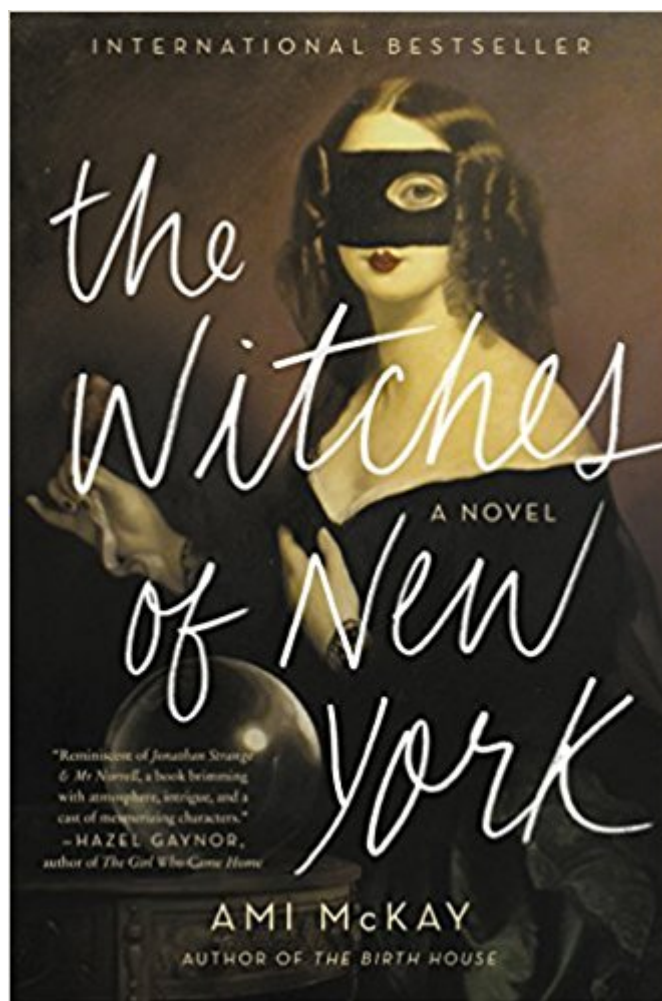


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The Witches Of New York: A Novel



Synopsis

INTERNATIONAL BESTSELLER “Wonderfully wicked and deliciously dark, *The Witches* of New York had me totally spellbound. Reminiscent of *Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell*, Ami McKay has written a book brimming with atmosphere, intrigue, and a cast of mesmerising characters. I loved it.” —Hazel Gaynor, New York Times bestselling author of *The Girl Who Came Home*
Respectable Lady Seeks Dependable Shop Girl. Those averse to magic need not apply. New York in the spring of 1880 is a place alive with wonder and curiosity. Determined to learn the truth about the world, its residents enthusiastically engage in both scientific experimentation and spiritualist pursuits. Séances are the entertainment of choice in exclusive social circles, and many enterprising women—some possessed of true intuitive powers, and some gifted with the art of performance—find work as mediums. Enter Adelaide Thom and Eleanor St. Clair. At their humble teashop, *Tea and Sympathy*, they provide a place for whispered confessions, secret cures, and spiritual assignments for a select society of ladies, who speak the right words and ask the right questions. But the profile of *Tea and Sympathy* is about to change with the fortuitous arrival of Beatrice Dunn. When seventeen-year-old Beatrice leaves the safety of her village to answer an ad that reads “Respectable Lady Seeks Dependable Shop Girl. Those averse to magic need not apply,” she has little inclination of what the job will demand of her. Beatrice doesn’t know it yet, but she is no ordinary small-town girl; she has great spiritual gifts—ones that will serve as her greatest asset and also place her in grave danger. Under the tutelage of Adelaide and Eleanor, Beatrice comes to harness many of her powers, but not even they can prepare her for the evils lurking in the darkest corners of the city or the courage it will take to face them.

