

# The devil in the white city: a book review



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

## **The Devil in the White City by Erik Larson**

The devil in the white city concerns a hardly forgettable story that took place in around world's Fair Chicago in 1893. Erik Larson wrote the book, and he brilliantly systematizes the book from event to event and scene to scene with characters that possess diverse behaviors and motives. The author bridges two plot lines and attempts to address some issues that history left untackled. The first plotline focuses on the right, where the character Daniel Burnham who was a competent architect builds the Chicago World's Fair in 1893. The second plotline focuses on the bad, where the author centers on H. H. Holmes, who is a serial killer (Arnold and White 1963)

His friend John Root facilitated the works of Daniel Burnham, the two were young and close associates who gained lots of eminence in Chicago as very competent architects. Root was famous in drawings and plans while Burnham was known best for business affairs. They provided solutions regarding the building of tall and cumbersome structures on the soft or wet sand around Chicago, during the late 19th century. The project was a massive one, and efforts were made to gather a more skilled and competition workforce to complete the work.

The author presents various challenges and opportunities that emerged during the construction process. Death incidents come about during the construction process, including the passing of the key team player John Root, financial problems erupted, the workers complained of long working hours, a deadly storm came to be, and destroyed much of the work that had cost the team a lot of efforts and money. Some global investors intervened to fund

the project. Despite these setbacks, the construction was complete and Burnham improves fair attendance to make profits and settle debts. The success of the building is later hindered by the assassination of Henry Harrison, Chicago's Mayor, which leads to the closing of the fair (Erik Larson 2016).

As the reader keeps following the progress of Daniel Burnham, the second plot line concurrently unfolds. Dr. H. H. Holmes sets up a small pharmaceutical shop, just a few blocks from the construction site in Chicago. Later, Dr. Holmes buys the block-long structures across the street. With his skilled architectural plans, he constructed a death castle and named it The World's Fair Hotel (Erik Larson 2016). The rooms had no windows, and he developed gas line pipes into some rooms where a single switch from his luxurious room could suffocate a victim in that structured room, he also included a crematorium in the underground store and a hidden shaft to transport remains of victims. In the upper floor, he included surgical rooms. Dr. Holmes is portrayed as a handsome and convincing young man, whom several women fell in love with, children also developed a great affection to Dr. Holmes and creditors were convinced with the services he offered (Erik Larson 2016). He took numerous lives of young women who traveled alone to Chicago and sought accommodation in his hotel. He married several women and interacted with various children who vanished without a single trace and surprisingly no one paid attention to these horrific characters until some individuals began to realize just how many people had disappeared after the fair (Walsh and Brian 2001).

The story progress as detective Frank Geyer focuses on the illegitimate activities Dr. Holmes and uncovers several murders that Holmes had conducted in Toronto and across the Midwest. When Holmes discovers that his horrific activities had been brought to light, he flees Chicago and travels to numerous places until he is captured in Philadelphia for insurance fraud.

The author mainly focuses on the construction of the Chicago World Fair and the fair itself. The building process is conducted within a given period, which Burnham and his team players withstood. The author also makes sense with the use of Burnham as the main character who represents the right people in the society and Dr. Holmes who represents the evil and psychopaths. The action of Dr. Holmes together with his house of horror appears untrue, yet it was wholly factual. This incident can be associated with Jack the Ripper and Dahmer, which also involves serial killing. The book draws the reader into moments of majesty and magic, with characters including Susan B. Anthony, Buffalo Bill, Archduke Francis Thomas Edison and so forth. The concepts of mystery, romance, determination and hard work during the ancient time are well depicted like never before. The city of Chicago was flocked with numerous travelers in 1893 despite the several accidents and the sinking economy. The author also points out unlawful activities in the history, which include serial killing and houses modified for murder cases that go unnoticed for quite an extended period.

