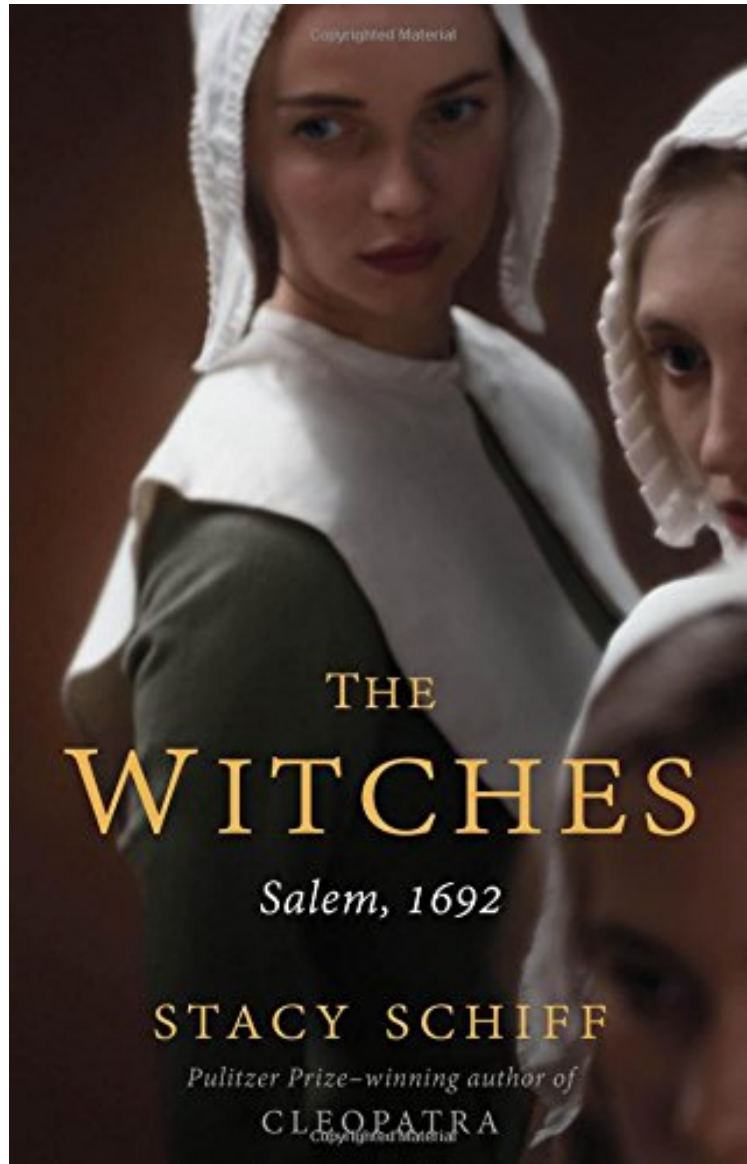


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The Witches: Salem, 1692

Stacy Schiff

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Stacy Schiff : The Witches: Salem, 1692 before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Witches: Salem, 1692:

188 of 193 people found the following review helpful. How I Wish She'd Organized It Better By John Sparks If there's one historical event that the citizens of the United States had better never forget, it's the 1692 Salem Witch Craze, and historian Stacy Schiff's newest work could have gone a long way towards re-establishing the tragedies and injustices

