



The Afflicted Girls

Suzy Witten

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"Something terrible happened in Salem in 1692 . . . but it isn't what you think!"

THE AFFLICTED GIRLS A Novel of Salem by author-researcher Suzy Witten presents a startling new theory of the Salem Witch Hunt which is certain to put this 300-year-old unsettled mystery to rest by expertly guiding readers through the Historical Record to revelation. Part parable, part star-crossed romance, and part supernatural venture, this is an intuitive human history--and inhuman--spun with a modern twist. Centering her story on Salem Village and its inhabitants, exploring their dark household corners as if she is solving a crime, the author adeptly details how the disintegration happened while spinning familiar facts in new directions, with the mysterious "afflictions" finally explained. A controversial debut by a new Historical storyteller. A Walt Disney Studios Fellowship Finalist, 2010 IPPY Silver Medal for Historical Fiction. (Historical Fiction, 456 pages, paperback and eBook for ages 17 and older; mature content with some sex and violence.) Published by Dreamwand www.theafflictedgirls.com

The Afflicted Girls Details

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From Reader Review The Afflicted Girls for online ebook

Paul Bennett says

Having lived in Salem, MA. for 30 plus years I can attest to the fact that witches are still big in Salem. In fact, witches play an important part in the tourism that fuels the economy in these parts. I reckon that the curiosity of today's tourists is akin to the infatuation of pious Christians or the centuries worth of fear our ancestors felt when dealing with the strange and unusual. The author has rendered a tumultuous period of our history into a gripping tale of greed, lust and ignorance. I was particularly keen on the author's ability to bring to life the caustic atmosphere of the villages involved; the day to day struggle; the ever present differences in class; the overwhelming hold of the church on the lives of the villagers. Her characters are well defined for the time and for the society they lived; a society dominated by obedience to authority no matter that the authority figures are abusive or just plain blind to truth. The Afflicted Girls is full of drama as the plot begins to unfurl and thrusts New England into a rash of horrible deeds. Page turning and replete with surprises (some disgusting), The Afflicted Girls is a worthy recipient of your reading time. 4.3 stars

Ana Mardoll says

The Afflicted Girls / 978-0-615-32313-8

It is my belief that any historical novel must be subjected to two questions in a review - first, is the material historically accurate, and second, is the material pleasant and engaging to read.

In answer to the first question, as an avid student of the Salem witch trials, I can say that "The Afflicted Girls" is the least historically-accurate Salem artifact I have encountered. Much of the novel feels like a very loose re-write of Arthur Miller's "The Crucible" - popular antagonist Abigail Williams is again given an age upgrade from her historical 11 years of age to a sexually tantalizing 16 years of age so that she can feel up men, rape young boys, and have masturbatory fantasies about her uncle Parris. Major societal details have been changed - far too many of the characters are literate as a plot-device, and pretty much all of the Puritan girls running around Salem are sexually active and without a single thought to accidental pregnancy (some brief mention is made of birth control herbs).

As for the trials, the actual details of the trials have been totally rewritten. The order in which the accused were arrested, tried, and executed is arbitrarily changed. One of the accusing girls - protagonist Mercy Lewis - never actually testifies in court, and her role as accuser, and then accused, and then accuser again is completely rewritten. Several people who were either executed or left in prison until finally bonded out at the end of the trials have now been rescued in a completely narrative-breaking adventure jail-break sequence. This isn't even to mention that the entire novel only covers the events up to and including the first, initial set of hangings - barely a fraction of the Salem story. Indeed, so much has been removed, changed, or omitted, that I do not understand why the author didn't just use different names and make this completely fictional, instead of marketing this as a Salem novel.

