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First published in 1894, the story of the diva Trilby O'Ferrall and her mentor, Svengali, has entered the mythology of that period alongside Dracula and Sherlock Holmes. Immensely popular for years, the novel led to a hit play, a series of popular films, Trilby products from hats to ice-cream, and streets in Florida named after characters in the book. The setting reflects Du Maurier's bohemian years as an art student in Paris before he went to London to make a career in journalism. A celebrated caricaturist for Punch magazine, Du Maurier's drawings for the novel--of which his most significant are included here--form a large part of its appeal.

Trilby Details

Date : Published July 22nd 1999 by Oxford University Press (first published 1894)

ISBN : 9780192833518

Author : George du Maurier , Dennis Denisoff

Format : Paperback 368 pages

Genre : Classics, Fiction, Literature, 19th Century, Historical, Victorian, Gothic, Cultural, France

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From Reader Review Trilby for online ebook

Felix says

Having finished reading *Trilby*, I am at a loss to explain why there ever was something like a Trilbymania around 1900. The hype about this book was as big as the one about Stoker's *Dracula* and Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Mr. Jekyll and Mr. Hide*, both of which still enjoy an immense popularity while *Trilby*'s fame has dwindled over the years. Deservedly, I must say.

The narrator is one sickeningly condescending and self-loving windbag. The anti-semitism is hard to bear and coupled with a terrible jingoism. The narrative flow is awkward since the narrator is so fond of using French phrases that there's hardly a paragraph that can be read without consulting some translating notes. All this makes the book extremely wearisome to read and the fruit of this labour is rather small and rotten. Svengali is not much of a villain, in fact I found him rather piteous, while Little Billee is nothing more than a moping fop.

I can only recommend rereading *Dracula* or picking up some of the better urban gothic or sensation novels instead of wasting time on this annoying tale of bourgeois complacency. The only reason for the second star is the academic interest I had in the novel and the way it lends itself for an analysis of late nineteenth-century bourgeois self-fashioning.

Carly says

a fascinating story, starting off regularly enough with some flirting, as victorian novels do, and then veering into this creepy, supernatural, pyschological place. plus it's about performing, and i'm all about that.

classic reverie says

Trilby was something I was looking forward to read not just because George du Maurier is Daphne du Maurier's grandfather but I had seen a silent movies long ago based on the book. The Svengali was very much part of this book but definitely this story is not just about his ability to control a young girl's mind through hypnotism but a commentary on class distinction & religion and belief in God. I love reading classic books but I always have to remind myself of the times in which these stories are written & racism which is not all of a book but is there nonetheless. It seems that the Jewish people get most of the brunt of it but also blacks are definitely not immune to being portrayed a certain way. I touch on this because Svengali the evil genius is of Jewish decent & his character and description are far from charming as are the two other Jewish females. Trilby is a young girl who is an orphaned early in life. Her younger brother is taken in by a family which Trilby is grateful. At a young age she models for artists which also leads into some unchaste affairs which she is unaware of it being immoral. She is then acquainted with three young English painters who are living in Paris Latin Quarter & a close friendship is made. She then sees her lax morals & changes this after seeing the immorality in it. Trilby meets Svengali & takes an immense disliking of him but he does cure her extreme headache. The story revolves around these characters & especially Little Billee who is a gifted painter with a special quality that charms his friends & Trilby. This is a romance with more sentiment than anything. Another classic questioning the social class rise or fall & the ability to be welcomed there. Can

