

**A Desperate Attempt at Conflict Resolution:  
Daphne du Maurier, Moral Re-Armament, and World War II**

**Une tentative désespérée de résolution des conflits :  
Daphne du Maurier, le Réarmement moral et la Seconde Guerre mondiale**

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**Abstract:** The eleven inspirational tales which Daphne du Maurier published in 1940, in a booklet entitled *Come Wind, Come Weather*, were written in support of Moral Re-Armament, or MRA, a religious movement which gained momentum especially on the eve of World War II. Like many Britons and Westerners of that time, du Maurier was seduced by the overly simple and optimistic idea that changing the world was attainable if one started to curb one's lower instincts and to cultivate instead the "four absolutes" of honesty, purity, unselfishness and love. Grateful for the courage and the noble ideal thus given her, du Maurier became a sort of standard-bearer of the movement. This led her to become more of a public figure, and to try her hand at literary genres which she had not yet explored. It soon became clear, however, that du Maurier was ill-fitted for the task, and that the self-fulfilment made possible by the movement was heavily offset by a form of self-denial and a total psychological mismatch which made her further active involvement in the movement impossible.

**Keywords:** Daphne du Maurier, moral re-armament, MRA, inspirational stories, inner conflict, self-fulfilment, self-denial

**Résumé :** Les onze récits publiés par Daphne du Maurier dans l'opuscule intitulé *Come Wind, Come Weather* (1940) furent écrits en vue de soutenir le « Réarmement moral » (*Moral Re-Armament*, ou MRA), mouvement religieux qui avait surtout pris de l'ampleur à la veille de la Seconde Guerre mondiale. Comme beaucoup de Britanniques et d'Occidentaux de l'époque, du Maurier avait été séduite par l'idée simple et optimiste qu'il était possible de changer le monde en maîtrisant ses propres instincts et en cultivant à la place les « quatre absolus » prônés par ce mouvement : l'honnêteté, la pureté, la générosité et l'amour. En reconnaissance du courage et de l'idéal noble ainsi donnés, du Maurier se mua en une sorte de porte-drapeau du MRA. Cela l'amena à devenir une figure plus publique qu'auparavant et à s'essayer à des genres littéraires qu'elle n'avait pas encore explorés. Cependant, il apparut vite qu'elle n'était guère faite pour cette tâche et que l'épanouissement personnel ainsi permis était largement compensé par une forme de déni de soi et une inadéquation psychologique totale qui rendaient impossible la poursuite de son engagement actif dans cette cause.

**Mots-clés :** Daphne du Maurier, réarmement moral, MRA, récits inspirants, conflit interne, accomplissement personnel, déni de soi

Despite the fact that *Come Wind, Come Weather* sold roughly one million copies in English-speaking countries in under two years, Daphne du Maurier's 1940 booklet of morale-boosting tales is little known and less studied. True, no translation into French—and probably into any language whatsoever—ever appeared, and readers might find it odd today to discover those forgotten stories with a decided Second World War flair from the pen of an author whom they believe they know quite well. But those tales and the story behind their writing are both historically and psychologically arresting, revealing as they do not only the complexity of the human psyche, but also the role that religion and literature can play when cataclysmic and uncontrollable events, like a worldwide conflict, submerge individuals and offer them no hint of resolution. Indeed, a complex relationship existed for a few years between du Maurier and the religious movement called Moral Re-Armament (MRA for short), for which she not only produced the 1940 booklet under study here, but also agreed to participate in a few radio broadcasts.

To understand such an unlikely relationship, we will start by setting the historical context of the late 1930s which brought about the writing of those tales, and by describing the biographical circumstances which led the famed author of novels like *The Loving Spirit* (1931) or *Jamaica Inn* (1936) to uncharacteristically take a moral stand that resonated throughout the Commonwealth. As will then be shown, those tales met with such phenomenal success that du Maurier grew uneasy about the whole venture and endeavoured to distance herself from a movement in which she could never bring herself to totally believe. Finally, the writing of *Come Wind, Come Weather* will be presented as an intriguing psychological case study: du Maurier's double-edged cooperation with MRA will be analysed in terms of both self-fulfilment and self-denial, seeing that although those tales allowed her to try her hand at a new public role and at new (for her) literary genres, she also found herself unable to fit into a mould that was not made for her. In other words, it will be argued that MRA appealed to du Maurier for a time because it claimed to hold the key to solving both personal and political conflicts, but that she soon saw the tenets of such a system of thought as actually inimical to her deep nature.

## A Conflict in the Offing

In 1938, European powers were tottering on the brink of a disastrous conflict with Germany—and they knew it. After Austria was annexed and made into a mere province of the new Greater Germany, the rest of Europe held its breath when Hitler claimed the Sudetenland, wondering whether occupation of those parts of Czechoslovakia would satisfy the Führer's appetite or only serve to whet it some more.

As we now know, the Munich Agreement signed on 30 September 1938 was only a fool's bargain. Before another year was out, Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain would live to regret delivering his "Peace for Our Time" speeches, first at Heston Aerodrome, then outside 10 Downing Street, when he read out to the assembled crowds the agreement signed by Hitler and himself, an agreement that was supposedly "symbolic of the desire of our two peoples never to go to war with one another again." Fatigued and relieved at the same time, Chamberlain had parted from his listeners, telling them that they could "[g]o home and have a nice quiet sleep<sup>1</sup>".

As numerous Britons sensed even then, however, war *was* in the offing, no matter what appeasers might say, so that the sleep of many of them must have taken on a much more restless quality than Chamberlain imagined. At best, the four-power conference was greeted by many as a lull or respite, the short duration of which should be filled with attempts at avoiding the looming catastrophe—or with preparations for it.

One such endeavour took a surprising form, one in which Daphne du Maurier, the writer of an already substantial number of popular novels, short stories and biographies, played a part. Indeed, across Britain at first, then across other European nations, the United States and the rest of the world, people from all walks of life and with varying degrees of faith started adhering to the tenets of a religious movement that had been around since 1921, but of which most of them had never heard before. The movement in question, called MRA, for "Moral Re-Armament," was the brainchild of Frank Buchman, an American Lutheran reverend who, after a personal crisis, had a conversion experience while listening to a female evangelist in a little chapel in Keswick, England, in 1908<sup>2</sup>, and who then settled in Oxford, where he founded a fellowship which first came to be known as the Oxford Group.

