

Deformance,
Performativity,
Posthumanism:
The Subversive Style
and Radical Politics
of George Lippard's
The Quaker City

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ONE of the richest examples of the genre known as city-mysteries fiction, George Lippard's *The Quaker City* (1844–45) created a sensation, sparked a city-mysteries craze in America, was pirated abroad, and unleashed cultural energies that contributed to tropes and themes in major American literature.¹ City-mysteries fiction

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This essay is part of a special issue on George Lippard's *The Quaker City*

¹ Although the sales figures of *The Quaker City* and Lippard's other writings are undetermined (longstanding very high estimates are currently being revised downward), Lippard was so widely read that *Godey's Lady's Book* (a magazine he loathed) conceded in 1849 that Lippard "stands isolated on a point inaccessible to the mass of writers of the present day. . . he is unquestionably the most popular writer of the day" ("Editors' Book Table," *Godey's Lady's Book*, January 1849, p. 67). On the day after his death Lippard was described in a Philadelphia newspaper as "the author of a number

came in different varieties and ranged in political vantage points. The genre originated in Europe, where Eugène Sue's *The Mysteries of Paris* (1842–43; English translation, 1844), G.W.M. Reynolds's *The Mysteries of London* (1844), and “mysteries” of several other European cities—Berlin, Brussels, Rome, and Vienna, among them—enjoyed great popularity. These European novels were offshoots of the well-established genre of sensational fiction that reached back to the crime pamphlets

of novels, which have been read probably as extensively as those of any writer in the country” (*Public Ledger*, 10 February 1854). Lippard in 1849 boasted that *The Quaker City* was “more attacked, and more read, than any work of American fiction ever published” (George Lippard, *The Quaker City; or, The Monks of Monk Hall: A Romance of Philadelphia Life, Mystery, and Crime*, ed. David S. Reynolds [Amherst: Univ. of Massachusetts Press, 1995], p. 2. Hereafter, page numbers from the novel are cited parenthetically). Relationships of analogy or influence have been drawn between Lippard and other writers, including Nathaniel Hawthorne, Edgar Allan Poe, Herman Melville, Walt Whitman, James Fenimore Cooper, Charles Brockden Brown, Stephen Crane, Mark Twain, and British and Continental writers of sensational or Gothic fiction. For such discussion, see, for example, Emilio De Grazia, “The Life and Works of George Lippard,” *Dissertation Abstracts: Section A. Humanities and Social Science*, 31 (1970), 741A; Heinz Ickstadt, “Instructing the American Democrat: Cooper and the Concept of Popular Fiction in Jacksonian America,” *Amerikastudien/American Studies*, 31 (1986), 17–30; Paul J. Erickson, “George Lippard (1822–1854),” in *Writers of the American Renaissance: An A-to-Z Guide*, ed. Denise D. Knight (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2003), pp. 240–43; Dana Luciano, “The Gothic Meets Sensation: Charles Brockden Brown, Edgar Allan Poe, George Lippard, and E.D.E.N. Southworth,” in *A Companion to American Fiction 1780–1865*, ed. Shirley Samuels (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), pp. 314–29; Carl Ostrowski, “‘The Best Side of a Case of Crime’: George Lippard, Walt Whitman, and Antebellum Police Reports,” *American Periodicals: A Journal of History, Criticism, and Bibliography*, 21 (2011), 120–42; Samuel Otter, *Philadelphia Stories: America's Literature of Race and Freedom* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2010); David S. Reynolds, *Beneath the American Renaissance: The Subversive Imagination in the Age of Emerson and Melville* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1988); David S. Reynolds, *Walt Whitman's America: A Cultural Biography* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995); David S. Reynolds, *George Lippard* (Boston: Twayne, 1982); David S. Reynolds, “Radical Sensationalism: George Lippard in His Transatlantic Contexts,” in *Transatlantic Sensations*, ed. Jennifer Phegley, John Cyril Barton, and Kristin N. Huston (Farnham, England: Ashgate, 2012), pp. 77–96; Shelley Suzanne Streeby, “Republican Gothic: George Lippard, Urban Sensationalism, and the Transformation of the Literary Public Sphere in the United States, 1830–1860,” *Dissertation Abstracts International*, 55 (1995), 2876A; Shelley Streeby, “Haunted Houses: George Lippard, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Middle-Class America,” *Criticism: A Quarterly for Literature and the Arts*, 38 (1996), 443–72; Shelly Streeby, *American Sensations: Class, Empire, and the Production of Popular Culture* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 2002); Toshiyuki Tatsumi, “Amerika shōsetsu no kakumei (22),” *Eigo Seinen/Rising Generation*, 144.10 (January 1999), 606–8; and Carey R. Voeller, “Masculine Interludes: Monstrosity and Compassionate Manhood in American Literature, 1845–1899,” *Dissertation Abstracts International, Section A: The Humanities and Social Sciences*, 69 (2009), 2714.

and Gothic novels of the eighteenth century.² As such, the European city-mysteries novel explored the city as another locus of sensation, like the labyrinthine, gloomy castle of bygone Gothic fiction. America witnessed a surge of fictional portraits of the “mysteries” of cities—not only large eastern ones like Philadelphia, New York, and Boston but also smaller ones like New Orleans, San Francisco, St. Louis, Baltimore, Cincinnati, and Lowell, and even towns like Nashua, Haverhill, Fitchburg, and Papermill Village. City-mysteries fiction contrasted the private vices of aristocrats with the squalor and crime of the lower classes. Several authors exploited this paradigmatic contrast merely for adventure and titillation, treating upper-class vices with voyeurism and viewing working-class types from a complacent perspective. In some cases, however, writing about the working class yielded sincere sympathy with it. This was the case with Eugène Sue, a wealthy Parisian who hired a bodyguard when he toured low-life areas to gather information for *The Mysteries of Paris*. Sue’s political consciousness was aroused by writing this novel, which later became known as the *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* of socialism because of its revelation of the wretchedness of the Parisian underclass. Having defended the poor in his fiction, Sue went into leftist politics and was elected as a deputy to France’s National Assembly in the wake of the 1848 working-class revolutions, which his *Mysteries of Paris* had helped spark.

Such leftist sympathy, acquired by the affluent Sue, was inbred in the American novelist George Lippard (1822–1854). Lippard, the fourth of six children, was born on a farm near Yellow Springs, Chester County, Pennsylvania, about forty miles northwest of Philadelphia. When he was two, the family moved to Philadelphia’s Germantown area. He was soon virtually abandoned by his sickly parents, who moved elsewhere in the city and left him and his siblings in the care of their grandfather and two maiden aunts. After Lippard’s mother died from tuberculosis in 1831, the aunts took the children to Philadelphia proper, where they lived apart from their father. At fifteen, Lippard was sent to a school in Rhinebeck, New York, to train for the Methodist ministry, but he left the school

² See *Transatlantic Sensations*, ed. Phegley, et al.

in disgust over what he considered unchristian behavior on the part of its clergyman director. Lippard returned to Philadelphia, where he took on law-assistant jobs that paid little and exposed him to “social life, hidden sins, and iniquities covered with the cloak of authority.”³ His father, who had remarried, died in 1837, leaving George and his siblings no share of an estate worth about \$2,000. Within a few years, Lippard had lost many members of his immediate family. Indigent, he lived for a time like a drifting bohemian in Philadelphia, staying with friends or in an abandoned building.⁴ He witnessed the ravages of poverty firsthand during the five-year economic depression that followed the Panic of 1837. He was also immersed in the tumultuous street life in Philadelphia, marked by racial and religious riots, and he developed a deep and genuine identification with marginalized or oppressed Americans. He took up what he called his “Sword-Pen” to defend the interests of working-class readers while entertaining them with sensational plots that had great appeal in an era of penny newspapers, trial pamphlets, and pulp novels. Between 1842 and his death from tuberculosis at the age of thirty-one in 1854, Lippard produced twenty-three separately published books and countless periodical pieces.⁵ In the last four years of his life, he devoted himself largely to working on behalf of the Brotherhood of the Union, the labor organization he founded in 1849. His dedication to the cause of labor was unwavering, as was his mistrust of the moneyed elite.

