



The Scapegoat

Daphne du Maurier

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By chance, John and Jean--one English, the other French--meet in a provincial railway station. Their resemblance to each other is uncanny, and they spend the next few hours talking and drinking - until at last John falls into a drunken stupor. It's to be his last carefree moment, for when he wakes, Jean has stolen his identity and disappeared. So the Englishman steps into the Frenchman's shoes, and faces a variety of perplexing roles - as owner of a chateau, director of a failing business, head of a fractious family, and master of nothing.

Gripping and complex, *The Scapegoat* is a masterful exploration of doubling and identity, and of the dark side of the self.

The Scapegoat Details

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From Reader Review The Scapegoat for online ebook

Bionic Jean says

Have you ever wanted to run away from your life? What would happen if you suddenly had the chance to; would you "grasp the nettle"? Or what if a new life was imposed on you, whether you liked it or not? Such is the premise of Daphne du Maurier's 1957 novel, **The Scapegoat**.

The Scapegoat is reminiscent of novels such as, "*The Prisoner of Zenda*" and according to one of Daphne du Maurier's biographers, this rollicking adventure was a favourite story of Daphne's when she was a little girl. But it also owes a great deal to "*Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*" as Daphne du Maurier also explores how two selves begin to feel as if they are part of the same person, the viewpoint character. In fact it is neither a straightforward adventure story as in Anthony Hope's tale, nor a dark study of two individuals; personalities within the same body, as in Robert Louis Stevenson's classic horror story. It lies somewhere between the two, yet is also an unsettling tale, full of suspense, sometimes even having a dream-like quality.

Daphne du Maurier had the idea for **The Scapegoat** when she was in France in 1955, to research the lives of her ancestors, the Busson-Mathurins, who were glass-blowers. She did subsequently write the novel for which she intended this research, entitling it "*The Glassblowers*" (1963). But before writing it, she became distracted by a number of incidents that happened to her in France, which inspired the plot of **The Scapegoat**, published in 1957. She apparently wrote it at record speed, finishing within six months, and then collapsed with nervous exhaustion.

One of the triggers was that while out for a walk in a square in a French town, Daphne du Maurier saw a man who looked identical to someone she happened to know. According to one of her biographers, Judith Cook, she then watched a family scene through a window, and began to put the two incidents together in her feverish imagination. Typically, she began to wonder about the people; who they were, and what their secrets might be,

"She imagined herself suddenly transported into their midst, listening to their conversation, perhaps even becoming one of them,"

and so the seeds of **The Scapegoat** were sown.

Another instance provides part of the novel's setting. Houses often seem to take on a life of their own in Daphne du Maurier's novels. For example, "*Manderley*" in "*Rebecca*", seems to be imbued with as much of a presence - to be as much a character - as any of the actual people in the book. Indeed in her own life, she seems to have had an almost obsessive love for her "*Menabilly*" the house she rented for so many years. Here in France, as part of her research, Daphne du Maurier discovered a house that had belonged to one of her ancestors two hundred years earlier. Exploring the derelict buildings, she saw fragments of the glass they had made, still there, scattered by the wind. She used these impressions and experiences, drawing on them to create an atmospheric, dramatic suspense novel, set in France.

In **The Scapegoat**, her ancestral glass-blowing foundry became the failing business of the de Gué family. They in turn were depicted as more grand, in fact minor aristocrats, the Comte and Comtesse. And instead of writing herself into the story, the author took on the guise of a male narrator, one of five occasions in major novels when she did this.

The narrator, and viewpoint character, is an Englishman named John. At the start of the novel we learnt that John is dissatisfied with his life as a university lecturer, and tending to become depressed with what he sees

as a futile life. It is evident that he is travelling through France, where he meets a man who eerily is his double in looks; a confident French count, Jean de Gué. Intrigued despite himself, John plays along with the Count's wishes, indulging in a night of drinking, and staying in an anonymous downbeat hotel overnight. On waking, he discovers that the man has disappeared, taking all John's own clothes and belongings, and leaving him to play the role of the "Comte Jean de Gué". Thus we have the novel's basic premise.

At first confused, John then becomes angry,

"filled with an intense desire to get away from that dingy, shabby hotel and never set eyes on it again, and as my anger rose and self-disgust took possession of me..."

And a little later, he describes being,

"possessed by a reckless feeling I had never known before, the sensation that I myself did not matter any more... no one could call me to account for any action. For the first time I was free."

He thus become his double's scapegoat, and the events which follow enmesh him further in deceit and duplicity, which at first he considers to be in itself wrong, but quickly comes to regard as a means of basic survival,

"My sense of power was unbounded... I felt my bluff to be superb, and it must have worked... My self-confidence mounting every moment... I recalled my success the night before... little scraps of family history fell on my ear... what I gleaned would have to be sorted and sifted at leisure."

John learns about the idiosyncratic family he has been thrust amidst. He learns how his doppelgänger had influenced the destinies of these individuals, mercilessly twisting their lives to his own purpose. Gradually John begins to feel sympathy for the family who have accepted him, John, totally at face value. They have treated him variously with the emotions he has seemed to lack in his life so far; that is with love or hatred, but rarely with indifference. And as the novel proceeds we become aware that John has become emotionally committed to this family, within the space of seven days. He determines to use his family position as a tool, to influence both the workers in the factory, and "his" individual family member's lives for the better. Although a scapegoat, he is desperate to learn everything about the family intrigues, deceptions, jealousies and murders, both the events in the past and also those in the present.

