



Daphne du Maurier

Margaret Forster

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Rebecca, published in 1938, brought its author instant international acclaim, capturing the popular imagination with its haunting atmosphere of suspense and mystery. du Maurier was immediately established as the queen of the psychological thriller. But the more fame this and her other books encouraged, the more reclusive Daphne du Maurier became.

Margaret Forster's award-winning biography could hardly be more worthy of its subject. Drawing on private letters and papers, and with the unflinching co-operation of Daphne du Maurier's family, Margaret Forster explores the secret drama of her life - the stifling relationship with her father, actor-manager Gerald du Maurier; her troubled marriage to war hero and royal aide, 'Boy' Browning; her wartime love affair; her passion for Cornwall and her deep friendships with the last of her father's actress loves, Gertrude Lawrence, and with an aristocratic American woman.

Most significant of all, Margaret Forster ingeniously strips away the relaxed and charming facade to lay bare the true workings of a complex and emotional character whose passionate and often violent stories mirrored her own fantasy life more than anyone could ever have imagined.

Daphne du Maurier Details

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Lynda says

This was a very interesting and thoroughly researched read. However I found it diminished rather than enhanced my view of Daphne Du Maurier and her oeuvre. Her was a woman who lived to write and wrote to live and everyone and everything apart from perhaps Menabilly took a second place to that. It is easier I suppose to accept as a modern day reader to accept her conflicted sexuality but not so easy to accept her self confessed disinterest in her children and laterally her grandchildren. She also appeared to have been lacking rather in gratitude at the privilege. of her life and circumstances. Although it does not deter me from reading her novels it does cast them in a rather different light.

Jaksen says

Very clear, insightful biography of the author, with emphasis on her inner turmoil as she continually attempted to balance the needs of the outside world - society, family, husband's career needs, friends and confidantes - with the constant need to write. This is a dilemma felt by many writers, that in order to write, there's a need for long periods of solitude to think, reason, plan, research, write and re-write. I emphasize that this is not merely a desire, but a need, and one which most nonwriters do not comprehend. (Neither do they respect it.) Du Maurier would have been happy in a hovel with a pad and pen, or a typewriter, and did indeed write this way, in a 'writing hut' on the estate of Menabilly.

(Menabilly, in Cornwall, is as much a force and a personality as it is a house. Du Maurier lived in this grand estate, the model for Manderley in her most famous book, Rebecca, yet it wasn't 'hers.' She rented the vast estate for over twenty years and went through personal crises every time the lease came up or the family which owned it threatened to return. From reading this book one can come away with the fact that she had three great loves, and one of them was this house.)

Anyhow, her entire life was one huge, difficult balancing act, which she chronicled in meticulous detail through the hundreds of letters she wrote. There was no doubt she was never more at perfect peace - and more happy - than when writing. The fact she's almost always writing, if not on paper, then in her head, is revealed in these letters. She's very open and honest about it, and even when receiving the Queen and Prince Philip for tea, she's waiting for it to be over with so she can -guess what? Write! She was a recluse who wanted social contact on her own terms, and often she wanted no social contact at all.

(It was surprising to me that despite this, she did have a lot of friends and was very close to several family members. She, however, often writes how few friends she has. She's a dilemma!)

Anyhow, that's my greatest takeaway on her life, and this book. There is also the chronicling of life events, family history, births and deaths of those close to her; revelations on how she viewed love, desire and the 'fame' she didn't want but learned to enjoy; as well as issues with editors, fans, friends, lovers, and so on. There's great discussion on where her ideas came from - she had to 'wait' for them to come and most of her stories were prompted by events in her own life, which she freely admits - and some psychological insight into her personal and writing life. It's a very complete picture of a complex individual.

All in all, a meticulously-written biography with more than ample documentation. My one complaint: more

pictures! More photographs! But that is often an editorial, not author's, decision.

Gerry says

An excellent biography by a superb writer.

Margaret Forster explores Daphne du Maurier's background and details her sometimes difficult relationship with her famous father, Gerald, before examining Daphne's complex and intriguing character.