Buchman had what can certainly be called a stroke of genius on 29 May 1938 when he delivered a speech at East Ham Town Hall, a place dubbed "the cradle of the British Labour Movement" in one MRA publication<sup>3</sup>. Indeed, he chose to abandon the name *Oxford Group*—which raised questions about the link between the movement and the famous city or its university, and possibly created confusion with the 19<sup>th</sup>-century High Church *Oxford Movement*—and boldly selected the catchy moniker "Moral Re-Armament" at a time when the frightening thought of the military rearmament currently in progress in Germany lurked at the back of everyone's mind. Buchman's message was simple: Europeans were on the brink of conflict and physical chaos because they had neglected the core spiritual values of Christianity which they had learnt "at [their] mother's knee." The remedy lay in a return to a life of absolute "honesty, purity, unselfishness and love"<sup>4</sup> under God—God being in his view the only source of power that could bring about such a drastic change. As Buchman further asserted in that speech:

How can we precipitate this moral recovery throughout the nations? We need a power strong enough to change human nature and build bridges between man and man, faction and faction. This starts when everyone admits his own faults instead of spot-lighting the other fellow's.

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<sup>1</sup> These two Neville Chamberlain quotes may be found here for instance: <<https://www.britannia.com/history/docs/peacetime.html>>. Accessed on 5 February 2019.

<sup>2</sup> This decisive episode in Buchman's life is described by Garth Lean in his biography of the religious leader. See LEAN, Garth, *Frank Buchman: A Life*, London, Collins, 1985, p. 30.

<sup>3</sup> BUCHMAN, Frank, *Remaking the World: The Speeches of Frank N.D. Buchman*, London, Blandford Press, 1958, p. 45.

<sup>4</sup> *Idem*, p. 46 and 45 respectively. Those are the four "absolutes" which form the basis of MRA's doctrine.

God alone can change human nature. [...] That power active in a minority can be the solvent of a whole country's problems. Leaders changed, a nation's thinking changed, a world at peace with itself<sup>5</sup>.

The principles set out in this speech, however simplistic they might seem in their implication that world peace would stem directly from a new, clear-eyed habit of individual introspection, caught like wildfire because they perfectly encapsulated the *zeitgeist* of a frightened nation, eager to look into itself for causes that could explain Europe's quandary. War between European powers, they argued, could only be avoided or abated by means of *inner* conflicts in which each and every individual should strive to vanquish their own base human instincts, most notably their deep-rooted selfishness. The notion that the Treaty of Versailles had imposed terms on Germany that no country could have borne under any circumstances explained part of the unease felt by the victors of WWI and their offspring. As Frank McDonough summarizes in his book on the British road to war, "[e]very German greeted Versailles with a mixture of disbelief, horror and disgust," while British appeasers "came to believe Versailles had punished Germany too harshly and required revision"<sup>6</sup>, so much so that British foreign policy was forced to take into account various legitimate grievances expressed by the Germans.

Soon, the press ran letters and releases in which British and European organizations, elected officials, political figures and influential citizens claimed their attachment to any or all of the four "absolutes" or "standards" set out by MRA. Others wrote to say that they agreed with letters to the editor previously published in their newspaper of choice. In doing so, they often placed particular stress on one or two absolutes, to the detriment of the others, and the names they gave to those standards often varied, clearly showing that they appropriated MRA's general message without necessarily being familiar with its finer rhetoric or propaganda.

## Daphne du Maurier and Moral Re-Armament

In a booklet entitled *Moral Rearmament: The Battle for Peace*, H.W. ["Bunny"] Austin, the former tennis champion, collated about fifty excerpts from newspapers and speeches favourable to MRA, published between September and December 1938. Their signatories included English peers, famous sportsmen, trade unionists, city administrators, local government officials, and magistrates, not to mention a former Prime Minister (Stanley Baldwin), a former President of the United States (Herbert Hoover) and a couple of crowned heads (Queen Wilhelmina of the Netherlands and King Leopold of Belgium).

Another famous signatory to be found in that booklet was Daphne du Maurier, whose bestselling novel *Rebecca* was still creating an international sensation<sup>7</sup>. The declaration reprinted in Austin's book was excerpted from the *Sunday Times* of 20 November 1938. In it du Maurier—together with Austin and two others—publicized her support for MRA on the following grounds:

There is no class or nation to which it cannot appeal. It calls forth the highest in us. It demands that we cast our fear, hate, pride, and self-seeking, which divide man from man, and form the root causes of war. It demands that we first admit our own faults before trying to remedy the faults of others<sup>8</sup>.

As Margaret Forster explains in her biography, Austin was not only an old friend of both Daphne and her father Gerald, but also a frequent Sunday visitor as he lived a mere stone's throw from their Hampstead residence<sup>9</sup>. When Austin became enthusiastic about MRA—to the point of deciding to devote his (to him) empty life to the movement by joining forces with Buchman in America once the war broke out—he shared his thoughts with du Maurier, whose faith had never been "deep" or "simple"<sup>10</sup>. One might also remember that, nine years before, du Maurier had published "And Now to God the Father," a short story written in the ironical vein of both Maupassant and Maugham, about a

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<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> MCDONOUGH, Frank, *Neville Chamberlain, Appeasement and the British Road to War*, Manchester, Manchester UP, 1998, p. 14-15.

<sup>7</sup> As biographer Jane Dunn informs us, Daphne's sister Angela was told by one of Neville Chamberlain's daughters that, on his way to Munich to meet Hitler, her father "had packed a copy of *Rebecca* in his luggage, to take his mind off the momentous business he had to conduct". See Jane DUNN, *Daphne du Maurier and Her Sisters: The Hidden Lives of Piffy, Bird and Bing*, London, HarperCollins, 2013, p. 230.

<sup>8</sup> AUSTIN, H.W. [Bunny], *Moral Rearmament: The Battle for Peace*, London, Heinemann, 1938, p. 28.

<sup>9</sup> FORSTER, Margaret, *Daphne du Maurier*, London, Arrow Books, 2007, p. 94.

