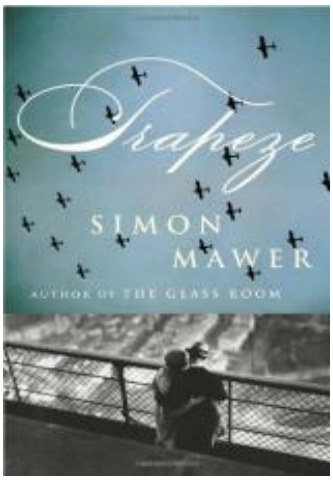
Trapeze

by Simon Mawer



About the Book

Barely out of school and doing her bit for the war effort, Marian Sutro has one quality that marks her out?she is a native French speaker. It is this that attracts the attention of the SOE, the Special Operations Executive, which trains agents to operate in occupied Europe. Drawn into this strange, secret world at the age of 19, she finds herself undergoing commando training, attending a ?school for spies,? and ultimately, one autumn night, parachuting into France from an RAF bomber to join the WORDSMITH resistance network.

But there?s more to Marian?s mission than meets the eye of her SOE controllers, for her mission has been high-jacked by another secret organization that wants her to go to Paris and persuade a friend from before the war?a research physicist?to join the Allied war effort. The outcome might affect the whole course of the war.

A fascinating blend of fact and fiction, **Trapeze** is both an old-fashioned adventure story and a modern exploration of a young woman?s growth into adulthood. There is violence and there is love. There are death and betrayal, deception and revelation. But above all there is Marian Sutro, an ordinary young woman who, like her real-life counterparts in SOE, did the most extraordinary things at a time when the ordinary was not enough.

Discussion Guide

1. Marian?s training in Scotland and her French background ready her for the logistical and practical aspects of her mission, but in what other ways is she prepared, or not prepared, for her mission?

2. Much of the novel?s narrative recounts past experiences and each character?s backstory. Why are each of the characters involved in the resistance, and how do their backgrounds affect each of their missions?

3. Marian Sutro has many different pseudonymns --- Marianne, Alice, and Anne-Marie --- and each one takes on a different personality. How are these personalities useful and distinct from one other?

4. Within the novel, spies and spying are often compared to children?s games. What are the deeper implications of this?

5. There is a foreboding atmosphere of fear, resulting from the war and the characters? roles in it. What are the different layers of fear and secrecy? How does each character respond to these fears?

6. Trapeze takes place within a vividly depicted historical context. What other books have you read or movies have you seen about the French Resistance? How are the depictions similar or different?

7. Marian is taught not to trust anyone or anything, and to live in almost complete anonymity. When does she go against this --- whether intentionally or accidentally --- and what are the reasons?

8. The subplot of Clément and Ned?s scientific research in nuclear physics, and the foreshadowing of the atomic bomb, give the narrative a sinister and thrilling backdrop, but what other functions does this subplot serve?

9. The men in Marian?s life --- Ned, Clément, and Benoît --- each have a very different impact on the formation of her character. What does she gain from each relationship?

10. In some ways, **Trapeze** resembles a coming-of-age story. By the end of the novel, how has Marian changed, and what has she learned about herself in the process?

Author Bio

Simon Mawer was born in 1948 in England. His first novel, CHIMERA, won the McKitterick Prize for first novels in 1989. MENDEL'S DWARF (1997), his first book to be published in the U.S., was long-listed for the Man Booker Prize and was a *New York Times* Book to Remember for 1998. THE GOSPEL OF JUDAS, THE FALL (winner of the 2003 Boardman Tasker Prize for Mountain Literature) and SWIMMING TO ITHACA followed, as well as THE GLASS ROOM, his 10th book and eighth novel, which was short-listed for the Booker Prize. TRAPEZE was published in 2012 and its follow-up, TIGHTROPE, in 2015.

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