

The HERetic's Daughter:

a novel

By Kathleen Kent

New York : Little, Brown and Co.,

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Summary

Martha Carrier was one of the first women to be accused, tried and hanged as a witch in Salem, Massachusetts. Like her mother, young Sarah Carrier is bright and willful, openly challenging the small, brutal world in which they live. Often at odds with one another, mother and daughter are forced to stand together against the escalating hysteria of the trials and the superstitious tyranny that led to the torture and imprisonment of more than 200 people accused of witchcraft. This is the story of Martha's courageous defiance and ultimate death, as told by the daughter who survived. Kathleen Kent is a tenth generation descendent of Martha Carrier. She paints a haunting portrait, not just of Puritan New England, but also of one family's deep and abiding love in the face of fear and persecution

Reviews

Library Journal

For this debut, Kent goes back to her forebear Martha Carrier, who was hanged as a witch in 1600s Salem--but saved her daughter by convincing her to lie. (c) Copyright 2010. Library Journals LLC, a wholly owned subsidiary of Media Source, Inc. No redistribution permitted.

Publishers Weekly

Starred Review. A family's conflict becomes a battle for life and death in this gripping and original first novel based on family history from a descendant of a condemned Salem witch. After a bout of smallpox, 10-year-old Sarah Carrier resumes life with her mother on their family farm in Andover, Mass., dimly aware of a festering dispute between her mother, Martha, and her uncle about the plot of land where they live. The fight takes on a terrifying dimension when reports of supernatural activity in nearby Salem give way to mass hysteria, and Sarah's uncle is the first person to point the finger at Martha. Soon, neighbors struggling to eke out a living and a former indentured servant step forward to name Martha as the source of their woes. Sarah is forced to shoulder an even heavier burden as her mother and brothers are taken to prison to face a jury of young women who claim to have felt their bewitching presence. Sarah's front-row view of the trials and the mayhem that sweeps the close-knit community provides a fresh, bracing and unconventional take on a much-covered episode.

Booklist Review

Kent, a tenth-generation descendant of Martha Carrier (who was hanged as a witch in Salem in 1692), personalizes the witchcraft trials in this fictional account by Martha's daughter. Sarah Carrier was just nine years old when she and her three older brothers also were arrested for witchcraft, spending months imprisoned under horrific conditions while following their mother's dictum of admitting the charges against them to escape death. But Martha gave her life maintaining her innocence in the face of lying accusations that were fueled by her sharp tongue, her family's unknowingly bringing smallpox to Andover from their home in Billerica, family disputes (including tensions between a mother and her preadolescent daughter), and grudges between neighbors all

at a time when any negative event was thought to be the work of the devil in human form. Kent brings history to life in this vivid, sometimes wrenching account of a child and her family sustained by love through the hysteria of the time



Biography <http://www.kathleenkent.com>

Kathleen Kent is a tenth-generation descendant of Martha Carrier. She is also a masterful storyteller, and in her first novel she paints a haunting portrait, not just of Puritan New England but also of one family's deep and abiding love in the face of fear and persecution. Kathleen was very honored to be awarded the **David J. Langum, Sr. Prize in American Historical**

Fiction!

From the Author

Most of the books that have influenced and touched me the most are historical fiction. When I was a child I read a lot of Dickens, Poe and H.H. Monroe. Some of my favorites from the past are *The Quincunx*, by Charles Palliser, *Instance of the Fingerpost* by Iain Pears, *The Weight of Water* by Anita Shreve, and *The Source* by James Michener. I also read everything by Annie Dillard, Cormac McCarthy and Larry McMurtry. Currently I'm re-reading a book called *The Long Home* by William Gay who is, to me, one of the best writers in American fiction today.

Bibliography

The HERetic's Daughter: a novel

The Wolves of Andover: a novel (2010)

Author Interview from LoadedQuestions.com (Nov. 22, 2008)

Martha Carrier was one of the first women to be accused, tried and hanged as a witch in Salem, Massachusetts. Like her mother, young Sarah Carrier is bright and willful, openly challenging the small, brutal world in which they live. Often at odds with one another, mother and daughter are forced to stand together against the escalating hysteria of the trials and the superstitious tyranny that led to the torture and imprisonment of more than 200 people accused of witchcraft.

With [*The HERetic's Daughter*](#) Kathleen Kent has brought to life the defiance and courage and death of Martha Carrier to life through the eyes of her surviving daughter. Kent's debut novel is filled with rich historical research as well as the drama and terror of a very contentious time.