<sup>10</sup> *Idem*, p 142.

hypocritical and worldly vicar, more intent on hobnobbing with the ruling class than on helping the destitute. Later, in 1946, a translation into French of that story would even appear in *Action, Hebdomadaire de l'Indépendance française*<sup>11</sup>, a short-lived newspaper with Communist leanings and a satirical sketch on its front page.

Against all odds, Austin's reflections found an echo in her –though her ambivalent attitude to religion meant that she could never be a model devotee. One tends to see proof of this in the fact that, in Austin's booklet just as in one of her previous publications (a letter to the editor of *The Times* on the subject of Armistice Day, 1938), du Maurier never refers to "God" and is content to vaguely mention the need for "faith, and hope, and charity." In the *Times* letter, she had likewise argued that Armistice Day should be used to further "the cause of international good will" and "the better understanding of the peoples of this country with the peoples of other nations"<sup>12</sup>—noble causes all, naturally, but rather humanist in scope and couched in lay terms. In spite of this she agreed to do whatever she could to help the movement, mostly because she had privately grown convinced that she must come to terms with the selfishness which, she felt, lay at the centre of her personality. MRA, one of whose four absolutes was *unselfishness*, thus offered a chance to work on a personal defect which privately depressed her and made her feel guilty.

## Eleven Inspirational Tales for the Movement

Consequently, it is something of a shock to see that, from February 1940<sup>13</sup>, a series of inspirational tales with a moral outlook and a structured system of thought started to come out in an extremely impressive array of newspapers, mostly regional. Among those were *The Lincolnshire Echo*, *The Liverpool Evening Express*, *The Hull Daily Mail*, *The Fife Free Press*, *The Londonderry Sentinel*, *The Lancashire Daily Post*, *The Newcastle Evening Chronicle*, to quote just a few. In these short, simple narratives, supposedly based on true stories lifted from various newspapers, then handed out to her by Garth Lean (a friend of Bunny Austin's), du Maurier described the radical changes for the better which MRA standards, once applied, brought about in the lives of various people, including an East London Councillor ("Spitfire Megan"), a small trader ("Over the Ration Books"), a Finnish feminist ("A Nation's Strength") and a Harley Street doctor ("Physician, Heal Thyself").

Whether these tales rely on "true" facts, and whether the press cuttings on which du Maurier based her work were dependable, remains to be seen. Besides, as Melanie Jane Heeley argues:

Truth in MRA terms means its conviction of its own success in helping to bring about recognisable change in people and hence events. Correspondingly, its particular version of the truth means that its intervention in such situations is *always* successful; the movement never admits to failure or even to partial success<sup>14</sup>.

Be that as it may, the eleven<sup>15</sup> tales in question are both realistic and religious in tone, mixing as they do "true" morale-boosting stories with the notion that sincere believers are not only supported by their faith in times of crisis, but also physically protected from the destructive force of war. For instance, a woman fobbed with two difficult evacuee boys manages to instil in them a sense of respect for themselves and each other by telling them: "In this house I don't tell you what to do, nor my husband either. God tells you what to do. That better feeling you'll get in a minute is God<sup>16</sup>". Or also,

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<sup>11</sup> Published in four instalments in that weekly paper (numbers 102 to 105, 16 August to 6 November 1946), under the title "Considérez les lis des champs."

<sup>12</sup> du MAURIER, Daphne, "Armistice Day, 1938" [Letter to the Editor], *The Times*, 26 October 1938, p. 15.

<sup>13</sup> FORSTER's unsurpassed biography of du Maurier asserts that "[t]he first of these stories had appeared in March 1940 in the *Edinburgh Evening News*" (*op. cit.*, p. 149). Nevertheless, the *Newcastle Evening Chronicle* had already published the same story, entitled "The Admiralty Regrets...", on p. 10 of its 23 February 1940 issue.

<sup>14</sup> HEELEY, Melanie Jane, *Resurrection, Renaissance, Rebirth: Religion, Psychology and Politics in the Life and Works of Daphne du Maurier*, Doctoral thesis, Loughborough University, September 2007, <<https://dspace.lboro.ac.uk/2134/4434>>, accessed on 15 September 2018, 71. Heeley links this up with Plato's concept of the Noble Lie, expounded in *The Republic* (see HEELEY, *op. cit.*, p. 66).

<sup>15</sup> Only ten stories were included in the first edition of August 1940: "The Admiralty Regrets...", "George and Jimmy," "Over the Ration Books," "A Nation's Strength," "A Miner's Tale," "Physician, Heal Thyself," "Spitfire Megan," "The Revolutionary," "London, 1940?" and "Mrs. Hill and the Soldiers." As we will see, an eleventh story ("In A London Air-Raid Shelter") was added when a "New and Revised" edition was printed in November of the same year. My references below will be to the revised edition.

<sup>16</sup> DU MAURIER, Daphne, *Come Wind, Come Weather*, New and Revised ed., London, Heinemann, [November] 1940, p. 10.

a physician who feels that his life is a mess because he has always cured bodies but never taken care of his patients' (or his own) soul, finds it in him to turn his life around and to help others do likewise. To one patient he claims: "'I can cure the body, but I can't cure the spirit [...]. You and Almighty God have to do that between you. If you put right what you can put right, God will put right what you can't put right'"<sup>17</sup>.

What happened between the autumn of 1938 and February 1940 is that, under Austin's guidance, du Maurier gradually warmed to the message of MRA. Unlike Austin, she may never have believed that "Buchman's ideas represented the best chance of stopping the outbreak of war"<sup>18</sup> but she did attend a week-long MRA conference in Eastbourne (East Sussex) in January 1939. That inspired her to officially lend her services to the cause—an offer that was quite rapidly taken up, seeing that du Maurier soon campaigned for MRA on the radio when she spoke to the American Literary Societies, which had awarded her a prize for *Rebecca*<sup>19</sup>.