Sue’s and Lippard’s different perspectives toward urban realities become apparent when we compare *The Mysteries of Paris* and *The Quaker City*. In Sue’s novel, Rodolphe, a German duke disguised as a poor man, explores the crime-ridden Parisian underworld, rewarding the virtuous and punishing the

³ James B. Elliott, introduction to George Lippard, *Thomas Paine, Author-Soldier of the American Revolution* (1852; rpt. Philadelphia: n.p., 1894), p. 15.

⁴ For further biographical details, see Reynolds, *George Lippard*, pp. 1–26; and Joseph Jablonksi, “George Lippard,” in *The American Radical*, ed. Mari Jo Buhle, Paul Buhle, and Harvey J. Kaye (New York: Routledge, 1994), pp. 33–39.

⁵ For a concise overview of Lippard’s literary career, see Roger Butterfield, “George Lippard and His Secret Brotherhood,” *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, 79 (1955), 285–309. The publication of *The Quaker City* is adeptly analyzed by Michael Winship in “In Search of Monk-Hall: A Publishing History of George Lippard’s *Quaker City*,” in this issue.

wicked. Fearless and compassionate, Rodolphe is the forerunner of many later masked or caped crusaders in popular culture. *The Quaker City* has no such moral center. Its protagonist is the monstrous pimp Devil-Bug, whose criminal nature was shaped by his background as a poor orphan. The novel's wealthy characters are depraved types who cheat the poor instead of helping them, while its working-class characters resort to crime or suicide because of economic exploitation.

Lacking the consolatory aspect of *The Mysteries of Paris*, Lippard's novel, while rich in characters, stymies the novelistic stability conventionally provided by the struggles of heroes against villains in the mystery genre. Lippard's style thus gets foregrounded as the locus of morality and politics, displaying an acerbic, presurrealistic edge, noticeably lacking in Sue. The current essay surveys linguistic and generic deformations (alinear narrative, irony and parody, bizarre tropes, performativity, and periperformativity) and biological and material deformations (posthuman images, including animals, objects, sonic effects, and vibrant matter) in *The Quaker City* to suggest how Lippard stylistically reinforces his goal of satirizing literary and social conventions and exposing what he regards as hypocrisy and corruption on the part of America's ruling class.



The principal ways in which Lippard transforms contextual data are compression, layering, and irony. His plots accentuate complexity and mixed motives. His method is visible in the novel's main plot: the seduction of Mary Arlington by Gus Lorrimer and the subsequent murder of Gus by Mary's brother, Byrnewood Arlington. This plot is based on the case of Mahlon Heberton, a twenty-three-year-old Philadelphian who in early January 1843 encountered the sixteen-year-old Sarah Mercer on the street, seduced her on a promise of marriage, and had several trysts with her during the next month in a house of assignation.⁶ Sarah ended the affair when her family

⁶ Details of the case can be found in several Philadelphia newspapers of February 1843 and in the pamphlet *The Trial of Singleton Mercer, for the Murder of M. Hutchinson Heberton, at Camden, N.J., on Friday, 10th February, 1843* (New York: Herald Office, 1843).

learned of it, but her brother, Singleton Mercer, sought out Mahlon Heberton and demanded that he take Sarah as his wife. When Heberton responded indifferently, Mercer stalked him for two days, followed him as he boarded a New Jersey-bound ferry in a carriage, and, just before the ferry reached Camden, fired several shots into the carriage, inflicting a wound from which Heberton soon died. The case, known as the Camden Catastrophe, was widely reported. Singleton Mercer was brought to trial for murder and was found not guilty after his lawyers argued that he had been temporarily insane and had taken justifiable retribution against his sister's seducer. Mercer, regarded by many as a defender of a sister's virtue, became something of a local hero. On the day of his acquittal, he was surrounded by cheering supporters.

In *The Quaker City*, Lippard takes events that took some forty days to unfold—Mahlon Heberton met Sarah Mercer in early January 1843 and was killed by her brother on 10 February—and squeezes them, using a few flashbacks, into the three days ending on Christmas Eve, 1842. Lippard's compression of time creates a dense, suffocating atmosphere that suits his aim of representing harsh social realities he views as crushing. Compression also generates many instances of hysteron proteron in the novel. Literally "the last comes first" or "disorder of time," hysteron proteron refers to a phrase in which words are reversed (e.g., "Put on your shoes and socks") and also describes a larger narrative strategy of interpellated flashbacks and violations of chronology.⁷ The novel is full of sudden time shifts, and the repeated leaps between different times and perspectives disorient the reader and mirror the social confusion Lippard is trying to represent.⁸

⁷ See Karin Kukkonen's analysis of hysteron proteron, as well as narrative anaphora, chiasmus, and other devices, as they are used in the comic book series *Watchmen*: Kukkonen, "Form as a Pattern of Thinking: Cognitive Poetics and New Formalism," in *New Formalisms and Literary Theory*, ed. Verena Theile and Linda Tredennick (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp. 159–76.

⁸ Robert Zecker notes that *The Quaker City* conveys the notion that "the city, with all its anonymous crowds of nobodies masquerading as somebodies, embodied the destabilizing and threatening uncertainties of America's early industrial revolution" (Zecker, *Metropolis: The American City in Popular Culture* [Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2008], p. 18).

Layering characterizes setting and plot in *The Quaker City*. Monk Hall, the den of iniquity that is a main locus of action in the novel, bears no similarity to the plain house kept by an African American woman in southwestern Philadelphia where Mahlon Heberton and Sarah Mercer had their trysts. “Conflicting traditions” and “dim legends” surround the huge Monk Hall, whose multivalent suggestiveness is matched by the novel’s palimpsestic plots (*Quaker City*, p. 47). In addition to the seduction plot, there are two other main narratives—one centered on a social-climbing adulteress and another on a swindling and forgery scheme—as well as several lesser ones. This layering of narratives enhances the novel’s dizzying, claustrophobic effect and communicates Lippard’s central message about the ubiquity of corruption and social turbulence in urban America. Most of the characters in the novel are multi-layered. The confidence man Algernon Fitz-Cowles is, in the words of his black servant Endymion, “so many tings, dat de debbil hisself could’nt count ’em—” (p. 155). The procuress Bess is a “mass of contradictions” who represents “the mass of good and evil, found in . . . the self-warring heart of man” (p. 82). Many characters in the novel show a false front to others or literally wear a disguise—with the added dimension that their real names are often withheld through Lippard’s use of antonomasia (e.g., The Personage; Ellis Mortimer as Gabriel Von Pelt; Easy Larkspur as Major Rappanhannock Mulhill; Luke Harvey as Brick-Top; and Algernon Fitz-Cowles in his many avatars). Many of the novel’s characters swing between emotionalism and rationality, with shades in between. In any scene, someone can be overwhelmed with terror, anger, jealousy, joy, or some other emotion while in the presence of another person who is cool and calculating, and then, in a later scene, the formerly emotional character can become the rational manipulator of another’s emotions. This perpetual seesawing creates a kind of narrative anaphora in which the manipulator and the manipulated, the con man and the dupe, the pursuer and the pursued frequently trade places.

Through layering and compression, Lippard creates irony—as we see, for example, in the portrayal of Byrnewood Arlington. Reportedly, a principal reason the dramatized version

of *The Quaker City*, scheduled to open at Philadelphia's Chesnut Street Theatre on 11 November 1844, was halted was that Byrnewood's real-life prototype, Singleton Mercer, was so angry about Lippard's depiction of him in the novel than he defaced a playbill and bought more than two hundred seats "for the purpose of a grand row."⁹ Mercer had reason to be upset. Lippard presents a completely altered picture of Mercer in his portrayal of Byrnewood, who over champagne and oysters playfully bets \$100 that Gus will not succeed in seducing a girl "connected with one of the first families in the city" (*Quaker City*, p. 15). Lippard makes Byrnewood not only a co-conspirator in Gus's sexual scheme but also a seducer himself: Byrnewood is haunted by his seduction of Annie, his family's servant. Lippard also includes a fictional visit by the two men to an astrologer (evidently based on the Philadelphia astro-metereologist Thomas Hague, celebrated for his predictions of murders, seductions, and other sensational occurrences).¹⁰ The astrologer's warning of doom, anticipatory of Elijah's prophecy to Ishmael in Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick* (1851), lends a sense of inevitability to Byrnewood's bloody deed. Mercer would not have been pleased by the implication that his crime was foreordained; nor would he have appreciated Lippard's rendition of the murder. In reality, shortly after Mercer shot Heberton on the Camden-bound ferry, he was so excited that he asked for a fiddler so that he could dance.¹¹ Lippard turns this momentary aberration into a sanguinary fantasy in which Byrnewood, "a maniac," rhapsodizes about the gurgling sound of his victim's "blood warm, warm, aye warm and gushing" and calls for "the drum, the trumpet, the chorus of a full band" so that he can dance over the corpse "while a wild song of joy, fills the heavens!" (*Quaker City*, p. 568) Here we witness Byrnewood's sadistic glee, and in the closing chapter we observe his strangely obsessive ritual of ignoring Annie (now

⁹ Francis Courtney Wemyss, *Twenty-Six Years of the Life of an Actor and Manager* (New York: Burgess, Stringer & Co., 1846), p. 395.

