



Hexenhaus

Nikki McWatters

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In 1628, Veronica and her brother flee for their lives into the German woods after their father is burned at the stake.

At the dawn of the eighteenth century, Scottish maid Katherine is lured into political dissent after her parents are butchered for their beliefs.

In present-day Australia, Paisley navigates her way through the burning torches of small-town gossip after her mother's new-age shop comes under scrutiny.

Hexenhaus Details

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Author : Nikki McWatters

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From Reader Review Hexenhaus for online ebook

Bron says

I enjoyed it this so much! I've read a few things on witch hunts/trials this year and loved this set of three stories with different but connected takes on it. And to see how the hysteria can take hold in today's world was so interesting too.

Benjamin Black says

I sat down the other night to read a few chapters of this whilst on holidays and then magically it was 4am and I had finished it! I just couldn't put it down. I have traversed our pale blue dot to Scotland, Germany and even Bundanoon too and these wonderful witchy words instantly transported me back to all of these fantastic places. The plight of these three young and strong women grabs hold of you tightly and doesn't let go until the very end. The way that the author decided to cycle through the three girls tales every chapter was devilishly smart and part of the reason I just couldn't stop. I would highly recommend this to everyone especially if you are interested in the witch hunts of old as this book is actually very factual. Fingers crossed for a sequel!

Maria Lewis says

I loved this so much. I usually struggle with books that jump between different characters each chapter - even if it's just three characters like in Hexenhaus - because I get deeply involved in one character's story over the others and get annoyed by being constantly pulled out of it. With this, each woman at the centre of her story was so interesting and so different from the last, I found myself excited to start a new chapter each time because I loved each character so much. The historical settings - Germany and Scotland specifically - were so well researched it felt really immersive, but at the same time there were tweaks to make it more readable and work story-wise, which I really liked. My favourite element was the theme of sisterhood running throughout: how women have found strength in times when they've historical had none and used that to hold each other up and pull each other through. There is real, legitimate power in girl magic. Hexenhaus was one of my favourite reads of 2016 and something I will definitely be passing on to my coven sisters.

Charley Rose says

I couldn't put it down and read it one sitting. The writing and characters pulled you in from the first confronting and intriguing line. I felt as if I was there with each of the three girls in the book and found myself wanting to get back to each one at the end of each chapter. The book is such a clever commentary on the effects of mass hysteria and what fear can drive people to do. I especially loved Veronica and all of the characters in her storyline and found myself crying at the airport where I was reading the book numerous times throughout reading. A really good read. Please write a sequel! :-)

Calzean says

An interesting book.

Three stories featuring young 18 year oldish women. Veronica in 1628 in Germany, Scottish Katherine in 1696 and Paisley in modern day Southern Highlands NSW.

All stories revolve around witchcraft, young love, betrayal, abuse of power, prejudice, the impact of small mindedness and the inherent dangers of being powerless.

For YA readers, a book to discuss.

Henry IX says

I loved everything about this book: the story, the characters, the prose, the intelligence in the writing. I laughed so much and was so enthralled the whole time. Definitely will follow this author from now on

Lily says

“By fear and by terror she has been possessed” I agreed. ‘And the poor girl looks for the cause in the only things her little eyes can see: us, those around her who are different’”

‘Hexenhaus’ is a work of historical fiction exploring the witch trials across Early Modern Europe and the psychology that perpetuates such horrific acts. The story weaves together the lives of three teenage girls from different periods in history – 17th Century Germany, 18th Century Scotland and modern day country town Australia – who are each condemned by their communities for witchcraft. A surprisingly thoughtful, nuanced and powerful read, the author examines the hysteria that led to the persecution of thousands of people, primarily women, during these witch hunts, and contrasts this with how such a mentality translates into the contemporary day.

This is such a sadly poignant and haunting story, in parts quite difficult and painful to read, that is ultimately about fear culture, social conscience and the excuses that are used in order to other and oppress those who are different. Well written, compelling and incredibly confronting, this book does so much with the subject matter. It is a deeply relevant story, despite the historical setting, with important parallels to modern attitudes that cleverly examines the danger of unjustified mistrust and hatred that leads society to accuse and persecute innocent minorities. Whilst I found the beginning a little slow, the dark atmosphere coupled with an undercurrent of tension, danger, paranoia and suspicion draws you deep into the story. The use of alternating perspectives worked really well, making it impossible not to become invested in each characters harrowing and horrifyingly real experiences, and I really adored the way the theme of sisterhood was layered throughout the story.

