

# The Birds

"The Birds" Fly in High Style This Halloween

By Gerry Furth-Sides

The memory is so powerful it seems minutes, not decades ago. I was a kid when I first opened Daphne du Maurier's novel-ette, "The Birds" one night, all snug in my bed, my family in adjoining rooms. A few pages into it, I was so scared I had to stop reading until the next morning in broad daylight.

Decades later, watching Alfred Hitchcock's film of the same name, even on daytime TV provokes about the same reaction, this time being scared for the heroine, and played by Tippi Hedren. It doesn't help to remember, "this is only a movie," and imagining a film crew on the set. It is one of three terrifying movies "in my book."

None other than Tippi Hedren will introduce a special outdoor screening of "The Birds" to fans this Halloween weekend and do a Q and A at a 50 year anniversary celebration of the film's inception. Guests are invited to come in costume!

What makes this story so special? "The Birds" is a simple tale of a farmhand and his family on the Cornish coast in England who are attacked by a massive number of birds. It was inspired by the author seeing a man ploughing a field while seagulls were wheeling and diving above him; she developed the idea of these birds becoming hostile and attacking.

But how duMaurier developed it! First published in her 1952 collection, "The Apple Tree," the response to the story was so strong that by the second printing, the book was titled, "The Birds and Other Stories." This was same year Hitchcock starting filming his second DuMaurier novel, Rebecca, captivating new audiences and adding to DuMaurier's already author's considerable wealth and fame from her best sellers.

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While there has been all sorts of academic speculation about the underlying socio-political undercurrents in "The Birds," the conclusion of most critics is the meaning, "not everything can be explained."

Half a century later, even the story behind the story remains fascinating. Born into a privileged family with a rich artistic and historical background, du Maurier grew up writing stories in the midst of her stylish high society

DuMaurier would have been earned a place in literary history for her modern gothic tale, "Rebecca" without the added distinction of her other books, especially "The Birds."

It established within the signature twentieth-century sense of dislocation." She was the first to write about the accepted order of things suddenly, and for no apparent reason, turned upside down, where people find themselves battling for their lives against presumed

inferior creatures, like birds. (I remember in a screenwriting workshop, my fellow writer insisted on making his paper-eating Silverfish in his sci-fi story into giant monsters; simply multiplying these tiny, slimy creatures, a la DuMaurier, would have been ever so much more effective.)

More than anything else, though, du Maurier with her 'old-fashioned' novels and

straightforward narratives remains for all ages, "a great read."

And what other movies terrify me? "Deliverance" (from James Dickey's novel) and "Don't Look Now." And guess what! I just learned it is from a short story by Daphne DuMaurier. So I'm off now to get the book.

The Q and A with Tippi Hedren begins at 6:15 PM, the screening is at 7:15 PM of "The Birds" on October 30th, the last in the 2010 Arts and Leisure Series at the Ojai Valley Inn and Spa (\$25). For information: [www.ojairesort.com](http://www.ojairesort.com). Online tickets at [brownpapertickets.com](http://brownpapertickets.com)

As private as duMaurier was, the public Tippi Hedren has used her fame to promote animals at her Shambala Preserve. Proceeds from the event will benefit the preserve, Help of Ojai and Share Our Strength Project. An old-fashioned (gourmet) concession stand also benefits the charities.



crowd. When she was in her early twenties, a prestigious publishing house accepted Daphne's first novel, Rebecca, which brought her enormous success and introduced her to a handsome soldier, Major (later Lieutenant-General Sir) Frederick Browning, who became her beloved husband.

How can I not love Daphne du Maurier? She was a historian and researcher of the first order obsessed with the past and with chronicling the history of her own family (and dramatic homes).

A stunning beauty herself, duMaurier was articulate and fascinating but so private she was known only to close friends and family. A romantic to the end, after her husband, 'Boy Browning' died, a World War I hero and personal friend of Eisenhower, she wore his clothes and used his desk and writing pen.