Trilby be accepted in Little Billee circle? Questioning God & religion is throughout this story & you get a feeling that George du Maurier is more in the lines of Darwin's thinking. Here are some quotes—"History goes on repeating itself, and so do novels, and this is a platitude, and there's nothing new under the sun" Excerpt From: George du Maurier. "Works of George Du Maurier." "They were shocking bad artists, those conceited, narrow-minded Jews, those poor old doting monks and priests and bigots of the grawsome, dark age of faith! They couldn't draw a bit-no perspective, no chiaro-oscuro; and it's a woful image they managed to evolve for us out of the depths of their fathomless ignorance, in their zeal to keep us off all the forbidden fruit we're all so fond of, because we were built like that! And by whom? By our Maker, I suppose (who also made the forbidden fruit, and made it very nice-and put it so conveniently for you and me to see and smell and reach, Tray-and sometimes even pick, alas!)." "Pray to Him? Well, no-not often-not in words and on my knees and with my hands together, you know! Thinking's praying, very often-don't you think so? And so's being sorry and ashamed when one's done a mean thing, and glad when one's resisted a temptation, and grateful when it's a fine day and one's enjoying one's self without hurting any one else! What is it but praying when you try and bear up after losing all you cared to live for? And very good praying too! There can be prayers without words just as well as songs, I suppose; and Svengali used to say that songs without words are the best!" "There'll be no hell for any of us-he told me so-except what we make for ourselves and each other down here; and that's bad enough for anything. He told me that he was responsible for me-he often said so-and that mamma was too, and his parents for him, and his grandfathers and grandmothers for them, and so on up to Noah and ever so far beyond, and God for us all!" Two poems I really liked—"Then the mortal coldness of the Soul like death itself comes down;It cannot feel for others' woes, it dare not dream its own;That heavy chill has frozen o'er the fountain of our tears,And, though the eye may sparkle yet, 'tis where the ice appears." "Though wit may flash from fluent lips, and mirth distract the breast,Through midnighthours that yield no more their former hope of rest:'Tis but as ivy leaves around a ruined turret wreathe,All green and wildly fresh without, but worn and gray beneath" "The Ending poem—"That blessed harbor of refuge well within our reach, and having really cut our wisdom teeth at last, and learned the ropes, and left off hankering after the moon-we can do with so little down here....A little work, a little play To keep us going-and so, good-day!A little warmth, a little light Of love's bestowing-and so, good-night!A little fun, to match the sorrow Of each day's growing-and so, good-morrow!A little trust that when we die. We reap our sowing! And so-good-bye!" Such a difference than my last book- Madame Bovary Daughter- Trilby is a true classic which many passages need for French translation & some Latin & German. Some passage are not discernible due to dialect unknown or author's humor but they are not vast. Reading electronic makes these translation possible & full enjoyment of this gem of a book

Surreysmum says

[These notes were made in 1983. I read this in an 1895 edition:]. Du Maurier is a minor novelist at best, and like Bram Stoker and Mary Shelley, what he has created is not so much a great work of art (although I would say that *Frankenstein* is a good one) but an impingement on popular consciousness, an addition to popular culture. Svengali is a byword these days, tho' few people know his origin, and fewer still, I think, would recognize him in his portrait here. I begin to realize how prevalent the stereotypical repulsive Jew is in English literature (*Merchant of Venice* and *Twist* come to mind immediately), and have a little more sympathy with those who are outraged by it. It seems entirely unnecessary to specify a race or country of origin for the greasy, demanding, amoral, gifted dominator. Trilby is an interesting, if not terribly consistent character. She is altogether too spiritualized in her last scenes to have anything to do with the charming, earthbound creature of the beginning. As for the main device of the plot, it's an intriguing idea that latent musical genius could be released under hypnosis, but I see no reason why the personality should be utterly suppressed at the same time! As for Little Billee, the ostensible hero, he's just too sickening for words, and

the jingoism of the book (LB's English, and the secondary characters are Welsh and Scots) is nearly as sickening. Du Maurier's drawings are a very interesting addition indeed, for his ideal of female beauty, much clearer in the pictures than in the words, is scarcely everyone's. He seems to have a particular fondness for a ski-nose and a jutting chin in a woman! In short, I found this more interesting than compelling.

Laura says

Free download available at Project Gutenberg.

This book was published serially in *Harper's Monthly* in 1894.

This is the story of Trilby O'Ferrall, an half-Irish girl working in Paris as an artist model and laundress. There she meets Svengali, a Jewish hypnotist who teaches her to sing since she is tone-deaf. In Paris, she meets Little Billee and fails in love with him but she cannot stay with him since he belongs to a higher social class. Later on, he will become a famous artist in London. After a love disillusion, Billee returns to Paris and meets both Trilby and Svengali.

Trilby, hypnotized by Svengali. Svengali exaggerated features were typical of anti-Semitic portrayals of Jews at the turn of the century. This engraving was done by Du Maurier himself for the first edition of the novel in 1894.

According to Wiki, this book has inspired Gaston Leroux's novel .