She has the co-operation of Daphne's family so every little aspect of her life is looked at in detail and nothing is ignored; her troubled marriage to 'Boy' Browning and how she battled to keep it going, her various love affairs and how she handled Daphne No1 and Daphne No 2. The last mentioned most interesting!

The production of her novels and short stories are also examined in detail, how and why she came to write them and her interesting relationship with publisher Victor Gollancz. Gollancz was magnificent in ensuring that there were plenty of copies of each of her books available, even those in wartime when paper was short but in the end the initially published number had to fall because Daphne's saleability had dropped a little. Daphne was none too pleased but accepted it eventually with good grace.

All-in-all it makes for compelling reading and puts Daphne into context with her various novels.

Helle says

This was a pleasant read – as good as any novel about a strange, elusive woman who happened to have written a lot of books, have a desire to be a recluse and whose inner life was often a struggle between different personalities.

I had recently seen a BBC production about Daphne du Maurier, and having read some of her books and being fascinated by the era she belonged to as well as the area she lived in, I was curious to explore her life further. And what capable hands her life is in in those of Margaret Forster.

Daphne du Maurier, to me, is an old world kind of author (two of her stories being made into movies by Alfred Hitchcock), and I mean that in the most positive sense. It's also something that she apparently considered during her writing career: That from the publication of her first novel in 1931 to her last novel in 1972, the publishing business had changed dramatically, but so had the notion of literature and how writers were supposed to write. She was one of few writers who managed to write (melo-) dramatic bestsellers but who also explored the depths of the human psyche, sometimes drawing on the macabre.

The biography is candid. We get all the details, some of which must have been painful for her grown children to read about. I felt saddened at some of these details, especially reading how Daphne du Maurier, as a child, was never held by her mother and how, no doubt, this led to some aspects which I did not sympathize with at all, notably how she treated her own daughters when they were children: they weren't allowed to eat with their parents until they were 12, and their nanny took more care of them than their mother did. And she treated their younger brother quite differently, being only really contented when she finally had a son.

I felt almost jealous of how du Maurier could just sit down and pour out her innermost thoughts and hey, presto, a book would emerge from that in a matter of months. She was very prolific, but then writing was her life. She felt miserable when she couldn't write, and it was, Margaret Forster convincingly explains, the only way in which a crucial part of her could find an outlet.

I have been to Cornwall a few times (I keep on returning to the south of England) and would love to try to find the area around Menabilly where Daphne du Maurier lived for most of her adult life, and which was the house and grounds on which she modelled Manderly in *Rebecca*.

Jessica says

I picked up this biography a few years ago from the discard shelf of my local library. How sad! Published in 1993, it seems it should still be relevant. Even if all Du Maurier ever wrote was *Rebecca*, that's still impressive, isn't it? makes her worthy of today's library shelves? I didn't know much about her but her list of titles--novels, plays, short stories, family and historical biographies--is long. Still the biography sat on my stack of unread books for a couple years.

A few months ago I came across *My Cousin Rachel* on a swap rack (another fortuitous find). That novel, with its powerful exploration of love and jealousy, passion and infatuation, and the mystery at its end (was she or wasn't she planning to kill our narrator?) prompted me to finally give Du Maurier's biography a read.

What a fascinating person and life. One of three daughters, Daphne was determined to be a boy growing up and seems to have been seen as a son initially by her father who of course wanted one (and then as a very attractive companion-daughter). Du Maurier hated the word lesbian, did not see herself as one (she has "Venetian" tendencies instead) but would be seen as bisexual today. Some of her most passionate relationships were with women though her marriage endured (that would be the right word) until her husband died. Dedicated and prolific, Du Maurier supported her family with the earnings from her books--her husband, in the British army, did not earn much or at least not enough to support the life she wanted in Cornwall in a neglected mansion, etc. A mother of three children herself, two daughters and a beloved son (finally!), Du Maurier employed a live-in nanny for her children so that she could write and seems to have been able to enjoy them more when they were themselves adults.