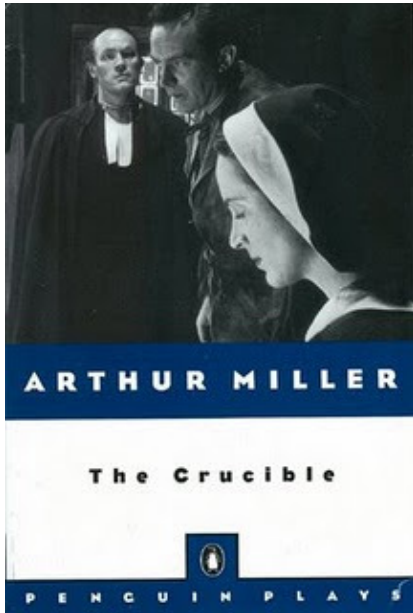
Kelly Hewitt: As a fellow historian I appreciate the fact that in *The Heretic's Daughter* you portray a very honest look at Puritans who, as you noted in one interview, in 1692 more closely resembled the Elizabethan Puritans who historical documents tell us were, in your words, "contentious and libelous, full of superstitious dread and malicious gossip." That is not to say, and you acknowledge this also, that there weren't individuals and groups who were moving towards the sort of New England Puritan that we associate with the religion today. In some of reviews your readers have expressed some surprised at this fact, as was I when I first discovered it. Why do you think that we have this view of Puritanism? What sources would you recommend readers read to get a better idea of Puritanism at the time?

Kathleen Kent: I do believe that much of what we regard as "Puritan" has come to us not just through the acute study of history, but also through the religious practices of Protestantism (the need to view the founders of our church as somehow more filled with moral certainty) and social rituals, such as Thanksgiving. Through the lens of Victorian idealism we see a God-fearing, saint-like people who came to this country escaping religious persecution. In [*Wayward Puritans*](#), though, Kai T. Erikson writes, "The main theme of this story [of New England Puritans], however, does not really help us understand the Puritan settlement in America, for it pays too little attention to the English background against which the whole adventure was played. In order to imagine what this experience meant to the men who participated in it, we must begin by looking at the world they claimed as their own rather than the world they happened to make."

The Puritans, then, were transplanted Western European peoples, strangers in a strange land, who brought with them their dress, their language, their practices and superstitions and tried to survive, at least initially, by imposing their way of life onto the

New World. Another good source of the life of the Puritans can be found in [The Puritan Family](#) by Edmund S. Morgan who details not only the practices, but the ideals, of relationships within family groups--husband to wife, parent to child, etc.

What makes the most interesting, and telling, reading, however, comes from town records that reflect the warnings, fines and arrests of the citizens of such villages as Salem, Andover and Billerica for drinking, fornication, swearing and, most of all,



gossiping. One detailed account is "The History of Billerica, 1653-1883" by the Rev. Henry A. Hazen, and published by The Billerica Historical Society, which gives in great detail the early conflicts of the colonists, including Roger Toothaker, brother-in-law to Martha Carrier, who was "wasting his time and substance in pursuit of the witchcraft delusions at Salem, and leaving his family to charitable aid." Roger Toothaker had been fined on numerous occasions for abandoning his family for drink.

Kelly: A lot of interviewers and reviewers of *The Heretic's Daughter* have noted that your great-grandmother nine generations back is Martha Carrier, the real life inspiration of your book who was one of the first women hung in August 1692 during the Salem witch trials and that you first heard this fascinating piece of family history at the age of eight or nine. Aside from being jealous about your link to history I couldn't help but wonder what it must have been like when Halloween rolled around and little girls were dressing up like witches, what reading [The Crucible](#) in high school was like or studying about the trials in history class. Did you feel a special connection to these stories or a sort of sorrow for an individual whom you have written was very real and often mentioned in your family? Did you tell your friends and classmates when the subject came up?

Kathleen: I was always very proud to be related to Thomas and Martha Carrier and, following my grandmother's attitude towards our family history, a little bit gleeful to be

descended from Carrier women who were known for being outspoken and forceful. My grandmother used to say that Martha was not a witch; merely a ferocious woman. Studying early American history was always fun, and relatively easy, because I always knew what my research paper was going to be about--The Salem Witch trials, of course! The only down side to all this family pride was during Halloween while we were children. My mother made all of our costumes and, although she never forbade us from wearing "witch" outfits, she actively discouraged it. She wasn't humorless about it, but she felt it made light of the suffering of men and women wrongly accused of being confederates of the Devil.

Kelly: I read that you did 30 interviews in three days when the Italian version of the book came out! What was that like? Were there particular questions or aspects of the book that your European interviewers were interested in?

Kathleen: As *The Heretic's Daughter* is my first published novel, I had no idea what to expect on the initial book tour. In an unusual turn of events, the book was to be published first in Italy and I was fortunate enough to be able to travel to Milan and Rome for the launch. When I got the schedule, I was stunned to see close to 30 interviews (radio, print and TV) scheduled within 3 days. It was particularly exhausting because every interview had to be translated, real-time, from English to Italian. I have to say I was very impressed by the knowledge the interviewers had, not only of the Salem witch trials, but of early American history. The Italians have a great interest in, and a great respect for "La Streggha"--the witch-- and without exception, they all asked if there were parallels to be drawn between the witch trials of the 17th century and the treatment of women within some closed societies currently in Western Europe.