The novel has been adapted to the stage several times. During one of these plays, an actress wore a short-brimmed hat with a sharp snap to the back of the brim, thus giving the name of the well-known hat "trilby":

George du Maurier was the father of the actor Gerald du Maurier and grandfather of the writers Angela and Dame Daphne du Maurier. He was also the father of Sylvia Llewelyn Davies and grandfather of 5 boys who inspired J.M. Barrie's *Peter Pan*. He wrote several cartoons in *Punch*.

Chloe Thurlow says

Beauty Without Talent

From school with strict cheerless nuns to university, where I came under the severe hand of my tutor, I identified with the eponymous Trilby the moment I opened the pages of George du Maurier's novel of domination and submission, a book with an undercurrent of eroticism that can only have slipped by the censors by its sly subtlety and incisive examination of the human condition.

Set in the Paris Bohemia of the 1850s, it is in Trilby that we meet Svengali, a name from fiction that has found its way into the language, like quixotic, Scrooge and Catch 22. Svengali is a music teacher and would

be impresario with a perfect ear and an eye for the main chance. Trilby O'Ferrall works as a laundress and artists' model. She is young, pretty and vulnerable. All the men she meets fall in love with her, which forms the body of the book. But when she enters the orbit of Svengali, he becomes obsessed with making her his protégée and a singing star; a Diva.

Although Trilby is tone deaf, she is susceptible to hypnosis, another of Svengali's dark arts. Under his power, she performs in a trance. They travel across Europe, making their fortune until Svengali has a heart attack during a concert in London and Trilby, as she sings on, is shown to be talentless without the maestro's influence. Having been acclaimed in high society and lived among the élite, Trilby O'Ferrall returns to her former role in the laundry aware that her only gift is her fading prettiness, the fate of most women.

Written in the 1890s, the writing is sometimes overblown and prosaic; overlook this and the novel remains a delight.

Katie Lumsden says

I enjoyed some aspects of this book - the examination of Bohemian art circles in Paris especially, but the plot did grate on me at points - and was ruined by the blurb of the book! Trilby is an interesting character, but I want always entirely comfortable with her presentation.

notgettingenough says

Such was the power of Svengali to mesmerise the world that his name became a word. In brief he takes a tone-deaf girl and turns her into a great diva, as long as she is hypnotised before she sings. Alas at one performance he is incapacitated and as Trilby tries to sing, but cannot - to the disgust of the audience – she is in a strange situation where she is aware of her life with Svengali but has no conception at all of her singing career. In fact this is not exactly how hypnotism works, but never mind that, the idea is fascinating.

If you'd asked me I would have thought the most likely reasons people want to be hypnotised is to give up smoking and to lose weight. Not so! The most asked for thing is this – can I be hypnotised to forget a person?

The uneasy reply is somewhere between a reluctant 'yes' and 'this isn't the right thing to do.' What the experts want you to do, apparently, is trash the person you want to forget. There seems here to be a presumption that if you do want to forget them, they deserve to be trashed – ie it isn't an artificial construct to get you over somebody who doesn't deserve to be thus treated in your head. So, my first question is, but what if you don't think that? I know the answer is supposed to be that you are a sucker who hasn't gotten over a bad person in your life, but that can't possibly always be true. Must there not also be some chance that this is a fabulously wonderful person and that trashing them as being undeserving in some way is a terrible thing to do? I find it hard to believe this is seen as the healthy option. If it comes down to it, maybe you are a scumbag and he isn't.

My next question revolves around the idea that you *have* been hypnotised to forget a person and this has worked. How has it worked? If you forget a person successfully, what impact does this have on the rest of

your memories? A person isn't a discrete unit. He is time and space, sensation, touch, sound, he has a context, a background, he is part of a social setting. You went to dinner with this person and had the most divine meal. What impact does hypnosis to forget the person have on the memory of the meal? Instead of a picture in your head of some wonderful romantic occasion where you shared spaghetti together, you have what? The same picture, but your lover is erased? It is just you and a plate of spaghetti? Is there an empty chair next to you? Has the waiter filled two water glasses? Does the other fork move, but there is nobody attached to it???? Most importantly, do you get more spaghetti in this changed memory than you did on the real occasion? How much is erased with the memory of the person?