On 10 March 1941, during the Blitz, du Maurier made another broadcast to America and Canada, this time from a London shelter, while a German raid was in full swing. The script of that other broadcast has been preserved, and demonstrates how familiar she had by then become with the rhetoric of MRA's propaganda. In it she starts out declaring that, due to present circumstances, the past is over and done with, "closed forever"<sup>20</sup>, adding that the false value formerly placed on material possessions has been replaced by "the desire to help, to share, to bear one another's burdens"<sup>21</sup>. Then comes the mainstay of her demonstration, the idea that war, especially for those on the home front, is becoming "a personal challenge to all of us". In other words, war is not only about "break[ing] the power of two dictators" in Europe, but also about "conquer[ing] the dictator in ourselves". In a remarkable statement, she boldly asserts:

How many of us in our homes, our offices, our farms, our factories, behave like dictators? How many of us are self-absorbed, self-seeking, egotistical, jealous, grasping, even in our small fashion, cruel to our fellow creatures? And isn't it possible that even when the dictators today are overcome others will rise in their place, until men and women everywhere in every land fight their own personal battle and conquer the dictator in themselves<sup>22</sup>?

Her ambitious conclusion, both utopian and problematic, is that a new world must be created, one with no room for "slipshod standards," "class struggles," "racial and personal jealousies" or even "political differences." Like any Grouper, as MRA members were sometimes called, she claims that only divine power can make this task possible: "we can listen to God daily, receive and obey His orders. This is the secret which these fighters for moral re-armament have taught us"<sup>23</sup>. But more than du Maurier's total conversion to MRA principles, this broadcast proves how eager she had become to rise to the challenge of both the war and the high moral ground which that world-wide conflict seemed to call for. Ever the chameleon<sup>24</sup> which even her children deemed her to be, she therefore publicly embraced a cause about which she had serious reservations, and for which she secretly felt unfit.

## The Conflicts Within

By March 1941, du Maurier had thus become a sort of standard-bearer of the movement. Indeed, the stories previously released<sup>25</sup> in the press between February and August 1940 had already been put together and sold as a six-pence booklet, named *Come Wind, Come Weather*, in reference to the famous hymn at the end of the second part of John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* (1684). Published in August 1940, all 340,000 copies had sold out by October, so much so that another edition, featuring an eleventh story ("In an Air-Raid Shelter") and a much longer "Epilogue," came out in November

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<sup>17</sup> DU MAURIER, Daphne, *Idem*, p. 39.

<sup>18</sup> MARGARET FORSTER, *Daphne du Maurier*, *op. cit.*, p. 142.

<sup>19</sup> *Idem*, p. 147.

<sup>20</sup> DU MAURIER, Daphne, *Britain Behind the Headlines: A Trans-Atlantic Broadcast over the National Network of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation*, "Canada Calls from London" series, n.p., 1941, p. 3.

<sup>21</sup> *Idem*, p. 4.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>24</sup> FORSTER, Margaret, *Daphne du Maurier*, *op. cit.*, p. 417.

<sup>25</sup> I have not yet been able to trace the publication of two of these stories, namely "A Miner's Tale" and "The Revolutionary," in any 1940 newspaper.

with a print run of 250,000<sup>26</sup>. American, Canadian, and Australian editions (and a few others) followed in quick succession the next year. Presenting her booklet as a must-have morale-booster, an ad run in a Canadian newspaper even quoted a *Sunday Express* review of du Maurier's book, couched in the following glowing terms: "DAPHNE DU MAURIER will help win the war. [...] Her book is one of the most constructive pieces of writing since the war began<sup>27</sup>".

As Forster shows, the trouble was that the writer herself was of two minds about the whole cause and that, however hard she tried, she could not make MRA teachings work for her. She must be "a rotten receiving set<sup>28</sup>". she flatly (and somewhat disrespectfully) confessed to Garth Lean. No vital message from God ever came her way during the quiet time she devoted to listening to the still, small voice within her, as MRA instructed its followers to do. "All I get is a 'wait and see' signal, and it will arrange itself<sup>29</sup>", du Maurier further explained. Likewise, the notebook in which she jotted down her private thoughts seemed to her to contain nothing but "practical things<sup>30</sup>", a noble effort for someone as impractical as she was, but still a far cry from the earth-shattering revelations for which she hoped. In other words, even as her little book of tales was selling hundreds of thousands of copies, helping the population face up to the fear of Nazi invasion and the horrors of aerial bombing, du Maurier herself experienced powerful inner conflicts. MRA's method, aimed at combating human selfishness and opening oneself up to divine influences, was failing in her case. There were moments, Forster informs us, when she felt like a fraud and blushed at her "ghastly cheek to suggest anything to anybody<sup>31</sup>".

Accordingly, letters indicate that du Maurier tried to pull out of MRA precisely when readers must have regarded her as a kind of model, not to say as a spiritual guide. Forster mentions that, already in 1941, Garth Lean failed in his attempt to convince her to write more of those inspirational tales. Du Maurier had no wish to become some sort of Winston Churchill, she wrote. Moreover, from a literary point of view, she felt that "[n]ovelists who try to do moral uplift always go astray, it's not their forte<sup>32</sup>" –a rather incongruous thought, one may add, since this was exactly what she had set out to do. All the same, staunchly faithful to her friends, du Maurier never severed for good the ties that bound her to her MRA acquaintances. She even seems to have obliged them when necessary.

A case in point is a book review which she published in 1945<sup>33</sup>, about her friend Peter Howard's new opus, *Ideas Have Legs*, in which Howard expounded yet again the usual MRA tenets (by stressing the need to listen to God, to accept His control, to give more than to get, to stand together as a community, or to practice the Four Standards), and called for "new men<sup>34</sup>" with a new spirit. Indeed, in this review, if du Maurier stresses right from the outset that Howard's essay on the New World about to dawn after the war made her uncomfortable and irritable—because her conservative instinct "is always to reply, 'Was the old one so very bad?'"—she concedes that it is not a preachy kind of book, and that the solution it puts forward may well be the best currently on offer. Yet, in a final statement which shows how impervious she meant to remain to Howard's rhetoric, she jokes, "But I have not decided yet what I propose to do about the New World myself!" In other words, this strange review reads like a balancing act, one in which du Maurier obliges old friends, and wishes them well, while claiming for herself the right to have grown detached from the cause that they go on defending.

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<sup>26</sup> For those two figures, see FORSTER, Margaret, *Daphne du Maurier, op. cit.*, p. 151. The second Indian edition of *Come Wind, Come Weather* (February 1941) lowers the print run of the second British edition to 170,000. However, by adding all British, American, Canadian and Indian copies printed until then, this Indian edition quotes a grand total of 743,000 copies published in those four countries. In all, it is likely that around one million copies of this booklet were sold worldwide.

