



The Witch of Blackbird Pond

Elizabeth George Speare , Karen Cushman (Introduction)

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Sixteen-year-old Kit Tyler is marked by suspicion and disapproval from the moment she arrives on the unfamiliar shores of colonial Connecticut in 1687. Alone and desperate, she has been forced to leave her beloved home on the island of Barbados and join a family she has never met. Torn between her quest for belonging and her desire to be true to herself, Kit struggles to survive in a hostile place. Just when it seems she must give up, she finds a kindred spirit. But Kit's friendship with Hannah Tupper, believed by the colonists to be a witch, proves more taboo than she could have imagined and ultimately forces Kit to choose between her heart and her duty.

Elizabeth George Speare won the 1959 Newbery Medal for this portrayal of a heroine whom readers will admire for her unwavering sense of truth as well as her infinite capacity to love.

The Witch of Blackbird Pond Details

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Author : Elizabeth George Speare , Karen Cushman (Introduction)

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From Reader Review *The Witch of Blackbird Pond* for online ebook

Kaylin (The Re-Read Queen) says

3.5 Stars

The problem with re-reading childhood favorites, is they very rarely live up to my memories. **RTC**

Julie says

A good witch is hard to find.

I should know; I've been searching for one my entire life.

So, I went into this read thinking. . . maybe this is her. . . the witch of blackbird pond. Maybe she will finally be the “tatter-haired witch” that Karla Kuskin describes, or the “magical prognosticator, chanting, canting, calculator” that Felice Holman makes me want to meet.

I wasn't looking for a *Bellatrix LeStrange*, I just wanted the witch I've been waiting for. . .

And I didn't find her here.

Nope. No real witches here. Just a bunch of those Arthur Miller type “witches” from **The Crucible**. Meaning, no delightful cleavage or cackle, no orgies by the river. . . no incantation, no levitation, no black tresses or long black gowns.

Just a sad, partially demented Quaker woman who has been ostracized from the town for her religious beliefs.

Oh, and a town with “a pillory, a whipping post and stocks.” All of the proper accoutrements for provoking public humiliation in the village square in Connecticut in the 17th century.

God, I hate Puritans.

I hate 'em, and so does Kit, our protagonist, who is forced to leave wealth and the paradise that is Barbados for the bleak, never ending Puritans and snow.

I think this is known as “hell,” or purgatory, at the very least.

Poor Kit.

And poor me. But once I let go of my attachment to the perfect witch, I allowed this Newberry winner from 1958 and Kit Tyler to capture my attention, and I found an “old school” appealing story and a winning protagonist.

This is good, clean story-telling, and it's a surprisingly romantic coming-of-age story as well.

And, God as my witness, as I finished up the story today, my 9-year-old daughter arrived home carrying a giant, black cauldron from a thrift store.

I retreat to my lair with magical thoughts.

inbetween says

A serious favourite from my formative youth, strange and harsh and nearly illicitly romantic so that I reread it, no matter how much Kit's predicament upset and scared me (mobs and trials and institutions are some of my worst fears).

Reading it quickly now - for the first time in English - many decades after first finding it in the small town library, I'm struck by how good a book it is. Many, amongst them the woman who "raised/formed" me as well as Narnia, crumble in retrospect, but there was a reason I'd remembered the title and found this book and even wrote a report on it at my brief stint working in a bookshop, a report also decades after having read it.

Due to circumstances I'd like to explain elsewhere, I've been searching romance novels again, tempted by what I know are false reviews and would lead only to more bad, boring and soul-sapping money-wasters. This children's book has more romance than ANY of the official adult romances, even should those have explicit sex scenes. Nat's wiry figure, his hard tanned wrists in the stocks, how Kit sees those glimpses is so much more effective and still to my taste after all those years.

The terror of the mob is lessened, and I took in more of the political situation (Royalists and American rebels), but I'm still surprised that Speare wrote such a liberal book 50 years ago. Of course Puritans today are also positive like Gale portrayed them in "Notes", but to realise it was just Quakers they branded and killed and to see tiny inserts about how the baby son died because he had to be christened in the freezing cold is unusual.

