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Craig Brown

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A witty and profound portrait of the most talked-about English royal

She made John Lennon blush and Marlon Brando tongue-tied. She iced out Princess Diana and humiliated Elizabeth Taylor. Andy Warhol photographed her. Jack Nicholson offered her cocaine. Gore Vidal revered her. Francis Bacon heckled her. Peter Sellers was madly in love with her. For Pablo Picasso, she was the object of sexual fantasy.

Princess Margaret aroused passion and indignation in equal measures. To her friends, she was witty and regal. To her enemies, she was rude and demanding. In her 1950s heyday, she was seen as one of the most glamorous and desirable women in the world. By the time of her death in 2002, she had come to personify disappointment. One friend said he had never known an unhappier woman. The tale of Princess Margaret is Cinderella in reverse: hope dashed, happiness mislaid, life mishandled.

Such an enigmatic and divisive figure demands a reckoning that is far from the usual fare. Combining interviews, parodies, dreams, parallel lives, diaries, announcements, lists, catalogues, and essays, Craig Brown's *Ninety-Nine Glimpses of Princess Margaret* is a kaleidoscopic experiment in biography and a witty meditation on fame and art, snobbery and deference, bohemia and high society.

Ninety-Nine Glimpses of Princess Margaret Details

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From Reader Review **Ninety-Nine Glimpses of Princess Margaret** for online ebook

Sayde Scarlett says

I loved every word of this. What a fantastic antidote to the typical stodgy biographies of Royals. If you're looking for a typical biography - this is **not** for you! The whole book is terrific fun.

Nigeyb says

I never thought I'd ever read a biography of Princess Margaret, let alone thoroughly enjoy it but that is exactly what happened.

I read a couple of very favourable reviews of 'Ma'am Darling: 99 Glimpses of Princess Margaret' and then heard Andy Miller praise it to the skies on an episode of the Backlisted Podcast, and so I was convinced to give it a go. Andy described it as a royal biography for people who wouldn't ordinarily read a royal biography. I think that's spot on.

'Ma'am Darling: 99 Glimpses of Princess Margaret' is extremely playful, very original and provides a multi-faceted portrait of HRH Queen Elizabeth II's sister. Some of it is "what if" musings e.g. what if Margaret had married Pablo Picasso (who was obsessed by her) or Group Captain Peter Townsend (which very nearly did happen), however the bulk explores how she was perceived by numerous different people.

Craig Brown explains how he noticed references to Princess Margaret in numerous different memoirs, from Andy Warhol to political commentators, and this is part of what makes this book so fascinating. Princess Margaret's life intersects politics, show business, bohemia, the aristocracy, and the wider public. The other aspect is that as the sister to the Queen her designated role was fairly restricted and tedious, so it's no wonder she sought to liven things up wherever possible. Factor in her wholly unsurprising massive sense of entitlement aligned to a mischievous (occasionally malicious) desire to make others suffer, and you have all the ingredients for a rollocking good read.

Craig Brown, who I have never read before, does an inspired job of taking this rigorously research material and creating a highly original, always compelling, thought provoking read. By the end I was genuinely fascinated by Margaret and felt I had got to understand her.

For all Margaret's snobbishness and privilege, I felt quite sorry for her by the book's conclusion. Her ill treatment by her husband, and the diarists who laughed at her behind her back, helped render her bizarre life a tragedy.

Dead John Williams says

Ahh....it is books like this that make the ridiculousness of life seem somehow worth it. There is so much here to marvel at for sheer lunacy and pathos. I don't know what this book would be like for someone who wasn't British and wasn't around at the time of PM. But reading this I guess you could only wish that you were. I'd swap a thousand Trumps for just one PM.

Best quote: "the most highly paid dwarves in Europe"

Loved it

Debbie says

Thank you Netgalley and the publisher for providing a free copy of this book in exchange for a fair review.

