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 ***Neverland: J. M. Barrie, the Du Mauriers, and the Dark Side of Peter Pan (review)***

Anita Tarr

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REVIEW

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**In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:**

**Reviewed by:**

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*Anita Tarr (bio)*

Reading *Neverland: J. M. Barrie, the Du Mauriers, and the Dark Side of Peter Pan* is like watching Fox News: we witness someone claiming to be an investigative reporter spouting outrageous claims that are undergirded by little if any support. Dudgeon's premise itself is odd, as he claims to trace Barrie's nefarious influence over four families: Barrie's childhood family, especially his older brother David, who died at the age of thirteen; Barrie's adult family, when he was married to Mary Ansell; the Llewelyn Davies family—parents Arthur and Sylvia and their five sons, whom Barrie claimed as his own after both parents had died, and for whom he wrote *Peter Pan*; and the du Maurier family, especially Gerald, Sylvia's brother, who acted in several of Barrie's plays, and his daughter Daphne, best known for her novel *Rebecca*. Fortunately, Dudgeon provides a genealogical chart of the Llewelyn Davies and Du Maurier families to help readers keep track of all these relationships.

Dudgeon uses the nineteenth-century's craze for mesmerism to explain Barrie's hold over both children and adults, alleging that he hypnotized (as we now call mesmerism) his closest companions, both children and adults, resulting in disaster. Mesmerism was already in the du Mauriers' past; Sylvia's father George du Maurier became famous for his novel *Trilby* (1894), which introduced the evil mesmerist Svengali. Barrie was an admirer of *Trilby* and George's previous novel *Peter Ibbotson* (1891), as he claimed to have named his St. Bernard dog Porthos after the fictional canine and his character Peter Pan after the titular Peter (Barrie made *Peter Ibbotson* "a source myth for his life," claims Dudgeon [116]). Dudgeon refers to Barrie as another Svengali, but he also refers to Barrie as Mephistopholes,<sup>1</sup> Satan, Puppeteer, and Mother-hater. Barrie is the villain, the corrupter, the underlying cause of everything bad that happened to these four families.

Since Dudgeon was able to interview Daphne du Maurier just before her death in 1989, he is more interested in her life story than in the stories of her cousins, the Llewelyn Davies boys. The tragic deaths of

George, Michael, and Peter Llewelyn Davies serve as a backdrop to explore the causes of Daphne's unhappy marriage and her mental breakdown, as well as the stimulus for her prolific writing, often haunted and macabre.<sup>2</sup> According to Dudgeon, all of Daphne's misfortunes can be attributed to Barrie and his mesmeric relationship with her: "... Daphne's life was written and produced by Uncle Jim" (142, image h). This allegation, among others, is particularly at issue for readers of Dudgeon's book. Daphne admitted **[End Page 464]** to suffering from a "Daddy complex," which Dudgeon refers to as "the main destructive drive in her life and work." Some observers of Daphne and her father Gerald assumed their relationship was incestuous (Daphne equivocated on saying this was actually the case), and apparently the randy Gerald entertained his teenage daughters by "sharing tales of his sexual conquests" with them (225). Gerald's words and actions would seem to account for much of Daphne's misery in her life and works, but Dudgeon believes that Barrie was behind all of it, manipulating both Gerald's emotions and finances so that he did Barrie's bidding. Dudgeon carefully explains that as a child Daphne attended opening night of Barrie's play *Dear Brutus*, which, through fantasy, grants the wishes of several characters so that a childless man becomes the father of a daughter he regretted not having. But the father-daughter relationship is a troubled one, and, says Dudgeon, when Daphne understood that the play dramatized the real relationship between her and her father, she ran from the theater, sobbing. Acting in the play, for Gerald, and seeing the play, for Daphne, served as the "catalyst" for the incest that began later (225–26) because the staged relationship wrote the script for them both.

Accusing Barrie of being responsible for Daphne's traumas is just...

is no doubt that it is a tricky task, and Horne and White are, on the whole, to be congratulated for producing a book that does *The Wind* justice.

*Peter Hunt, visiting professor in children's literature at Newcastle University, United Kingdom, is currently editing Treasure Island and The Secret Garden for Oxford University Press's World's Classics.*

*Neverland: J. M. Barrie, the Du Mauriers, and the Dark Side of Peter Pan. By Fiers Dudgeon. New York: Pegasus Books, 2009.*

Reviewed by Anita Yarr

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