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SIMULTANEOUS IMMEDIACY IN TWO STORIES
BY DAPHNE DU MAURIER:
“THE BIRDS” AND “THE SPLIT SECOND”

This essay explores Daphne du Maurier as a writer of popular fiction by comparing her work in two popular-fiction genres, Gothic and time travel. It will be drawing from the 1953 short-story collection *Kiss Me Again, Stranger*, examining “The Birds” as a Gothic story and “The Split Second” as a time-travel story.¹ The time-travel and the Gothic genres are related, historically and developmentally, with clear lineages of textual influence. Both feature encounters with the “impossible” and typically a tone of fear and awe. The time-travel genre is normally categorized as a subgenre of science fiction, a genre that emerged from—and developed in relation to—the Gothic. A well-known example of this genre relationship is *Frankenstein* (1818), both a founding text of science fiction and a massively influential step in the development of Gothic fiction. Still, the time-travel and Gothic genres are not merely related through the origin and overlap of genres. These genres’ core mechanics are, upon close inspection, the same. Both create their particular genre energy and tension through the same two-part process:

1. The genres first establish two opposed time categories. I am defining a *time category* as a grouping of time, based on a particular historical period,

1. British readers might be more familiar with the earlier collection *The Apple Tree: A Short Novel and Several Long Stories* (1952). The 1953 US version *Kiss Me Again, Stranger* added two stories, “The Split Second” and “No Motive.” “The Split Second” was not published in the UK until the 1980 short-story collection *The Rendezvous and Other Stories*. For this collection, it was retitled “Split Second.”

but constructed from a web of ideas associated with that period. A time category is distinguished from other time categories through at least one point of opposition. (Consider, for example, the time categories from the 1985 film *Back to the Future*: a general idea of mid-1980s America set against a general idea of 1950s America.)

2. The genres then make those two opposed time categories *simultaneously immediate*. In other words, these genres construct a perspective through which opposed time categories are felt, simultaneously, as present, substantive, and active. (Consider, again, *Back to the Future*: the 1980s protagonist carries the “1980s” within himself and within his perspective, while he travels to and experiences a living “1950s” world; thus the two time categories are experienced in his perspective as simultaneously immediate.)

THE GOTHIC MECHANISM

The Gothic story is often defined by a list of its likely material and situations: discovered manuscripts, ghosts, claustrophobic situations, medieval power structures, and so on. Such an approach is useful and has its place, but I am more interested in studying a Gothic mechanism that these elements serve. I have found this mechanism to be the simultaneous immediacy of opposed time categories.² Furthermore, in a Gothic text the time categories are always the same two: the “modern” on one side, and “Gothic” (or “pre-modern”) on the other.

The Gothic, pre-modern time category is based on the medieval period, but as a time category it is a grouping of ideas associated with that historical period, not the period itself. In “The Sins of the Fathers: The Persistence of Gothic,” John Fletcher succinctly traces the early use of “Gothic” as a time category. Early in the eighteenth century, the Gothic began to be used as “a synonym for the modern” (115) in contrast with the “classical” time category of ancient Greece and Rome. In comparison to the classical, the Gothic category was deemed inferior—“Gothic” architecture, for instance, was relatively disproportioned, dark, and crude. However, a few decades later, influential definers of “modern,” like Alexander Pope, re-aligned the Gothic as the “ancient” category in opposition to the modern—as “a repudiated but newly fascinating past . . . now felt to possess majesty, strength, and

2. I began uncovering this mechanism through my study of Nathaniel Hawthorne’s writing, including his Gothic creation *The House of the Seven Gables* (1851), which is simultaneously Gothic storytelling and Gothic-genre analysis.

solemnity” (113), while retaining the earlier negative, yet now more potentially attractive, associations. Fletcher suggests that, through this foundational development, the Gothic time category came “to designate that which has been lost, from which we the moderns are separated, the other in antithesis to modernity” (115). The Gothic text is thus not just about the Gothic time category, or even primarily about that category, but rather about the discourse between two time categories: “the discourse of modernity about its own pre-history” (115).

In this ongoing discourse, each of these time categories defines itself against the other; each nebulous and polarized, gathering and repelling associations. Within this dynamic, the modern time category is simply what *is*, what is *normal*, what we *have*, what is *now* (the Latin *modo* means “just now”). It readily asserts its immediacy for the “modern” reader because it is “our” category.

The “Gothic” time category, vaguely medieval, is the *not-now*. It is what has been “surpassed,” but also what has been “lost” (Fletcher 115). It can be dismissed as inferior or repulsive, but it can also be pined for. In relation to the modern, the Gothic is what has been left behind or lost or covered up—what, though not immediate, is felt in its absence. It is placed against the modern, but it nonetheless belongs to the modern as its heritage or even inheritance.

