

# A lifetime of frustration

DAILY TELEGRAPH

14/5/07

## THE WEEKEND ON TELEVISION

Patricia Wynn Davies

The work of novelist Daphne du Maurier was shot through with secrets waiting to be unravelled, even if they remained imperfectly understood. It took until 1994, and Margaret Forster's biography, for du Maurier's own secrets - bisexual, duty-bound to a sterile marriage from the Second World War onwards - to be revealed. The biographical drama **Daphne** (BBC 2, Sat) was hitherto uncharted territory for television, which these days relishes a spot of abandoned bodice-ripping. So it was a relief to find its creators - writer Amy Jenkins and director Clare Beavan - cleaving to the more controlled atmosphere of postwar times.

Which is not to say that du Maurier's "Venetian" tendencies - a reference to du Maurier family slang for lesbianism - never found physical fulfilment in this drama or in life. (Fulfilment took the form of untroubled, devil-may-care actress Gertrude Lawrence - one-time lover of du Maurier's father, the kind of woman "who should be enjoyed on a divan not a bed".) Equally, the success of this 90 minutes didn't turn greatly on the fact

that it was period drama of the most sumptuous kind.

*Daphne* also delivered another dimension, which was needed because we now know how much du Maurier's personal tribulations fed into her writing - and because repressed desire and disappointment appropriated such a big slice of her emotional life. A good part of it was consumed by her unrequited love for Ellen Doubleday, the untenably attractive wife of her American publisher. Du Maurier called herself a "boy in a box" and said her life had been "one long lie", certainly since the pash she had had for a finishing school mademoiselle. But a key part of passion, particularly of the

forbidden sort, resides in the anticipation and in the imagining. "I thought you gorgeous," reflected Daphne to herself after Ellen's first appearance in her cabin mid-Atlantic. Enough said, really.

At the other end of the emotional spectrum, within the restricting walls of home in Cornwall, it took no more than a pained expression from husband Tommy and a mumbled excuse about five years of war for Daphne to know that the physical side of her marriage was over. Going back further, it was enough for Daphne to say she'd received "not one touch of the hand from Mummy". Amid the sumptuous surroundings of well-heeled America, fabulous frocks, classy soft-focus

production values and flawless performances from Geraldine Somerville, Elizabeth McGovern and Janet McTeer, it was these sparely articulated renderings of private tragedy that did most to illuminate du Maurier's life.

At the other end of the social scale, **Supergrass** (BBC 2, Sun), a slice of the reality behind the *The Sweeney* and *Life on Mars*, proved equally watchable, if lengthy. On one level, it was a series of reconstructions of how, in the 1970s, London's armed robbers took to breaking the 11th commandment (thou shalt not grass) to get reduced sentences - until the whole system came crashing down on the heads of a Metropolitan Police force that had allegedly got too close to the crims.

Alongside all that, though, came an additional flourish - the production after years of silence of the retired senior detective Tony Lundy, the former "supergrass master" who ran a conveyor belt of grasses from his Finchley nick. Unfortunately for his reputation, he also had a boxing-club acquaintance who was involved in the fabled £3.4million silver bullion robbery of 1984.

Around that time, the system started to go pear-shaped - by then a lesser breed, so to speak, of grass just made things up. A lengthy investigation followed. Now Lundy became the darling of crime correspondents for all the wrong reasons, until he was cleared and indeed promoted. A case of axe-grinding, he said, because "I did my job, better than most." As for "doing a Royal" on fellow villains today, it's recently been put on a statutory footing.

## DIGITAL REVIEW

Serena Davies

Even if it's not the most avant-garde new comedy show, BBC 3's sitcom **Gavin and Stacey** is still several marks up on that channel's *Tittybangbang*. It is also funnier than BBC1's puzzlingly popular *My Family*, though this can scarcely be considered much of an achievement. Last night's opener introduced, you guessed it, Gavin and Stacey. Stacey (Joanna Page) was a dizzy, pretty Welsh blonde and Gavin (Mathew Horne, previously seen in *The Catherine Tate Show*) was a rather handsome Essex boy. As work colleagues who'd been flirting on the phone for months but never actually met, they finally decided to bite the bullet and hook up in London. Accompanying them were their fat friends Nessa and Smithy (played by the show's writers,

Ruth Jones and James Corden). Predictably, the good-looking ones fell instantly into each other's arms, while their ugly mates had to get hammered first. This isn't a series that looks like it's going to be free of cliché. Never mind, there's still lots to enjoy: the central romance was really rather touching on first viewing, and Rob Brydon provided able support as Stacey's anally retentive uncle. Alison Steadman as Gavin's mum was customarily overwrought, but her screeching added to the general sense of bonhomie. The scriptwriters were a little too wary of offending the Welsh - or the English, for that matter - to wring the maximum comic potential out of our nations' little differences. But this may well be a vein mined in future episodes.