



# The Seance

*John Harwood*

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Wraxford Hall, a decaying mansion in the English countryside, has a sinister reputation. Once, a family disappeared there. And now Constance Langton has inherited this dark place as well as the mysteries surrounding it. Having grown up in a house marked by the death of her sister, Constance is no stranger to mystery, secrets, and the dark magic around us. Her father was distant. Her mother was in perpetual mourning for her lost child. In a desperate attempt to coax her mother back to health, Constance took her to a seance hoping she would find supernatural comfort. But tragic consequences followed, leaving her alone in the world-- alone with Wraxford Hall. Saddled with this questionable bequest, she must find the truth at the heart of all these disappearances, apparitions, betrayal, blackmail, and villainy, even if it costs her life. John Harwood's second novel delivers on the great promise proven by his first with this gripping mystery set in the heart of Victorian England.

## The Seance Details

Date : Published April 3rd 2008 by Jonathan Cape, Vintage Publishing (first published January 1st 2008)

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Author : John Harwood

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Genre : Horror, Historical, Historical Fiction, Mystery, Gothic, Fiction, Fantasy, Paranormal, Ghosts

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# From Reader Review The Seance for online ebook

## Gigi says

This definitely satisfied my urge for a gothic mystery.

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## Katiria says

I know this book was not for everybody and I totally understand way, but I absolutely loved and enjoyed it so much. I actually pick this book up from the library for a book club group that I joined on goodreads that there were going to read in the month of Oct. I know some readers from the book club group didn't really like this one. Because it does have different pov's and subplots within the story that it all connects to the main plot at the very end. It also have a very eerie, haunted and dark gothic vibe too the book as well. I just love and enjoy all these aspects in this book I also really love the writing style in *The Séance* I don't now how to describe it too you on why I love John Harwood writing style, but I just love how John Harwood writes and I thoroughly love how he tells as an amazing haunting and very eerie story in *The Séance* to me. I really don't want to go into too many details about the books, because I don't want to spoil it for anybody. But I will say if you love a good haunted, very eerie and dark gothic book than this book is for you. If you haven't read a book quite like *The Séance* before I still say give it a try who knows you might be surprise and love this dark gothic tale! All and all I absolutely loved and enjoyed everything in *The Séance* that I will most definitely try too read more books by John Harwood in the near future.

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## Terry says

I enjoyed this quite a bit. It was a good mystery, and each time I thought I knew which way it was going, it went a totally different way. By the end, it all made sense though. I thought the writing was very good, and I really enjoyed the Victorian setting. It felt right to read this in October. Thanks to my friends for an excellent buddy-read as well!

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## Vanessa says

This book was a strange one. I went into this with low expectations, as I'd seen a review prior to picking this up which emphasised how little of the supernatural was present in the storyline. I honestly think *The Séance* as a title is incredibly misleading, implying ghosts and visions. This book is not that. It is a story set during the Victorian period, and is more of a mystery than anything else. The tagline is a more apt title.

It took me a while to read this, and it took a long time to get into it. I found with each part my interest intensifying, but it never got to that point where I couldn't put the book down. In fact, every time I did put it down, it made it a lot harder to pick back up. The story was interesting, but I never felt drawn to the characters, and although I was interested to see what twists and turns were ahead, I put it down with a sense of 'meh'. It was good but nothing special.

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## Hannah says

I rated John Harwood's debut novel, *The Ghost Writer*, 2 stars, but this second novel is definitely a big improvement, and kept me interested (and creeped out) the entire time I was reading it.

*The Seance* is certainly a send up of all the classic Victorian gothics of the 19th century, (without all the flowery and overly melodramatic dialogue). Harwood's prose is almost flawless in its execution, and he is a master in drawing the reader into an implausible world and making them believers in it.

From the very first paragraph, I was hooked on the story, and could hardly bare to put it down late last night, even though I was too sleepy to continue. Yes, it was *that* kind of good, and deliciously spooky as well. I would have given it a full 5 stars had the ending been as tightly woven as the rest.

Thanks to my GR friend Amy S. for pointing me in the direction of this one. It was certainly one of the better gothics I've picked up in 2011.

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## Tony says

There is a good story here but it is buried beneath the tedium of excessive Victorian pleasantries and feints too clever for their own good. The late Nineteenth Century setting is perfect for this sort of story as superstition and mystery are still commonplace although being gradually worn away by the advance of science and technology. The characters attempt to provide rational and scientific explanations for phenomena but retain the hopes or beliefs that something supernatural may account for the goings-on, providing a fertile ground for charlatans and showmen to prey upon their imaginations. Things we take for granted today--and even those we don't yet understand--were easy pickings as avenues for knowledgeable people to control those with less inquisitive minds.

