



The Convent

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The crumbling convent of Our Lady of Mercy stands alone in an uninhabited part of the Spanish sierra, hidden on a hill among dense forest. Its inhabitants are devoted to God, to solitude and silence—six women cut off from a world they've chosen to leave behind. This all changes on the day that Mother Superior Maria Ines discovers a suitcase punctured with air holes at the entrance to the retreat: a baby, abandoned to its fate. Is it a miracle? Soon she will find that the baby's arrival has consequences beyond her imagining, and that even in her carefully protected sanctuary she is unable to keep the world, or her past, at bay.

In this beautifully told novel, "we witness justice and injustice, theological controversy, the politics of a tiny enclosed society, despair, cruelty, generosity, scandal, suspicion and suicide, all told with immense verve and skill" (*London Sunday Times*).

The Convent Details

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Author : Panos Karnezis

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From Reader Review The Convent for online ebook

Leonidas Moumouris says

Με τον Καρν?ζη νομ?ζω ?τι την ?χω πατ?σει ?σχημα. Το Μικρ?ς Ατιμ?ες ε?ναι ?να απ? τα πιο αγαπημ?να μου βιβλ?α. Φοβ?μαι ?τι ψ?χνοντας να βρω κ?τι αν?λογο δικ? του θα π?φτω σε ?φαλο. Το Π?ρτυ Γενεθλ?ων που δι?βασα ακριβ?ς μετ?, ?ταν μια πανωλεθρ?α. Δεν μπορο?σα να πιστ?ψω ?τι ?ταν ο ?διος συγγραφ?ας στα δ?ο αυτ? βιβλ?α.

Το Μοναστ?ρι στ?κεται κ?που στη μ?ση. Θα το ξεχ?σω ?μως γρ?γορα.

Ακ?μα ελπ?ζω σ εκε?νη την απ?κοσμη γραφ? του που δυστυχ?ς ο?τε κι εδ? την βρ?κα.

M says

For every time that a staggeringly high GR rating leads me astray, there is the occasional opposite experience, such as The Convent. I have no idea why it has scored so low - and I want to wait until after my review to find out (I have occasionally changed my mind about books post reading reviews and that seems wrong) - when I found this book to be quietly, but wonderfully, moving and altogether fascinating.

The Convent's premise is a great one - a baby turns up at the steps of a convent, abandoned in a suitcase, newly born. This in itself is fabulous - forget where the child came from, that's the least of it - suddenly you have women who have sworn off this very thing forced to contend with it. I don't know about you, but it never occurred to me that a nun's vow of chastity also meant a vow against motherhood. I mean, obviously, but I never really put it in those terms. This tension was dealt with really well - the women are all thumbs, and are in fact frightened of the child. The presence of the child also cast a certain interesting light on the life of a nun; the accepted reality of a life of mild suffering (no heat in winter, meager meals) suddenly was unacceptable for a child. More than that, the child is a boy, begging the question of how long such a person can coexist within the nunnery.

The story gets juicier as we discover (early on) the Mother Superior's incentive behind keeping the child - she herself aborted a fetus back in the day, forever feeling guilty, now sees this child as her second chance. But she cannot admit this to the sisters, and her behavior is perceived as strange, and indeed often cruel. Once we do find out the origin of the child, well, let's just say that the very question of all things holy in the book is broadened even more.

I really, really enjoyed this. The writing is tight and eloquent, the scenes are gripping, the characters are, for the most part, very well sketched and multi dimensional. There is the sister that no one likes, and the sister who is harboring a secret, and the sister who nurtures stray dogs out of a thinly disguised need to be a mother. Much of the church is explored in a way that I loved to read about, and I thought that, while it has minor flaws, this was a really wonderful (and underrated) work.

Dora says

το διαβασα το 12 αλλα θυμαμαι οτι ηταν ενδιαφερουσα η ιστορια (3.5 αστ?ρια) και πηρα κ το παρτυ γενεθλιων αργοτερα

Michael Kotsarinis says

Αν και τα βασικ? γεγον?τα και η πλοκ? ε?ναι απλ?, η γραφ? του συγγραφ?α θυμ?ζει ψηφιδωτ? ? παζλ που σιγ? σιγ? αποκαλ?πτει την εικ?να. Παρ? το ?τι εκ των υστ?ρων ?λα μοι?ζουν απλ? και προφαν? ο αναγ?στης επιβεβαι?νει τις υποψ?ες του προς το τ?λος, το οπο?ο δ?νει πολ? ωρα?α με το ?λο κλ?μα του βιβλ?ου. Ο συγγραφ?ας δεν παιδε?ει τον αναγ?στη μ?λις αυτ?ς καταλ?βει τι γ?νεται αλλ? του αποκαλ?πτει ?λες τις λεπτομ?ρειες και επιταχ?νει το ρυθμ?. Διαβ?ζεται πολ? ευχ?ριστα.