I was in the mood for a light, funny, perhaps slightly snarky portrayal of the royal family. I was happy when I was provided this book, which seemed to fit the bill perfectly.

My problem with this book was the snark. Perhaps if it was toned down a bit this could have been a hoot. As written, there was too much poking fun of dead people who cannot defend themselves. Princess Margaret had no redeeming features. Her famous friends came off no better. I did not enjoy this book

Philippa Leah says

Quirky, full of cracking anecdotes and humour - I'm a big fan of HRH but wasn't sure I liked her very much by the end. Her acerbic wit shines through, but also her lack of purpose, which seems to have rendered her rudderless. He is spot on with his description of her tumbling down the order of succession whilst the empire crumbled, yet her becoming more and more imperious and demanding (as she felt befitting of her status). I felt enormous sympathy for her, although I imagine it would have been difficult to maintain that had I been on the receiving end of her withering remarks...

My greatest disappointment was Lord Linley though - imagine selling the wedding tiara to pay for school fees!!!! And saying she would approve! How very dare he!!!!

Frederico says

After watching the TV series The Crown, I became somewhat bewitched with the portrayal of Princess Margaret by Vanessa Kirby. So I picked up this book to know more about who Princess Margaret was. The concept of 99 glimpses or chapters is ingenious, in the sense that the Princess comes off sometimes glamorous, sometimes pitiful, sometimes insufferable, sometimes petty, sometimes a scorned woman, sometimes ahead of her time, sometimes very much springing forth from Edwardian royalty. This is very unlike the TV series I watched, which I now see as utterly romantic, elegiac and sympathetic to royalty. After this book, I no longer see the fun in the royal bunch.

Jim says

Badly (terribly) written with a lot of amused speculation on the part of the author, and hearsay, along with some actual documented accounts by servants, letters, etc. It's fun as tawdry one-sided gossip, but that's ALL it is. It is in no sense a biography.

Princess Margaret comes off as a relentlessly selfish, difficult and impossible-to-please snob and harridan whom nobody could possibly want to put up with ever, let alone care for as a friend or lover. As with most people though, there must surely have been some aspects of her life and relationships that were softer, kinder, more charitable and less demanding, but nothing like that comes through in the 99 "Glimpses".

In these brief snippets, she doesn't like anything or anybody, regularly pulls rank and technicalities of royal protocol to inconvenience whole rooms full of people for hours, and never shrinks from snubbing or insulting anybody who makes the slightest faux pas in her presence. It's hard to believe that's all there was to her, or if it was, that anybody with any self respect would choose to grovel before her in this way. It would be fairer to include a few examples of nice things she did.

It also could have used an index. Like with Andy Warhol's Diaries, there are often scattered names dropped of English society or entertainment figures where some background information and context would have been helpful. I had never heard of Roddy Llewellyn and it wasn't clear until after many pages of accounts of his affair with Margaret that it mentioned he'd tried and failed to launch a cheesy singing career in the 70s.

Overall, it's entertaining in sections, some more than others, but hardly "screamingly funny" as one jacket blurb claims.

Jeanette says

This is a vastly disjointed tale of eye witness and "he said, she said" conversations and observations within the times and places of Princess Margaret's company. And in nearly all periods of her life, too. Not in chronological order or in any such grand feature of continuity unless you count the derision and general hatchet job that rules in each portion. And in this case that disjointedness is probably not a bad thing for the book as a whole. Because it justly does rather portent what you are going to get. Extremes of ire and not "fitting"- all around.

It's super sad, and I skim read portions. Especially those when she was part of a dual couple with Tony her husband, and Peter Sellers and Brit Ekland. Also some of the longer portions re Picasso interludes and latter years derogatory inclusions at all the names she was called. "Royal dwarf" being one of the nicer ones. And with Sellers and that crowd, the animals had it even worse. Disgusting. Snowdon was little too- the jokes about their sizes are NOT P.C. Midget has numerous conversational asides/ references. Relating to all different aspects - even the size or height of her car's floors or fenders etc. She was just 5 foot tall. All the royals in her birth family are short. The Queen is the tallest by just 3 or 4 more inches. If you are a short person, some of this copy is going to get aggravating. Be warned.

