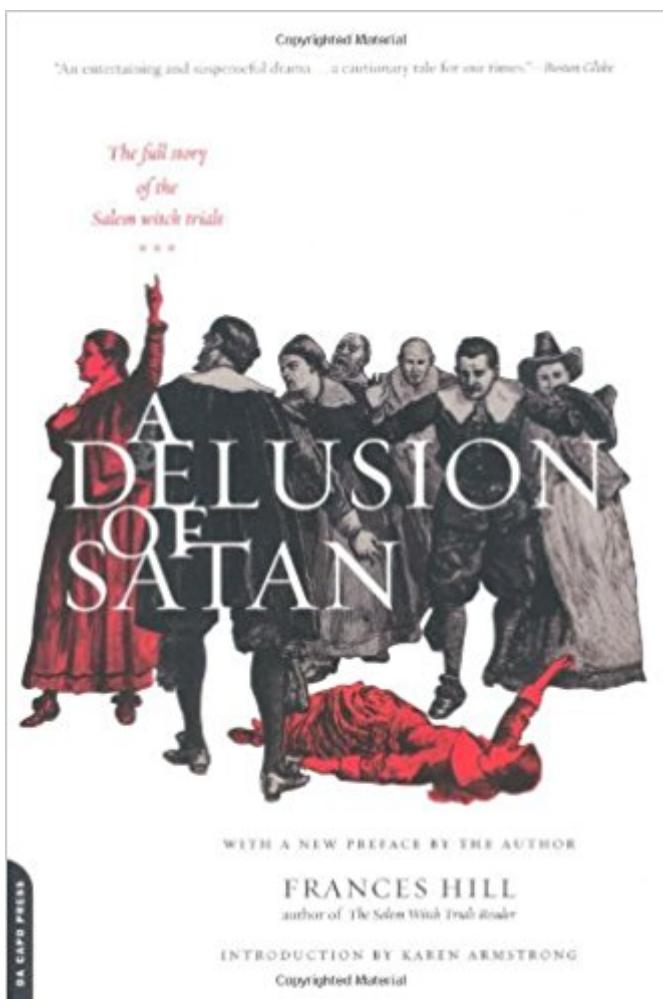


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A Delusion Of Satan: The Full Story Of The Salem Witch Trials



Synopsis

This acclaimed history illuminates the horrifying episode of Salem with visceral clarity, from those who fanned the crisis to satisfy personal vendettas to the four-year-old "witch" chained to a dank prison wall in darkness till she went mad. Antonia Fraser called it "a grisly read and an engrossing one."

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Starred Review Almost everyone knows something about the infamous Salem witch trials, but few are privy to the chilling details that Hill, a British novelist and journalist turned scholar, reveals in her superb and boldly analytical study. Hill documents every grim particular of this travesty of justice and terrifying example of the power of suggestion, from the very first accusations to the last brutal executions. As Hill tells the all but unbelievable tale about how a group of girls accused innocent women from all walks of life of practicing witchcraft, thus instigating a year of mass hysteria and causing the death of 25 people, she emphasizes the harshness, sterility, and repressiveness of seventeenth-century New England Puritan life. It's no coincidence, Hill asserts, that Betty Parris, Abigail Williams, Ann Putnam, and Elizabeth Hubbard began having their dramatic fits in the dead of winter and in the wake of serious political and economic conflicts. The mystery is why allegedly responsible adults eagerly embraced and ruthlessly acted on their wild claims. Hill's astute psychological insights offer cogent explanations for this moral breakdown, but no interpretation can diminish the horror. And Hill reminds us that "witch-hunts are still with us." Donna Seaman --This

text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

"Impeccably researched and intelligently written." -- Los Angeles Times Book Review