<sup>27</sup> For this blurb, see *The Daily Colonist* [Victoria, British Columbia], 1 March 1941, p. 18.

<sup>28</sup> FORSTER, Margaret, *Daphne du Maurier, op. cit.*, p. 150.

<sup>29</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 159.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 151.

<sup>32</sup> *Idem.*, p. 163. The Winston Churchill reference appears on the same page.

<sup>33</sup> DU MAURIER, Daphne, "Ideas Have Legs, Reviewed by Daphne du Maurier," *The Warminster and Westbury Journal, and Wilts County Adviser*, 16 March 1945, p. 7.

<sup>34</sup> HOWARD, Peter, *Ideas Have Legs*, London, Frederick Muller, 1945, p. 165.

## Venturing into new literary genres

Working from newspaper clippings given to her by Garth Lean, du Maurier first selected ten stories, the barebones of which she had agreed to flesh out into a narrative with an inspiring message and a morale-boosting impact—a rather daunting task, in fact, as the newspaper articles must have revealed so little about their protagonists or their backgrounds. Even if the press sometimes argued the contrary<sup>35</sup>, the characters in those stories were totally unknown to her. Besides, though she professed in the epilogue that "their lives are not spectacular, and they are not heroes and heroines, but ordinary work-a-day people like you and me"<sup>36</sup>, du Maurier's sheltered and privileged milieu was nothing like that of the people she portrayed. As a consequence, she endeavoured to tell those stories in as straightforward a manner as possible, knowing perfectly well, as noted before, that literature and propaganda seldom make happy bedfellows. Besides, she asked for all royalties from her booklet to go to the Soldiers', Sailors' and Airmen's Families Association (which they did), and for "Author of *Rebecca*" not to appear below the title of that totally different kind of publication of hers (here, her request was turned down by Heinemann who, as her editor, must have had no qualms about cashing in on his writer's fame). Thus, the resulting stories are only "competently written" and du Maurier may indeed have been "unable to work any magic"<sup>37</sup>, as Forster tersely puts it, but one must remember that she had not set out to write her usual kind of stories. Moreover, as will be argued below, if the tales are plain (not "magic") in terms of their literary merit, du Maurier does expound MRA's propagandist message with an impressively lofty tone and a metaphorical style which carries conviction.

Interestingly, though du Maurier's trajectory towards MRA and the war effort was of such a personal nature and so full of chance encounters, it nonetheless bears a strong resemblance to that of many other British women of letters of that period. Indeed, like the professional writers in Fred M. Leventhal's study—Vera Brittain, Phyllis Bottome, Mollie Panter-Downes, to name but a few—who played a role in keeping up or creating a feeling of Anglophilia in the United States before Pearl Harbor, thus helping to pave the way for that country's involvement in the war, du Maurier found herself tackling literary genres that were not in her usual line<sup>38</sup>. While the aforesaid writers contributed accounts of ambulance depots, air-raid protection posts, Women's Voluntary Service canteens and munitions factories<sup>39</sup>, du Maurier ventured into the realm of pseudo-journalism. A case in point is "Over the Ration Books," a story which focuses on the changes which MRA principles supposedly made in the lives not only of Tom, a grocer from Poplar, in London's East End, but also his wife, and the barber across the street, and Tom's friend, Harry, a grocer also in nearby Stepney. Not the church-going type, Tom is a rationalist who leads his own battle against selfishness simply because it is "darn common sense" and because "the funny thing about this love-your-neighbour business is—believe me or not—that the darn thing WORKS"<sup>40</sup>. Accordingly, he has become less intent on competing with other grocers and regularly listens to the inner voice which advises him against placing his profit margin before his customers' interests, convinced as he is now that "we'll never get the Nasties right unless we get ourselves right first"<sup>41</sup>. As if du Maurier herself had interviewed him in his store and were transcribing their conversation as faithfully as possible, the narrative is interspersed with breaks during which the grocer helps a number of customers, be it a child requiring oranges or an old lady in

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<sup>35</sup> For instance, the Canadian *Glengary News* of Alexandria (Ontario) asserted that du Maurier's book was "[w]ritten from her experiences with these people." (28 February 1941, p. 3)

<sup>36</sup> DU MAURIER, Daphne, *op. cit.*, 79. Her introduction also states: "In the following stories I have tried to show how ordinary men and women, like you and me, have faced up to the challenge of war and change, and how they have overcome their troubles. There is nothing heroic about them, they are in no wise different from or better than ourselves." (*ibid.*, x)

<sup>37</sup> FORSTER, Margaret, *Daphne du Maurier, op. cit.*, p. 150.

<sup>38</sup> "All of these women were professional writers for whom such reportage marked a distinct change of literary genre." See LEVENTHAL, Fred M., "British Writers, American Readers: Women's Voices in Wartime," in *Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies*, n°32/1, Spring 2000, p. 3.

<sup>39</sup> *Idem*, 14-15.

<sup>40</sup> DU MAURIER, Daphne, *op. cit.*, p. 20. As Allan EISTER remarks in *Drawing Room Conversation* (1950): "It works!" was one of the phrases most frequently heard in the testimonials and endorsements of the Group program and practices." (qtd. in HEELEY, *Resurrection, Renaissance, Rebirth, op. cit.*, p. 71)

<sup>41</sup> *Idem*, p. 19.

need of sardines. When Tom's wife calls out that dinner is ready, the "interview" comes to an abrupt end<sup>42</sup>.

Religious essays are another genre with which the writing of *Come Wind, Come Weather* brought du Maurier into contact, and the least one can say is that her chameleon-like nature comes through quite strongly in the two essays—namely the introduction she penned for the August edition, and the amplified Epilogue published in November. Indeed, though rather known for the fluctuating and idiosyncratic quality of her own religious beliefs, du Maurier's tone throughout these pages impresses the reader with its unwavering argumentation and its ever-increasing fervour.

