

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER



HOUR
of the
WITCH

A NOVEL

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BOOK CLUB KIT

Dear Friends Who Read and Readers Who Are Friends,

For over twenty-five years, I have been visiting with book groups via speakerphone, Skype, Zoom, and sometimes in person.

There are three reasons for this:

1. Book groups know how to drink;
2. Book groups have fun;
3. Book groups tell it like it is.

Arguably, reasons two and three stem from reason number one.

Obviously, I'm kidding. Sort of. I don't want any of you to drink to excess.

But book groups have always been candid with me about my novels: what works and what doesn't. You've also shared with me countless book recommendations that over the last quarter century, have become cherished titles in my own library.

So, let me begin by thanking all of you. Thank you for — metaphorically and sometimes literally — letting me into your homes. Thank you for reading my books. And thank you for caring so passionately about fiction that you would rather argue about a book than watch “*The Bachelorette*.” [In truth, it's great to do both. I don't judge.]

And, yes, thank you now for reading *Hour of the Witch*. I'm honored. There are myriad reasons why this book matters to me, including the historical role of women and accusations of witchcraft. If you wanted to be hanged in seventeenth-century New England, the formula was pretty simple: be smart, opinionated, and female. But I also wanted the parallels between 1662 and the present day to resonate — because, alas, there are parallels. When Magistrate Caleb Adams calls my heroine, Mary Deerfield, “a nasty woman” in the novel, I knew readers would hear its contemporary echo.

I hope you have a spirited discussion. Thank you so much for your faith in what words and reading and books can mean to the soul.

All the best,

Chris Bohjalian

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PS: About those forks. It's true, the Puritans did not use three-tined forks, because the new piece of cutlery resembled the Devil's trident. [They did use two-tined carving forks.] They used knives, spoons, and their hands. They also drank beer like it was spring break in Miami, and frequently ate from mini-pigs' troughs called trenchers instead of plates. So, while the Puritans could be severe, I imagine they did not eat with particular decorum. Bear that in mind when chowing down at your *Hour of the Witch* repast. Party on, Puritan style!



Questions and Topics for Discussion

1. The Puritans believed that they were always in the presence of God or the Devil—that they were never truly alone. How did the characters' behavior reflect, or not reflect, this belief? How would you behave differently if you felt there was always someone watching?
2. The Puritans used God and the Devil to explain the inexplicable events of everyday life. It is suggested that having this type of explanation is comforting. Do you agree?
3. Mary often wonders if she herself has been possessed by the Devil or if, instead, it is God influencing her actions. How does this inner dialogue change your view of Mary's motives?
4. Were you surprised by the way the Puritans in the novel lived? How did their lifestyle differ, or not, from any ideas about Puritans you may have had before reading this book?
5. Discuss Henry Simmons' actions throughout the novel from his first encounter with Mary to the kiss in her parents' dining room. Do you approve of his behavior? What about Mary's?
6. As you were reading, who did you think buried the objects in the ground outside Mary's door? Were you surprised by the answer?
7. Was justice served at the end of the book? Did the characters get what they deserved?
8. In what ways does Mary's story resonate today? Has society progressed in its treatment of women, in its views on divorce and domestic violence?

Suggestions for Further Reading
from **CHRIS BOHJALIAN**

The Works of Anne Bradstreet

BY ANNE BRADSTREET

Everyday Life in the Massachusetts Bay Colony

BY GEORGE FRANCIS DOW

Everyday Life in Early America

BY DAVID FREEMAN HAWKE

The Scarlet Letter

BY NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE

*The Devil in the Shape of a Woman:
Witchcraft in Colonial New England*

BY CAROL F. KARLSEN

The Crucible

BY ARTHUR MILLER

The Puritans, A Sourcebook of Their Writings

EDITED BY PERRY MILLER AND THOMAS H. JOHNSON

The Devil Discovered: Salem Witchcraft 1692

BY ENDERS A. ROBINSON

The Witches

BY STACY SCHIFF

Devil's Food Cake

Recipe from Vermont company King Arthur Flour

INGREDIENTS

- 12 tablespoons [170g] unsalted butter, at room temperature, at least 65°F
- 1 3/4 cups [347g] Baker's Special Sugar or granulated sugar
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 2 cups [240g] King Arthur Unbleached All-Purpose Flour
- 3/4 cup [64g] Dutch-process cocoa
- 2 teaspoons baking powder
- 4 large eggs, at room temperature
- 1 1/2 cups [340g] milk or water, at room temperature
- 2 teaspoons vanilla extract

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Preheat the oven to 350°F. Lightly grease and flour two 9" round cake pans, three 8" round pans, or a 9" x 13" pan.
2. In a large mixing bowl, beat together the butter, sugar, and salt until fluffy and light, beating for at least 5 minutes.
3. In a separate bowl, whisk together the flour, cocoa, and baking powder. If lumps remain, sift the mixture.
4. Add the eggs to the butter mixture one at a time, beating well after each addition.
5. Mix together the milk or water and the vanilla.
6. Add one-third of the flour mixture to the batter, then add half the milk, another third of the flour, the remaining milk, and the remaining flour, stirring to combine after each addition. Scrape the sides and bottom of the bowl occasionally throughout this process. Divide the batter evenly between the prepared pans.
7. Bake the cake[s] for 30 to 35 minutes [a bit longer for the 9" x 13" cake], until a cake tester or toothpick inserted into the center comes out clean, and the cake begins to pull away from the sides of the pan.
8. Remove the cake[s] from the oven, cool them for 5 to 10 minutes, then remove them from their pans [leave the 9" x 13" cake in the pan, for easiest serving]. Cool completely before frosting.



We recommend frosting with chocolate buttercream, serving alongside a glass [or two] of Madeira, and eating with a three-tined fork!