The author seems not to have utilized the element of dialogue in the book. The book, therefore, lacks that superb interest and suspense in the reader's mind. However, a detailed analysis of the works of Erick Larson indicates that the book was intensively researched, and it included an excellent inclusion of

<https://assignbuster.com/the-devil-in-the-white-city-a-book-review/>

the American history and a collection of true mystery and crime, which is Don Wismer, Wayne ME, Cary Memorial Lib and so forth. The government, non-governmental, private sector partners, community, individuals' relevant security agencies of the state, local, tribal, territorial prolonged their responsibilities to install safety measures or information that could help to save the lives of the women and children who were killed in cold blood (Arnold and White 1963)

. The book mainly surrounds the good and evil that surround the lives of the architect and the serial killer during the 1893 Chicago's World Fair. The author systematically bounces back and forth with the lives of the major characters utilizing the concept of flashback. The author also introduces brilliant comments during or after an event, which draws the reader to required conclusion or enables him or her to give the event a wider view. During the introductory part, the author presents a tone that foretells the numerous setbacks and deaths that yet to come in the novel. For instance, the sorrowful Titanic death of Millet during the introduction and an evaluation of Burnham's relationship with Millet foreshowed the upcoming events.

A critical assessment of Erik Larson's work indicates that the author follows the lead provided by literature. For instance, the book has various aspects that match Harper Lee's work *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *The Outsiders* by S. E. Hilton (McAdams and Richard 2008). By mimicking the works of prominent authors, Larson can full cycle of historical events. Moreover, the use of contrasting characters enables the author to depict his theme, good and evil clearly (Jay and Gregory 2015, Straight et al 2014).

The author considers the historical events that transpired around Chicago and the entire nation. He presents contrasting characters and activities, which draws the reader to compare them and draw a significant conclusion. He introduces the central theme of sanity and insanity and other ideas like modernity and anonymity, ego and cooperation, men and women and the difference between American patriotism and civic pride. He utilizes events and characters to present the behavior that we witness in our daily lives. For instance, he succeeds in making the actions of Dr. Holmes appear terrifying with a detailed elaboration of his slaughterhouse, pretence, and high convincing power. Holmes sells the remains of his victims to medical schools and gains significant returns. The role of government to provide security and protect Chicago citizens is clearly demanding. The authors match various horrifying historical events, for instance, the trail of tears that involved the relocation of the Native Americans from their native land to India. The event exposed many victims to diseases and death. The author also relates the horrifying events that followed the Dred Scott decision in 1857 by the US Supreme Court, which encouraged slavery and suffering

The author seems to visit the gateway to link up two eventful situations that that were seemingly left undone. They are projected in the two plot lines of the literary presentation of the book between the right and the bad. The main attribute presented is a positive bridge between the right and the bad in the plotlines. The positivity aspect is centered on dialogue as the solution to the projected evil that he points out in the context. This projects a good combination of his artistic works materials to endure the presentation of the main themes in the book, (Jay and Gregory 2015).

## References

Arnold, Bruce and W. J. White. 1963. " The Devil You Know". *Books Abroad* 37 (1): 82. doi: 10. 2307/40117511.

" Erik Larson". 2016. *The Devil In The White City* . <https://d3jc3ahdjad7x7.cloudfront.net/BDwgPngiFs9Q45UsRD5q9VEMGcUvC1XbLvISJjA939JSxTpr.pdf>.

Jay, Gregory. 2015. " Queer Children And Representative Men: Harper Lee, Racial Liberalism, And The Dilemma Of To Kill A Mockingbird". *Am Lit Hist* 27 (3): 487-522. doi: 10. 1093/alh/ajv023.

McAdams, Richard H, 2008. " Empathy And Masculinity In Harper Lee's To Kill A Mockingbird". *SSRN Electronic Journal* . doi: 10. 2139/ssrn. 2646066.

Straight, Bilinda, Ivy Pike, Charles Hilton, and Matthias Oesterle. 2014. " Suicide In Three East African Pastoralist Communities And The Role Of Researcher Outsiders For Positive Transformation: A Case Study". *Cult Med Psychiatry* 39 (3): 557-578. doi: 10. 1007/s11013-014-9417-4.

Walsh, Brian. 2001. " The White Devil (Review)". *Theatre Journal* 53 (3): 499-501. doi: 10. 1353/tj. 2001. 0092.