So, now that we've established that teachers won't be handing out copies of "The Afflicted Girls" in history class, the next question is, is it a good story? The answer, for me at least, is 'no' - too much of the narrative is sensationalized and lurid for me to have derived enjoyment out of it. Protagonist Mercy Lewis is a textbook example of a "Mary Sue" character - she's an orphan who taught herself to read, has the unique talent of

being able to completely read and commit to memory any sheet of paper just by glancing at it, and can recognize and quote back Shakespeare at the drop of a hat (and she does this a lot). All this, and she's survived years of childhood trauma being raped repeatedly by her master George Burroughs - a minister who not only raped her repeatedly, but did so whilst reciting a Black Mass in Latin.

Somewhat frustratingly, Mercy has the distressing talent of being raped by almost every person she meets - to paraphrase Ben "Yahtzee" Croshaw, if you left her alone in a waiting room for an hour, she'd find a way to get raped by a chair. What is more disturbing is that these scenes are always presented from the attackers' points of view, as something exciting and erotic for the reader, rather than from the victim's point of view as something horrible and traumatizing. Add on the fact that Mercy has a bad habit of picking herself up afterward as if nothing happened, and in one case excusing and falling in love with her attacker, and you have a recipe for very unpleasant reading material.

The violence isn't just limited to Mercy Lewis - this 450+ page novel feels less like a vehicle for telling the story of the Salem trials and more like a dark erotic novel. There isn't a single major male character in this novel who isn't a rapist - Rev. Parris purchased Tituba specifically for gratification and sold off their children for pocket-money; Thomas and Joseph Putnam both have extremely brutal scenes with Mercy, and Joseph (the main love interest of the story) frequently and deliberately hurts his girls in order to humiliate them; the doctor who attends the afflicted girls openly goes about raping them with their mothers in the same room (and also has the unique ability of being able to detect an "intact" hymen by *smell*, a detail that was less lurid and more ludicrous); and I could go on and on.

Almost every chapter contains a sexual interlude, most of them violent, cruel, humiliating, and uncomfortably detailed and varied - pretty much every possible variation of the sex act is on display here. Abigail Williams, being the antagonist, doesn't get raped by anyone (although she basically outright asks one man to do so and is offended when he refuses), but she does drug a boy and force herself onto him.

Apart from anything else, this novel is written very poorly and the pacing is frustratingly slow and tiresome. For a novel concerning the Salem trials, it is worthy of note that the first accusation doesn't occur until the mid-point of the novel - that's over 200 pages of backstory and rape before the Salem story even starts. The author frequently breaks off mid-narrative to give parenthetical backstory, often about things the reader doesn't care about. For instance, if Abigail walks into her uncle's study and smells the faint whiff of tobacco, the author will then break off a full page to explain, in parenthesis, how Parris got the tobacco, when he last smoked it, how his wife feels about that particular habit, and how she usually aired the room better, but somehow forgot to do so today, so that was why Abigail was able to smell it upon her arrival. This sort of narrative break happens frequently, and the book is poorer for it. I feel that with a talented editor to excise these parenthetical intrusions, the book would be shorter, the story would be tighter, and the whole thing would be more worth reading - assuming the lack of historical accuracy and the high incidence of sexual violence didn't put you off.

NOTE: This review is based on a free Advance Review Copy of this book provided through the author.

~ Ana Mardoll

Moriah says

Superb story, well-researched, skillfully written and highly entertaining.

Shellie (Layers of Thought) says

Original review posted at Layers of Thought.

Actually 4.5 stars.

When two young friends, both orphans, arrive in Salem MA in 1692, the litigious and imbalanced nature of a community sets in motion a horrific series of events. The author uses a unique perspective around why she thinks this may have occurred.

About: This is set around actual events where the warped moral boundaries and a desire for revenge inflame the emotions of a local pastor and a selfish young woman. Situations are manipulated for personal gain, culminating in the hanging deaths of a number of its core community members - for witchcraft. Bloody scary!

It's a historical novel about this infamous North American witch hunt, with a slightly different take on the original. The author's slant is very plausible and extremely intriguing. While not giving this key piece away, let's say that through some research and a bit of insightful luck or brilliance, Suzy Witten has added a theory around this 200 year old story which has created a page turning twist of a tale - a very good one at that.