of the Witch Trials in the public consciousness--if the public could read it. In spite of all the laudatory blurbs provided to by the work's publisher, twice the number of Customer reviewers give it one or two stars than give it five. Three- and four-star reviews are in shortest supply. Sadly, there's a reason for this. "The Witches: Salem, 1692" is probably one of the most disorganized contemporary historical works that I've seen. The author begins by a caustic dismissal of perhaps the best known popular history of the Witch hysteria, Marion Starkey's 1949 "The Devil in Massachusetts", and undoubtedly the best known fictional portrayal, Arthur Miller's "The Crucible": "The Holocaust sent Marion Starkey toward Salem witchcraft in 1949. She produced the volume that would inspire Arthur Miller to write 'The Crucible' at the outset of the McCarthy crisis. Along with Nathaniel Hawthorne, Miller has largely made off with the story (p. 11). "That sounds an awful lot like sour grapes, but to be fair, Stacy Schiff may have one legitimate gripe. She argues that most recent historians before her, including Starkey, have utilized sources that have been traditionally viewed as primary, but which are actually secondary, to begin the witchcraft story--namely, the monographs the ministers Increase and Cotton Mather penned one to five years after the craze had subsided. Only from the Mather writings, she contends, do we get the idea that the girls of Salem Village were introduced to witchcraft by elementary voodoo and fortune telling practiced by the Parris family's West Indian slave, Tituba, and Schiff theorizes that this was a "must-have-been" hypothesis supplied by the Mathers rather than an "actually-was" fact that could be gleaned from court documents or other contemporary records. For all that, though, Schiff chooses to prove her point by an eye-crossing myriad of dry, repetitive, poorly-arranged data that goes in, around, up, down, across, and through the chronological line to suggest that not only interpersonal community tensions but a confusing Gordian knot of other contributory factors, including even the political attitudes of a cabal of ministers who had worked together to oust the previous governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, Edward Andros, and establish the new one, William Phips, all had their part in the great witch scare. I note with dismay how many other reviewers remark that they gave up trying to read the book, or simply started skimming, after so many pages along, because finally, on pp. 386-398, Schiff offers her own thoughts on the phenomenon's causes: hysteria, as defined first by Jean-Martin Charcot and later Sigmund Freud. And, by the anthropomorphic, schizophrenic-as-the-humans-who-thought-it-up God that the Puritans worshiped, she stands a danged good chance of being right. But if Schiff had only stated her thesis at her work's beginning and built her historical case around it in an orderly and logical manner, much as Marion Starkey had done with her own thoughts in 1949 however much they may have been influenced by Cotton and Increase Mather's after-the-fact hypotheses, Schiff could have produced a much more readable and compelling volume. 82 of 83 people found the following review helpful. Nothing new rampant with careless errors

By Lindsay McCoy

It is difficult for serious students of the Salem Trials to fathom why this book made the best-seller list and how its author came to be current darling of the talk-shows. Although I have submitted only positive in the past, as a teacher and author focusing on the Salem Trials for 30 years, I cannot allow Schiff's "The Witches - Salem 1692" to escape my critical eyes. There has been too much serious and exemplary scholarship published on the subject, particularly since the international Tercentenary Conference held at Salem College in 1992. And these highly-respected scholars have uncovered much more of true historical value and explained the topic and era better. Nothing new is offered here and the book is tedious, overlong, and rampant with factual errors. The word is that Schiff hired 8 researchers and if this is true and she did not do all her own research, it shows! For example, Schiff tells us that "Men with formal legal training did not immigrate to the colonies, which had no law school" when actually, "New England's laws were crafted from English Precedents as well as from Holy Scripture. New England first immigrants brought with them experience and knowledge of the British judicial system. Indeed, some of the earliest colonial leaders, including Governor John Winthrop and Chief Justice William Stoughton, were formally trained in English Common Law (see Mofford, "The Devil Made Me Do It!" - Crime Punishment in Early New England" (Globe Pequot Press, 2012), p. 4. Folks living in Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1692, never referred to themselves as "Puritans." This was a derisive term used in Old England by their Anglican enemies. And this was hardly "our first true-crime story," as author Schiff claims. She would have been wise to hire fact-checkers since the book is riddled with careless mistakes. "Giles Corey's age; the spelling of Proctor's name; Dudley Bradstreet never served as Governor (although his father, Simon, did); Martha Carrier's first son was not born before marriage; nor were her "strapping sons ever "orphaned," as Schiff erroneously claims! Nor did any of Carrier's children sat that their mother told them she ever was or would be "Queen of Hell!" (Indeed, that comes from the "Examination of Mary Lacey, Junior" and was later used by the Rev. Cotton Mather in his 1692 book "The Wonders of the Invisible World." Schiff also states that Mary Walcott said Carrier boasted she'd been a witch 40 years, where elsewhere in this same book, Schiff informs readers that Martha Carrier was 38 years old! In the York massacre of January 25, 1692, the minister Shubael Dummer was not "butchered on his doorstep" as Schiff tells us, but was actually killed as he attempted to mount his horse. The author and/or her team of researchers gives us 1694 as the date of the Native American raid upon Haverhill that resulted in Hannah Duston's captivity, when the event took place in 1697. It is as if the author is determined to show off every trivial fact in her repertoire. She seems eager to show off all she knows from her ventures into psychology, world literature and European history. And why not select relevant 17th century quotes instead of words from the likes of Montaigne, Jean Renoir, Charles Dickens, Flannery Connor, Somerset Maugham, and Ambrose Bierce? Regarding religion, Schiff strangely decides to