One of the foundational associations used in the Gothic discourse, established during the early definition of the “modern” in the eighteenth century, is yet another discourse on opposed time categories: night and day. The Gothic, associated with night, is obscure, hidden, and mysterious, while the modern, associated with day, is relatively bright, revealed, and known. And supported by these associations is that essential Gothic tone of fear. Gothic fear exists not merely within the Gothic time category, but within its discourse between Gothic and modern: a fear of a dark past rising again, a fear of regression into a dark past, and other such Gothic threats on the modern. In an actual Gothic story, the Gothic discourse between “modernity and its own pre-history” is achieved by placing the two categories into simultaneous immediacy—they must somehow be felt, simultaneously, as present, substantive, and active.

SIMULTANEOUS IMMEDIACY IN “THE BIRDS”

“The Birds” is a Gothic story: it contains the typical material, situations, and tone of a Gothic story, including death, confinement, reversion, and oppressive fear. Yet, considered more deeply, does the story establish these

opposed time categories, the modern and the Gothic, building them toward a perspective of simultaneous immediacy? And, if so, where and when does that happen?

“The Birds” starts with a reference to time: “On December the third, the wind changed overnight and it was winter. Until then the autumn had been mellow, soft” (32). This is a strange opening sentence, for in the next sentence the story reverts to the time preceding this abrupt seasonal change, and then gradually, over the next pages, builds back to it. The abrupt seasonal change presents a relatively normal type of simultaneous immediacy. One season has not properly ended when the other begins. The abruptness causes both seasons to be present in the minds of those who experience the change, the autumn time category remaining immediate as experiential residue. This seasonal event is not part of the simultaneous immediacy of the Gothic time categories—or rather it is not revealed as such yet—but it helps prime the story for that event.

A second introductory primer is the description of the restless autumn birds, including their relation to the change of seasons. The non-migratory birds display a restless energy in the autumn. Migration is “denied them,” but they are “caught up in the same driving urge” (33). Again, this is not the establishment of Gothic simultaneous immediacy, but a priming of its eventual establishment.

Nat, the protagonist, is a third introductory primer. He is a bird-watcher. We are told that “because of a wartime disability,” he “had a pension and did not work full-time at the farm” (32). Even in this light introductory description, du Maurier seems to be setting up a character through whom the reader could potentially experience simultaneous immediacy. Nat is already slightly displaced from the normal: he is a part-time worker, shaped by the war. His displacement will shape his understanding of and response to a Gothic simultaneous-immediacy event.

It makes sense that, if simultaneous immediacy of the two categories is the central Gothic mechanism, the introductory elements—the abrupt seasonal change, the displaced-in-time birds, and the displaced-in-time protagonist—should prime the reader for receiving that mechanism. The Gothic experience is established through not just simultaneous immediacy, but also through the foreboding of simultaneous immediacy.

Nonetheless, these three introductory elements have also established the modern time category. These elements may all be unusual, but they are all securely modern—particularly in relation to the Gothic time category that they at this point merely hint at. A Gothic text will often establish its modern time category first, presenting any foreboding Gothic priming alongside and

even through that category's establishment. So far then, the story has made the modern time category immediate. It has hinted at both simultaneous immediacy and the Gothic time category. Now it must also make the Gothic time category immediate in order to create Gothic simultaneous immediacy.

This immediacy is created when the seasonal change described in the first sentence finally occurs: "Black winter descended in a single night" (35). The birds, it seems, change along with the weather. They burst into the bedroom of Nat's children and attack them. He gets the children out, closes the door, and fights:

How long he fought with them in the darkness he could not tell, but at last the beating of wings about him lessened and then withdrew, and through the density of the blanket he was aware of light. He waited, listened; there was no sound except the fretful crying of one of the children from the bedroom beyond. The fluttering, the whirring of the wings had ceased. (36)

Nat becomes lost in time, which is appropriate, since this is the point of blatant Gothic simultaneous immediacy. Through Nat's perspective, the reader pictures his normal, "modern" home, with his family nearby, even as s/he experiences a Gothic, "pre-modern" threat—mysterious, unrefined, and frightening. Gothic fear can be felt in this discourse between modern and Gothic as a peculiar Gothic collective mass invades the modern time category.

Toward the end of the story, Nat categorizes the birds as *old*, wondering "how many million years of memory were stored in those little brains, behind the stabbing beaks, the piercing eyes, now giving them this instinct to destroy mankind with all the deft precision of machines" (66). The birds are particularly subversive and effective Gothic monsters because they are a normal part of the modern time category, but they are also easily refashioned to be Gothic, eventually existing in the perspective of Nat and the reader as both. In Nat's musing, their Gothic nature rises from hiding underneath or inside their modern selves, and their beaks and eyes are instantly repurposed to kill people.

No explanation is given as to why the birds change other than Nat's musings on restlessness, the abrupt seasonal change, and their "many million years of memory" instinct. The story needs no particular explanation beyond that. Sometimes ghosts or vampires persist supernaturally past their time into a modern time. Sometimes old beastly natures emerge from modern bodies, as in werewolf stories and "The Birds." And "actual" time travel, though rarely used in Gothic texts, has transported a Gothic monster into a modern world or a modern individual into a Gothic world. Yet, all Gothic texts involve some

form of “time travel” in order to bring the Gothic and modern time categories together.