Thoughts: One of my favorite genres is horror, so I devoured this story. At the same time, because it is based on a true story it is all the more terrifying, especially since it is entirely possible that something of this nature could happen again. As well as its plausible and intriguing twist, it has complex and well developed characters - many are easy to relate to and likable while others are naturally despicable. With its insight, it feels like a study in human nature with extreme examples of human failings. I was left on the "edge of my seat" (or the bed since I usually read at night). At one point I had to set the book aside with the downward spiraling events.

Another element which I liked is that there is "lustiness" as a large thread throughout the story, giving it darkness and juiciness which in my opinion did not become unrealistic and standardized (one of my peeves). So if you're looking for a "clean" read this is not a good book for you. Witten also uses language that is accessible yet with a slightly "old English style" so that you feel like it is set within the period which it occurred. These elements give depth to the story and make it perfect for a historical fiction novel.

This is an impressive independently published debut novel, even though the author has extensive writing experience - she is a Walt Disney Studios Fellowship Finalist, which you can definitely tell by reading this book. **The Afflicted Girls** is also the winner of The 2010 IPPY Silver Medal for Historical Fiction (Independent Publisher Book Awards). I would say that this book deserves 4.5 stars. I will be waiting for Suzy Witten's next book since I think she is a talented writer and am curious why this book has not been snapped up by a bigger publisher. Highly recommended!

Adele Clagett says

I'm afraid I was not able to "get into" this book. Note: There are somewhat explicit sex/rape scenes. I'm not

stating whether that is good or bad, just a warning. I did not expect that for this book.

Wendy Bertsch says

The Salem Witch Trials have fascinated people for over 300 years. A frenzy of accusation and executions, followed by recantation and vindication—but much too late. It's the stuff of horror stories.

How could this madness be triggered by the wild accusations of children and adolescents? Oh, so easily. There's always someone who has something to gain...

The author has spun a terrifying tale, drawing us deftly into the minds and hearts of the major characters. Her story makes sense. It could have happened much that way...and it could happen again.

This is not a book for the precious and delicately sensitive. But it is a good read for anyone who can bring an open mind to it, and has a sound grasp of the way society actually functioned at the end of the 17th century. Thoughtless brutality and smug hypocrisy existed--whether you like to read about it or not.

Beth says

Very interesting. Suzy Whitten weaves an intriguing tale. Not entirely historically accurate but engaging. Note, this is a dark story with a strong sexual element so not appropriate for YA readers.

Suzy Witten says

THE COPPERFIELD REVIEW
A Journal of History and Fiction
Winter Issue 2011

"The Afflicted Girls"
Review by Paula Day

There is that stand by concern about how historically accurate one must be when writing historical fiction. Some will argue that writers of historical fiction should be 100% accurate, as if novelists were stand-ins for historians. After all, they say, if one is writing with historical information, then one should share that information accurately. Others will argue that perhaps the facts can be tampered with. Novelists are storytellers, and as storytellers they may change what they must in order to tell their story their way. So is the story driven by history, or is the history driven by story? In the case of *The Afflicted Girls: A Novel of Salem* by Suzy Witten, she seems to have chosen the second option. She has used the facts about the Salem Witch Trials to tell the story she wanted to tell.

Those of us with a basic understanding of the Salem Witch Trials (or who at least have some memory of *The Crucible*) will recognize the usual cast of characters in this book. Witten, similar to Arthur Miller, has chosen a sexually charged theme to the story, perhaps as a contrast to the uptight standards held by the Puritans of the time. There is also a supernatural element to the story, which gives an interesting twist to the events.