There is a great economy of writing, nothing superfluous, another mark of all the books I wanted to keep and not return to the library, back when I read a lot without it all getting mixed up or being washed out, when I reread; all those books seem so much shorter now, but it's THERE, just as in old movies - more content in less space.

Speare also shows great fairness, shows how the gruff and initially "hateful" uncle is a good man, having fought hard, his grief and load shown in a single simple powerful image, his politics and those of other men balanced to cross over, checkboard, religion and politics and ethics not all given to the "good" or "bad" side. I had forgotten that the old "witch" was saved, and even the cat, and was glad. I had not forgotten that the beautiful young priest came back and fell into the lap of the crippled girl, or how Kit met Nate again in the bright sunny wheat field, and the pleasant surprise of that at my first read.

It should be public knowledge by now that it's not easier to write for children than for adults. I hope as much care is still paid to YA Lit., because it's missing in romance and fantasy novels, the genres we progress to as "adults". I wish there were adult books like this.

ETA: since the Swedish series Gulla was another formative book before I went into romantic thriller land, I guess there is Puritan in me or my upbringing.

Duane says

This is my 9th Newbery Medal book and maybe the best so far. Well written with good characters, especially Kit Tyler, the young lady who is the heroine of the novel. There is a bit of a history lesson here also since the setting is 1687 in Wethersfield of the Connecticut Colony where the heavy handed Puritan's are dispensing their brand of religion and law. You can get an idea of the plot from the book description, but it plays out on the pages so well with such a strong, young female character that it's just a pleasure to read.

1979 Newbery Medal winner.

Katherine Arden says

This book got me into historical fiction which is the genre perhaps closest to my heart. The conflict between freedom and responsibility, between individual and family and community ring as clear today as they did when I first read this book as a kid

Andrei B?dic? says

Unul dintre cele mai frumoase romane pe care le-am citit vreodat?!

Corinne Edwards says

This is a breathtaking book. It takes us to Puritan New England, in the colony of Connecticut. Sixteen year old Katherine (Kit) arrives in America after having been brought up by her grandfather in Barbados. Her liberal Shakespeare-reading, ocean-swimming, silk-dress wearing upbringing did nothing to prepare her for the inflexibility and piousness of her aunt's family that takes her in. In fact, Kit's free thinking and outspoken ways create suspicion and irrational fear.

Speare's characters are fleshed out and conflicted and it is a pleasure to watch them learn and grow throughout the book. Kit's constant impulsive decision making and the inadvertent consequences never felt contrived. The time period and its rigid culture played a huge part in the plot of this novel – where seemingly harmless gestures and friendships can somehow make a person seem like a Satan-worshipper and be put on trial for witchcraft. It was a tremulous and frightening time, where politics were a constant topic of conversation as the colonists were just beginning to decide that they no longer wanted a king.

Kit's indecision about what and who she loves, and where she belongs, rang so true to me. The descriptions of New England itself and of the traditions and chores of the time were expertly woven into the prose. The sprinkling of romance throughout the story fit just right and I loved the ending. If you are a lover of young adult historical fiction, this Newberry Award winner is a must-read.

Anne Osterlund says

Kit, Katherine Tyler, is a free spirit. When her grandfather dies, she sells off his giant home in Barbados and sets sail to find her only remaining family in Connecticut colony. She weathers a storm, avoids seasickness,

and even manages to wrangle two entire conversations out of the blue-eyed son of the ship's captain.

However, the Connecticut mainland has a sharper edge than any of the challenges on board ship. How can Kit bear the insidious patience required to drop cornmeal in a bowl one pinch at a time? And the agony of spending her entire Sunday on a hard pew in church service? And the spiteful tongue of her cousin Judith? But there are far greater things to fear in the colonies than boredom.

And when Kit begins sneaking away to find her own happiness.

The real danger begins.