Immersive, gut-wrenching and intelligent, ‘Hexenhaus’ is a disturbing yet fascinating look at an important part of history from the perspective of three strong, brave, loyal and determined young women. Well worth the read.

TW: torture/violence, some ableist language (regarding mental illness) and use of a potentially harmful racial slur ('gypsies') that is not unpacked in text.

Disclaimer: I received a free unsolicited copy of the book from the publisher in exchange for an honest review.

Tanya Grech Welden says

Well done Nikki McWatters, you just succeeded in bundling everything I love about YA fiction in 331 pages!

As you can probably gather I am quite excited about this title. A delectable combination of 15th Century European History and Contemporary fiction, I was riveted to the book from the first page. Told in alternating narration Hexenhaus tells the story of Veronica, from 1628 Bamerg, Franconia (in what is modern Germany), Katherine, from 1696 Scotland and Paisley from present day Bunadoon, Australia. The three share a commonality, their names inscribed in a single book, the Systir Saga, a volume which binds them together in a witchy sisterhood that transcends generations, hailing back to early pagan society. With a powerful mix of historical truth and fiction, McWatters weaves the lives of the women together through their shared experiences of persecution and journey of self-discovery.

From the outset, as a text aimed at a YA audience, I think this works magnificently. Paisley's narration effectively grounds the story in the here and now and will appeal to many teen readers, drawn to stories that speak to their own experiences. As a contrast to this, the narrations of Katherine and Veronica add a historical depth to the tale that is intriguing and highly evocative of the period explored. I challenge anyone to read this story without feeling drawn (at the very least) to read further into the history of the Grand Inquisition.

With obvious parallels to Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* and Arthur Miller's magnificent play *The Crucible*, Hexenhaus is perfectly suited for use with senior secondary students. Used independently, or as a shared text, it is a story that will certainly inspire important discussions about modern society, while complementing a historical exploration of the Grand Inquisition, witchcraft through the ages and life and society in 15th century Europe.

Hexenhaus is much more than a tale about witches and witchcraft. It is a story which examines the notion of evil masquerading in the guise of good, the evolution of mass paranoia and hysteria, all the while celebrating the indomitable feminine strength and triumph of the human spirit. Hexenhaus succeeds in its mission to unveil historical truths that must never be forgotten all the while speaking to a contemporary YA audience in a voice that they will understand.

Tanya Grech Welden

Jeann (Happy Indulgence) says

This review was originally posted on Happy Indulgence. Check it out for more reviews!

Three women, from three different timeframes have only one thing in common - they are condemned for being witches. From 17th Century Germany, to 18th Century Europe, and modern day Australia in a small regional town, we hear from Veronica, Katherine and Paisley. They are each teenage girls with their own

hopes and dreams, from worrying about their family, to survival, and the persecution that they experience.

What's immediately evident are the different voices that are given to each girl, which felt authentic to the time period - from the more formal, olden day setting to modern day Aussie English and slang. I was able to pick up which of the characters I was reading at any one time, even though the chapters were extremely short.

Reading Hexenhaus was like reading three different stories in one, with key elements that ran parallel to each other. From their relative innocence before being condemned, to torture and persecution, to the road after everything's been said and done, their stories went in three rapidly different directions. Aside from Paisley, I didn't know whether Veronica or Katherine were going to escape their circumstances because of how severe the charges were laid against them.

From learning about Hexenhaus, a German witch house built to torture young women, the horrific torture devices that were used and the sheer horror these women felt at what had happened, Hexenhaus was a dark and harrowing experience about witchcraft in the 17-18th century. It was evident that you didn't need to really do anything suspicious to be blacklisted as a witch - you just needed to be in the wrong place, at the wrong time to endure these unspeakable events.

There's a strong theme of sexism running through the story, where the fate of many young women were decided from men along. At one stage, a male condemns one of the girls for intentionally beguiling him and casting a spell on him. Another women is blamed for a kid 'seeing spirits' which was sent after them. It was frustrating to see how these women could simply not defend themselves against such accusations, and it's easy to see how far these rumours and accusations can spread like wildfire, causing the townspeople to spiral out of control.