Witten has an elegant style to her writing, and she does a good job capturing the tone of the seventeenth century language. While she takes some liberties with the facts of the witch hunts as we know them, overall the story is engaging enough for us to allow her a few free passes with the historical content. The Salem Witch Hunts are a prime time for the creatively minded storyteller to spin a yarn around since, for all the facts that we do know about that dreadful time, there is still much that is a mystery. Why did the girls act the way they did? What brought about the horrible accusations? If you read *The Afflicted Girls*, you will discover Witten's unique theory. This is an entertaining book about a fascinating and little understood time in American history. While it may not be entirely strong on the history, it is a good story, which is why we read novels.

Paula Day is the review editor for *The Copperfield Review*. She lives in Los Angeles, California.

<http://www.copperfieldreview.com/reviews/the-afflicted-girls>...

http://www.lep.co.uk/lifestyle/book_reviews/the-afflicted-girls...

THE AFFLICTED GIRLS

Book Review

By Pam Norfolk

Lancashire Evening Post (UK)

Published on Friday 8 April 2011 07:00

America's 17th century Salem witch trials, perhaps one of the most notorious examples of the pernicious effects of mass religious hysteria, have long been a source of literary fascination.

Arthur Miller's 1953 play *The Crucible*, written as an allegorical attack on McCarthyism and the vilification of US communists, is probably the best known dramatisation of what has become a shameful period of history for many Americans.

US film-maker and screenwriter Suzy Witten's debut novel, *The Afflicted Girls*, takes up the story of the trials, in which 19 people were hanged for witchcraft, but applies a very modern and astute psychoanalytical lens to the mysterious goings-on in colonial Massachusetts.

Using 21st century theories on post-natal depression, child abuse, drug addiction and class warfare – to name but a few – and looking beyond historical records, Witten turns detective to shed new light and probabilities on the motivations and actions of those early Puritans.

The result is a re-writing – and a very sexually charged re-writing – of the 'afflictions' that beset the girls in the household of the Reverend Samuel Parris at his church in Salem Village in the early months of 1692.

Two orphan girls, Mercy Lewis and Abigail Williams, are travelling to Salem when their carriage is involved in accident and two local men, Ben Nurse and Joseph Putnam, come to their rescue.

Mercy, a shy and retiring 19-year-old, has special powers that she tries to keep hidden but soon the vulnerable and impressionable girl becomes infatuated with the vain and weak Joseph.

She is indentured into a branch of Joseph's bitter and warring Putnam family where she quickly wins the

hearts of the three daughters, the only children of the family who have survived infancy, much to the chagrin of their father who has been tempted to trade with Satan for a son.

Meanwhile, Abigail, a newly discovered niece of the Reverend Parris and a forward and forthright teenager, settles into his household. Parris, a calculating and mercenary figure, believes he has divine responsibility but is regarded by many of his parishioners as ‘a trumpeting, bare-threaded strut who...calls other kettles black’.

Entangled in her hopeless love, Mercy asks Bridget Bishop, the attractive innkeeper of a local tavern, for a secret charm to make Joseph fall in love with her.

Unfortunately the hot-headed Abigail also learns of the charm and also of the extraordinary plant-based cakes made by Caribbean slave Tituba which make strange things happen to those who eat them.

Underestimating the plant’s powers, Abigail distributes the cakes as charms and people start becoming ill and having inexplicable ‘fits’.

In the hysteria that follows, the terrifying wheels of witchcraft investigation begin to roll and when the motivation is revenge, malice and greed, the outcome proves to be deadly.

Graphic scenes of rape and molestation make this an adults-only read but Witten’s aim was always to inform as much as to entertain and armed with the knowledge that thousands of 17th century New Englanders were, in fact, charged with offences ranging from incest to infanticide, her pursuit of the truth may have left her little choice.

Witten writes with style, charm and fluency, and her moving novel is a bold attempt to give an old story a new and more authentic rationale.

The facts might have been rearranged and the characters re-imagined, but there is an appealing honesty in the new order that makes *The Afflicted Girls* well worth the journey.