In the introduction, to make her (or MRA's) point that materialism has grown rampant in modern society, she contrasts the selfishness at work, she feels, in the Britain of 1940 with the "certain selfless gallantry" which, she asserts, governed the lives of famous Elizabethan, Jacobean, and Puritan figures of the past—like Sir Francis Drake, the Pilgrim Fathers and Oliver Cromwell—when it came to trusting God's plan for their country. Whatever defects may have afflicted them personally, those Renaissance and 17<sup>th</sup>-century men must be admired because they never forgot "the old fundamental values"<sup>43</sup> which ranked *giving* much higher than *getting*. In that light, she goes on, the protagonists of her tales have known how to rise to the challenge of the day and how to rekindle the flame of bravery, however unheroic their inner battles against self-centredness may look from the outside.

Conversely, what is remarkable about the rhetoric used by du Maurier in her Epilogue is that, from the outset, she leaves behind those lay figures of the past to concentrate directly on the most efficient Christian influence of all: Christ himself. Basing her demonstration on the famous saying according to which "A house divided against itself cannot stand"<sup>44</sup>, du Maurier launches into a strikingly well-crafted sermon of sorts in which her previous rant against selfishness is backgrounded while the need for national unity and for spiritual unity with God takes centre stage. To do so, the Epilogue repetitively resorts to aggressive metaphors of conflict, whereas her introduction had underlined the need for people on the home front to be content with small, unformidable deeds of gallantry. The phrase "We cannot all be soldiers" used in the introduction thus metamorphoses into much more combative paragraphs in the Epilogue:

We can be warriors too, knowing that the drill is hard, the training difficult, and the pack upon our shoulders heavy at times, but if we have faith in our commander and unhesitating trust in his decisions we shall prove valiant fighters on the field of battle.

The raw recruit may grumble that his mornings are spent, not in fighting foes, but in cleaning his equipment. When he is fully trained, and faces enemy fire, he realises that "spit and polish," so often mocked at by himself and his companions, have proved the foundation of his training, and that by living up to the high standards of his regiment, he has fitted himself for battle<sup>45</sup>.

One may then surmise that MRA leaders must have been more than satisfied with such a well-constructed booklet, signed by one of the most popular authors of the day. Indeed, the introduction draws the reader into what looks like a self-help guide for men and women eager to do their bit for the war by mobilizing their better instincts, while the stories underline how easy changing oneself can be when one sets one's mind to it. If the concluding essay comes as a shock, it is because it unfurls MRA's doctrine in full garb rather than dressing it in the demure cloak of stories with merely a ring of truth to them. It is a flat-out call to arms meant to rouse readers to immediate action, a powerful call that leaves one wondering how a writer like du Maurier could ever pen such unflinching propaganda while in the throes of intense inner conflict.

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<sup>42</sup> DU MAURIER actually got to meet the man behind the story *after* the booklet was published. It appears that "Tom" was actually one Tom Osborne, a grocer indeed, whose store and home were later bombed during the Blitz. Alongside du Maurier, Osborne took part in the 10 March 1941 broadcast mentioned above. This seems to have been the only instance in which du Maurier actually met a person whose story she had recounted for MRA purposes. See for instance "Broadcast from Shelter," *The Daily Mail*, 10 March 1941, 2.

<sup>43</sup> DU MAURIER, Daphne, *op. cit.*, viii for both these quotes.

<sup>44</sup> This proverb derives from Matthew 12:25: "And Jesus knew their thoughts, and said unto them, Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand."

<sup>45</sup> DU MAURIER, Daphne, *op. cit.*, p. ix ("We cannot all be soldiers.") and p. 82 for the longer quote.



## War and Gendered Differences

The similarities between the wartime work produced by du Maurier and the other female writers mentioned in Leventhal's study go well beyond this foray into new (for her) literary genres. Just like them, when she decided to act as public speaker and address the population not as a novelist but as a British citizen, du Maurier needed to negotiate her new position between the gendered roles permitted by society, the current changes brought on by the war, her own desires and limitations, and the MRA message which she officially conveyed.

Since du Maurier was eager, as indicated before, to be part of the war effort in some literary form or other, her name can be added to Leventhal's list of "[t]hese authors, familiar names in the United States and comfortable in the role of culture brokers, [who] perceived their literary contributions as a patriotic duty." Seeing their new public role as a measure of their character, those women even experienced "a sense of living with an intensity that transcended normal experience"<sup>46</sup>, just as male writers of the First World War had come to view and valorise trench warfare as a test of manhood. For example, Leventhal quotes a sentence from Vera Brittain's autobiography, in which she exclaims that she "wouldn't for anything have missed the past two months" of living dangerously. Such an elated feeling is indeed part of du Maurier's rhetoric and allows her to conclude her Epilogue on a convenient—but much-needed—note of optimism when she exhorts her readers to believe that "the world we live in is no prison house but a place of supreme adventure for free men and free women," or that the children born in 1940 shall be "the first explorers in a new and changing world"<sup>47</sup>.

Nonetheless, the exploration of that changing world was not devoid of gendered bias, and while political events were supposedly the natural realm of male writers, women's sphere was seen to comprise endeavours of a more personal or testimonial nature. What female writers were expected to contribute included letters, journals, novels, autobiographies or memoirs, so that the new public roles that they tried to play were limited in scope to the description of private thoughts and impressions. In a way, as we have seen, *Come Wind, Come Weather* was indeed the result of a personal reassessment, and the logical outcome of an introspective quest born of self-doubt and guilt. In that sense, the heavy accent placed by du Maurier (and MRA) on the fight against egocentrism does create an obsession with the self that is in line with the limits imposed on women's wartime work. But the issues addressed in some of the tales—like the problematic national unity of Finland in "A Nation's Strength" or the hatred of the capitalist class in "The Revolutionary"—ensure that du Maurier occasionally oversteps such boundaries, if only to show that the world must mend its ways. As Heeley observes, "The coming of the Second World War finally shifted du Maurier's emotional conservatism into practical religious-cum-political action"<sup>48</sup>. For example, in the last-mentioned story, the protagonist has been unemployed for years, and following the death of his son from pneumonia and lack of food, he takes to committing violent acts with a view to overthrowing an unfair and indifferent society:

The years passed, and John Rogers stood on the platform side by side with the leading revolutionaries of the day. It was John who painted barrack walls with slogans, urging soldiers to mutiny. It was John who led street fights, who smashed windows, who threw bricks at political speakers, who strewed broken glass in roadways so that horses should fall, so that traffic should pile up, so that men and women would be wounded, would be killed.