While I was invested in Veronica and Katherine's stories, I had trouble connecting to Paisley who probably had the least interesting perspective. She's defending her mother, the town's fortune teller from being accused as a witch. Perhaps it was done intentionally to illustrate how unfair these accusations were, but I had trouble believing that a kid repeatedly chanting her name was good enough to condemn her from the town. Paisley's perspective was also quite out of place, given the historical settings of the rest of the book.

Hexenhaus provided a fascinating side-by-side glimpse into 17th-18th century witch accusations and today's rumour mill. From witchy persecutions to the strong sexism vibe and how little "witchcraft" there actually was in the novel, it offers more of a historical perspective on witches. While I had trouble connecting to some of the characters, the interchanging chapters and stories kept the story moving.

I received a review copy from the publisher in exchange for an honest review.

Cass Moriarty says

Hexenhaus (UQP 2016) is a fictionalised tale of witchcraft anchored on true events, by author Nikki McWatters, who has woven together three different tales, based on three young women living in very different times. In 1628, after their parents are burnt at the stake for their beliefs, Veronica and her brother Hans flee into the safety and anonymity of the woods in Germany. Tainted by their family's reputation, Veronica begins to discover her own healing power. In 1696, in Scotland, Katherine is pursued as a witch

after a child in her care exhibits strange behaviour. And in present day Australia, teenage Paisley struggles to deal with her new-age hippy mum who runs an alternative healing shop and is blamed for the disappearance of a boy she had counselled. Paisley's absent dad shows up and things get a little weird.

This is YA fiction, although the themes and historical accounts of torture and deprivation are visceral and authentic, and may not be suitable for younger readers. But for adolescents, this book offers a tantalising and dark exploration of the origin of the term 'witch-hunt', and depicts how real life historical characters were caught up in the religious and pious fervour of the day. McWatters cleverly transposes this with alternating chapters of the present day, with a mirrored view of how 'witches' (ie anyone alternative or different) might be perceived and treated. The book could almost be three separate stories combined. First we have a chapter from Veronica's perspective, then from Katherine and finally from Paisley, and this continues throughout. And while the girls are each from very different circumstances and times, their journeys progress with somewhat similar challenges and difficulties. Each of them must confront the fear and persecution of the political and religious beliefs of the day. Each faces prejudice and gossip. And despite the very different times in which they live, each has a strong connection to family and loved ones, each values loyalty and trust, each faces betrayal. Veronica, Katherine and Paisley each have a romance attached to their narrative also, and it is somehow so gratifying to read about three young women from such different lives who nevertheless share the same feelings, doubts, hopes and dreams.

On one level, this is an historical novel based on solid research about the European witch-hunt trials and the trauma of that time. But on another level, it draws parallels with modern Australian life, and with the current zeitgeist of the embracing of difference versus the fear and panic of the unknown or unfamiliar.

I was drawn into each of the girls' stories. I found the two historical stories compelling and fascinating, rich with detail of the time, very descriptive and full of sensory elements. Paisley's tale added a regular and welcome light relief to the book – her story is relatable and funny, and provides an opportunity to escape from the darker sections of Veronica and Katherine's lives. But I think what McWatters has done really well is to highlight the similarities between these young women, not in the particulars of their situations, but in the broad brushstrokes of how they are seen by the world, how they represent themselves, how they fight for what they believe to be right and true, how they suffer for their beliefs, and the loyalty they show to those they love. They may live centuries apart, but their circumstances – their hurts and disappointments, their small successes and achievements, their dreams – transcend time. This book is such a great way to demonstrate how our differences unite us, how history is real and being made all the time. It shows the similarities of these girls' lives, despite the years and countries separating them. If you have a young person interested in witchcraft, this is an enthralling read that also satisfies with plenty of historical accuracy and facts. And it is perhaps a timely lesson about intolerance and misinformation, misunderstandings and folklore, prejudice and fear.

Tamsin says

HEXENHAUS is a beautifully written story that completely surpassed my expectations. I totally fell in love with the characters of Veronica, Katherine and Paisley (I loved that name!).

The book is told from the point of view of three young women spanning four hundred years, all facing persecution and the accusation of witchcraft.

