



The Hundred-Year House

Rebecca Makkai

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Meet the Devohrs: Zee, a Marxist literary scholar who detests her parents' wealth but nevertheless finds herself living in their carriage house; Gracie, her mother, who claims she can tell your lot in life by looking at your teeth; and Bruce, her step-father, stockpiling supplies for the Y2K apocalypse and perpetually late for his tee time. Then there's Violet Devohr, Zee's great-grandmother, who they say took her own life somewhere in the vast house, and whose massive oil portrait still hangs in the dining room.

The Hundred-Year House unfolds a generational saga in reverse, leading the reader back in time on a literary scavenger hunt as we seek to uncover the truth about these strange people and this mysterious house. With intelligence and humor, a daring narrative approach, and a lovingly satirical voice, Rebecca Makkai has crafted an unforgettable novel about family, fate and the incredible surprises life can offer.

The Hundred-Year House Details

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Author : Rebecca Makkai

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From Reader Review The Hundred-Year House for online ebook

Carmen says

*Zee wondered, in brief amazement, if it **had** all been true, if she'd simply set things in motion. But no, this was her own creation, her own monster. She had willed this into being.*

I grudgingly have to admit that this book was brilliant.

It is about a house that was built in 1900 and eventually became an artists' colony.

The story is told in three parts: 1999-2001, 1955, and 1929, and a small prologue at the end which takes place in 1900. Yes, it is as if the book were written backwards.

The reason I say that I am **grudgingly** admitting that it was brilliant is because I like the first part (1999-2001) the best. It was wonderful, and I really was attached to all the characters in this part of the book. Zee is the daughter of a rich family. As a professor married to a struggling writer, she and her husband Doug move into her rich parents' coach house. To their surprise, Zee's mother announces that Zee's cousin, Case, and his wife Miriam will be moving into the coach house as well.

Zee and Doug seemed determined to shoot their marriage in the face. Observe Doug meeting Miriam:

She wasn't exactly attractive, Doug decided (he'd been deliberating, against his will), but she had an interesting face with a jutting chin, eyes bright like a little dog's.

A little dog's? Fucker.

As soon as he thought it, her recognized it. It was the beginning of a thousand love stories. ("She wasn't beautiful, but she had an interesting face, the kind artists asked to paint.") And uninvited, the next thought bore down: He was supposed to fall in love. It wasn't true, and it wouldn't happen, but there it was, and it stuck. Anyone watching him in a movie would expect him to fall in love, would wait patiently through the whole bag of popcorn. He tried to push the thought away before she turned again, before she saw it on his face.

Okay, let me get this straight: you are looking for trouble from the get-go. Just from the first day of meeting her, you are like: 'Oh, the universe sent me this woman to have an affair with. Oh, of course I wouldn't do that, but you know... ha ha ha.' *rolls eyes*

Well, perhaps Zee will be more sensible. Let's take a look at her discussing Miriam's arrival at the house with her friend:

"The worst part is, Doug will fall in love with her." She was whispering. There were students all around.

"Is she pretty?"

"The point is she's there.

... "But he's not like that, is he? Your husband?"

"He's so desperate not to work on [his book], he'd fall in love with a zebra."

Wow. Way to have faith in your husband, there. Way to set your marriage up for failure.

Well, I won't tell you what happens, but this whole first half of the novel is thrilling, riveting, layered. We have an (allegedly) haunted house, two marriages in trouble, really questionable behavior on both Doug and Zee's part (although in my opinion Zee was seriously disturbed and almost evil), clandestine activities of spying and breaking and entering, and TONS of secrets - old and new.

It's funny, it's layered, it's complex, it's mysterious, and it's very well-written. I was loving every moment of it.

And then Makkai wrests you out of this time frame and plops you into the year 1955. And you're like, "WTF, Makkai? Why did you DO that? I liked that story!" Sigh. I was very upset with the book at this point. However, I trudged on, even though this 1955 section focused on a much less interesting story with much less interesting characters.

But, I have to admit, the 1955 events beautifully illuminate what happened in the first half of the book for you. The pieces were slowly coming together, and the unanswered questions to a lot of the mysteries in the first half of the book were solved.

Makkai does that again with the 1929 section, which (in my opinion) was even less interesting than the 1955 section. However, each of the sections is vitally important because they reveal something new and exciting which will make you go "A-ha!" about what you've already read. Also, each section is very well-written. It is just that the amount of time you spend with the characters in the beginning (50% of the novel) cannot compete with characters trying to ingratiate themselves to you in one-third of that time.

This book is like peeling back layers of paint and seeing how the final masterpiece was constructed stroke by stroke.

It is brilliant. Even though I don't think the second half of the book matches up to the exciting, funny, and intense first half, I have to admit that Makkai is cleverly putting everything together in a surprising way. The end result is superb and very satisfying.

And the writing itself is wonderful, in turns beautiful and funny. Makkai is a great wordsmith.

Tl;dr - I highly recommend this book. It really surprises you with how amazing it is. Everything comes together in a beautiful, unexpected way. It's a work of art, really.

P.S. I wish this were available in Spanish!

P.P.S. For all of you who have been told this is a ghost story, or a haunted house story - IT IS NOT. You will be sorely disappointed if you expect spookiness, ghosts or haunting from this. FYI.

P.P.P.S. I read this book once, then opened it up and started all over again. I suggest you do this if you have the time, the second read is even better than the first because you will be putting everything you've learned together. The second time reading it is very illuminating and satisfying.

