and contained by, the larger sentence through the use of long dashes, which places linguistic prominence on the notion of time. The disturbance to time occurs in the second sentence of this passage. Du Maurier's rhetorical use of *anaphora* in repeating the negative indicators in succession at the beginning of each clause ('no,' 'no' and 'nothing') emphasise the unusual absence of scheduled voices from the usual media. Descriptions of the disruption to time, then, overflow the passage and foreshadow the imminent invasion and hostile takeover of Britain.

M. Keith Booker once described dystopian literature as "the failed utopia in which ideals have been replaced by repression, violence and rampant inhumanity" (Booker n. pag.).

I generally agree with this assessment, but would posit that literatures of the 1970s that utilise dystopian elements operate on more complicated levels than Booker suggests. Of course, some of the most well-known of fictions that speculate on dystopian futures frequently do so by immersing the reader in a dystopic setting where repressive apparatuses are already in place. Often, as in the case of Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four,* authors take a synchronic approach; the despotic methods evoke a feeling of heightened fear in part because there is no context provided for how they came into being. To use Fredric Jameson's words, the "dystopian dimension ideologically calculated to make the political flesh creep and to indict social systems allegedly devoid of individuality" (Jameson 115). On the other hand, there is something rather different at play in this opening scene in *Rule Britannia*. Evident are systemic changes to the United Kingdom by the American invasion happening, quite literally, overnight. The effect of this very near future in the novel is that du Maurier can diachronically show the processes of manipulation and creation of ideologies at work. I would argue that du Maurier in *Rule Britannia* speculates upon the possibility of a dystopian Britain by showing the apparatus of manipulation happen only gradually. What is more, as the novel closes du Maurier carefully retreats from this speculative position, for this is a dystopia that never reached its full repressive potential but was dismantled by the resistance of the people.

In the novel's early scenes, Emma and her family observe with trepidation and confusion the "sound of planes," "a great barricade across the main road," the "choppers overhead" and the warships in the bay" (du Maurier 1-10). Du Maurier slowly dispels uncertainty by introducing elements of totalitarian propaganda, thereby developing a threatening mood:

> The television set was turned on. It showed a picture hitherto unseen, of two national flags side by side, joined together at the base. They were the Union Jack and the Stars and Stripes. Colin settled himself on the stool at Mad's feet, with Ben between his knees.
>
> 'What's it going to be, a Western?' he asked.
>
> 'Sh!' said Emma.
>
> Joe came in, holding Sam by the hand, and they went and sat beside Terry and Andy on the window-seat. Dottie, with a glance at Mad, drew up a hard chair. Emma perched on the arm of the sofa. The two flags faded, giving place to the face of the

> announcer, who looked nervous and harassed, unlike his customary debonair self (du Maurier 21).

Televisions as a trope in speculative fictions have often served as a means through which the authoritarian state could impose conformity on the people; arguably most well-known are the television walls in Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*, which so successfully serve as an arm of the state in subduing Mildred and other characters. Du Maurier's descriptions of the television in this passage are odd and seem to build on this trope. Syntax of the phrase "[t]he television set was switched on" is incongruously passive; it is unclear which family member switched it on. Similarly, the expression "hitherto unseen" draws rhetorical attention to the contrived nature of the images on the television set. On this point, there is something futuristic and portentous about the flags' fading away to reveal the announcer. It is, too, significant that the announcer, who is a familiar face, looked "nervous and harassed," a stark comparison with "customary debonair self." This blatant change in the evidently well-known announcer, a person with whom the family lays their trust, further builds on this sense of unease. Du Maurier is, then, preoccupied in this passage with the gradual building of propaganda by the leaders of the invasion. Purposefully locating each member of the family within the drawing room in order to show their reactions to these peculiar images, she successfully builds a mood of fear towards the takeover of the United Kingdom. It is of no small implication that Colin, a young child, mistakes the news bulletin for a Western film because of the Stars and Stripes. The Western as a genre was among the most lucrative for Hollywood until the 1960s and so can be interpreted as an inherently North American cultural product during the context in which du Maurier wrote. At the same time though, the Western as a genre is marked by its characteristic colonial themes. This most frequently takes the form of depictions of exploitation and conflict between Native American peoples and white settlers, as well as the seizure of Native American lands. Colin's mistake, then, is of broader significance than it would seem, foretelling *Rule Britannia'*s developing invasion narrative. This anxiousness continues and the announcer introduces Admiral Joliff to explain the situation to British viewers:

