



The House of Hawthorne

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From the bestselling author of *Hemingway's Girl* comes a novel that explores the unlikely marriage between celebrated novelist Nathaniel Hawthorne and accomplished artist Sophia Peabody—a forgotten woman in history who inspired one of the greatest writers of American literature.

As a sensitive, artistic young woman, Sophia Peabody is discouraged from pursuing a woman's traditional roles of marriage and motherhood. But from their first meeting, she and Nathaniel Hawthorne begin an intense romantic partnership. Together, they cross continents, raise children, and experience all the beauty and tragedy of life fully lived. Sophia's vivid journals and masterful paintings inspire Nathaniel's writing. But their children's needs and personal losses fuel a perennial tug-of-war between Sophia's domestic duties and her own desires.

Spanning the years from the 1830s to the Civil War, and moving from Massachusetts to England, Portugal, and Italy, *The House of Hawthorne* explores the story of a woman, forgotten by history, who inspired one of the greatest writers of American literature...

Readers Guide Included

The House of Hawthorne Details

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Author : Erika Robuck

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From Reader Review The House of Hawthorne for online ebook

Sarah says

It's just so saccharine - completely focused on how wonderful and perfect the love between Nathaniel and Sophia was, with the result that any events with real potential for drama and conflict (the Hawthornes' money worries, Sophia's attempts to balance being a mother and an artist, Nathaniel's discomfort with female self-expression, Elizabeth's jealousy at Nathaniel being romantically interested in her sister and not her) are brushed over. The closest it gets to being moving is when Una nearly dies of malaria. And after a while, this refusal to face any of the negative aspects of life in detail becomes really dull. It's not that I want to read something depressing, it's that all lives have light and shade, and all people have flaws.

Perhaps because of this, the characterisation is very thin; apart from Sophia (who seems lively and passionate, but also jealous and petulant), everyone else is characterised in broad strokes. Hawthorne is reserved, with a playful side that only Sophia sees; Julian is energetic; Una is tempestuous and then frail; Rose has visions; Emerson is intellectual at the expense of his feelings; Margaret Fuller is blunt and headstrong.

Worst of all is Herman Melville - who, as portrayed here, is emotionally volatile and obsessed with Hawthorne in a way that makes Sophia uncomfortable. (oh, and so many of the things he says are awkwardly reworded quotes from Hawthorne and his Mosses; as if the Hawthornes weren't aware of that essay!) That Melville was volatile I'll give you; likewise that his feelings for Hawthorne were intense; but Sophia, like all the Hawthornes, was struck by what a genuinely good and likeable person he was. This is the real Sophia's actual opinion of him; and there's nothing to suggest that she found him a threat to her marriage or a burden on her domestic happiness. The two of them, if anything, seem to have got along well. While you're allowed some license in writing about real people, why so completely misrepresent what actually happened? (especially when I know she's read Patricia Dunlavy Valente's biography of Sophia, who stresses how well the three of them fit together, to the point where you can virtually see <3 OT3 <3 written in the margins!)

That thinness extends to the writing style as well; it's reasonably period-appropriate, but doesn't feel quite like how real people from the 19th century expressed themselves.

Ultimately, because of its lack of depth in emotion or characterisation, I don't feel like I've gained anything from reading this that I couldn't have got from a biography, of either Nathaniel or Sophia. Where historical fiction adds to biography is its ability to imagine feelings and motives, to create emotional truth beyond fact, and by those lights this book isn't successful. If you're interested in the Hawthornes, read the novels, read the correspondence, and read the biographies - but this book isn't worth the effort.

Erika Robuck says

Dear Reader,

When Nathaniel and Sophia Hawthorne bewitched me through their etchings on the window glass of their first residence together, the Old Manse, in Concord, Massachusetts, I became obsessed with those passionate artists, and what they both gained and lost to lead lives of domesticity.

While reading her Cuba journal, I felt Sophia Peabody assert herself as my narrator: the keeper of the Hawthorne story. As is often the case, history recognizes the one who had the most fame, who is traditionally the man. Like other stories of artists and their spouses, the one without the attention is often a large and dynamic influence on the work of the one who is well known.

