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# Twisting Reality for a Cause: American Mythology, Early Surrealism, and Audience Empowerment in the Works of George Lippard

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Twisting Reality for a Cause: American Mythology, Early Surrealism, and Audience  
Empowerment in the Works of George Lippard

by

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Accepted by:

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## Dedication

This document is dedicated to my son, Krishna Samuel Hall. You came into this world on June 11, 2017, growing alongside my thesis. I suspect you may never read these words, but just in case you ever get curious and want to know what your old man got up to in graduate school, please remember: the scarecrow won an award because he was outstanding in his field.

## Acknowledgements

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## Abstract

This article examines Philadelphia writer George Lippard's often-overlooked usage of literary conventions more typical outside of the genre he is most famous for, social-reform city fiction. In particular, the article focuses on Lippard's vision of an American mythology, proto-surrealistic imagery, and demands for audience response and interaction. Various works are analyzed, most prominently: stories from *Washington and His Generals*, *The Rose of the Wissahikon*, *Adonai: The Pilgrim of Eternity*, and *The Killers*. The article concludes that Lippard values the artfulness of historical romance over presenting historical fact, recognizing the ability of the romance to instigate a greater collective response in his audience.

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## Chapter 1:

### Introduction

Although interest in his work vanished shortly after his death, Philadelphia's George Lippard was among the most popular American writers during his short life (1822-54). Recently, studies of Lippard have begun cropping up again, mainly focusing on what the political and regional aspects of his writing reveal about Nineteenth-Century American culture. However, aside from David Reynolds' 1986 introductory analysis in *George Lippard: An Anthology*, many of Lippard's most curious pieces of fiction have been left shelved in an unpublished limbo. There is a tendency among critics, particularly before the revival of interest in his texts, to think of Lippard as considered a hack writer, incapable of presenting an accurate, nuanced view of his historical and social subject matter. However, for Lippard, twisting the truth is the point: he creates a form of hyperbolic romance in order to deliver a social and political message. While critics have recently focused on his political city fiction—particularly his most famous serial, *The Quaker City*—some reanalysis of Lippard as a writer of historical romances and proto-surrealism is in order, particularly because these texts inform his most prominent work. While writers of serial realism tended toward didacticism and ostensibly purported to represent reality in fiction, using symbol and metaphor sparingly, Lippard distorts conventions of realism in his work, all the while remaining committed to social change.



Upon Lippard's tombstone, erected by his political organization, The Brotherhood of the Union, is an engraving from the Book of Luke, which seems as if it could have been written by Lippard himself:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord (Pettit).

Any scholar of Lippard would recognize the significance of this engraving's emphasis on preaching to and saving the poor, which may have been Lippard's most noble pursuit. What may be overlooked in the passage from Luke, however, is the fact that Lippard wrote with what he believed to be a spiritually-ordained purpose and that in preaching "gospel," he would be writing stories that hoped might inspire his audience like Biblical legends. Moreover, while Lippard was a deeply religious man, the primary Spirit inspiring him was not in fact Christ, but General George Washington, who Lippard wished to establish as a uniquely American savior figure. Lippard's writing career follows a pattern of imitating the revolutionary spirit of his version of George Washington to battle tyranny in his own time. In Lippard's eyes, the tyrannical figures of the Nineteenth Century were the proxy rulers of capitalist America: his greatest enemies are leaders of business who indirectly, but knowingly, cause violence in the lower class. In order to overcome this perceived tyranny, Lippard sought to act as a foil to these enemies, informing and organizing the public. However, he borrowed the tool of twisting the

truth from his white-collar criminal opponents: he romanticized the facts, sensationalizing the evils he wanted his audience to oppose.

Lippard's legends of the American Revolution, pivotal surrealist time-travel text *Adonai: The Pilgrim of Eternity*, and late city serial *The Killers* are examples of works deliberately designed not to depict real-world social issues accurately, but to instill a philosophical sense of social justice in readers. This article will analyze elements of various Lippard texts, briefly synopsized here:

#### Historical romances.

*Washington and His Generals*, a collection of historical romances concerning George Washington published in 1847, contains several stories set during the Revolutionary War. "The Battle of Germantown" is a romance of the titular battle, notable here especially due to Lippard's reverence for Washington and depiction of him as a legendary hero. "The Wissahikon" is cited primarily for Lippard's descriptions of early American scenery; the story is set in the modern Wissahickon Valley Park, an area sacred to Lippard (and the site of his marriage). The article also references a short story, "Rider of the Black Horse," one of Lippard's various odes to controversial Benedict Arnold, notable for its inherent controversy in speaking reverently about the well-known traitor. Lippard's book *The Rose of the Wissahikon*, an 1847 romance of the signing of the Declaration of Independence, will also be referenced.

Adonai and other texts collected by David Reynolds.

*Adonai: The Pilgrim of Eternity* (1851) is one of the primary texts covered in this article. It is a surrealistic tale of a time-traveling Christian, Adonai, under Nero's rule. Adonai travels to Nineteenth Century America and explores various sites in the country, joined by a resurrected George Washington. Additionally, some shorter passages of historical and philosophical writings by Lippard are referenced, particularly "The History of Eighteen Hundred Years" and "The Gospel of the New World."

### The Killers

The final text analyzed in the article is Lippard's *The Killers: A Narrative of Real Life in Philadelphia* (1850). This serial tells the story of a corrupt business man, Mr. Hicks, who profits off of the slave trade and, indirectly, causes his own son to lead the titular street gang, who cause a riot in the streets of Philadelphia. It is an exposé on the machinations of white collar criminals in the city.

Fittingly, one of the clearest pictures we have of George Lippard's reputation with his peers comes from an indulgent, hyperbolic fluff piece. Reverend Chauncey Burr, Lippard's good friend and officiator of his marriage, provided a "biography" as an introductory piece in Lippard's 1847 compilation of American legends, *Washington and his Generals*. In the piece, Burr implies Lippard might be a legendary writer in his own right, claiming that "[Lippard] seems to have been born with that same restless, heaving, fiery heart [as geniuses like Shakespeare]; the wild earnest, truthful, sincerity withal; that has marked Genius in all ages" (iv). Burr's implication that a genius needs passion

imparted by birth, which might seem like a dubious distinction to attribute to Shakespeare, falls in line with the Nineteenth-Century American desire to overcome the literary behemoths of England. Notably, in “Hawthorne and his Mosses,” Herman Melville encapsulates the need to match Shakespeare through the assumption that an American counterpart could already exist: “You must believe in Shakespeare’s unapproachability, or quit the country. But what sort of a belief is this for an American, a man who is bound to carry republican progressiveness into Literature, as well as into Life? Believe me, my friends, that Shakespeares are this day being born on the banks of the Ohio” (524).