<http://www.bibliobuffet.com/bookish-d...>

Bookish-Dreaming
How We Understand the Past ? From Three Directions
by Gillian Polack
Published December 11, 2011 on *BiblioBuffet*

(Excerpted)

A third book that’s led first and foremost by the writer’s passion for the (historical) subject is different again. It’s fiction, for one thing. Suzy Witten, in *The Afflicted Girls* shows her passion for communicating the horrid events of Salem in 1692.

This kind of book is harder for the historian to evaluate. I can read the letters presented by Goldberg and I can analyse Hannam’s approach to science, but the measure of success for history in a novel is how much the reader cares. And the historian as a reader of historical fiction or fantasy is a very difficult reader indeed. It’s not that I don’t read historical fiction: it’s that I’m a fussy audience for historical fiction.

Witten has been dutiful in her research, and it shows in the fine detail that colours the novel. What is missing for me is that (especially near the beginning) the fine detail is uncoloured by emotion. I don't know whether to be impressed or disgusted at the Porter family's "roll-top bright painted calash." It's not something that I know from my own frame of reference and Witten doesn't always give enough information for me to interpret it within the frame of reference of the novel. It must be important, for the description occurs at the beginning of a chapter, but I don't know the way in which it's important. Is it presumptuous of the Porter family to paint in bright colours, or is it an entirely everyday thing? Are they rich, or struggling poor? Without any knowledge of how much it costs to buy and run a calash, I don't know where it fits in the society of the novel. This means that, while the society of the novel is full of detail, I don't always have the tools to assess that detail and Witten herself doesn't always give me the tools. I can see Witten's passion for the past and for bringing readers the lives of this town at this time, and I hurt when they hurt (for it's a strong narrative) but I do it from the vantage point of the present. It's a distant viewing, not a close one. When Witten brings us close in (as she does on the very next page, when we learn that the use of a Boston dressmaker has social and emotional consequences) the past is far more alive.

By the time we reach the harrowing events of the witch trials, the past is more fully alive and the novel is powerful. Still, it's interesting that Witten carries with her the baggage of description. Its excessive detail is her way into understanding what the past looks like and feels like. It's her way of carefully documenting it. Documenting, however, works best in a book such as Hannam's and fine documentation of detail works best of all in a book such as Goldberg's. In a novel, that documentation works better when it has an emotive aspect. It is a path into the past for the reader and it's important that this path show us how the specifics of the place and time were viewed.

Telling detail is, in fact, the reader's link to the normative past, the typical day. Those small bits of information concerning daily life show how that normal everyday moment is seen by those who live in the world of the novel. When this small world all falls apart, we then have a frame of reference from which we can understand the emotional depths. This link between the apparently trivial and the narrative is something that's much more difficult for nonfiction to achieve. It can bring us into the past and make us feel for the history of individual and to cry for the loss of their lives.

All three of these books—the popular history, the letters, the historical novel, carry us into the past. They use different methods and have different reasons for the journey, but they are how we, as readers, begin to understand the people who have gone before.

Gillian Polack is based in Canberra, Australia. A writer, editor and educator, she has a doctorate in Medieval history from the University of Sydney.

Jo Butler says

Imagine a town, carved out of wilderness nearly four hundred years ago by a small group of settlers. The leaders who ruled this colony were guided by the Bible and English law, and by their own ruthless determination. Residents who did not bow to the colony's governors and ministers were expelled. The colony survived internal conflict and a brief war with the region's indigenous people, and came to prosper.

Sixty years later, most of the old leaders have passed to their heavenly rewards. The second generation is in control, and their children and grandchildren are chafing under increasingly rigid laws. There are more colonists now, battling over divided estates. The soil, never rich, is depleted after a half-century of intensive

farming.

Discontent and dispossession, envy, old feuds never settled, and newly risen conflicts have the region simmering. Add to this sullen mix a strong belief that witchcraft often stands behind one's downturn in life, the loss of a newborn child, the death of livestock, or even a wet dream about an attractive female tavern-keeper. Salem Village, Massachusetts in 1692 is primed to explode, and witchcraft accusations provide the spark.