I first came across "A Delusion of Satan" about five years ago when I was reading several books that covered early American life. For example I read a few books on the Pilgrims, the Mayflower and books that covered the very early, what we'd probably call pre-colonial period of the 1600's. This however, was a bit of a revelation. Like most people who are at least vaguely familiar with history I had certainly heard of the Salem Witch Trials. But there's been such a distillation of this actual historical event that we truly have no idea what we're really talking about when we talk about Salem. Perhaps nowhere is this better evidenced than in popular culture where Samantha on "Bewitched" is from Salem, Sabrina: The Teenage Witch has a cat named Salem, Halloween celebrations in the actual Salem, MA are the largest in the world. It's everywhere more or less and it says virtually nothing about the horror that this story tells with an unblinking eye. There is something genuinely chilling in the way the Salem hysteria came to be, and if there isn't a cautionary tale in this somewhere I don't know where there is. The notion of a few "children" - mere teenagers from a village that isn't actually the town of Salem at all but the (at the time) hinterland hamlet of Salem Village (current Danvers) creating this much trouble is frightening. Far more frightening than anything in a scary mask or a sheet. The truth is the fits of hysteria that the girls fell into started with just one, and then two, and then three and so on....it was, for a time, a potent spell to fall under. Just imagine the role of a woman in this Puritanical society. It was pretty repressive - you were a child for a time but even there they were repressed and eventually you'd take an even more rigid role in the community. So now imagine having everyone around you in thrall that you have been "bewitched" and as a result you can act out in ways you never could on your best day, you can accuse others of mischief and see them called before a court for it. You can literally sentence someone to DEATH over pure nonsense. Talk about a power trip! So make no mistake, the author informs us, this had EVERYTHING to do with the society in which these people lived, their deepest fears and repressions and more than anything the rabid religious beliefs they held which in very short order would make true monsters of them all. Those few who spoke out against this hysteria - call them people of common sense - soon found THEMSELVES accused. It was, for a very short window, a tragic season of the witch. The author goes to great lengths to place us in that time and location and I feel does an excellent job of it. It is not just a dry read of known facts. Also too, the author steers mostly clear of condemnation of the participants when that seems a very easy thing to do. I rate this

highly, I really do. You won't walk away with an intact vision of anything pop culture when you hear "Salem" again.

A very interesting analysis of the witch hunt phenomenon. The author uses what happened in Salem as a template and does a thorough examination of that situation not only from the standpoint of mass hysteria and superstition exasperated by hardship, but also the peculiarity of contemporary society to readily fall into the same pit. She points to the 50s communist scare, the 80s daycare center fiascos, and today's terrorist threat. So overall I liked this book very much and found it to be a fascinating commentary, and also an easy read.

This is not what I would call a book that you "can't put down," but it is well worth the time spent. This comprehensive account of the Salem witch trials is concerned not only with the historical events, but also delves into the reasons behind what fueled the witch-hunt. The political forces at work are examined in detail, as well as the psychology behind what enabled this tragedy. Through extensive research, the author reconstructs the environment of self-repression and religious extremism that defined the times. This account reads more like a narrative than a history book. The author includes many interesting asides, such as what the Puritans' days were like, what they ate for their meals, and how they lived in general, giving a realistic feel for the era. Her detailed description of the dungeon experience gives you a real appreciation of the cruelty these victims endured. This is not your tourists' Salem. If you are interested in the real story behind the witchcraft fury, this well researched account recreates the Puritan experience in detail. The summary of key persons, chronology, and death toll at the end of the book serves as an excellent reference. Recommended reading for anyone interested in this era.

Overall, this book by Francis Hill was a pretty thorough account of the Salem Witch Trials and the hysteria surrounding them. She does a good job describing notable individuals involved, as well as the climate that led up to the town believing, seemingly beyond comprehension or reason, the stories of the afflicted girls. Especially in the first few chapters of the book, I was fascinated by Hill's description of the dour, fanatically religious Puritans and their endless capacity for masochism. However, as the book went on, I was annoyed by Hill's propensity for jumping back and forth in the sequence of events, especially as there were so many characters in the book that it was hard to keep track of them in the first place. Even though the dust jacket clearly states the Hill is referring to the year 1692 only, it still would have been better if when relaying events she would have included

entire dates, rather than the month and the day only. At the end of the book, Hill does include a synopsis of key players and a timeline to make up for this, but she wouldn't have even needed it if she had relayed events in sequential order and inserted the dates correctly to begin with. That said, her work is pretty readable, if repetitious at times.

I've never read a nonfiction book in 2 days before this one. This isn't the first book I've read on the topic, but it's far and away the best. It's admirably researched, very well organized, and the narrative style of the writing makes it a fast, interesting read (I never found it dull). I didn't feel bored by information I already knew, and there was plenty of information I didn't know. Hill presents a dignified portrait of the accused and, in my opinion, a very fair one of the accusers. Readers expecting to read about real paranormal phenomenon may be disappointed. Hill's narrative is sympathetic to the accusers while taking a careful look at their behavior and motivation. I finished the book thinking that Salem Village might have fared a lot better if Judge Danforth had taken the afflicted girls over his knee and given them a good spanking. All in all, an excellent, informed, and thought provoking account of this tragic event that never becomes sensationalistic.

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