¹⁰ See, for example, the reports about Hague's astrological predictions in *The Daily Picayune* (New Orleans, La.), 22 May 1842; *Bellows Falls Gazette* (Bellows Falls, Vt.), 25 February 1843; *Albany Argus*, 9 August 1844; and *Jeffersonian Republican* (New Orleans, La.), 15 July 1845.

¹¹ *Public Ledger*, 13 February 1843; and *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 29 March 1843.

his wife) and retiring to a private room, where he unveils the portrait of his murder victim and stares at “the handsome Gus Lorrimer,” who has “the same laughing face of manly beauty, the same dark hazel eye, . . . the flowing locks of dark brown hair” as he had when living (p. 574).¹²

Lippard parodies the gender norms that were promoted in the era’s sentimental-domestic fiction. As scholars have shown, the virtuous heroines of domestic novels typically exhibit self-sufficiency and sturdiness, even as they remain pious and chaste.¹³ In *The Quaker City*, in contrast, the virtuous heroines are largely pawns of outside forces. Ironically, the most decisive actions that Mary Arlington takes are approaching a man in the street, who later proves to be her seducer, and then lying to her parents in order to get to him. Mabel shows no independent action at all, whether in Monk Hall or in Ravoni’s exhibition room. The fact that Mary and Mabel are saved not by their own uprightness but rather by the determined intervention of the procuress Bess and the criminal Devil-Bug attest to Lippard’s

¹² This queer scene characterizes Lippard’s treatment of sexuality, which in *The Quaker City* is cast into a fluid middle space where heteroeroticism and homoeroticism oscillate, as witnessed in the homosocial carousing of the four seduction conspirators and, later, of the inebriated “monks” in Monk Hall; in Bess’s admiring gaze at Mary; in the attraction that Devil-Bug feels when the disguised Dora appears in drag, her “effeminate beauty of shape” made all the more enticing because she is dressed as “a young man” (*Quaker City*, p. 279, 278); and in the androgynous Ravoni, with his frail body, long dark hair, and flowing robes, exercising magnetic power over women and men alike. Mary Unger in “Dens of Iniquity and Holes of Wickedness’: George Lippard and the Queer City,” *Journal of American Studies*, 43 (2009), 319–39, points out that Monk Hall is a transgressive space where heteronormative conventions are shown to be inoperable or are openly mocked. See also David Anthony’s discussion of homosociality, emasculation, and economic themes in *The Quaker City* and other urban texts in “Banking on Emotion: Financial Panic and the Logic of Male Submission in the Jacksonian Gothic,” *American Literature*, 76 (2004), 719–47. For another take on Lippard and gender issues, see Dana D. Nelson, *National Manhood: Capitalist Citizenship and the Imagined Fraternity of White Men* (Durham, N.C.: Duke Univ. Press, 1998), esp. pp. 135–75.

¹³ See Nina Baym, *Woman’s Fiction: A Guide to Novels by and about Women in America, 1820–70* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1978); and Jane P. Tompkins, *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction, 1790–1860* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1985). See also Frances B. Cogan, *All-American Girl: The Ideal of Real Womanhood in Mid-Nineteenth-Century America* (Athens: Univ. of Georgia Press, 1989); and Reynolds, *Beneath the American Renaissance*, pp. 337–437. For a discussion of unconventional treatments of marriage in sensational fiction, see Dawn Keetley, “Victim and Victimizer: Female Fiends and Unease over Marriage in Antebellum Sensational Fiction,” *American Quarterly*, 5 (1999), 344–84.

effort to challenge domestic literature's formula of efficacious virtue.

Lippard also subverts the domestic novel's moralistic ending. Bess is not rewarded for her heroism: instead, she ends up as an "unknown female" who is found dead in a graveyard and, with no friends to claim her body, is buried near a poorhouse (*Quaker City*, p. 572). In contrast, Bess's boss, Mother Nancy, escapes punishment, despite her unrelieved criminality; known to the world as "a respectable widow lady, who lives retired, in an ancient mansion [Monk Hall]," she is brought to trial "on a scandalous charge, originated by some designing enemies" but is "acquitted by the jury, without leaving the box"—an example of what Lippard sees as corrupt justice (pp. 571–72). The passive Mabel reaps rewards from the crimes of her father, Devil-Bug, through whose machinations she is accepted by the world as Izolé Livingstone, wins the hand of Luke Harvey, and inherits the estate of her supposed father, a deceased businessman with a British title. Meanwhile, the ostensible domestic harmony of Annie and Byrnewood Arlington is belied by Byrnewood's moodiness and his fixation on the portrait of his murder victim, which elicits from his deluded sister Mary, as she gazes at the portrait, the cry "LORRAINE!"—the last, false statement in a novel full of sham appearances (p. 575).

Besides revising gender roles, Lippard overturns racial hierarchies. On the surface, the main black characters in *The Quaker City* appear to align with antebellum stereotypes. The Arlingtons' Lewey is the devoted house servant anticipatory of Harriet Beecher Stowe's Uncle Tom; Fitz-Cowles's humorous, well-dressed lackey Endymion is like the "fancy" Zip Coon of the minstrel stage; Ravoni's silent Avar seems like a dumb brute; and Devil-Bug's enforcers Musquito and Glow-worm are hulking figures with "form[s] scarcely human" (*Quaker City*, p. 52). But Lippard deploys such stereotypes in situations in which they are modified. Lewey's repeated declaration that Mary is an angel whom he hopes to join in heaven heightens the irony surrounding Mary, who uses the servant as a cover for behavior that is hardly angelic—i.e., lying to her parents so that she can sneak off to meet her lover (p. 20). The other black characters have surprising agency. Endymion calls Fitz-Cowles

“massa” but in fact controls the con man even as he caters to him. He fashions Fitz-Cowles physical disguises, reminds him whom he is impersonating, and tells him who his various fiancées are. He often speaks back to his master in remarks that range from witty rejoinders to self-assertion to recalcitrance, as when he declares that he plans to quit his job because of maltreatment. Spirited and creative, Endymion can read and has a language of his own. Avar, somewhat like the sullen Atufal in Melville’s “Benito Cereno” (1856), serves as a stolidly resistant force at Ravoni’s mansion, where he regulates white people who enter.

This policing function is even more pronounced in the novel’s two principal black characters, Musquito and Glowworm. Jeremy Bentham’s concept of the panopticon, which Michel Foucault uses as a symbol of how powerful people and institutions in the nineteenth century surveyed and policed the criminal, the insane, and others, is altered in *The Quaker City*. Lippard was appalled by the maltreatment of poor prisoners in Philadelphia’s Eastern State Penitentiary, the fortress-like structure with a central tower that was the quintessence of panoptical surveillance.¹⁴ In Monk Hall, Lippard creates an inverse panopticon, where the social outcast Devil-Bug surveys, entraps, and punishes ruling-class types who, in Foucault’s world, would be parts of the repressive, regulatory establishment. “Police,” Foucault writes, “is the twin of the Panopticon.”¹⁵ Devil-Bug describes his black helpers as “the ‘police’ of Monk-Hall, certain to be at hand in case of a row” (*Quaker City*, p. 53). Lippard invests these black police with agency and power that are lacking among the novel’s actual police, Easy Larskspur and his men, who either show up late (at Becky Smolby’s house) or botch the capture of criminals (at Monk Hall). Just as Devil-Bug’s honest villainy is shown to be preferable to the ersatz virtue of establishment

¹⁴ Lippard’s most extensive critique of the dehumanizing conditions in this prison (also known as Cherry Hill) appears in his novel *The Killers* (see George Lippard, *The Killers: A Narrative of Real Life in Philadelphia*, ed. Matt Cohen and Edlie L. Wong [1850; rpt. Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 2014]).