> I am not, I am afraid, empowered to tell you any more at this moment. I do, however, want to impress upon you all that there is no cause for alarm. I repeat that, no cause for alarm. The aircraft you have seen and heard passing overhead this morning are

> friendly to us. The American Sixth Fleet is in the English Channel. The troops you may have observed in the towns and ports belong to the combined armed forces of the United States, and are here in the United Kingdom with our full knowledge and co-operation (du Maurier 22).

Though Admiral Jollif evidently attempts to reassure the public, there is evident in this passage tensions between the United Kingdom and the United States. The heavy opposition between militaristic lexis and public register is expressive of this. Diction like "I am not, I am afraid, empowered" is especially telling, connoting the toppling of power of the British military by American forces. There is an incongruous contrast then, with phrases like "friendly to us" and "with our full knowledge and co-operation."

Fredric Jameson noted in *Archaeologies of the Future* that "at best Utopia can serve the negative purpose of making us more aware of our mental and ideological imprisonment" (Jameson xiii). Accordingly, we could in *Rule Britannia* be looking at a modulation on the status of the "special relationship" between Britain and the United States in the post-war period. Winston Churchill's renowned speech 1946 on the 'special relationship' between Britain and the United States made global headlines. Du Maurier's diction throughout *Rule Britannia* seems to emulate the impact of this speech. The loaded and frequent use of the word 'relationship' is marked by its affinity with the Churchill speech. For instance, Martha describes the unification as "designed to bring us one and all into a harmonious and meaningful relationship" (du Maurier 66).

Cultural and National Symbols

But let us return to the loaded symbols of the two conjoined flags on the television: "two national flags side by side, joined together at the base. They were the Union Jack and the Stars and Stripes" (du Maurier 22). The profound effects evoked by flags seem, at first glance, to need no lengthy explanation; as nationally, emotionally, politically, historically, and culturally-loaded symbols, the meanings of flags are more frequently accepted than interrogated. In this scene in *Rule Britannia,* the manipulation of the flags, should, then, evoke pathos in the family, but shifts in narration and modes of discourse mean that we are not afforded their internal reactions. Emma hushes Colin ('"Sh!" said Emma') so that she can listen to the missive. The narrative perspective then moves towards direct speech, where the

announcer commences his broadcast. This narrative disruption presents a problem for the reader insofar as the interference with the Union Jack is an unresolved tension. Put simply, the flag is signifier form the sign takes, the United Kingdom is the signified concept it represents and the sign is the combination of these two notions. Roland Barthes in *Mythologies* (1957) suggested on the representation of flags:

> When it becomes form, the meaning leaves its contingency behind; it empties itself, it becomes impoverished, history evaporates, only the letter remains. There is here a paradoxical permutation in the reading operations, an abnormal regression from meaning to form, from the linguistic sign to the mythical signifier (Barthes 116).

So the manipulation of the Union Jack in this scene ought to have a profound effect on the family, but this is an effect that lurks only below the textual surface as each family member gathers around the television set silently watching the worrying images. The dictatorial joining the Stars and Stripes with the Union Jack empties historical meaning from both symbols. This is an altogether unrecognisable conglomeration of symbols that points more towards a hypothetical future than the heritage each flag would represent independently.