Nat is a *threshold* character, first experiencing the Gothic simultaneous immediacy in the fight with the birds, and from that point carrying that simultaneous immediacy within himself. He “bridges” the time categories in his struggles to navigate them and resolve them—and the reader experiences the bridging of categories through his perspective. Although he tries to return to normal, the horrific event stays with him. This is highlighted when he protectively walks Jill to and from school: “She seemed to have forgotten her experience of the night before. She danced ahead of him, chasing the leaves...” (38). Jill appears to have forgotten the Gothic invasion (though that may not be true), but in observing her, Nat underscores his own inability to forget and disentangle himself from the Gothic time category. While he cannot dismiss the Gothic, he realizes how, “in daylight, the battle of the birds would sound absurd” (39). Nat struggles with not only the Gothic, but with the typical modern person’s potential response to him as he responds to the Gothic. The modern category is associated with conformity, and he must be careful not to break too visibly from that conformity.

When he walks his daughter back home from school, he carries a hoe as a weapon. His daughter asks him about it, and the other children “crow[d] around him, laughing, pointing” (46). When she asks to play outside in the lane, what they “always” do, he tells her no. He has accepted the Gothic simultaneous immediacy, though now he seems foolish from a purely modern perspective.

As suggested in the story’s introduction, Nat is flexible enough to “bridge” the categories. His flexibility comes from his war experience, his reading, his bird-watching, his irregular job, his ability to fortify his home, and his desire to protect himself and his family. He is also lucky, since his relatively safe fight with the birds in his children’s room allowed him to experience the monstrous birds and also to live and learn from his experience. Still, beyond luck, his chief advantage seems to be his being slightly “off,” so that the strain of shifting out of the modern inertia and its standards of conformity is not so difficult for him as it is for others. The Gothic time category is associated more with flexibility, and that flexibility often is a chief advantage for the Gothic monsters.

Inflexibility apparently prevails in everyone other than Nat and his wife. He anticipates that the police “would think him mad, or drunk, or take the statement from him with great calm” (41). Those at the farm where he works do not take the threat seriously (“Lot of nonsense. They like to scare you on the wireless” [48]). Even the radio announcer speaks of bird attacks

in a voice that is “smooth and suave”: “Nat had the impression that this man, in particular, treated the whole business as he would an elaborate joke” (43). Nat, who is rightfully frightened of the birds, grows gradually isolated from the *pure* modern time category and its “reasonable” response. He wants to save everyone, but he cannot force them to be flexible.

In the Gothic tradition, the Gothic category is repulsive, but it is often at least somewhat attractive too. Here Nat speaks of the birds as they peck away at his home:

“You can’t help admiring the beggars,” he said, “they’ve got persistence. You’d think they’d tire of the game, but not a bit of it.”
Admiration was hard to sustain. (58)

Nat speaks “approvingly” of the birds even as he speaks disapprovingly of the moderns who are too inflexible to accept or respond to their Gothic threat. The narration sides with Nat on the threshold in looking disapprovingly upon the modern category. The Gothic category may be terrifyingly monstrous, but it is usually, at least obliquely, praised for its fearful strength, while the modern is denigrated for its weakness. In fact, throughout its development, the Gothic genre has included an exploration of, and commentary on, modern weaknesses (for example, in the variously constrained “modern” heroines of the early Gothic stories). Yet the Gothic side has its own weaknesses, like the “magical” restraint on all of the birds during low tide. The two time categories can be regarded with both repulsion and attraction.

Regardless, Nat unquestioningly sees the modern category as that which contains value and which must be saved. And he not only wants to save his children physically, but also psychologically. He and his wife fight to shield their children from experiencing the Gothic time category:

“Go quickly past that second gate,” whispered his wife. “The postman’s lying there. I don’t want Jill to see.”
He accelerated. The little Morris bumped and rattled along the lane. The children shrieked with laughter.
“Up-a-down, up-a-down,” shouted young Johnny. (64)

The most disturbing horror in this story is this perspective of childish naiveté (which essentially *is* the story’s pure modern perspective) as a subset of the bridging perspective of the parents (and the reader), who see this “modern” time category that the children see alongside the Gothic time category. The contrast and proximity of the two, especially when children are involved, is

sickeningly horrific. Another example of this juxtaposition occurs when the family eats a meal as another attack begins:

They ate in silence. A piece of the dripping ran down young Johnny's chin and fell on to the table.

"Manners, Johnny," said Jill, "you should learn to wipe your mouth." (65)

Like the children laughing in the car, this enforcement of manners is absurd and even horrifying to the bridging perspective. Nevertheless, it is, even then, a piece of the modern category the parents are fighting to preserve.

A threshold character is often changed by the encounter with the Gothic, either broken or strengthened, either experiencing progress or regress. The end of this story does not tell us what happens to Nat or his family. His flexibility, planning, and new supplies suggest that they might make it, but in his smoking the "last" cigarette, and in the sounds of the hawks "splintering wood," there is a strong suggestion that they will die.

