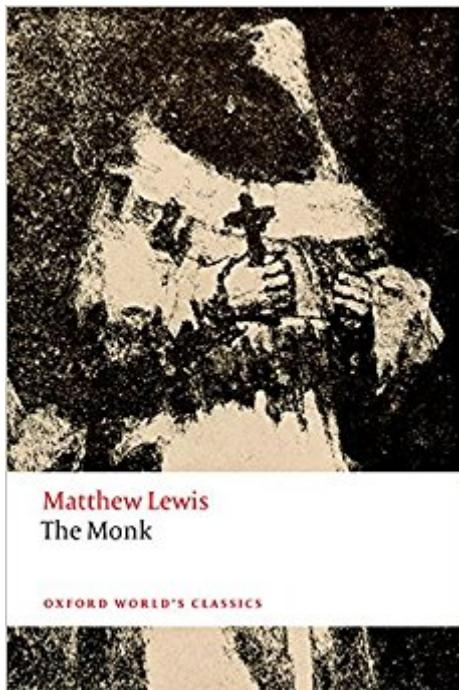


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The Monk (Oxford World's Classics)



Synopsis

'He was deaf to the murmurs of conscience, and resolved to satisfy his desires at any price.' The Monk (1796) is a sensational story of temptation and depravity, a masterpiece of Gothic fiction and the first horror novel in English literature. The respected monk Ambrosio, the Abbot of a Capuchin monastery in Madrid, is overwhelmed with desire for a young girl; once having abandoned his monastic vows he begins a terrible descent into immorality and violence. His appalling fall from grace embraces blasphemy, black magic, torture, rape, and murder, and places his very soul in jeopardy. Lewis's extraordinary tale drew on folklore, legendary ghost stories, and contemporary dread inspired by the terrors of the French Revolution. Its excesses shocked the reading public and it was condemned as obscene. The novel continues to beguile and shock readers today with its gruesome catalogue of iniquities, while at the same time giving a profound insight into the deep anxieties experienced by British citizens during one of the most turbulent periods in the nation's history.

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Customer Reviews

Nick Groom publishes widely for both academic and popular readerships and his recent books

include *The Forger's Shadow* (2002), *The Union Jack* (2006), *The Gothic: A Very Short Introduction* (2012), and an edition of Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* for Oxford World's Classics (2014). His book *The Seasons: An Elegy for the Passing Year* (2013) was shortlisted for the Katharine Briggs Folklore Award and nominated for BBC Countryfile Book of the Year.

Now that's what I'm talking about. In the same manner that *Dangerous Liaisons* saved an entire genre (the epistolary novel) from never having a proper representative book written well, so too does this book rescue one (goth) from such a fate. It takes what all goth books preceding it tried to do (and failed), and does it right. I have written before that this goth genre is very kitchen sink. It attempts to throw dozens of elements into a narrative and weave a story. It isn't done well. Until this one! Every aspect of the genre is made interesting here, and fascinating. Things are compelling, and grab your attention, and peril and bedamnedness is ever-present and comes across as real, and feasible, and possible, as opposed to the trash that is the work of the Marquis De Sade. Yes, a man can devolve in precisely this way. It is completely believable. The goth elements could have been stripped away, and the story could have been great, but somehow, by skill of the young author, these elements add to the story. They don't subtract at all. I even understand how the somewhat-lengthy diversions serve the story, as instructive parables to how things might turn out. Finally, the ending is altogether fitting, and horrific, and satisfying.

I was recently talking to a man I'd just met and he said that he hadn't had a television growing up and that he read a lot as a kid, so I asked him to tell me which book he'd read as a kid that had blown him away and he began to tell me about this book. I was so intrigued that I came home and immediately downloaded it to my Kindle (and I never read anything on Kindle, I always wait for the actual book to arrive) but I began reading this book and it just took me to this amazing place! Wow! So wonderful! And to think of when it was written and what courage to write something like this! I really loved it and without laying out the entire storyline, I'll just say that it was a great book and so bizarre that I can't quite get it out of my head.

This is a new edition of one of the most sensational Gothic fictions -- the first horror novel in English literature -- and it provides a wealth of detail about the social and political events that fed into Lewis's terrifying story of a pious monk turning bad. One of the most influential Gothic novels, "The Monk" is also a key text on the debate on the French Revolution, and it bears the stamp of other incendiary issues of the day, from gender roles to the depiction of sex and violence to slavery.

Editor Nick Groom is an expert on the Gothic, and his Introduction examines the literary and historical contexts of the novel, including politics, libertine and erotic literature, the position of women, the emergence of horror fiction and much more. Groom's explanatory notes use contemporary sources provide information on cultural sources, myth and legend, religion and iconography, and contemporary reactions. This edition also includes a chronology and up-to-date bibliography.

I was reading this because it gets a mention in one of Jane Austen's novels. I was surprised at the sex scenes, and didn't like the way there was a story inside a story inside a story. Early on I almost gave up, but it did become more bearable as I go further into the book. I don't really recommend it. Surely young ladies didn't read such racy stuff? One thing did make me laugh: how one should not let one's daughters read the Bible, there being so much sin and bad behaviour in it.

The Monk is a wonderful Faustian tale. However, this is far from just being about the monk himself. All the side characters get their chance to tell their tales. With each new story you realize when it was done, "Oh, yeah, forgot about the rest of the story." All of these overlapping tales do come together quite well. Be warned that the opening is a bit slow but like in a Dickens book you must pay attention to the beginning as it all gets wrapped up in the end. The one drawback I saw was that of characters who are so emotionally distraught that they have to take to their sickbeds in grief. Guess when you have money you can afford to waste away for weeks. Makes me wonder how these people would handle the strain of having teenagers. That aside this is a marvelous read and a true classic. If Faust wasn't already out there then this could have easily taken its place. For here we see the downfall of false piety and the triumph of true nobility of character. Oh, yes--there are also ghosts, murder, and broken hearts a plenty.

The characters in this novel are very well developed. Ambrosio, the Abbot of a monastery, is completely pure until the age of 30, when a seductress is sent by a demon into his life. Like a flipped coin, the Abbot begins to exhibit the underside of his personality, the side that has been suppressed since his childhood. At time, I felt like the diversions could have been shorter, but the author brought everything together in the end. Excellent piece of work for his time, and worthy of the reader's attention today.

I really enjoyed this story. I read a lot of classics from this era and this one was a little different. I

love the way you are just reading the story and all of a sudden something really startling is revealed... makes you want to say OMG!. There are a lot of twists and turns in the story but not too many characters to remember and the story is all tied together at the end. It has a very satisfying ending with the right amount of happy endings and justice. The heroes are heroic and the villains are evil. It's an adventure all the way through.

While the story itself is in line with expectations, there are too many very long poems, songs, and quotations for my taste. Then again, I'm not a fan of gothic novels in general.

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