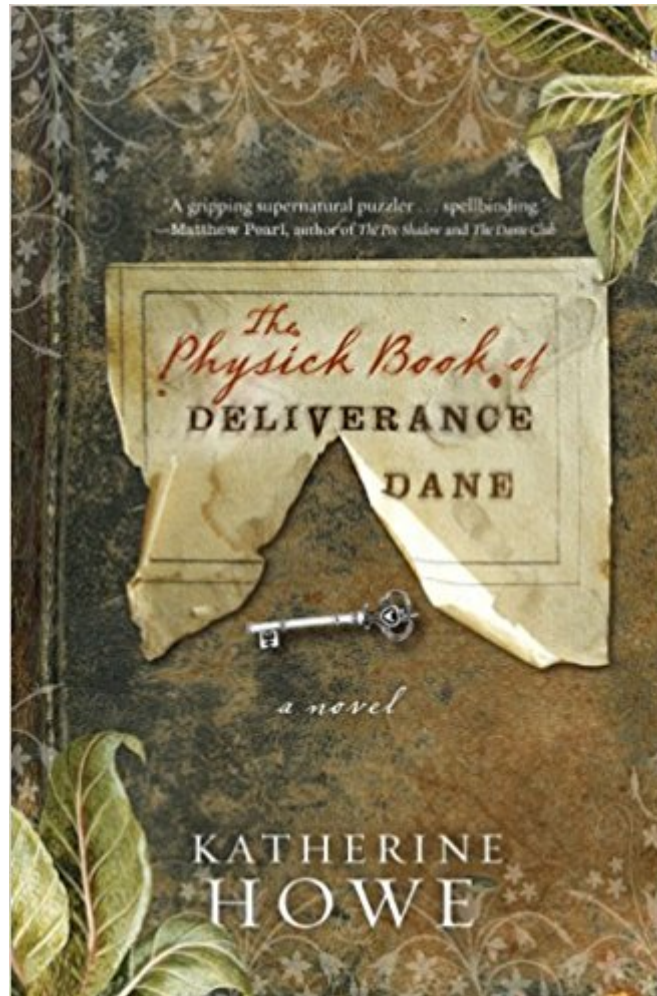




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# The Physick Book Of Deliverance Dane



## Synopsis

"A fresh present-day story infused with an original take on popular history. Forget broomsticks and pointy hats; here are witches that could well be walking among us today. This debut novel flows with poetic charm and eloquence that achieves high literary merit while concocting a gripping supernatural puzzler. Katherine Howe's talent is spellbinding."--Matthew Pearl, author of *The Poe Shadow* and *The Dante Club* A spellbinding, beautifully written novel that moves between contemporary times and one of the most fascinating and disturbing periods in American history--the Salem witch trials. Harvard graduate student Connie Goodwin needs to spend her summer doing research for her doctoral dissertation. But when her mother asks her to handle the sale of Connie's grandmother's abandoned home near Salem, she can't refuse. As she is drawn deeper into the mysteries of the family house, Connie discovers an ancient key within a seventeenth-century Bible. The key contains a yellowing fragment of parchment with a name written upon it: Deliverance Dane. This discovery launches Connie on a quest--to find out who this woman was and to unearth a rare artifact of singular power: a physick book, its pages a secret repository for lost knowledge. As the pieces of Deliverance's harrowing story begin to fall into place, Connie is haunted by visions of the long-ago witch trials, and she begins to fear that she is more tied to Salem's dark past than she could have ever imagined. Written with astonishing conviction and grace, *The Physick Book of Deliverance Dane* travels seamlessly between the witch trials of the 1690s and a modern woman's story of mystery, intrigue, and revelation.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Set in Cambridge and Marblehead, Mass., Howe's propulsive if derivative novel alternates between the 1991 story of college student Connie Goodwin and a group of 17th-century outcasts. After moving into her grandmother's crumbling house to get it in shape for sale, Connie comes across a small key and piece of paper reading only Deliverance Dane. The Salem witch trials, contemporary Wicca and women's roles in early American history figure prominently as Connie does her academic detective work. What follows is a breezy read in which Connie must uncover the mystery of a shadowy book written by the enigmatic Deliverance Dane. During Connie's investigation, she relies on a handsome steeplejack for romance and her mother and an expert on American colonial history for clues and support. While the twisty plot and Howe's habit of ending chapters with cliffhangers are straight out of the thriller playbook, the writing is solid overall, and Howe's depiction of early American life and the witch trials should appeal to readers who enjoyed *The Heretic's Daughter*. The witchcraft angle and frenetic pacing beg for a screen adaptation. (June) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