Indeed there are at least two other contenders for the description of "scapegoat". Either the daughter or the wife could be seen in these terms. Marie-Noel seems over-eager to sacrifice herself for her father, as does Françoise, the Count's wife. The intensity of the little girl Marie-Noel's relationship with her father is clearly a reflection of that between the author, Daphne du Maurier, and her own father, the charismatic actor-manager Gerald du Maurier.

But Daphne du Maurier's descriptions of the little girl's religious fervour, as well as that of her aunt Blanche, serve well to heighten the tension at various points. It borders on the macabre, and makes the novel seem almost a gothic tale. All Daphne du Maurier's novels are tightly plotted, and this one, like *"My Cousin Rachel"* is full of suspense, coincidence, hints and dark secrets. The narrator continually suspects various members of his family - including his doppelgänger - of not only duplicity, but also of some evil deeds in the past. The whole novel is driven by the narrator's desperate desire for knowledge and understanding. He never reflects back on what has led him to this point, or what his life has been so far, but always concentrates on remaining undiscovered, and as the novel proceeds, on influencing the future of his "adopted family" for their good.

As with many of Daphne du Maurier's novels, there are so many elements of mystery that it is sometimes rather like reading a detective story. She often drops hints to the reader; clues carefully planted so that the

reader is able to puzzle out the various roles and relationships before the viewpoint character John does. We suspect Renée's behaviour, for example, before John seems to have an inkling of why she seems so overly flirtatious and petulant. And we know who the woman Béla in the neighbouring village of Villars must be.

We see as the novel proceeds, a merging of the two John/Jeans,

"The feeling of power, of triumph that I was outwitting this little group of unsuspecting people had turned again to shame. It seemed to me now that I wanted Jean de Gué to have been a different sort of man. I did not want to discover at each step that he was worthless... I had exchanged my own negligible self for a worthless personality. He had the supreme advantage over me in that he had not cared. Or had he, after all? Was this why he had disappeared?"

And later,

"I knew that everything I had said or done had implicated me further, driven me deeper, bound me more closely still to that man whose body was not my body, whose mind was not my mind, whose thoughts and actions were a world apart, and yet whose inner substance was part of my nature, part of my secret self."

At this point just less than half-way through, the dream-like quality is notched up a step, and we realise that John is beginning to perceive another, darker, personality hidden within his own self, much as the character "Doctor Jekyll" did, but more subtly. Although Jekyll became subsumed and ultimately destroyed by the malignant influence of Hyde, John conversely seems to become more self-possessed and confident through his exploration of his darker self. He seems to become, in a sense, a more complete character, and his past a mere shadow.

There are recurring themes in this novel. Take the motif of a broken ornament, for instance. In "Rebecca", the episode where the new wife accidentally destroys a valuable china ornament given to her predecessor (Rebecca) on her marriage, and becoming a particular favourite, is powerfully symbolic. Here there is a similar event involving Anne-Marie and her mother, and a porcelain cat and dog,

"the only things I possess and value in this house."

Real-life dogs are another device. There are heart-stopping moments where the readers wonder whether the dog will recognise the supplanted character of John, in the place of César's master, the Count. In "Rebecca", the dog is suspicious for a long time of the new wife. In both cases the apprehension devolves on the viewpoint character. When César, the dog, finally accepts John, the author says,

"as he wagged his tail, I felt that I had scored a triumph."

The writing style too, feels very like Daphne du Maurier's other novels. There is much description to add colour and mood. On quite a few occasions she will use personification, or even the pathetic fallacy, to influence and further heighten the atmosphere, such as when,

"There was no break in the weeping sky to give direction."

At one point halfway through the novel, John feels that he is trapped in a corner. He feels impotent, and that whatever he does will not work; he is sinking further and further into a morass of his own making. The author describes the scene outside the house,

"Immediately beside me was a gargoyle's head, ears flattened, slits for eyes, the jutting lips forming a spout for rain. The leaded guttering was choked with leaves, and when rain came the whole would turn to mud and pour from the gargoyle's mouth in a turbid stream... seeping down the walls, swirling in the runways,

choking and gurgling above the gargoyle head, driving sideways like arrows to the windows, stinging the panes... there would be no other sound for hour after hour... but the falling rain, and the flood of leaves and rubble through the gargoyle's mouth."

On another occasion, when the reader is finally about to learn the truth about the mysterious Maurice Duval,

"A fluttering sound by the window made me turn my head. It was a butterfly, the last of the long summer, woken by sunshine, seeking escape from the cobwebs that imprisoned it. I released the butterfly from its prison, and it hovered a moment on the sill, then settled once more amongst the cobwebs."

The novel hurtles to its conclusion, within its short compressed time-frame, as John desperately tries to right the wrongs as he sees them. Increasingly he is more committed, yet contrarily also more unsure,

"I wondered how much further I had to fall, and if the sense of shame that overwhelmed me was merely wallowing in darkness... I had played the coward long enough."

When the dog, César, drags him at reckless speed through the woods, it is as if John's own darker side is "dogging" him,

"I dragged myself to my feet, and with my hell-hound in tow started off once more through the vastness of the wood, feeling, as the poet did before me, that my companion would be with me through the nights and through the days, and down the arches of the years, and I should never be rid of him."

