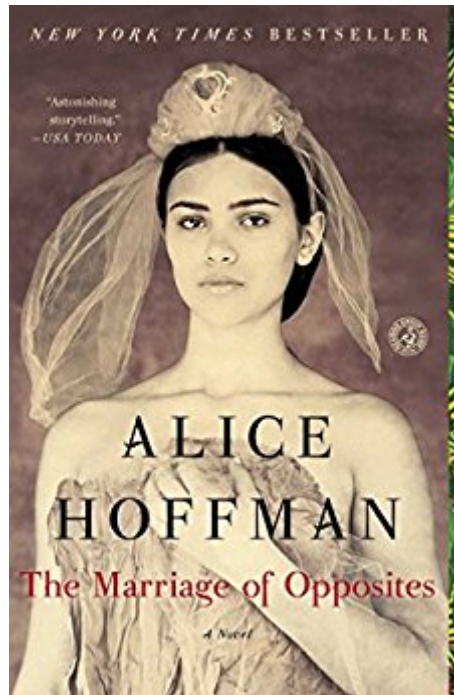




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# The Marriage Of Opposites



## Synopsis

“A luminous, Marquez-esque tale” (O, The Oprah Magazine) from the New York Times bestselling author of *The Museum of Extraordinary Things*: a forbidden love story set on a tropical island about the extraordinary woman who gave birth to painter Camille Pissarro “the Father of Impressionism.” Growing up on idyllic St. Thomas in the early 1800s, Rachel dreams of life in faraway Paris. Rachel’s mother, a pillar of their small refugee community of Jews who escaped the Inquisition, has never forgiven her daughter for being a difficult girl who refuses to live by the rules. Growing up, Rachel’s salvation is their maid Adelle’s belief in her strengths, and her deep, life-long friendship with Jestine, Adelle’s daughter. But Rachel’s life is not her own. She is married off to a widower with three children to save her father’s business. When her older husband dies suddenly and his handsome, much younger nephew, Frédéric, arrives from France to settle the estate, Rachel seizes her own life story, beginning a defiant, passionate love affair that sparks a scandal that affects all of her family, including her favorite son, who will become one of the greatest artists of France. “A work of art” (Dallas Morning News), *The Marriage of Opposites* showcases the beloved, bestselling Alice Hoffman at the height of her considerable powers. “Her lush, seductive prose, and heart-pounding subject” make this latest skinny-dip in enchanted realism “the Platonic ideal of the beach read” (Slate.com). Once forgotten to history, the marriage of Rachel and Frédéric “will only renew your commitment to Hoffman’s astonishing storytelling” (USA TODAY).

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

The Marriage of Opposites by Alice Hoffman is a beautifully atmospheric work of historical fiction set in the 19th century on the tropical island of St. Thomas where the reader learns about the life of Rachel Pomie, who later becomes known as the mother of the famous painter Camille Pissarro, the father of Impressionism, and while I would have delighted in reading a book entirely about Pissarro's life, his mother's life is extraordinarily intriguing. I went into The Marriage of Opposites with knowledge of the Father of Impressionism, however I knew absolutely nothing about his mother and here Hoffman shines in her exceptional account of Rachel's life from childhood through her adulthood, from a young girl dreaming of Paris, to an arranged marriage, through widowhood, and finding true love in Fredrick. I was hesitant that this would be a basic love story, a genre I usually do not enjoy, however Hoffman, the fabulous storyteller that she is, weaves together many forms of love into this absolutely fantastic story, pulling on the heartstrings of readers, while making history come alive in what is researched as well as imagined by such a gifted storyteller. Rachel is not an easy character to always like, however, she is one to be understood, like most people she had dreams that in her day and time were not possible and while she pushed the boundaries of convention at that time and place in history, she also knew her place and her duties. I found the telling of the multilayered characters to be exceptional and Hoffman excels at showing the reader through her elegant prose, the many facets of love. I would highly recommend The Marriage of Opposites to anyone who enjoys excellent literary and historical fiction as well as to all book discussion groups.

In this very atmospheric, visual, historical novel, Hoffman tells us the story of Rachel Pomi and Fredrick Pizzarro. Their son was the renowned French Impressionist painter, Camille Pissarro. From blurbs, I gather that blending in magic, folktales, and romance is a trademark of Hoffman that also makes this novel poetic. My art book club chose this book because it was about Pissarro, but you needn't be an art enthusiast to enjoy this dramatic story. The book begins when Rachel is a little girl in St. Thomas (early 19th c.). The island with its heat, vivid flora and fauna, and

multi-cultural history becomes a main character in the book. She wraps us up in elaborate folktales and religious and cultural background. Most residents speak several languages, including French and Danish. There are still slaves on the island, which is a Danish colony. Rachel's family is Jewish, so they have their own strict guidelines for behavior and ritual, and Rachel isn't inclined to accept the rules of others. Yes, there's plenty of conflict, scandal, and hidden secrets. When Camille is old enough to become interested in art, he shows he inherited his mother's rebellious nature. The novel shifts toward him as the main character about halfway through the book. Some of the narrative takes place in Paris. The beginning of Chapter 11, set in 1855, the buildup to the Civil War, chilled me: "There was trouble brewing in America, a lawlessness that sometimes portends war."

I liked the story and I liked the descriptions of the locales, but I found the book very repetitive in describing the character's motivation and remembering past events. I think the book could have been edited much more carefully, and then would have made a read that held my attention throughout.

This is the story of Camille Pissarro's mother and her relationships with family and society in St. Thomas and in Paris. As an historical novel I found it lacking in detail, but as an account of the emotional growth of a young girl, friend, wife, mother and eventually grandmother, it held my interest. Some of the descriptions were repetitive, perhaps to give a fairytale feel to the stories told within the narrative. She wrote detailed description of colors and shapes, as would an artist, especially in the chapters where she wrote from Camille's POV. On the whole it is a slow moving yet satisfying book, but not one of Hoffman's best.

This book is a rather complex story of one family's struggle with their traditions and changing times. The story takes place on St. Thomas Island where a Jewish community has been established as a result of the Spanish Inquisition. Determined to practice their faith and maintain Jewish traditions, the community grew close and remained strong. Rachel is the daughter of a prosperous businessman, who raises her to believe she can be whatever she wants to be. The conflict begins when Rachel realizes that her father does not really mean what he says. She finds herself married off to an older man in order to help the family business. The story takes us through her marriage to a man she does not love and into her second marriage where she finds true love but defies family tradition and by doing so, is turned away from the church. Secondary stories follow a similar path

where characters find themselves ostracized because of their personal choices. The combination of the setting, the circumstances and the bit of history that is woven throughout the book make it very readable.

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