



To the Devil a Daughter (Molly Fountain, #1)

Dennis Wheatley

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Beneath the azure sky of the French Riviera, Christina Mordant looks and behaves like any other attractive girl. But each night as darkness falls, the demon within her betrays its presence.

A thousand miles away, deep in the Essex marshes, a priest of Satan is about to achieve his life's ambition: Canon Copely-Syle of Bentford Priory prepares for the virgin sacrifice which will give breath to the foul abomination he has created...

To the Devil a Daughter (Molly Fountain, #1) Details

Date : Published September 10th 2007 by Wordsworth Editions Ltd (first published January 1953)

ISBN : 9781840225440

Author : Dennis Wheatley

Format : Paperback 336 pages

Genre : Horror, Fiction, Occult, Fantasy, Mystery, Thriller

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From Reader Review To the Devil a Daughter (Molly Fountain, #1) for online ebook

Dfordoom says

To the Devil - a Daughter, written in 1953, is everything you could ask for in a Dennis Wheatley novel. It has wicked devil-worshippers, outrageous conspiracies, and some amusingly lurid descriptions of satanic rituals. A businessman makes a deal with a satanic clergymen, and has his daughter Christina baptised into Satan's church. Twenty-one years later, provided she is still a virgin, she is destined to be the centrepiece of a hideous satanic ritual. As she has been dedicated to Lucifer she undergoes a personality change every evening when the sun goes down. In the hours of darkness she becomes a Bad Girl, giving herself up to all kinds of naughtiness. Luckily she makes the acquaintance of Molly, a middle-aged English writer who used to work for British Intelligence during the war, and Molly and her son John are determined to save Christina from the clutches of the Satanists, and quite probably from a Fate Worse Than Death. Wheatley also finds time for his favourite hobbyhorse, the links between Satanists and Communism. It's all breathless excitement, and a silly but highly entertaining romp. The fact that Wheatley took this stuff seriously just makes it even more enjoyable. This novel was of course the basis for the last horror movie made by Hammer Studios. The movie doesn't follow the plot of the book very closely at all, but it's also great fun in its own way.

Derek Baldwin says

The version I read had an even more salacious cover pic than this one does - one of those ones with the crystal ball etc. Anyway: this is by the Dan Brown of his day, and really quite fantastic. At one level it's the most awful guff. Some of the authorial opinions - not least the disdain for "swarthy" people, as Mr Wheatley tended to put it (and it gets much worse) - are pretty reprehensible. But this IS a cracking good read! The denouement is characteristically impossibly tense until, suddenly, all loose ends are tied up in about a page and half. This rocks.

Mike says

This is an odd mixture of mystery, horror, and adventure. The central mystery of the story -- what is going on with the odd young English woman in a villa in Nice, France -- is largely telegraphed by the book's title, though we are nearly a third of the way through the story before things take a turn from the mundane to the fantastic, and all the vague talk of occultism and conspiracy comes to the fore. It is a little distracting that Wheatley is obsessed with connecting Satanism to Communism, but given that this was written during the height of the Cold War, it is understandable that the author chooses to align all the enemies of respectable upper class morality and the monarchy. Wheatley's characters are all interesting and vivid, even if his extreme classism and nationalism cause him to rely on overt stereotyping.

Despite the absurdity of the novel's central conceit -- that Satanists are aided by Communists in their effort to take over the world -- the story moves quickly and works as a thriller. The author's piety is tempered by some decent humor and mostly good dialogue. I suppose it would be odd to write about a Satanic cult without getting moralistic, but his protagonists are occasionally such pious, law-abiding twits that I began to find myself indifferent to their fates, and it was only the extreme evil and arrogance of the villain that made me root for the good guys.

There is some really creepy imagery, particularly in the final third of the book, and some interesting asides. For one thing, apparently Wheatley actually met the infamous Aleister Crowley and he's included a story about him in one character's dialogue -- painting an unflattering but plausible portrait of "the Great Beast." Another throw-away idea he includes is that Atlantis was sunk by White Magicians in response to horrible rituals being carried out by Atlantis' Black Magicians. I get the sense that Wheatley was both attracted to and repulsed by the occult movement of his time and it gave him some really cool plot ideas, even if many are never developed.