Maybe you can do that, I imagine. Maybe the mind's eye picture of this whole occasion is erased. But add to this, a social setting, for example. Now there are three of you at dinner. How does the removal of one person from the memory of this work? You recall person 'a' asking a question but there is no answer because you have erased the memory of person 'b' to whom the question was addressed? I can't see that in forgetting the required person, you would also forget the innocent bystander, so to speak.

And there are the things that will be fundamentally imprinted on you, in a way spaghetti might not be. (MIGHT not, mark you...) How would you forget the way you made love, slept, woke up? And even if you forgot in a passive sense, surely you would be reminded of them by – well, it could be anything. Putting out the washing and noticing that a cardigan has been undone that isn't usually and there is a whole memory attached to that. How it was taken off, what happened next. You are made love to exquisitely. It involves all of him, he is completely joined to you. What happens to that? Does it become an Immaculate Orgasm?

Note to self: discuss this with the VM next time in church, maybe she knows. Hey, though. That makes me think. Maybe this is exactly what happened. She shagged someone who was a bad 'un, a couple of sessions with a hypnotherapist and voila, the Immaculate Conception.

Bettie? says

[(hide spoiler)]

F.R. says

I've actually seen this book credited to Daphne in the newspapers; as if some journalist put the name 'Trilby' into a search engine, saw it was written by 'du Maurier' and researched no further than that. I know, it's hard to believe that the British press could be so shoddy.

Of course the most famous thing about 'Trilby', the thing that gets it mentioned in the newspapers from time to time, is the fact that this is the novel that created the character 'Svengali' – that rare fictional presence whose name has entered the language. And it is definitely interesting to see this character, to see this phenomenon in its rawest form. It's also quite disconcerting. Yes, this is a character who harnesses talent, who builds up a star – yet as presented here he lacks the sophistication and glamour of what we now know as a Svengali. Bluntly, he's a smelly sex pest, and the way du Maurier portrays him is more than a tad anti-Semitic.

However, he is still by far the most compulsive character in 'Trilby'. But that's no great boast as the book around him is a mess. An unfocused tale of struggling artists in Paris, which fails to realise which are the good sections of its narrative, and instead indulges in dozens of digressions and meanderings. If ever a book could have done with a better editor (if it ever had an editor at all) it's this one. du Maurier clearly hopes that his charming prose will carry the whole along no matter where his pen wanders, but it really doesn't. 'Trilby' is disengaging much more than it's engaging, and annoying far more frequently than it's endearing.

Apparently it was a big influence on 'Phantom of the Opera', which is far from the best book ever written, but a damn sight better than 'Trilby'.

El says

In 2005 film critic Nathan Rabin coined the term *Manic Pixie Dream Girl* after watching Cameron Crowe's *Elizabethtown*. Pulled from Wikipedia, Rabin's definition of an MPDG is "that bubbly, shallow cinematic creature that exists solely in the fevered imaginations of sensitive writer-directors to teach broodingly soulful young men to embrace life and its infinite mysteries and adventures."

Can an MPDG exist in literature?

Sure, why not. I make the rules here.

Trilby is an MPDG in so many ways. She's beautiful and quirky, or beautiful in her quirkiness, or quirky in her beauty, or something like that. We first meet her in Paris as a model for bohemian painters, at which time three English friends (Little Billee, Sandy the Laird, and Taffy) encounter her. In a classic MPDG move, their lives are never the same. Little Billee in particular feels that if only he could be with her, his life would be complete and he would only know happiness. She certainly doesn't mind this attention, though it's not obvious whether or not she's aware of just how deep this interest lies in her admirers.

But then things get complicated, the way things always get complicated (both in life and good literature). Billee's meddling mother... well, she meddles, the dynamic changes, and Trilby is gone, crushing the heart of young Billee beneath her perfectly sculpted heel.

Then there's the sinister Svengali, who uses his hypnotic skills to manipulate Trilby. This is pretty whacky. Svengali is one of the most interesting characters in literature (that I've encountered thus far at least).

This isn't a perfect novel. There are flaws, some of which are pretty large. But I'm not going to lie: I loved this book. I loved the bohemian aspect of the characters, I toured the streets of Paris with them (you couldn't see me, but I was there, arm-in-arm with the boys), we totally checked out the paintings at the Louvre. I recognized some parts of Paris from this reading but all it really did was make me want to go back, right now, screw all of y'inz, I need to be in Paris STAT.