Even the structure of this one sentence gives the impression of hurtling towards doom. It does not let up; there is no break.

Towards the conclusion, the identification, or perhaps the confusion or melding of the two characters John/Jean, becomes ever more apparent. Here John refers to an event long past, but seems to also draw truths from it about his doppelgänger,

"I knew that what had happened on a dark night nearly fifteen years ago had not come about by chance but was something planned and done deliberately by a man without heart or feeling, who saw perhaps, in the other someone finer than himself possessing... all the qualities he himself lacked."

Yet he still fears discovery,

"...she knows at last. I've given myself away... But I was wrong."

"I could not ask forgiveness for something I had not done. As scapegoat I could only bear the fault."

On the penultimate page, the transmogrification is complete,

"I walked on through darkness, undergrowth and moss, and now I had no present and no past, the self who stumbled had no heart and mind..."

"wishing to condemn him, it was as if it was the shadow I condemned, the man who had moved and spoken and acted in his place, and not Jean de Gué at all.

"It's no use... I'm not describing the man you know."

"You are... but you're describing yourself as well."

There was the fear. Which one of us was real?... It struck me suddenly that if I should now look at myself in a mirror I should see no reflection."

This is a disturbing tale, and it comes as no surprise to learn how emotionally drained and disturbed the author was on its completion. Events in Daphne du Maurier's own life were mirrored within the novel, and the author became increasingly jittery and confused as to which had actually happened first. When she wrote about the character Françoise needing a blood transfusion, in real life shortly afterwards, her daughter Tessa gave birth to a son who needed two blood transfusions. Her biographer Judith Cook says, of the odd coincidences and connections,

"Daphne began to find it all rather frightening."

And another biographer, Margaret Forster, reprints a letter, which Daphne du Maurier wrote in the same year of **The Scapegoat's** publication, 1957, just after her (Daphne's) husband Tommy had had a nervous breakdown. She herself was also on the verge of nervous collapse. In it, she talks about her novel,

"It is my story, and it is [his] also. We are both doubles. So it is with 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 that man's nature had to fuse together to give birth to a third, well balanced. Know Thyself. (view spoiler)Can Moper, and can I, learn from this? I think we can ... but the dark side is not yet destroyed. We must be patient."

The ending she refers to comes across to the reader as quite weak. It provides neither the delicious twist we have learnt to expect from this author, nor the massive ambiguity she can do so well. Clearly from this letter though, it is what she intended, and perhaps had to wrestle with internally herself. Perhaps after all it is a fitting ending to a novel, in which she delved into John/Jean's - and possibly her own - psyche and explored other, imaginary selves. Did she explore mere fantasies, or their secret lives? Increasingly after this novel, she became intrigued by what she called the "dark side" of our natures, and some of her best short stories and novellas, explore this theme. *"Don't Look Now"*, *"The Blue Lenses"*, and *"The Breakthrough"*, are examples. They too are macabre and strange, tense and chillingly unexpected tales, relying on the same speculative atmosphere of suspense and mystery, both disturbing and uncanny.

Note:

The Scapegoat was made into a film in 1959 starring Alec Guinness and Bette Davis. Additionally there is a 2012 film with Matthew Rhys which is based on the novel. However this is not set in France but in the UK in 1952 just before the coronation. Teacher John Standing, who has just lost his job, meets his doppelgänger Johnny Spence, a failed businessman. Thus none of the French associations are there, and in fact the story is entirely different, with different characters, different major and critical episodes - and even a different ending!

Further note:

Here are links to my reviews of other major novels by Daphne du Maurier:

Jamaica Inn
Rebecca
My Cousin Rachel
The House on the Strand

and one play:

The Years Between

Mary Beth *Traveling Sister* says

4.5 stars

I have read several of Daphne Du Maurier's books and loved every single one. Rebecca is my favorite but this book came very close to it.

I will be reading more of her books.

What would you do if you came face to face with yourself? That's what happens to John, an Englishman on holiday in France, when he meets his exact double - a Frenchman called Jean de Gue. John agrees to go for a drink with Jean but falls into a drunken stupor and wakes up in a hotel room to find that Jean has disappeared, taking John's clothes and identity documents with him!

When Jean's chauffeur arrives at the hotel, John is unable to convince him of what has happened - and ends up accompanying the chauffeur to Jean de Gue's chateau, where the Frenchman's unsuspecting family assume that he really is Jean de Gue. Naturally, they expect him to continue running the family glass-making business and arranging shooting parties - things that John has absolutely no experience in. Before long, it starts to become obvious that Jean is using John as a scapegoat; Jean's family and business are both in a mess and he wants someone else to have to deal with them.

Throughout the book, I was forced to revise my opinions once or twice about what was really going on. If everything in the book is supposed to be taken literally, then we need to suspend belief at times: could two men really be so identical that even their mother, wife and daughter can't tell the difference? There is also another way to interpret the story, one which goes deeper into the psychology of identity - I won't say any more about that here, but if you read the book this theory may occur to you too. I found the book very thought provoking.

As usual, du Maurier's writing is wonderfully atmospheric. She has a way of making you feel as though you're actually there in the hotel room in Le Mans, the grounds of Jean de Gue's estate in the French countryside and Bela's antique shop in the town of Villars.

