## The Scapegoat: 1959 Film Adaptation and Event Review

On Sunday 2nd February at the Everyman Cinema in Hampstead, there was a special screening of the 1959 adaptation of Daphne du Maurier's novel *The Scapegoat*, organised by the Society for Analytical Psychology. The screening was followed by a panel discussion of the psychological aspects of both the film and novel, with Rupert Tower (Jungian Analyst and Daphne du Maurier's grandson), Dr Coline Covington (Jungian Analyst), and Christopher Perry (Jungian Analyst and the panel chair). The event was very well attended and the panel discussion drew a large number of questions from the audience. Du Maurier expert Dr Laura Varnam has written this review of the event for the Du Maurier website and she also shares some of her own research on the adaptation. (Please note that the review contains spoilers for both the novel and film! For a full review of the novel, also containing spoilers, visit our Book and Play Reviews page)

### The Story and its Psychological Background

*'He turned and stared at me and I at him, and I realized, with a strange sense of shock and fear and nausea all combined, that his face and voice were known to me too well. I was looking at myself.' The Scapegoat* by Daphne du Maurier (ch.1)

The narrator of *The Scapegoat*, an Englishman named John, is dissatisfied with his life as a university lecturer and is travelling in France when he meets his double, the French count Jean de Gué (renamed Jacques in the film). After a night of drinking with his double, John wakes up to discover that Jean has disappeared, leaving him to assume his doppelgänger's identity and become his scapegoat in a complex web of family intrigue and deception.

*The Scapegoat* is one of five du Maurier novels with a male narrator and it was published in 1957, during a complicated time in du Maurier's life, as her grandson Rupert Tower explained. He described the novel as 'the most psychological work that [du Maurier] ever wrote' and in the panel discussion he described the crucial events in his grandmother's life that lead to her interest in exploring the duality of the self in this novel. In her personal life, Daphne had suddenly lost her dear friend Gertrude Lawrence in 1952, the actress who had played the lead in Daphne's 1949 play *September Tide*, and with whom Daphne had had a passionate friendship. Lawrence was also, notably, one of Daphne's father Gerald's mistresses, and Daphne herself had had an intense relationship with her father, whose biography she had written in 1934. Daphne's relationship with her husband Tommy, 'Boy' Browning, was also under pressure during the mid 1950s as he was suffering from a mental breakdown and the strain of leading a double life, commuting between Cornwall and London at weekends, for his job at Buckingham Palace. Their relationship had suffered from their years of separation during the second world war, and from extra-marital friendships on both sides, but as Rupert stressed, when Tommy became ill Daphne rushed to his side, determined to 'face reality' and achieve reconciliation, both with her husband and in her psychological understanding of her own complex identity.

Rupert quoted the famous letter included in Margaret Forster's biography in which du Maurier described *The Scapegoat* as follows:

*'It is my story, and it is Moper's also* [Moper was a family nickname for Tommy]. *We are both doubles. So is everyone. Every one of us has his, or her, dark side. Which is to overcome the other? This is the purpose of the book. And it ends, as you know, with the problem unsolved, except that the suggestion there, when I finished it, was that the two sides of man's nature had to fuse together to give birth to a third, well balanced. Know Thyself. The one man went back home having been given a hint that his family, in future, would be different, would be adjusted; the other man went to the monastery, for a space of time, to learn 'what to do with love.' Can Moper, and can I, learn from this? I think we can.'*

From a psychological standpoint, the novel also arose from du Maurier's reading of the work of psychoanalyst Carl Gustav Jung and his concept of the shadow. Jung theorised that every individual has at least two aspects to their personality and in du Maurier's letters of this period she referred to her own No 1 and No 2 selves, using Jung's terminology. Rupert Tower characterised his grandmother's No 1 self as humorous, fun, serene, and non-confrontational, and her No 2 self– which she expressed in her writing– as darker, more complex and questioning, and often expressed as a kind of masculine energy that fuelled her desire for independence and adventure. Rupert suggested that Daphne's reading of Jung reassured her about the internal contradictions in her personality and inspired her to explore the multiple nature of the self in *The Scapegoat*, in which a man comes face to face with a darker version of his self and is then given the freedom to live out a life very different from his own.

In the 1950s, Daphne had also begun to research her French ancestors, who were glass-blowers that originated in the Sarthe region of France, and it was during one of these trips that the 'seed' for *The Scapegoat* was planted in her mind (du Maurier's research at this time culminated in her 1963 novel *The Glass Blowers*). As Rupert explained, this interest was also stimulated by Jung's exploration of the psychological as well as biological inheritance that we gain from our ancestors. In the questions, an audience member asked about the importance of France to du Maurier and Rupert replied that she was very proud of her heritage and would often remark, 'oh that's the old French blood talking'. The intensely realised French setting is crucial to *The Scapegoat* and demonstrates that du Maurier's gift for recreating place in her novels was not limited to Cornwall.