There are illustrations included in this book, all drawn by the author's hand. The introduction points out that at the time of this, du Maurier had lost vision in his left eye, and intimated that this is why the drawings aren't that great. I don't know what the hell that means. These sketches aren't fantastic, but they're hardly worth apologizing over. If I were to include illustrations in anything I wrote, you'd see a series of stick figures with either a smiley or a frown-y face. And I can even see out of both eyes. So I scoff at that. The illustrations were fun and added a nice element to the story.

I can't quite say that I loved this *more than* du Maurier's granddaughter's *Rebecca*, but I can say that both novels have touched in me in surprising ways, in spite of their flaws. Du Maurier seems to put his finger right on all the spots that affect me deeply - art, literature, music - all the things that make me feel truly alive. If 19th-century Paris could ever feel alive to a 21st-century American woman, this is a perfect example.

He had never heard such music as this, never dreamed such music was possible. He was conscious, while it lasted, that he saw deeper into the beauty, the sadness of things, the very heart of them, and their pathetic evanescence, as with a new inner eye - even into eternity itself, beyond the veil - a vague cosmic vision that faded when the music was over, but left an unfading reminiscence of its having been, and a passionate desire to express the like some day through the plastic medium of his own beautiful art.

(Page 25)

Genia Lukin says

Well, this was quite the anti-Semitic rag. Even for the norms of the time, which were notoriously lax about this sort of thing, and a publication date perilously close to the Dreyfus affair, this book has a... kick in it, shall we say.

My favourite moment of that Antisemitism was when the villain - a Jew to end all Jews, of course, although not religious, unwashed and naturally cowardly - noticing the hero all alone and dejected and "being an Oriental Israelite Hebrew Jew, could not help but spit at him." Wow, tell me more! Could you find another racial noun to add into that not-at-all-redundant chain, perhaps?

Being a Jew, or a non-Jew, or a part-Jew, is a big deal in this book in general. The author's attention to Jewishness is worthy of a strict rabbi right before a wedding. One of his protagonists, in an attempt, perhaps, to forestall claims to prejudice, is described as having a "small part of that blood which, in isolation..." well, you can imagine, "but without which no beauty is possible," or something like that. Thanks, author! Your universal acceptance is fortifying and encouraging. Whereas a Jew alone is like an ugly bulldog, you need someone in your family somewhere to have consented to tolerate one of these in order to provide, suitably diluted, many generations down the line, a good sample of a fighting dog. Yup. No racism there.

Fortunately for my conscience, the book possesses many more virtues, such as, for example, half a section - not a chapter, note, a section - in which the protagonist monologues incessantly to a dog. And, as though to remind us that it is the dog he is monologing to, uses his (the dog's) name every other sentence. The most noted part of the woman in the centre of the story, the eponymous *Trilby*, is her foot, of all things, being, apparently, the most perfect appendage in the universe and sufficient for the "sensitive, brilliant painter" to fall in love with her for ever. Well, I suppose one cannot expect in a book from 1893 to have a woman's merits considered, rather than her feet.

The book does have a few moments of grace to it, for example, like the author's surprising tolerance for women of the "lower" sort who sit nude for sculptors and painters in portraits of all sorts. I guess he realises that if all women were of "unimpeachable virtue" artists and sculptors of the time would be in severe trouble. There is also occasionally the glimmering of a sense of humour in there, somewhere, as when talking about the French aristocracy and attitudes towards them at the fin-de-ciecle period. But, on the whole, the fact that

this was a bestseller is cause for much eyebrow raising and concern.

Nancy Oakes says

somewhere around a 3.5 -- it's neither great nor perfect, but it is great fun, and I'm very, very happy to have read it.

Set mainly in Paris, du Maurier gives us the story of Trilby O'Ferrall, the young artist's model who enchants not only the three artists of this story, but the musician Svengali as well. Trilby is offered both headache cures and singing lessons from Svengali, and at the same time, finds herself falling for one of the artists, Little Billee; he is also in love with her enough to propose marriage. The book is the story of these two people whose lives take very different turns after Billee's mother steps in to ensure that the marriage doesn't happen. While Billee goes on to England to become the up and coming artist William Bagot, Trilby stays in Paris with Svengali. Eventually, their paths will cross again, in a most unexpected way.