I love Kit! And Nat (the captain's son)! And Hannah (the Quaker woman who shares soft kittens and blueberry pie). And Prudence (the little girl who needs Kit almost as much as Kit needs her). This is one of my favorite books. Full of wonderful historical detail but also fun, alive characters that you feel as though you would love to meet. I've read *The Witch of Blackbird Pond* at least a dozen times—maybe two-dozen. And now may have to read it again.

Madelyn says

FULL REVIEW HERE:

<http://literarycafe.weebly.com/home/t...>

"She ?snatched at the dream that had comforted her for so long. It was faded and thin, like a letter too often read."

A search of identity, belonging, friendship, and breaking social class boundaries, this book is uncharacteristically deep for young adult novels. Not only is the time period historically accurate, but Elizabeth George Spear incorporates easy to read, yet distinct and complex, accents. From the Quaker 'witch', to the Barbados Kit Tyler, to the Connecticut colony residents, each of the many characters has a personality that can't be mistaken.

Don't be put off by the title. There is absolutely no witchcraft involved in the book. It's basically a Salem Witch Trial book that takes place in another New England coastal town, Wethersfield.

A few major themes in *The Witch of Blackbird Pond* include the political issues of the 17th century, religious differences from protestants and Quakers, how education differs from country to country ("**What a pity every child couldn't learn to read under a willow tree...**" -Kit, who learned in Barbados), judgement and how it affects culture... these are just a few of many elements. See? Didn't I say it was deep for a YA novel? ;)

If you're into history, you'll love the richly detailed depiction of day-to-day life in 17th century America. Even if you're not (like me) you will still definitely enjoy this Newberry Medal-winning classic.

We'd love to hear your thoughts! Please feel free to comment on the blog!

<http://literarycafe.weebly.com/home/t...>

Joe Valdez says

My autumn witch-a-thon continues with *The Witch of Blackbird Pond*, the Newberry Medal winning novel by Elizabeth George Speare. Published in 1958, I gather this is required reading in some public schools; The Bookman in Orange carries new copies, while a buddy of mine named Steve Green at McClain's Coffeehouse in Fullerton caught me reading this and experienced a bad flashback to his junior high days. I was enamored by the finesse with which Speare propels her narrative and the historical detail she wields, but the story didn't deliver on my wicked witch-a-thon expectations and suffers from issues common to the Young Adult genre.

The drama centers on Katherine "Kit" Tyler, a sixteen-year-old who arrives in the Connecticut Colony in April 1687. Born and raised on a plantation in Barbados with her grandfather, Kit departs for the Colonies after his passing to live with her Aunt Rachel. Aboard the *Dolphin* as it docks in the village of Saybrook, Kit meets two young men: Nathaniel "Nat" Eaton, son of the vessel's captain, and John Holbrook, a clergyman headed to the town of Wethersby upriver to study with a reverend doctor. When a wooden doll belonging to a put upon child named Prudence goes overboard, Kit boldly dives in to the bay to retrieve it, alarming those who have never known a woman to swim.

Kit continues to make waves by revealing to Holbrook that she can read. Upon finally reaching Wethersby when the winds permit, Kit reveals to the captain that she has not sent word to her aunt of her arrival and her seven trunks must be transported to "town," which Kit is shocked to learn is little more than a church, a square and the scattered homes or fields of the Puritan villagers. Aunt Rachel initially mistakes Kit for her dead sister, but is welcomed, even when Kit notifies her aunt that she has come to live with them. Her uncle Matthew is a taciturn farmer whose word is law, and does not truck to his daughters Judith and Mercy idling the day away trying on the dresses Kit offer as presents.

Her uncle regarded her with scorn. "No one in my family has any use for such frippery," he said, coldly. "Nor are we beholden on anyone's charity for our clothing."

"But they are gifts," cried Kit, tears of hurt and anger springing to her eyes. "Everyone brings--"

"Be quiet, girl! It is time you understood one thing at the start. This will be your home, since you have no other, but you will fit yourself to our ways and do no more to interrupt the work of the household or to turn the heads of my daughters with your vanity. Now you will close your trunks and allow them to get about the work they have neglected. Rachel, take off that ridiculous thing!"