Accepting the Lippard-Shakespeare comparison would be accepting blatant hyperbole as fact, but the result of Lippard’s writing career does befit the image of a defiant, earnest, unapologetically American challenger to the accepted model of tasteful literature. Burr’s statement, “Genius by intuition falls into truth, sooner than the greatest elaboration of mere talent can reason its way into it,” suggests that writers like Lippard and Shakespeare effortlessly depict truths of the world that a regular, intelligent writer could never hope to find (xx). Hyperbole aside, the statement declares that intellect is not enough to get at real truth—a truly great literary figure has an eccentricity that allows them to somehow change the world. Burr insists that the test of a great writer is the ability to bring about a real-world revolution by inspiring their audiences to action. The proclamation that “we want Luthers, who will throw their ink-stands at the devil’s head” and that “these true earnest kind of men are the only records that Time leaves behind him” establishes the sheer importance of political and social

change in the Nineteenth-Century zeitgeist (vii). Despite its extreme proclamations, Burr's introduction to Lippard prepares a reader to acclimate with two important aspects of his works: a revisionist passion and his literature's unusual conventions. Lippard is a writer who chooses to create events that reveal what he perceives as important truths, which might not be visible through a literal view of history; thus, he must revise history. Lippard's writing is also not of the same aesthetic conventions one expects in canonized literary figures: he writes sensationally and uses blunt, often crude language; he is not a Melville or Hawthorne and had no intention of being one.

Lippard's childhood poverty remains one of the well-known facts about his life that characterizes his work, even in recent critical appraisals. In fact, his past validates his writing in some sense. His depiction of a factory torturing its workers in *Adonai* or of Hicks as a manipulative, evil business owner feeding the slave trade in *The Killers* could be interpreted as purely libelous and sensationalist toward business owners, but because Lippard could count himself a victim of economic inequality, these images also feel sincere and well-intentioned. Burr's introduction serves to enforce that narrative: "In the earliest boyhood, thrown upon his own resources—cheated by pious villains—buffeted by poverty—his soul at length kindles up under the cold winds that blow upon it, into flames that flash evermore in the face of the world" (iv). Burr's language establishes Lippard as an underdog who has been "cheated" and beaten, but overcome the odds and only strengthened his resolve as a result. Lippard and Burr both desire his readers to perceive him as this figure in order to create a mythological Lippard that

overcomes the limitations of personal history and joins the ranks of Revolutionary Americans as a freedom fighter.

Despite his earlier comparisons to Shakespeare, Burr remarks that readers of his time desire an entirely different type of work: “Words with souls in them is what we want: words that go out like cannon balls against all falsity in church or state. Rigid, unsparing, outspoken truthfulness—rough and rugged as a northern land-scape” (vii). Burr then continues to decry “harmless” and “puss-in-boots literature,” a typical perspective that mirrors Hawthorne’s infamous grunt about the “damn’d mob of scribbling women” (vii). Ironically, Lippard’s writings would get lumped together with these writers and forgotten for some time after his loss of critical favor. Burr’s sentiment suggests that many readers have lost patience with art for art’s sake, and thirst to find works that speak directly to their own generation’s social ecosystem.

According to the mindset Burr champions, it is simply not enough for a work to inspire on its own terms—an enduring American writer must have an impact outside of his own text. Under this assumption, George Lippard would certainly seem like one of the most important writers of his era, as he wrote for quantity over quality and generally had a social or political agenda. This introduction intends to shift the reader’s focus away from any mundane criticisms—of which there are plenty—pertaining to the rushed, lightning pace of Lippard’s text production, and instead emphasizes Lippard’s cultural significance and unpretentious sincerity. In fact, Lippard himself agreed with Burr’s philosophy on the matter, and stated he meant to write a purely American mode

of literature, harshly criticizing English novelists. On the offensive against an English aesthetic, he claims that “literature which does not work practically for the advancement of social reform, or which is too dignified or too good to picture the wrongs of the great mass of humanity is just good for nothing at all. ‘English novels’ do more to corrupt the minds of American children than any sort of bad literature” (qtd. in Oberholtzer 260). Lippard distinguishes writing by nation in part because of personal attacks the English made on his and other writers’ profits. Lippard, in a revolutionary spirit, calls the English out for “attacks upon American freedom” and being “published by greedy pirates,” and thriving off the Church of England, who he accuses of starving the Irish en masse (qtd. in Oberholtzer 260). This distaste for English writing and publishing practices suggests that Lippard himself would believe any Shakespeare equivalent in the new era should possess a stronger sense of social activism than poetics. With this belief, Lippard committed himself to serving the impoverished and making bold, political statements against oppressive organizations.

## Chapter 2

### Lippard the Romancer

One of the great problems of accepting Lippard's particular assault on English literature is that he himself engages in his own form of poetic writing, present from early in his career: romanticization. As Charles Brockden Brown would describe in his 1800 essay, "The Difference Between History and Romance," Lippard "is a dealer, not in certainties, but probabilities, and is therefore a romancer" (341). Notably, Lippard sees a clear difference between romanticization and dishonest. In his Dedication in *Washington and His Generals*, Lippard wrote to the editor of the *Saturday Courtier*, Andrew M'Makin, thanking him for his defense and vowing to remain an enemy of falsehood, namely those who slandered him in previous issues, forever (3). At first, it might seem contradictory that Lippard would embellish details and invent events when depicting history to his audience when he was so passionately opposed to misrepresentation. However, Brown's—and by extension, Lippard's—distinction between romance and history is quite clear: "though history be a term commonly applied to a catalogue of natural appearances, as well as to the recital of human actions, romance is chiefly limited to the latter" (Brown 342). Lippard's intent is to observe the human qualities of historical figures and locations, but with the recognition that his romances reflect the truth of human nature, as well as greater ideals humans should



guide themselves by. Lippard took Brown's ideas about romancing over writing history to an extreme. Not only does he spice up the historical tales he retells, but he goes a step beyond and makes them reminiscent of formative tales, as seen in old English folklore or Greek mythology.