Book Information

Paperback: 560 pages

Publisher: Harper Perennial (July 11, 2017)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0062359924

ISBN-13: 978-0062359926

Product Dimensions: 5.3 x 0.9 x 8 inches

Shipping Weight: 14.4 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 3.7 out of 5 stars 13 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #15,879 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #60 in Books > Literature &

Fiction > Genre Fiction > Gothic #148 in [The Books > Literature & Fiction > British & Irish > Historical](#) #162 in [The Books > Literature & Fiction > Genre Fiction > Horror > Occult](#)

Customer Reviews

“An excellent read.” (Bustle) “In this weighty, wonderful novel, McKay takes a sidelong glance at misogyny through a veil of witches, ghosts, and other mystical entities in 1880 New York.... Skillful worldbuilding, fascinating characters, and a suspenseful plot make McKay’s novel an enchanting, can’t-put-down delight.” (Publishers Weekly, starred review) “With a remarkable cast of characters | McKay has crafted a stunning work that bridges the gap between historical and contemporary women’s issues. The novel is ambitious in its scope yet still delves deep into the thoughts and motivations of characters who normally exist on society’s outskirts – or even beyond the earthly realm | McKay’s elegant prose bridges the gap between the real world and the spiritual realm with skill and compassion.” (Kirkus, starred review) “Wonderfully wicked and deliciously dark, *The Witches of New York* had me totally spellbound. Reminiscent of *Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell*, Ami McKay has written a book brimming with atmosphere, intrigue, and a cast of mesmerising characters. I loved it.” (Hazel Gaynor, author of *The Girl Who Came Home*) “In the tradition of Susanna Clarke’s *Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell*, Ami McKay recreates not just a historically confident vision of 1880’s New York, but a richly imagined, detailed subculture of witchcraft, occultism, and sinister dark forces that coexist precariously, in plain sight; stealthily encroaching upon the affairs of the Gilded Age. Skillfully written, peopled with refreshingly authentic female characters and hurtling forward at a furious pace, McKay delivers that most precious of all experiences to discerning readers – a refuge of intelligence, insight, and genuine invention. Easily one of my favorite books of the year.” (Kathleen Tessaro, author of *Rare Objects*)

New York City in the spring of 1880 is a place alive with wonder and curiosity. *Séances* are the entertainment of choice in exclusive social circles, and many enterprising women – some possessed of true intuitive powers, some gifted with the art of performance – find work as mediums. At their humble teashop, Tea and Sympathy, Adelaide Thom and Eleanor St. Clair provide a place for whispered confessions, secret cures, and spiritual assignments for a select society of ladies who speak the right words, and ask the right questions. When Tea and Sympathy posts an ad that reads, “Respectable Lady Seeks Dependable Shop Girl. Those averse to

magic need not apply, a seventeen-year-old Beatrice leaves the safety of her village to answer, though she has little inclination of what the job will demand. Beatrice doesn't know it yet, but she has great spiritual gifts, ones that she will come to harness under the tutelage of Adelaide and Eleanor. But not even they can prepare Beatrice for the evils lurking in the darkest corners of the city or give her the courage it will take to face them.

Ami McKay did not disappoint! She has yet again written a book that is intriguing and an excellent read. Can't wait for her next book.

Everything I hoped it would be, the story has beautiful writing and imagery, strong social and personal messages, and above all is charming and immersive. A nice twist of gothic fairytale which is right up my (1800s manhattan) street.

A very fun read. Well written. I hope that there's a sequel.

Love this author and this book is no exception

3.5 STARS - What do magic, mystics, suffragists, female oppression and Cleopatra's Needle all have in common? They're a mixed bag of topics but they're all important parts of The Witches of New York. McKay's story focuses around three women who just happen to be witches - Adelaide Thom and Eleanor St Clair own a tea shop which is a front for their real services for women which include tarot card reading, palmistry, herbal medicines, contraception etc. Beatrice Dunn is a teenager who comes to New York and becomes an apprentice at the tea shop. My favourite part of this book was the vivid description of the era. This book oozes with the atmosphere of the time so readers will have no trouble imagining New York in the 1880's. I thought that the inclusion of Cleopatra's Needle, as it was being brought to Central Park, was an interesting way to bring a real historical element to the book. This era was male dominated and while magic and mysticism was quite prevalent within all walks of life there were still many who held independent women, such as Eleanor and Adelaide, with contempt and suspicion. I enjoyed that these three witches weren't portrayed as devil worshipers but strong women trying to lead normal lives ... with a touch of magic. Getting a peek into Eleanor's family grimoire was interesting and I liked how these three women used their magical abilities to help and empower others. The book started off quite strong with the characters quite varied and the addition of Beatrice and her, as yet unknown, abilities had me