Worth checking out, despite its flaws.

Stephen Osborne says

This may have been a thrilling page turner when it first came out, but the years have not been kind. A LOT of talking. And thinking about what to do. When the action does happen, it's well done and exciting, but getting there is a chore. First, this is listed as "Molly Fountain #1", which I guess it is, but Molly only shows up in the first few chapters and then disappears until the very end. Sort of like saying "Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone" was "Hedwig the Owl #1". And Christina acts SLIGHTLY naughty when the sun goes down, so of course she's possessed by the devil. Honestly, she drinks and flirts a bit. If that's being possessed by Satan, then I'm in big trouble. And when a character in this book says, "I'd better tell you my story from the beginning" you know you'd better buckle up, because they aren't going to leave out any detail. And where did Christina's father get the ape he used to guard his house? Rent-a-ape?

Michael Sterckx says

Read as a teenager. Off it's head, completely mad and authored by someone with dodgy Right wing autocratic and aristocratic sympathies. What a ripping yarn though!

James says

Disappointing, as I remembered reading Wheatley when I was a kid & finding it scary fun. But it's awful writing, with lapses into reactionary ranting and dialogue which is truly risible.

The idea that a writer can simply put down as literally Satanic everything he finds dangerous or distasteful is worth thinking about, though. Wheatley is rightly afraid of totalitarianism, but foolishly sees no evil - in fact, sees the ultimate good - in the English class system. Nobody could take his ravings seriously because his reactionary ideology dates him so terribly, and his writing isn't good enough to earn him the pardon which Yeats promised Paul Claudel.

Esdaille says

When I was at school, Dennis Wheatley books (the horror stories not the historical novels) were all the rage. I had thrown all my Dennis Wheatley novels away except this one and read it again out of curiosity to see how it would come across more than 40 years on. I gained much the same impression as I had had when I was 14. Firstly, as almost anyone who is honest with themselves and free of intellectual snobbery should

admit, Dennis Wheatley's ability to keep a reader turning the page is hard to beat. He is the master of the "pot boiler". The "Black Magic" novels do expect the reader to accept for the purposes of enjoying the stories, that there exist some sort of parallel Satanic underground. This view, which is conspiratorial and invites an interpretation of world events as being driven by "occult forces" is quite naturally reactionary, quite apart from the fact that the Gothic paraphernalia of Satanism is likely by its very nature to involve a nostalgic yearning for luxury, service, style, superstition, tradition, ritual, hierarchy, tradition and all the trappings of a society that is anything but egalitarian. I suspect that part of the explanation of the resounding success of Wheatley's "Black Magic" tales lies in the authenticity of the writer's approach. It seems to me that he genuinely believes in the facts in the plots which he uses for his stories, eg possession, exorcism, the protective power of pentagrams. For this reason, there are probably many biographical and historical portraits and references which I miss, although I could see that the Black Magician in this tale is a portrait of the notorious non-fictional Black Magician, Alistair Crowley. So, whereas liking or not liking Dennis Wheatley has something to do with enjoying a thriller, it is impossible to ignore the expectation of at least a "suspension of disbelief" or better, concurrence with the author's interpretation of the world. Either one is going to "buy into" the Manichean Wheatley world of Good versus Evil or as a rationalist or progressivist, one will reject it. Although this is only a thriller, it makes some religious demands upon the reader, not in terms of belief as such, but in terms of empathy. Where both elements meet and where I think Dennis Wheatley disappoints, in this as in the other Black Magic novels, is in his conclusions, his inevitable very happy endings. The triumph of Good always takes the form of some kind of last minute Bruce Willis style saving of the world (or virgin!) and heroes and heroines fall into one another's arms while the forces of Darkness are sent packing down to Hell, ready and willing however, to return in a new episode. Time and again, and "To the Devil a Daughter" is no exception, I find Dennis Wheatley ending his novels with a kind of maybe divinely orchestrated "Big Bang". Satanists and Devils are very much present, whilst God and the Angels are not physically present at all. This is probably because Wheatley was attached to the Aryan heresy, alluded to in several of his books, which maintains that the World was given over unto Satan. At the end of the book, I am left thinking-"all that struggle and furor and the baddies could have been destroyed in a puff of divine smoke anyway". Come to think of it, is that not the disturbing thought which challenges atheists and Christians alike? Be all that as it may, whoever enjoys and for whatsoever reason, innocent or not-so-innocent, the world of luxury, ritual, power of magic and symbols, the gothically inclined shall we say, will not have to fear that Dennis Wheatley will allow any wry and cynical rationalist to wink at them from behind the sacrificial altar or break into their fantasies with knowing smirks or rational explanations of the paranormal.