When John first arrives at the de Gue chateau, every member of the household is a stranger to him but we (and John) are given enough clues to gradually figure out who each person is and what their relationship is to Jean de Gue. From the neglected pregnant wife and the hostile elder sister to the resentful younger brother and the religious ten-year-old daughter, every character is well-drawn and memorable.

Another thing I love about Daphne du Maurier's writing is her ability to always keep the reader guessing right to the final page (and sometimes afterwards too). This was a fascinating and unusual story.

Marita says

4.5 stars

Be careful what you wish for...

In *The Key of the Tower* by Gilbert Adair, an Englishman and a Frenchman swapped cars and mayhem ensued. In Daphne du Maurier's **The Scapegoat**, a Frenchman and an Englishman swap identities, although it isn't exactly a mutual decision.

John, an Englishman, is a francophile and historian. He meticulously prepares his scholarly lectures for his students, but there is a certain detachment to what he does. He is law-abiding, unmarried and has no family ties. He spends much time in France because of his research and he speaks French as well as any French person. However, he becomes a stranger, simply another tourist, the moment that he presents his British passport at yet another hotel. No matter what he does, he is never one of them. No matter how well he speaks the language, or how well he knows their history, he is an outsider. What he wants is to connect with people, to belong. *"I was an alien, I was not one of them. Years of study, years of training, the fluency with which I spoke their language, taught their history, described their culture, had never brought me closer to the people themselves."*

Having lost his way (in more ways than one) he finds himself in a bar near the railway station where he is having a drink with someone called Jean who doesn't only look like his identical twin, but even sounds the same - a mirror image of himself. *"I was looking at myself."* From this moment his life changes completely and irrevocably. Before he knows what's what he finds that he and Jean have swapped identities, albeit that he, John, has done so unwillingly and initially unwittingly. He wanted to be one of them, and now unexpectedly he is, but not in the manner he had envisaged. Be careful what you wish for...

Not only is John now a Frenchman named Jean, but he has "inherited" (view spoiler) This caboodle comes with history and baggage. It also comes with problems! He "inherits" Jean's past and present, but what about the future? *"And there was no answer, only a question mark."*

Having set the scene, Ms du Maurier now proceeds to explore identity and duality in this carefully crafted novel. John initially feels like a spectator at a play, but before long he is one of the players and he immerses himself in the role. Of course he now plays the role of Jean, but is he Jean or is he John - or maybe both? At first he experiences freedom as he sets free the restrictions imposed by his John personality. But soon he becomes engulfed in the problems inherent in his new role. He walks a tightrope and is never quite sure whether he is terrified or amused. That is, the John in him is terrified, but the Jean (his dark side) is amused. Not only does he have to keep his wits about him, but he has to learn new skills, as well as examine his own motives and actions. In the process John learns a great deal about himself and both the John and the Jean sides of his personality. In the past John had no need to consider others, whereas Jean was bogged down by family and business commitments. *"Never before had I been concerned with the feelings of anybody but myself, except for the minds and motives of characters in history long since dead."* But John as Jean is now the patriarch of a family. *"Lecturing on Joan of Arc was no preparation for a père de famille, and I was not even a père de famille, I was someone acting a part in a masquerade."* As John assumes his Jean role he becomes repulsed by the Jean persona, and he has to come to grips with one moral dilemma after another, and in the process faux pas follows faux pas. There is for example (view spoiler) It would be a comedy of errors, except that it is no comedy at all but instead a drama filled with tragedy. Everything is topsy turvy; what seems benign one moment is malicious the next. And so he becomes a scapegoat: *"I could not ask forgiveness for something I had not done. As scapegoat, I could only bear the fault."*

Ms du Maurier succeeds brilliantly in this exploration of self, of identity and of the duality of good and evil within a person. Words are carefully chosen, and even simple sentences are laden with meaning. I couldn't help smiling when John/Jean's valet/chauffeur innocently and solicitously inquires: *"Monsieur le Comte is himself again?" he asked anxiously."*

Here are a few more quotes;
(view spoiler)

And, by the way, if you are going to assume someone else's identity, beware of dogs (who always know their master) and children:
(view spoiler)

Andrew Smith says

I must admit to feeling a little nervous about taking on this book. Novels of 'a certain age' really aren't my thing, I seem to struggle with everything about them. If it's not the stilted or overblown language it is a plot that feels horribly tame and dated. If there's a phobia attached to reading these books, then I have it. I'd never read a book by Daphne du Maurier before so I wasn't sure quite which I'd get - the overblown or the stilted - but I was confident the plot would be asinine. And guess what, I was right! But I was also wrong...

John, a discontented English academic travelling in France meets an unhappy Frenchman who, by chance, is his doppelganger. They share a drink and then a few more. Before long John has passed out and when he wakes he realises that his identity has been stolen – Jean, his Gallic lookalike, has run off with his clothes, wallet and car. This is the point where the story takes a fairly unlikely turn (if it hadn't already) in that John decides to live Jean's life, moving in with his family and picking up the loose threads of the life Jean had left behind. Strange, unlikely... both? Yes. But stranger still is the fact that I slowly became drawn into the story and significantly invested in the outcome.

The language is rich and hugely descriptive – all in a good way – and as the tale gallops along more and more problems seem to crawl out of the woodwork. Can John possibly add value here, can he right the wrongs and solve some of the problems? He is certainly going to have his hands full as there is much to do if he is to right this particular ship. (view spoiler)

Probably some time around half way through the book I realised that I'd put aside all my concerns regarding the realism of the story in favour of just enjoying the tale. From this point on it was easy – and hugely enjoyable. As I approached the end I started to worry whether du Maurier would land a bail out happy ending on her readers, even though I couldn't really work out what this would look like. I needn't have worried, the story was tied up brilliantly and in a way I couldn't have foreseen.