The family can pick up no radio signals from anywhere in the world. Everyone else might be dead. If so, and if Nat and his family were to die, it would be more than just physical death. It would also be the death of the modern, the "now," and whatever value that holds. Still, the story leaves their fate open. Even if death seems inevitable, as the story ends, the Gothic simultaneous immediacy is not yet closed one way or the other.

Progress and regress have been central concerns of the Gothic genre since its beginning, vitally tied to its central mechanism and proceeding from the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century definitions of the Gothic and modern time categories. The ending of "The Birds" suggests an unfathomable regress of the modern and, with its regress, the destruction of the modern concept of "progress."

In "The Monstrosity of Predation in Daphne du Maurier's 'The Birds,'" Mary Ellen Bellanca states that the "unreadable mystery of the birds' attack"—the unexplained change that begins the Gothic simultaneous immediacy—functions in suggesting the regress of humans "into an epistemologically primitive state in which they cannot understand the fate that befalls them" (38). Thus the story's lack of explanation itself invokes a state of regression. Bellanca traces the fearful power of "The Birds" to echoes of World War II, fears of nuclear warfare, folklore, and "pre-modern" fears of predators. Yet she notes that each threat is connected to our fear of regression: "It is precisely because modern humans in the developed world do not live with daily fear of predation that narratives of animal attack, whether factual or imaginary, unsettle our complacency" (38). Such anxieties over possible

regression are an essential component of the modern time category, baked into its foundational, definitional opposition to the Gothic. This anxiety is given discourse through the Gothic simultaneous immediacy. It seems that the time-travel genre shares not only the Gothic's central mechanism but also its anxieties.

THE TIME-TRAVEL MECHANISM

In *Time Travel: The Popular Philosophy of Narrative* (2013), David Wittenberg argues convincingly that the time-travel genre emerged from the utopian romance, a genre that was popular at the end of the nineteenth century (47). The utopian romance is a story in which a modern-day character visits a futuristic society that is presented as the evolutionary result of the modern-day world. Wittenberg does not consider the utopian romance itself to be a time-travel story because it describes evolutionary sociopolitical extrapolation on a single, fixed timeline rather than “the sorts of temporal alterations that will eventually make time travel into paradox fiction” (90), “paradox fiction” describing paradoxical time-crossings like visiting one's past self or changing something that already happened. Wittenberg's definition of time-travel as “paradox fiction” is not entirely different from simultaneous immediacy which does create a paradoxical now-ness. Yet, my definition focuses on the mechanism of simultaneous immediacy, and thus I do consider the utopian romance to be a part of the time-travel genre.

Rather than looking for the “first” time-travel story, Wittenberg seeks to uncover “the more complex literary and extra-literary influences that prompted a given writer's devices” (48). Accordingly, I discussed earlier how many of the Gothic genre's definitional developments happened before its first story was ever written. This is true of the time-travel genre as well, whether the Gothic genre is regarded as its pioneer form or as an influence.

Wittenberg argues that the time-travel genre lacks a “single originating moment” and emerged from the “partial failures” of literary types like the utopian romance (48). It also emerged from the failures and successes of the Gothic genre. I thus offer the Gothic as a genre antecedent, one that provided a developed and tested mechanism for time travel in the simultaneous immediacy of time categories. Although it could be argued that the Gothic was the pioneer time-travel subgenre and thus is a part of the time-travel genre, it is clearer to save the “time travel” label for stories that create simultaneous immediacy through “actual” fantastic time travel. This distinction is

particularly helpful when discussing a story like *The Time Machine* (1895) as being “both” time travel and Gothic.

By “actual” fantastic time travel, I mean “impossible” travel through time in the chronological sense *that is also* “impossible” travel through time in the “time category” sense. And not only does the time-travel story contain “actual” fantastic time travel, but the time-travel version of the Gothic mechanism is not limited to the time categories of “modern” and “Gothic.” Nonetheless, the Gothic setup is effective, with the obvious appeal of placing a familiar “now” time category in simultaneous immediacy with a less familiar and opposed category. So the time-travel mechanism does typically have a “now” category, the normal or modern category, set against an “other” or “not-now” category—though the “other” is not necessarily “Gothic.”

The “now” or normal time category is often the author’s time (as in *The Time Machine*, when the “now” is the late nineteenth century), but regardless of the relationship between author time, reader time, and the text’s “now” time, the text establishes a “now” time as “now” in contrast with an “other” time category. Furthermore, a threshold character is usually a “now” character who helps establish the “now” category and through whom the reader experiences simultaneous immediacy.