And still employers remained employers, workers remained workers, and the revolution had not come<sup>49</sup>.

True, what the story officially aims to show is that such horrendous crimes are totally inefficient as far as effecting change is concerned, that revolutionising one's self and one's home is really the first step towards solving the world's conflicts. Nevertheless, the somewhat graphic details given by du Maurier, added to the unfairness of the years of poverty which strike the formerly deserving protagonist, prove that even through simple tales like these, a woman writer could hint at fundamentally disruptive socio-political issues which, she felt, should not be overlooked. It may therefore not be coincidental that "The Revolutionary" never made it to print in the regional press and

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<sup>46</sup> LEVENTHAL, Fred M., *op. cit.*, p. 4 for these two quotations and the test of manhood argument. The Vera Brittain quote below from *England's Hour: An Autobiography, 1939-1941* can be found on p. 14 of the same article.

<sup>47</sup> DU MAURIER, Daphne, *op. cit.*, 83 and 84 respectively.

<sup>48</sup> HEELEY, Melanie Jane, *Resurrection, Renaissance, Rebirth...*, *op. cit.*, p. 55.

<sup>49</sup> *Idem*, p. 47.

was equally excluded from the 1941 edition published in the United States and Canada<sup>50</sup>. By nature, class warfare and social injustice are dangerously subversive issues for anyone to tackle, but they may have been seen as wholly unfit for females, especially if women's treatment of such themes laid stress on the causal chains which led to them, or if they called for a tightening of the social fabric after centuries of hierarchical thinking. Indeed, as Leventhal's research showed him, women's wartime writings differed from men's in that they stressed the necessity of a post-war coming-together:

Several of them acknowledge their obliviousness to the gravity of the pre-war crisis, but they all affirm a belief in post-war social reconciliation. Middleclass and, with notable exceptions, politically conservative, they are readier than male counterparts to embrace classlessness, an attitude calculated to appeal to American readers<sup>51</sup>.

Seeing that du Maurier wrote the tales without knowing that they would eventually be compiled into a booklet, let alone be published in North America, this taking into account of social injustices cannot be construed as "calculation" on her part, but rather as a sincere confession of past blindness and as adherence to MRA principles.

In one instance, such compliance with MRA principles was even so contrary to du Maurier's own personal needs and psychological makeup that one is left baffled and wondering. A conservative in certain respects, du Maurier did not look too kindly on feminism and women's rights, thinking that a talented woman would always know how to fend for herself in a man's world. The first lines of her unflattering portrait of Saimi, the feminist in "A Nation's Strength" who left "women dissatisfied with their homes and resentful against their husbands and children<sup>52</sup>", is therefore a reflection of both hers and MRA's views on the issue. But the description of the visceral defect at the root of Saimi's supposed psychological imbalance, expounded in the next two paragraphs, takes one completely unawares when one has read about du Maurier's own inner conflicts and sexual tensions in Forster's biography:

Saimi felt she had all her grandfather's love of his country, all his energy and devotion, but she had never got over the fact that she had been born a girl instead of a boy. She tried to rid herself of this resentment by making the rest of her sex resentful too, and she strode through life dominating and exhausting everyone she met, including her own family.

Then one day, like Paul of long ago, she travelled her own road to Damascus. In a blinding light of self-revelation she saw she was no Joan of Arc, but a stubborn egocentric, using her gifts to her own ends, demanding from everyone, giving nothing in return. Broken-hearted, she reached out to the unknown spiritual power she had always denied—and for the first time in her life was filled with peace and confidence<sup>53</sup>.

The shock caused in the reader by these lines stems from the fact that most of the traits in her protagonist's personality were also du Maurier's. Like Saimi, she regarded her (Anglo-French) grandfather George du Maurier as a landmark figure, and she had inherited from him the love of his country of birth—France. Like her also, she knew that she had often sacrificed her family life to a demanding pursuit—literature, in her case—which had egoistically isolated her from both her husband and her children. More importantly still, as her autobiography shows, du Maurier herself had spent her childhood wishing she had been born a boy: she invariably cast herself as a male character in the games that she played with her sisters and their friends, and for three years or so, she even created a male *alter ego* for herself: "one Eric Avon, captain of cricket in School House, Rugby," a school hero who "just shone at everything<sup>54</sup>". At the age of fifteen, she had felt that she must let go that male image of herself, but the parting from him had been nothing short of traumatic:

Eric Avon went downstairs and into the garden and stared out at the cricket lawn, scene of so many triumphs. Then he descended to the lower garden, out of sight of the house, and said goodbye to the many friends who had gathered there. [...] He wept. The moment of sadness was intolerable. Then someone from the house called, 'Daphne!' and it was all over. Eric Avon had left Rugby School for ever<sup>55</sup>.

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<sup>50</sup> I have not been able to trace any publication of "The Revolutionary" or of "A Miner's Tale" in the British press. "The Revolutionary" is the only one of the eleven tales in the British November 1940 edition to be left out of the American and Canadian booklets.

<sup>51</sup> LEVENTHAL, Fred M., "British Writers, American Readers...", art. cit. p. 4.

<sup>52</sup> DU MAURIER, Daphne, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

<sup>53</sup> *Idem*, p. 20-21.

<sup>54</sup> DU MAURIER, Daphne, *Myself When Young: The Shaping of a Writer*, London, Virago, 2007, p. 55.

<sup>55</sup> DU MAURIER, Daphne, *ibid.*, p. 56.

If we admit that du Maurier was sincere in her condemnation of Saimi, on the conservative grounds that Saimi's feminist cause amounted to a betrayal of her biological sex and a transgression of accepted gendered attitudes, we understand the ambivalent nature of her attraction to MRA. Like Saimi, du Maurier seems to have "reached out to the unknown spiritual power she had always denied," in hopes that the supposedly crooked aspects of her personality (her self-centred aloofness, her bisexuality, her marked male component) should be made straight. Yet on the other hand, she knew only too well that it would be totally wrong for her to vanquish that masculine Other inside her, because she quite consciously associated that part of herself with her own creative urge. Without her "Boy-in-the-box," as she called her male component, her creativity would inevitably run dry, she thought<sup>56</sup>. It is therefore this inner battle between two powers—creative and spiritual—which accounts for her guilt-ridden and doomed adherence to Moral Re-Armament. To use Heeley's words:

Perhaps this recognition of internal division, which she herself had struggled with, helps to explain du Maurier's interest in MRA, a movement that was in part founded on the rhetoric of personal division, and which professed to offer the only remedy<sup>57</sup>.