Jenna says

Oh, Rebecca Makkai, I think you have become my manic pixie dream girl of literary fiction authors.

Reading a Makkai novel is like gleefully flipping open all the little flaps and hatches on a fabulous Advent calendar or pop-up book. This is especially true of this novel in particular, a fictional biography of a fictional house. Its story is told in the format of three separate-but-linked novellas connected only by the house and its grounds and the artistic ambitions and troubled love relationships that have animated them over the course of one hundred years. The house is a historic artists' colony populated by "ghosts" both dead and living who help to maintain an environment in which artists are tortured to their usual degree, but non-artists and non-creative types definitely don't fare so well. Which - hello, wonderful wish fulfillment for all you arts and letters types in our non-artsy, non-lettery world!

But back to the Advent calendar -- Makkai offers a truly multidimensional and tactile reading experience. You will quite literally get under the house's skin, beneath its walls, and all up in its rafter-business. You will try and try to get its enigmatic portraits to meet your eyes, knowing that none of them will ever meet your eyes, but you will want to keep on trying to the bittersweet end...

What I'm trying to say is that this author's books are for readers who appreciate writing with a fabulous sense of place, and character, and place-as-character. In both *The Borrower* and this book, Makkai escorts the reader on a madcap, whimsical-with-a-touch-of-darkness, behind-the-scenes tour of possibly haunted attics, winding library aisles, graveled country backroads, and mysterious artist colony outbuildings and the equally mysterious psyches of the artists and scholars who inhabit all these places.

And oh those psyches! One of the great things about Makkai's characters is that they look like us and act like us to a certain extent, and then... they might pull one of those bold, twisted, Robin Hood-esque, redistribution-of-fortune moves, the kinds of things that we may dream of doing but cannot slip our moral tethers enough to be able to pull off. Like: fake your own death and disappear to a new beginning, or kidnap someone to give them a better life that they deserve and that you feel confident you can provide...

Or - her characters may also blackmail you, or leave you for dead at the bottom of the stairs, or at least seriously think about doing so. But probably only if you really deserve it. Retribution seems to be a theme in these Makkai books, in which the quiet ones are always kinda crazy...

And likewise - this is a quiet book for a patient reader who can enjoy lovely writing and be in the moment of the book without pining away for plot, which is certainly present, but is not the main point. If that works for you, then you may well find this book crazy fun and delightful. The beautiful cover is also worth a mention.

Paquita Maria Sanchez says

A good book from a clever writer which suffers from a sluggish last act and a rigidly conceived format. Her characters are believable if occasionally detestable, her comedic tone is consistently on without coming across as frivolous, and she plays some interesting games with the "house as character" element seen in a lot of classic horror n' la-huuuuv-drama novels from far and away, way back in stuffy dresses fancy hair times. Unfortunately, as the book moves along its reverse-chronological path, the scenes get shorter and the

characters less developed, resulting in ever-decreasing tension and fewer invest-in-able plot points or people until before long you just want things to wrap up as quickly and painlessly as possible, preferably yesterday. Most of the parts when Laurelfeld was an arts colony were just zzz for me, though that may be less the book's fault and more a result of years in art school; I've known enough self-obsessed, drunken, flaky, "free spirited" starving-artist types to last me years in space, so being made to read about them was like having a scab picked, especially when all I wanted to know about was the earlier, more interesting characters who sadly got themselves straightjacketed and stuffed away by an almost stubborn clinging to structural presets.

I will definitely read something else by this author, just maybe not right away. I hope she will abandon her bag of tricks for her next effort, and just write about some people doing some shit somewhere. Ghosts are totally still welcome, though.

Celeste Fairchild says

This book definitely takes you for a ride (in more ways than one). You start off in 1999 and wind up in 1900. I was worried once I figured out that this was the format -- I was getting attached to these 1999 people, who were funny and weird, and then I'm looking ahead and realizing that we're never coming back to 1999. But -- in a bizarre, unanticipated way -- we ARE. (That's cryptic on purpose. I wouldn't spoiler this one for the world.) You get emotionally involved with all these characters, and you don't ever leave any of them behind.

The 1955 section is tough emotionally (and I assume that's on purpose), but it's the shortest of the sections. It might also be my favorite, for reasons I can't quite explain, except to say that it's intense.

Then we're in 1929, which again I thought was going to disengage me from the story -- suddenly there's this huge new cast of characters, because we're at an artists' colony -- but actually we've met most of them before in various ways, and they're having so much fun (the section starts with a streaking raid) that it's hard not to have fun with them. This section ends with one of the strangest, coolest narrative moves I've ever seen (spoiler: yes, there's totally something in that wall) and then we're back in 1900 for a quick "prologue" which is aptly named despite its place at the end of the book.

There's a lot of stuff in here that would be easy to miss -- like the Ovid quote at the beginning is from the myth of Daphne turning into a laurel tree (which I only know because I Googled it, I'm not that smart), and the name of the colony is Laurelfeld, and someone literally crashes into a tree halfway through the book transforming basically everything, and someone else runs away and reinvents himself like Daphne did -- but I don't think missing them would necessarily ruin your appreciation of the book. It's more like we're in the land of ten thousand Easter eggs (perhaps left behind by the plague of rabbits in the middle section...) and you'll find a few of them, but you probably won't find all of them, and that's fine. (I know I missed a ton.)