SIMULTANEOUS IMMEDIACY IN “THE SPLIT SECOND”

The protagonist in du Maurier’s “The Split Second” presents a remarkable variation on the bridging time traveler. The story is included in the 1953 *Kiss Me Again, Stranger* collection, but the story was first published in the January 1953 edition of *Today’s Woman: For Young Wives* magazine. As its title suggests, this post-World War II US magazine provided an ongoing discourse for defining the successful “now” wife and mother of the late 1940s and the 1950s, in contrast with previous definitions. *Today’s Woman* was one magazine among many in this genre, teaching “New Ideas” for achieving success in “Food, Fiction, Fashion, Beauty, Equipment” (as is stated on the January 1953 cover). These new ideas were designed to help define “today’s woman.”

Yet, Mrs. Ellis, the time-traveling protagonist in “The Split Second,” is not “today’s woman.” She lives in 1932, twenty years before the magazine story’s publication—before World War II instead of after it. Although the story does not initially state the time period, it becomes gradually clear through clues, and then through its blatant acknowledgement (at least for the reader)

toward the conclusion. Furthermore, Mrs. Ellis is conservative and “old-timey” even for the 1930s.

Thus, the protagonist and the text’s “normal” time category were “other” for the 1953 readers, but normalized for them through time spent with the protagonist as the narrative follows her perspective. That normalizing in turn allowed the 1953 readers to see their own time, Mrs. Ellis’s time-traveling destination, as “other” from her perspective. Simultaneous immediacy requires flexibility from its readers and trains them in flexibility, and further complications of simultaneous immediacy like this reversal required an even further level of flexibility from the 1953 readers. Further flexibility is also required of readers from decades later. Yet, the establishment of the “normal” time category by the story guides them all in this act of reader flexibility.

Nonetheless, as if in direct contrast with Nat from “The Birds,” Mrs. Ellis is characterized as especially inflexible. The story opens with this description: “Mrs. Ellis was methodical and tidy. She disliked disorder. Unanswered letters, unpaid bills, the litter and rummage of a slovenly writing-desk were things that she abhorred” (234).

In a bit of time-travel priming, orderliness is connected by Mrs. Ellis to time:

Besides, it was the first of the month, and as she ripped off the page of her daily calendar and saw a bright clean 1 staring at her, it seemed to symbolise a new start to her day.

The hours ahead of her must somehow seem untarnished like the date; she must let nothing slide. (234)

The timely work that she must do is maintaining her home through ordering. This work causes her to think back thankfully to a larger-scale home maintenance of a few years earlier, though it required her husband’s death:

[she] thought how comfortable [her home] was, and bright, and how wise they had been not to move when poor Wilfred suggested it a few months before he died. They had so nearly taken that house in the country, because of his health, and his fad that vegetables should be picked fresh every morning and brought to the table, and then luckily—well, hardly luckily, it was most terribly sad and a fearful shock to her—but before they had signed the lease, Wilfred had a heart attack and died. Mrs. Ellis was able to stay on in the home she knew and loved, and where she had first come as a bride ten years before. (235-36)

This ordering of time and home feeds into Mrs. Ellis’s central interest, her relationship with her daughter: “Life, if she thought deeply about it, which

she did not because to think deeply made her uncomfortable, was really built around Susan. Susan was nine years old, and her only child” (236). Du Maurier presents Mrs. Ellis as a middle-class magazine reader, a shallow, inflexible thinker, who holds comfortably to a single perspective on what her life is and what it should be. She has trained herself to remain inflexibly within the comfort of her one perspective (as when she fights within herself to cover her husband’s “lucky” death as a “most terribly sad and fearful shock to her”).

In order to begin construction of the time-travel mechanism, the story establishes the “now,” “normal” time category of the 1930s. Furthermore, it establishes that “now” overwhelmingly according to the perspective of Mrs. Ellis.³ Like the original readers of 1953, we perceive that Mrs. Ellis’s “normal” time category is not truly normal, and mostly a filtered representation of a time period. It is, after all, Mrs. Ellis’s time category, invested with meaning by her. We experience it as normal through her, even while we are likely annoyed by her and the way that she sees the world.

Yet, there are subtle cracks in this time category that do not harmonize with Mrs. Ellis’s “now.” And these cracks introduce the “other” time category that will eventually burst forth as fully alive and immediate. Again, this “other” is similar to the Gothic category in how it is defined in opposition to the “now” category. It can be primed before it is established as immediate.

First, there are threats to Mrs. Ellis’s classist ideals for her home. She is annoyed when her maid Grace crudely thrusts only her head through the doorway to announce lunch, embarrassed by how it might look to visitors (240). She is “forever” correcting Grace when she calls the “drawing-room” a “lounge” (235). She thinks of Grace as a potentially degrading influence on Susan. When Susan’s noisy childish behavior threatens to disturb her ailing father, Mrs. Ellis ruefully chooses to send Susan to boarding school rather than send her “down to the kitchen with Grace” (236). Mrs. Ellis’s fear of class-based degradation extends to the changes in her neighborhood, an encroaching threat to the order of her home. She hears from others that “the locality was going downhill,” but she denies it willfully because, for instance, a new “block of flats . . . could not be seen from her windows” (236). As the story establishes the “now” category, Mrs. Ellis’s fear of class degradation, the loss of *order*, is forebodingly priming the “other” time category, in which, very “soon,” her own home will be a lodging house, she will be mistaken as lower class, and her daughter will be “low.”