¹⁵ Michel Foucault, et al., “La prison vue par un philosophe français” (1975), rpt. in Foucault, *Dits et écrits: 1954–1988*, 4 vols. ([Paris]: Gallimard, 1994), II, 729 (my translation).

types, so the direct brutality of Musquito and Glow-worm is contrasted with the oiliness and deception of the people they police.¹⁶ Memorable in this regard is their punitive function in the scene in which they torture F.A.T. Pyne, the hypocritical clergyman. In preparing Pyne for interrogation about the true identity of Mabel, Devil-Bug announces that he has “a couple o’ first rate lawyers to plead with” Pyne (*Quaker City*, p. 326). These “lawyers,” Musquito and Glow-worm, heat up iron poker that Devil-Bug plans to use on Pyne’s eyes if he does not answer questions about Mabel. Then the black henchmen tie Pyne in X fashion to a bed and tickle him until he nearly goes insane with laughter—a reversal of blackface minstrelsy, in which white audiences laughed crazily at the absurd antics of faux blacks. Lippard’s satiric reversal of racial performance is sonically enforced when Pyne’s uncontrollable laughter is answered by a screeching chorus—Devil-Bug’s “Ha! ha!,” Glow-worm’s “Hah! ya-hah!,” and Musquito’s “Ya-hah-ha-yah!” (p. 328)—that is a politically subversive forerunner of the Montresor’s perverse exchange of screams with the enchained Fortunato in Edgar Allan Poe’s “The Cask of Amontillado” (1845).¹⁷ Not only do Musquito and Glow-worm help draw the truth out of the white villain, but later they also take an active role in Bess’s rescue of Mary and Mabel. They give Bess the keys that enable her to take the girls out of Monk Hall, and they promise her that they will not reveal her action. Toward the end of the novel, Musquito and Glow-worm accomplish a kind of metaphorical slave revolt, when Devil-Bug, arranging his own suicide, has them push the boulder that crushes him. The black servants,

¹⁶ Lippard’s racial message seems all the more subversive when we consider that Devil-Bug himself—with his “flat nose,” “swarthy brow,” and “wide mouth” (*Quaker City*, pp. 51, 105, 110)—is, as Sari Altschuler and Aaron N. Tobiason point out, racially ambiguous, at least early in the novel. In the playbill for the dramatized version of the novel, Devil-Bug was identified as “a Negro.” See Sari Altschuler and Aaron M. Tobiason, “Playbill for George Lippard’s *The Quaker City*,” *PMLA*, 129 (2014), 267–73. Also suggestive is the fact that the dark-skinned Algernon Fitz-Cowles, who controls much of the novel’s action, is the son of an enslaved Creole woman.

¹⁷ For a discussion of the influence of *The Quaker City* and other popular fiction on Poe’s tale, see David S. Reynolds, “Poe’s Art of Transformation: ‘The Cask of Amontillado’ in Its Cultural Context,” in *New Essays on Poe’s Major Tales*, ed. Kenneth Silverman (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1993), pp. 93–112.

then, end up killing their master, thereby projecting a sense of insurrectionary violence in a way that involves no guilt, since the act is unintentional on their part and is planned by Devil-Bug.

Lippard's subversive tactic can be usefully described by utilizing a recent development in literary analysis known as deformative criticism. As discussed by critics like Lisa Samuels and Jerome McGann, deformance involves tearing apart structured discourse so that it seems new or different—taking, for example, a poem and reversing its lines so that it reads backward, or isolating the poem's nouns or verbs so that grammar is abolished and gaps appear on the page.¹⁸ Lippard takes a similar approach to the established discourses and themes of his time. He rips signifiers from the signifieds that have gathered around them in the general culture. He *deforms* these signifiers by transplanting them to utterly new settings or characters. Witness Lippard's deformance of popular sentimental-domestic imagery. Gus entraps Mary by telling her two syrupy domestic tales: he lures her into his "*family* mansion" (Monk Hall) with a "long story" about a fond uncle he will please by getting married (*Quaker City*, pp. 80, 79), and later he concocts the fiction about his and Mary's future life together in "a home, quiet and peaceful," by a lake and surrounded by flowers and trees, with a "cheerful fire" blazing and "a fair babe" at her breast (pp. 126, 130)—what Mary, sighing blissfully, calls "heaven on earth, with the holy lessons of an all-trusting love" (p. 130). Bess also performs a sentimental-domestic con, telling Mary that she is wearing black because she recently lost her beloved fiancé and now needs a female friend "to pay a nice little call on [her] dear old relative" (p. 78). That relative, it turns out, is the madam Mother Nancy, who has inveigled countless innocent women into illicit affairs but who acts like "a reputable old lady" (p. 22), proper and pious, and looking, "for all the world, like a quiet old body, whose only delight was to scatter blessings around her, give large alms to the poor, and bestow unlimited amounts of tracts among the vicious" (p. 76). Devil-Bug too joins the sentimental-domestic

¹⁸ See Lisa Samuels and Jerome McGann, "Deformance and Interpretation," *New Literary History*, 30 (1999), 25–56.

game, talking of his “purty quiet” life “in the comfortable retiracy o’ domestic felicity” (p. 221), arranging a torture chamber to look like a room “such as housewives use for domestic purposes” (p. 109), and calling a convocation of gangsters in his basement “a werry respectable family party” (p. 503).

Lippard’s deformatory strategy is particularly visible in his grafting of moral or religious signifiers onto the grotesque, especially in the portrayal of Devil-Bug. The squat, one-eyed, bristle-toothed Devil-Bug enjoys killing and seeing his victim’s blood ooze, drop by drop. And yet Devil-Bug, to some degree, attracts Lippard’s sympathy because he is a complete social outcast, having been reared as a destitute orphan with no opportunity for education. Through him, Lippard expresses the idea—conveyed, in various ways, by Eugène Sue, Victor Hugo, Charles Dickens, and others—that cruel social conditions engender crime. Just as Stowe in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1852) would underscore the dehumanization of slavery by having the enslaved Topsy announce that she “never was born,” so Lippard emphasizes the degradation of urban low-life by having Devil-Bug say, “I sometimes think, I was never born at all” (*Quaker City*, p. 228). And just as Stowe had the anarchic Topsy embrace Christianity, so Lippard assigns this monster the most religious scene in the novel. Thinking back on his year with his beloved Ellen, Devil-Bug senses the presence of God and feels that he, “the outcast of earth, the incarnate outlaw of hell, had one friend in the wide universe; that friend his Creator” (p. 339). (Unlike Topsy, however, Devil-Bug goes on to commit crimes and is never integrated into mainstream society.) Lippard also grants Devil-Bug the novel’s most prophetic moment, in his dream of America’s inegalitarian future, and one of its most heroic ones, when he rescues Mabel (actually his own daughter, Nell) by killing Ravoni. Also through Devil-Bug, Lippard deforms the utilitarian spirit of America, a nation increasingly devoted to technological advance and business efficiency. Devil-Bug’s repeated exclamation “I wonder how that’ll work!”—sometimes verbally deformed by being spoken in broken grammar or a foreign accent—reverses American notions of work, since Devil-Bug’s tools are trap doors and secret springs, and his business is crime and violence.

The novel's subversive tone is due in part to its unusually variegated, often blackly humorous language. Lippard makes use of devices such as catachresis (outrageous word play), burlesque metaphor (a comically overstated or grotesque comparison), and asteismus (a mocking reply involving puns). He also offers versions of numerous native and foreign idioms, including the argot of urban "sports" (young men on the town), African American dialect, Southern patois, gutter slang, Barnumesque exhibition speak, pseudoscientific lingo, Irish brogue, mass-oriented evangelical sermon style, and French and German inflections. Like Melville's *Moby-Dick*, *The Quaker City* forcefully challenges monologic language through its hybrid, carnivalized idioms.

