[PDF] Daughters Of The Witching Hill

Mary Sharratt - pdf download free book

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Description:

Product Description *Daughters of the Witching Hill* brings history to life in a vivid and wrenching account of a family sustained by love as they try to survive the hysteria of a witch-hunt. Bess Southerns, an impoverished widow living in Pendle Forest, is haunted by visions and gains a reputation as a cunning woman. Drawing on the Catholic folk magic of her youth, Bess heals the sick and foretells the future. As she ages, she instructs her granddaughter, Alizon, in her craft, as well as her best friend, who ultimately turns to dark magic. When a peddler suffers a stroke after exchanging harsh words with Alizon, a local magistrate, eager to make his name as a witch finder, plays neighbors and family members against one another until suspicion and paranoia reach frenzied heights. Sharratt interweaves well-researched historical details of the 1612 Pendle witch-hunt with a beautifully imagined story of strong women, family, and betrayal. *Daughters of the Witching Hill* is a powerful novel of intrigue and revelation. **Amazon Exclusive: Katherine Howe Interviews Mary Sharrett**

Katherine Howe is the bestselling author of and a descendant of both Elizabeth Proctor, who survived the Salem witch trials, and Elizabeth Howe, who did not. Read her interview with Mary Sharrett, author of *Daughters of the Witching Hill*:

Katherine Howe: I am so looking forward to learning more about *Daughters of the Witching Hill*. As I started the book, I was curious about something. covers some well-worn territory in American history: the Salem witch trials, which we all learn about in school so early that it's hard to really know when they appear for the first time in our culture. Can the same be said for the Pendle witches in British history? If so, how did you feel about revisiting something already so well known? And if not, how did you first learn about them?

Mary Sharratt: It's so wonderful to be doing this interview with you. I'm such a fan of *The Physick Book of Deliverance Dane*!
Unlike the Salem Trials which are so well known that they've become almost a part of the American psyche, I wouldn't say that the Pendle Witches are that well known outside the Pendle region. I think many people in other parts of England might find them as unfamiliar as Americans would. The most famous English witch trials would be those associated with Matthew Hopkins's career as a witchfinder during the anarchy that ensued during the English Civil War.
So, although the Pendle Witch Trials were meticulously documented by court clerk Thomas Potts in his book, *The Wonderfull Discoverie of Witches in the Countie of Lancaster*, I'd say that they are not so well known. Novels and academic studies have been written about them, of course, but not so many that I felt like I was treading on over-familiar ground.
KH: I am not surprised to hear that the Pendle witches are a bit more obscure than Matthew Hopkins' witches. How did you first stumble upon this mysterious history in your area?
MS: When I first moved to the Pendle region in 2002, I hadn't heard anything about the Pendle Witches, but once you are in the region, it's impossible to ignore this history. There are images of witches everywhere: on private houses, pubs, bumper stickers, walking trail signs, realtors' logos, a whole fleet of commuter buses going into Manchester.
At first I thought these witches belonged to the realm of fairy tale and folklore, but once I learned the actual history, I was so moved by their story. Seven women and two men from this region were hanged for witchcraft at Lancaster in 1612, but the most notorious among them, Elizabeth Southerns, aka Old Demdike, the heroine of my book, died in prison before she came to trial. She was a cunning woman and healer of long-standing repute who had practiced her craft for decades before anyone dared to interfere with her or stand in her way. Another accused witch, Mother Chattox, was also a renowned cunning woman--Mother Demdike's rival. Alizon Device, Demdike's granddaughter, was first to be arrested and last to be tried at Lancaster. Her last recorded words before she was hanged were a passionate vindication of her grandmother's legacy as a healer.
What moved me was not only the family loyalty but the fact that these women believed in their own powers and made no attempt to hide who they were when interrogated by their magistrate. They seemed very proud of their perceived powers.
KH: I was particularly intrigued by your representation of the relationship between the cunning folk tradition in late Medieval and early modern England with the loss of the Catholic faith and its mysteries. In effect it seems as though Demdike and her family are merely adherents of what the book calls the "old religion," though the story is often agnostic on whether that term refers to Catholicism or to something pre-Christian. I gather that some of that representation draws on the work of Keith Thomas, a historian whose work I relied on for research as well, though I was trying to uncover ways in which the cunning folk tradition might have persisted even for adherents of Puritanism. Can you tell me about some of the other research that you did to really root the story in historical truth?
MS: I based all the major events and details on the primary source material, Thomas Potts's The Wonderfull *Discoverie of Witches in the Countie of Lancaster*. Here you can see the accused witches'

