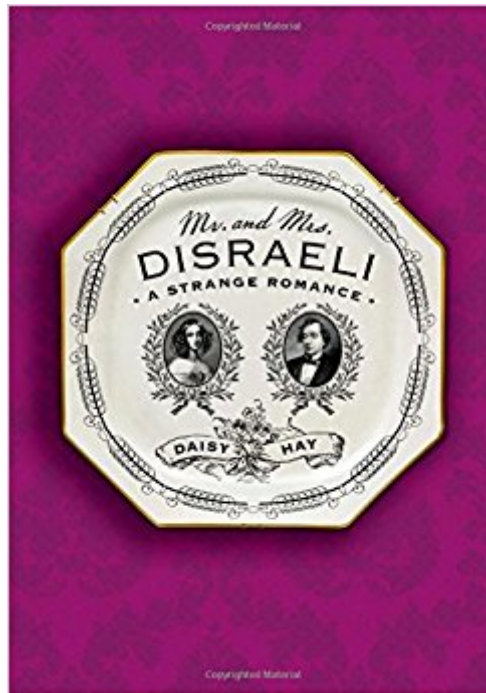




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Mr. And Mrs. Disraeli: A Strange Romance



Synopsis

Deep in the archives of the Bodleian Library at the University of Oxford lies a tattered scrap of paper with newlyweds' scribbles on it. It is a table listing the qualities of a couple. One column reads: "Often says what he does not think," "He does not show his feelings," "He is a Genius"; and the other: "Never says anything she does not think," "She shows her feelings," "She is a Dunce." The writing is Mary Anne Disraeli's, contrasting her own qualities with those of her husband, Benjamin Disraeli, one of the foremost politicians of the Victorian age. From the outset they made an unlikely couple. Mary Anne was the daughter of a sailor, twelve years Disraeli's senior, and married to someone else when they met. She was also highly eccentric, liable to misbehave, and (worse still) embarrassingly overdressed for grand society dinners. Her Diz was of Jewish descent, a mid-ranking novelist who was mired in debt. They made perfect targets for the vicious Victorian press and society gossips, who pounced on any and every foible. Yet their odd match appeared to make them impervious to such slings and arrows, as together they spun their unusual tale into a romance worthy of the novels they so loved. Reading between the lines of a great cache of their letters and friends' anecdotes, Daisy Hay shows how the Disraelis rose to the top of the social and political pile. Along the way, we meet women of a similar station and situation whose endings were far unhappier than Mary Anne's, acting as a counterpoint to her fairy-tale status as the landed angel in the prime minister's house. In an age where first ladies and their husbands are under ever-increasing pressure to perform and to conform, Mr. and Mrs. Disraeli offers a portrait of a political couple who refused to do either.

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Customer Reviews

“[A] remarkable book . . . Hay’s thoughtful and measured prose, filled with quotations from letters, missives, and love poems, is a page-turner of a historical, political, and feminist romance. A superlative achievement.”
—Eloise Kinney, Booklist (starred review)
“Through strong scholarship and deft storytelling . . . Hays’s vivid account offers an empathetic, modern understanding of a passionate, seemingly mismatched couple.”
—Publishers Weekly (starred review)
“Hay provides insight into the marriage of convenience that became a love story to rival Victoria and Albert’s . . . With this new addition to Disraeli-ana, readers will be enlightened by the younger man and how alike he was to Mary Anne, who became the love of his life.”
—Kirkus Reviews
“A vivid portrait of a marriage . . . a tour de force, written with intelligence and compassion.”
—Paula Byrne, The Times
“A warm and rounded portrait.”
—Tim Bouverie, The Daily Telegraph
“A beguiling account of a very unusual marriage. . . [Hay goes] beyond the conventional chronological narrative to discover the roads not taken, the unspoken realities beneath the factual skeleton. . . Hay brings alive a marriage that has always been a puzzle to Disraeli’s conventional biographers with skill and imagination.”
—The Sunday Times
“All marriages have their mysteries, political marriages more than most. The marriage of Mr. and Mrs. Disraeli was stranger than fiction, but every bit as compelling.”
—Robert McCrum, The Observer

Daisy Hay is the author of *Young Romantics: The Tangled Lives of English Poetry’s Greatest Generation*, for which she was awarded the Rose Mary Crawshay Prize by the British Academy. She has a Ph.D. in English Literature from the University of Cambridge and an M.A. in Romantic and sentimental literature from the University of York. From 2012 to 2013 she was a fellow at the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study at Harvard University, and is currently a lecturer in English literature and archival studies at the University of Exeter. She lives in Devon, England.

A very well researched history of a marriage. Both personalities and historical environment are presented in a balanced fashion. In spite of this depth "a strange romance" still remains "strange". The author does not try to explain the relationship away. The marriage remains a mystery like any marriage.

A very interesting narrative about an unusual couple - daring to live somewhat outside the social rules of the time. It was truly revealing about that period of history and especially about two people who sacrificed so much to stay together and serve England.

I didn't realize how boring other people's love letters could be. There was no real organization to this book, nor any discernible point to it. It was painful to try to plow through and the only reason I lasted through as much as I did (about half) was that my book club had selected it. Don't bother.

An absorbing read superbly portraying the times and of Disraeli and his wife. A strange and convenient marriage initially but blossoming into lifelong love and affection

It was a good book about subjects of whom I knew very little. The book was filled with interesting facts and was very well researched.

It's a fascinating story, but too scholarly for a novel, too many details, tedious to read. On the other hand seems well documented, perhaps more credible than without all the references and foot notes

This book seems to be thoroughly researched, using correspondence apparently saved by MaryAnn Disraeli. The author does a great job in describing the marriage of the Disraelis and the politics and sociology of the times.

Good information-hard to access. Index difficult to use. No direct access to referenced material

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