On this point, there is an overlap in theme in this scene in *Rule Britannia* with Jasper John's Neo-Dadaist painting *Three Flags* (1958) which looks at the familiar and culturally-loaded symbol of the United States flag. As Fred S. Kleiner put it, "In *Three Flags*, Johns painted a trio of overlapping American national banners of decreasing size, with the smallest closest to the viewer, reversing traditional perspective, which calls for a diminution of size with distance. Johns drained meaning from the patriotic emblem by reducing it to a repetitive pattern – not the flag itself but three pictures of a flag in one" (Kleiner 967). Johns himself famously said of this encaustic on canvas that "by working with things the mind already knows it gave him room to work on other levels. Motifs like targets, flags and numbers, he said 'are seen and not looked at, not examined" (Burn 205). There is, I claim, a contextual implication embedded in ways in which both du Maurier and Johns interrogate seemingly simple yet ubiquitous symbols like flags. I would suggest that in *Rule Britannia* du Maurier presents a unique response to Britain's place globally at this tense moment.

On a more specific historical level, it is of consequence that du Maurier's invasion narrative occurs in the immediate aftermath of the decline of the British Empire. But more than this, the notion of nation-building took on new forms of significance in the post-period

as the Iron Curtain claimed territories for either Capitalism or Communism. This was reflected in a boom in fictions on speculative political futures during this time. Erika Gottlieb noted a similarity between mass democracy and mass dictatorship in her study on political dystopia. For Gottlieb, works including George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*, Kurt Vonnegut's *Player Piano*, and Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale,* are "projections of the fear that their writers' own society in the West […] could be moving towards a type of totalitarian dictatorship" (Gottlieb 7). Likewise, as Michael Schoenhals and Karin Sarsenov recently pointed out:

> The struggle to create national and cultural identities outside the Soviet bloc after World War II often took mass dictatorships as the point of reference, the 'evil other' in relation to which a positive identity was constructed. Pragmatically, this identity formation process had many advantages, but it also served the purpose of veiling or disguising obvious instances of similarity between mass democracy and mass dictatorship (Schoenhals and Sarsenov 2).

Speculative fictions of the 1970s boom, including du Maurier's *Rule Britannia*, react to a specifically Cold War concern with nation building, drawing the reader's attentions to some more uncomfortable aspects of global relations. This is not to say, however, that these fictions always necessarily challenged dominant positions on global relations; in many ways, they were also seen to reflect cultural anxiety in conservative methods. For illustration, Robert A. Heinlein, who is sometimes credited with coining the term 'speculative fiction', identified Larry Niven and Jerry Pournelle's novel *The Mote in God's Eye* (1974) as 'the finest science fiction novel' he had read. Fredric Jameson agreed, adding that it was "composed in a resolutely Cold War spirit, and designed to preach an unremitting vigilance and hostility to the newly discovered alien species scarcely disguised as a foreign policy lesson" (Jameson 132). It is perhaps useful, then, to tentatively consider *Rule Britannia* as part of the speculative futures boom in Anglophone fiction in the post-war period. The novel is concerned with the construction and manipulation of national identity for totalitarian means, an anxiety it shares with much of the literature of this boom. This is best expressed in the scene where the sarcastic third-person narrator summarises the plans for Britain's place within the USUK merger:

> Plans for Great Britain herself would take some little time to formulate. It must be recognised that her heyday as a great industrial nation had now ended, but a new future lay ahead for her as the historical and cultural centre of the English-speaking peoples. Just as some years previously people on holiday had gone in their thousands to the Costa Brava in Spain for sea and sunshine, so now tourists would flock in their millions to explore the country that had given birth to Shakespeare, Milton, Lord Byron, Lord Olivier, Nelson (the order of priority seemed rather odd), Florence Nightingale and others. The scope was literally tremendous. 'There is not a county in England or Wales,' wrote an enthusiastic supporter of the scheme, 'that is not steeped in history. King John signing the Magna Carta at Runnymede … Richard III losing his crown at Bosworth Field … the Wars of the Roses … all these scenes and countless others could be enacted for our visitors. Hotels and restaurants could be transformed into old coaching inns as a further attraction. Bear-baiting, cock-fighting, jousting, duelling, masked highwaymen on horseback – the tourist could watch them all from the comfort of a roofed-in stadium, or even from his car' (du Maurier 136-137).