What makes it so sad is that she is eternally unhappy. And also quite mean to viscous in her own brand of

notorious put downs. Not to mention the humongous amounts of rudeness she craved by making people wait and finding some issue or item that she wants and that they cannot provide. So she could perform the resultant snicker.

What a sad and terribly strange and difficult worldview and mindset coupled with her down low or over the top personality that went with it. She was most likely always acting. And she had twice a day hairdresser habit (often with a drive up and back each time) and a 37 year career limo driver that she rarely spoke a Good and/or Morning to.

I felt quite sorry for her actually. She didn't have a clue to what she was looking for either and she didn't have more than a handful of happy days.

Not ever having read a "Royalty" book before, I can certainly understand why the entire institution is disliked by some of the public. Their roles are so artificial in 100 various ways.

This book was worth the read, regardless. It actually portrays what a monarch for "form" is set there to do. And what they are NOT to do too.

And also it's a fantastic window into the arts and movies and other types of celebrity brand as well. What a blindfold to most/ more common human endeavor that they hold! And not in a good way either.

Some of the other people in this one that were '60's and '70's "stars" and within those times' events especially! They deserved the put downs and were even worse then she was. Including Liz, who made people wait the exactly same way and for identical reasons. As did Marilyn Monroe. Ego driven (inferiority core) passive aggression to put others in an inferior position. All of them.

Almost forgot something I learned- Margaret burned many letters. Almost all of her Mother's and sister's too that her mother had in several different lodging locations. She called it "tidying up" and took all paper she could find of correspondence and made it permanently vanish. Not just her own communications but ALL of their communications in print OR in personal cursive.

Jo Chambers says

My criteria for a 5* read is that I miss its world when I've finished the book. I'm missing Princess Margaret already, though I don't think I would have liked to meet her in real life! The Queen's younger sister was a snob and the mistress of the sharp put-down. She liked to mix with the arty bohemian set, but was quick to make sure they knew she was Royal. Even her closest friends still had to call her 'Ma'am'.

This book is not the conventional sort of biography, but 99 chapters (sometimes short) of insights into PM's personality. At times it is hilarious, other times very sad. She was someone born into great privilege but who was unlucky in love. I found the passages about her mistreatment by her husband particularly moving. As a child she was at one time third in line to the throne, but by the end of her life had slipped down to about 11th. The more she 'slipped', it seemed the more snooty she became! After a lifetime of heavy smoking and drinking, she paid the price by having a series of strokes, which ultimately killed her at the age of 71, dying a few months before her mother. Her funeral was very low key compared to that other Princess, Diana. She was cremated in a municipal crematorium in Slough, and there were few bystanders to see her last journey. To cap it all, her children sold her tiara to pay the school fees!

I recommend this book to anyone, Royalist or not - its an excellent character study of a fascinating woman

(not always fascinating in a good way!)

Literary Soirée says

NINETY-NINE GLIMPSES OF PRINCESS MARGARET by Craig Brown leaves a raging debate on both sides of the Atlantic. Brits seem to love this intimate, often catty bio of the Princess who never would be Queen. Americans seem appalled ... by Margaret's excesses, her cruelty, her seemingly wasted life that began flush with promise. For she was beautiful, witty, a brilliant mimic, once considered among the most desired women in the world. By the time of her death, however, a friend remarked that he had never known an unhappier person. She had belittled Princess Diana, demeaned Liz Taylor, caused her children to sell all her belongings post-death even though they did not need the money. Was it alcoholism, mental illness or soul sickness that claimed her? Unfortunately, this memoir that I found compulsively readable as an unabashed Royal addict did not reveal the answer as perhaps no human can know it. I was just left feeling sad. Sometimes great biographies do that. 5/5

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Thanks to Farrar, Straus and Giroux and NetGalley for the review copy. Opinions are fully mine.

