

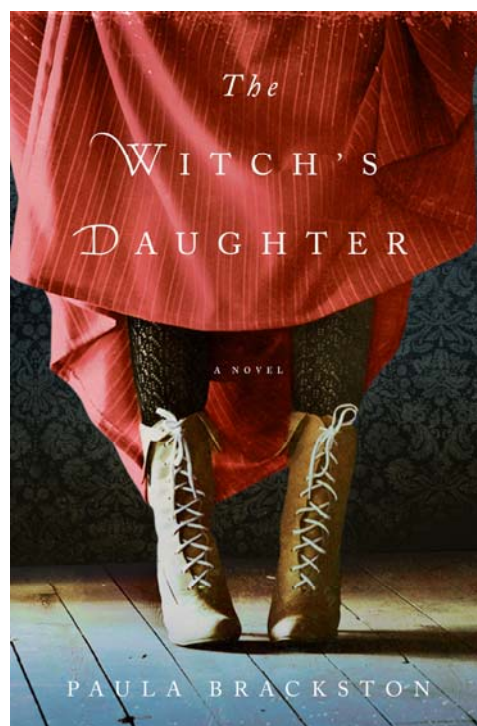


The Witch's Daughter

by Paula Brackston

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About this Guide

The following author biography and list of questions about *The Witch's Daughter* are intended as resources to aid individual readers and book groups who would like to learn more about the author and this book. We hope that this guide will provide you a starting place for discussion, and suggest a variety of perspectives from which you might approach *The Witch's Daughter*.

About the Book

My name is Elizabeth Anne Hawksmith, and my age is three hundred and eighty-four years. Each new settlement asks for a new journal, and so this Book of Shadows begins...

In the spring of 1628, the Witchfinder of Wessex finds himself a true Witch. As Bess Hawksmith watches her mother swing from the Hanging Tree she knows that only one man can save her from the same fate at the hands of the panicked mob: the Warlock Gideon Masters, and his Book of Shadows. Secluded at his cottage in the woods, Gideon instructs Bess in the Craft, awakening formidable powers she didn't know she had and making her immortal. She couldn't have foreseen that even now, centuries later, he would be hunting her across time, determined to claim payment for saving her life.

In present-day England, Elizabeth has built a quiet life for herself, tending her garden and selling herbs and oils at the local farmers' market. But her solitude abruptly ends when a teenage girl called Tegan starts hanging around. Against her better judgment, Elizabeth begins teaching Tegan the ways of the Hedge Witch, in the process awakening memories--and demons--long thought forgotten.

Part historical romance, part modern fantasy, *The Witch's Daughter* is a fresh, compelling take on the magical, yet dangerous world of Witches. Readers will long remember the fiercely independent heroine who survives plagues, wars, and the heartbreak that comes with immortality to remain true to herself, and protect the protégé she comes to love.

Praise for *The Witch's Daughter*

"Brackston's first novel offers well-crafted characters in an absorbing plot and an altogether delicious blend of historical fiction and fantasy." --**Booklist**

"This pleasantly romantic historical fantasy debut flips lightly between the past experiences of ageless witch Elizabeth Anne Hawksmith and her present-day life in Matravers, England... Bess's adventures are fascinating." --**Publishers Weekly**

"With her first novel, author Paula Brackston conjures up a riveting tale of sorcery and time travel. By mixing feminine heroism with masculine might, Brackston successfully captivates readers with characters Bess, an immortal witch, and sinister dark lord, Gideon... It's almost impossible not to root for the underdog in this magical twist on the classic David vs. Goliath tale. Plus, the skill with which Brackston weaves her characters through time makes this book a fascinating take on global history." --**Marie Claire**

"Stretching her tale over several centuries, British-based Brackston brings energy as well as commercial savvy to her saga of innocence and the dark arts.... History, time travel and fantasy combine in a solidly readable entertainment." --**Kirkus**

"An engaging, well-written novel that will appeal to fans of historical fiction and fantasy alike." --**Portland Book Review**

"Part historical romance, part modern fantasy, *The Witch's Daughter* is a fresh, compelling take on the magical, yet dangerous world of witches. Readers will long remember the fiercely independent heroine who survives plagues, wars, and the heartbreak of immortality to stay true to herself, and protect the protégé she comes to love." --**NightOwlReviews.com**

"*The Witch's Daughter* is a wonderful combination of historical fiction and paranormal. Brackston's story alternates between past and present as she mixes tales of Elizabeth's early life with the present day, tying in historical events including Jack the Ripper and the horrors of WWI... Overall, a really enjoyable read." --**BookBitch.com**

"Readers who enjoy historical fantasy built around an epic struggle between good and evil should enjoy this original take on the theme." --**HistoricalNovels.info**

"An enjoyable read." --**Genre Go Round Reviews**

"This tale spans centuries and walks the line between good and the darker side of magic. Magic and those who possess it have been feared and persecuted throughout most of human history. Find out what it is like to live for hundreds of years, mostly in solitude, and have to struggle with having the power to help people, but being afraid to use that power." --**Affaire de Coeur**

About the Author

Paula Brackston is the author of a travel book, *The Dragon's Trail*. She has an MA in Creative Writing from Lancaster University in the UK, and her autobiographical writing has been published in several anthologies. She lives halfway up a Brecon Beacon with her partner and their two children. Visit her online at www.paulabrackston.com.