3. This is unlike the establishment of the “now” time category in “The Birds”: in that story, the “now” is not established by the particular viewpoint of Nat. His relatively normal perspective contributes to the “now” category, but throughout the story he is portrayed more and more as a threshold character, between categories. The close-minded townspeople more solidly represent the “now” category.

All of Mrs. Ellis's interest in order of home and time feeds into her interest for her daughter Susan, and a second priming of the "other" time category is Mrs. Ellis's fear of separation from her. When her husband eventually dies, Mrs. Ellis expects Susan to return from boarding school. Yet Susan responds "with dismay, and even tears." Her mother tries to reason with her:

"You would make other friends at a day school," said her mother, "and think, we would be together in the evenings."

"Yes," answered Susan doubtfully, "but what would we do?"

Mrs. Ellis was hurt, but she did not permit Susan to see this. (237)

This exchange presents the disconnection between Mrs. Ellis and the one person whom she builds her life around. Her daughter cannot comprehend how they would spend time together, and Mrs. Ellis will not let her daughter see her true feelings. Mrs. Ellis says that though her life may seem "dull," "at least [she has] succeeded in making a happy home for Susan" (239). However, that happy home is threatened by the boarding school (touting itself as a "home from home" [237]) and the long gaps of time that they spend apart.

Alongside its introduction of the "other" time category, the text also primes the simultaneous immediacy of fantastic time travel through the everyday time travel of Mrs. Ellis's subjective experience:

The holidays were like brightly coloured beads on a frame, and stood out with significance in Mrs. Ellis's engagement diary, throwing the weeks between into obscurity.

How leaden was February, in spite of its twenty-eight days; how blue and interminable was March, for all that morning coffee at the Cosy Café, the choosing of library books, the visit with friends to the local cinema, or sometimes, more dashing, a matinee "in town."

Then April came, and danced its flowery way across the calendar. Easter, and daffodils, and Susan with glowing cheeks whipped by a spring wind, hugging her once again; honey for tea, scones baked by Grace ("You've been and grown again"), those afternoon walks across the heath, sunny and gay because of the figure running on ahead. May was quiet, and June pleasant because of wide-flung windows, and the snapdragons in the front garden; June was leisurely. (237)

The precious rare holiday time with Susan creates a montage effect of rapidly changing scenes through the calendar. Coupled with Susan's "instantaneous" growth ("You've been and grown again"), the rapid memories create a simultaneous immediacy of time categories: the time of "younger" Susan persists as a residual category into the time of "older" Susan. And lonely Mrs.

Ellis experiences simultaneous immediacy as she in the present thinks back on her too-brief memories with Susan. Both simultaneous immediacies highlight the mother and daughter's tenuous connection as childhood and life slip by.

After reminiscing, Mrs. Ellis is left with the thought that "[a]ll things pass" (239), but soon, "for no reason," she experiences "a wave of such intense melancholy as to be almost unbearable" (240). She assumes that this feeling means that "[s]omething is wrong with Susan . . . a warning that she wants me" (240). It is reasonable to say that the melancholy arises from Mrs. Ellis's typically avoided "deep" thinking on her relationship with her daughter, her home, and time.

Following the strike of melancholy, Mrs. Ellis forces herself to go on an unpleasant walk. During the walk she experiences one more instance of everyday simultaneous immediacy of time before she "actually" time travels. She imagines herself in the future picking out a bicycle for Susan, but then her mind goes to the past:

Hoops were out of fashion, which was a pity. When she had been a child there had been no fun like a good springy hoop, struck smartly with a little stick, bowling its way ahead of you. Quite an art to it, too. Susan would have been good with a hoop. (242)

Note that in this complex simultaneous immediacy of time categories we essentially end up with 1930s Susan skillfully rolling a hoop during her mother's childhood at the beginning of the century.

As she crosses the street, Mrs. Ellis is fatally hit by a laundry van, which becomes her unusual method for time travel in the "split second" of her death. Immediately after she is "killed," now twenty years in the future, she says this to herself: "I shall speak to the driver next time he calls. . . . One of these days there will be an accident" (242). Mrs. Ellis's time travel gives an extraordinary display of her inflexibility. It is as if, after being killed, she simply carries on with her thoughts and with her walk. However, when she arrives home from her walk it is not her home anymore. Two time categories, the "normal" 1930s and the "other" 1950s, are brought into simultaneous immediacy through her time-traveling experience. She brings with her the 1930s (or at least *her* time-category version of it), and she experiences the 1950s through that perspective. She, of the 1930s, is present, substantial, and active, and the 1950s, the entire world around her, is, of course, present, substantial, and active.