I liked Makkai's first novel, *The Borrower*, and I adore her short stories... This book is maybe more like her stories in some ways -- partly there's the fact that there are three short arcs (plus the prologue) rather than one huge arc, and partly there are just more thematic similarities with the stories of hers that I've seen.

All that said, this is a slightly difficult book, one that absolutely rewards the effort a reader would put into it, but I could see the negative reviews, especially from people who read it quickly, being along the lines of "I couldn't keep track of the characters." Which would be a damn shame, but that reader's loss.

You kind of need to read it a second time, a la *The Sixth Sense* (but no, they're not dead people, don't worry)

and I hope to do that soon.

**I was loaned an early copy by a bookseller, and this review is based on the uncorrected proofs.

Tamsen says

It's amazing to me that so many people liked the last two sections the best. To me - the best sections by far are the first two - 1999 and 1955. I wish that Makkai had written the whole book from those two timelines instead of all four (1929 and 1900 are the last as the book is structured in reverse order). 1929 is especially disconcerting with the many, many artist perspectives.

I love that we all have such different experiences with a book. I would have given this a solid four star rating if 1999 had been the only time setting for this novel.

I've sat with this review for a few days, and I decided to elaborate on why 1999 should have been the only time setting of the book (perhaps with 1955 as the 'prologue'.) This setting is strongest considering the ghost and Zee (along with her career). She teaches college courses and they discuss often the gothic 'ghost' in literature. The ghost is often just a symbol for the madness of the solitary woman. The more solitary the woman, the more that madness is expressed as ghostly apparitions and manifestations.

The reader really gets a sense of this modern madness in 1999 - Zee descends into her paranoia and fear. She goes mad - (view spoiler) All through Zee's madness, there is a sense of loneliness. She's been forced to move out to her mother's carriage house. Her husband is keeping (real this time) secrets from her and is jobless. She feels isolated at work. And all the time, there is Violet Devohr's painting, staring down on the family from the dining room.

And of course, like the gothic novel, there is some basis in reality. But once you feel madness, you descend into it. I should be Makkai's sounding board for her next novel - I'd live in any manner of creepy carriage houses to be able to assist.

Some lines I liked:

"It was one of the moments when Zee remembered to be happy: looking at him, considering what she had. A job and a house and a broad-shouldered man. A glass of white wine in her left hand."

"Was there much distance between rooting for someone and loving him? Was there any difference at all, even now?"

Taryn Pierson says

This book is so startlingly creative it defies classification. Reading it is like sinking slowly into a warm bath. Makkai's skillful prose pulled me under the surface and held me there, entranced. (Does that sound malevolent, like the book was trying to drown me? Maybe my metaphor is flawed, but I loved this book so

much I would have accepted oxygen deprivation as a fair price to pay to keep reading.)

Makkai tells her story in reverse, beginning with the most recent generation of the eccentric old-money Devohr family and ending nearly a century earlier. The book opens in 1999 with married couple Zee and Doug living somewhat sheepishly in the coach house on Zee's mother's estate, Laurelfeld. Zee is a literary scholar and professor, and Doug is supposed to be writing a book about a little-known poet, though his motivation and his research have stalled and he's secretly resorted to writing trite chapter books for preteen girls. Doug has read that Edwin Parfitt, the poet on whom he's focused years of research, once stayed at Laurelfeld in the years when it was an arts colony. If he could convince Zee's tempestuous mother Grace to let him into the attic to look through the colony's archives, he might be able to regain his momentum and finish his book. However, Grace is being typically stubborn and oddly cryptic about the house's history and, for that matter, her own.

Makkai plants lots of seeds of questions in this first section, but the magic happens when she rolls back time to 1955, then 1929, and finally 1900 and starts harvesting. The book is full to bursting with tiny details, the delicate strands of which stretch tenuously from one generation to another. I felt compelled to read as closely as I could, trying to remember all the little signposts so that when I encountered them again, I would feel the thrill of recognition.

I've seen this book called "ambitious," and that's exactly what it is—ambitious in the writing, but also ambitious in the reading. Makkai has written the treasure map, but the reader has to do the hunting. It's absolutely worth the effort.

With regards to NetGalley and Penguin for the advance copy. On sale July 10.

More book recommendations by me at www.readingwithhippos.com

Rebecca Foster says

(4.5) In a brilliant postmodern take on two classic genres, the country house novel and the ghost story, Makkai traces – backwards – the story of a Chicago-area house, once an artists' colony, throughout the twentieth century.

The first thing you'll notice about this novel is that, like a crazy house, it's upside-down. That is: it opens in 1999, that near-contemporary storyline taking up about half the text; follows it with sections set in 1955 and 1929; and finishes with a prologue set in 1900. The second thing to jump out is that this is a ghost story – or is it? The first line is both declaration and qualification: "For a ghost story, the tale of Violet Saville Devohr was vague and underwhelming."

A most unusual novel, but it works.

(See my full review at [The Bookbag](http://TheBookbag.com).)

Kristin says

I received an arc copy of this book from Goodreads in exchange for an honest review. This was my first GR Giveaway win and I had read a lot of great reviews so I was super excited to read it. Let's just say that my anticipation was not rewarded. Thank you Firstreads for the opportunity!

Synopsis: As the name implies, this novel is about a one hundred year old house, Laurelfeld, and the lives of its inhabitants over time. In a unique approach, the narrative is broken up into parts that take place in reverse from 1999, 1955, 1929, and 1900, respectively. No part fully explains what happens, “ leading the reader back in time on a literary scavenger hunt as we seek to uncover the truth about these strange people and this mysterious house.”