Cadences of the enthusiastic verbosity within this section seem to emulate through free indirect discourse the language of the authorities who formulate these "plans." This is indicated throughout the passage where, for instance, Britain is feminised as "Great Britain herself." In this instance, the attitude seems to indicate a linguistic hierarchy. Moreover, the word 'formulate' belongs to the lexis of business and so has connotations of a methodological systemisation through which British culture would, without consent of British people, be appropriated for explicit political means under an aptly-named "Cultural-Get-Together." What du Maurier puts under scrutiny here is the act of cultural appropriation for the purposes of imperialism. Jonathan Hart explained this notion succinctly where he said 'Imperialism is about the expansion of political property through the acquisition of colonies. That colonization involves setting up the cultural example of the imperial centre, while that centre also appropriates aspects of the colonized cultures officially and unofficially' (Hart 137). The notion of cultural appropriation took on new forms of meaning in the post-war period with decolonisation and the emergence of postcolonial studies. Immensely influential during this time were Frantz Fanon's canonical works *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952), *A Dying Colonialism* (1959), *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961) and *Toward the African Revolution*

(1964), which took a hard look at the processes of imperialism, the treatment of colonial subjects, and the aftermath of colonialism.

One of the hallmarks of cultural appropriation is that the original objects or works change meaning within the new context; they no longer signify alone their original meaning but are re-contextualised by this new work. Through the Cultural-Get-Together, we can see processes of colonial manipulation at work; the regime takes elements of British culture and re-contextualising it with the authoritarian political ideals in mind. To return to the previous scene, rhetorical litotes in the sentence "It must be recognised that her heyday as a great industrial nation had now ended" would, too, underpin this notion, where sweeping statements about the status of Britain in the contemporary global context is simplified for the purposes of propaganda. There is an underlying sense of unease about the status of Britain in the post-war world in this sentence though, and seems to resonate with post-war British literature dealing with the postcolonial age. For instance, Muriel Spark's *The Mandelbaum Gate* (1965), as Phyllis Lassner put it, "surveys the potential damage of the enfeebled British presence to nations engaged in their struggles for self-determination in a postcolonial age" (Lassner 41). Of course, this is a time in which Britain was very much concerned about its status globally. As Lassner tells us, "the British Empire was just about bankrupt by the end of World War II and had surrendered most of its colonies by the 1960s" (Lassner 1). One of the most crucial moments for Britain in the process of decolonisation came in the form of Harold Macmillan's famous 1960 'Wind of Change' speech. Addressed to both Houses of Parliament of the Union of South Africa in Cape Town, Macmillan surmised that,

> The wind of change is blowing through this continent and, whether we like it or not, this growth of national consciousness is a political fact. We must all accept it as a fact, and our national policies must take account of it (Macmillan, quoted in Butler and Stockwell 1).

It should be noted that a similar ambivalent mood ("whether we like it or not") is echoed in the above extract quoted from *Rule Britannia.* Although the passage seems to emulate the enthusiasm of vested interests for the regime, the narrator's attitude is deeply ironic. Take, for instance, the multifaceted message embedded in the following phrasing: "so now tourists would flock in their millions to explore the country that had given birth to Shakespeare, Milton, Lord Byron, Lord Olivier, Nelson (the order of priority seemed rather odd), Florence

Nightingale and others." Du Maurier's own sardonic attitude seems to be parenthesised here, while hyperbolic language in the short sentence "[t]he scope was literally tremendous" serves to undermine supporters.