With each novel, I seek to challenge myself in a new way. In *THE HOUSE OF HAWTHORNE* I have attempted to take on the voice of Sophia Peabody Hawthorne to tell the story of what creatives give up for love, and how some artists are never at home on the earth. I do hope I did Sophia and her dear family justice.

Sincerely,
Erika Robuck

Paula Cappa says

A lovely story and insightful peek into the personal lives of Nathaniel and Sophia Hawthorne. We get an intimate look at the woman behind the man, a woman who struggled with migraines and gave up her art for home and family. Ninety percent of the story is told as a flashback: courtship, marriage, children, travel, Nathaniel's struggles to write, and visits from Emerson, Channing, Margaret Fuller, Thoreau, and others. This is an enchanting historical ride in 19th-century Concord, Cuba, and Europe. Robuck's writing is saturated with poetic images. Sophia certainly gushes with love for her husband and even names the early years of their marriage at the Old Manse as 'their Eden.' "Even in our Eden days, the stain of death spilled like crimson ink over the clean, white pages of our lives." A highly emotional and romantic account. Robuck handles this territory with the utmost grace. I especially liked Robuck's chapter on Martha Hunt. Let me also say that I was partial to this book before even starting it because I have written about Hawthorne at the Old Manse; I love anything historical about Concord writers of that era. I received this book free via NetGalley (NetGalley's ebook technically failed to produce quotation marks and had instead m-dashes and parallel lines to indicate dialogue. What a mess. Not happy with that distraction at all).

Lolly K Dandeneau says

This is the story of Nathaniel and Sophia Hawthorne. Sophia was lucky to be the daughter of parents who allowed her to be a thinker rather than just a man's silly wife. The time she spends in Cuba is painful and her first love awakening as we learn early in the story. The feelings of anger and horror the sisters feel as they witness the nature of slavery in Cuba convey to the reader that Sophia was ahead of her time. We learn early on that Sophia is a gifted artist, but also suffers from bad headaches- her health troubles. When her sister Elizabeth meets the handsome, talented author Nathaniel and has a hard time getting him to open up, her sister steps in and steals his heart forever, but take heart- it was inevitable.

While they interacted with great artists of their time the two preferred their solitude, which made them so perfectly well matched. With their poverty the song 'All You Need is Love' circled my mind, because they lived off their passion for each other. I didn't like Nathaniel's sisters from the start, he was an upstanding son and brother- putting aside so much of his desires to care for his family but that wasn't so unusual during the times. I have a love hate with historical fiction, particularly as some authors turn a famous historical figure into a caricature. This isn't the case in *The House of Hawthorne*. I loved both Sophia and Nathaniel in this telling of their love, both are complex human beings. I feel even if you aren't a fan of Hawthorne or keen on

historical fiction it would still be a lovely read.

Laura Lee says

Nathaniel Hawthorne and his wife. Was so interested in reading because I know nothing about the author of The Scarlet Letter and it is one of my favorite books. I realize this is historical fiction but Robuck is well versed in adding so much truth to her stories. Found much of the book heartbreaking. His wife Sophia is an artist but suffers headaches when she creates and Hawthorne does not have much confidence in himself. They live a hand to mouth existence through most of their marriage. But it's a beautiful relationship, as they love each other very much.

Great read, went by quickly. Robuck has become a favorite author of mine. I would recommend this book to any historical fiction lover.

Albert says

I will preface my review of The House of Hawthorne by Erika Robuck by admitting freely that I do not read romance novels. I read historic novels. I read erotica. But I do not read romantic novels. I don't enjoy them, I don't as a general rule...get them. So it is with some surprise and considerable joy that I say, for every rule there is an exception and for me The House of Hawthorne is that exception!