The biography is well-written, overly detailed in places, as most biographies are. And I felt a little uncomfortable reading over and over again Du Maurier's code words--for intercourse, for foreplay--she has her own language to describe sex and much else. (Is there no privacy left to a writer once a biographer comes along? I guess not.) Forster had access to Du Maurier's letters and diaries, and so to much of her interior life, at least what was written down. She also conducted copious interviews, etc.

Forster believes at least three of Daphne Du Maurier's novels belong in the canon: *Rebecca*, *The House on the Strand*, *The Scapegoat*. I would add *My Cousin Rachel* and many of her short stories to the list. I'll be reading much more of her work now.

Popular in her lifetime (often best-selling), Du Maurier felt she never got the critical acclaim she deserved. It would seem she has not still. She is a consummate story teller and creates atmosphere, setting and character like no other.

Kaethe says

I was content to look at the pictures; I'm afraid to learn stuff that will just annoy me

Nikki says

This is overall a well done and exhaustive biography, pulling out a lot of interesting factors, events and people in Daphne du Maurier's life and relating them to her work. If you're interested in Daphne du Maurier it's definitely worth a read — I'm not a super fan, personally, though I've read a couple of her books, and I found it pretty interesting and found myself really wanting to reread her books with some of this in mind (especially *Rebecca* and *My Cousin Rachel*).

I didn't end up actually finishing the book, but that's a pretty personal thing — Daphne du Maurier is described as being a pretty private person, and hating the very idea of being thought to be a lesbian, and yet this is so frank about her affairs with women. I found it felt too much like prying for me.

Reviewed for the Bibliophibian.

Hannah says

A very complete, no holds barred biography about an author whose novels I have long admired.

Forster had access to hundreds of family and friend letters, as well as being able to interview those close to Du Maurier. Her written portrait of Daphne paints a woman both brilliant and conflicted in her sexuality, her marriage, her role as a mother and her overriding need to express all these inner conflicts through her writing. Forster not only sketches the life history of Du Maurier (which is fascinating in and of itself), but she goes on to show how each of her novels came to be written, and why there's a whole lot more of Daphne in each of them than the casual reader might previously have known.

I came away from reading this feeling that Du Maurier wouldn't have been an easy person for me to be around (or even like). That being said, my appreciation for her creative genius increased after reading Forster's biography. It's an excellent piece of non-fiction on a one-of-a-kind author, and one I recommend to any reader interested in her life and work.

Marguerite Kaye says

In many ways, Daphne du Maurier is as unlikeable as the heroines of some of her greatest books, but in the same ways, she's also compelling. This was an excellent bio, candid without being lurid, enquiring without going too wildly astray into the author's own theories. As a writer, I'm always fascinated by where other writers get their ideas from and how they go about writing. Du Maurier was a major and detailed plotter,

keeping immense amounts of notes and diaries, and only writing (save one book) once she had every bit of the characters and story sorted in her head - not for her, the idea that the characters might take over once she started putting them on the page. Only in her writing could she express what she called her Number 2 character - the inner boy which she thought of as her true self. The extent of her self-dullusion or repression of this true self is tragic, and makes many of the unattractive facets of her character understandable if not acceptable. I'm making her sound awful, but like Rebecca, as I said, I found her horribly compelling, and this a really great book.

Deodand says

You might be wondering, what could be so great about a midcentury English author and housewife to warrant a full biography. Reader, you won't know what hit you. I kind of don't want to spoil this book by talking about du Maurier's life, it's better to just jump in. For someone who stayed home a lot, she sure had a lot of "adventures".