This simultaneous immediacy is revealed gradually. When her key does not work, a strange lower-class man answers the door "in his shirt sleeves," and a dog yapping inside suggests that she has callers. She is mortified: "What

would people think?” (244). Yet the greater shock comes when she enters: everything of hers is gone, and the house is filled with a disorderly array of unfamiliar items and furniture. Several tenants now share her home. Mrs. Ellis then tries to explain this bizarre situation as “normally” as she can. She sees the 1950s tenants as intruders, possibly criminals or lunatics, because to her it is still her 1930s home. The narrative ironically presents a current resident as an “intruder”:

“Excuse me,” said the intruder, pushing his horn spectacles on to his forehead, “but do you want anything? My wife is upstairs.”

The diabolic cunning of the plot. The cool bluff of his sitting there, the typewriter on his knees. (245)

In fact, Mrs. Ellis appears as the intruder, the lunatic. In “The Birds,” the “other” emerges from within the birds to invade the normal world, but in this case, from everyone else’s perspective, she is the invading “other.” “The Split Second” presents Mrs. Ellis as “normal,” but it presents this categorization ironically, so that we also understand her as “other.”

From Mrs. Ellis’s perspective, this 1950s world is a nightmarish realization of her fears. As in “The Birds,” what was already present in the “normal” emerges as the “other”; the connection between the two is revealed through simultaneous immediacy. Like Nat in “The Birds,” Mrs. Ellis is a threshold character. Through her perspective, the reader experiences the simultaneous immediacy of time categories. Still, as a threshold character she is bizarre for she never once realizes, or even considers, her fantastic movement between time categories. In this way, she resembles Nat’s inflexible neighbors, who were unable to think outside of the normal modern category. Thus, the simultaneous immediacy is ironically filtered through Mrs. Ellis’s perspective, but only in her experience of it and not in her recognition of it, that is, through her refusal to accept it—through her inflexible maintenance of “now” against the relentless and accumulating evidence of the “other.”

Irony itself is a type of simultaneous immediacy formed from two contradictory yet simultaneously immediate perspectives on the same subject. In the complex arrangement of “The Split Second,” the ironic simultaneous immediacy functions on top of the time-travel simultaneous immediacy. To treat Mrs. Ellis fairly, her inflexible, un-ironic response is understandable. She is experiencing something that is “impossible.” However, when she finally meets her now-grown-up daughter, she is given direct clues that stare her in the face—and she will not even consider the possibility. Although she is disconnected from everything she knows and loves, her precious Susan and her grandson are right in front of her, yet she cannot see it. It is maddening.

Her daughter even identifies herself as the former “Susan Ellis,” now “Susan Drew,” and Mrs. Ellis repeatedly notes how closely she resembles her husband’s sister. The tension builds in this scene as she cannot, or for some reason will not, recognize her daughter. Certainly, one cause is Mrs. Ellis’s inflexibility, but because her daughter does not recognize her either, it may also point to their lack of deep connection. Mrs. Ellis does not like the 1950s Susan, just as she did not like her husband’s sister; she calls her grandson a “[d]ear little fellow,” but her daughter a “tiresome nagging mother.” Also, Susan’s 1950s home is a “mess” (276), unlike Mrs. Ellis’s orderly 1930s home:

What an untidy, scattered sort of room, everything all over the place. Shoes in the middle of the floor, a coat flung down on a chair, and Keith’s cot had not been made up; the blankets were rumpled anyhow.

“Badly brought up,” thought Mrs. Ellis, “and such rough, casual manners. But poor girl, if she had no mother . . .” (279)

The last two sentences of this climactic scene (powered by the unreleased tension of its anti-climax) suggest two competing impulses: Mrs. Ellis’s desire for class-based order (particularly for Susan), and her desire for connection with people (particularly with Susan). Mrs. Ellis sent Susan to boarding school so that she would not be excessively influenced by lower-class Grace, and that potentially cost her a deeper connection with her daughter. Susan may be unrecognizable because she is now low class—because she falls so far from Mrs. Ellis’s expectations for her.

“The Split Second” starts and closes with a look at the calendar: “She took a glance round the room, and she saw with a shrug of her shoulder that even Mrs. Drew’s calendar had a printing error. It said 1952 instead of 1932. How careless” (279). This story does not spend much time, as many other time travel stories often do, on describing the contrasts between the cultures and technologies of the simultaneously immediate time categories. Instead, it focuses on the disconnection between “today’s woman,” Susan, and “yesterday’s woman,” her mother. From Mrs. Ellis’s perspective “progress” is to return to the “now” that she knew. For her daughter, and the 1953 readers, the “other” time that threatens Mrs. Ellis is their “now.” The time-travel genre allows for this ironic displacement of “now” alongside its displacement of “today’s woman.”