quote a 20th century mill worker. Her frequent references to Sweden are tiresome and unnecessary, and only serve to interrupt the flow of the narrative. Her references to Joan of Arc whose "Saints appeared" to her and "also thoughtfully identified themselves," are likewise out of place and irrelevant. In one end-note she even attempts to sum up the Enlightenment by name-dropping Issac Newton and John Locke and the alignment of the stars and astrological wisdom from a 1692 Almanac. I'm guessing Schiff's references to modern pop culture are designed to appeal to modern readers who have never been exposed to seventeenth century studies. These all-too-frequent distractions seldom make sense and only trivialize serious history. She sticks in scenes dialogue from *The Wizard of Oz* ie. "like watching the Wicked Witch of the West melt back into Miss Gulch" or "It is because Miss Gulch owns half the property in town that Auntie Em cannot say what she thinks of her to her face.") We are even treated (?) to references from Harry Potter. Perhaps Schiff hopes to snag middle-school audiences with "as Dumbledore assures Harry Potter..." and "Of course it is happening inside your head, Harry, but why on earth should that mean that it is not real?" This historian found Schiff's comparisons to contemporary life downright irritating. Here, Indians are described as "swarthy terrorists in the backyard" or "in its permanence, a witchcraft accusation resembled an Internet rumor." Or "Nearly as many theories have been advanced to explain the Salem Witch Trials as the Kennedy assassination." Or "she stumbled upon a Catch-22 of the 17th century system." Or, "As Hilary Mantel writes of her six year old self" Speaking of the devil, Schiff claims "He operated as a kind of steroid." Indeed, she even calls upon Donald Rumsfeld to inform her readers that "People were chasing the wrong rabbit!" Although the selected Cast of Characters that introduces the book is helpful, one can't help but wonder how Schiff knows what these players looked like or how they acted. Tituba is "kindly," William Barker: "silver-tongued," Mary Esty is "kindhearted," Ann Foster: "quiet;" Susannah Martin is "tiny," while the Reverend Francis Dane is "autocratic, uncompromising." although his assistant minister, "excitable." "Dane ruled with a strong hand, (while) Thomas Barnard with a sharper edge." The Rev. Nicholas Noyes may be a "plump, uncompromising poet," but Schiff somehow knows him to be "good company, vivacious, and witty." Is Schiff writing historical fiction or simply aiming for a popular audience? Whatever, she fictionalizes far too many well-documented facts. Indeed, the book contains far too many personal opinions to be considered serious history. For example, she says "Andover turned out to be rife not only with sorcery but also folk magic, religion's popular, wayward stepsister. It settled comfortably into parsonages. The Barnard and Dane households, like those of Higginson and Hale, were infested." (p. 290) Statements like "History is not rich in unruly young women; with the exception of Joan of Arc and a few underage sovereigns" will not set well with historians or seventeenth century scholars. "The Witches - Salem, 1692" does little to enlighten our understanding of what and why the events of 1692 happened. 235 of 255 people found the following review helpful. Tedious, vague and overlong