Dr Covington began her contribution to the panel discussion with a quote from the poet May Sarton who said that 'we have to dare to be ourselves, however frightening or strange that self may prove to be', and she suggested that one of the themes of du Maurier's novel is the exploration of how much of our identities are tied up with how we are viewed by others. She remarked that in the novel, the majority of the characters do not recognise John as an imposter because they only see him through their own preoccupations and their own preconceptions about Jacques. Dr Covington explored the way in which Jean/Jacques' character was far more complex and interesting in the novel, in which it is discovered that he worked for the resistance during the war and was partly responsible for the death of his sister Blanche's fiancé, Maurice Duval, who collaborated in order to keep the glass foundry running. This provided an important backdrop, Dr Covington argued, for the theme of guilt in

the novel, which is not evident in the film version as references to the family history are removed. She also discussed the bold actions that John takes in the novel to make things better for the de Gué family, from signing the contract that prevents the foundry from closing to encouraging his mother to give up her morphine-addiction, and noted that this made John's character more dynamic and engaging in the novel.

The 1959 film's drastic rewriting of the plot removed much of the psychological interest in the novel. These changes included: reducing the number of characters (including cutting Jean's brother Paul and his wife Renée, with whom Jean is having an affair in the novel); implying that Jacques returns to the chateau and murders his wife, Françoise (who in the novel falls out of a window, perhaps in an attempted suicide); and finally, the substitution of an entirely new ending, which as Rupert Tower and Dr Covington explained, has a considerable impact on the novel's psychological meaning. In the quotation from his grandmother's letter mentioned above, Rupert stressed that Daphne's optimism that both she and Tommy might learn from their experiences was crucial to the novel's conclusion, in which Jean returns to the chateau and John sets off for the abbey to which he was travelling at the beginning of the novel. The panel discussed the fact that in the novel this enables the possibility for different kinds of relationships to emerge within the de Gué family and for the abbey to act as a transitional space for John which– in du Maurier's typically ambiguous fashion– might lead either to a reconciliation within his self or to a desire for future escape.

The film version, however, closes down the possibility of psychological development and healing, and du Maurier herself recognised that not even 'the fairest critic had a good word for the "trick" ending, which I knew was hopeless from the start'. In the new ending, John confronts his double Jacques at the glass foundry and in a dramatic showdown, the light goes out and both men shoot at each other. In the final scene of the film, one of the men– we assume John because of his bandaged arm, as a result of deliberately burning himself earlier the film– goes to see his lover Béla and we are left to surmise that John will assume the life of his double full-time, now that Jacques has been eliminated. As Dr Covington noted, this new ending removed the potential for Jean/Jacques to learn from the experience. In the novel's final chapter, Béla says to John: '*You've given something to all of us, to me, to his mother, to his sister, to his child. Just now I called it tendresse. Whatever it is, it can't be destroyed. It's taken root. It will go on growing. In the future we shall look for you in Jean, not Jean in you.*' This is crucial to novel's exploration of how both characters are changed by their experiences and it is unfortunate that the film did not pursue this idea further.

**The Film Adaptation**

The film of *The Scapegoat* was released in 1959 and it starred Alec Guinness in the role of John and his doppelganger Jacques, and Hollywood legend Bette Davis as his mother, the morphine-addicted Countess. French actress Nicole Maurey played Jacques' mistress Béla (the only character who questions the identity swop, in both novel and film) and Irene Worth played his overwrought wife, Françoise, who seems to be entirely correct in her fears that her husband secretly wants her dead. Jacques' sister Blanche is played by Pamela Brown, a performance that has a touch of Judith Anderson's Mrs Danvers in movement and atmosphere, and Annabel Bartlett played the daughter, Marie-Noel, whose relationship with Jacques/John is perhaps the most believable in the film (although the actress seems much older than Marie-Noel's ten years in du Maurier's novel).

Very quickly after the book's publication, Hollywood movie-makers were keen to turn it into a film; it had been ten years since du Maurier's *Hungry Hill* had been adapted for the screen and over fifteen since Hitchcock's *Rebecca* had enthralled audiences across the globe. Cary Grant was suggested for the lead but du Maurier was determined to have Alec Guinness in the role and she formed a production company with Guinness in order to ensure that he was cast. Du Maurier was especially keen on Guinness because of his resemblance to her father, the actor-manager Sir Gerald du Maurier, who was always acting and playing a part, both on and off stage. In *The Scapegoat*, Guinness had to film a number of important scenes in split-screen where he played opposite himself– in the bar and hotel where John/Jacques first meet

and when they are reunited in the final denouement– but Guinness already had experience of this kind of multiple role. In 1949, he had played no less than eight members of the D'Ascoyne family, including a female character (Lady Agatha), in the Ealing comedy *Kind Hearts and Coronets*, directed by Robert Hamer and produced by Michael Balcon and Michael Relph. Hamer had worked on a du Maurier film before, having edited Hitchcock's 1939 version of *Jamaica Inn*, and he went on to direct Guinness in *The Scapegoat*, Hamer's penultimate film before his death. (Indeed, due to Hamer's battle with alcoholism, Guinness reportedly had to take the reins of the film during production as Hamer's powers were declining, despite his efforts to remain sober). Michael Balcon, who had worked with Hamer and Guinness on *Kind Hearts* and headed up the successful Ealing Studies from 1938-55, produced *The Scapegoat* in conjunction with MGM who financed the film. But unfortunately, the final movie did not live up to the subtleties of Du Maurier's novel or her vision for the film.