Sophia Peabody suffered horribly from an early age from terrible headaches, what we would consider to be migraines today. Being raised in the early 1800s, she was taught early on not to follow the traditional roles for a woman during those times. Sophia was an artist, but her headaches made her into an invalid, unable to rise from bed due to the pain. She is sent with her sister to Cuba, in hopes that the climate would do her health good. She prospers but also, while on the sugar can plantation, witnesses first hand the horrors of slavery and the beatings and broken families that the slaves suffer.

Sophia returns to Massachusetts but the images of the Caribbean island never leave her, the beauty and injustice. She is determined to one day fight for those whose lives have seen so much injustice. Like her sisters, she lives a life most women of the time do not. She does not pine for a husband, but for what she alone can do. Until one day...

"...My head pains continue to plague me, and since my youngest brother Wellington has died of yellow fever, I find it hard to go through the motions of living, and spend many hours in this hammock.

'Hush, hush,' she says, breathless with excitement, her face glowing like a happy specter from the candle she carries. 'You must come downstairs.'

'Why?'

'Because a man who makes Lord Byron look plain as paste sits in our parlor, flanked by his two dour sisters.' Elizabeth has a tendency to exaggerate when her intellect is aroused. I am doubtful.

'It is the reclusive writer,' she continues, 'The mysterious one who penned those intensely fascinating Twice Told Tales...'

Sophia is about to meet the man who will change all her perceptions of what her life was to be. The man who would become her husband and the one true love that would rise above all else. The writer, Nathaniel Hawthorne. The intense love affair that follows chronicles the struggle and poverty the two go through as

Hawthorne fights for recognition for his writing. For Sophia the struggle is to maintain her self and her art as the responsibilities of a wife and mother intrude upon her life. More so are the condemnations she receives from friends and family as she dedicates more of herself to her husband and her children. But the love affair between Nathaniel Hawthorne and Sophia Peabody is not the norm for its time. Nathaniel, though in need of Sophia's love and care, does not want her to give up her art and supports her to continue with it. But can she? For she also finds that being the wife and mother in the House of Hawthorne to be a joy as well.

The House of Hawthorne is the story of the lives and love of Sophia Peabody and her husband, arguably the greatest and most important American writer of the 1800s. It is also the tale of a woman who learns that with sacrifice and love, she can have and be it all.

A wonderfully written novel that should not be missed.

Rebecca says

We often resent books we're forced to read in school, but *The Scarlet Letter* wasn't like that for me. Even though it was assigned reading for high school, I could instantly sense how important it was in the history of American literature. The tragic story of Hester Prynne and her judgmental community is one that stays with me half a lifetime later. I reread it in college for a Hawthorne & Melville course, for which I also read *The Blithedale Romance*, *The House of the Seven Gables*, and several of Nathaniel Hawthorne's best short stories.

My more-than-average interest in Hawthorne, combined with my love of historical fiction about "famous wives," meant that I was eager to read Erika Robuck's latest. She's made a name for herself with novels about some of history's famous women, including Zelda Fitzgerald, Edna St. Vincent Millay and one of the Hemingway wives, but somehow I've never read anything by her until now.

"Time flies over us, but leaves its shadow behind."
(from Hawthorne's *The Marble Faun*)

The novel is from the first-person perspective of Sophia Peabody, later the wife of Nathaniel Hawthorne. The Peabodys were an artistic, intellectual family who encouraged Sophia to cultivate her talent as a painter and sculptor, but illness often held her back: she suffered from debilitating headaches and turned to morphine and mesmerism for relief. The story begins and ends in the spring of 1864, when Nathaniel, suffering from a stomach ailment, sets off on a final journey without Sophia. In between these bookends, the novel spans the 1830s through the 1860s, taking in Sophia's sojourn in Cuba as a young woman, her and Nathaniel's courtship, and the challenges of parenthood and making a living from art.