"Even the gloves, Father?" Judith was still rebellious. "Everyone wears gloves to Meeting."

"Everything. No member of my household will appear in public in such unseemly apparel."

Mercy had said no word, but now as she folded the blue shawl and laid it quietly on top of the trunk, Rachel found courage for her only protest. "Will you allow Mercy to keep the shawl?" she pleaded. "'Tis not gaudy, and 'twill keep off the draft there by the chimney."

Matthew's glance moved from the shawl to his daughter's quiet eyes, and barely perceptibly the grim line of his jaw relaxed. So there was one weakness in this hard man!

Kit tries her best to fit in to the Puritan village. Upon learning that her people have no servants, she tries to earn her keep carding wool, preparing meals or making soap. Bossy Judith settles on assigning her cousin corn pudding. To the more sympathetic Mercy, Kit reveals the reason she did not give her aunt prior notice is that her late grandfather's debts made her vulnerable to marriage to one of his creditors. The runaway bride turns heads by attending Sabbath Meeting in silk, the only outfit she has. Kit despairs that the boring service lasts practically all day, but garners the attention of William Ashby, a wealthy young suitor who has never seen anything like her.

The stranger in a strange land begins to find her stride when she assists Mercy in teaching the dame school for young children. Helping Judith weed the onion field out by Blackbird Pond, Kit inquires about a shack out there in the tranquil meadow and is told a witch lives there, a Quaker named Hannah Tupper. When Kit improvises a lesson by involving her students in playacting a Bible scene, chaos erupts and her Puritan observers fire Kit. She flees to the meadow for solace, where she is comforted by Hannah and learns that the woman is no witch, just a misunderstood widow who's persecuted in Massachusetts for her religious beliefs. Kit befriends the old woman.

Kit summons the courage to ask for her job back. William has come courting Kit, with John Holbrook putting in similar family time with Mercy, but Kit finds her thoughts turning back to Nat, who she encounters at Hannah's home delivering her goods and helping with repairs to her roof. Uncle Matthew forbids Kit from visiting the Quaker, which Kit ignores with support from her aunt. She even starts to teach her young fan Prudence how to read in secret, introducing her to Hannah and turning over lessons to the old woman. But when a fever afflicts the youth of the village, Hannah is singled out as the cause and the rebellious Kit's relationship with the woman pulls her into the witch hunt.

"Do you deny that on a certain day in August last, on passing the pasture of Goodman Whittlesley you cast a spell upon his cattle so that they were rooted to the ground where they stood and refused to answer his call or to give any milk on that evening?"

"Goodman Whittlesley, will you repeat your complaint for this assembly?"

Her head reeling, Kit stood helpless as, one after the other, they rose and made their complaints, these men and women whom she scarcely recognized. The evidence rolled against her like a dark wave.

One man's child had cried aloud all night that someone was sticking pins into him. Another child had seen a dark creature with horns at the foot of her bed. A woman who lived along South Road testified that one morning Kit had stopped and spoken to her child and that within ten minutes the child had fallen into a fit and lain ill for five days. Another woman testified that one afternoon last September she had been sitting in the window, sewing a jacket for her husband, when she had looked up and seen Kit walking past her house, staring up at the window in a strange manner. Whereupon, try as she would, the sleeve would never set right in the jacket. A man swore he had seen Kit and Goody Tupper dance round a fire in the meadow one moonlit night, and that a great black man, taller tan an Indian, had suddenly appeared from nowhere and joined in the dance.

Elizabeth George Speare does a wonderful job of not only placing the reader in a working Puritan village in the 17th century but populating her story with compelling characters and leaving the readers with a good message. If it adhered a bit closer to history, it's a story that had the potential for great violence and tragedy, but perhaps due to its young audience, everything turns out happy in the end. I liked how Speare introduces close to a dozen characters, assigning them roles in the village and personalities that distinguish them from one another. Most of the characters remain static, while Uncle Matthew and Nat evolve the more they come

to understand and appreciate Kit. The prose is poised and illustrates its setting quite effectively.