intrigued. You may think it odd but my favourite character was Perdu, Eleanor's raven. He was the most interesting character to me but sadly the mystery surrounding him is one of the loose ends that isn't dealt within this book which was disheartening. I found this to be quite a slow-paced book with a rather straightforward plot. While it does have some suspense that builds, the conclusion is quite predictable. There are a few 'baddies' thrown in to spice things up, like a jealous husband and Francis Townsend, a sadistic, religious zealot. Both of these men bring some much needed energy to the book but I can't help but feel that these bad guys were portrayed as the clichéd villains. I wish this suspense could have been used more throughout instead of just at the end. What McKay does give her readers is a strikingly vivid picture of life in 1880's NYC. I enjoyed the addition of ghosts, mystics and magic as well as seeing how these strong, independent women handled being seen as threatening to the male-dominated culture. But with the slow pace and the predictable ending I liked this book, I just didn't love it. In the end, this was a wonderfully atmospheric novel that puts female friendship, love and witchcraft in the forefront. Disclaimer: My sincere thanks to Knopf Canada for providing me with a paper copy of this book in exchange for my honest review.

Author Ami McKay had too many ideas for one good book and rather than winnow them down to a good strong tale, she kept them all, leaving readers overwhelmed and lost amidst the details. She starts with a beautiful young performer pretending to see the future, horrendously disfigured through an attack that removes her beauty and an eye. The performer is nursed by a healer, a witch, and together they open a shop offering tea and sympathy, to women in New York. Herbal remedies unavailable from physicians or pharmacies become part of the shop's services. As they become busier, they advertise for a shop girl and one arrives, apparently destined for their lives and work; she just doesn't know it yet. All of this is a slow but interesting story filled with details of the era. Yet somehow the author decides to embark upon religious oppression. And then swiftly to serial murder of women and the requisite torture thereof. I don't know why books about independent women somehow always involve the simultaneous mutilation and killing of them. As a reader, I have a hard time with this juxtaposition. As a reviewer, I question the value of it for the plot or the character development. The book attempts to move from historical fiction to thriller and back again. It's an uneasy journey between two styles that are not natural fits. I received my copy from the publisher through Edelweiss.

Today, Ami McKay's new historical magical realism novel, *The Witches of New York*, was released in the US. I managed to get an early copy in exchange for a review. The story

follows three witches in New York City in 1880 and covers the darkness of mental illness and sexism in that period. While that part of the tale was fascinating, I do wish that the story had worked in more character development as well as possibly leaving out some unneeded individuals. Eleanor and Adelaide run a tea shop in Manhattan complete with apothecary cures, birth control and fortune telling. They are later joined by young Beatrice who finds she can speak with ghosts. When Beatrice is supposed to speak at a scientific symposium, she is instead kidnapped by an evil man hiding behind the cloth. The clock is ticking for her friends to find her before she becomes a ghost herself. This story moves slowly, but all the information worked in about that time is captivating. I had no problem meandering through the book. The thing that bothered me was that the characters didn't have much growth. Evil men and demons stayed evil. Adelaide who was supposed to have this great epiphany really didn't change much, nor did steadfast Eleanor. The only character that really grew was Beatrice from mousy and unsure to more confident in her powers. Also, certain characters, like Palsham, seemed unnecessary. The book was left open, so maybe he'll come into play more if there's another novel in the series. The Bird Lady, the Dearlies and the prisoner in the ladies asylum also seemed extraneous. Overall, this was a tale that I enjoyed. I found out after I read it that Adelaide was the main character in McKay's novel, *The Virgin Cure*. However, I could read this book as a standalone without that knowledge. If you're interested in 19th-century mediums, the darkness of the witch hunts and women's rights, you may find this novel worth reading. I'll definitely be waiting to see if it turns into a series.

3.75 out of 5 stars

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