



The Quaker City: The Monks of Monk Hall

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America's best-selling novel in its time, The Quaker City, published in 1845, is a sensational exposé of social corruption, personal debauchery, and the sexual exploitation of women in antebellum Philadelphia. This new edition, with an introduction by David S. Reynolds, brings back into print this important work by George Lippard (1822-1854), a journalist, freethinker, and labor and social reformer.

The Quaker City: The Monks of Monk Hall Details

Date : Published April 24th 2001 by University of Massachusetts Press (first published 1844)

ISBN : 9780870239717

Author : George Lippard , David S. Reynolds (Editor)

Format : Paperback 582 pages

Genre : Fiction, Classics, Literature, 19th Century, Historical, Historical Fiction, Gothic, Horror



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Download and Read Free Online The Quaker City: The Monks of Monk Hall George Lippard , David S. Reynolds (Editor)

From Reader Review The Quaker City: The Monks of Monk Hall for online ebook

Heather Allen says

I read this book for my pulp fiction class in my senior year of college. I did not think I would enjoy it as much as I did, but there is plenty of mystery and adventure in this novel as there would be in any other thriller, but a lot more grotesque imagery that is not seen in today's modern novels. This novel (about 600 pages) is set in 1850's Philadelphia(also when it was written), a place full of corruption and greed. The characters are stark and haunting, have their own agenda's, and always find a way to get what they want -- or they die. There are secret underground societies, a home that has secret passageways and secrets of the people who frequent it. At one point there is a scene where one character is torturing another by tickling them. I promise there are things much worse, like a cellar full of dead people. Each of the stories interact with one another but could stand alone on their own until they start colliding with others. The ending was unusual and left to the reader's interpretation (in my opinion, anyway, not so much my English professor). I highly recommend this book if you like commentaries on society, gruesome characters and scenes, and the theme of good verses evil. The Quaker City: The Monks of Monk Hall

Justinian says

2018-09 – The Quaker City, Or, the Monks of Monk Hall: A Romance of Philadelphia Life, Mystery, and Crime. George Lippard (Author) 1845. 632 Pages.

Every now and then you read a book or encounter a character in a book that stays with you ... that becomes a permanent fixture in the ready assessable bookshelf of your mind. You think about the book or person, you encounter other things in life that remind you of it or that you somehow link to it. For me this book is such a book. This was the most popular novel in the USA until "Uncle Tom's Cabin" in 1852. This book was besides being that popular was also equally reviled for some of the scenes. The story occurs in Philadelphia in the 1830's. It is a large industrializing city of class divides. It is a story that takes place over a weeks' time and inhabits the dark cellars of debauchery as well the prim parlors of the well do to do. Scoundrels abound ... and you never know whom to root for and whom to chide. Where the rich believe they can do whatever they want and rules and laws do not apply to them. This is a society where the honor of rich woman is a hanging offense but that of a regular or poor woman is a game chit to be wagered and played. This is a society where the religious needs of the distant "Hindo" matter but those of the neighbor and those in the dingy alleys and boardinghouses of Philadelphia. The writing is the florid prose of the Romantic Era and people do not write like that, or talk like that anymore. Let me say ... one character for me stood out as a figure I think about ... and that is Devil-Bug. It is hard to say if he is the villain or the hero. Devil-Bug though is a quintessentially American character ... a long nailed, hunchback of prodigious strength who "... loved not so much to kill, as to observe the blood of his victim, fall drop by drop, as to note the convulsive look of death, as to hear the last throttling rattle in the throat of the dying." He along with the city itself dominate this story of seduction, privilege, and mirth. An excellent book ... one that stays in my thoughts and against which I reference ideas, people, and other stories and events. Stunning piece of work.

Andrew Sydlik says

Convoluted urban Gothic/sensation fiction with murder, rape, adultery, forgery, and a 200-year sorcerer who controls minds, resurrects the dead, and wants to start his own religion with him as the god figure. A little bit o' something for everyone!

Alexa says

Had to read this for a required class. I have to say, 19th century American novels are appallingly terrible. This was yet another painful text I had to get through. I was promised gore and Poe-like prose, but instead encountered droning soliloquies, various annoying dialects, funky use of words and at times, inconsistent characterizations.

While the novel is rich in recounting Philadelphia life in the 1830s-1840s, it is also based on real people and events, which made its serialization almost like a gossip column.

Most disappointing was the writing. Like the rest of the novels we've covered in class, the writing lacks any compelling elements. It is dense, but evokes no emotion of fear and it is not as poetic as Poe. The characters are too dramatic and annoyingly self obsessed, but not in an interesting way. Many times actions are left unexplained, which makes the characters appear irrational to an unrealistic degree.

