

Plugged In

Edited by **Gabriel Tate**



Geraldine Somerville plays impassioned novelist *Du Maurier* in the BBC's superb literary biopic

Daphne

Saturday, 9pm, BBC2

Three of the scariest, and, for that matter, classiest psychological thrillers ever written – 'Rebecca', 'The Birds' and 'Don't Look Now' – sprang improbably from the pen of a highly conventional, upper-crust English woman, Daphne du Maurier. To mark the centenary of her birth, the BBC is screening a beautifully realised film about the mismatch between the woman and her work. It seems that underneath the fox furs and elegant dresses, the author of these dark tales was a woman seething with conflict and emotion.

The drama, which has been scripted by Amy Jenkins ('This Life'), concentrates on the period in Du Maurier's life between 1945 and 1952. During these seven years, she underwent a highly public trial for plagiarism, fell in love with Ellen Doubleday – the socialite wife of her American publisher – and was chased into bed by Gertrude Lawrence, Noël Coward's muse and one of the most flamboyantly camp actresses of her generation. In a curiously Oedipal twist, Lawrence had also been the mistress of Daphne's father, Gerald du Maurier.

'You just have to read "Rebecca", which has so many hidden things in it, to know that there was a lot more to her,' says producer-director Clare Beavan. 'Before starting I went to her estate,

because I didn't want them to block it, and told Kit Browning, her son, that I wanted to concentrate on the most incendiary period of her love life. He wrote me a very funny email back in which he basically said: as a filmmaker I would have picked exactly that period, but as a member of the family I want to leave the country when it goes out.'

If he does so, he will be missing one of the most engrossing and inventive televisual literary profiles the BBC has made in years. Beavan has filmed the whole thing as a homage to classic Hollywood movies of the '40s and '50s; Jenkins has tailored the script to match.

It begins with a flashback and a voiceover recalling the past: a tribute not only to the genre but also a direct reference to the starting point of 'Rebecca' ('Last night I dreamt I went to Manderley again...') in both the book and Hitchcock's film version (showing Saturday, 5.15pm, BBC2). There is a terrific soundtrack, with lush music and soaring strings à la Douglas Sirk; the driving sequences use the old technique of rear projection; the weather outside Daphne's study goes rapidly through all four seasons to indicate the passage of time; and there are visual references galore to movies of the period from 'Now Voyager' to 'Brief Encounter'.

Interestingly, this stylistic choice was as much a matter of necessity as of creative choice. The project started life as

a documentary, and was consequently allocated only a fraction of the budget needed to make a period drama. A house off the M25 stands in for a Long Island mansion, Florida is recreated in the studio with fake sunshine and Cornwall stands in for America's north Atlantic seaboard. More importantly, Beavan didn't use fancy modern lenses or try to soup up the film in post-production, and thereby maintains the authentic period feel.

She is helped enormously by the actors she has cast in the three central roles: Geraldine Somerville as Du Maurier, Janet McTeer as Lawrence and Elizabeth McGovern as Doubleday. Their impressive performances successfully convey the underlying complexity of some distinctly unsympathetic characters.

Du Maurier was no gay liberationist and far from being a feminist icon. She believed that a woman's role was as a wife and mother. Although she had been involved with women since she was an adolescent at finishing school, she never considered herself a lesbian and insisted that if anybody mentioned the word she would 'tear their guts out'. So this won't go down too well with the right-on brigade, while the Home Counties set might well bridle at the steamy sex scenes. The rest of us can settle down and watch that rare thing: a film that doesn't pull its punches about the contradictory nature of love and human sexuality. *Alkarim Jivani*

Also this week...

Premiership Football: Chelsea vs Manchester United

Wed, 7.30-10.30, Sky Sports 1
By this stage the showdown may no longer have a bearing on the title, but it's a preliminary scuffle to next week's FA Cup final.

The Museum

Thur, 7.30-8.00, BBC2
The conservators at the British Museum come under the lens in this opening episode of a new series, as they take their scalpels to art from 1350BC. No pressure.

Ray

Tue, 9.00-10.30 & 11.00-12.25am
ITV1
Jamie Foxx turned in an Oscar-winning performance as the mould-breaking musician, Ray Charles, who was still alive when this biopic was in production.

Power To The People

Mon, 9.00-10.00, BBC2
A country village under threat decides to up sticks and come to Islington – morris dancers, livestock and all.

Ian Hislop's Scouting For Boys

Mon, 9.00-10.00, BBC4
The diminutive hack pulls on his woggle and follows in the footsteps of Lord Baden Powell – up to a point.

Sleeper Cell

Tue, 10.00-11.10, FX
A new series of the thriller in which an undercover FBI agent and practising Muslim is dispatched to infiltrate a cell of Islamic terrorists.

'What's this thing they call online?'

Lanreath pensioner

Beattie tries to

understand why

her local post office

has closed in

'Power To The People'

(Monday, 9pm, BBC2)