One of Lippard's strategies is to borrow liberally from existing legends, which is quite evident in the opening chapters of *The Rose of Wissahikon, or, The Fourth of July, 1776*. This story, a romance of the signing of the Declaration of Independence, borrows heavily from English legends. For instance, in the early chapters, a hunter reminiscent of Robin Hood rescues a woman named "Marion" from robbers. Lippard also refers to "Washington, the King," tying the general to Arthurian legend ("Rose," 34). These transformations of fictional and historical American figures into mythological tropes make the "characters" of history seem distanced from real humans. Choices such as these indicate Lippard's interest in the historical lessons of his tales over presenting any kind of genuine history. His "secret history" of the signing of the Declaration of Independence, referred to in the subtitle of the book, is only history in the sense that all history is retold and romanticized. Lippard paints the events of the signing as an ancient past, and the setting like a forgotten temple from a bygone age: "This [vibrant prior description] was on the third of July, 1776. Now, the rocks are clad with wild vines; the garden is a waste" ("Rose," 9). His specific use of the garden here adds an Edenic element to colonial America, reinforcing a popular romanticization of the "virgin land," which Lippard believes has fallen to ruin because of political and social change since the establishment of the United States.

Lippard's words themselves demonstrate an atypical perspective on history; given the sheer volume of fiction he produced about historical figures, one would assume he possessed an inherent love of the subject, but his comments at various junctures suggest otherwise. Once, when Rev. J. T. Headly plagiarized Lippard's *Washington and His Generals*, Lippard made his accusation "viciously in an open letter [in the May 15<sup>th</sup> issue of *The Saturday Courier*], charging him with plagiarism, and in proof of it confessing that he had only written fiction, and not history" (qtd. in Jackson 387). It would seem to be a strange turn, then, declaring the illegitimacy of his collection of American legends. However, Lippard's statements in other venues tell us that his concept of history was that history itself is a subjective matter and cannot be proven with enough accuracy to truly call itself history. His perspective falls cleanly into Brown's own concerning history: "An action may be simply described, but such descriptions, though they alone be historical, are of no use as they stand singly and disjointed from tendencies and motives, in the page of the historian or the mind of the reader. The writer, therefore, who does not blend the two characters, is essentially defective" (Brown 342). Lippard, guided by Brown, sees romance as in fact a higher form of history, the latter missing the point of writing about historical events in the first place.

Clearly, Lippard valued fiction far more than truth when it came to writing, despite his emphasis on depicting actual events, suggested in subtitles like *The Killers'* "A Narrative of Real Life in Philadelphia." Burr praises this aspect of Lippard's writing, which he claims circumvents falling into the "dull popular idea of history," instead showing us "pictures; with all the truth of history in them, where the heroes are made

living, present, and visible to our senses” (xvi). This emphasis on “truth” in history having a correlation with one’s ability to perceive the event implies that a writer’s perception of events is actually more important than the real events themselves, at least in the minds of the readers currently engaging with the texts. After all, a story is an accessible document, while the “truth” of history can never actually be seen, or at least could not with the technology available to readers in the Nineteenth Century.

Regardless, while many might believe they inherently value factual accuracy and sourcing in history above all else, fantastical stories that formed the basis of western culture’s understanding of the world are as much a part of history as real events. Hence, when Burr claims “all that survives either of *fact* or *legend*, of those battles and battle men is brought to light: painted before us, so that we can look upon every feature of the perilous times,” he equates legends of the American Revolution with real facts because, to the reader of histories, they are the same (xvi).

Though he presents events with embellishment, Lippard’s romanticization of history has some similarity with his tendency toward sensationalism, a quality that led many to peg him as a hack writer. Given the nature of his most popular work, the question of Lippard’s capability of properly representing history is a fair one. As Samuel Otter notes, Lippard has a tendency to oversimplify history and suggest that events “were arranged by a few individuals” and that “Lippard has difficulty representing what happened” in the historical events he writes about (Otter 183-4). However, by examining Lippard’s own writings about historical truth, we can conclude he was well aware of his inability to do so, and depicting the truth was never the point. Lippard’s purpose is not to make

audiences aware of all the facts, but to communicate the themes of history using “terms that are familiar and recognizable; narratives that permit us to inhabit the world comfortably” (Pihlainen, “The Work,” 128-129). This concept, which Hayden White coined as parahistorical representation, was something Lippard had ruminated on nearly a century beforehand. Lippard was in disbelief about the concept of objective history, and explains his position in “The History of Eighteen Hundred Years.” In the text, Lippard states that religion is adopted and adapted over time, and so is history. Because of his belief in the artificiality of history, it follows that Lippard would have little concern for factual accuracy in his own works. Moreover, Lippard recognizes the potential for artificialized ideas to draw a widespread response in his society:

Could the *real history* of those fifteen hundred years be written, by the real men of every age, -- could it be written even as it is known to God [...] the new Religion, depended not upon splendid temples or gorgeous costumes, or intricate creeds, -- that as it was an indestructible thing, a fixed fact in the history of the Universe [...] It found its Church in every Heart that responded to its Gospel of Love. It penetrated hearts and homes, -- countless millions of homes, -- that were never known to Priests or Historians” (“The History,” 90).

Here, Lippard emphasizes that the evolving church affected people outside the big events elevated by history. Just as notable to him are the “millions” who are lesser than footnotes in the history books. These people were the audience Lippard wanted to reach with his works, and he stresses that the current tenants of Christianity are “the

opinion of the mouth-piece of the Few” (“The History,” 91). Lippard sees the forgotten followers of Christianity as a group that has been silenced by the subjective hands of history writers, and a major theme of his work is giving a voice to the oppressed. In order to accomplish this, Lippard eventually turns to the genre of urban legends, the modern day equivalent of mythology, writing his most popular serials in the form of sensationalist city fiction, such as *The Quaker City* and *The Killers*.

Lippard understood the power legends and myths have to disseminate information and beliefs across the masses, and honed that ability in his writings about legendary American figures. However, Lippard’s method raises the complications of truth in representation and an inherent dishonesty in intentionally fictionalizing history. Critics such as Hayden White would point out that Lippard’s method is ostensibly a “sleight-of-hand of introducing extra-textual truth to a narrative rather than engaging in textual truth-creation” (Pihlainen, “Confines,” 63). The question one has to ask is whether the lessons of history outweigh a presentation of exact factual sequence, and for Lippard and Brown they certainly do. In some sense, a historical narrative cannot ever be truly objective about history because it is filtered through an author’s reading of evidence, the author’s writing about the evidence, and the reader’s interpretations.