The stories begin in Franconia and take readers through the midlands of Scotland to the Australian town of Bundanoon. The three story threads are a powerful rendering of the struggles faced by women in a world that treats them very unfairly. The writing is breath-taking but it is the writer's empathy for her characters and her ability to invoke strong emotions in the reader that make this a novel to read and savour. The fairy-tale

elements of the Franconia story were gorgeous, the scenes in the Hexenhaus, gut-wrenching and the modern tale was very obviously a parallel to contemporary issues of the hysteria around certain minority groups! It was clever and subtle.

I am a fierce critic of bad endings in books but this one left me gasping and physically moved to tears and I immediately wanted to read the whole book again.

Highly recommended if you like historical fiction (it was based on real people and events) and good story-telling....

Stephanie says

I couldn't put it down once I started to read it. This was a brilliant book, and I think any girl or woman of every age will find themselves swept along with Nikki's wonderful prose. She manages to carry you along through the three different ages so the girls Veronica, Katherine and Paisley come alive in your imagination. You will feel their terror and pain and for two of them the sweet release from their anguish.

Trisha says

Three and a half stars rounded up. The three narratives are told in alternating chapters - Veronica, Katherine, then Paisley. These are very short and it was disconcerting to have to jump from story line to story line so abruptly. Half way through, I changed to reading straight through each girl's story, and found that much better.

There is a lot of sadness and injustice, and misery, which is difficult to read, especially when in hindsight, we know how corrupt and ridiculous witch-burning was (is).

Careful plotting means there are subtle links between what appears to be three distinct stories from three time periods and places.

Kate McNally says

I have always been fascinated by the witch stories from the Middle Ages and rate *The Crucible* as one of my favourite reads. THIS BOOK WAS SUBLIME! I was transfixed from the first page and could not put it down. I loved the way the writer wove the three stories together and absolutely loved the three main characters. I could hear their different voices and feel their fear. The writing was beautiful, haunting and evocative and I stopped sometimes to reread passages that were just so charming. The book was so visually appealing (and shocking in places) that I felt like I was watching a movie. The book really did transport me to Germany and Scotland of old and the modern story, set in a small community reminded me of my own childhood. Paisley reminded me of Saffie from *Absolutely Fabulous* and I loved that she was a "middle-aged woman trapped in a teenage body". Her mother was a lovely whimsical character. I will recommend this highly to all my students as I think it is a powerful and very important read and can open up a dialogue about modern hysteria connected with racism that seems rampant in this world. Arthur Miller wrote *The Crucible* to shine a light on McCarthyism. Nikki McWatters has written a brilliant book that does the same thing for

racism (particularly but not exclusively Islamaphobia).

Bec says

This review first appeared on Readers in Wonderland

INITIAL REACTION

5 THINGS ABOUT HEXENHAUS

Three different stories, three different times

HEXENHAUS features three different witch hunts in three different time periods, told in alternating chapters. These alternating chapters can be a bit worrying as sometimes you like one character more than the others and so some chapters become boring. In HEXENHAUS this was not the case, as I really enjoyed all the stories and the distinct voices. Victoria's POV was very historical fiction-esque, Katharine's was conversational (it reminded me a bit of CODE NAME VERITY in style), and Paisley's was a more modern contemporary tone.

Strong, determined, loyal women

All three main characters are incredibly loyal to their family. Their dedication to their loved ones and their determination to protect them no matter what horrors they go through is truly admirable.

Not all endings were happy

I liked all the stories in HEXENHAUS, but there was one in particular that had a lasting impact on me. I won't say which because spoilers. Basically for the entire time I expected it to go in a different direction, to end happily for the characters as most stories do. But it didn't. Not at all. I'm still in shock and feel so bad for the character who was lovely. The people she loved really let her down, the poor girl.

All the endings felt abrupt

Right from the beginning the pacing is decent and develops the stories well and this continues until the end. However, after the main climax events occur everything suddenly concludes rather quickly. I think I would have preferred a bit more time wrapping things up because it really felt like I blinked and everything was done. The fact I really wanted more of the character may also explain this feeling haha.

Veronica's story was my favourite

I did enjoy all the different storylines but if I had to choose, Veronica's is my most preferred. It's the oldest period of history and I just really liked the way it unravelled. Hers was also the most slow burn romance, and we all know how much I like those.

In Summary

HEXENHAUS was a novel I quite enjoyed overall. I really admired the characters and as always, loved the historical aspects of the stories. It was well paced and the only complaint I had was the endings of that the stories felt rather sudden.