**\*Starred Review\*** Harvard graduate student Connie Godwin is determination personified. She will get her doctorate and find success as a historian, whether her aura-reading mother understands her bookishness or not. But first she has to contend with her tweedy adviser's oddly urgent demands and her late grandmother's incredibly old, long-abandoned house in Marblehead, Massachusetts. The house is cloaked in vines and stuffed with dusty old bottles and books, but its clutter yields a tantalizing scrap of paper carrying the words "Deliverance Dane." Connie hasn't a clue, but the reader knows, thanks to alternating chapters set in the late-seventeenth century, that Deliverance was a good woman accused of being a witch during the infamous Salem witch hysteria. Soon Connie, admirably sensible in the face of mystifying, even terrifying occurrences, zealously searches archives and libraries for healer Deliverance's shadow book, while struggling to understand her own weird, new powers. Historian Howe's spellbinding, vividly detailed, witty, and astutely plotted debut is deeply rooted in her family connection to accused seventeenth-century witches Elizabeth Howe and Elizabeth Proctor and propelled by an illuminating view of witchcraft. In all a keen and magical historical mystery laced with romance and sly digs at society's persistent underestimation of women. --Donna Seaman

In "The Physick Book of Deliverance Dane", Katherine Howe uses the Salem Witch Trials to tell a

story of the legacy of cunning women in history, interweaving historical fact with modern fiction. Though Deliverance Dane was a real person, the scanty records of her existence allow Howe to reimagine her and her role in the trials, demonstrating a knowledge of Salem based on the work of the most eminent historians in the field. Though the historical field has largely moved past Chadwick Hansen's work, Howe reinvents his most outlandish claim (maybe there WERE witches at Salem) as the basis for the more fantastical elements of her story. When discussing Dane's fictional descendants, Howe draws upon the work of other historians, such as Laurel Thatcher Ulrich's groundbreaking monograph, "A Midwife's Tale". The modern-day parts of Howe's story, set in 1991, resemble other stories that reinterpret history for a modern setting, such as Elizabeth Kostova's "The Historian" or Dan Brown's "Angels & Demons". Certain parts of the modern story fall into cliché, such as the skeptic who turns out to have powers, parts of the romantic subplot, and the identity of the modern antagonist, but the historical elements combined with Howe's romanticized portrayal of her protagonist's research are endearing enough that the clichés never grow tiresome. "The Physick Book of Deliverance Dane" will appeal to those interested in the history of Salem or general witchcraft history as well as fans of historical fiction. Howe's writing is an excellent introduction to the academic history of Salem for non-historians and the fantasy elements will entertain even those who do not enjoy history.

This book garnered some attention when initially published, and I clearly recall passing it up on in the bookshop because Salem witches are not a topic that intrigues me. But, when our book club selected this one, I crossed my fingers and started reading. Some of my friends were listening to the audio version, and I could see how this would be perhaps more appealing than just reading it with Howe's inconsistent phonetic spelling of the Boston Brahmin accent in her dialogue. Its use definitely slowed the already ponderous pacing. Howe's prose, in some sections, crossed the line into providing too much detail. It invited the reader to get caught up on inconsistencies (one scene involving a dirty kitchen sink had me reading and re-reading it several times). It reminded me a lot of Elizabeth Kostova's *The Historian*, but with a less skilled protagonist. And though vampires certainly appeared in "new" twists in fiction, the Salem witch trials felt equally overdone to me. Nothing felt new about this book. And though it was easy to see why the author chose this topic (two of her relatives stood accused in the Trials - one even, who makes a cameo in the novel, was condemned to death), the mix of magic and scholarly mystery never flowed together for me. It felt forced and artificial. I never once felt swept into the story and other than the magical dog, I never felt worried or particularly invested in any of the characters' fates. And on the topic of that dog, the book displayed