- In 1999 we meet Grace Devohr; her husband Bruce who is stockpiling for the Y2K collapse; Gracie’s daughter Zee (Zilla), a professor and Marxist literary scholar who detests her families wealth (but doesn’t know how to live without it); Zee’s husband Doug, a lazy, down-and-out writer who is procrastinatively writing about a long forgotten poet, Edwin Parfitt; as well as Bruce’s son and daughter-in-law. This section consists of about half the novel.
- In 1950 we meet the young, newlywed Grace and Zee’s bastardly drunken ‘father’ and get answers to some of the family’s secrets (sort of).
- In 1929, Laurelfeld was an artist’s colony. Here, you met a number of characters, so many that it was somewhat difficult to keep track of who was whom. Most notable are Edwin Parfitt, Zilla Silverman, Samantha, Viktor, Armand, and Gamby (Grace’s father).
- In 1900 you meet Violet Devohr, Zee’s great-grandmother, who plays a vital role throughout the novel, but you never really get to know. Violet apparently “took her own life somewhere in the vast house, and whose massive oil portrait still hangs in the dining room. Violet’s portrait was known to terrify the artists who resided at the house from the 1920s to the 1950s, when it served as the Laurelfeld Arts Colony—and this is exactly the period Zee’s husband, Doug, is interested in.”

The GR blurb states: “In this brilliantly conceived, ambitious, and deeply rewarding novel.....With intelligence and humor, a daring narrative approach, and a lovingly satirical voice, Rebecca Makkai has crafted an unforgettable novel about family, fate and the incredible surprises life can offer.”

I felt NONE of this whatsoever. Although the writing and premise were good, the characters were flat and one dimensional, not to mention completely unlikable. Since large portions were left for the reader to piece together, the story felt disjointed and underwhelming, and since there was zero emotional connection to any of the characters, the book dragged for me, taking my months to force myself to finish it. If it weren’t for receiving this as a giveaway, I likely would not have finished it. Last but not least, the suggestion of a supernatural element to this story, the ghost of Violet Devohr and the house being “alive”, as if it were its own character, was alluded to, but never fully represented. Mainly, you have a bunch of rich, spoiled, emotionally handicapped people living in the same house over a one-hundred year time span.

Terry says

I totally lost the thread of this story and had to make myself finish it. It started out promising enough, but then the story just kind of dragged and got confusing. Maybe I’m just dense.

Snotchocheez says

I find myself in lock-step with Rebecca Makkai's blend of humor and whimsy, and really enjoyed her earlier effort *The Borrower*. The first half of *The Hundred-Year House* follows in *The Borrower*'s footsteps, but a creative decision to tell the story in reverse renders the second half (and final product) somewhat anticlimactic.

The titular house in question, built in 1900 by the Devohr family near Lake Michigan, evolved to become the centerpiece of an artist's retreat for the first half of the twentieth century, then shuttered for reasons that become clear as the story unfolds backwards. The novel begins at the eve of Y2K, with a quirky bunch of Devohr descendants living at the long-closed compound: from Zee Grant (shortened by choice from Zilla to stave off childhood taunts of 'Godzilla'), a professor of Marxist theory; her husband Douglas whose dissertation (on a poet that once frequented the artist's retreat several decades prior) is hopelessly stymied by his mother- and sister-in-law; and Gracie and Bruce (Zee's mother and step-father) with their own set of quirky back stories, all revolving around this strange house (which might possibly be haunted by the ghost of Zee's great-grandmother Violet.) As the story progresses, several clues arise as to why the retreat was shuttered, that ultimately are revealed (as the focus shifts from 1999 to the Fifties, to 1929, to the start of the Twentieth Century.)

It's an inventive endeavor, but once Ms. Makkai shifts backwards, the whimsy and humor (so prevalent in the first half of the novel) recede, leaving us with a sort of half-baked mystery (rather than a wry, off-beat Shirley Jackson-esque gothic ghost story she seemed to emulate at the start. Not a bad book by any stretch, but more indicative of a sophomore slump (in my estimation, anyway.) Still, enough here to savor, if not exactly embrace.

switterbug (Betsey) says

Rod Stewart once sang, "The first cut is the deepest," and although Makkai doesn't channel Rod Stewart in her intrepid, ambitious, darkly witty and astringent second book, that line has been embedded in me since I closed the last page. The deep cut goes back almost 100 years, to 1900, but you have to get backwards via forward progression of pages. Makkai did a bold and brave thing in her narrative, inverting the timeline, which starts in 1999. Section two starts in 1955, section three in 1929, and the prologue, where the beginning of the tale ends, or the end begins, is set in 1900.

This story in no way resembles the narrative style of her first charming book, **THE BORROWER**, a tender but easily accessible caper-cum-coming of age tale. As these pages move forward/backward, the story gets denser, with gothic filigree, and I had to concentrate (in fact, a second reading would help me tie the looser ends). The thread that heads back one hundred years looks not so much like a straight line as it does an elaborate cat's cradle. Or Chinese boxes. And don't look for a haunted house/horror tale in the conventional sense. It isn't nail-biting, gasp-inducing horror. But it is mercurial.

The centerpiece that embraces the story is the house, on an estate named Laurelfeld, near Chicago, now 100 years old and once an art colony for writers, artists, dancers, and musicians. However, by 1955, it was closed down. One thing that survived is a haunting oil painting of ancestor Violet Devohr, a portrait that doesn't follow you with her eyes; rather, you can't even stand at an angle that directs her vision towards you. It's a different kind of creepy. Violet supposedly killed herself in the attic.