What a pity every child couldn't learn to read under a willow tree, Kit thought a week later. She and Prudence sat on a cool grassy carpet. A pale green curtain of branches just brushed the grasses and threw a filigree of shadows, as delicate as the wrought silver, on the child's face. This was the third lesson. At first Prudence had been speechless. In all her short life the child had seldom seen, and certainly never held in her hands, anything so lovely as the exquisite little silver hornbook. For long moments she had been too dazed that the tiny alphabet fastened to it were made up of the same a's and b's that she had overheard through the school doorway. But now, by this third meeting, she was drinking in the precious letters so speedily that Kit knew she must soon find a primer as well.

There's a lot of Drama(!) in *The Witch of Blackbird Pond*, with the sister who loves the boy who loves the other sister, and parents who just don't understand. I was amused by the suggestion that teenagers were apparently running wild in the streets as far back as the first Thanksgiving. Speare handles her story with class, with language that is poised and vivid, and takes her historical subject matter seriously. That was my problem with the novel: nothing eerie or frightening occurs. Hannah Tupper is easily the most static and forgettable character in the book despite being the title character.

Cover art over the years hints at different types of books. My favorite is Cover #4, from the first Dell printing in 1971. This promises a far out chiller and a thriller featuring a spooky witch haunting the countryside. I love the proportionality of its elements and the beguiling mood it conjures. Cover #1 accurately reflects the YA novel the author wrote, which despite the colonial setting and high level of writing, is in many ways a generic teen book. *The Witch of Blackbird Pond* is a good book, but not one I'd recommend to get the pulse racing on Halloween.

Lucy says

I know this is a classic. A Newberry award winner for juvenile fiction, I can hardly criticize such a loved book. Sadly, I did not read this when it was meant to be read, as a youth struggling to know it's more important to do the right thing than to fit in with what everybody else is doing.

Important, worthy lesson, but after reading two young adult novels this week with very similar themes (does this happen to anyone else? I always seem to inadvertently read books in "themes"), I feel there is something lacking when an adult reads young adult literature. Innocence, perhaps. It's too simple. The protagonists don't fit inside the story. They are almost always ahead of their times and privy to understanding that their peers don't seem to have access to. Where did Kit come from? Barbados, yes...but possibly from the 20th century as well? As modern readers, we have the hindsight to see and learn from the foibles of our ancestors and their limited understanding, but the author gave this sort of vision to Kit immediately.

I don't know if this is ever argued (and why am I arguing, didn't I promise not to?) but part of me feels like there is an anti-obedience theme in this book. Kit is almost always disobedient, and her disobedience always turned out to be the right thing to do. Because it's young adult literature, everything turns out fine in the end, but there is a difference in doing the right thing and doing what you want to. This is a much deeper discussion to be typed out here, and I won't blaspheme this good book any more. I know it's a favorite.

The Captain says

Ahoy there mateys! This being Banned Books Week and having just finished a historical fiction about witchcraft in England, I thought it be high time to read the beloved favorite. I reread this in one delightful sitting.

This book is a young adult historical fiction about a girl named Katherine, i.e. Kit, who is forced to leave her home in Barbados and move to Connecticut to live with her Aunt and Uncle. She goes from a care-free rich island lifestyle to a hard-working Puritan one in America. It is a tale about growing up, change, and family. And it has witchcraft. Or better yet it doesn't.

The two people accused of witchcraft in the book are not witches. However this book has been banned because of promoting witchcraft and violence. Huh? What is shown instead are the consequences of gossiping, fear, and ignorance. The book dispels the notions of witchcraft using proper proof. Instead the book promotes hard work, good relationships, and education. I find the idea of banning this book to be ludicrous.

The book certainly stood up to the passage of time and I found meself happily rediscovering old details that had been clouded over. Kit is strong, intelligent, and above all changes for the better. The other characters are equally well drawn and compelling. I love that Kit is challenged over her ideas of politics, religion, slavery, and class. It is still fast paced and engrossing. The love and friendships and bonds formed by Kit and her family and neighbors made me happy. I also think credit goes to this novel for teaching me to call kittens "tiny balls of fluff." I believe that it completely deserved winning the Newbery Medal of Honor.