In this passage, the change in narrative perspective from third-person omniscient to direct speech denotes a further derisive attitude: "There is not a county in England or Wales," wrote an enthusiastic supporter of the scheme, "that is not steeped in history." Considering that the scheme is supposed to herald the cultural union of people in the United Kingdom, this statement notably excludes Scotland and Northern Ireland. This oversight seems to be intentional on du Maurier's part; it serves to undermine the enthusiast's position. It is implied that the speaker is unaware of their own national boundaries and, for this reason, their stance is groundless. What is more, the scornful attitude becomes most explicit in its references to blood sports: "Bear-baiting, cock-fighting, jousting, duelling, masked highwaymen on horseback." This amplified list has multiple connotations; on the one hand it undermines the speaker's own standpoint, but on the other, it provides grim possibilities for the future of Britain. There is also evident in this excerpt an embedded rejection of the standardising of heterogeneous regions into a homogenous tourist area. It should be noted here that du Maurier was entirely resistant to tourism industries, feeling that they undermined and commoditised heritage, particularly of rural areas like Cornwall. She voiced these sentiments in her earlier non-fiction work *Vanishing Cornwall* (1967), published six years before *Rule Britannia*, where she said "What does the future hold for Cornwall? Will it indeed become the playground of all England, chalets and holiday-camps set close to every headland, despite the efforts of the county planning authorities and the National Trust to preserve the coast?" (du Maurier, 1967, 197). Her reflection on tourism industries were, as Margaret Forster put it, "acid" and "outspoken" (Forster 360), but at the same time, they denote her real apprehension about the future of Britain's Celtic regions. In this same way, *Rule Britannia* seems to provide a tentative answer to the question she posed in her earlier non-fiction work.[1]

Intertextual Resonances

I have already mentioned the indebtedness of du Maurier's novel to its multiple intertextual resonances. In *Rule Britannia*, du Maurier crosses genres and modes in order to build her speculative position, and she does this both implicitly and explicitly. It is fitting

that the leaders of the resistance in the novel combat attempt to homogenise British culture by reclaiming it from the authoritarian government:

> 'H'm,' said Mad thoughtfully. '"We must be free or die, who speak the tongue that Shakespeare spake"… Who was it said that?'
> 'Wordsworth,' replied Emma hastily, 'but darling, honestly …'
> 'Apropos of what?'
> 'One of the sonnets to liberty. "Milton, thou should'st be living at this hour"'. (du Maurier 299-300).

As Julia M. Wright argues of 'Written in London, 1802', 'Milton was often figured as a saviour for England in the limited national sense. In Wordsworth's sonnet […] Milton appears as a Christ-like national saviour who, like Arthur, Merlin, and other British heroes, should rise in the nation's hour of need' (Wright 118). Du Maurier's explicit drawing attention to Wordsworth here shapes her own text in the context of the French Revolution and its effects on Romanticism. The revolutionary context in which Wordsworth wrote is evoked and intended to rouse a radical sense of pride and belonging, as well as the resultant establishment of a defiant territory. Du Maurier's evocations of Wordsworth are overt, but what is less evident is the affinity in this text with Ray Bradbury's political future novel *Fahrenheit 451*. In Bradbury's earlier novel, Guy Montag, a fireman employed by the totalitarian state to burn censored books, recites an extract from Matthew Arnold's "Dover Beach" as a symbol of resistance. As Peter Sisario points out, "Guy reads from Matthew Arnold's 'Dover Beach'; the last two stanzas are quoted, and the last one is particularly apt, since it shows two lovers looking at what appears to be a happy world, but recognizing the essential emptiness that exists" (Sisario 204). Like Bradbury, du Maurier exalts extracts from canonical British authors and poets as glorified apotheoses and voices of dissent. Du Maurier draws this notion to its full conclusion in the following scene, in *Rule Britannia* where she analogises the French Revolution through Emma's hesitant reference to the Peace of Amiens. As Emma struggles to recite large extracts of Wordsworth's sonnets:

> Such as … Emma tried to think. Written in London, 1802, what was Wordsworth doing in London, and was it something to do with the Peace of Amiens or war breaking out again or what? All the lines were jumbled together in memory. Aloud, she quoted,

> '… We must run glittering like a brook
> In the open sunshine, or we are unblest:
> The wealthiest man among us is the best;
> No grandeur now in nature or in book
> Delights us. Rapine, avarice, expense,
> This is idolatry; and these we adore:
> Plain living and high thinking are no more:
> The homely beauty of the good old cause
> Is gone.'
>
> She paused, concentrating hard. Blank, blank, blank in her mind. Wait a minute (du Maurier 302-303).