Zee, Violet's great-granddaughter, a scholar on Marxism, is reluctantly living in the next-door coach house in 1999 with her husband, Doug, who is keen to get in the attic of the main house and search through papers to find information on the homosexual poet, Edwin Parffit, a former member of the art colony. Doug is writing a book on him, but is suffering from writer's block, so he's doing hobbyist work for a series of YA books, and hiding this embarrassing information from his wife. Zee is slowly unraveling, almost like a nineteenth century or early 20th century heroine. The matriarch, Zee's mother, is mum and guarded about the attic and most things about the house's history. The section ends with lots of unanswered questions and a few trails on the interconnected road to yesteryear.

Section two, the shortest (other than the prologue) and most acutely intense, focuses on Zee's ancestors. The threads from section I tie around, and lead to even more baffling and cryptic questions, which are revealed in various ways as we visit the art colony in the final section, in 1929. The characters from the past 100 years mirror and appear in different guises, connections, and descendants, supplying the fuel for this metafictional comedy of manners. The prologue, although only a few pages, is a hot coal of lore and lowdown.

The response to this book is going to be divided, I am certain. Those seeking a more lightweight read may be disappointed in its dense complexity of story, which combines farce, satire, gravity, even violence. It takes patience and dedication to read this circuitously constructed tale. But, I love that Makkai is, like her first book, impassioned about the importance of the arts, which comes to light in the poignant telling of the art colony. However, I want to give a heads up--not to convince you to read this book, but to hopefully help in your decision-making on whether this is a book for you.

I was struck by the quote about Daphne that begins the book, from Ovid's *Metamorphosis*—"Nothing of her was left, except her shining loveliness." Although I have yet to read Ovid, I was entranced by Bernini's sculpture, *Apollo and Daphne*, at the Galleria Borghese in Rome. This quote, magnified for me by Bernini's artistic devotion to Daphne's enigma, is an uncanny key to the novel's themes. Rebecca Makkai is a commanding writer--whimsical yet dense--a romp, but one with gravitas. What an impressive feast of literature is this book!

Nicole D. says

This book might be a nod to *The Haunting of Hill House*. Laurelfeld has been used intermittently as an artist colony. And I think there's a ghost. The story is told in reverse, so we start with the "current" day which is the end of 1999 (and the Y2K stuff was moderately entertaining, but so dated, perhaps it's just too soon to be a good joke yet). The writing was good, the idea was solid, the structure was interesting... so why only (generously) 2.5 stars? The characters! They were AWFUL--- there was not a single person I could get behind and root for. I didn't care what happened to ANY of them.

I vaguely remember having the same issue with *The Borrower*. Something "off" about the characters.

I'll be curious to hear what others think of this book, and I did find the end relatively satisfying, but it was a long way to go to get there.

Margitte says

My dearest Laurelfield,

Your tale started out as a short story about male anorexia. The author have no idea what the hell happened next, and neither do I, sorry to say !

The first woman, Violet Saville Devohr, to step over your threshold, understood the meaning of doors when she said to her husband: "***You may shut me in, but I can shut you out. There are two sides to every door, Augustus.***" And then she proceeded to commit suicide by her own rules. She defined the rest of your story as a painting hanging over your mantelpiece, being a constant reminder of what you had to witness and endure.

(view spoiler)

Built in 1900, you experienced some tumultuous moments through four significant time periods: 1999, 1955, 1929, 1900 - and lived to tell the tale of pride, vanity, envy, gluttony, lust, anger, greed, sloth and covetousness. A side-tale of opportunism, violence, abuse, extortion, and scavenging completed your sad tale.

You were firstly a house with a name - Laurelfield. Secondly, you were a mansions with a gatehouse and infamous wealth providing the status behind you. But oh dear, thirdly, the inhabitants, not you, were infested with insanity, greed, bad blood and bad luck. You had so many doors: some wide open, some formidably closed. Your windows were big and welcoming. Anyone could enjoy a view, from the inside out, or outside in.

Like our pets, you reflected the personalities of the artists gracing your rooms for twenty-five years, and they had the audacity to blame you for everything happening to them. Yes, they even blamed the ghost of Violet for their misdemeanors, mishaps and bad blood.

(view spoiler)

Some people blame God for their louzy lives, but these lot were either agnostic or atheistic, or too self-absorbed for that. They call themselves artists, I beg you! A character in the movie *As Good As It Gets* accused another of "being a disgrace to depression" Really, they were that and even more. They were a disgrace to art!

If I were you, I would have spooked these conniving, plotting moochers and high-class squatters out. Got Violet to move the furniture around in broad daylight, when ghosts were not suppose to be active and have them running away by the speed of lightning!

But you endured. Even when your tale was told backwards, too many characters killed the story, and cliffhanger moments threw your history into confusing chaos. Goodness me, Laurelfield, were you ever able to figure out who was whom in the end? Who sired Grace, and who was Zee really? Who really died, and who is really alive?

For crying out loud, I couldn't. I almost succumbed to some of the characters' insanity!

They were all con-artists! Yes, thinly veneered and slightly educated: you know, academically distinguished,

mentally challenged, but emotionally arrested!

(view spoiler)

And this is where I love and leave you, dear Laurelfeld. You are the only thing I fell in love with in the end! You were so worth it!