some abrupt inconsistencies with the perspective. Arlo's viewpoint was used a few times (mostly to avoid romantic scenes, it seemed) and towards the end, even a rat's POV was offered. But, my biggest problem with the book could lay entirely at the feet of this one sentence: "Like a lot of people who are known only by nicknames, Connie tended to forget that she had any connection to that word." As someone who also is known only by a nickname and who is married to someone known only by a nickname, I must attest to the sheer ridiculous convenience of the way that Connie managed to forget her first name for two months (when all along she must have been using it daily on her IDs and signing into all of these rather negatively represented archives and libraries)...I really wanted to like the book, and though I never hated it, its elements never gelled for me. It will be interesting to see what the rest of the book club thought of it, though!

Close to finishing Harvard grad school, Connie Goodwin works on her doctorate dissertation on Colonial New England history and is suddenly interrupted as her free-spirited mother informs her that during her summer off she needs to clean out her deceased grandmother's house. This historical home near Salem needs to be prepared for sale as years of back taxes have gone unpaid. Arriving at the decrepit yet charming 17th century farm house, Connie finds it to be rather quaint, a place where she can do research for the next few months. As she slowly excavates this dilapidated relic she finds an old bible with a rusted iron key hidden inside, and an old scrap of paper with two words on it: Deliverance Dane. Questioning who or what Deliverance Dane could be, her scholarly nature takes over as she begins scouring local libraries and public birth and death records hoping to score a hit as to who Deliverance could be. What link did Connie's grandmother have to the old skeleton key and the name of Deliverance? As Connie uncovers more information, she meets a local steeplejack doing church renovation nearby, a handsome young man named Sam who also has an interest in unearthing history's secrets. Together they get involved in the hunt for Deliverance's story and fall in love during the process. What they unravel is that Deliverance was an excommunicated witch who fell from grace during the time of the Salem Witch Trials in the late 1600s, and that their answers reside in finding Deliverance's book of spells, or her Physick Book. The novel switches back and forth from the 1990s with Connie and Sam on a treasure hunt for the book, to the times of Deliverance and her ancestors as the book is passed from daughter to daughter, allowing Connie in the future to slowly trace it's path. I'm at a loss as to why this book is getting so much hype and is on every book club reading list for discussion. It's not horrible, but not fabulous and certainly nothing to write home about. This method of switching from the future to the past as a literary character hunts for a lost relic, is popular and overdone, and Deliverance Dane travels along with the other novels in

this genre being extremely formulaic and a bit predictable. I found Connie and Sam rather lifeless, and found it is almost inconceivable that Connie, a Harvard grad upon receiving her professorship, can be so clueless and presented as a bit of an airhead. For the short time within the 371 pages that we are allowed to meet Deliverance Dane herself, she too was rather an undeveloped heroine. I do see future promise for the author because the writing, although not overly accomplished, could improve if she continues to write and gets more polished. There were some occasional inconsistencies and typing errors that an editor should have caught, but minor enough so that some readers might not even be aware of them. My main concern with this book is that it strongly lacked excitement, suspense, or drama. If the author had the intention of setting this up as a mystery, she failed in her effort due to the fact that we know who the villain is right from the get-go! The story just plods along at a not too rapid pace and I felt very wishy-washy as I turned the pages rather uninterested. I do have a major gripe however that I feel stands out like a sore thumb, and a might be a very touchy one to other Massachusetts readers. The author employs continual use of the local New England accent. The tendency to drop the Rs and INGs in words is a New England trait in speaking and is heard from in most of the elder generations around Massachusetts. Sometimes the author uses it in dialog and sometimes she doesn't allowing inconsistency, and she just happens to not use it for her character of Catherine the soon-to-be professor, as if she is beyond speaking so lowly. The author indeed presents this manner of speaking as if she is making fun of the New England manner of speech, and as a Massachusetts girl herself, I found this appalling and just not cool. It could have been done without, and in my opinion, was not necessary. I actually found it offensive and not an attractive aspect for a debut author wishing for recognition in this very competitive literary world.

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