

## Not To Be Trifled With

A Review of Ami McKay's *The Witches of New York*

Ami McKay's *The Witches of New York* blends together the perfect potion of magic, thrill, intrigue and feminism.

Set in 1880's New York City, the novel revolves around a large cast of unique, enthralling characters but centers around three in particular. Beatrice Dunn, a young, timid girl with a

powerful gift; Eleanor St. Clair, a patient, kind-hearted witch; and my personal favorite, Adelaide Thom, a strong, cynical soothsayer.

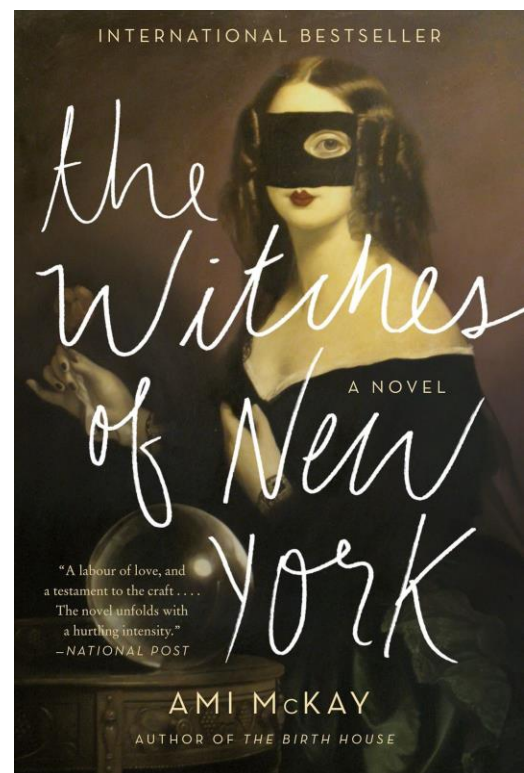
Adelaide and Eleanor are the co-owners of Tea and Sympathy, a shop that offers more than just tea. The witches provide a space safe and advice to women in a time when men still fully dominated. They write an ad in the newspaper seeking help around the shop, and small-town Beatrice packs up her belongings and applies for the position.

Realizing that Beatrice has strong powers in need of coaxing out, Eleanor and Adelaide mentor the girl and help Beatrice come to terms with her special gifts. Along the way, the witches must deal with Reverend Townsend—a crazy, sexist preacher set to vanquish witches/powerful women—demons, and all varieties of men trying to take them down.

The novel's point-of-view changes frequently between chapters, giving us the perspectives of each of the three main witches; Reverend Townsend; Dr. Brody; some ghosts; some witches; and a demon. The plot is complex, but McKay writes in such a manner that leaves little room for confusion. However, because there are so many intertwining stories—the main plot, Adelaide's and Eleanor's troubled pasts, back stories of characters who are killed off fairly quickly—I almost wanted the book to be longer. I did not find that everything was tied together when I finished, and though McKay likely did this intentionally to set us up for a sequel, I think there were too many loose ends.

High-strung Adelaide Thom (formerly Moth) is the strongest character, with the most intriguing, heart-wrenching back story and the best character development. Throughout the story, we are given hints and flashbacks to her childhood and problems with her Gypsy mother—a ghost who spends her time looking after Adelaide. At first highly skeptical of Beatrice and cynical to magic, men, and the outside world, she learns that with the help of friends, working together, and believing in yourself, a glowing light in the darkness of her life can be lit and maintained.

Eleanor St. Clair is portrayed as the motherly,



nurturing character. A few years older than Adelaide and a well-practiced witch, we are offered glimpses of Eleanor's backstory and early days with her mother, Madame St. Clair, a powerful and respected witch. Eleanor looks out for both Adelaide and Beatrice, and as the novel progresses we see her gradually become the wise, graceful spitting image of Madame St. Clair.

Beatrice Dunn, mousy and unsure, suffers the most challenges throughout the book due to her ever-growing powers. With both her parents dead and only a stern aunt looking after her, Beatrice seeks guidance in more ways than one. As her friendship with the two vastly different but equally enthralling and courageous women grow, so do both her powers and confidence, and Beatrice grows into another strong female character.

**“Adelaide had sauntered over from her table in the back of the shop. Picking up the last bit of their exchange, she'd chimed in, ‘You are Beatrice Dunn. You're a witch. You're not to be trifled with.’ At least she and Eleanor had seen eye to eye on that.”**

Going hand-in-hand with the inspiring female characters and spinning the term “witch” into something both positive and powerful, McKay's underlying theme of feminism in the novel shines brightly. Early on, she slyly references the last presidential election, when Donald Trump referred to Hillary Clinton during a debate as “Such a nasty woman.” In the novel, McKay's



antagonist Reverend Townsend refers to one of the witches as ““Such a vile woman,””(119) implementing the idea of power hungry men threatened by strong women. In comparing the patriarchal character to Donald Trump and the witch to Hillary Clinton, McKay is able to delicately modernize the otherwise historical fiction piece with the current issues for women today. Not all of the male

characters in the book are bad, however. Dr. Brody, an advocate for feminism with a fascination for communicating with the dead, adds to the novel as a refreshing, shining example of a man who does not feel threatened by strong women. McKay allows him to offer help and assistance to the three main protagonists without having the women depend or fully lean on him in any way—another very feminist approach.

*The Witches of New York* beautifully articulates so much power into the words “witch” and “woman.” This novel not only encourages me to continue with my writing and aspire to create a story equally compelling, but also gives me hope for the future of women in this time of regression.

And hope for a little bit of magic, too.

Ami McKay has written two other books, *The Birth House* and *The Virgin Cure*. McKay developed the idea for *The Witches of New York* from her love of witches growing up, as well as her admiration for Glinda and Ozma from *The Wizard of Oz*. Many of McKay's own ancestors were accused of witchcraft during the Salem witch trials.



*The Witches of New York*

By: Ami McKay

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\$15.99

This book is available for sale through the River's End Bookstore

<http://www.riversendbookstore.com/search/site/the%20witches%20of%20new%20york>

*AnneMarie Dehm is a creative writing major who spends her time reading, writing, and drinking wine. She plans on moving to the Big Apple after graduation to work on her current novels. Much like the witches of New York, she is not to be trifled with.*