Lippard’s characters draw on archetypes seen in Greek and English mythology and lore, but he also incorporates elements from more recent American gothic fiction. On the most basic level, Lippard’s Greek pantheon is the council signing the Declaration of Independence, as seen in *The Rose of Wissahikon*. He is committed to creating his own

unique visions of historical characters, and one example is his unusual depiction of Benedict Arnold as a hero. Doing this could be considered a bold turn, as Lippard takes a near-universally despised figure and attempts to glorify him in the same manner as he does Washington. Certainly, Lippard knows the reputation Arnold has, but more important is that Arnold, the betrayer, is an important character in the “mythology” of America, much like Hades was part of the Greek pantheon or Satan part of Biblical lore. Lippard depicts Benedict Arnold’s treason as a “Fall of Lucifer” in his chapter titles, and in fact, Arnold resembles the Miltonic Satan in several of Lippard’s writings. In “Rider of the Black Horse,” Lippard focuses on Arnold’s time in battle at Quebec before his treason, “face red with British blood,” and asks the reader, “Is it not a magnificent sight, to see that strange soldier and that noble black horse dashing, like a meteor, down the long columns of battle?” (99). Lippard’s peculiar emphasis on the least interesting historical aspect of Arnold has its own tie to Milton’s Satan, who has all the appearance of a hero from a narrative standpoint, and actively chooses to become a betrayer of heaven. For Lippard, it is important that the reader recognizes Arnold was in fact a hero before falling—this makes his treason all the more tragic. Additionally, Washington Irving’s influence on this story cannot be denied, as Lippard channels “Sleepy Hollow” when he chooses to depict Arnold as the rider of a black horse with a “shattered limb” that “bears the mark of a former wound” (101). This combination of the betrayer myth with a relatively newly-penned American gothic legend is crucial in establishing the figures of the American Revolution as heroes with their own mythological resonance.

For Lippard, the primordial American mythological hero is unsurprisingly General Washington, given the sheer amount of stories he wrote about the first President. Lippard's Washington is at times a demigod-like entity, at times an ordinary man; he even plays the role of a ghostly companion, a gothic figure, in *Adonai the Traveler*. Furthermore, Washington sometimes acts as a parallel to Christ, most directly alluded to with the title of "The Temptation of Washington," compiled in *Washington and his Generals*. While stories of Washington and the other founding fathers of America were not uncommon, Lippard specifically reinvents his historical figures through the lens of his own time's gothic and sensationalist fiction, exaggerating their deeds and making them seem like heroes of Greek mythology. Lippard's recreation of the American hero in this vein does not tie him to Shakespeare as Burr suggests; rather, Lippard's techniques could more closely be said to resemble Ovid's. Like Ovid, Lippard aimed to compile his legends in a sort of canon retelling of the story of the American Revolution, obviously in the case of *Washington and his Generals*, but also across separate works. For instance, in *The Rose of Wissahikon*, he references a story in which "The blood of a father poured forth by the son, moistened that grassy sod," ("Rose," 8) which occurred in a scene ripe with crucifixion imagery in a different story, "The Wissahikon" ("The Wissahikon," 97-8). Using historical facts and rumor, as well as his own personal romanticization, Lippard invents an image of General Washington that he desires to become an iconic figure carrying significance beyond any historical basis and far beyond the time of writing. Lippard also refers to Washington at times as "WASHINGTON THE MAN," stressing his humanity above any superhuman feats; the "demi" in demi-god is of utmost importance

to Lippard. David Reynolds remarks that when writing about any kind of heroic figure, Lippard “regarded [them] as godlike precisely because of their affinity with common people. Thus, Lippard’s Washington is a fallible, tortured man, constantly struggling with self-doubt and irresolution but finally rising above his flaws to fulfill his holy mission of established America as ‘the Palestine of Redeemed Labor’” (30). Lippard’s Washington is a holy figure, but one specifically in service of the working class; he is the model that Lippard strives to follow in his own advocating for social change.

This version of General Washington has connections to various legendary characters and motifs, which Lippard attempts to Americanize. In “The Wissahikon,” we observe Washington pacing and thinking in scenery that seems to be out of Arthurian legend: “far above the Wissahikon [...] attainable only by a long, winding path—fenced in by the trunks of giant pines, [...] covered with a carpet of evergreen moss” (107). In this scene, Washington is focused on how to deal with metaphorical, personified plagues (Disease, Starvation, and Nakedness), American counterparts to figures from English morality tales or the Riders from the *Book of Revelation*. His image of Washington is heavily and almost erotically masculinized, and Lippard employs the imperative as a way to make the reader visualize the character: “see that eye burn, that muscular chest heave under the folded arms” (108). Lippard takes care not only to depict Washington as a legend, but to mythologize American landscapes, particularly Philadelphia’s Wissahickon Valley, an important scenes in many of his legends. He refers to America as a Palestine or Mecca at many points in his work, a pilgrimage point for the oppressed in Europe: “And thus of all lands—coming out from Europe as the Israelites of old went forth from



Egypt—these exiles formed a nation” (“The Gospel of the New World,” 108). The idea of America as a “virgin” or Edenic land where the settlers had a second chance at forming a nation is the basis of his mythologization, which he would claim had later been compromised in *Adonai the Traveler*.

The Wissahikon, the site of the signing of the Declaration of Independence, is described not in Edenic terms, but as a new garden, built in reverence to God: “this wild wood is the cathedral of Nature, where every tree that towers, every flower that bends to the sod, as though sleepy with voluptuous perfume, every ripple of the stream, every leaf of the bough, says, as it floats or shines, or blooms, or waves, ‘There is a God, and he is good, and all men are his children!’” (“Rose,” 3). When writing about the Wissahickon, Lippard prefers using his own “Wissahikon” spelling, in full knowledge that it is incorrect (he uses the correct spelling in a dedication to his wife in *The Rose of Wissahikon*), seemingly to fictionalize the scenery and disassociate it with the actual location. The description of the forest in *The Rose of Wissahikon* certainly lends to the idea of fictionalization, and lays a framework for each individual portion in the American landscape having a story to tell:

every old tree has its story, every foot of mossy earth its legend [...] that huge rock was an altar, that beautiful stream, winding in light and shadow, the baptismal font of a forgotten religion, while here, among these shadowy ravines, grouped the maidens, their bosoms beating beneath vestments of snowy white,

[etc,] the warriors, whose strange costume, and dark physiognomy, and weapons of battle, have long since passed from the memory of man (4).

Here, the “long since passed” remains of warriors likely refers to the Indigenous people of America, who have been lost by time due to European influence, and on the surface Lippard’s ascription of the “dark physiognomy” certainly suggests that Europeans have enlightened the Americas. However, he also personifies the area as an “Indian maid, called Wissahikon” who “opens to us a prospect as strange as it is wildly beautiful” (5). There is an element of Orientalism at play here; Lippard recognizes the “otherness” of the land’s original inhabitants, but also reveres the unique beauty of the maiden, who will essentially act as the mother spirit of the newly founded United States.