If ye haven't read this one then hoist those sails and get moving!

Check out me other reviews at [https://thecaptainsquartersblog.wordpress...](https://thecaptainsquartersblog.wordpress.com/)

Katy says

I really liked this book, and have therefore come to the conclusion that books written for children can be higher quality writing than books written for adults because there isn't this pressure to impress with heavy metaphor and poignant statements about life. When adults write for adults there is too much pressure, adults writing for children understand that it is the story and the characters that matter most, and if those two are well written then I think you have a deep, satisfying book.

Kp says

"Buy the truth, and do not sell it,
also wisdom and instruction and understanding"
-> Psalm 23:23

A wholly satisfying read (and respectable look at Puritan life)!

(I'm a 23 yr old [in college] guy, and->) Who knew I'd get so emotionally invested??

I certainly didn't.

There were several parts when I was legitimately frustrated, angry, and a little teary-eyed (to level with you...).

My favorite scenes were quite easily John's return home (the teary-eyes; c'mon-> I'm just trying to give you an honest review) as well as the final pages of the book.

Sidenote-> With a character named "Thankful Peabody", how could you possibly go wrong?

Sidenote-sidenote-> Goodwife Cruff was completely (and impressively) unlikeable.

If I'm lucky enough to have a daughter or two, this one'll most definitely have a space their bookshelf.

Sarah Mac says

So. I read this for the first time since 5th grade.

As a kid, the romance between Kit & Nat gave me great anxiety. I really wanted them to end up together. The idea that they might not was excruciating because it was SO OBVIOUS!!! that they were the OTP of this book...so when I picked it up again after so many years, I remembered little else about the story.

But as an adult, two things stand out: the relationship between Kit & her uncle Matthew, & the complete lack of sexual menace in a period rife with that particular issue.

I really liked the way Kit & Matthew's interactions developed. They butt heads over huge differences in ideology, both religious & political; Kit makes no apologies for having owned slaves in the past (which is great -- no overly sanitized 21st century disease) & she doesn't understand her uncle's Puritan obsession with work, work, work for the enjoyment of working. Matthew, meanwhile, thinks Kit is too lazy & needs supervision to finish basic chores (which she does); her religious training is lax (which it is); her flouting convention sometimes goes too far (which it does). But for all that, he's clearly a good man. He takes her in, treats her as equal to his daughters, & stands up for her in public -- all of which Kit gradually comes to appreciate. Reading between the lines, we also see how Matthew comes to esteem her 'wild' instincts of charity & inclusion, & I thought they were very realistic in terms of guardian & ward. By the close of the book they still don't agree on everything, but they do respect each other.

That said, this is clearly a book for younger readers. None of the male characters *ever* thinks or behaves in any way improper, no matter their age or role in the story. There's no exploration of the sexual jealousy that was so important to the Salem-area paranoia -- particularly with young, pretty 'witches' like Kit, who were frequently charged with wantonly tempting the so-called upstanding male citizens. It's not that there wasn't plenty of room for these elements in the storyline -- rather, they were nonexistent. Likewise, Kit's adventures could well be the outline for an excellent bodice ripper -- but the author glossed over much of the peril inherent in her story. It's a book which would take only a small nudge to turn into a gripping ripper-style novel for adults...but it's a young adult read from 40+ years ago, so that nudge is simply not there.

It's not that I demand every book flaunt a score of hardcore ripper themes, but when the plot presents SO MANY opportunities & ignores them...well, that's disappointing to my sophisticated eyes of adulthood.** Certainly I loved this book as a 5th grader. Nowadays I call it an enjoyable light read & give 3.5 stars, but I'm rounding up for the sake of nostalgia. (I still love that beautiful red cover, though. It's one of my favorites.)

**Says the girl who will never give up her *Ghostbusters* dvd. Never, dammit. ~~That's a big twinkie.~~