Memo to myself: don't be so dismissive of books written before I was born – I can learn much from them and the medicine to cure my phobia is simple enough, seek out my next one PDQ.

Marian says

Someone jolted my elbow as I drank and said, 'Je vous demande pardon, ' and as I moved to give him space 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. Two men--one English, the other French--

meet by chance in a provincial railway station and are astounded that they are so much alike that they could easily pass for each other. Over the course of a long evening, they talk and drink. It is not until he awakes the next day that John, the Englishman, realizes that he may have spoken too much. His French companion is gone, having stolen his identity.

Emma says

What an amazing story! I read the second half in one go because I just couldn't put it down. Oh what a tangled web...! This book had all the feels- sadness, hope, love, regret, redemption, transformation and loss. The ending was the right one but I railed against it. Once again I am in awe of Du Maurier's skill. This story will sit with me for quite some time.

Recommended

João Carlos says

John e Jean - Alec Guinness no filme The Scapegoat/O Outro Eu (1959) realizado por Robert Hamer

”É fácil para mim perder-me num passado meio real meio imaginário, sempre que fecho os olhos ao presente.

(...)

A sombra inspira-me confiança, ao passo que a luz crua da realidade gera a dúvida e a apreensão.”

(Pág. 7) - estas duas frases sintetizam admiravelmente o complexo e fascinante romance **”O Outro Eu”** (1957) da escritora **Daphne du Maurier** (1907 – 1989).

A sinopse refere: **Dois homens, um inglês e o outro francês, conhecem-se, por acaso, num restaurante de uma estação de comboio. A sua semelhança física é inquietante e passam as horas seguintes a conversar e a beber - até que John, o inglês, se embebeda. Será o seu último momento de descanso, pois quando acorda o seu amigo francês trocou com ele a sua identidade e desapareceu. Assim, John assume a vida do francês e é confrontado com uma série de papéis confusos - como dono de um château e director de um negócio à beira da falência.**

”O Outro Eu” é um romance bastante melodramático, narrado na primeira pessoa, um thriller psicológico sobre uma família problemática, num cenário dominado pela mentira e pela descrença nos relacionamentos entre as diferentes personagens; num contexto de profunda complexidade, associado ao relato de eventos, verdadeiramente plausíveis e de uma forma sólida, com uma eficiente e admirável caracterização das personagens secundárias, mantendo o leitor preso aos mistérios da “história” ou das “histórias” e ao seu imprevisível desfecho.

Não posso deixar de destacar como as diferentes “histórias” pessoais – ambíguas e quase sempre dominadas pelas paixões e pelas intrigas, mas, sobretudo, pela mentira – se vão interligando, criando uma “história” mais ampla e mais profusa, com um ritmo ágil, por vezes, impetuoso, obrigando o leitor a tentar deslindar a imprevisibilidade do comportamento de John e de Jean – dois homens, ora presentes ora ausentes, o verso e o reverso, a luz e a sombra, o amor e o ódio.

”Não havia o direito de brincar com a vida das pessoas. Não se devia interferir nos seus sentimentos. Uma palavra, um olhar, um sorriso, um franzir de sobranceiras, tudo isso podia afectar outro ser humano, provocar-lhe simpatia ou aversão, e logo se formava uma teia, sem princípio nem fim, estendendo-se para fora e para dentro, emaranhando-se a existência de um ficava ligada à existência de outro.” (Pág. 60)

(view spoiler)

Elyse says

Thank You to the MANY readers who came before me: I'm no longer a virgin to author "Daphne Du Maurier". Special thanks to Jean, Sara, and Candy.

Two men....one English, "John"...(the narrator), the other French, "Jean de Gue", meet by chance one evening. It's like looking into a mirror: they look almost identical- other than the color of their eyes.

At the start of the novel, we learn that John- on holiday in France...

was a historian and gave lectures in England about his country and it's past. Not married - and has no children.

And even though he was English - he studied French for years. He taught their history, and described their culture, however he felt like an outsider - an alien. He wasn't one of them.... but wished to be. He wished to be bound by a family..... share their laughter and sorrow.

Due to his depression - he walked the streets at night in the rain and knew he must get drunk. He also was thinking of spending a few days at a monastery in hopes of finding the courage to go on living before returning to England.

Over drinks in a bar, John shares with Jean de Gue how as an individual, he feels like a failure.

Jean de Gue tells John that we've all 'failed' - everyone has. He tells him:

"The secret of life is to recognize the fact early on, and become reconciled. Then it no longer matters".

John says: "It does matter, I am not reconciled".

During this evening the men continue drinking and talking. Jean de Gue takes John to a restaurant....driving John's car (after all, he knows it city best), and brings them to a shabby hotel.... and says "Sometimes, these places can be useful".

USEFUL FOR WHAT???

After the fourth drink....the men let down their guards more.

John continued to talk about loneliness, death, and the empty shell of his personal world.

Jean de Gue, master of a chateau, and director of a failing business says, "You complain that your life is empty", to me it sounds like paradise. An apartment to yourself, no family, no business worries".