Also in the introduction to *The Rose of the Wissahikon*, Lippard creates a short, metaphorical tale presented as a dream vision the reader experiences that resembles the story of Echo and Narcissus. Herein, the angelic, virgin figure essentially represents the promise of America, “as beautiful as Eve before she fell,” while the “dark woman” is a mysterious figure that stares into your soul:

You beheld the angel form of the young girl walk beside the dark woman, who led her to the verge of an awful cliff, smiling all the while, as she pushed the virgin toward the abyss. Flowers and skulls, perfumes and horrors, blasts from the grave, and breezes of May, were mingled in a strange--a grotesque panorama. And the last thing that you beheld, was a fair young face, sinking slowly into the waters of a fathomless abyss (“Rose,” 5-6)

This passage of the text contains a refrain between each paragraph, ensuring the reader that their “dream” is here in the Wissahikon; even though the dark woman has drowned that dream, it still exists in this place. Thus, the moral of Lippard’s mythology is that these areas of natural beauty in America inherently possess the original promise of the land, whether the actions of Americans have compromised that promise or not. This juxtaposition between the natural promise of America and the influence of its European founders is a theme present in much of Lippard’s work, and is an undercurrent to his city fiction. The creation of cities built on a pure foundation and ruled by moguls and corrupt politicians is the tragedy of Lippard’s America, a tragedy quite personal to the collective population of those cities.

Lippard’s version of George Washington is an entity existing because of this collective group sharing his stories, like an urban legend. Among the many stories of Washington in *Washington and His Generals*, “The Battle of Germantown” is a romance of the titular British-won battle during the Revolution, which notably ends with a three-part eulogy to the dead who served under Washington. At the beginning of the romance, the crowds anticipating Washington seem to both fear and eroticize him: “every lip repeats the whisper, and every heart beats at the sound, echoed like a word of magic along the lines—‘There he rides—how grandly his form towers in the mist; it’s Washington—it’s Washington!’ and the whole army takes up the sound—‘it is Washington!’” (37). As seen here, Lippard’s writings have a tendency to homogenize crowds into one unit, even when they are clearly referred to as groups, with an individual feeling or purpose. For instance, when Washington first appears, Lippard

writes as if the general's existence is a rumor spread across the land that has become universally known: "Had you listened to the murmurs of the dying on the field of Brandywine you would have heard the name, that has long since become a sound of prayer and blessings on the tongues of nations—the name of WASHINGTON" (32). Note how Lippard refers to the "tongues of nations;" this image represents a generalized understanding of myth in the context of its original culture, but from a modern perspective. For instance, if one assumes the story of Orpheus and Eurydice—a Greek myth—was widely told and believed in its time of origin, it is thought as precisely a "Greek myth," with no regard to how individual Greeks might have conceived of the story. Similarly, Lippard creates mythical versions of American figures and paints the public's perception of them in broad strokes. In turn, he desires a collective response in his readers. An individualistic, personal response to a work of art has little merit to a writer who wishes to actually encourage social reform; thus, the wider long-term impact of mythology is highly appealing to Lippard.

## Chapter 3

### Oversights in Lippard Studies:

#### *Adonai: The Pilgrim of Eternity* and Proto-Surrealism

The work that most clearly shows the connection between Lippard’s legends and social reform texts is 1851’s *Adonai: The Pilgrim of Eternity*, which is out of print and most readily (but only partially) accessible in David Reynolds’ *George Lippard: An Anthology*. *Adonai* suits the mindset of millennial as it is a speculative work concerning the predicted apocalypse and rapture; in it, Europe has already fallen and America is the last hope for the world. It is likely Lippard found inspiration for *Adonai* in the popularity of melodrama at theaters in his time, especially “spectacle-centric disaster plays,” which his surrealistic apocalyptic vision suggests (D’Alessandro 212). The plot involves a Christian, Adonai, from Nero’s time traveling forward to Nineteenth Century America seeking a land where “the Gospel of Nazareth is preached unto the Poor” (131). There, Adonai encounters a resurrected George Washington (thereafter called Arisen Washington) and the two of them witness what has become of the nation Washington helped establish. *Adonai* distinguishes the old world (Europe) from the new world in many respects, and Washington is America’s martyr figure: America is “land watered with the tears of Revolution—made holy by the deeds of Washington—rich with the harvest of Martyrs’ blood—land of the Gospel” (132). Both characters hope to see that their respective battles for religious and political freedom were not in vain; Lippard

frames both Christianity and the creation of the United States as initial successes that have faced corruption over time. Adonai meets the new world appalled that the class divisions from his own time still exist in modern times, while Washington is appalled that his nation has bent to inhumane exploitation and corporate interest.

Adonai's guide throughout this process is a trickster-type character called The Executioner, eventually revealed to be Satan reborn as a distinctly American devil who has abandoned the ruined Europe (150). Lippard has a penchant for using these characters in his work; typically, they feel like a familiar of the author, granting the reader witness to events outside of the normal. For instance, he uses one named Flib in his early *Spirit of the Times* publications, who lets readers "observe silently the secret exchanges and exploitations of antebellum Philadelphia" (D'Alessandro 205). The Devil-Bug in *The Quaker City* is perhaps the more prominent example, but the existence of this trope from early on in Lippard's writings suggests the character is formative for him, or even reflective of a shade of his own character. It could be argued that Lippard sees himself as one of these figures, but desires to be more like Washington. If the Executioner is meant to reflect Lippard as a twisted tour guide, then he demonstrates just how far the world has fallen, as Lippard is content making a spectacle of the corrupted America before his hero, Washington.

When Adonai first travels to the New World, after a surrealistic journey through a Colossal Dome resembling Roman architecture, he encounters "the Man of the Place," who immediately asks him "Do you want to sell or buy?" (133). The scene comments on

the rise of capitalism, particularly how it has become the face of an America founded by righteous virtue, and quickly escalates into exposing capitalism's greatest sin. The "wares" being peddled by the greeter naturally turn out to be slaves, ironically sold in the "City of Washington," and with his own blatant irony The Man continues to assure Adonai America is "the Land of the Free and the Home of the Brave," and that his ancestors fought under Washington's command (134).

