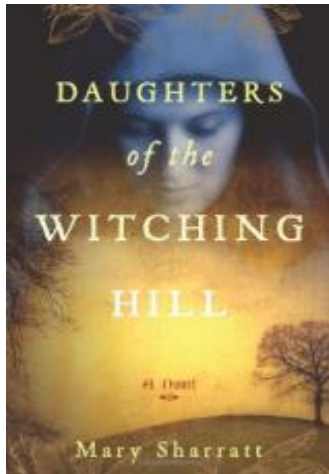


# Daughters of the Witching Hill

by Mary Sharratt

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## About the Book

**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 Southern, 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.

## Discussion Guide

1. Does the book's portrayal of magic and cunning folk in early modern Britain feel authentic to you? Did the book change any of your views on historical witchcraft?
2. Compare the Pendle Witch Trials to the more familiar Salem Witch Trials of 1692. What were the primary differences in the social forces driving the two witch hunts?
3. A cunning woman of longstanding repute, Bess Southern earned her living by using her folk charms to heal humans and livestock. She practiced her craft for decades before anyone dared to interfere with her. Only at the age of eighty,

near the end of her long and productive career, was she arrested on witchcraft charges. Why do you think this was?

**4.** Unlike many other accused witches, Bess freely admitted to being a cunning woman, and she even bragged to the magistrate about her familiar spirit, Tibb, who appeared to her in the guise of a beautiful young man. Why didn't Bess try to save herself by denying the accusations?

**5.** Who, or what, is Tibb, Bess's familiar spirit? Do you see him as good, evil, or neither? Does he ultimately benefit Bess or lead her into tragedy?

**6.** The cunning craft Bess practiced reveals a sincere faith in the power of Catholic prayers combined with folk beliefs in familiar spirits, sympathetic magic, and the fairy folk. Would you describe her worldview as ultimately Christian or pagan? How does Bess's spiritual vision differ from that of fellow accused witch Alice Nutter, a recusant Catholic, who concealed outlawed priests in her manor house?

**7.** Bess's family's charms were recorded in the trial documents and presented as evidence that her family practiced diabolical witchcraft. Yet these charms were Catholic prayers: one was a moving depiction of the Virgin Mary watching her son die on the cross. Why were the Protestant authorities so eager to conflate Catholicism and witchcraft?

**8.** Why do you think so many people in Lancashire, England, clung to the outlawed Catholic faith in the face of persecution and death?

**9.** Is Chattox justified in her actions to protect her daughter, Anne Redfearn, when she knows the authorities will do nothing to help her? What would you have done in Chattox's situation?

**10.** How does Jamie's affliction --- as well as his community's ignorance and bigotry --- shape his fate?

**11.** What do you think is the origin of the "green sickness" that kills Alizon's best friend, Nancy? How did people's view of illness in this period mirror their beliefs in witchcraft and the supernatural?

**12.** Why is magistrate Roger Nowell so obsessed with witch-hunting? After having known about Bess and her magical activities for several decades, why does he finally make his move in 1612?

**13.** Why is it so important for Roger Nowell to convince the authorities that a vast conspiracy of satanic witches is threatening to undermine the social order? After arresting so many of Bess's friends and relatives, why does Nowell spare Bess's son Kit and his family?

**14.** What do you think of 9-year-old Jennet Device and her betrayal of her family? What do you think happened to her after the trial?

**15.** What enduring message does the Pendle witch tragedy have for people of our time?

## Author Bio

Mary Sharratt, the author of seven critically acclaimed novels, is on a mission to write strong women back into history. Her novels include DAUGHTERS OF THE WITCHING HILL, the Nautilus award-winning ILLUMINATIONS: A Novel of Hildegard von Bingen, THE DARK LADY'S MASK: A Novel of Shakespeare's Muse, and ECSTASY, about the life, loves and music of Alma Mahler. She is an American who lives in Lancashire, England.

Photo Credit: Reg Whittam

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