BOOK BLURB FROM THE BOOK:

In this brilliantly conceived, ambitious, and deeply rewarding novel, Rebecca Makkai unfolds a generational saga in reverse, leading the reader back in time on a literary scavenger hunt as we seek to uncover the truth about these strange people and this mysterious house. With intelligence and humor, a daring narrative approach, and a lovingly satirical voice, Rebecca Makkai has crafted an unforgettable novel about family, fate and the incredible surprises life can offer.

COMMENTS:

There is an expression in Netherlands '*Met de deur in huis vallen*', in German '*mit der Tür ins Haus fallen*', in Afrikaans '*met die deur in die huis val*' - which, translated directly, means 'falling into the house with the door'. And that is what I want to do with this house ... mmm... review: getting directly to the point. No beating around the bush.

So here it is: This book annoyed the living daylights out of me.

But wait! Before your heart drops to the floor, catch it for a second, and if you later feel like dropping it anyway, be my (as well as Laurelfeld's) guest! But not now. Not yet!

Narrative: Brilliant!

Language: Brilliant!

Characterization: Brilliant! Sadly, way too many characters and none of them lovable.

Theme: Mmmmm.....messy but a great idea;

Plot: Confusing - too many sub plots;

How the plot, characters and setting relate to reality: Excellent.

Entertaining Outstanding!

Detail: Outstanding!

HOWEVER: I did feel the last two periods, 1929, 1900 - messy and chaotic, were more a form of information-dumping, to enhance the plot. It was as though the story lacked validation and needed this information to make sense, but it did not initially fitted into the main story in the first period, 1999. It was therefore added as an urgent, yet messy, after-thought. Did not work for me. The inverted chronology might define this book, as is evident from all the attention it receives, but I did not like it. Neither did I appreciate the end landing in the middle of the book.

Conclusion By golly! What a captivating unbelievably suspenseful read! The story caught me from the get-go and had me reading non-stop until the end. I did want to end it all into the second half, though but kept going. Optimism and hope it is called.

I won't pursue another book written in this style, though. It was just too confusing. For a club read: excellent! I do consider reading the book again to understand its deeper nuances and hidden plots better. I want to.

Was it worth my time? Yes. The prose was outstanding. I will read the author again. She's good with words.

The book was provided by Viking Press through Netgalley. Thank you for this great opportunity.

Diane S ? says

3.5 This was a very slow starter for me, but there was just enough intrigue and strange occurrences happening to keep one reading. The book starts in the present, in 1999 just before the supposed Y2K. Two couple re living in the coach house and Grace and he hubby live in the house shepherded from her mother. At one time an artist's colony the house has seen many deaths of those that have stayed there.

This novel does in fact go backwards, though the first part in the present is the longest, almost 50%. This is a book that needs to be taken in slowly, paying close attention, because as the novel goes back in time so answers are provided, some secrets revealed. We follow the author to the nineteen fifties, where a young marred Grace is living a most unhappy life. This was my favorite section. Then even further back to when the house was the artist's colony, more answers, more secrets and finally to 1900, when the house is first being built and we meet Violet, she I one who is said to haunt the house.

This is a beautifully crafted work, characters of which some you will love and some you will hate but they are fully realized and relatable characters. Not your normal haunted house story but one that begs an answer to the questions, "Is it the house that is haunted or are the people who stay there haunted themselves? I loved the slow unveiling of the novel, the ah-ha moments when an answer from a previous time period is revealed. I also liked that some of the answers given are open to our own interpretation, that she trusted the reader enough to put some of the pieces together for themselves.

ARC from NetGalley.

Paula says

Rebecca Makkai has written a clever, brilliant puzzle box of a book about a house and the secrets it has witnessed, gathered - and maintained its silence about - over its one hundred year lifespan. This is a novel of many characters and many layers. It relates its history and divulges its secrets from the present day backwards - rather like deconstructing an onion – until, at its very end (the Prologue), you “unpeel” the final layer and find, just like an onion, you have nothing tangible left in your hand.

Nothing that is, except for a strong sense of portent fraught with potential.

The story “begins” in 1999 on the cusp of the 21st century (remember the Y2K scare?). In this 1st section, you are presented with answers – lots of them. But, and this is what Makkai has done so cleverly, you are in the unusual position of having more answers than you have questions. And because of that, you aren’t really sure which question goes with which answer, the result being that, even if you have the right answer associated with the right question, you don’t really know what that answer means. This first section is an easy read and engages you immediately. The prose is crisp and the characters are well-drawn, warts and all. Partial truths and the portents of further mysteries are tantalizingly and frustratingly revealed. You want to know more.

Part II (1955) divulges more layers of secrets and characters. The tone is darker, the prose is softer and more melancholy – weightier and atmospheric - which is in keeping with the events it relates. Questions associated with the answers discovered in Part I are revealed. But... even more answers come to light; and again, you have more answers than questions. The puzzle box continues to mystify and intrigue you.

Part III (1929) continues the deconstruction of the onion. Honestly, I found this section to be the least successful. It is a bit overwrought and overwritten. There are a profusion of characters, and while this is understandable (it is an artist colony after all), Makkai’s decision to keep all the characters in the forefront while telling the important events that occur during the evening of the “bacchanal”, drags the story down. You have to plow through a lot of words and you have to do it carefully because there are secrets and final answers to be unearthed – it’s just that you have to shovel a lot of earth to get to them. You will want to start skimming (not all the characters are as interesting as Makkai thinks they are), but don’t skim. Once you get past the events of that pivotal evening, the story shakes off its torpor and moves right along. Careful reading will yield maximum reward.