Tim Poston says

I read this in my teens, when I read everything in the local library that was SF or fantasy. (not enough.)

Garbage.

Matthew says

Molly nearly dropped her glass and her mouth fell open. Then she gave a cry of consternation. 'Oh, Johnny! What can be at the bottom of all this? De Grasse is one of the most evil men in France.'

'I feared as much!'" Molly said grimly.' And now we know the worst! Every night when darkness falls, you become possessed by the Devil."

I do not usually provide quotations from the books that I review. I am not writing a literary essay, but merely providing a few impressions that I formed while reading the book. However, I could not resist giving you the cliffhanger paragraphs that close Chapters 4 and 5.

These should give you a fair sample of some of the risible dialogue that can be found in Dennis Wheatley's supernatural adventure story, *To the Devil a Daughter*. Does anybody really talk like this? Do people suddenly announce that someone is the most evil person in a country or make sudden deductions about Satanic possession? They do in Wheatley stories, it seems.

The novel is a sequel of sorts to *The Devil Rides Out*, which was made into a passable Hammer horror movie. However, while there are allusions to the earlier book, no particular knowledge of it is required, as this one deals with entirely different characters. I cannot remember the film too clearly and have not read the earlier book, but had no problems following this one.

The story opens with a novelist called Molly Fountain who is living in France. Her new neighbour is a young lady called Christina Mordant. This is not her real name, but it is the one that is used throughout the book so I will use it. She is in hiding at her father's request, but uncertain why, and exhibits certain odd characteristics. Animals dread her, churches make her sick, and she becomes less prudish and more bold, sensual and wicked at night.

Actually, she is not possessed by the Devil, as the quotation at the beginning of this review suggested, but her father became a Satanist and has signed away his soul and involved her in the initial rites, so that she is influenced by them. Now the devil worshippers wish to sacrifice Christina on her twenty-first birthday, according to a previous agreement, in order to revive a sinister creature called a homunculus.

Standing between Christina and the Satanists is Molly's son, John, and a representative from the intelligence services called C.B. who has investigated devil worshippers and other subversive elements. I won't go into the rest of the story which is a series of episodic adventures, leading to a fairly inevitable conclusion.

Wheatley probably imagines his tale as a traditional battle between the forces of evil and those of good. Personally I see it more as a fight between the evil and the odious, since Wheatley's heroes are a fairly detestable bunch.

Of course if you like heroes who sit around by the pool in their second home moaning about the socialist government and how hard done by they feel, and a hero who calls his mother Mumsie, then this may be for you. Even our heroine's pitiable status as a future sacrificial victim is somewhat muted by the fact that she is the kind of privileged gal who, when she gets bored, is sent to finishing school by daddy.

Of course, there is nothing wrong with posh people per se, and they can make very sympathetic heroes, but this is not the case here. The only thing the Fountains appear to fear more than evil Satanists is having to pay their taxes, an issue that is raised with ludicrous frequency in the early part of the book.