By E. Smiley

This book, a historical account of the Salem witch trials by an author whose prior work has been highly acclaimed, turned out to be a long-winded and tedious disappointment. I regret the many hours I spent slogging through it. Schiff takes a textbook-like approach to the writing, throwing facts and assertions at the reader without connecting them through any meaningful narrative. We learn little about the accusers and victims; those curious about the lives, personalities, and motivations of the people most directly involved will be disappointed. There is more information about the witchcraft judges and the local ministers in fact, perhaps the two most-discussed figures are Increase and Cotton Mather, prominent ministers who were not present for any of the events in Salem. Lengthy accounts of accusations and confessions are included, relating fanciful stories as if they were true: Skimming groves of oak, mossy bogs, and a tangle of streams, Anne Foster sailed above the treetops, over fields and fences, on a pole. . . . Before Foster on the pole sat Martha Carrier, half Fosters age and the dauntless mother of four. Carrier had arranged the flight. She had persuaded Foster to accompany her; she knew the way. Many pages are spent paraphrasing such accusations, but very few on analysis. The book has no organizing principle or thesis, focuses on no key figures, and has almost nothing to say about why the events in Salem might have occurred. And the writing style makes for laborious reading; it alternates between drowning the reader in details whose import to the larger picture is unclear, and wallowing in wordy abstractions that utterly fail to enlighten. It is often repetitive, and sometimes jumps between ideas that have no apparent connection. I give a second star because the book appears to be well-researched, and I did learn some information about colonial New England. It sheds light on the strains placed on the community, such as deadly Indian attacks nearby; many of the young accusers were refugees or orphans. We also learn a bit about life at the time. But despite the lengthy bibliography, the author makes sweeping generalizations that hurt her credibility; for instance, she claims the Salem witch trials were one of few occasions that women played a key role in American history and that after Salem, women went back to being invisible, where they remained, historically speaking, until a different scourge encouraged them to raise their voices, with suffrage and Prohibition. Women were invisible and had no effect on history in all of the 18th and 19th centuries? Harriet Beecher Stowe, Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Harriet Tubman, Louisa May Alcott, Sojourner Truth, Clara Barton, Belle Boyd, Dorothea Dix, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Lucretia Mott, Elizabeth Van Lew, Sacagawea, and many more would beg to differ. For that matter, the Salem witch trials themselves were a local event occurring in a few small towns; it would be hard to argue that any of the women or men involved had much impact on American history, especially compared with those listed above. Salem represents neither the first nor the last time people were executed for witchcraft in America, and while with its 20 executions, Salem claimed the

greatest number of victims at once, it pales beside many European witch hunts. Perhaps my frustration with this book has soured me on this piece of history, but having read *The Witches*, it is even less clear to me why Salem has gained such a foothold in the national imagination. Ultimately, Schiff can't explain Salem, nor can she make it interesting. Instead, she gives us a 400+ page summary of her research, then concludes that we have too little information to know why anything happened as it did. In other words, as far as I'm concerned, it's a whole lot of nothing. Those with a keen interest in the witch trials may find it worthwhile, but for the general reader looking to be informed and entertained by well-written, engaging historical accounts, this is one to avoid.

The Pulitzer Prize-winning author of *Cleopatra*, the #1 national bestseller, unpacks the mystery of the Salem Witch Trials. It began in 1692, over an exceptionally raw Massachusetts winter, when a minister's daughter began to scream and convulse. It ended less than a year later, but not before 19 men and women had been hanged and an elderly man crushed to death. The panic spread quickly, involving the most educated men and prominent politicians in the colony. Neighbors accused neighbors, parents and children each other. Aside from suffrage, the Salem Witch Trials represent the only moment when women played the central role in American history. In curious ways, the trials would shape the future republic. As psychologically thrilling as it is historically seminal, *THE WITCHES* is Stacy Schiff's account of this fantastical story—the first great American mystery unveiled fully for the first time by one of our most acclaimed historians.