My favorite portions of the novel were set in Concord, Massachusetts, that haven for writers and Transcendentalists. Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau and Herman Melville all play minor roles. It's especially amusing to see Melville, Hawthorne's ardent admirer, overstep the boundaries of polite society and become an irksome stalker. What I did not realize from previous biographical reading about the Hawthornes is that they nearly always struggled for money. They rented Emerson's uncle's house in Concord but were evicted when they fumbled to make payments. Nathaniel's jobs in the Custom House and as the U.S. Consul in Liverpool (appointed by President Franklin Pierce, who was a personal friend and whose biography he wrote) were undertaken out of financial desperation rather than interest.

The Hawthornes' time in Europe was another highlight of the novel for me. They encounter the Brownings and finally get a chance to see all the Italian art that has inspired Sophia over the years. Their oldest daughter, Una, also falls ill with malaria, which provides some great dramatic scenes in later chapters. I warmed to this late vision of Sophia as a devoted mother, whereas I struggled to accept her as a vibrant young woman and a randy wife. Her constant complaints about headaches are annoying, and I wasn't convinced that the Cuba chapters were relevant to the novel as a whole; Robuck tries to link Sophia's observations of slavery there with the abolitionist sentiments of the 1860s, but Sophia's devotion to the antislavery cause was only ever half-hearted, so I didn't believe the experience in Cuba could have affected her that deeply. Her unconsummated lust for Fernando is also, I suppose, meant to prefigure her abiding passion for Nathaniel – which is described in frequent, cringe-worthy sex scenes and flowery lines like “In his gaze, I feel our souls rise up to meet each other.”

Ultimately, my disconnection from Sophia as narrator meant that I would prefer to read about the Hawthornes in biographies, of which there are plenty. Two novels I would recommend that incorporate many of the same historical figures are *Miss Fuller* by April Bernard and *What Is Visible* by Kimberly Elkins (about the deaf-blind Laura Bridgman – who has a tiny cameo here). *Beautiful Fools* by R. Clifton Spargo uses a Cuba setting to better effect in telling the story of Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald's last holiday. I preferred all three of these to *The House of Hawthorne*. However, I'm certainly up for trying more of Robuck's fiction.

(Originally published with images at my blog, Bookish Beck.)

Julie says

My Review for *The House of Hawthorne* will be featured on Romancing the Book Blog later this month-April 2015. To read the review for this book, and many other insightful reviews on this blog, visit-
<http://www.romancingthebookblog.com>

Pam Jenoff says

Have you read this remarkable account of Sophia Peabody, an artist in her own right, who inspired Nathaniel Hawthorne? Robuck has written a captivating story of their tumultuous relationship, as well as Peabody's internal and external struggles, against the background of an important period of American history.

?Karen says

A revealing glimpse into the lives of struggling author Nathaniel Hawthorne and his wife Sophia, his Dove. Sophia, an artist, tells us of their long courtship, their marriage in a time when they struggled financially, the sadness of losing a child, while remaining hopeful nevertheless, and of her many health issues.

Love and hope were what they lived on in those early years before Nathaniel was given any real payment for his writing. How Nathaniel and Sophia both dealt with their individual talents' ebb and flow felt so genuine and intimate, thanks to Robuck's ability with words. I could understand how an artist's environment and

social dealings can affect his/her inspirations and aspirations alike. These two were meant for each other, and I am thankful to NetGalley and the publisher for sharing with me their beautiful, although heartbreaking, love story.

Sarah says

This book's greatest strength was the characters. Personalities shine with distinction, and every character's voices ring with truth and vitality. I loved that I could truly know these people, they were that three-dimensional. Extreme shyness, passion about art, sacrifice for family, and jealousy over missed opportunities all make an appearance to create the framework for our characters.

I especially enjoyed the main character, Sophia. Her struggle to balance her growing family's demands and to create her art drove the story. I liked that even though she couldn't have both in the full measure that she wanted, she found contentment in what she had and experienced the joy that that brings. I found her to be just a shining example of how well this author pulled off the characterization card.

I also really enjoyed the relationship between Nathan and Sophia. From the beginning, they have this intense connection that I as a reader felt in my bones. These two had the feel of soul mates to me which the author pulled off very well. Nathan and Sophia balanced each other out, with varying personality types but with the same drive towards their art and family.