Even the first meeting between John and the most evil man in France proves something of an anti-climax. The champions of good and evil spend a surprising amount of time complaining about having to pay their taxes, and how the money is spent on the idle poor. Not that we any of these characters having to work hard for a living, their jobs being rather easy for the amount of money they appear to have.

Actually, this scene rather shows how much in common the Count and John have, since they are both idle, selfish rich people who feel the world owes them a living, and it is a bit rich to criticise the Satanists for their sexual freedom when John Fountain is himself a bit of a ladies' man.

The nature of Satanism portrayed here is also subject to a lot of Wheatley's political biases. The Satanists

generally represent those sections of society that Wheatley dislikes, and he has no problem in blaming Satanism for the rise of Communism amongst other things.

Followers are inducted into Satanism by way of such shocking practices as drug-taking, sexual promiscuity and (apparently) yoga. Incidentally, if the person reading this review happens to be gay or lesbian, then I'm sorry to inform you that you are a prime candidate for becoming a Satan worshipper.

Since Wheatley has supposedly studied the subject, I must be careful in expressing any scepticism about this obvious farrago of nonsense. I cannot help imagining that most of the details are entirely fictional, however.

There is nothing wrong with making up your own world, and much that is here is certainly no worse than you would find in a Lovecraft story. Similarly, we may object to his portrayal of Satanism, but this is fiction after all.

I have spoken to Satanists on social media, and actually found their attitudes more puritanical than those of many Christians I have met. I am prepared to allow for the fact that these are more people who find the idea of Satanic rebellion trendy, but would run a mile at the thought of sacrificing animals, let alone humans.

The Satanists however are no worse than many other fictional portrayals of them, however, and the only thing that is really objectionable is that Wheatley ties it in with his political biases. He can link this to his Christian beliefs safely and deplore the rise of secularism and devil worship, since these opinions, right or wrong, do relate to the subject matter on display here.

However, he is less forgivable in tying Satanism to those political opinions he dislikes. I can only feel relieved that the leading Satanist turned out to be a corrupt clergyman and not a tax collector, as seemed likely. Wheatley wishes to lump Satanism in with any other subversive social or political elements he dislikes.

Yet curiously, his book unconsciously has more bad things to say about the wealthy and privileged than Wheatley is so dazzled by than it does about subversive secular or left-wing elements in society. For all the vapouring about communism, the leading Satanists are nearly all bored, wealthy men.

The exception is Christina's father, an arriviste who acquired his wealth thanks to selling his soul. However, since his promotion into the upper echelons is achieved unscrupulously through blackmail and disregard for his own daughter, then we cannot really count him as being any different than the other Satanists.

I should probably stress that most of the book is not occupied with the more ridiculous elements described so far. Much of it is essentially the stuff of boy's own adventure stories, laced with a little supernatural occurrence. There is in fact surprisingly little of this until the end, and the devil worshippers do not actually succeed in killing anyone. Actually it is the opponents of devil worship who do the killings.

As a result, much of this would fit perfectly well in a spy story. Wheatley's style is not as stodgy as writers in that genre however (Jack Higgins, Alistair McLean etc). His writing is not especially brilliant, but it cheerfully breezes from one set piece to the next with a sensationalist cliffhanger at the end of each chapter to keep the reader interested. In this way, it resembles a serial as much as a novel.

This may explain the male emphasis in the book. It is the men who lead on both sides, and move the action forward. Christina is only there to be rescued by our heroes, and his mother is there to offer the necessary tea and sympathy to get our heroine to talk.

Admittedly Molly takes part in the final assault on the enemy, though being a woman she of course slows them down. In a rather odd twist, when she arrives on the scene, she proceeds to dispatch an explosive

device in the room filled with Satanists, not only disposing of many of them but even killing Christina's father who is belatedly helping our heroes. This is soon smoothed over however.

Similarly, the action is firmly based around white heroes. If we see a black character, he will be a servant for a prominent devil worshipper, certainly not a leading Satanist, or (Heaven forbid!) one of our heroes.