.com An Best Book of November 2015: In 1692, at the edge of the New England wilderness, an entire village went insane. Everyone knows the story: The pre-teen daughters of the local minister are mysteriously overcome by convulsions, their uncontrollable screaming sending the superstitious community into fear and confusion. Lacking other explanations—adolescent rebellion, maybe?—Satanic influence is suspected, and accusations of witchcraft soon fly like enchanted broomsticks. The town is pitted against itself, and by the time the hysteria fades, 19 men and women are hanged, another pressed to death. But what actually happened? Pulitzer Prize-winner Stacy Schiff's *The Witches: Salem, 1692* steps back from more than three centuries of hyperbole and supposition, giving us our most complete account yet. It can't have been easy: As Schiff points out early in the book, the Puritans of Salem village were often assiduous diarists and record-keepers, but first-hand accounts of the months of the hysteria are mysteriously rare—and those that exist are mainly unreliable. To construct her history, Schiff went through the looking glass, compiling seemingly every fact available to create a historically accurate narrative of events while placing it within the cultural context of 17th century New England. The results are obvious: this book is dense with facts and a large cast of characters, and readers must commit. But Schiff keeps the proceedings rolling with wry humor and an eye for the peculiar-yet-illuminating detail. This isn't *The Crucible* or *Blair Witch*; it's light on sensationalism, but rife with real-life toil-and-trouble. The truth, as always, is strange enough.--Jon Foro A USA Today "Top 10 Books of 2015" pick A Time Magazine "Top 10 Nonfiction Books of 2015" pick An NPR "Great Reads for 2015" pick A Boston Globe "Best Nonfiction Books of 2015" pick A Washington Post "Notable Nonfiction of 2015" pick A San Francisco Chronicle "Best Books of 2015" pick An O, The Oprah Magazine "16 Books To Start 2016 Right" pick A Bloomberg "Best Books of 2015" pick A Chicago Tribune "The Best Books of 2015" pick A Houston Chronicle "15 Notable Books of 2015" pick A Bustle "11 Nonfiction Books By Women Every Book Club Should Read" pick A BookPage "Best Books of 2015" pick "An intoxicating brew of history.... It's unsettling, gripping stuff, rendered in the burnished sentences of a master prose stylist. Every page of *The Witches* is almost scandalously pleasurable." (4 Stars)--Kevin Nance, USA Today "Dazzling.... Schiff is at her best, infusing a historical event with as much life, mystery, and tragedy of any novelist."--Nicole Jones, Vanity Fair "[A] beautiful retelling of one of our ugliest tales."--John Freeman, Boston Globe "Her research is impeccable; no previous writer has scoured the documentary record to such great depth. Moreover, she has mastered the entire history of early New England.... This enables her to provide deep, richly textured background for specific moments and situations. Indeed, readers may experience her narrative as a virtual tour of the time and place. Her recreation of courtroom scenes is especially convincing; one feels, almost palpably, their pulsating mix of words, actions, and—above all—emotion.... Schiff's skills as a writer extend to such formal matters as structure, pacing, and point of view. The various parts of the narrative unfold in apparently seamless succession.... Now and again she inhabits her characters, yet she maintains throughout the authority of an omniscient narrator who is firmly in charge."--John Demos, New York of Books "Haunting.... The first major commercial nonfiction book on the subject in decades. By sidestepping most of the popular theories, *The Witches* stands out from much of the existing literature."--Alexandra Alter, New York Times "Investigated with relish." --O, The Oprah Magazine "History in the hands of Stacy Schiff is invariably full of life, light, shadow, surprise, clarity of insight, and so it is again and then some in her latest work, *The Witches*. Few writers combine as she does superb scholarship and an exceptional gift for language with amazing reach and agility of mind. This is a superb book."--David McCullough, Pulitzer Prize-winning author of *The Wright Brothers* "Sharp-eyed, discriminating, crisp."--Hilary Mantel, Times Literary Supplement "Schiff brings to bear a sensibility as different from the Puritans' as can be imagined: gentle, ironic, broadly empathetic, with a keen eye for humor and nuance.... Thanks to this, and to Schiff's narrative gifts, the present-day reader flits above New