charms quoted by the prosecution and cited as damning evidence of satanic witchcraft. However, the charms contain not a shred of diabolical imagery. They are Catholic prayer charms. The charm to heal a person who is bewitched, attributed to Mother Demdike's family, is a moving description of the passion of Christ as witnessed by the charm contains language very similar to the White Pater Noster, an Elizabethan prayer charm discussed in Eamon Duffy's landmark work, . So the Catholic connection is based on fact and this was one of the things that surprised me most in my research, because I hadn't even considered such a connection.

Keith Thomas's *Religion and the Decline of Magic* was hugely influential to my writing, but my research also draws on a course I did at Lancaster University on Late Medieval Belief and Superstition. There was much mysticism and mystery associated the pre-Reformation Catholicism and indeed the yearly round of village holidays took place under the blessing of the old Church, even festivals we associate as pagan, such as May Day, were adopted or appropriated, depending on one's viewpoint. So, pre-Reformation, one could be a mainstream Christian and still embrace a worldview that made room for positive folk magic. It was believed that certain prayers could aid healing. Mother Chattox's charm to heal a bewitched person, for example, involves saying five Pater Nosters, five Ave Marias, and the Creed, while picturing the five wounds of Christ. You could pray to a certain saint or visit a holy well, and so on. Puritanism stripped all these blessings away, yet people still faced the same harsh fears of the evil supernatural, but no longer had the "good" charms to protect them. So it's no wonder that older people like Mother Demdike, who would have remembered the old Church, clung on to these prayers and healing charms.

On the other hand, the belief in familiar spirits, which was the foundation of English folk magic, seemed to draw on a faith quite different from Christianity. It's difficult to substantiate that historical witches and cunning folk believed in anything like modern Wicca, but the lingering belief in fairies and elves in this period is well established, and I followed the theory advanced by people like Emma Wilby, author of the scholarly study *Cunning Folk and Familiar Spirits*, that the belief in familiar spirits was intimately connected with this lingering fairy faith, something that co-existed for centuries with Christianity. In his 1677 book, *The Displaying of Supposed Witchcraft*, Lancashire author John Webster talks about a local cunning man who claimed that his familiar spirit was none other than the Queen of Elfhame herself.

KH: Just a quick last question: One of the most common questions that readers ask me is whether or not writing about witches has made me more superstitious. So now I would like to ask you the same thing: has writing about witches made you see the world differently? And do you think lungwort will grow well in a New England garden, as you have now inspired me to try?

MS: Katherine, writing this book was such a magical experience for me. I identified with my heroines, Mother Demdike and Alizon, to the point where I "heard" their voices as I was writing their story--or letting them tell their own stories through me. I felt a powerful connection with the land and with these women whose spirit lives on in the land. I can't just walk down a country lane or footpath again without feeling that connection to every herb and tree and animal that crosses my path. And I find myself counting magpies.

You could always try planting lungwort and let me know how it grows!