A pervasive deformative technique in *The Quaker City* is Lippard's satirical descriptions of establishment figures—business leaders, lawyers, judges, clergymen, publishers, and so on. In mocking such figures, Lippard makes extensive use of performatives (speech acts that bring attention to the constructed or discursive nature of conventional attitudes or behavior) and periperformatives (performatives that emphatically renounce or warp normative discourse).¹⁹ Virtually every scene in *The Quaker City* is in some sense quotational or periperformative. Characters orate, pose, or quote from authoritative discourses that are deflated by the circumstances and manner in which they are used. An example of this periperformativity is the scene when the "monks" (the respectable types Lippard is satirizing) drink themselves into oblivion in Monk Hall. Each utters some kind of normative discourse that comes out as fragmented and nonsensical. As the revelers become increasingly drunk, Lippard tells us, "all disguise seemed thrown aside" (*Quaker City*, p. 58). This phrase might suggest that each character's real self is coming through. But, in each case, the real self is discursive, referring only to cultural signifiers whose hollowness is revealed by the absurdity of the situation. A lawyer mentions a judge who ruled against "dens of iniquity and holes

¹⁹ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick describes periperformatives as a "powerful class of negative performatives—disavowal, demur, renunciation, depreciation, repudiation, 'count me out,' giving the lie" (Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* [Durham, N.C.: Duke Univ. Press, 2003], p. 70).

of wickedness” (p. 56) even as he carried on a liaison with a French actress. A clergyman starts preaching a sermon in broken phrases—“When we con-consider the wickedness of the age, when we reflect tha-that there are thousands da-i-ly and hou-r-ly going down to per-per-dition, should we not cry from the depths of our souls . . .”—and then he asks for brandy (p. 57). The publisher of a ladies’ magazine announces his poem “The Ten Commandments,” which, he boasts, has in it a flavor “above ordinary butter-milk. A sweetness, a path-pathos, a mildness, a-a-vein, gentlemen, of the strictest mo-ral-i-ty” (p. 57). The editor of a penny newspaper declares, “I’ll cut this fellow up in my next Black-Mail! . . . Unless he comes down handsome—I’ll give him a stinger, a real scorcher—” (p. 57). There is no authenticity, no humanity here, only disconnected scraps of official discourse uttered by poseurs who pay little attention to each other.



Such inhumanity is enforced throughout *The Quaker City* by Lippard’s insistent use of tropes related to animals or abiotic matter. Recent posthuman theory deconstructs essentialist notions of subjectivity by reassessing binaries such as human/animal and human/abiotic. As Matthew Calarco writes, posthumanism, mapping a presubjective and postmetaphysical epistemology, represents “the leap from a humanist, anthropocentric (and falsely empty) universal to a truly empty, nonanthropocentric one.”²⁰ Lippard, who at the time he wrote *The Quaker City* saw around him neither essentialist principles he could fully accept nor humans he could fully admire, crowded his novel with hollow, amoral ruling-class poseurs and their oppressed, often feral working-class victims. And so he applied what we would call posthuman strategies toward undercutting social and cultural hierarchies.

The cumulative effect of Lippard’s posthuman images is to summon up a materialist world in which people, animals, and things are put on the same level. As with that of his German

²⁰ Matthew Calarco, *Zoographies: The Question of the Animal from Heidegger to Derrida* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 2008), p. 10.

contemporary Karl Marx, Lippard's materialism, coupled with radical politics, yielded a subversive vision by which the conflict between an inhuman social elite and dehumanized workers was figured in sensational, posthuman images.²¹ In *The Quaker City* such images create a phantasmagoria of intermixtures and displacements that reflect an American society that Lippard views as cruel and nightmarish.

On a fundamental level, Lippard shows how animals can mirror, anticipate, or control human behavior. What Donna Haraway calls the *entanglement* of the human world and the animal world is a prominent theme of *The Quaker City*.²² Lippard introduces Mother Nancy's pet dog by remarking that most people have "a favourite of some kind, either a baby, or a parrot, or a canary, or a cat, or, in desperate cases, a pig" (*Quaker City*, p. 77), a phrase that pointedly enforces human-animal entanglement by putting a baby on the same level as a canary and a pig. Nancy's Dolph is "a huge bull dog, with sore eyes and a ragged tail" (p. 77)—a sign of the ugly reality beneath the domestic surface of the "Mother Abbess" of Monk Hall. Special dimensions of entanglement emerge with the portrait of the widow Becky Smolby, whose pets include four cats and a parrot—five animals

²¹ To call Lippard and Marx materialists is not to equate their philosophical outlooks. Marx was an atheist, whereas Lippard, who came from a family of Methodists, was not. It must be noted, however, that Lippard forged a politically radical, secularized religion that placed class struggle at the heart of faith. For Lippard, Jesus was the lowly Carpenter of Nazareth, the scourge of moneychangers. Like Marx, Lippard was a harsh critic of churches. Lippard wrote that throughout history "Popes, Priests, and Kings [were] elevated into a horrible Godhead, while the great mass of mankind were brutalized into Devils" (George Lippard, *Adonai: The Pilgrim of Eternity*, Vol. I [Philadelphia: George Lippard, 1851, p. 26]). Organized religion, Lippard argued, was merely a tool of the capitalist establishment, which violated Jesus's egalitarian principles, and creeds begat endless religious wars, persecution of heretics, and disregard of the practical needs of the poor. For further discussion of Lippard and religion, see Streeby, *American Sensations*, pp. 38–77; Streeby, "Haunted Houses: George Lippard, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Middle-Class America"; Carl Ostrowski, "Inside the Temple of Ravoni: George Lippard's Anti-Exposé," *ESQ: A Journal of the American Renaissance*, 55 (2009), 1–26; R. Laurence Moore, "Religion, Secularization, and the Shaping of the Culture Industry in Antebellum America," *American Quarterly*, 41 (1989), 216–42; David S. Reynolds, *Faith in Fiction: The Emergence of Religious Literature in America* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1981), pp. 187–96; and Reynolds, *George Lippard*, pp. 73–92.

²² See Donna Jeanne Haraway, *When Species Meet* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2008). See also Kari Weil, *Thinking Animals: Why Animal Studies Now?* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 2012).

that have replaced her five deceased husbands. After Becky is killed and her corpse is on the floor, her parrot screams “Murder!” and her cats wander through her pooling blood and moan miserably. Lippard writes that the cats have “an expression of brute anguish, more painful to see, than the deepest agony of a human countenance, for the human countenance has a tongue to speak, while the brute can only look and mourn” (p. 247). It was precisely this voiceless affect of a cat, shaming humans and emptying language, that so moved Jacques Derrida.²³

Animals play destabilizing roles elsewhere in the novel as well. The hanging of the British sailor is surrounded by images of dead animals. The sailor’s executioner, Devil-Bug, who is described in posthuman fashion as “a wild beast, a snake, a reptile, . . . —any thing but—a man” (*Quaker City*, p. 106), declares that as a boy he loved hanging dogs and cats but that it was even more exciting to hang a man—a periperformative equation of humans and animals that gains further resonance when the innocent sailor says he is about “to be hung like a dog” (p. 507) and when, just before the hanging, two animals suddenly die: a white pigeon falls from the sky, and the horse pulling the sailor’s coffin collapses. If Lippard uses human-animal entanglement to enforce his antigallows message, he also employs it to accent horror in the scenes at Albert Livingstone’s New Jersey mansion, Hawkewood. The white owl that falls from the sky outside the mansion, like the dying animals in the hanging scene, portend doom—in this case the murder of Dora Livingstone by her vindictive husband. Horses have a key role in the Hawkewood episode. On the trip to the estate, Dora’s horse-drawn carriage is followed by her horse-drawn hearse, which in turn is followed by the horse-borne Livingstone. On the trip, Livingstone is overtaken by a horseman who has papers from England proving that Livingstone is of aristocratic British lineage. A horse facilitates the grisly scheme of Livingstone, who tells his wife that the hearse, which is for a woman who lives in the area, must stop at Hawkewood so that the carriage horse can rest. A horse also deepens the mystery surrounding the murder, for

²³ See Jacques Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, ed. Marie-Louise Mallet, trans. David Wills (New York: Fordham Univ. Press, 2008).

after killing his wife, Livingstone rides off on a horse, which is found riderless the next morning. Animal-human entanglement in the scene becomes more pronounced with the arrival at Hawkewood of the pursued Fitz-Cowles, whose eyes have “the glare of a bloodhound at bay.” He says: “If they want to trap the bloodhound, they must fight for it!” (*Quaker City*, p. 512). A Southerner adept at using his Bowie knife, Fitz-Cowles recalls foes who died “like dogs with *that* knife in their hearts” (p. 512).