England's smoky chimneys and thatched rooftops.... It is a wizardry of a sort--in a flash of brimstone, a whole world made wondrously visible."--Adam Goodheart, Atlantic "Though the Salem story has been told many times, Schiff's splendidly written account brings it thrillingly to life." --Dan Cryer, San Francisco Chronicle"Brilliantly assured.... Schiff's account is better written than any I have encountered."--John Wilson, Christianity Today "Masterful.... Schiff painstakingly reconstructs not just the events of 1692 but the world that birthed them."--Elizabeth Hand, Los Angeles Times"Haunting.... Schiff makes the dark an inviting place to linger."--Maureen Corrigan, NPR"This brilliant, compelling book is the most meticulously researched, effectively constructed, and beautifully written work I have read in a very long time. It is dramatic history and also a timeless thriller: who-or what-drove a New England town to madness three centuries ago, resulting in the deaths of nineteen men and women for 'witchcraft?' The answers are astonishing."--Robert K. Massie, Pulitzer Prize-winning author of Catherine the Great"Riveting nonfiction."--Entertainment Weekly "Brings a fresh eye to the worst misogynist atrocity in American history."--Megan O'Grady, Vogue.com"[Schiff] brings her gifts to the confusions of Salem, piecing together a dramatic narrative from disparate and often tersely unrevealing sources."--Ruth Franklin, Harper's "Once again Stacy Schiff dazzles us. The Witches is a must read for anyone intrigued by this baffling and horrifying chapter from American's Puritan past. What Schiff uncovers is mesmerizing and shocking. Her meticulous research and lyrical writing lay bare an injustice that we should never forget--lest we repeat it."--Patricia Cornwell, author of Depraved Heart "Absorbing and enlightening."--Nancy Klingener, Miami Herald"Thoroughly researched and written in a compelling style."--Bloomberg"No stone [is] left unturned.... Schiff recreates the most chill-inducing, finger-pointing months in American history."--Steph Opitz, Marie Claire "Fantastic."--Kristin Van Ogtrop, Time"Brilliant.... Schiff writes movingly as well as wittily; this is a work of riveting storytelling as well as an authoritative history."--Lara Feigel, Guardian"Masterly.... Alternately absurd and heart-rending."--Economist"Schiff's The Witches is an indelibly etched morality fable, the best recounting of the Salem hysteria in modern times. Clear-eyed and sympathetic, Schiff makes the complex seem simple, crafting a taut narrative that takes in religion, politics, folklore, and the intricate texture of daily life in Massachusetts Bay, with particular attention to those 'wonder-working' women and girls who chose this moment to blow apart the Puritan utopia they'd helped to found. It's all here in one devilish, oracular book."--Megan Marshall, Pulitzer Prize-winning author of Margaret Fuller"The fullest and finest story ever told about Salem in 1692, and no one else could tell it with the otherworldly flair of Stacy Schiff."--Joseph J. Ellis, Pulitzer Prize-winning author of The Quartet"Compulsively readable."--Nancy Rommelmann, Newsday"With fresh feminist insight, Schiff plumbs the mindset of late-seventeenth-century New England to explain our original 'national crackup.'"--Louisa Kamps, Elle"[Schiff] reconstructs the time and place in remarkable detail.... [And] skillfully re-creates the visceral tensions at the heart of everyday life in the Massachusetts Bay settlement."--Peter Manseau, Bookforum"Spellbinding."--Lizzie Crocker, Daily Beast"Schiff honors her subject's gaping documentary absences by fleshing out the actual world in which the witch panic took root and thrived, showing the full range of factors that influenced its participants...with gratifying vividness."--Kate Bolick, New Republic"[A] must-read."