Reading this book for the story of Little Billee, Trilby and Svengali takes a bit of patience because rather than writing a straight narrative that sticks to that plotline, Du Maurier has placed us in the milieu of the Bohemian artists of the Latin Quarter of Paris, and he spends a lot of time giving us his own version of that life, a "mixing of reality and fantasy" (xii) based on his own experiences. Then, when the story moves to London, we are made privy to the world of the British upper classes, where Little Billee is now William Bagot, successful artist. While you may wonder what's going on with Trilby all this time, well, eventually we do get back there. So anyone considering reading this book should plan to be in it for the long haul. There is a LOT happening in this novel under its surface as well, so it's not a skimmer.

This edition from Oxford World's Classics has an interesting introduction by Elaine Showalter, and the publishers have included du Maurier's original illustrations for this book, which made Svengali a household word. As I said, I did have fun with it; it did sort of meander here and there, but it's what it is. Probably best for very patient readers who enjoy 19th-century fiction.

<http://www.oddlyweirdfiction.com/2017...>

Petra X says

I've finished the book now, and so expanded the SC note to include something of a review, below.

Simon Cowell:

"They will not let me play myself, but I can teach, I taught the girl to sing, she was nothing by herself. A good voice, but that won't make a great singer. I taught her phrase by phrase, she was my instrument. This is how it begins.

I take the money, she sings more excreble nonsense and always they pay and she gives me half. Soon she is playing in larger clubs and gets more money and I make more money. Perhaps I will find another little

protegee, a string of them. I am a pimp then, a pimp with my girls,

But she betrayed me. She sang songs that were not mine. She wants to be off on her own now. I will have to find another girl, one who will not defy me in the end. One that will do as I bid, always.

I have someone in mind already. What is more, she is ready to be used. She will jump at the chance."

Not Simon. Svengali. Do you think he was SC's inspiration.

The ending is tragic. ~~Simon~~ Svengali dies and without his magic hypnosis and autotune, Trilby finds she cannot sing at all. She engages a singing master but her voice is just not good enough for her to perform live and it seems all is lost. But then she sees a photo of her hero, of the man himself, and for a brief moment she is transported back to the concert hall, the finale of American Idol, and she soars, it's her moment, She Can Sing. Just for a moment. Then that's that.

But then that's always the way with American Idol isn't it? Once the hopeful stars' ~~Svengali~~ Simon has lost interest, they go back to the murky towns and used-car suburbs from which they came, emerging only at weekends in tribute bands and solo spots down at the pub. (view spoiler). Trilby didn't even get that.

Great book. Very much fun to read.

Renee M says

An unusual fairly anti-Semitic melodrama about the lives of several expatriates in bohemian Paris. The second half tells what becomes of them, including the beautiful young model, Trilby, who becomes a singing sensation under the tutelage of the mysterious Svengali. My favorite parts centered on the boys living in the Latin Quarter. Then, the story goes all Camille, and finally, full-on creepy tale of mesmerism. Fascinating that it was so wildly successful in its day. The anti-semitism is a poke in the eye, but otherwise it's a quirky, entertaining read.

Bryn says

This is a gothic, tragic, beautiful novel and I loved it. There are so many ways in which the narrative defies romantic expectation.

Trilby is a Parisian girl, model for various artists. She's a simple, well meaning, innocent soul who at the outset can take her clothes off for art without any real shame. One of the artists (a naive young lad called Billy) falls in love with her, but she also wins the attention of Svengali, a dark, twisted sort of person whose intentions towards her are less than good.

The author, du Maurier is part of the same family as Daphne Du Maurier, although an older generation.

Because of the age of the book, there are places it does not go - only hinting at things, and never following any of the protagonists into the bedroom. There are things we do not know about their relationships, and we don't get inside heads much.

There is a fascinating strand involving Trilby's loss of innocence - far less about her own actions than her coming to realise how the world might see her.

The descriptions are engaging, the plot full of surprises. I loved it. It's not for people who like comfortable romance formulae, but if gothic and full of uncertainty is your thing, I highly recommend this novel.

Bookish Ally says

I thought I knew what a Svengali was but I did NOT!