#Ninety-nineGlimpsesOfPrincessMargaret #NetGalley

Anna Baillie-Karas says

I've been watching *The Crown* and fascinated by Princess Margaret, so this was a great gift. There are some funny excerpts of diaries & letters - she befriended theatre types and as Brown puts it "it was her misfortune that many of them kept diaries". An insider view of her life from a range of sources. But even if accurate, it's an unflattering portrait of an unhappy woman. I was torn between joining in the fun and tiring of the meanness.

Susan says

I loved Craig Brown's previous book, "One on One," and so, although a biography of Princess Margaret did not particularly appeal; having heard so many good things about this unusual biography, I decided to give it a try. Subtitled, "99 glimpses of Princess Margaret," this book has 99 chapters – some short, some longer. Unlike most biographies, this skips across time, backtracks and even veers into fantasy, at times. For example, there is an inspired piece about Princess Margaret marrying Pablo Picasso, who was obsessed with her. In reality, she was disgusted when she heard about his feelings.

Princess Margaret often shows disgust in this book – along with boredom, impatience, dislike, petulance, snobbery, waspishness and extreme inconsiderateness. Unlike her sister, the Queen, who tried (and presumably still does) to put people at ease, Princess Margaret was quite happy to make her unhappiness, and demands, known. A stickler for protocol – apparently even pointed out to her own children – she was all too aware that people could not eat until she did, leave until she left, sit unless she sat – and she delighted in taking full advantage of this. Arriving late, gobbling her food and then finishing so guests were left with half

their dinner still on their plate, outstaying her welcome and being such a demanding, snappy and unpleasant guest that you wonder anyone wanted to gain an invite to dine with her. Of course, though, the lure of royalty led many to want to meet her and to relish being 'presented' to the royal presence.

She did have friends, true friends, who seemed to care about her. However, mostly she was attracted by the bohemian set – who delighted in her acting up, and gleefully reported her bad behaviour in diaries, with an eye on publication. This book abounds with the famous and, at times, the infamous. We hear of Elizabeth Taylor, the Beatles, Peter Sellers, Dudley Moore, Peter Cook, Kenneth Williams, Kenneth Tynan, Mick Jagger – and on and on and on. There are love affairs – the well known agreement that she would not marry the older, divorced, Captain Peter Townsend, for example. The marriage, and divorce, to the later Lord Snowdon and other love affairs. You do feel sorry for her, with Snowdon, in particular, seeming to delight in tormenting his wife. There is also her relationship with the other members of the royal family. She seems to have accepted most of her sister's commands; such as who could, and could not, attend her birthday parties. However, she was less than impressed with both Princess Diana and Sarah Ferguson and made her feelings very clear, when both may have imagined she would have been more sympathetic to their own marital failures than most.

Overall, this is a fascinating portrait of a woman, who despite her sheer awfulness, does demand some sympathy from the reader. In a difficult position – royal, but slipping down the order of succession to the throne with every marriage and birth – she was criticised for not undertaking more royal duties. Time made the public, and press, less forgiving. She expected the protocol and respect of her childhood and failed to receive it in a less deferential era. Those around her were wary, never quite relaxed. Meanwhile, with those around her – from a former governess, to a footman, to 'friends,' putting her words and life into print – she could be forgiven for not relaxing thoroughly either. I find that, having read this, I miss the verbally vicious, over-bearing Princess Margaret. She may have spent most of her life with a cigarette in one hand and whisky in the other (while hosts panicked over which brand she would like), but she had a lot of boredom to endure in a basically unfulfilled life. This is both a cruel portrait and yet also shows the drudgery of the royal life and the criticism that always seems to follow public figures. Her sense of duty seemed somewhat forced. Archly, she informed the producer of the Archers, who asked her whether she could sound as though she was enjoying herself more, when pretending to take place in an official engagement, "well, I wouldn't be, would I?!" Perhaps that one line says more than anything about her life. A clever, inventive and excellent read.