Kelly: The story of *The Heretic's Daughter's* publication is a lesson in taking initiative. I read that you wrote the book and just sent it out blindly. How long did it take before it got picked up? I think a lot of Loaded Question readers, in addition to being avid readers, are aspiring authors as well. How did you select which publishers you sent to?

Kathleen: Having no contacts, or experience, in publishing, I sent cover letters out

blindly to agents in the U.S. who I thought would be interested in the story, or who specialized in historical fiction. I got quite a few nice, and not so nice, rejection letters until I was contacted by Julie Barer, of Barer Literary Agency. She was intrigued by the story and is living proof that there are literary agents committed to finding new talent, even if it means slogging through the "slush" piles. Julie led me to Little Brown, and to my wonderful editor, Reagan Arthur, who gently and skillfully guided me through the final editing processes. The process from agent to publisher was relatively short, only a few months--and I'm grateful for (and amazed by this) every single day.



Kelly: Do you think that your familial connection to the topic of witch trials gives you more credibility with your readers?

Kathleen: People seem to be endlessly fascinated by the witch trials and it's surprising the number of people who have approached me with knowledge of their own genealogy connecting them to the trials. I think it does add interest to readers, knowing about my family lineage, but more so, I think what touches people is finding out that these stories about the Carrier family have survived through 10 generations and more than three centuries.

Kelly: The reviews for the book have been really great. A lot of the reader interviews at Amazon.com commend you for your detailed focus on the harshness of the time period. What books would you recommend readers check out to get more info about the realities of life during the period the book is set in? Did you look at a lot of primary resources?

Kathleen: Reading the transcripts from the trials makes for very poignant, and disturbing reading. Many of the trial documents have been collected into the work: [*Salem Possessed; The Social Origins of Witchcraft*](#) by Paul Boyer and Stephen

Nissenbaum. Another very good, non-fiction book is [*In the Devil's Snare*](#) by Mary Beth Norton.

Kelly: I think that *The Heretic's Daughter* really works because of your connection to the subject, the research that you have obviously done and most importantly your ability as a storyteller. It is kind of a perfect storm, this your debut novel. If you hadn't written about with trials and Sarah Carrier what kind of debut novel might we have seen from you?

Kathleen: I can't imagine having written any other novel first. The story and the characters have been rattling around in my head for decades and I always knew that I would some day write this book. Since my first love is historical fiction it might have been a book about post-civil war Texas (which is an idea that hopefully will be developed down the road). Reconstruction after mass civil conflict makes way for a lot of human drama; the good, the bad and the ugly.

Kelly: I was excited to read that you will be writing a prequel to *The Heretic's Daughter*. What can you tell us about that?

Kathleen: The follow-up novel will explore the life of Thomas Carrier, Martha Carrier's husband, who lived to 109 years of age, was over 7 feet tall and, according to family legend, fought for Cromwell during the English Civil War and was one of the executioners of King Charles I of England. The contents of the "red diary" that was presented as a literary device in "The Heretic's Daughter" will be revealed, and the story will encompass the events leading up to the flight of the regicides from the Old World to the New.

From BookBrowse.com

Interview : A Letter from Kathleen Kent

Dear Readers,

Martha Carrier, my grandmother back nine generations, was hanged as a witch in 1692

in Salem, Massachusetts. Called the "Queen of Hell" by Cotton Mather, Martha was unyielding in her refusal to confess and went to her death rather than join the accused men and women who did so and were spared.

I've read countless historical sources about the trials, including the transcripts that captured verbatim Martha's defiance to the court. But it was the stories of my mother and my maternal grand parents that defined more clearly the courage—and obstinacy—that set the Carriers apart.

All the Carrier tales I heard as a child were enthralling. The children made bows and arrows and practiced shooting objects off each other's heads. Their cow was fed pumpkins so she would give golden milk. Martha's husband Thomas was, according to local gossip, a soldier for Cromwell and the executioner of King Charles I of England. Thomas was over seven feet tall and, when he died at 109, two coffins had to be fitted together to bury him.

Sarah is the central character of *The Heretic's Daughter*, and Martha did have a daughter with that name. She was arrested on suspicion of witchcraft along with her three brothers and spent months in captivity in a crowded cellar prison. It's my hope that weaving my family legends into the fictional narrative will bring an authenticity to the story of their tremendous bravery and fortitude.