Animal imagery supplies energy to one of the most striking periperformatives in the novel: Dr. McTourniquet’s bizarre statements about his thoroughbred horse, Henry Clay. Here Lippard makes an especially mordant application of human-animal entanglement. The Whig leader Henry Clay was one of the most revered political leaders of the time, the man Lincoln called his “beau ideal of a statesman.”²⁴ When Dr. McTourniquet speaks, he frequently veers into the announcement that he is going to fetch Henry Clay, who, says the doctor, trots handsomely, gives marvelous speeches in the Senate, and is an otherwise splendid specimen. Lippard’s surreal comparison of Henry Clay with a horse is approached in its politically subversive sting by Lippard’s debunking of the equally revered Daniel Webster through Devil-Bug’s oration in the Dead Vault, where he urges gangsters to lynch a man while presenting “in his person and manner, a capital burlesque of some ‘Godlike Senator’” (*Quaker City*, p. 479). Doubtless Lippard, a Jacksonian Democrat, disliked Clay and Webster because they were leading Whigs and were known for their womanizing and excessive drinking—the kind of private misconduct, at odds with public postures of probity, that Lippard saw as rank hypocrisy.²⁵

Animal comparisons in the novel are often made in a post-human spirit of stripping humans of anthropocentric specialness. We see stirrings of Mary’s “animal nature” and Mabel’s

²⁴ Abraham Lincoln, Lincoln-Douglas debate, 21 August 1858, in his *Speeches and Writings, 1832–1858*, ed. Don E. Fehrenbacher (New York: Library of America, 1989), p. 526. Clay, known for forging compromises that held the Union together, long served in the Senate and the House of Representatives and ran for president five times.

²⁵ In his novel *New York: Its Upper Ten and Lower Million* (Cincinnati: H. M. Rulison, 1853), Lippard describes the “dark countenance” of Gabriel Godlike (Webster) as “seamed by the wrinkles of long years of sin” and has the senator discourse on the prevalence of illicit sex in Washington (p. 159).

taking on a “mere animal loveliness” (*Quaker City*, pp. 85, 322). Dora has “the beauty of a mere animal” (p. 137). When Livingstone learns of his wife’s adulterous affair from Luke Harvey, he becomes an animal before our eyes. Luke does not simply tell Livingstone that he is a cuckold; he stares at the merchant and says that he sees “Nothing but—horns. Horns, sir, I say—horns. A fine branching pair!”—that is, Livingstone is a living embodiment of the metaphor of a cuckold as a man wearing antlers (p. 41). Now “a full-grown stag” (p. 41), Livingstone signals his acceptance of the animal metaphor when he later mutters that cheating wives “ought to remember that these ornamental *branches* may be turned into dangerous weapons! Stags *gore* people sometimes!” (p. 195). Another animal-like character is Gabriel Von Pelt (the disguised forger Ellis Mortimer), who has a high “shapeless hump” for a back and whose head “gave you the idea of a horse’s head, affixed to a remnant of a human body” (p. 175).

In depicting several characters, Lippard moves beyond animal comparisons to vegetable, fruit, or abiotic imagery. One of Fitz-Cowles’s creditors, a lawyer, has a small head that “overlooked his immense corporation, like a pea observing the circumference of a pumpkin” (*Quaker City*, p. 165). Another creditor, a Parisian bootmaker, is a short man with “arms hanging straight by his sides, like pendulums to some walking clock” (p. 166). A plump military man has a face that looks like “a dissipated full-moon, with a large red pear stuck in the centre for a nose, while two small black beads, placed in corresponding circles of crimson tape, supply the place of eyes” (p. 7). A magazine editor has eyes that “remind you of nothing more, than those glassy things which, in obedience to a wire, give animation to the expressive face of a Dresden wax-doll” (p. 7). Buzby Poodle, the editor of a penny newspaper, is a conglomeration of animals and abiotic things. His name suggests a dog, and in the course of the novel he is also compared to a monkey and a female orangutan. His short, heavy body is “shaped something like a pine-knot,” and his legs are “fashioned like a pair of inverted parentheses, or like a pair of sickles with their backs placed together” (p. 157). His face is “a saffron lump of flesh, with a small projection in the centre for a nose, a delicate gash

below this projection for a mouth, and two faint stripes of whity-brown hair, in the way of eyebrows,” with eyes that looked like those of “a salt mackerel, roasting on the griddle” (p. 157).

In keeping with the prominence of posthuman imagery, among the periperformative heroes of *The Quaker City* are worms. Lippard reminds us that worms have the power to reduce humans to a state of undifferentiated thingness. Toward the start of the novel, Gus discourses on “worms—those jolly gleaners of the scraps of the feast of life” (*Quaker City*, p. 24). This is the first of many such references by other characters, including Dora, who envisages herself “all loathsome with crawling grave-worms” (p. 356); Livingstone, who privately mocks Dora’s desire for a coronet by saying she will soon wear a “coronet of worms” (p. 496); Ravoni, who says a woman’s “fair young bosom” will soon be “dainty food for the grave-worms” (p. 412); and Devil-Bug, who exclaims as he looks at the unconscious Luke: ““Ho, ho! The worms won’t play all sorts o’ games with his eyes? O’ course not. Nor strip the flesh from his skull, nor fatten on his lips until the white teeth grin for joy?” (p. 314). Lippard invokes worms not just as corrupt and decomposing but as necessarily so to begin again. The posthuman theorist Jane Bennett points out the importance of worms for Charles Darwin, who devoted many of his later years to studying them because of their important role as actants within the earth, contributing to the soil that makes human civilization possible.²⁶ *The Quaker City* is full of references to corpses, body parts, and physical decay—all of which have associations with grave-worms. As we know, what is called the grave-worm is actually a maggot, which is a cross between a worm, a bug, and, after developing from the larva, a flying insect. If we heed the declaration by the dying “good old lawyer” at the start of *The Quaker City* that Philadelphia is a “Whited Sepulchre, without all purity, within all rottenness” (*Quaker City*, p. 3), then we can view Lippard himself as a kind of grave-worm, feasting on the American body (which for him was

²⁶ See Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham, N.C.: Duke Univ. Press, 2010), pp. 95–100. Darwin presented his findings on worms in his book *The Formation of Vegetable Mould, through the Action of Worms, with Observations on Their Habits* (London: John Murray, 1881).

a rotting corpse) and sending “insects” (his words) into the cultural and social atmosphere. In this regard, Glow-worm and Musquito (described as “two insects”) and their master Devil-Bug make a kind of deformative triumvirate—worm, bug, flying insect—let loose as subversive, transformative actants in nineteenth-century America.

Lippard intensifies his materialist message through his accounts of the effect on humans of ingested substances—alcohol, opium, potions, or poison. Jane Bennett describes the ingested substance as “an actant operating inside and alongside humankind, exerting influence on moods, dispositions, and decisions” (*Vibrant Matter*, p. xvii). Ingested substances control many scenes in *The Quaker City*, including the alcohol-fueled seduction episode, the drunken revelry in Monk Hall, the drug-induced memory loss of Byrnewood, Ravoni’s drugging of Annie so that he can perform his ostensible revivification of her body, and the fatal poisoning of Dora. Lippard is interested not only in how the ingested substance affects humans but also in how it makes the material world come alive. In the sequence in which the seduction conspirators walk drunkenly through Philadelphia, ingested substance makes material things spring to life and become, in effect, what Bennett calls vibrant matter, or nonsubjects that are neither inert nor passive but that instead manifest “active powers,” with “trajectories, propensities, or tendencies of their own” (*Vibrant Matter*, pp. ix, viii). The inebriated Gus reports that “yonder watch-box is walking across the street, to black the lamp-post’s eyes—for—for—making a face at him” (*Quaker City*, p. 6). Byrnewood, also drunk, mounts a fireplug and rides it like a horse. When Gus speaks, Byrnewood hushes him with the warning, “You’ll scare the fire-plug. He’s trying to run off with me—the scoundrel. Wait till I put spurs to him, I say!” (p. 8). Later, the mass drunkenness in Monk Hall is projected in images of vibrant matter, as the revelers reach a “state of brutal inebriety, when strange-looking stars shine in the place of the lamps, when the bottles dance and even tables perform the cracovienne, while all sorts of beehives create a buzzing murmur in the air” (p. 55).