“The Split Second” is a time-travel story, but is it also Gothic? It certainly has “hauntings” of the Gothic, as all time-travel stories do. The simultaneous immediacy of Mrs. Ellis’s home is “Gothic” in how the “other” emerges from within her comfortable home—as the Gothic monster in “The Birds” emerges from the “modern” birds. The “ruin” of the home, suggestions

of madness, and Mrs. Ellis's disconnection from others are all elements that can be linked to Gothic simultaneous immediacy. Yet, even without these outstanding Gothic elements, the Gothic genre can still be used to understand this story better because of the shared mechanism of simultaneous immediacy. Here is Mrs. Ellis at the police station, trying to plan out how she will restore order to a house that is no longer hers: "Her mind ran on and on, taking in the mess, the disorder, these people had created, and how many days and weeks would it take for her and Grace to get everything straight again?" (250). She is intent on restoring her home according to the 1930s time category. She is like a ghost in a Gothic story, a "dead" person stubbornly fixed in her time category despite her fantastic persistence into an opposing time category. Any time traveler who travels to the future is a ghost, and any time traveler who travels to the past is visiting ghosts or the ghosts of what once was. And, as mentioned earlier, any Gothic monster involves some form of "time travel." All Gothic stories, even those before the time-travel genre, point to time travel, while all time-travel stories point to their Gothic heritage.

DAPHNE DU MAURIER'S REDEFINITION OF THE MODERN

In "Starting Your Journey in the Past," Gina Wisker studies du Maurier's time-travel writing in *The House on the Strand* and "The Split Second." Among many other valuable insights, she states that du Maurier's time travel "enacts and encourages reflection, revisiting, a reinterpretation of one's own position and life, of history and human development, a potential recuperation, clarification, settling, and understanding of events in a larger context and frame" (473). Because of the shared mechanism of simultaneous immediacy, any analysis of du Maurier's time-travel writing can also be applied to her Gothic writing, and vice versa. Both her Gothic and her time-travel stories enact and encourage the flexible re-definition ("reflection," "revisiting," "reinterpretation") as one time category provides re-contextualization for the other.

Despite their "crushing" endings (and in some ways because of these endings), du Maurier uses "The Birds" and "The Split Second" to give space for re-definition of the modern time category through its simultaneous immediacy against an "other" time category. Instead of relying on genre tropes, du Maurier remains true to the genres' mechanism by giving that mechanism further ironic twists. "The Birds" presents a purely "modern" perspective as a threat to modernity. "The Split Second" portrays a similar threat, particularly because in the story there is no "pure" modernity: its modern "now" is an

ever-moving marker. In both stories, the “other” emerges from within the modern. Through these twists du Maurier manipulates the simultaneous-immediacy mechanism to highlight what she presents as the necessary and unavoidable re-definition of the “modern.”

Du Maurier has a particular interest in threshold characters like Mrs. Ellis and Nat who display flexibility or inflexibility in relation to re-definition. Pressing such characters into anxieties over modernity’s loss or regress (often represented in the “other” time categories) tests the characters’ flexibility. Through the instability and danger of simultaneous immediacy, the flexibility or inflexibility of threshold characters, and ironic twists, du Maurier’s popular fiction encourages the reader to pick flexibly through opposed time categories for potential strengths and weaknesses by which to re-construct and re-define the modern time category and the modern identity. In “The Birds” and “The Split Second,” du Maurier continues the Gothic and time-travel “pre-genre” work of defining the “modern” in relation to its anxieties in the “other”—and she defines “progress” not as the continuation of modernity, but as its flexible and ongoing re-definition.

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Cet article étudie Daphne du Maurier en tant qu'auteure de fiction s'illustrant dans des genres populaires. Il se concentre en particulier sur deux histoires de son recueil *Kiss Me Again, Stranger* (1953), édition américaine (enrichie) de *The Apple Tree: A Short Novel and Several Long Stories* (Gollancz, 1952) : la nouvelle gothique "The Birds" et l'histoire de voyage dans le temps "The Split Second". Ces deux genres, le gothique et le voyage dans le temps, méritent d'être examinés ensemble car ils partagent un mécanisme central impliquant des catégories temporelles. Ce mécanisme commun au gothique et au voyage dans le temps place des catégories temporelles opposées dans une immédiateté simultanée (ou une actualité simultanée). Dans ses nouvelles, du Maurier utilise ce mécanisme pour positionner des personnages flexibles ou inflexibles sur le seuil de ces catégories temporelles. Par ce positionnement, elle définit la catégorie « moderne » en relation avec l'anxiété des personnages qui s'en sentent désormais exclus.

This article examines Daphne du Maurier as a writer of popular-fiction genres, concentrating in particular on two stories from *Kiss Me Again, Stranger* (1953), the (enriched) American edition of her collection *The Apple Tree: A Short Novel and Several Long Stories* (Gollancz, 1952)—the Gothic story “The Birds” and the time-travel story “The Split Second.” The Gothic and time-travel genres are worth studying together because they share a central mechanism involving *time categories*. The Gothic and time-travel mechanism places opposed time categories in *simultaneous immediacy* (or simultaneous present-ness). In her stories, du Maurier uses this mechanism to position flexible and inflexible characters on the threshold of time categories. Through this positioning, she defines the “modern” category in relation to her characters’ anxiety over its loss.