While I have a certain fondness for bad movies and bad songs, I cannot feel the same enthusiasm for bad books, since they require a level of time and energy that I generally do not like giving. However, To the Devil a Daughter comes closest to being an enjoyably bad book, until even that gets lost in endless action set pieces.

Overall though, this book is more likely to inspire howls of laughter rather than howls of terror.

Angel says

The book started off well enough, but took a horrid downturn on page 72. This is where the main character leaps from surmising that the girl she is helping suffers from some sort of personality disorder to dispassionately concluding she is possessed by the devil. This would be fine if Wheatley brought the reader with her, but the suspicion seems laughable because it comes out of nowhere. Plus, it would have been more entertaining if he followed the Ann Radcliffe school of suspense and kept the mystery going longer.

After that, I decided to keep plowing through, but what followed was undisguised propagandistic drivel. The main character casually explains that the Devil exists (and strangely seems overly familiar with his plans and thought processes), that Satanic cults are flourishing and use yoga and sex to control people, and that Communism is an evil tool meant to deliver the world into the hands of Satan. We also learn that girls' schools can be places of sin where sexual experimentation among the girls can provide an ingress for the devil's possessory powers. So in a mere couple of pages we learn that non-exclusive, non-hetero, non-binary, non-missionary sex is the devil's work and disfavored political theory is the equivalent of sin.

And if you can hold your lunch down through that fun little chapter, you get treated to a social darwinist diatribe in the next chapter about the horrors of government taxation, a dialogue which has no apparent purpose except to display Wheatley's political views. If one is going to incorporate their own biases into their writings, at least do it subtly and not through the characters lecturing the reader. What should have been a fun read has suddenly become a poorly written polemic.

Kimberly says

The story starts out intriguing enough, with a mysterious girl living next door to a strong woman, Molly, and her son, John, who had just recently returned home. Unfortunately, the novel becomes very cliched shortly after that. One thing that bothered me was that Molly immediately comes to the assumption that her new neighbor, Christina, is taken over by the devil's influence at night. From the period that Wheatley wrote this, the content was probably quite acceptable; unfortunately, in this time, I found it very difficult to follow along with the events that were just thrown out as "fact" without any real backing to them.

There were some very interesting and tense moments (and a great scene at the end!); however, the story just was very difficult for me to get emotionally involved in, and I failed to make an attachment to any of the

major characters. I DID enjoy Molly, but she ended up "disappearing" from the novel for a rather extended period of time, only to come back again at the end.

I gave TO THE DEVIL A DAUGHTER three stars, taking into account the time it was originally written in.

I won a copy of TO THE DEVIL A DAUGHTER from GoodReads First Reads Giveaway.

Bob Rust says

To the Devil A Daughter (1953) in which a Mad-Scientist Communistic Satanist attempts to animate deadly homunculi with captured souls in order to destroy democracy.

Nick Pemberton says

Typical Dennis Wheatley satanism story, lots of details of satanic rituals, heroic good guys, evil satanists. Nice Riviera & Essex locations too. My problem with Wheatley's writing is that it always feels slightly padded out, there's an awful lot of dialogue with characters describing what they're going to do & what they've done & what's going on, lots of telling, not showing. There are some good set-pieces such as what the villain has hidden in a crypt & an exciting climax too, but it'll be a little while before I pick up another book by this author.

Incidentally, my wife was reading another famous Dennis Wheatley satanism book, The Devil Rides Out, having loved the movie version, & found the same problems with narrative pace, lots of explaining, not a whole lot of action, she's now more or less given up with it.

Adele Geraghty says

A horror classic from the days when only the upper classes were depicted to engage in activity of merit and excitement. This can only be read as a period piece and since I collect classic supernatural horror, it was on my reading list. Not recommended as a gripping read, but rather an historical legacy.

Titus Hjelm says

This was plain awful, even by Wheatley standards. Not even the anachronistic sexism, racism and commie-baiting was remotely interesting this time. It was just bad and took me ages to finish. This must be one of the few instances where the later film adaptation was actually way better.