Nicola says

There is something faintly disconcerting about the stripping away of someone's private life in non-fiction writing. Reading not even between the lines, the vision you get of Daphne du M is that she was rather a self-absorbed and even a rather selfish character. She lived a fairly sheltered and privileged life, and indeed seemed more preoccupied with remaining the inhabitant of the house of Menabilly than with her own children. She certainly wasn't particularly maternal or sociable. She was sometimes cruel, and the revelations about her infatuations with both sexes over the years before and during her union with the rather stoic husband 'Boy' left me as a reader feeling rather voyeuristic. I clearly don't read enough biographies... Fascinating, though, to hear her talk on BBC Radio 4's Desert Island Discs back in 1977, highly recommend you have a listen while doing the ironing, or equivalent, each to his/her own... Read full review at literary ramblings etc

Kim says

In *The Uncommon Reader*, Alan Bennett has his main character, Queen Elizabeth II, reflect that authors are "probably best met within the pages of their novels" and are "as much creatures of the reader's imagination as the characters in their books". There's wisdom in that attitude. It's quite possible that I'd be disappointed if I encountered one of my favourite novelists at a dinner party and that experience might colour how I react to their writing in the future. And yet, I still find myself drawn to literary biographies. When I really love a novelist's writing, I can't help wanting to know more about the novelist.

Forster has done an excellent job exploring du Maurier's life, covering her privileged childhood as the second daughter of actor Gerald du Maurier, her first love affair with a teacher from her French finishing school, her troubled marriage to Boy Browning, her extra-marital affairs (including with actress Gertrude Lawrence), her relationship with her children, the development of her writing career and her long association with Cornwall. Forster's prose is easy to read, her research is thorough and she engages in very little speculation.

What emerges about du Maurier is interesting, perplexing and ultimately very sad. Du Maurier's sexual ambiguity – “the boy in the box” as she referred to that part of her which was attracted to women – was clearly an important feature of her psychological make-up. Another important feature was du Maurier's relationship with her father. While Forster is careful not to draw conclusions - I suspect because she wished to avoid distressing du Maurier's children - it is at least possible that du Maurier's father sexually abused her. If so, this would explain a lot about du Maurier's adult sexual relationships and her fraught relationship with her daughters.

I'm reasonably sure that I wouldn't have liked du Maurier. She was painfully shy, reclusive, judgmental and very difficult to live with. However, Forster's work has increased my admiration for du Maurier as a writer. She was passionate about her work, mining every experience for ideas. For du Maurier, writing was breathing. When, as an elderly woman, the ability to write evaporated, she lost the will to live. This was devastating to read about, but a testament to the strength of the creative impulse and evidence that writers are born and not made.

I enjoyed the experience of reading this biography with my friend Jemidar and I'm looking forward to reading more of du Maurier's work. It will be interesting to see how my increased knowledge of her life affects my response to her writing.

Beth Bonini says

I read Forster's biography immediately after reading the more recently published book *Manderley Forever*. Author Tatiana de Rosnay did a rather bold thing by writing her novel in the present tense; not quite getting inside the skin of 'Daphne' by giving her protagonist the first-person voice, but still presenting the events of Daphne du Maurier's life as if she (and the reader) were eyewitnesses. It's an interesting and entertaining read, but in many ways I felt it did not manage to make the real person of Daphne du Maurier 'real' to me. The Daphne I encountered in that book seemed spoiled, selfish, standoffish, duplicitous, secretive and brittle; I couldn't warm to her at all, despite the fact that Tatiana de Rosnay was so obviously enamoured of her subject. What I found in Margaret Forster's biography (published 24 years before, in 1993) was insight and analysis into the admittedly complex character of Daphne du Maurier. Reading both books together enabled me to feel that I did gain some feeling and understanding for someone who was obviously a rather difficult, complicated, but in many ways, very admirable woman.

Forster excels at explaining Daphne's lifelong belief that there was a boy - Eric Avon, or 'the boy in the box' - inside her. This alter ego was more in line with the idea of a second self - and importantly, the bold, creative (and often sexual) self of DdM. When the two selves of DdM were balanced, and this was chiefly when she was engaged in the act of creative engagement (ie, writing), she was a fulfilled woman, if not always a happy one. But when her creative self was stymied, or dormant, she seemed to experience both depression, malaise, anger and neurosis. (Interestingly, the boy inside her allowed her to deny any lesbian (or 'Venetian') tendencies in herself.)