Petra X says

From beginning to end a total hatchet job on the late Princess Margaret, or Priceless Margarine as John Lennon called her, less nasty perhaps than another of her nicknames, The Royal Dwarf.* The book is extremely funny and is about 95% based on printed material, letters and interviews. 5% of it is invented utter rubbish, like her marriage to Picasso or Captain Peter Townsend. No one it seems had a good word to say about the imperious Margot, perhaps because she would pull rank on them and they never got the last word. Elizabeth Taylor was the exception, she got it and there was no possible comeback.

(*Princess Margaret was a shade over 5'0", her husband Lord Snowdon was 5'5", the Queen Mother was 5'1.5" and the Queen is 5'4". If you are 5'2" like me then these are ok, but for those who are taller, we are Short People!)

When Richard Burton bought Liz Taylor the huge Krupp diamond, Princess Margaret who did not get along

with Taylor pronounced the ring as "the most vulgar thing I've ever seen". This reached Taylor's ears and when she was presented to Princess Margaret at a party, she asked the Princess if she would like to try the ring on? Princess Margaret did so and Liz Taylor remarked, "Doesn't look so vulgar now, does it?"

The only piece of wisdom in the entire book was this,

"The Queen has managed to avoid saying anything striking or memorable to anyone. This is an achievement, not a failing: it was her duty and destiny to be dull, to be as useful and undemonstrative as a postage stamp, her life dedicated to the near impossible task of saying nothing of interest."

After Princess Margaret's death, there was an outpouring not of kind words, but the utter nastiness people felt towards a woman who insisted on royal protocol at all times, meaning at a dinner no one could drink or eat until she did, and no one could leave until she did. And she was famous for turning up hours late, and wanting to drink and chain smoke and not eat until everything was ruined and then hang around drinking some more until 4 a.m. She really pissed everyone, but a very few "good friends" off.

I really enjoyed this book.(view spoiler) It's anything but a balanced portrait, but all the better for that!

Ena says

i really enjoyed this biography. its structure and gossipy nature make it extremely entertaining, but overall i thought it was a really honest-but-kind portrait of a woman that seemed to be very unhappy and quite misunderstood in some ways. overall, i thought it was really compassionate, and witty, and bitchy, and fun, and sad and interesting all at the same time. (much like its subject). also viscount linley selling all his mother's possessions... smh...

Valerity (Val) says

I've been a bit of a royal watcher again of late the past few years, with the marriage of Prince William and Kate and the births of their three beautiful children. I'll even admit to my insomnia having me up when Prince Harry and Meagan recently tied the knot. So it wasn't much of a stretch for me to have grabbed this book about Princess Margaret because she's mostly a mystery to me, and I wanted to check her out. I wasn't disappointed at all. So unlike her sister Queen Elizabeth! She's a bit of a holy terror and I got a kick out of reading about her in this book by Craig Brown.

When the book brought up Margaret being married to Picasso, I thought I was seeing things, but she actually was. Quite the double take for me, I must say. I paid better attention after that. Needless to say, she was quite headstrong and determined to have her own way, to a point. She had a very fascinating life for the period in time that she lived in and she was introduced to so very many prominent people around the world that it's quite mind-boggling at times. But for all of that, I don't believe that hers was actually all that happy a life really. Not when you think of living life as a princess. Sometimes it's just not all that it's cracked up to be. Princess Margaret, Countess of Snowdon, younger daughter of King George VI and sister to Queen Elizabeth, the Queen Mother. 8/21/1931 to 2/09/2002. My thanks for the advance digital copy that was provided by NetGalley, author Craig Brown, and the publisher for my fair review.

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