Photo Credit: Michael Taylor

Discussion Questions

1. Gideon is a dark, unsympathetic character, and yet Bess found herself drawn to him. Why is there such a strong attraction to people we can see are bad, and did you, as a reader, find yourself repulsed or intrigued by Gideon?
2. How did you react to the Witch trials and surrounding procedures in the book?
3. One of the themes of *The Witch's Daughter* is identity and trying to pinpoint what makes us who we really are. Is there a pivotal moment or event where Elizabeth realises magic is an inextricable part of herself?
4. Names play an important role in the story. How are they used to reflect this theme of identity?
5. Bess never uses her magic for personal gain. What do you think about the choices she makes regarding her use of the Craft?
6. Why is Elizabeth's relationship with Tegan such a crucial one, both for her and for the story?
7. The early seventeenth century and the early twentieth century were both times of great political instability and upheaval, whereas Victoria's reign provided decades of growth and prosperity for many. Which period in history did you most enjoy in the book, and why?
8. The Passchendaele section is perhaps the most visceral part of the book. How did you find yourself responding to the horrors of wartime Flanders?
9. Put yourself in Elizabeth's place. Are there things you would have done differently?

A Conversation with Paula Brackston

When you start a new book, do you like to outline the entire story or fly by the seat of your pants? What about your characters? Do you figure them out entirely before you start writing or do they reveal themselves to you along the way?

An idea will start forming in the murky mists of my mind, and out of that will step my main character. I'll spend some weeks noodling over a story before I write anything down. It has to incubate before it's ready to fall onto the page, even in note form. It is the characters who drive the story, and the clearer they become to me, the easier it is to find the tale they want to tell.

How do you come up with your character names?

I enjoy choosing names for my characters, but it often takes me a while to find the right one. Sometimes I'll finish a book and then go back and change the main character's name. In *'The Witch's Daughter'* names were even more significant than they ordinarily are. Both Elizabeth and Gideon had to have names that could be changed, slightly or more fundamentally depending on who they were 'being' or where they were. Fortunately, I've always been quite good at anagrams.

If your book were to be turned into a movie, would your dream cast be?

I think Rachel Weiss would be the perfect Elizabeth Hawksmith. Gideon would be harder to cast, but I'm always impressed by the performances of British actor Tom Hardy. He'd make a splendid job of it. Well, a girl can dream.

Which fictional character do you have a secret crush on?

I'll try and avoid giving you a list! I spent many weeks as a teenager dreaming about Emily Bronte's Heathcliff. And I've always had a bit of a thing for Bram Stoker's Dracula. Both a little worrying, really.

Desert Island time. You can bring one person and one thing. What would you bring?

As I couldn't choose between my children I guess it'd have to be my partner. He's good at all the things I'm rubbish at, like lighting fires, building shelters, fishing, etc. He's also a good listener, so I could construct whole new books in my head and tell them to him, while sitting next to the

fire he's just lit, outside the shelter he's built, eating the fish he's caught. A fair division of labour, I feel.

I'd take a fine bone china cup and saucer. I'm sure there would be something on the island we could make tea out of, but it wouldn't have the same calming-yet-restorative effect if I didn't have a decent cup. Now I feel irredeemably British!

What's up next for you?

I'm working on a new novel. I don't want to give too much away, but I'm exploring another historical period, and right now I've got a wonderful new witch standing at my shoulder and whispering ideas in my ear.

Essay

I have long been fascinated by the idea of Witchcraft, and wanted to write a book based on the notion - *What if there are Witches living among us, here and now, using real magic?* This in turn set me thinking about Witches in times before our own, and how opinions have altered down the centuries. In Bess's time (the sixteen hundreds) cunning women, or those using hedge craft to heal, were often accused of *maleficia*, that is, the use of magic to attempt to bring about bad events or harm to others. From our twenty-first century perspective this seems like fear and superstition causing panic and injustice, and we accept that most of these women were harmless, and indeed in many cases effective healers. But then - *What if some of those women were true Witches?* This gave me my start point for Elizabeth's origins.

By granting her immortality I was able to place her in other eras that I find fascinating. For me, there has always been a frisson of menace about Victorian London. It was a place of so much poverty and suffering, where the poor and the desperate rubbed shoulders with the wealthy but could only dream of the comfort and security their birth had assured them. The poorest, as always, were the most vulnerable, which is why I wanted Eliza (who of course had a strong social conscience) to live where she did, helping the prostitutes as best she could. I wanted to include Jack the Ripper as he symbolises all that was dangerous and cruel about the city as the century shuddered to a close.

I was particularly keen to position our heroine in the First World War. I wanted to see her tested to her limits, and to watch how she might be persuaded to use her magic to heal, whatever the personal cost. The very name Passchendaele conjures up suffering and emotion. The more I researched the third battle of Ypres, the conditions the troops and non-combatants endured, and the grim realities of the Field Hospitals, the more I knew Elise would be irresistibly drawn to such a place.

I was born in Dorset and although I moved to Wales when I was five I have spent many years visiting that part of England. I love the quintessentially English feel of the landscape. It is Thomas Hardy, and cream teas, and thatched cottages, and bucolic life, and all that is good and quiet and peaceful about the countryside. This setting, then, was the perfect foil for the darkness that continued to pursue Elizabeth and threatened both herself and Tegan.

I found writing *The Witch's Daughter* a wonderful and entirely consuming experience. My family had to put up with many long months of me going about with a distracted look on my

face, or were forced to drag me away from one of the myriad books I devoured while researching. My children got used to all their bedtime stories being about Witches, or the seventeenth century, or medical procedures one hundred and twenty years ago. My son is now well informed on the weaponry of the Great War, and my daughter insists on dressing as a Witch for fancy dress parties. They are as thrilled as I am that Elizabeth's story is now going out into the world. I hope readers find themselves as bewitched as I was by the idea of secret magic being among us if only we care to look for it.

Note to readers from Paula: I am always interested to hear readers' comments, so feel free to comment on my website blog at www.paulabrackston.com or email me at paulabrackston@yahoo.co.uk/.

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