Jean de Gue's voice changed - its clear he had personal problems too - felt resentment. He said he had a sister who only thinks about religion and nothing else.

He thinks the only motive force in human nature is "GREED". People in Jean de Gue's life were never satisfied--[from his point of view].

So... I ask: if you have read this far:

.....which of these two men's life sounds most attractive to you? Would you rather be without a family, with no responsibilities, but also feel lonely, depressed and empty?

Or, have many people counting on you - wife - mother - daughter - brother - sister-in-law- friends with benefits - business associates- and feel resentful?

And if you could step into one of these men's lives - by trading places --as a stranger/ actor taking over the role.... how do you think you might make a difference? And how might you do harm? In THIS story...we get the opportunity to watch how the entire scenario - this crazy game - so to speak - affects each person.

As this story plays out we watch how brilliantly John steps into Jean de Gue's life.....Funny transition scene - had to chuckle- a little!

Jean de Gue had acted wrongly. He ran away from his life, he escaped the emotions that he himself created. John brought forth 'his' emotions - and whether right or wrong...(I think even the most skeptical readers can suspend disbelief, in this masterfully written fiction novel),I had faith that what John was searching for would somehow transform not only him but heal bruised family members with empathy and love. But how? And at what cost?

When John first stepped into Jean de Gue's life, he noticed that his mother looked frightened. His sister silent. His brother hostile. His sister-in-law angry. His wife crying, and his daughter threw a tantrum. The dog, ignored him.

There are some "OH BOY" situations.... sticky as taffy! Also, this story is simply a compelling fantasy ride with marvelous prose to boot!
The ending of this story calls for discussion!!! Personally -- I think it fits!

Off to join my group and read what others are saying! A book so much richer than many of the newer fiction books I often read. Just sayin!

A DELICIOUS BOOK!!! At least one of my top 20 favorites of all times!!!!

Teresa Proença says

*"para lá de qualquer zona proibida
há um espelho para a nossa triste transparência"*
— Alejandra Pizarnik

(Rene Magritte - *The Musings Of The Solitary Walker*)

Enchantress debbicat ? says

Very clever and enjoyable! I am not sure what I can say about this that hasn't already been said in other reviews...but, I can tell you for certain that I loved it. So, I can add that to the others that truly enjoyed this novel. It was unexpected. It wasn't even what I thought it would be about when I had so many times passed it over for something else. I might not had read it had it not been for my reading group picking it as a buddy read and, well, I like to read with those gals.

The book has been summarized often in GR reviews. I am not going to add anything more. Du Maurier is one of my favorite authors. I named one of my very pretty tuxedo cats after her 10 years ago this March. (this is 2017). Rebecca has been on my favorites list for it seems forever. If you have not read a Daphne du Maurier before, do yourself a favor and read one now. They never disappoint.

This story about two men who switch identities is so much more than what it seems on the surface. It brings a lot of self-introspection and often times has the reader asking, "What would I do in this situation?" The are memorable characters you won't soon (if ever) forget. The conflict is decidedly resolved in the way that

works best, though, initially, I was not so sure of that.

I loved the discussion our group had. Other perspectives always make for a more interesting read for me. So much to think about. I am still pondering some of the character's actions. I think this will stick with me for a long while. Such a satisfying read. Highly recommended!!! I picked it up first at a very low price on Amazon for Kindle when my buddies decided to read it. I later added the audible version as I got further into the book. I can tell you it is well worth the credit! The narrator is exceptional. And, I listen to a lot of audio books.

This was just the perfect read. I couldn't ask for anything more :-)

Connie says

"Someone jolted my elbow as I drank and said 'Je sous demande pardon,' and as I moved to give him space 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."

John, the narrator, is an Englishman who is an expert in French history and language. He's a lonely man without a family who is thinking of joining a monastery to find meaning in his life. His double, Jean de Gue, is self-centered, extroverted, and the head of a large French family and a failing business. After a night of drinking, John awakes to find Jean has disappeared with John's identification papers, luggage, and car. A driver comes to pick up Monsieur le Comte, and John goes into Jean's life without any background knowledge. Since Jean is known to be charming one minute and hurtful the next, no one but the dog can tell the difference between the two men.

It's a suspenseful psychological study as we learn the secrets of Jean's life through the eyes of John as he works out the relationships and family history. As he deals with Jean's family, John is transformed. Since John has a kinder, more thoughtful nature, the family also undergoes some changes. Will Jean ever return to his family?

The book has a wonderful setting--a chateau in St Gilles in the Pas de la Loire. A dozen years have passed since the Occupation and there is still friction between those who were members of the Resistance and the collaborators. The book reveals the psychological profiles of the two men and the family layer by layer. I'm a fan of Daphne du Maurier's skillful writing, and "The Scapegoat" is one of her best works.

Candi says

My only complaint with reading a Daphne du Maurier novel is that every book I pick up for some time afterwards pales in comparison. The depth of the characterizations, the richly described settings, and the undercurrent of suspense throughout never fail to enthrall me. No less so with this one, **The Scapegoat**. I found myself once again under du Maurier's spell.

John is an Englishman well-educated in everything French – the language, the history and the culture. He passes on all his knowledge as a lecturer at a university; he travels in France with ease. What he lacks, however, is a connection with the people. At the tail end of a tour in this country, John has fallen victim to a feeling of melancholy, of failure. He feels as an outsider, both in his own country of England as well as in France. He yearns to feel a part of the people, a kinship with his fellow human beings.