I thought it to mean a person of such amounts of charisma and charm that people (usually women) would find them absolutely irresistible. But the Svengali of George DuMaurier is none of those things. He reminds me of the descriptions of Rasputin. He is dirty, never bathes. He is an egomaniac in the extreme and when people do not act as he wishes, he resorts to cruelty, and he preys on the weak. He is inconsiderate on the best of days and a manipulative monster on the best.

Trilby on the other hand is as sweet and innocent as you can imagine a person could ever be. There is even an innocence in her posing as a (nude) artist figure model.

This is one of the flaws of this book, the idealized look at humanity as if any one person could be all good or all bad. All the characters in the book are either wonderful, affable, if not downright angelic like the aforementioned Trilby.

The story is a tragedy and it slowly becomes more and more sad. It's not a wonder many people put it down finding it depressing or boring. I found it interesting and it's romanticized view of the artistic life was charming, even if a bit simplistic. I must clarify that the WRITING is not simplistic at all, and in fact with its liberal splatters of untranslated French throughout, I will say that it can be a bit to get through at times.

3.75 stars

Stephanie Jane (Literary Flits) says

I'm still using my Derren Brown 'Svengali' tour mug which Mum got for me after I saw his show. The historic name is as much a cultural cliché for dark hypnotic power as the word 'Trilby' denotes a certain style of hat. It had never occurred to me to learn where either originated yet it turns out that George Du Maurier's novel is the source for both. Wildly popular in its day, Trilby is now considered a classic, the Wordsworth Classics edition being the one I spotted in a Spanish campsite library. Personally, I am not sure that the novel has aged well! The underlying storyline is a great idea, but its telling is very much of the time.

Told by a condescending first person narrator who doesn't actually feature in the story, we get lots of personal asides (frequently snobbish, sexist and racist) which slow the flowery writing style. I enjoyed the atmospheric descriptions of 1860s Paris, but was often infuriated by Du Maurier's pace - get on with it! The potentially most interesting part of the novel, Trilby's take-over by Svengali and her fantastic musical breakthrough, actually happen 'offstage' so the reader is presented with reports of the fait accompli, and while I'm showing off my French, a warning that Du Maurier does that a lot. Often whole conversations are in French with little or nothing by way of translation. Hopefully much of it was just small talk as, overall, I

probably missed half a dozen pages this way.

The characters are strong although, again, very much of their time. Our insipid English hero, Little Billee, is suitably upstanding; his chums are both Good Sorts; etc. Trilby herself is initially a refreshing change. She makes her own money by modelling for artists and is blithely independent. Of course, as time goes by, she is taught to be ashamed of such a lifestyle and to take pleasure from domestic drudgery instead, and her great success comes only at the instigation of a man, but at least she started out promisingly! Vicious antisemitism is the other big problem with the novel. Svengali is a nasty piece of work. I don't mind that - the tale needs a good villain. But Svengali isn't just A Bad Man. It's repeatedly made plain that his badness is due to his being Jewish and Du Maurier's insults descend to real childish namecalling. As he spends the rest of the book trying to impart a sense of his own superiority, this really stands out as bizarre.

I'm not sure if I enjoyed reading *Trilby* or not. Some sections are beautifully written with energy, atmosphere and a real knowledge of the Paris of the day. Other sections are slow, ridiculously sentimental or simply pointless. A note to current authors: if you feel the need for your hero to start talking at length to a dog, please don't report it to your readers!

Rick says

Trilby is highly sentimental, in the worst tradition of late-19th century British fiction, and were it not set in Paris and London, I might be tempted to think of it as kailyard. Svengali and Trilby and several other characters are memorable, but they're not enough to rescue the novel from bathos. Another deterrent for the average reader is that a large portion of the novel's dialogue is in French, which makes it slow going for anyone whose French is rudimentary, even though all the French passages are translated, of course, in the endnotes. The notes in the Oxford World's Classics edition are generally helpful, but they were far too copious. Following the recent trend of explaining everything to everyone—no matter how lazy or culturally deprived—we are given footnotes, for example, explaining who Dickens and Thackeray are, telling us that “Benedictine sisters” are nuns of the Benedictine Order, and explaining that a “Broadwood piano” is one made by the English piano maker Broadwood. The novel is worth reading. Just don't expect...well... Dickens or Thackeray.