With an intriguing new cause for the possession of Salem Village's bewitched girls, Suzy Witten's "The Afflicted Girls" is a dramatic account of the Salem witchcraft outbreak. In this poignant tale, teenaged girls in the grip of hallucinogens, and misguided by boredom, malice, or simply drunk with power, turn neighbors against one another. Magistrates and ministers accept "spectral evidence" with deadly results when the possessed girls report visions of their tormentors cavorting with Satan.

If demonic possession wasn't enough, Ms. Witten also presents a woeful look into the life of an indentured servant, subject to the abuse and lusts of her masters. I wanted to whisk poor Mercy Lewis away from the Putnam family and give her a new chance at life. I also wish to heartily recommend "The Afflicted Girls."

Jo Ann Butler (a descendant of the Putnam family) is the author of "A Scandalous Life: Rebel Puritan," published in 2011 by Neverest Press. She can be reached at joann@rebelpuritan.com.

Gwyn Ryan says

This realistic novelization of the Salem Witch Trials was a joy to read. I often shy from historical fiction, particularly novels in which the author has held close to the true events (as Witten clearly has done), because I usually find them dry and lacking in a clear narrative voice. Witten's novel suffers neither of these defects -- her characters are fully developed with voices that inspire sincere empathy. Witten provides a rational and convincing set of circumstances that could realistically result in the bizarre events that took place in Salem village, while not completely discounting the numinous possibilities that make the event so mysterious and intriguing. Although she takes some liberties with minor events and indulges in creative speculation, the novel nonetheless rang true to the spirit of one of the darkest episodes in American history. Definitely recommended!

Glen Craney says

I had the good fortune of being present at the creation and evolution of this wonderful novel over many weeks participating in a professional writers' workshop. I would look forward to each new chapter brought in by Ms. Witten for our reading and critique, because the story grabbed me from the start and I could sense that we were being led toward a radical new interpretation of what happened in Salem during those tense and tragic times. It takes a great deal of courage for an author to take on and question the accepted traditions of American history and culture, but this author has that courage and even more--a keen awareness of the deep psychological and mythic undercurrents often manipulated by the powers-that-be for their own designs.

Marta Weeks says

A gripping story.

Julie Dawson says

My full review is available here:

<http://www.goodreads.com/topic/show/3...>

Paulette Mahurin says

Suzy Witten's The Afflicted Girls is a masterfully interwoven story of a dark period in history, the Salem Witch Trials, a debacle of deceit by false accusations of young girls, spun out of control to devastating consequences of injustice and death to innocents. The horror of a lie, that spreads like the plague to catch its victims and hold them to the destruction of others, is sewn into the story line way early on, so the reader knows what is to come and as the tension builds so does the mind boggling lack of understanding how the human condition can sink to such lows as to allow with utter disregard the life of another human being. Witten creates believable characters, intricately interwoven into each other's lives, to develop the complex of a town that would involve itself in the devastation of persecution. The darkness of the massive town agreement against the vows of innocence grabs ones cells, that there by the Grace do any of us walk. We live among evil, in the shadows of each of us, when the darkness by group agreement overtakes, resulting in senseless destruction. This dark side lived in Salem, as it lives now, and Witten's telling of it then, back in the turbulent days of Salem, is a reminder that this lesson lived 400 years ago, but in the big evolutionary scheme of the human condition is a baby step away. The historical aspects of the writing are intelligently well crafted into this beautifully written story, with believable character development, and scene description, that all come together to make this a wonderfully compelling read.

Sarah says

Reading this book was a lot like watching the movie The Titanic. No matter how hard you gesture toward the screen, you can't make that boat turn faster. No matter much I hoped for certain characters to triumph, I knew what was coming. The story is heart-breaking at times, fills you with anger one moment, and then leaves you with a glimmer of hope. Very well written, this story will take you on a roller coaster ride of emotions and leave you reflecting on on human nature both historically and in present day.