"Years of study, years of training, the fluency with which I spoke their language, taught their history, described their culture, had never brought me closer to the people themselves. I was too diffident, too conscious of my own reserve. My knowledge was library knowledge, and my day-by-day experience no deeper than a tourist's gleanings. The urge to know was with me, and the ache. The smell of the soil, the gleam of the wet roads, the faded paint of shutters masking windows through which I should never look, the grey faces of houses whose doors I should never enter, were to me an everlasting reproach, a reminder of distance, of nationality. Others could force an entrance and break the barrier down: not I. I should never be a Frenchman, never be one of them."

Anyone that has ever hungered to be a part of a group, but yet always felt as a stranger, will relate to John here. What should happen, however, if you had the opportunity to take someone's place? Would you do it? When John bumps into an exact likeness of himself in a tavern, he is given precisely this chance. While John is a lonely man with a feeling of emptiness inside, Comte Jean de Gué claims to have only the problem of having too many 'human' possessions. Jean wants to play a clever game – that of switching identities with John and assuming each other's lives. When John wakes the next morning, stripped of his own clothes and everything he had on his person, what choice does he have but to put on another man's clothes, take his suitcase and assume this new life?

"Just as an actor paints old lines upon a young face, or hides behind the part he must create, so the old anxious self that I knew too well could be submerged and forgotten, and the new self would be someone without a care, without responsibility, calling himself Jean de Gué... "

If only life were this simple. If only human relationships were straightforward, with little or no difficulties, no web of intricacies to disentangle. John, as the new Comte Jean de Gué, finds himself taking on a failing business and a family with secrets and complex feelings. John will come to know Jean through this family and his interactions with them. Jean may not be the kind of person our narrator would wish to emulate if given a choice. But isn't he somehow responsible for these people now that he has allowed himself to be an accomplice to this deception? Does he want Jean to fail because he feels a victim in this charade? Perhaps John is Jean de Gué's scapegoat, or maybe another is fulfilling this role in the drama that plays out in this wounded family.

I was completely absorbed in this book. The psychological complexities and moral dilemmas, the Gothic-like atmosphere, and the superior writing that I have come to expect from Daphne du Maurier left me thoroughly satisfied. You really must read this if you have not. There's so much more to this author than just her masterpiece, **Rebecca**, and you would be missing out if you didn't immerse yourself in every last bit she had to offer – I know I will!

Misfit says

Two strangers, identical in appearance, a chance meeting and lives are forever changed. English John meets French Count Jean and share dinner and drinks as they discuss the remarkable likeness the two share. But Jean's financial problems drive him to render John unconscious, switch identities and leave him in his place to deal with his failing glass factory and fractious family. John soon finds himself in the midst of a mine-field dealing with a pregnant "wife", a couple of mistresses (one of those being his sister-in-law), a "sister" who won't speak to him, a precocious "daughter" and an ailing "mother" with a bad habit.

Despite all the pitfalls, John comes to care for this new family and strives to find ways to make the glass factory a success – until a tragedy strikes that brings an unexpected financial windfall to the family's fortunes - but news of that windfalls also brings back..... More than that I'm not telling - you know I'm not into

spoilers and book reports. As with all Du Maurier's books her writing and characterizations are subtle and sublime and I'm once again left with an enigmatic ending that kept me guessing just a little bit more. Four stars.

Laura says

When a dissatisfied Englishman on holiday collides with someone in a railway station, he realizes he's looking at his double — only his double is French. The next morning, the Englishman discovers his passport and papers have been replaced by the Frenchman's, so he figures his best option is to assume the Frenchman's identity. Navigating his new role as master of a chateau and head of a complicated family and family business is tricky enough for the Englishman, but adding to the suspense are his efforts to avoid discovery and unravel dark family secrets. Extremely enjoyable.

Jessica says

An extraordinary novel by the incomparable Du Maurier. Most know the plot: an Englishman and scholar, bored with his life of detachment, is pushed to change identities with his doppelganger, Jean de Gue, and take on his life and famille in an aged Chateaux and glass-blowing factory in France. Exquisitely plotted, richly textured, Du Maurier's novel is fully convincing in its portrait of de Gue's adopted life and ways...until-- perhaps--the twists and turns of the ending. I'm still thinking about how it ends. It may be right, after all. Regardless, I applaud Du Maurier and the novel, unlike any other you'll read by her or anyone else.

Lori says

Very thought provoking novel. I found the premise of this story very intriguing and I found I couldn't stop wondering what I would do if I met my exact double. I think the hair on the back of my neck would stand up if I walked into a pub and sat down next to a clone of myself. But that's just the beginning of this adventure. Like Alice falling down the rabbit hole, the narrator finds himself in another world; a world that he finds curiouser and curiouser.

So, what happens when you come face to face with your exact double but wake up the next day only to find that he/she has switched identities with you? You might feel like you have no choice but to play along. Let the chauffeur take you home to a chateau full of depressed and embittered family members. Throw in a couple of religious fanatics just for good measure. Next, you might actually begin to think that you can help these people if you can just avoid detection long enough. I think you're getting the idea. I'm actually still a bit unnerved by this macabre tale and I will be thinking about this thriller for many days, probably weeks. What Daphne du Maurier achieved is a well-crafted and suspenseful mystery that pulled me into the story very swiftly and even though I've closed the cover I still feel like a deer staring into headlights. I can't quite pull myself away from the events and the characters, so I'm at a standstill.