## A Question of Power

What MRA officials were truly after remains unclear. In 1964, Tom Driberg, a formidable opponent of the movement, wrote that MRA, like any serious political organization, must be eager for power, both spiritual and temporal in that case<sup>58</sup>. Though that statement applies to MRA in the post-WWII era, some of Buchman's older speeches do indicate a desire to substitute a new religious theocracy for the old political order. On 22 July 1939, for instance, Buchman had exhorted his listeners to adopt a conqueror's stance in their battle against the old order:

We must forge new weapons of warfare. We cannot live on the past. Our weapons of statesmanship seem like relics from the armoury of some illustrious ancestor, which in their day were useful, but now, out-moded, leave us defeated and defenceless. We must have superior forces of spiritual armour. We need for reconstruction the same characteristics that distinguish a great general—the plus of character, the plus that will change the world<sup>59</sup>.

Practically speaking, Driberg and other opponents asked, what kind of theocracy had Buchman in mind? Wouldn't MRA leaders find it acceptable to deal with a god-controlled Nazi autocrat, convinced as they were that Nazism was at least a sort of bulwark against Communism? And if such were the case, how eager was MRA to see Nazism vanquished? Even Buchman's sympathetic biographer, Garth Lean, showed how naïve Buchman's system of thought had retrospectively been in relation to Hitler. To the last, Lean asserts, Buchman remained convinced that "[a] God-controlled dictator could change the position in a country overnight," and assured his friends that, however disapproving of a dictator he might personally be, he "cannot deny the possibility of change in any man<sup>60</sup>".

As far as one can tell, the "ordinary" run of men and women, to whom du Maurier professes to belong in *Come Wind, Come Weather*, had no thought of establishing a form of theocracy in their country when they let themselves be convinced by MRA propaganda. It was not a thirst for political power that motivated them either, but rather a complex blend of hope and guilt—all the more so once the war was truly on, as they must have been submerged by the inevitable thought that while young fellow countrymen were dying atrocious deaths, *they* went on leading certainly anxious, but much quieter and safer, lives in the relative comfort of the home front.

Consequently, although little known, or seen as mere curios from a bygone era, the tales which du Maurier wrote during WWII are of true historical and psychological value. If their purely literary value is no match for the novellas that she would craft in the 1950s, or even for the short stories of

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<sup>56</sup> See FORSTER's biography for an elaboration on du Maurier's "Boy-in-the-box" theory (12-14, 221-23, 237-38, 276-77, 421-22). DU MAURIER also links "Eric Avon" and her creativity in her autobiography: "Whatever the reason, he remained in my unconscious, to emerge in later years—though in a quite different guise—as the narrator of the five novels I was to write, at long intervals, in the first person singular, masculine gender, *I'll Never Be Young Again, My Cousin Rachel, The Scapegoat, The Flight of the Falcon, The House on the Strand.*" (*Myself When Young, op. cit.*, p 57)

<sup>57</sup> HEELEY, Melanie Jane, *Resurrection, Renaissance, Rebirth...*, *op. cit.*, p. 65.

<sup>58</sup> DRIBERG, Tom, *The Mystery of Moral Re-Armament: A Study of Frank Buchman and his Movement*, London, Secker and Warburg, 1964, p. 298.

<sup>59</sup> BUCHMAN, Frank, *Remaking the World, op. cit.*, p. 100.

<sup>60</sup> LEAN, Garth, *Frank Buchman: A Life, op. cit.*, p. 240.

her apprentice years, one must remember that they were only meant to be simply retold newspaper stories, or unadorned inspirational tales, rather than fully fictionalized narratives. Besides, the moral message attached to them, aiming at demonstrating the miracles that a simple change of heart could work in any person's life, implied that the humour in another wartime story like Angela Thirkell's "A Nice Day in Town," for instance, or the gentle irony in du Maurier's own "Happy Christmas," were necessarily out of bounds this time<sup>61</sup>. Published in so many regional papers just as Britons were about to be terrorized by months of bombings during the Blitz, they sought to comfort civilians by giving them something to do or to believe in, and by idealistically positing that a war could only be won if one first underwent a radical change, becoming altruistically-minded in the process and renouncing the false gods previously worshipped. As du Maurier's foreword to the Canadian edition makes clear, drawing a direct parallel between the war in Europe and the battle which she called for in each of her contemporaries, "We can only win the first if we are victorious in the second"<sup>62</sup>.

As such, these stories are unique in that, like the religious movement which gave rise to them, they (both idealistically and ideologically) claimed to displace conflict from external theatres of operations to within individual consciences, and to create "the greatest force for good the world has ever known"<sup>63</sup> at the very moment when civilization as Britons knew it seemed about to collapse. In that sense, they were a form of psychological empowerment thanks to which individuals from all walks of life found the courage to deal with the chaos into which their political leaders had irredeemably plunged them. Apart from this much-needed courage, that such a scheme of God-controlled personal empowerment ever had an incontestable effect on the leaders and populations of any belligerent country remains to be seen.

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<sup>61</sup> In "Happy Christmas," the Lawrences begrudgingly agree to have a couple of Jewish refugees staying in the room over their garage. They claim to celebrate the Christmas spirit but are too prejudiced and narrow-minded to realise that Joseph and Mary also were refugees of sorts. In Thirkell's story, Mrs. Morland carps and complains about wartime privations but is forced to acknowledge that blessings of many kinds still surround her. (I wish to thank Anne Hall for bringing this writer to my attention.)

<sup>62</sup> DU MAURIER, Daphne, "A Word to Canada," *Come Wind, Come Weather*, London and Toronto: Heinemann, [February] 1941, p. vi.

<sup>63</sup> This quote can only be found in the American edition of the booklet. See Daphne DU MAURIER, "A Word to America," *Come Wind, Come Weather*, New York, Doubleday, Doran and Co., 1941, p. vi.

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