Daphne was obviously a very complicated character, and Forster was told by DdM's own children that she would discover a 'chameleon' when she tried to pin down the author, daughter, lover, mother and wife. Forster emphasises how her letters reveal just how much she could change her character and personality to suit her audience; also, there seems to be a great deal of evidence that the social personality was very different from the darker, more complicated internal personality - as was so evident in her work. One

appealing aspect of DdM which was not so evident in de Rosnay's book was Daphne's sense of humour and fun, also her self-deprecating ways and her lack of arrogance about her own writing. With her family, Forster says that 'there was always a lot of laughter, and the idea that Daphne had within her this demanding other self which was placated only by writing was impossible to guess at'. Another insight which Forster offers is Daphne's own admission that she only felt truly herself when she was alone. Yes, she was selfish - yes, she preferred her home Menabilly, her writing and her own rigid routine ('routes'), often to the expense of her children and her marriage - but she was not unaware of this. As Forster points out, through Daphne's own correspondence, she was very much aware of both the mistakes and compromises she made to be the writer she not just wanted, but needed, to be. I ended up admiring, very much, the incredible physical and psychic energy she put into her writing. She needed to write for many reasons, but not least of all as a way of working out the incredibly complicated emotional feelings which otherwise threatened to swamp her.

I thought that Forster's biography was very strong on DdM's marriage to Tommy 'Boy' Browning, but somewhat less revealing about her relationship with her sisters and father. She does a good job of describing the various novels and historical and biographical works, whilst putting them into context in DdM's emotional life. Although some people and events are dealt with too superficially, the truth is that the biographer obviously had to make choices. In a life as interesting as Daphne's, the biography could have easily been twice as long. 4.5 stars - with much underlining and starring as I read.

Doronike says

Sen jau mani gr?matplaukt? gaid?ja Dafnes biogr?fija, lai es var?tu uzzin?t kaut ko vair?k par "Rebekas" autori. Tas bija gana interesanti, lai ar? gaid?ju, ka b?s vair?k par dai?darbiem, bet autore koncentr?jusies uz di Morj? priv?to dz?vi. Man rad?s priekšstats, ka Fosterei ir savi noteikti priekšstati par sievieti-rakstnieci un sievieti-m?ti un sievu, un tad nu vi?a diezgan s?p?gi rea??. ja di Morj? neietilpst vi?as iedom?tajos r?m?šos. Un di Morj? ar? pati cent?s ?r?ji atbilst ang?u l?dijas t?lam, ta?u radošie veln?ni vi?as dz?vi dal?ja div?s da??s - pasaulei r?d?mo un iekš?jo, radošo. Fostere ir izvirez?jusi t?zi, ka di Morj? nebija iesp?jams dz?vot bez rakst?šanas - tikko izs?ka Dafnes radošais avots, vi?a l?n?m un ap??m?gi izdzisa ar? pati. Varb?t t?dam ar? j?b?t ?stam rakstniekam?

Mary says

This biography explores the motivations behind Daphne du Maurier's numerous spellbinding works. In a prolific writing career that began in 1931 with *The Loving Spirit* and subsequently spanned fifty years, the portrait that emerges is that of a woman constantly at odds with herself. Her various literary achievements coupled with a drive to succeed often conflicted with her role as a wife and a mother.

Access to Daphne's personal correspondence has allowed the author to reveal such private details of her life as Daphne's bisexual extramarital attractions, which included a longtime infatuation with Gertrude Lawrence - an English singer and actress, famous for her appearances on the London stage and on Broadway.

Daphne's rich fantasy life and fertile imagination enabled her to write captivating novels epitomized by 1938's *Rebecca* - a story which continues to endure even to this day. This richly layered biography aptly unveils the passionate nature of a woman who spent her life portraying the secrets of the sexual tensions between men and women.

I absolutely loved this book. I learned much more about Daphne du Maurier's life than I was expecting. I will say that Margaret Forster's writing style stopped just short of providing too much detail, although I would still give this book an A+!