The author did a fantastic job in creating a vivid look at mid-19th century life in a way that her readers experienced the setting, not just read about it. The settings were as varied as plantation-rich Cuba, stark industrial urban Britain, and the bucolic peace of rural east coast America. The author's research on details from the time period show through in her descriptions of the rising tension towards slavery and the intimate details of early Victorian life.

This novel was my first introduction of Robuck, and I felt like it was a fantastic one. She blew me away with her superb characters, beautiful relationships, and careful attention to details and scene setting. This was one of the books I was most looking forward to in the coming year, and I am extremely happy I was able to experience it early. Definitely look into this one if you enjoy historical fiction and living the past.

Note: Book received for free from the publisher in exchange for an honest review via Good Reads First Reads program.

Heather Webb says

Lyrical, intriguing, romantic. Robuck, once again, weaves a fascinating tale between a well-known character and those who love him. I found myself particularly drawn to the way Sophia balances her artistic yearnings with her love of family and her understanding of duty in the best sense. The lives we lead are art in themselves. Lovely and moving, and very realistic, especially for the times.

Kristie Kelty says

I entered to win this book in a Goodreads giveaway and was excited when I won. As an English teacher I spent 10 years teaching *The Scarlet Letter* and was curious to learn about the personal life of its author. At first I was not sure if I was going to enjoy the novel, but as I got into the story I found it difficult to put down. Not only did I enjoy learning about the life of this great author, but appreciated the mentioning of other great writers and how their lives crossed paths with Hawthorne. I feel Robuck does a fantastic job depicting the personality and lifestyle of this complex man. In a way, her story provides an understanding of the mind that created the great novels I have enjoyed reading. In addition, I especially enjoyed the voice of his wife, Sophia, whom I knew little about before reading this novel. Having her perspective in the story allows the reader to feel he/she is getting an intimate portrayal of Hawthorne.

Diane S ? says

3.5 My favorite parts of this novel were those when Emerson, Thoreau and Margaret Fuller, even Franklin Pierce makes a modest appearance, were in the story. Never knew nor would I have thought that despite his black moods Hawthorne was such a romantic. Parts of this book were absolutely fascinating, but parts for me at least dragged. Could never really attach myself to Sophie as the sole narrator. She tended to go over and over the same things many, many times. This broke up the story for me, yet there is much to admire for those fascinated with this time period and these amazing people.

Angela M says

I have to confess that *The Scarlet Letter* is the only thing I have read by Nathaniel Hawthorne and that I knew very little about his personal life . Yet I was intrigued enough to want to read this book when I read about his loving and dedicated relationship with his wife Sophia. This is exactly what was portrayed in this novel and I thoroughly enjoyed it. It is narrated in the first person by Sophia Peabody , an artist who falls in love with Hawthorne and eventually becomes his wife .

I really liked the writing - especially in the beginning with the beautiful descriptions of the landscape , flowers and birds in Cuba where Sophia and her sister stay with family friends in hopes that she will be cured of her constant headaches.

We are privy to Sophia's thoughts of and feelings about her art and what she would want in a perfect relationship. Nathaniel seems to meet her wants and desires from the first moment they meet. Their lives are not without hard times , loss of loved ones , financial difficulties and artistic struggles , moving from place to place in Massachusetts and to Europe. Sophia helps us know of Hawthorne's struggles at times to write and how he'd much rather be alone or with her than in social settings. She , too struggles with her art and pretty much gives it up to care for her children, a relevant dilemma for women today as well .

I was engaged in their story and loved the appearances of some of Hawthorne's friends - Henry David Thoreau, Ralph Waldo Emerson , Henry Longfellow. I should read another Hawthorne book . Maybe it will be *The House of Seven Gables* which I bought s number of years ago when I visited the house in Salem .

I recommend it if you are interested in the life of Nathaniel Hawthorne or would just like to read a lovely love story .

Thanks to PENGUIN GROUP Berkley, NAL / Signet Romance, DAW and NetGalley.