The story is told from the eyes of three different speakers, each one more depressing than the last. They are layered like an onion (abcba) in such a way that by the time the reader returns to Constance's time (a in the onion), it is very easy to forget who she was! The sheer number of meaningless characters introduced in each section makes following who did what a chore. This can be desired in a more mundane whodunit, but the promise of something fantastical renders them annoyances. Couple this with a thoroughly unsatisfying ending and I'm afraid I cannot recommend or appreciate this work in its current form.

This is an enticing early draft of what could have been a solid homage to Doyle's Holmes. Another pass or two, including a weaving of the narratives rather than the current bookending of Constance's current timeline, would have created a much more immersive and enjoyable read.

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## Michael says

Review from Badelynge

The Seance by John Harwood is set in the 1880s and is the story of Constance Langton. She becomes involved in spiritualism in an effort to lift her mother from the crippling grief of losing a child. Constance, due to the lack of regard and love from her parents has always had the nagging feeling that there is some mystery about her heritage, believing herself to be a foundling. Through diaries and journals and the aid of a world weary solicitor called Mr Montague she discovers a frightening legacy linking her to a crumbling deserted manor, Wraxford Hall, with a dark and murderous history. It's a brilliantly written homage to the Victorian mysteries and ghost stories of such classic authors as Wilkie Collins, Dickens, A.C. Doyle and M.R. James etc. It's full of styles, motifs, little references, names etc that will be familiar to fans of this area of literature. My personal favourite segments are those featuring the testimony of John Montague; with such a name it shouldn't surprise anybody to discover the style during these segments is an almost perfect homage to the ghost stories of Montague Rhodes James. It's a style I've seen attempted many times (I've tried it myself), but Harwood nails it flawlessly, bringing to mind stories like Count Magnus, The Mezzotint, Lost Hearts and others. If the book had been able to maintain its creepy, portentous atmosphere throughout I'd have given it 5 stars but the last third, as it attempts to resolve the various strands of mystery, does become a little more pedestrian in style. It's still one of the best book I've read this year so far.

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## Jaidee says

4.5 "insightful, melancholic and atmospheric" stars.

### 2015 Honorable Mention Read

Mr. Harwood has written a very, very fine book here.

This book will appeal to those readers that love a Victorian Gothic that has elements of mystery, the supernatural, romantic and familial love and deeply etched characters that think thoroughly, feel deeply and reflect on their own and others actions.

At first I thought this book was a series of interconnected novellas and then they merge into a story that is dark, sad and full of an atmosphere of deep fog and chills both in the physical and psychological senses. Despite this characters are drawn to each other with a deep hunger for connection despite many losses, prolonged grieving and feelings of inferiority for some and malignant superiority in others.

I read this on a beach at 90 degrees Fahrenheit and yet I could honestly say I would shiver when reading this. The writing was that authentic.

I feel that the author truly understood the motivations of all his characters and despite their deep flaws could have them all come together to create a story so multilayered, complexly interesting and full of suspense and interesting parallels.

This book was only a few inches short of perfect. I won't state the slight flaw in it as I don't want to detract to how excellent I found this.

Mr. Harwood you have found yourself a new fan. I look forward to adding another one of your novels to my to be read list.

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### **Tracey says**

How do you like your Victorian gothic ghost story mysteries?

What makes it cut the mustard?

Do you need a big old ramshackle, spooky mansion? What about a haunted wood with the ghost of a monk that if you see you are like as not to die? And don't forget spiritualism, lightning strikes, menacing villains, untimely death, clairvoyance. a suit of armour, a slow building but not plodding plot reminiscent of Wilkie Collins The woman in white and don't forget mesmerism.

Well John Harwood has managed to recapture this in a story that could have been written in the Victorian times.

It is brooding and has plenty of twists and turns that will keep you guessing until the end.

The multiple narrators which at the start felt to me like stories within themselves all came together and were interwoven with some skill by the author.

All in all a very satisfying read. For me it captures the feeling and the genre in buckets.

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### **karen says**

okay it is high time i remove myself from the victorian gothic for a little while - everything is blurring together... this one was fine, not great. there was just something a little cartoony about it - big house, hidden passages, suits of armor, harnessing lightning, mesmerism... the usual. good rainy day book though.