What separates *Adonai* from a traditional legend is Lippard's deliberate emphasis on social commentary and reform. In a stand-out scene, Adonai and Arisen Washington encounter a "Factory," which they mistake for a prison or graveyard (140). Like many writers of his time, Lippard recognized the inherent dehumanization of the factory system, and thus selected the factory to be his version of Tartarus, where men are forced to endlessly repeat their punishments; Adonai asks the Executioner, "What have these men, these women done, that you bury them alive, in this haunt of pestilence, chaining their living hearts to the wheels of your remorseless machinery?" (140). The difference between this factory and Tartarus is that the people in the factory have done nothing but try to live in the modern world, and this grotesque image of factory workers fastened to these wheels as literal cogs in a machine begs the reader to consider the importance of reforming the factory system. 75 years later, Charlie Chaplin's *Modern Times* would utilize similar imagery to iconic effect, but Lippard's feels like far more scathing commentary, especially given the context of slavery and its related corporal punishments, made far more public with the circulation of slave narratives in Lippard's time. The Executioner (Satan) makes it clear that the oppression of capitalist rule is

downright blasphemous: “This is the Temple devoted to the God of the Nineteenth Century, and who is called CAPITAL. We worship him, from fourteen to sixteen hours per day. We offer up LABOR as an acceptable sacrifice at his shrine. [...] This age improved upon Moloch” (141). He then gleefully describes how the factory chains children to iron wheels in the machinery. This Satan is a caricature, but is also synonymous with the malicious business men Lippard attacks in so many of his writings—To Lippard, America has been taken over by an obviously evil subset of humanity.

However, Lippard writes that there is hope, even though America has fallen into corrupt rule. The Executioner explains how all the great nations of Europe have fallen in this time, and Adonai proclaims America is “the last altar of human Brotherhood—the scene of God’s last experiment with the human race” (150). The Pope and King, figures of governmental and religious authority, are shown begging for Europe to be covered and forgotten, and the other nations are described in apocalyptic terms. Instead, the figures still standing in opposition to Satan are spirits who lived “earthly life” as great philosophers, like Plato, Socrates, and Thomas More. The promise this group makes is that society is capable of reorganization, which is “the will of the ONE AND LIVING GOD” (152). Reform is what will save the world, and the new “religion” is an era of enlightened thinking, inspired by these philosophers. In short, Lippard has created a story that follows up the apocalyptic vision of *The Book of Revelation* with the conclusion that America is a promised land, capable of recovering from corruption by listening to the thinkers of the past and fighting authority figures (like The Executioner)



who operate corrupt facilities like the factory. Published two years after his serial, *The Killers*, and only three years before his death, *Adonai* is a landmark work that encapsulates Lippard's philosophy that change is possible, combining the characters from his mythology of American history, style from his surrealistic writing, and ethical aims of his city fiction.

Given his previous success with *The Quaker City*, it is no surprise Lippard eventually turned away from the surrealistic style of works like *Adonai* and returned to his more grounded city fiction. Lippard began prioritizing the promotion of real change in his community during his final years, founding his Brotherhood of the Union in 1850 and serving as its "Supreme Washington." Lippard was well aware, from his own success and Charles Brockden Brown's essay, that his romanticization of history got readers more emotionally involved than presenting the facts as-is. This same year, in response to riots by the street gang in 1849, he began serializing *The Killers* in his own weekly paper, also titled *The Quaker City*. In order to write about the riots with his own political slant and expose the inherent corruption that led to them, he greatly fictionalized the incident, inventing characters and settings. For instance, Lippard took a real event reported briefly in a newspaper from October of 1849, then created a scene focused on Kate and Black Andy that embellishes on the event (Otter 192). Samuel Otter notes how Lippard's blending of facts and fiction indicates "the generative relationship between riot and fictional particularity" (187). *The Killers* contains a fictional Philadelphia, with fictional characters at work on all sides of the central riot; it combines fact, fiction, and pure political intent to create a world that sells the intensity and tragic genesis of the riot to

Lippard's target market. It goes beyond the historical, as Lippard was accustomed to doing, and makes the riot into a classical tragedy.

For much of his critical reanalysis, Lippard has been studied for his political and sensationalist fiction, but one movement he engaged with, unknowingly, is proto-surrealism. In "Towards Surrealism: The Irrational, The Erotic, The Nightmarish," David Reynolds pinpoints Lippard as an early surrealist "because his radical social views were combined with a soaring imagination that revelled in the irrational, the bizarre, the erotic, and the grotesque" (283). While surrealism would seem to have little connection to social reform texts, Lippard's blend of stories from real life and fantastical visions, most plainly on display in *Adonai*, bridges the two genres. Reynolds comments particularly on Lippard's casting of gothic archetypes in his texts: "Lippard believed that human irrationality and the horrors of industrialized America could best be exposed not through staid social realism but rather through novels peopled by ghouls and freaks, novels that brashly violated consequentiality and verisimilitude by playing games with plot, tone, and perspective" (283). Many of his legends go beyond the gothic and toward the surreal, but shades of this tendency exist throughout all of his fiction. Burr notes that even in several of his war stories, "the author's soul delights in the images of beauty and purity that seem to flit ever before him, in the midst of darkest delineations" (xv). While Burr wrote hyperbolically, there is truth to the claim that Lippard spends considerable time in comparatively realistic texts embellishing and characterizing scenery, such as his personification of the Wissahikon, which is repeatedly referred to as a dream sequence of the reader's. Lippard frequently indulges in writing about dreams,

a favorite environment of the surrealists. Short sequences like the opening of a chapter in “The Battle of Germantown” contain dreams—in this case, a soldier dreams about returning home—and ask the reader to interact with them: “And yet he sleeps—he dreams! Shall we guess his dream?” (36) Consistent involvement of the reader is a trademark of Lippard’s style, one he uses to escape the conventions of realism and write to enable a social reader response.

The matter-of-fact tone Lippard uses to describe fantastical scenery suggests he nearly desires the reader to accept the images at face value; he pens the bizarre and unusual in a natural manner, even when writing in genres like the political serial that tend toward realism. Most notably, Lippard’s rampant fixation on the color red permeates his texts to a near comical extent; the imagery is so prevalent that it defies reality within otherwise realistic settings. Lippard sees the color representing an inherent violence in the world; his writings are especially tinged with blood, but fire features heavily as well. In *Adonai*, the burning of Europe is a stand-out set-piece: “Europe was arched with a rainbow of flame. And everywhere the earth shook with the tread of armies. Everywhere the sky flung back the sounds of triumph and death. Like wrecks on a blood-red sea, crowns and thrones were tossing everywhere” (148). However, both blood and fire return as prominent imagery of *The Killers*, and together these move the text from serialized social realism into something more fantastical, even while the content maintains its didactic slant.