Trish says

One day after a long session shelf-diving on Goodreads, I came upon the title of *Trilby* by DuMaurier. I was pleased to discover my local library had a copy, and placed it on hold. Over a year later, I received notice that it had come in. It was a first edition in the original, now torn, binding and cover. It had apparently been removed from the shelves for restitching.

What a treasure it is, with wood block prints of DuMaurier's characters, Taffy, Billie, Trilby, and the infamous Svengali. The words Trilby and Svengali have stayed in the English vocabulary as a result of this influential book which eventually became a wildly popular stage and theatre production, inspiring Gaston Leroux's *Phantom of the Opera* and parodies.

George DuMaurier, grandfather of the English authoress Daphne DuMaurier, was a cartoonist for *Punch* magazine in the late 1800's. He created a fine series of portraits, both in etchings and in words, of three

British subjects enjoying *la bohème* lifestyle in Paris at century end when they come across a lovely, untutored artist's model called Trilby who inspires them to great heights of emotion.

A successful cartoonist must capture in a line a frame of mind and a personal characteristic. DuMaurier succeeds well enough in both the drawings and the writing for this novel, and in several cases captures the essence of character, if not in a word, then in a paragraph. Of Trilby she was "the warmest, most helpful, and most compassionate of friends, far more serious in and faithful in friendship than in love."

Whether it be an aggravation of her misdeeds or and extenuating circumstance, no pressure of want, no temptations of greed or vanity, had ever been factors in urging Trilby on her downward career after her first false step in that direction—the result of ignorance, bad advice (from her mother, of all people in the world), and base betrayal. She might have lived in guilty splendor has she chosen, but her wants were few. She had no vanity, and her tastes were of the simplest, and she earned enough to gratify them all, and to spare...So she followed love for love's sake only, now and then, as she would have followed art if she had been a man—capriciously, desultorily, more in a frolicsome spirit of camaraderie than anything else. Like an amateur, in short—a distinguished amateur who is too proud to sell his pictures, but willingly gives one away now and then to some highly valued and much admiring friend.

As for Little Billee, the young and talented painter who was wont to die of love for the woman who was to come under the spell of Svengali:

Little Billee was small and slender, about twenty or twenty-one, and had a straight white forehead veined with blue, large dark-blue eyes, delicate regular features, and coal-black hair. He was also very graceful and well built, with very small hands and feet...And in his winning and handsome face there was just a faint suggestion of some possible very remote Jewish ancestor—just a tinge of that strong, sturdy, irrepressible, indomitable, indelible blood which is such priceless value in diluted homeopathic doses, like dry white Spanish wine called montijo, which is not meant to be taken pure; but without a judicious admixture of which no sherry can go round the world and keep its flavor intact...Fortunately for the world, and especially for ourselves, most of us have in our veins at least a minim of that precious fluid, whether we know it or show it or not. *Tant pis pour les autres! [Too bad for the others!]*

But Little Billee's upper middle class family approved not of his choice of artist's model living hand-to-mouth, and so she fell under the spell of Svengali:

He had bold, brilliant black eyes, with long heavy lids, a thin, shallow face, and a beard of burnt-up black which grew almost from under his eyelids; and over it his mustache, a shade lighter, fell in two long spiral twists.

"Then a moment of silence and breathless suspense—curiosity on tiptoe!"(p. 316)

But I shan't tell you the end, as it is for you to read for yourselves. But there is a lovely section towards the end in which Trilby gives her rendition of what praying is:

"Pray to Him? Well, not—not often—not in words and on my knees and with my hands together, you know! *Thinking*'s praying, very often—don't you think so? And so's being sorry and ashamed when one's done a mean thing, and glad when one's resisted a temptation, and

grateful when it's a fine day and one's enjoying one's self without hurting any one else! What is it but praying when you try and bear up after losing all you cared to live for? And very good praying too! There can be prayers without words just as well as songs I suppose; and Svengali used to say that songs without words are the best!"

Oxford World Classics republished this novel in 1999, and Penguin Classics has a reprint published in 1995. It has been in circulation for nearly 120 years *because* it is a classic, and it is one you might want to have a look at one day, to see what inspired all the follow-on art: the music and plays and fashion and film and other stories.