(Photo © Laura Dandaneau)

Amazon Exclusive: A Letter from Mary Sharratt, Author of *Daughters of the Witching Hill*

Dear Amazon Reader,

Do you believe in magic? Our ancestors did. Let me introduce you to a woman of power who changed my life forever. The wild, brooding landscape of Pendle Hill, my home for the past seven years, gave birth to my new novel, *Daughters of the Witching Hill*, which tells the true story of Elizabeth Southerns, cunning woman, more commonly known by her nickname, Mother Demdike. In 1612, seven women and two men from Pendle Forest were hanged as witches. Yet Mother Demdike,

the most notorious of the accused, the ringleader who initiated all the others into witchcraft, cheated the hangman by dying in prison. This is how Thomas Potts describes her in *The Wonderfull Discoverie of Witches in the Countie of Lancaster*: *She was a very old woman, about the age of Foure-score yeares, and had been a Witch for fiftie yeares. Shee dwelt in the Forrest of Pendle, a vast place, fitte for her profession: What shee committed in her time, no man knows. . . . Shee was a generall agent for the Devill in all these partes: no man escaped her, or her Furies.* Not bad for an eighty-year-old lady! Reading the trial transcripts against the grain, I was amazed at how her strength of character blazed forth in the document written expressly to condemn her. When interrogated by her magistrate, she freely admitted to being a healer and a cunning woman. Mother Demdike was so frightening to her foes because she was a woman who embraced her powers wholeheartedly. As I sought to uncover the bones of her story, I was drawn into a new world of mystery and magic. Every stereotype I'd held of historical witches and cunning folk was dashed to pieces. Mother Demdike became a true presence, a shining light in my life. An ancestor of my heart, if not my blood. Her life unfolded almost literally in my backyard. Once in a place called Malkin Tower, there lived a widow, Bess Southerns, called Demdike. Matriarch of her clan, she lived with her widowed daughter and her three grandchildren, the most promising one being Alizon Device, a young woman who showed every promise of becoming a cunning woman as mighty as her grandmother. What fascinated me was not that Bess was arrested on witchcraft charges but that the authorities only turned on her near the end of her long, productive career. She practiced her craft for decades before anybody dared to interfere with her. Cunning craft--the art of using charms to heal both humans and livestock--was Bess's family trade. Their spells, recorded in the trial documents, were Roman Catholic prayer charms--the kind of folk magic that would have flourished before the Reformation. Yet she also drew on an even older source of power: Tibb, her familiar spirit, who appeared to her in the guise of a beautiful young man. Other books have been written about the Pendle Witches--both fiction and nonfiction, nuanced and lurid. Mine is the first to tell the tale from Bess's point of view. I longed to give Bess Southerns what her world denied her--her own voice. As a writer, I am obsessed with history and place, how the true stories of our ancestors haunt the living landscape. No one in Pendle can remain untouched by the witches' legacy. As contemporary British storyteller, Hugh Lupton, has said, if you go deep enough into the old tales and can present them in a meaningful way to a modern audience, you become the living voice in an ancient tradition. Mother Demdike's voice deserves to be heard. I hope you will be as moved by her story as I am. *Mary Sharratt*

(Photo © Staurt Ainslie)

Spells from the Pendle Witch Trial Transcripts and *Daughters of the Witching Hill* (Click on Images for the Spell [PDF])

Mother Demdike's Charm Charms of the Pendle Witches --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

From Publishers Weekly Starred Review. The 1612 Lancashire, England, witch trials that resulted in nine executions inspires Sharratt's gorgeously imagined novel that wonders if some of the accusations of witchcraft might be true. Sharratt (*The Vanishing Point*) focuses on the Southerns family of Pendle Forest. Widowed mother Bess Southerns tries to save her family from bleakest poverty by healing the sick, telling fortunes, and blessing those facing misfortune, conjuring charmes that combine forbidden Catholic ritual, medicinal herbs, and guidance provided by her spirit-friend, Tibb. Though Bess compassionately uses her powers, her granddaughter, Alizon, unwittingly endangers her family while under the interrogation of a conniving local magistrate. Sharratt crafts her complex yet credible account by seamlessly blending historical fact, modern psychology, and vivid evocations of the daily life of the poor whose only hope of empowerment lay in

the black arts. Set in forests and towers, farms and villages, deep in a dungeon and on the gallows, this novel grows darker as it approaches its inevitable conclusion, but proves uplifting in its portrayal of women who persevere, and mothers and daughters who forgive. *(Apr.)*

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