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### **Blair says**

After a somewhat dry and uninspiring start, this book developed into an excellently crafted and superbly chilling cross between a period mystery and a ghost story. I was impressed with the author's handling of both plot and characterisation; though the narrative is composed of personal accounts written by different characters at different times, it flows perfectly, and the ending ties up a great deal of loose ends without seeming implausible. The only thing I was unsure about was the juxtaposition of Eleanor Wraxford's suffering at the hands of her husband with the ghosts-and-spirits creepiness of the rest of the story - the former was frightening in a very human way and I don't think it sat too comfortably within a pleasurably spooky read like this.

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### **Kimberly says**

THE SEANCE, by John Harwood is a gothic, Victorian-style mystery. I have to say that I really enjoyed the author's writing style, and will be searching out other books by him in the near future. Using the technique of telling the tale with a series of narratives written by various people, we are taken further back in time to the legends and stigma surrounding Wraxford Hall. This decaying manor is somehow traced back through the

lineage and left to a young woman, Constance Langton--recently orphaned by parents that she never really felt "bonded" to.

Through the various diaries and narratives, we are given pieces of a puzzle going back decades, entwining many lives through its mysterious pages.

The menacing air hits immediately, and we are mere witnesses as Constance delves in deeper, determined to get at the root of what happened in that manor to make its reputation so bleak.

A great, slow-burning story for those who like to build upon the atmosphere and characters while leading to the ultimate conclusion of a tale that has never been known before.

Recommended!

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### **Scarlett Readz and Runz....Through Novel Time & Distance says**

I just finished this as part of a book group read and is not my usual type of read. As a fact, it's my first "ghost" story I read....besides kids spooky Halloween comics.

Set in the later eighteen hundreds, Constance lost her sister and her grieving mother. At first it was my impression, that "The Séance" would take off as Constance takes her mother to see one, to make her feel better about her lost daughter. But that wasn't so. The book is divided into many parts, timelines, and person's views. It really gets confusing.

So according to the jacket of the book it reads: "...a gripping gothic thriller set in late Victorian England. It is a world of apparitions, of disappearances and unnatural phenomena, of betrayal and blackmail and black-hearted villains – murder."

I can attest to the gloomy atmosphere, with fog, candlelight, dusty libraries, dark cellars, creaking floorboards, tombs and creepy churchyards. That all came well across by way of Harwood's writing style.

*"We think of the mind as enclosed within the narrow compass of the skull, but we could equally imagine a cavern filled with dark water and connected by some subterranean passage, to the limitless depths of the ocean, and think of each individual mind as a droplet of one great oceanic Mind which contains everything: all the gods and demons, the paradises and underworlds of every religion on earth, all history, all knowledge, everything that has ever happened. A mind upon which it could truly be said that nothing is lost, not so much as the fall of a sparrow..."*

**? John Harwood, The Seance**

It was so confusing. I had a hard time reading it. But I finished it. Maybe someone else enjoys this kind of writing or I really just did not get it. I found the story to be not "gripping" me, and somehow I must have missed the climax....cause for me there was none!

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### **Harry McKinley says**

I always think the sign of a good book is when one reaches the end and feels a sense of loss that the experience of reading it is at an end. Note I said GOOD book and that's my problem believe it or not. This book was good but should have been great.

With subject matter like seances and manor houses, Victorian London and mysterious deaths and visitations this book should have been sinister, gripping and dripping in atmosphere but unfortunately it lacked the ambience and thrills one expected. The plot was a little convoluted and the characters were not well defined enough, Constance was not really any different from Eleanor who was not really any different from Ada and so on and so forth. I also felt, without giving anything away, that had this book explored the supernatural more than trap doors and magnesium it would have been more successful, at least in delivering the atmosphere one expects from the genre.

It had a intriguing start that did get me hooked but lost momentum. I'm not saying it was a bad book, I just felt a little dissappointed and expected so much more. I'd still recommend it but more as a light weight page turner than grisly Victoriana.

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## **Joe Valdez says**

I made it as far as page 34 before giving up on *The Seance*. I can't tell you if the novel gets around to dealing with the supernatural in a practical way, or is more about a teenage girl dealing with spiritualism and the death of her sister in London of the Victorian Age.

It wouldn't make any difference to me if this was a classical ghost story or not if the story grabbed me. Either Hardwood is a tedious writer, or his editors approved the first 50 pages being tedious.

The entire novel reads like a prologue better off being cut: "I had hoped that Mama would be content with regular messages from Alma but as the autumn advanced and the days grew shorter, the old haunted look crept back into her eyes ..."

Events are summed up and skimmed through as if Hardwood is in a hurry to get somewhere, but as near as I can tell, the entire novel is written like this. A magnificent cover design wasted on a book I'm abandoning and an author I'll probably never read again, unless I need a sleeping agent.

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