--Joanna Coles, Cosmopolitan"Schiff delves into the archive to remind us that one of the most notorious miscarriages of justice in American history was also one of the few moments which featured regular women-not queens, not goddesses, but mothers and wives and daughters and servants-at the very center of drastic historical change. A wrenching, unforgettable read."--Katherine Howe, author of The Physick Book of Deliverance Dane"Diabolically entertaining."--Judith Stone, More "A comprehensive illumination of an unsettling period of American history that continues to captivate our cultural imagination."--Nick Romeo, Christian Science Monitor"A gripping, meticulously researched, sumptuously written history of the Salem witch trials and their historical context."--Kevin Nance, Chicago Tribune"A masterful modern reassessment of the deadly and tragic mania that gripped the colonies in the late 17th century."--Globe and Mail"A vivid investigation of the original American nightmare. Schiff brilliantly teases apart the strands of myth and history. In an age when superstition remains a vibrant and dangerous force, her book is, alas, also relevant."--Russell Shorto, author of The Island at the Center of the World"From Cleopatra to the Salem coven. From intelligent rule to hysteria, mayhem, and murder. The Salem witch trials offer Stacy Schiff an out-sized drama that seized Americans' imaginations more than 300 years ago. All of Schiff's books demonstrate her rigor as a historian and her dexterity as a stylist. The Witches proves she has something else: the instincts of a thriller writer. This book needs a seat belt."--Kathryn Harrison, author of Joan of Arc"Brilliant, exceptionally well-researched."--Alden Mudge, BookPage"Schiff writes with conviction and a strong sense of narrative, elevating the dry snooze of history to a new level. It's an endlessly fascinating read."--Megan Reynolds, Gawker"Compulsively readable.... The best-selling Schiff never disappoints."--Margaret Flanagan, Booklist (Starred)" [Schiff] writes with such spirit and agility that to read her books is something like watching a great dancer. To say that her latest book is fascinating and insightful is hardly sufficient. It's brilliant from start to finish."--David McCullough, Favorite Reads of 2015 "Enchanting. Out of the shadows of the past come excitable young girls, pompous ministers, abusive judges, grieving parents, and angry neighbors, all of them caught up in a terrifying process that seemed to have no end: discovering who among them deserved death for being in league with Satan. The Witches is as close as we will ever come to understanding what happened in and around Salem in 1692. Courtrooms, streets, churches, farm yards, taverns, bedrooms-all became theater-like places where anger, anxiety, sorrow, and tragedy are

entangled. An astonishing achievement."--David D. Hall, Bartlett Research Professor of New England Church History, Harvard University"Schiff's books are based on serious scholarly research, yet they're conveyed in bright, accessible prose... She displays the same sharp intelligence and eclectic interests that distinguish her body of work."--Publishers Weekly, "Most Anticipated Books of the Fall""Schiff has beautifully combined remarkable story telling with historical accuracy and insight. She has opened up important new avenues for Salem scholarship."--Bernard Rosenthal, editor of Records of the Salem Witch-HuntAbout the AuthorStacy Schiff is the author of Vra (Mrs. Vladimir Nabokov), winner of the Pulitzer Prize; Saint-Exupry, Pulitzer Prize finalist; A Great Improvisation: Franklin, France, and the Birth of America, winner of the George Washington Book Prize; and Cleopatra: A Life. Schiff has received fellowships from the Guggenheim Foundation and the National Endowment for the Humanities and an award in literature from the American Academy of Arts and Letters. Named a 2011 Library Lion by the New York Public Library, she lives in New York City.