Regards,
Kathleen Kent

A brief history of the Salem witch trials

The Salem witch trials of 1692 were a unique and tragic part of American history. The trials and executions, which took place in Salem Village, included nearly 150 men and women arrested from many different villages in Massachusetts. The accused came from such towns as Andover, Topsfield, Beverly, and as far away as Wells, in what is now the state of Maine. Ultimately 19 men and women were hanged, and one man pressed to death with stones because he would not testify, either to his guilt or his innocence. The witch hysteria, and the ensuing legal actions, took a little more than a

year from January 1692 to May of 1693, and yet the fascination with the Salem "witches" has never diminished.

One of the most terrifying aspects of the trials was the reliance by the court magistrates on "Spectral Evidence", said to be the manifestation of Satan's Invisible World seen only by the afflicted, accusing girls. It was the testimony of these young women which was accepted and written into the court transcripts; the original documents held for posterity in such institutions as the Peabody Essex Museum in Boston.

Many of the accused, to save themselves from death, pled guilty to consorting with the Devil and so were only imprisoned. The men and women who held fast to their innocence were all condemned to be hanged. Martha Carrier, one of the 19 accused witches who was hanged, not only professed her innocence, but harshly admonished her judges for allowing the words of a few hysterical girls determine such a cruel fate for so many. It is a common misunderstanding that the Salem witches were burned, but no witches in the Colonies were ever killed at the stake as they were in Europe, as the British courts considered a burning death too cruel. But to the Puritans who had forsworn themselves to being in league with Satan, this false self-testimony meant eternal damnation.

The imprisonment of mostly women and children took place in some of the most appalling conditions ever seen by the Colonial judicial system. Upon release from jail, many of the accused were never compensated for their expenditures for provisions such as food and water, as well as for the very shackles and heavy chains that confined them. With a few exceptions, such as the grave memorial of Rebecca Nurse, there are no known grave sites for most of the executed witches, as they were tossed into shallow open pits after being hanged.

There have been many different theories as to the cause of such a terrifying outcry by young women, ranging in age from 11 to 20, accusing their neighbors and friends of witchcraft; ergot poisoning, encephalitis, and, more reasonably, conflict brought about by land disputes, disagreements over fundamental religious practices and the dread of

attacks and capture by the indigenous native tribes. Whatever the confluence of causes, it is the mystifying social drama of family against family, friend against neighbor, that still haunts us and echoes today through the current events of religious intolerance, superstition and the fear of the "Other."

The men and women hanged by the Court of Oyer & Terminer 1692:

- June 10: Bridget Bishop
 - July 19: Sarah Good
 - July 19: Elizabeth Howe
 - July 19: Susannah Martin
 - July 19: Rebecca Nurse
 - July 19: Sarah Wildes
 - Aug 19: George Burroughs
 - Aug 19: Martha Carrier
 - Aug 19: George Jacobs
 - Aug 19: John Proctor
 - Aug 19: John Willard
 - Sept 22: Martha Corey
 - Sept 22: Mary Easty
 - Sept 22: Alice Parker
 - Sept 22: Mary Parker
 - Sept 22: Ann Pudeator
 - Sept 22: Margaret Scott
 - Sept 22: Wilmot Redd
 - Sept 22: Samuel Wardwell
- Pressed to death:** Sept 19: Giles Corey

Discussion Questions From Reading Group Guides.com

1. How was Sarah changed by living with her cousin Margaret? How was she changed by returning to her family?
2. What was it about Martha's character that seemed to antagonize so many neighbors?
3. What do you think was the most compelling reason that Martha was eventually brought to trial?
4. Discuss the various factors that lead to the witch hysteria.
5. Why did Martha choose to take a stand of innocence knowing that a refused confession meant death?
6. Why did Thomas, despite his size and capabilities, not seek to persuade or deter

Martha from her course of action?

7. Why did the community of Salem, and the magistrates, so easily believe in and rely on "spectral evidence"?
8. How has reading the book changed your opinions about the men and women hanged as witches?
9. Are there modern day "witches"?
10. Can we, or should we, redefine the meaning of the word "witch"?

For Further Reading

In the Devil's Snare by Mary Beth Norton (Published Alfred A. Knopf, New York 2002)

The Salem Witch Trials Reader by Frances Hill (Published DaCapo Press)

Salem witch trials : a day-to-day chronicle of a community under siege by Marilynne K. Roach

The devil's disciples : makers of the Salem witchcraft trials Peter Charles Hoffer

Bound by Sally Gunning

Holy Fools by Joanne Harris

Blackbird House by Alice Hoffman

The Physick book of Deliverance Dane by Katherine Howe

Daughters of the Witching Hill by Mary Sharratt

Jack Absolute by C.C. Humphreys

The Crucible by Arthur Miller

One Last Look by Susanna Moore

A Mercy by Toni Morrison

Prospero's Daughter by Elizabeth Nunez

The Uncommoner by John Schwartz