But Lippard does not dwell long on substance-induced distortions of reality, because he wants to show that affect can

spring from social discourse as readily as from ingested substances. This phenomenon is exemplified not only by Mary's and Mabel's passionate responses to sentimental-domestic images but by Dora's readiness to cheat on her husband and then plan his murder because of her socially conditioned desire to flee to England with the supposedly titled Fitz-Cowles and become the Countess of Lyndeswold, possessed of a coronet and other trappings of aristocracy. Her repeated words "Algernon—a coronet—wealth and power" (*Quaker City*, p. 138) are signifiers of social success that are so deeply embedded in the psyche of this shoemaker's granddaughter that she utters them even in her sleep. While embedded, these signifiers are not beyond modification. Like his friend Poe, Lippard was intrigued by the ways in which emotion, conscience, and reason can interrelate and change places in the human brain. Both writers reveal in their fiction that behavior is guided not only by nonconscious affect but also by rationality and guilt, and that the same person is fully capable of any of these motivations, and others as well, depending on the context and circumstance. Dora, for instance, wavers between carefully plotting her husband's murder, guiltily vowing to be faithful to him, and feeling overwhelmed by her desire for a title.

Vibrant matter mirrors or implicitly comments on ever-shifting human experience throughout *The Quaker City*. Lippard imbues nonsubjects with unexpected vitality. For example, the scene at the hotel where Fitz-Cowles is staying is full of animated matter. Fitz-Cowles himself is a constructed entity, identified by clothing and by artificial calves, hips, and other false body parts—predictive of Melville's confidence man, who appears as the man in a gray coat, the man with the weed, and in other matter-defined guises. Lippard describes the hotel as "a monster-building," with windows for eyes, green shutters for goggles, and a veranda opening into a barroom that "might be likened to the mouth of the grand-edifice, always wide open and ready to swallow a customer" (*Quaker City*, p. 151)—an image anticipatory of the Spouter Inn's jawlike barroom entrance in *Moby-Dick*, which also devours customers. In Fitz-Cowles's hotel room, his servant Endymion polishes a boot so well that the boot looks ready to walk down to the bar, order a mint julep, and "pull out

his quartair to pay for it" (p. 153). The chairs in the hotel room look "as though they were talking about the various gentry who had reposed on their well-cushioned seats" (p. 152). When Fitz-Cowles's many creditors come to the hotel and vie for his money, they quickly become "a forest of fists, rising up and down, a mass of angry faces, all mingled together," all looking "like the different limbs of some strange monster, undergoing a violent epileptic fit" (p. 172).

This montage of animated things, typical of Lippard's style in the novel, has reformist overtones, related mainly to anticapitalism. Such reform themes are pronounced in several vibrant-matter scenes. Lippard sees inequity and corruption as part of the very fabric of capitalist America. The misery and confusion that he sees in Philadelphia are captured in his materialist description of a street where "a mass of miserable frame houses seemed about to commit suicide and fling themselves madly into the gutter, and in the distance a long line of dwellings, offices, and factories, looming in broken perspective, looked as if they wanted to shake hands across the narrow street" (*Quaker City*, p. 48). Poverty is as natural in this environment as the weather. "Had the heavens on some stormy day, rained rags," Lippard writes of a group of outcasts, "and our friends, the vagabonds, been caught in the shower, they could not have been better furnished, with tatters, than they were now" (p. 478).

A striking instance of politicized thingness in *The Quaker City* relates to sound. When the State House clock strikes one, Lippard does a page-long riff on the bell's "wild music," which, he says, reaches the ears of both the suicidal poor and the types that Lippard considers oppressors, including "the Bank Director revelling at the sight of his gold, won from the poor by fraud to which a pirate's crimes are acts of benevolence," and "the minister of justice," who is counting "the hard gold which buys the life of some wealthy murderer from the gallows, or the liberty of some gilded robber from the jail" (*Quaker City*, pp. 346, 347). The bell announcing "One!" generates human affect and delivers a strong message wherever the sound travels, enhancing the desolation of the needy and haunting the wealthy with its knell-like tone. Ominously, the tolling bell foretells a revolution: "That dull and booming sound seems to call

into life the vengeance of the People, which shall one day hurl the lordly minister of the law from his proud position; already he beholds written on the walls of his chamber, in letters of flame, that black and staring word—CORRUPTION” (p. 347).

This fusion of revolutionary politics and vibrant thingness becomes the defining feature of one of the most remarkable chapters in the novel, “Devil-Bug’s Dream.” In the dream, Devil-Bug goes forward to 1950 and witnesses what has become of Philadelphia and the nation. Class divisions have widened to such an extent that democracy and republicanism have disappeared. “There is no America now,” Devil-Bug is told (*Quaker City*, p. 388). Independence Hall lies in ruins, and a marble palace rises in its place. The American flag is regarded as an odd relic and has been replaced by a flag bearing the insignia of a crown and a chain. The nation is ruled by a king and by attendant lords who, we learn, are bankers who cheat the poor, judges who favor the rich, conservative religious types who support capital punishment, and other callous ruling-class figures. The poor, meanwhile, have no hope of upward mobility. Devil-Bug, the vehicle of Lippard’s critique, witnesses the celebration of the anniversary of the death of freedom. He sees the king’s retinue proceeding to the palace, followed by a chained mass of “white and black” “slaves of the cotton Lord and the factory Prince” (p. 389). In delivering his critique, Lippard blends Gothic gloom and vibrant matter. As Devil-Bug surveys the cityscape, vibrant materiality takes over. Corpses, decomposed and crawling with worms, rise from their graves. The corpses swarm around the aristocrats, who at first do not see their grisly companions. Devil-Bug’s attention then shifts to the Schuylkill River, where he sees a violent battle between corpses in coffin fleets. Soon the battle ends and the corpses enter the city, assuming places near the social rulers. This, Lippard writes, is “the Last Day of the guilty and idolatrous city,” when “the God of the Poor . . . aris[es] in his might and crush[es] the lordlings under the heel of his power!” (p. 383) The earth convulses and collapses beneath the city, swallowing houses and people, and thousands of columns of boiling steam shoot up. The ground heaves and tremendous column of earth rises into the sky before collapsing upon the corpse-strewn city.

A “ghastly voice” proclaims: “The wrongs of ages are avenged at last!” (p. 393). Throughout the dream, the refrain “WO UNTO SODOM” adds a tone of biblical doomsaying, and Devil-Bug’s demonic laughter acts as a dark chorus that enforces Lippard’s vitriolic social critique.

The quintessential example of what Lippard called the “grotesque-sublime,” this merging of vibrant materiality and radical politics reflects a fear that corruption and economic oppression were destined to become like forces of nature. The message of Devil-Bug’s dream is at once Marxist (capitalism produces a society divided between the oppressors and the oppressed) and premodernistic (powerful institutions threaten to strip people of individuality and reduce them to abstract roles like “lords” and “slaves”). Anticapitalism here fuses with Gothicized posthumanism, as it often does in Marx’s writings, in which images of vampires, blood, monsters, werewolves, specters, and the like enact what Marx sees as the horrific results of economic exploitation.²⁷ In Lippard’s vision of the