Once again, du Maurier has put me in a trance with her atmospheric prose:

"I wondered how it would look at nightfall, this town of Villars, turning early to sleep and silence like all provincial market towns, the inhabitants behind their shutters and in bed, the houses in shadow, the mellow

roofs sloping to pitchy eaves, the flamboyant Gothic spire of the cathedral church stabbing an ink-blue sky; no sound, perhaps, but the passing footstep of a loiterer homeward bound and the hardly perceptible ripple of the canals still and dark beside the walls".

Oh yes, this story is beautifully written, haunting and is worthy of a second reading. Chock-a-block full of symbolism, this is a very well thought out plot but I think the less said the better. I don't want to give too much away. This is a masterpiece. My only complaint is the ending and I could quibble that it wasn't very satisfying. But, I've read other novels by du Maurier and that seems to be part of her style; she makes me come to my own conclusion.

If this sounds like too much effort to put into pleasure reading, I assure you it's well worth the time spent turning pages. I highly recommend this for rainy day reading or a sleepless night.

Ana says

3,5*

A inverosimilhança da história retirou-lhe alguma tensão e refreou o meu entusiasmo. Também não gostei particularmente do final. Mas o pior de tudo foi mesmo o completo desleixo que é esta edição, com uma revisão que, embora creditada, mais parece ter sido inexistente, com imensos erros sintácticos, gralhas e omissões de palavras que deturpam ou tiram significado às frases. Dos livros que já li desta autora, este foi o que menos me entusiasmou, mas, ainda assim, o balanço é positivo em termos do comprazimento proporcionado.

Sara says

If you have ever read any of Daphne du Maurier's novels, you will immediately recognize what I mean when I say the narrator here is another of her identity-free individuals. Like the new Mrs. De Winter in *Rebecca* or the tour guide brother in *Flight of the Falcon*, this narrator is a person without any sense of importance, sense of self or sense of his own value. He is so unloved and disconnected that he can assume another man's life and involve himself immediately in the other man's world to the point of burying himself inside the other man's skin.

A scapegoat: a person who is blamed for the wrongdoings, mistakes, or faults of others. What an inspired title for Daphne du Maurier's thrilling novel of exchanged identity. When John, an Englishman whose area of expertise is France, meets his doppelganger, the Comte Jean de Gue, he finds himself unexpectedly tricked into trading places. He goes from having no life or ties to being responsible for the complexities of a chateau and the lives that revolve around it, and he finds out that the life he has assumed is one of a dubious and sometimes cruel individual.

"One had no right to play with other people's lives. One should not interfere with their emotions. A word, a look, a smile, a frown, did something to another human being, waking response or aversion, and a web was woven which had no beginning and no end, spreading outward and inward too, merging, entangling, so that the struggle of one depended on the struggle of the other."

As our narrator uncovers the secrets of Jean's life, he begins to insert his own sensibilities into the lives he controls. But does he see these people as they are, or does he supply his own version of them? Does he help

them, or does he simply confuse and disrupt their lives? What would they think if they knew he was just a stranger playing at being their son, husband, father, brother, lover or master? And, what does he discover about himself along the way?

Nobody writes romantic gothic fiction like du Maurier. She knows how to make something subtle important. She has great command of the psychological thriller and weaves her tales to that you are never far from the edge of your seat. She writes descriptions that turn buildings into characters, and characters that emerge as real people.

If you have never read du Maurier, you are missing one of the great writers. If you have not read this book, you are missing a treat.

Laura says

I would give 4 stars to this book. However, the plot is very unlikely even that is captivating story. A quite disappointing end, I was expecting a more dramatic one.

Judy says

Scapegoat has an intriguing history as a word. Originally, in the Old Testament book of Leviticus, the High Priest confessed the sins of the people on the Day of Atonement over the head of a live goat which was then allowed to escape, taking the sins with it. From this religious tradition developed the meaning of a person, group or thing who takes the blame for the mistakes or crimes of others.

In Daphne du Maurier's excellent novel, an English history professor on his way home from holiday in France, is reflecting on his unfulfilling and lonely life when he meets a man in a restaurant. The man, Jean de Gue, is his double but of a very different character. By means of alcohol, possibly a drug, and trickery, the main character wakes up the next day with Jean de Gue's luggage and clothes, finds that his doppelganger has vanished, and that he is being picked up by de Gue's faithful servant.

Feeling that the police will think him mad, feeling in truth somewhat mad, he allows himself to be taken to a rundown chateau in the country, where he is not suspected by anyone in the family. In this post WWII setting, the three generations live in genteel poverty amid bitterness and a failing glass factory.

The man takes up Jean de Gue's life, penetrating the several mysteries of the family's past and in a bumbling fashion manages to fix everything and restore the family to happiness. All the while, though the reader is hoping this man will succeed, du Maurier in her inimitable fashion leaves you feeling that it cannot possibly end well. Of course it doesn't but the final scenes do support the title and the theme of the scapegoat.

What makes this book so good is the way the author handles all the improbabilities of the story. She had me willingly suspending my disbelief most of the time. Even when I could not believe that the family members did not realize it was a different man, I was so engrossed in the story that I did not care. I also love how this writer always makes some point of wisdom about life in her tales and she did not fail me in this one.