One character in particular whose role is less than successful is that of the Dowager Countess, played by Bette Davis. In publicity for the film, Davis was given second billing but this over-played her final role because after shooting was complete, MGM cut around forty minutes of filming, including a number of Davis's scenes. Indeed, the large number of cuts created a somewhat disjointed viewing experience and Guinness then had to record a voice-over, which does not entirely compensate for the deleted sequences. Davis blamed Guinness for the cuts, by whom she had felt side-lined throughout the film's production, but Guinness himself had felt snubbed by Davis who refused to socialise with the cast and crew. Davis quipped that Guinness was 'an actor who plays by himself and in this particular picture he plays a dual role, so at least he was able to play with himself' and she later condemned him as 'overbearing, egotistical, haughty, snotty, insensitive to play opposite and a dreadful actor!' There was seemingly no love lost between them as Guinness later described Davis a 'strong and aggressive personality' and declared that she 'entirely missed the character of the old Countess, which could have been theatrically quite effective, and only wanted to be extravagantly over-dressed and surrounded, quite ridiculously, by flowers.' In fact, Davis, whose career was on the wane, was anxious throughout the filming and the cluttered set of the Countess's bedroom seems to suffocate the actress, whose rather melodramatic performances seem off kilter against Guinness's understated, wry characterisation of John/Jacques. Neither Guinness nor Davis were pleased with the final film, indeed Davis rarely if ever referred to it and it is frequently glossed over in biographies of the star. Du

Maurier agreed that the complexities of her original character were sadly lost in the adaptation.

**The Screenplay**

The screenplay for *The Scapegoat* went through a number of drafts and revisions, including a version by the American writer Gore Vidal, who was under contract with MGM at the time. Du Maurier was 'appalled' by Vidal's version. She 'wondered if the whole thing was a joke or leg-pull, just to see how the story would seem if it was played as a farce' and she felt that if it was used, 'we are in for a disaster'. Despite Du Maurier joining forces with Guinness in the production company, she had very little control over the film and unfortunately the poor quality of the adaptation is all too obvious to fans of the book. The early scenes in which Guinness as John is pursued through the shadowy streets of Le Mans by his double are atmospheric and reminiscent of film noir but when he reaches the chateau, the tension evaporates as John is too readily accepted as Jacques and he seems at ease in his surroundings, in a way that his counterpart in the novel is not. In his memoir, *Palimpsest*, Gore Vidal revealed his patronising and condescending attitude to du Maurier's work, claiming that she had the 'enviable supreme confidence of the born best-seller writer who has no notion that there is something out there […] called literature', a summation with more than a hint of jealousy in its tone. Vidal failed to recognise the psychological significance of the

narrative and his lack of understanding of the novel's meaning is abundantly clear in his supercilious and mocking remarks about du Maurier's plot and style.

Despite having high hopes for the adaptation, Daphne du Maurier was deeply disappointed by the final result and throughout its production, the film was dogged by difficulties over the script and the cast members. A comparison with the original novel, especially through a psychological lens, does, however, reveal much that is of interest to fans of Daphne's work. In a letter to Oriel Malet in 1956, du Maurier summarise that in *The Scapegoat* she had tried to show:

*'How close hunger is to greed, how difficult to tell the difference, how hard not to be confused, how close one's better nature to one's worst, and finally, how the self must be stripped of everything, and give up everything, before it can understand love.'*

Du Maurier's ambitious and complex novel is open to multiple interpretations and it remains a firm favourite among fans today. Neither the 1959 film adaptation nor the more recent BBC television version in 2012 have done justice to *The Scapegoat* but thanks to the panel discussion on 2nd February, the psychological significance of the work has been illuminated for all to see.

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Thank you to the panellists Rupert Tower, Dr Coline Covington, and Christopher Perry, for an excellent event. Additional thanks to Daphne's son Kits Browning for discussing the film's production with me. A further film screening is planned for later in this year so do keep an eye on our news pages for more information.

**Further Reading**

Margaret Forster, *Daphne du Maurier* (1993).

Oriel Malet, *Daphne du Maurier: Letters from Menabilly* (1993).

Piers Paul Read, *Alec Guinness: The Authorised Biography* (2003).

Allan Hunter, *Alec Guinness on Screen* (1982).

Philip Kemp, 'The Long Shadow: Robert Hamer after Ealing', *Film Comment*, 31.3 (1995), 70-78.

Barbara Leaming, *Bette Davis: A Biography* (1992).

Lawrence J Quirk, *The Passionate Life of Bette Davis* (1990).

Gore Vidal, *Palimpsest: A Memoir* (1995).