The flames in the chaos of the riot are *The Killers'* key symbol; the riot is a massive conflagration that absorbs all of the people involved, making them one giant mass instead of individual men. In turn, dehumanization is the consequence of criminality and social injustice that Lippard exposes in the serial. Social and physical dehumanization exist in the story, and Lippard depicts both as contemptuous. The narrator's case against solitary confinement in Chapter VII, "The Peep Through the Wall of the Penitentiary," serves as the most prominent analysis of both types of dehumanization. When a man enters prison, the idea that "he becomes a number" rings particularly true for Hicks's estranged son, Elijah (Lippard 85). The circumstances of Elijah's confinement are akin to classical tragedy: his separation from his birth father, imprisonment over the father's own illegal bank notes, and lack of salvation from the father in this chapter are not depicted as mere coincidences, but events orchestrated by the hand of fate. Physically, Elijah appears hardened, pale, and sunken, and the narrator notes, "there was a history in that face" (86). A history of violence and oppression has physically scarred Elijah, but also indicates his humanity in spite of becoming a "number." A greater loss of humanity occurs in the climactic scenes as the riot reaches its peak. Lippard describes the red-tinged scene: "Firemen, Negroes, and Killers were mingled together in the dense crowd" with "their faces reddened by the glare which came from a burning house" (145). Lippard's conflation of the three groups in a singular color to match the flame is dehumanization on a massive scale, one reflecting his feelings concerning the vicarious nature of human aggression and herd mentality. Mark Seltzer writes that Lippard recognized how "the public mass spectacle of violence" inspires a blood lust in the

public, which leads to even more violent crime in a community (563). Mass violence is not only chaotic in the moment, but over a prolonged period as it inspires future violence.

This pattern of violence feeding itself exacerbates the problem with “respectable” killers exhibiting social control: not only do they manipulate their victims, but those victims then turn and attack one another. During the riot, Lippard refers to “rum and blood” that transform men into “devils” (145). The “rum” is an economic factor, an exchanged product that alters the mind. The blood carries a dual meaning: physically, as Seltzer outlined, the sight of blood has inspired the crowd to participate in the riot. However, blood also refers to lineage, recalling the story of the Hicks family. Cromwell, Elijah, and Kate—all related by blood—have found themselves involved in the riot because of the white collar crimes of their father, and their story is only one out of countless untold stories of every person involved. In his introduction, Lippard states “the sight of blood shocks” the white collar criminal so he avoids it altogether, but he still “does murder” from a physical distance (215). To Lippard, the men fighting on the streets are only devils because of proximity to violence, whether in the heat of the moment like the riot or over the course of a lifetime. The gradual rise of a devil is best exemplified by Cromwell’s gradual transformation into Bob Blazes, a name that represents a risen flame. The lack of an escape from the conflagration is unsettling: Black Andy’s ultimate fate cements the horror of collective dehumanization by squashing a possible means of escape from the herd. Black Andy’s sudden turn to “instinctively” rescue Kate, the woman he had previously helped kidnap for pay, from

the fire suggests that nobility remains buried in humans somewhere (Lippard 156). Unfortunately, his only reward for taking a noble turn is to be immediately slaughtered by the mob, overcome by the herd despite the good in human nature. If no escape exists from the herd mentality, then the solution to violence on this scale must be prevention.

## Chapter 4

### Lippard and Audience Empowerment

By 1849, Lippard was on record as saying he believed only the classes of rich and poor existed in the world, and everything else was a meaningless distinction. However, he would often argue for the nobility of individuals, those that “secretly carry noble English blood,” or in the case of the titular gang of *The Killers*, forge their own new groups to rule with power (qtd. in D'Alessandro 207-8). Additionally, the existence of the Bulgine, a stereotypical black character present in the text, indicates clear class consciousness within Philadelphia’s streets delineated by racial lines. This stratification among the lower class distressed Lippard, whose socialist tendencies suggested he wanted such disparities to eventually disappear instead of becoming more convoluted. The hunt for wealth within any ecosystem can lead to corruption; Lippard “laments the fragmentations of those within the lower million and decries the widespread ambition to reach the highest tier of exploitative wealth” (qtd. in D'Alessandro 208). Lippard used his *Quaker City* as his means of speaking to the mentalities within the lower class that led to riots and created social stratification, but as a positive force for potential social change.

Lippard was always keenly aware of the relation between his text and his readers; as a writer of serial fiction for periodicals and organizer of his own publications, he always

had audience in mind. From very early on, his focus on readers is apparent due to his interaction with critics. In responding to libelous strikes against Lippard, Burr states, “It is you [critics] who have driven genius out, and compelled it to pitch its extravagances against your own; for thus only can it weight you upwards, to give a lesson from the skies” (xv). Indeed, Lippard thrived off of criticism, fully aware of the adage that all publicity is good publicity. According to David Reynolds, Lippard boasted that he was attacked more than any other preceding American writer (Reynolds 5). It was natural for his works to evoke criticism, as Lippard fabricated events in his histories and took on the establishment in his writing. In particular, Lippard was frequently criticized for his use of exaggeration, to which he retorted in one instance: “Exaggeration! As if one could exaggerate in regard to the evils of the Factory System of the Nineteenth Century” (qtd. in Reynolds 24). Indeed, to Lippard, sensationalism and exaggeration were important elements of his style. Depicting the Factory as a blasphemous church seems mild in comparison to the apocalyptic state of the world in *Adonai the Traveler*. This same spirit of committing to extremes was evident in Lippard’s work ethic as well. J. M. W. Geist, who worked with Lippard on *The Quaker City* periodical observed, “he would not begin writing the weekly installment until the morning of the day before the paper had to go to press, and when he began he would not rise until his eight or ten columns were finished,” adding that it was Lippard’s style to invent his stories as he went along at a breakneck pace (Oberholtzer 257-8). He would also make stuff up as he went along, according to Geist (258). Recently, the production of earlier seasons of the television show *South Park* closely resembled Lippard’s style; staying socially relevant and



addressing current hot topics meant sacrificing the same care that typical writers and animation teams could put into their work, resulting in a product that felt very “do-it-yourself.” For Lippard, this seemed to be an extremely freeing process.