Part IV (1900) is the Prologue, where we meet Violet and learn of the genesis of the house.

I thoroughly enjoyed this book. I will tell you, it’s not a haunted house story. It’s not a ghost story either. Luckily, this fascinating novel doesn’t need anything so run of the mill. The whole Violet thread is not strong or compelling enough to be the connecting thread through all the layers. I’m telling you this so that you don’t go into the book with those expectations. You will find that the characters who resided in the house were haunted long before they ever came there. Haunted by grief, loneliness, longing, fear and need - combined with a fragile hope for relief and happiness.

Perhaps it is in Part I after all that you will find the true “answer” to all the questions – that, after one hundred years, there is light in the house again, and that, perhaps for this next “layer” of the story, the light will banish the darkness. Which would make the people who once walked those corridors and inhabited those rooms very happy indeed.

Steph says

This is a novel that takes place on one piece of land over the span of a century. I love the premise. From ‘virgin land’ to arts colony to occupation by a family, the story of *The Hundred-Year House* is told backward, starting in 1999. Unfortunately, it’s a very predictable story, not nearly as interesting as I’d hoped.

Like another novel I recently reviewed, the most compelling part of this story is its supernatural element, which is sorely lacking. The Laurelfield estate is said to be haunted by a woman who committed suicide

there at the beginning of the century. There are a few spooky occurrences, but it's not really a ghost story. It's more of a family drama. There are secrets which are meant to be intriguing. There are a lot of characters. It's boring.

And it's frustrating, because I really wanted to like *The Hundred-Year House*. It has a lot of potential, but it's just not that entertaining. If I had remained engaged throughout the novel, I might have felt rewarded by ending - there are some revelations and explanations, and an ominous last few pages. But by that point, I had stopped caring; it wasn't worth the wait.

There is a genre that is, more or less, 'boring rich white people drama,' right? I'm sure fans of that type of book will find this one very exciting, with its vague supernatural elements and its long time-span. But those looking for an interesting ghost story about compelling characters will probably be disappointed by *The Hundred-Year House*.

Thank you to NetGalley and Penguin Group Viking for providing me with a copy of this book in return for an honest review.

Ariel says

The structure of the book is very interesting because the story is told backwards. You start with the current generation in the house and then move backwards in time through the preceding 100 years. As you read, certain things the characters say and do puzzle you until you see how it relates to the generation that lived there previously. At first I loved the book. I was completely hooked into the current family living there and consumed by the mystery of what was hidden in the attic. It is the first family that comprises the bulk of the book. After that you learn less and less about the other generations and consequently my level of caring dropped too. By the end of the book the connections to the story are weaker and I found that I had to force myself to finish. I think the clue to what went wrong is in the author's own notes where she says that she set out to write a book about anorexia and doesn't know what the hell happened. By the end I didn't know what the hell was happening either. It just seemed strange to have the book start so strongly only to have it disintegrate at the end. By the time the last generation of Violet and her husband showed up in 1900's I had no idea what their contribution to the story was even about. It's a shame because I was really looking forward to reading this book. This was a great concept but the actually execution of the novel was somewhat disappointing.

Blair says

Review originally published at Learn This Phrase.

The 'hundred year house' is Laurelfeld, a grand, English-style manor house built in Illinois for the Devohrs, a family of eccentric, upper-class Canadians. Makkai's second novel tells the story of the house through its various incarnations - a prison for an unhappy wife; an artists' colony; the setting for an ultimately tragic tale involving swapped identities; the backdrop for an affair that never was and a search for lost files that may not exist - but it tells it backwards.

In the first (and longest) part, it's 1999, and Laurelfeld is inhabited by Grace, a descendant of the Devohrs,

and her second husband, Bruce. Grace's daughter Zee, a scholar of Marxist literature, lives with her husband Doug in the coach house, where they are soon joined by Case, Bruce's terminally unlucky son, and his flaky artist wife Miriam. Doug is ostensibly working on a PhD studying an almost-forgotten poet named Edwin Parfitt; in actual fact, he is close to giving up on his academic ambitions and spends his days ghostwriting trashy kids' books about plucky teenage girls. Doug has known for some time that Parfitt stayed at Laurelfeld when it was an artist's colony, but when he discovers that Grace may have some old files under lock and key in the attic, his curiosity is sparked and he becomes convinced that finding them is the key to finishing his thesis.

Part one takes up half the book, and it's inevitable, therefore, that this section involves the most detail and development, and produces the most emotional investment in the characters. What happens between them in the end is rather upsetting... At least, it was for me - I loved one character in particular and despised another, and was disappointed with how things worked out for them, though others may have different reactions. I must say, though, that although I really disliked what happened here (I might have given this book five stars if the outcome of this section had been different) the characters must have been very well-written if they made me care so much. And, this book being what it is, there is a reason things play out as they do: the reader will discover later that the dynamic being played out here closely mirrors events that took place three quarters of a century earlier, and indeed (without giving too much away here), in some ways it brings them full circle.

(Over-emotional personal notes on the first part: (view spoiler))

In the second part, it's 1955. Grace is a young wife, married to Zee's violent, philandering father, George. She is bored, restless and feels cooped up at Laurelfeld, and when she notices strange, small things she sees as omens, her life slowly begins to change, leading towards an inescapable fate. Because the reader has already discovered something of the nature of this fate in the 1999 story, what happens to her in the end is not a mystery... But how she gets there very much is. It's the uncovering of this chain of events that gives this section of the novel its tension and drama.