A lot of the issues I have with the novel could be blamed on the serialization, but regardless, I just could not see it as well-written.

Dane says

Crazy as hell.

Margaret says

While it is wonderful to wander around 1840s Philadelphia with Lippard's characters, some of the period details are very hard to take. It's pretty Gothic, I guess, plenty of horror, potential reputations ruined, eerie coincidences, etc. Then add the racism and it is just hard to get through, even as a window into the period. I am debating whether to finish.

Jonas says

Poe meets Marx in 1840s Philadelphia. Novel includes battling zombies, mesmerism, mass shrieking, murder, corsets, heaving bosoms, and an anti-hero named Devil-Bug. Enough said.

Devin Boehmer says

3 1/2 out of 5... Crazy crazy book! Unnecessarily long, but does move somewhat quickly. definitely not an easy read, but I am glad I read it.

B says

Good gracious, this book took me forever to read. It's not that it was particularly difficult to read language-wise, there were just 75 characters connected in 75 different ways with 75 plot twists going on. Also, peculiarly, there was quite a bit written in "dialect". Though I have never heard a Jew that speaks the way Lippard wrote them to speak and his slave dialect was particularly difficult to figure out. I think that's unnecessary work on the author's part. I have an imagination. When there is dialogue in a book, I imagine what they sound like, their speech patterns and what-not. I don't need you to write out some gobbledegook that is difficult to read, much less figure out what they were saying. Maybe people needed more help with this in the 1800s, what do I know. It was probably cutting edge and hip.

This is what this book was like: A soap opera set in 1800s Philadelphia. People were sleeping with people they weren't supposed to be sleeping with, there was gossip and betrayal and rich people and scandal. The only difference is that Quaker City is much more gory. So I guess it's like a horror movie soap opera. Which, admittedly, is pretty cool. The scene where the old widow gets her head bashed in with the knob on a bed post will stay with me for a while, to be sure. Her cats mournfully lapping up her still warm blood from her crushed in skull... lap...lap... "Meow?" These are the images I'm happy to have with me at night.

I will be happy if I never hear an author describe someone's hair as a collection of "glossy locks", however. Never, in my entire life, have I heard such use of the adjective "glossy" when it comes to hair. When you think about it? That's kind of nasty. I don't want glossy hair so much.

So, meh. I'm glad I finished this sucker, I was determined to finish it and I'm looking forward to reading what my brother-in-law wrote about it in his dissertation, but I didn't care for any of these characters. Like a soap opera, they're all nasty self-centered people. I need a book with people that I care about to some degree along with their flaws. The way in which the women were portrayed was particularly troublesome. OK, if you get "dishonored" by an evil man pretending to be your newly wedded husband, WHY DO YOU NEED TO TELL ANYONE ABOUT IT??? It's not like anyone is going to know! You know? But she goes home screaming about it to her Mom and Dad and ruins everyone's life.

The scenes with the poison were funny too. Oh ho, I poisoned you...wait, did I? No, you haven't taken a sip yet. Let me notice your glossy curls one more time before you die. Oh, you're taking a sip! Wait, no you're not. Oh, but you are! Oh, you're dying! But wait! I have the antidote! Am I going to give it to you? Do you want it? No, I won't give it to you. I'm going to dangle it in front of your face and watch you die. Oh, here is this personalized coffin I had made for you. Now I'm going to leave. Oh wait. You're not really poisoned after all, are you? No, because some strange cult leader sorcerer man is going to bring you back to life. Let me notice your glossy curls once more. Yes. Glossy.

I did enjoy having a hideously deformed one-eyed crusty monster man with old lady blood matted in his hair

as a main character, however.

Regina Betz says

Quaker City was an interesting class read for my 19th Century American Literature course. It's definitely something that was serialized; I think it's something that most people wouldn't read for pleasure now, but in the 19th century, it was extremely popular, and it was scandalous by noting unethical methods and challenging Philadelphia's society. This followed up my readings on Hawthorne and Poe for my class, so the grotesque themes united the three authors. There are cases of rape, murder, and terrible crimes and immoral behavior. Lippard provides rich descriptions of his characters (which, he has many of). As always, I'm fascinated with the character analysis, so a character named Devil-Bug is a deep, complex individual. The storyline is like that of a labyrinth, with characters' stories connecting and so forth. For someone who never proofread his work, he did a very nice job of wrapping these complex stories together while covering the multiple plots vividly.

Erin says

While I'm not a huge fan of 19th century literature, this book defies the common themes found in Victorian literature and needs to be revived in the canonical works.