Lippard wrote expecting his audiences to synthesize the material he produced for them, meaning his work was never actually complete until his audience had thought about and reacted to it. Christopher Looby, a critic who has extensively written on the effects of seriality in nineteenth-century texts, claims *The Quaker City* serial’s readers “are always collaborators in the construction of the text,” and that “Lippard’s choice of part publication reminded them in their bodies of their own constructive contribution to making *The Quaker City* cohere” (Looby 28). Looby’s reference to a bodily response applies to a reader feeling empowered through language, but that response could happen with any written text. The more unique quality of serial fiction informing the text is that readers instinctively construct text by filling in the margins between gaps in the text, particularly the large gaps of installments separated by real-world time. Cohen and Wong’s recent edition of *The Killers*, though very thorough, cannot capture this quality of seriality. To begin speculating on reader construction, one must examine the gaps in the original text. For instance, the first installment of *The Killers* ends when the narrator omnisciently reveals that Don Jorge had forged a letter to Mr. Hicks, ending with “The nature of this interest will appear in the course of our narrative” (55). The reader is left to speculate on the connection between Don Jorge and Hicks, which has no explanation in the next installment and does not become clear until much later in the

narrative. These final moments of installments invite a response that is creative and potentially social, as readers can speculate on future events with one another.

Looby proposes the reason seriality proved the best medium for this “democratic agency” is that pauses in the text represent “the future continuing to offer itself as open to human agency” (Looby 34). The future of the story itself is a secret for readers to construct, learn from, or conjecture on. While Lippard will eventually expose the narrative truth of these events, moments of reader creation are as much a part of the text as words on the page. Reader construction plays a role not only in the installment breaks, but in small segments of emotion and imagery. Emotional appeals are another of Lippard’s frequent devices, but they get filtered through the intermediary of the sensationalist narrator. For instance, when Elijah finally confronts Hicks and calls him out for ignoring his plight in solitary confinement, the narrator asks: “Was it a tear that rolled down his sunken cheek?” (139). Lippard writes the question with intentionally vague pronoun reference, allowing the reader to decide which of the men has recognized the tragedy of the situation. In this manner, Lippard allows the reader to contribute to constructing the narrative. Similarly, the narrator subversively suggests “we need not picture” Elijah’s sorrowful attempts to revive Kate, causing any reader invested in the characters to immediately picture just that moment in greater clarity than Lippard could probably depict (142). Passages like these recall the breaks between weekly serial installments in smaller chunks: the reader pauses to consider an event, constructing a portion of the text implicitly (akin to creating a prediction for the future week’s publication), then continues forward, more invested because of personal

involvement. Allowing a reader this agency involves a great risk on Lippard's part; of *The Quaker City* serial, Looby posits, "Lippard took his chances for a reason, allowing the textual cuts to fall where they might and thereby produce meaning-effects that were not under his perfect control—but, by the same token, were also not without their possibility of making meaning either" (20). If we take Looby's critical wager, Lippard's technique gains a self-sought merit. Lippard never intended to create finely crafted works of art that are distanced from his audience. Rather, his works intend to elicit an immediate, chaotic, and empowering reader response, and Lippard knowingly ceded some control of the text to achieve this reaction.

Lippard's most useful tool to draw on in this respect was the collective response created by mythology. As such, he aimed to make the legends of America feel real by involving the reader in them. One of his typical devices in this regard is liberal use of the second person and imperative, as seen in this passage from "The Battle of Germantown:" "Had you ascended Chesnut Hill on that calm autumnal afternoon, and gazed over the tract of country opened to your view, your eye would have beheld a strange and stirring sight. [...]. Gaze on the valley below" (28). Over and over, Lippard actively involves the reader in the locales of the past. History is not a dull thing, but an active event, and Lippard wants his readers to feel connected. He also draws on their hindsight to further flavor the scene: "Oh, there is something of horror in the anticipation of a certain death, when we know as surely as we know our own existence, that a coming battle will send scores of souls shrieking to their last account, when the green lawn, now silvered by the moonlight, will be saddened with blood" (31). Lippard has the reader not just actively

“there” in the past but also anticipating future historical events from that place in time. This foreknowledge, whether it concerned the founding fathers, early colonial stories, or recent urban legends, is a power in readers that Lippard aims to harness.

For Lippard, gathering readers together as agents collaborating on the meaning of a text is a step toward achieving social reform: his texts are meant to be shared and become a larger event than the text itself. By creating the catalyst for these gatherings of the mind, Lippard acts as a vigilante, potentially capable of creating justice in whatever vision he desires. Using this “SwordPen” of his, he could arm the masses with knowledge and potentially wage a form of intellectual guerilla assault against whomever he deemed worthy, exemplified in *The Killers* by his continual building of a case against Hicks (Reynolds 39). The power to do so raises the question of just how influential print media was in the antebellum United States, and in turn how large of a voice Lippard actually possessed. Notably, Lippard began his writing career directly after the Panic of 1837, which led to great economic disparity in his time, making the time ripe for socially-aware texts aimed at the lower class. Lippard also benefited from the revolutionary nature of penny newspapers; the “cheaper, more democratic penny paper, which was adapted to the tastes and the wallets of urban workers” (Reynolds 22). In some sense, it is fitting that his own legacy would have faded away, as Lippard’s goal was to organize contemporary readers, not sell himself. As such, while he “ensured that his enlightened followers—gathering in Philadelphia’s streets, trade meetings, and playhouses—would continue his toil,” his own input stopped being important after he had informed his audience (D’Alessandro 231).

Some subtle remnants of Lippard have remained, despite his ceding of power to his public. Lippard invented various folklore elements of American history, some of which are still believed today, most notably his mythologization of the Liberty Bell, which he claimed rang after the Founding Fathers had signed the Declaration of Independence (Reynolds 9). His fixation on divisions within wealth classes has also stuck around.

Lippard would contrast between the “upper ten” and “lower million” in his criticisms of economic disparity, which even found its way into contemporary American sentiments in the Occupy Wall Street movement of the 2010s (Reynolds 16). Perhaps self-publishers like Lippard have had a greater influence than many would suspect. Even if Lippard only inspired conversations among small networks of Americans, scandals and white-collar crime through the years have led many Americans today to default to suspicion of the government and figures of social authority. Certainly, hardly any of those Americans are familiar with Lippard, but his brand of vigilante journalism was a key influence in the establishment of these sentiments developing in the popular consciousness.

Lippard fed into the fears and interest Philadelphia had with organizations like The Killers, taking hold of a collective desire to make sense of America. If his writing appears “third-rate,” as critic William Bryan suggested in 1952 (and as certainly was the general consensus of critics before recent revivals in Lippard studies) it could be because, typically, a student who would encounter his texts reads them from a perspective that does not account for Lippard’s goals as a writer (192). While Lippard did not go on to be renowned as a great literary figure alongside Poe and Melville, his work had a subtle social effect, feeding the culture of skepticism and paranoia that defines Americans to

this day. In his texts, “his actors in riot are part of larger scripts” and “violence covers multiple interests” (Otter 190). He imitated his own revolutionary demi-gods, becoming a figure whose work remained in the air of America beyond his death by instigating a collective response to historical themes and the societies he exposed.

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