Narrative technique in this section is composite. Free indirect style shapes the passage where the third person narrative blends with Emma's internal thought processes in her attempts to quote the sonnets: "She paused, concentrating hard. Blank, blank, blank in her mind. Wait a minute." Colloquialisms, ellipses and *repotia* together work to break up the quotations, firmly re-contextualising Wordsworth's sonnets in Emma's speech and context. This is underpinned by Emma's consistent errors in quotation. The effect in this shift in narrative perspective is peculiar, and rendered even more complex where Emma awkwardly transplants passages from different sonnets. Du Maurier conjures many centuries of literary heritage here in an intricate method; evoking the voice of Wordsworth's inspirational sonnets on liberty, there is a particular significance that Wordsworth, too, in these sonnets evoked the words of Shakespeare and Milton. The effect is odd; there is a sense of *mise-en-abyme* in the many intertextual narrative layers and voices. A word on form is pertinent here; the sudden move from prose to verse is somewhat jarring for the reader, but there is meaning embedded in the use of the sonnet particularly which, it could be argued, further connotes this rich literary heritage. I would argue that this shift in form successfully interacts with the mingling of dialogue, direct speech, free indirect discourse. The result of this multitude of voices in this text linguistically reflects the many voices of Britain's literary and cultural tradition in order to inspire the revolutionary spirit in the Celtic Fringes and rural or peripheral regions within the national borders of the United Kingdom. And, as du Maurier asserted in *Vanishing Cornwall* (1967), "There is the Cornish character, smouldering beneath the surface, ever ready to ignite, a fiery independence, a stubborn pride" (du Maurier 1967 11).

On the other hand, du Maurier's careful narrative layering in this scene invites a reading from the perspective of postmodernism of play or pleasure; that these textual voices are always ultimately mediated through Emma's own spoken voice passage communicates a sense of scepticism towards grand narratives that lurks beneath the multifaceted textual surface. If we could turn to Julia Kristeva's essay 'Word, Dialogue and Novel', where she tells us on intertextuality that "the writer can use another's word, giving it new meaning while retaining the meaning it already had. The result is a word with two significations: it becomes *ambivalent.* This ambivalent word is therefore the result of a joining of two sign-systems. […] The forming of two sign-systems relativizes the text" (Kristeva 44). Kristeva proceeds to argue that "[a] third type of ambivalent word, of which the *hidden interior polemic* is an example, is characterized by the active (modifying) influence of another's word on the writer's word. It is the writer who "speaks," but a foreign discourse is constantly present in the speech that it distorts. With this active ambivalent word, the other's word is represented by the word of the narrator" (Kristeva 44). Following Kristeva's founding ideas on intertextuality, we can see in *Rule Britannia* that du Maurier utilises these intertexts in order to shape the novel itself. The plantation of these extracts within the narrative dramatizes many of the wider tensions within the narrative. If the regime attempts to appropriate British culture to suit its dictatorial aims, then the underground resistance counters this by utilising the enemy's own tactics. Addressing the specific mechanisms whereby the perceived cultural appropriation in the "Cultural-Get-Together" operates, the resistance is in this way counter-hegemonic and there are many historical layers working to reclaim culture from the system.

On its release, Daphne du Maurier's *Rule Britannia* was not a significantly influential work. Du Maurier's readership was confused by what Margaret Forster called her "last and poorest novel" (Forster 383). But, in many ways, *Rule Britannia* vocalises a moment of exasperation for Britain. Du Maurier imagines an invasion narrative for a previously-powerful country coming to terms with post-war economic strife, bankruptcy and the long process of decolonisation. By reading *Rule Britannia* we can hear du Maurier's frustration with Britain's transformation from a global power into "the sick man of Europe." The mood of suspicion, unease and desolation that pervades this speculative work speaks to an equally troubled cultural moment. *Rule Britannia* materialized from the late 1960s and 1970s speculative fictions boom, wherein authors took a hard look at the perceived failings of their governments and called for change.

Note:

1. On the problems relating to contemporary discourses surrounding versions of history and the tourist imagination, see Edensor 114.

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