Third part: 1929, during Laurelfeld's period as an artists' colony. There is a larger cast of characters here, a group of eight or nine artists of various types - including Doug's PhD subject Edwin Parfitt, and Zilla Silverman, the painter for whom Zee is named. The narrative here switches perspectives frequently (some of it is told in first person plural to describe the group's collective observations of an individual) and is told in short bursts. It follows the scheming efforts of the artists to 'save' the colony when it is threatened with closure by a particularly unpleasant Devohr.

There isn't a fourth part of the book, just a 'prologue', although it's placed at the end. Set in 1900, as the house is being built, it acts as a perfect coda to the earlier (or later) tales of Laurelfeld.

This is not really a ghost story, and readers expecting something that's actually spooky will be disappointed, but it certainly references ghost stories in a number of ways. There's a couple of inexplicable, possibly supernatural incidents; various people joke, or half-joke, about Laurelfeld being haunted; Zee teaches a class on ghost stories. Within the latter example there's a theory about a type of haunting that comes from the future rather than the past, and this informs the structure of the story: as the reader sees everything in reverse, it's impossible not to feel that the present is reaching back into the past somehow. That while the present, obviously, doesn't and can't affect what happens in the past, it does twist how the observer sees it. The full truth about everything that's happened at Laurelfeld remains a mystery to the characters, and although the reader uncovers parts of it, it will never be fully revealed. This is the sort of book you could definitely read again - and again - and notice things you'd missed the first time.

The Hundred Year House reminded me a little bit of Jonathan Franzen's *The Corrections* in its study of an unconventional family, sometimes unlikeable characters, and use of humour, but I preferred it to Franzen's book - I found it warmer and more believable. I hoped it would be good, but it actually surpassed my expectations, and I was surprised by how much I *felt* about this book and how much it seemed to come alive in my imagination. I'd love to re-read it at some point in the future, I definitely recommend it, and I've bumped *The Borrower* up a few places on my to-read list. *The Hundred Year House* is a vivid, memorable and rewarding read whether you usually love or hate ghost stories, tales of grand old houses, or any and all of the above.

Vanessa LaFerriere says

I was very excited to receive an advanced galley of this book. The early reviews called it "dazzling" and the premise sounded intriguing. Indeed, it was creative, unique, and well structured, but I felt like something was missing. Actually, a few things were missing.

WHAT WORKED: The novel is broken up into parts that take place in 1999, 1955, 1929, and 1900, in that order. It never revisits any of the later time frames - it just keeps taking you back in time. However, because of the author's clever and well thought-out writing, you can construct your own ending for the set of characters from 1999.

WHAT DIDN'T WORK FOR ME:

1. **1999:** I felt that too much of the book was devoted to the 1999 section. I was so bored that I would not have kept reading if I hadn't received an advance copy and, therefore, felt an obligation to finish. I felt no emotional connection to any of the characters from 1999. I found the whole section to be slow and the characters frustrating. Way too much time was spent on the question of "what's in the attic?" especially since the answer turned out to be "not much!" I get it that the 1999 attic access purposely doesn't reveal much because you have to uncover the mysteries with each subsequent time period, but I still don't think we should have wasted so much time in 1999.

2. **CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT:** I didn't feel any type of emotional connection to any of the characters from any of the time periods. The book dragged for me because I wasn't emotionally invested, so I didn't really care what happened to them.

3. **CAST OF CHARACTERS:** There were so many characters that I found it difficult to keep track of them, especially since I was reading this on an iPad and couldn't flip back easily to remind myself who was who. Even at the end of the book, I still didn't have them straight. I'm tempted to reread the book for another shot at sorting out the characters and figuring out how they connect, but I didn't like the book enough to reread it. I also feel that the excess of characters just confused and muddied the whole book - some of them seemed to have served no purpose, so why distract the readers with them?

4. **THE "GHOST STORY":** For me, there was no sinister undercurrent here that comes with a good ghost story. The author stated that the house seemed alive, but I didn't feel that at all. The author also stated that the portrait of Violet seemed to haunt the artists who lived at the colony, but I didn't feel that either. For me, the ghost story element fell flat.

Jessica says

I really enjoyed *The Hundred-Year House*. I must admit that I wasn't sure how I felt about it at the halfway mark—the first half is a story told in the present time of a marriage, with family mysteries and secrets and ghosts. The house gets under people's skins. This first section was interesting but I wasn't satisfied with the way it wrapped up in the end. But once I started on the other sections, I got it. The second half of the book is divided into three sections—one set in the 1950s (when the Devohr family returns to the house), one set in 1929 (when the house was an artist colony), and a final prologue that is set in 1900 (when the house is first being built). In effect, the story is told backwards. When you reach the end of one section, part of the story wraps up but there's a mystery or two left unresolved. The section that follows provides enough background to solve the mystery, or at least provide enough context to make the reader think it is solved, and then develops a new mystery, to be explained in the next section. I loved the way the story unfolded backwards through history, giving the reader a glimpse of the past and then developing each story. There isn't a complete resolution, but by the end the reader has enough information to figure out what happened to (and in) the house over the last hundred years, and it's a wonderful story.

I received an advance digital galley of this book through Penguin's First to Read program.