Zade says

I'm not sure how I got through this much school without even hearing of this novel. For those interested in 19th-century American literature, this should be required reading. Lippard was a bit of a nut-case, which shows clearly in his writing. The book is both an exposé of the corruption prevalent in both the upper and lower reaches of society in Philadelphia. It's over-the-top in terms of melodrama and scandal, with fraud, rape, incest, etc. playing major roles in the plot. It's also a temperance morality play writ large. While I don't think anyone's going to argue that Lippard was a master of his form, the novel is remarkably readable, given its age, as well as being shockingly different to the usual fare presented in 19th-century American Lit. classes.

Nancy Oakes says

I'm in for a 3.6 rating or so. This book has to be a satire of gothic novels and yet fits in very nicely with the "city mysteries" genre of Early American fiction. This book had me laughing in quite a number of places, cringing in others. It's also a twisted, sordid novel filled with debauchery, corruption, sensationalism and some of the most vile characters you'd never want to meet. It is rather a mishmash of genres, and ranks high in the melodrama department. More here at my online reading journal, but for now, here's a very general idea:

Monk's Hall is a

"queer old house down town, kept by a reputable old lady, and supported by the purses of goodly citizens, whose names you never hear without the addition of 'respectable,' 'celebrated' or--ha--ha--'pious'..."

These are not the "outcasts of society," but rather "Here were lawyers from the court, doctors from the school and judges from the bench," one of the "vilest rookeries in the world." It is run by a deformed pimp who goes by the moniker of Devil-Bug, sort of reminiscent of the old Hellfire clubs, but here there are trap doors in the floors, bodies in the cellar, and all sorts of devilment going on in the rooms upstairs. The titular "monks" are made up of the above-mentioned pillars of society and while some are busy satisfying their physical lusts, gambling, or taking opium, others spend their time drinking, "flinging their glasses on high, while the room echoed with their oaths and drunken shouts."

I'm not going to go into plot -- there are three major ones, a number of smaller ones and some subplots stemming from the three big ones so it would be nearly impossible in the amount of space & time that I have. Suffice it to say that the book takes on several segments of Philadelphia society to expose the city's hidden hypocrisies, and Lippard really outdoes himself in lambasting Philadelphia's religious leaders as well as its media institutions, financial institutions and wealthy merchants.

The Quaker City is difficult to get into at first, but once I was past the first couple of chapters and caught on to how to read this book, it's actually quite fun. It's a dark novel filled with gothic elements including the secret mansion where members dress up in monk's cowls, take on different names, and convene for debauchery. It is filled with secret rooms, trap doors, secret burial vaults, fallen women and those brought there to face ruination. My guess is that this is another one that doesn't make it onto a majority of course syllabi for studying American writers, and that's a shame. For one thing, it is interesting that it was such a bestseller, offering a glimpse into what people were reading at the time; for another, it's Lippard's examination of a corrupt society and what makes it thus. A lot of the issues he uncovers -- the buying of justice in the courts, the double standard between men and women, the hypocrisy of religion and religious leaders, and the corrupt power of financial institutions to name just a few, are still with us today. Funny how some things don't change over time, while others make leaps and bounds -- i.e., the roles and status of women, to be specific here.

I certainly wouldn't recommend this novel to everyone -- I read a LOT of weird stuff and this is among the strangest -- but for those who are at all interested in more off the beaten path antebellum fiction, it just might provide a few hours of entertainment. It will also provide an eye-opening look at what lies under the surface of the pillars of Philadelphia pre-Civil War society as seen through the eyes of this author, "an espouser of radical causes" who "waged holy war against all kinds of social oppressors." I will say that if you're in it solely for the sleaze value you'd be better off with the stories in George Thompson's *Venus in Boston and Other Tales of Nineteenth-Century City Life*.

Kristi says

This is a Gothic exposé of the hidden debauchery and exploitation in the underworld of Philadelphia, a city emblematic of America. While, the large cast of characters is overwhelming, and the dialect makes this less accessible, this allowed Lippard to immerse his readers into the uncomfortable strangeness and overwhelming anonymity of life in a 19th century American city.

Braden says

Human dissection! Mesmerism! Evil fraternal organizations! Trap doors! Devil-Bug's apocalyptic dreams! Many, many poisonous libations! Astrologers! Forgery! "Veins of ruination" popping out of young women's necks to make it obvious that they have just been ruined!

Suffice it to say that the plot is labyrinthine. But if you like sensationalistic, if you live for over-the-top, this is the book for you. Top-selling book of the 19th century before Stowe's Uncle Tom's Cabin. Published in 1844-5.