²⁷ There is no evidence that Lippard knew of Marx’s work; at any rate, *The Quaker City* appeared before Marx’s *The Communist Manifesto* (published in German in 1848; first English translation, 1850) and *Capital* (1867 [German edition]; 1887 [first English translation]). However, there are similarities between Lippard’s and Marx’s views. Marx’s notions that history was a record of class struggles and that society was divided between “freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, . . . in a word, oppressor and oppressed” (Marx, *The Communist Manifesto*, in *Marx: Selected Writings*, ed. Lawrence H. Simon [Indianapolis: Hackett, 1994], p. 159) resembles Lippard’s conviction that “there are only two nations in the world—the OPPRESSED and the OPPRESSORS” (speech delivered on 4 March 1850 before a Philadelphia mass meeting in support of Philadelphia tailoresses; in *George Lippard, Prophet of Protest: Writings of an American Radical, 1822–1854*, ed. David S. Reynolds [New York: Peter Lang, 1986], p. 213). Marx and Lippard both envisaged the possibility of a future workers’ revolution. Lippard’s portrayal of America’s moneyed class as a resurrected European aristocracy is similar to Marx’s argument that “the old nobility” of feudalism had been replaced in the West by “the new nobility . . . for which money [is] the power of all powers” (*Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, ed. Frederick Engels, trans. Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling [1867; rpt. London: Swan Sonnenschein, Lowrey, 1887], p. 503; the remaining quotations from Marx in this paragraph are from this volume). Lippard’s image of palaces being built by carriage-riding wealthy people who “have turned the sweat and blood of the poor into bricks and mortar” (*Quaker City*, p. 373) is analogous to Marx’s description of “the erection of palaces for banks, warehouses, &c, the widening of streets . . . for carriages of luxury” (*Capital*, p. 452). Lippard’s indictment of “the Holy Ministers of God” for their unchristian treatment of the poor (*Quaker City*, p. 375) parallels Marx’s attack on “holy ones” who “show their Christianity by the humility with which they bear the over-work, the privations, and the hunger of others”

future, all speech acts and sounds—from the announcement of the death of liberty to Devil-Bug’s sarcastic laughter to the repeated phrase “WO UNTO SODOM”—are periperformative. Narrative structure becomes aleatory; disturbing scenes appear with nightmarish arbitrariness. Written at a time when the Adventist William Miller stirred thousands of Americans with his predictions of the imminent Day of Judgment,²⁸ Lippard’s dystopic episode tapped into apocalyptic fears. It predicted massive upheaval and destruction without offering the assurance of social restoration or divine redemption. In Devil-Bug’s dream, the earth itself rises up in revolt against injustice, and humanity succumbs to thingness. The dream attests to the fact that at the time he wrote *The Quaker City*, Lippard saw no viable solution to the social problems he perceived.

To be sure, germs of a solution appear elsewhere in *The Quaker City*. At one point in the novel a character says: “Give me the honest Mechanic at the bench if we must have a nobility, for your true republican nobleman: not the dishonest Bank-Director at the desk!” (*Quaker City*, p. 184). Like his contemporary Walt Whitman, Lippard placed hope in average working-class Americans and in the egalitarian ideals of 1776—values that later impelled Lippard to found his labor group the

(*Capital*, p. 200). Lippard’s point that poor people go to prison or the gallows while the rich go unpunished is mirrored by Marx’s complaint that the elites “hang the small thieves” while escaping justice themselves (*Capital*, p. 422). Like Lippard, Marx utilized posthuman imagery related to animals or things. Marx describes capital as “dead labour, that, vampire-like, only lives by sucking living labour” (p. 160) and usury as “a great huge monster, like a were-wolf, who lays waste all, more than any [mythological giant such as] Cacus, Gerion or Antus” (p. 422). For analyses of Marx’s use of Gothic or sensational imagery, see Mark Neocleous, “The Political Economy of the Dead: Marx’s Vampires,” *History of Political Thought*, 24 (2003), 668–84; Terrell Carver, “Making Capital Out of Vampires,” *Times Higher Educational Supplement*, 15 (June 1984); Terrell Carver, *The Postmodern Marx* (University Park: Pennsylvania State Univ. Press, 1998); and Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge, 1994). It should be noted, however, that Marx, who tried to achieve historical and scientific objectivity, relied on Gothicized images far less heavily than did Lippard, who incorporated such images even in the initiation ritual for his Brotherhood of the Union.

²⁸ Calculating from passages in the Bible, Miller initially predicted that the world would end on 1 March 1844. When the Judgment Day did not come, he said that he had read the scriptural numbers incorrectly and set a new date, 22 October 1844—the first of many such postponements by Miller and later Adventists.

Brotherhood of the Union, which paid homage to the American Revolution in its rituals and aimed to supplant capitalism with a nationwide network of producers' and consumers' cooperatives that embraced all workers, regardless of race or creed. But in the venal America depicted in *The Quaker City*, there is no opportunity for working-class action or patriotic sentiment to bear fruit—as is witnessed, for example, by the fate of the impecunious John Davis, who commits suicide after he is refused access to his savings account, or by the old Revolutionary War veteran who is expelled from Parson Pyne's congregation by the preacher's intolerant followers.

There is an ongoing scholarly discussion over the degree to which city-mysteries novels, of which Lippard's *The Quaker City* is the preeminent example, can be considered politically subversive. The nexus of the debate is whether or not social protest is compromised by the titillating depictions of aristocratic vice and by the ultimate restoration of domestic values in some of these novels. In this regard, it is useful to recognize that there are varying degrees of subversiveness among antebellum authors and within individual careers.²⁹ Although *The Quaker*

²⁹ Though most of Lippard's works have political content, his novella *Adonai: The Pilgrim of Eternity* (1851) is his most consistently radical novel, while his Gothic thriller *The Lady Annabel* (1844) deemphasizes social protest (yet even that novel contains a subplot about the Monks of Steel, a secret society that vows to avenge crimes against the poor committed by Florentine rulers). Altschuler and Tobiasson in "Playbill" demonstrate that Lippard's effort to make a political critique in *The Quaker City* strengthened in the course of writing the successive installments of the novel in 1844–45. Christopher Looby convincingly argues that George Thompson's novel *The House-Breaker* (1848) emphasizes "seamy private vices of the privileged classes" rather than "general political or economic oppression" (Looby, "George Thompson's 'Romance of the Real': Transgression and Taboo in American Sensation Fiction," *American Literature*, 65 [1993], 659). Thompson, a prolific author of "porno-gothic" novels, never approaches Lippard in political seriousness, but certain other Thompson novels, especially *City Crimes* (1849) and *The Gay Girls of New York* (1853), are arguably more transgressive than *The House-Breaker*. Timothy Helwig contends that Lippard is uniquely radical among city-mysteries writers, especially in his treatment of race (see Helwig, "Denying the Wages of Whiteness: The Racial Politics of George Lippard's Working-Class Protest," *American Studies*, 47, no. 3–4 [2006], 87–111). For other interpretations, see Michael Denning, *Mechanic Accents: Dime Novels and Working-Class Culture in America* (New York: Verso, 1987), pp. 85–117; Hans Bergmann, *God in the Street: New York Writing from the Penny Press to Melville* (Philadelphia: Temple Univ. Press, 1995), pp. 115–33; Alexander Moudrov, "The Scourge of 'Foreign Vagabonds': George Thompson and the Influence of European Sensationalism in Popular Antebellum Literature,"

City, like other city-mysteries novels, oscillates between sensationalism and social protest, its political subversiveness is undeniable. Its numerous comments on social issues—including political and judicial corruption, widening class divisions, racial violence, religious bigotry, capital punishment, bribery in the press, and slavery—are sincere expressions of protest on the part of an author who later became a pioneering social reformer. In 1849 Lippard wrote that if peaceful reform failed, labor would have to “go to War, in any and all forms—War with the Rifle, Sword, and Knife.”³⁰—a statement whose revolutionary spirit had been stylistically enacted in the controversial, anti-establishment novel he had produced several years earlier.

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ABSTRACT

David S. Reynolds, “Deformance, Performativity, Posthumanism: The Subversive Style and Radical Politics of George Lippard’s *The Quaker City*” (pp. 36–64)

The most interesting American example of the genre known as city-mysteries fiction, George Lippard’s *The Quaker City* (1844–45), while rich in characters, stymies the novelistic stability conventionally provided by the struggles of heroes against villains in the mystery genre. Lippard’s style thus gets foregrounded as the locus of morality and politics, displaying an acerbic, presurrealistic edge. The current essay surveys linguistic and generic deformations (alinear narrative, irony and parody, bizarre tropes, performativity, and periperformativity) and biological and material deformations (posthuman images, including animals, objects, sonic effects, and vibrant matter) in *The Quaker City* to suggest how Lippard stylistically reinforces his goal of satirizing literary and social conventions and of exposing what he regards as hypocrisy and corruption on the part of America’s ruling class.

Keywords: George Lippard; *The Quaker City*; city-mysteries novel; Posthumanism and literature; Marxism and the novel

in *Transatlantic Sensations*, pp. 97–118; Reynolds, *Beneath the American Renaissance*; and the introduction to George Thompson, *Venus in Boston; and Other Tales of Nineteenth-Century City Life*, ed. David S. Reynolds and Kimberly R. Gladman (Amherst: Univ. of Massachusetts Press, 2002), pp. ix–liv.

³⁰ George Lippard, *Prophet of Protest*, ed. Reynolds, p. 219.