Judith says

An isolated convent in the Spanish sierra...home to 6 nuns of varying ages, whose lives are devoted to God, reflection and solitude....Everything changes the day that a baby is found, in a padded suitcase, on the front steps.

Everything changes..the world comes to the convent in an emotional sense, at least. Jealousy, cruelty, zealotry, pride...make for a heady, deadly mix..The MOTHER SUPERIOR is at the center of the storm, having kept her own secret for many years.in the misguided belief that the orphaned child is the expiation of her own past sin...she delves into madness and shame...wherein the story becomes itself. Too many tales of this ilk become tacky..this one does not

This book is not a religious screed, nor is it a tabloid expose...it is a story of 6 women living isolated lives whose world is suddenly shattered from without...how each one deals with this new "truth". This book won't set the world on fire..but may give a reader food for thought...regarding the sanctity of the Church..and the price it exacts from its "sons & daughters"

3 Stars

M.R. Dowsing says

The third book I've read by this author, and it's at least as good as the others. Karnezis seems to get compared to Graham Greene a lot for some reason, but to me he's closer to Garcia Marquez. This is a terrific story about how the arrival of a baby abandoned at a convent awakens suppressed memories and emotions in the nuns who live there, and the consequences that ensue. It's such a perfect novel it should be required reading for anyone considering writing a book - there are no plot holes, the characters are totally convincing, it's told with admirable concision and just the right amount of detail... It would also make a fantastic film! A great read from an author who deserves to be much better known.

DeLys says

I was anxious to read this book and read it in two days. Not that I couldn't put it down, but rather because it's

an easy read. It is intended to be a bit of a mystery, but I had figured out the main plot twists long before they were revealed. I couldn't help but wonder if I would have liked it better if it had been in Spanish. It might have felt more authentic.

K says

I'm giving this four stars even though it was admittedly kind of putdownable for me, and I really wavered about reducing my rating to three. Ultimately, though, four won out because of the book's haunting quality and stimulating questions which stayed with me after I closed it.

An unsuspecting nun about to leave for her errands finds a suitcase on the doorstep of the convent and discovers a sleeping baby. The mother superior instantly takes the baby as her own, and we soon discover her psychological reasons for doing so. Other nuns react as well, and the social structure of the convent slowly erodes.

This quiet book evoked convent life in a way that was atmospheric and believable. The characters were interesting and the conflicts were set up in a natural way. Various incidents arose that seemed like cheap ways for Panos to create drama, but happily Panos never took that easy way out, instead choosing to develop things in a more complex, subtle, and realistic way. The whole issue of religion and deprivation vs. the responsibility to this baby; religion vs. petty politics; etc. etc.; all of these were explored in a subtle way that kind of creeps up on you.

I usually reserve four-star ratings for books I have a hard time putting down. I can't really say that about this book, unfortunately. Its quietness and subtlety made for a more contemplative read but certainly a less exciting one. With that said, it was short and gave me a lot to think about when I closed it. Really better than a three-star. So four stars it is.

Zoe Hall says

Wow! I won this book in a Goodreads giveaway, so thank you for sending me a copy of this unexpectedly brilliant book.

I love books set in castles, convents, etc and this book didn't disappoint. It is contextually rich and I adore the descriptions of the convent. A thoroughly fascinating read with interesting characters.

At its heart is a story of sin, redemption and religion.

I would highly recommend this book.

4 stars.

James Barker says

My last nunnery book was Muriel Sparks' 'The Abbess of Crewe,' a Watergate-inspired satire that was not

the Dame's finest hour. But the madness, secrecy and paranoia that were the watchwords of that novel are certainly a feature of this work by Panos Karnezis. And it works- at least at first. A baby boy is abandoned in a (ha ha, hole-y) suitcase outside the convent of Our Lady of Mercy and, to the Mother Superior, it is a sign from the Lord that she has been forgiven for sinful acts she committed when a young woman. The boy is a redemption motif in a landscape rich with imagery of sky-scuttling storks that nest on the convent chimneys and rescued strays (dogs) that skulk within the walls.

But there is something about Karnezis' sentence structures that, particularly as the novel went on, brought me to a stop, at least on every page. This disconnect from the world he had created was irksome. The direction of the story, too, seemed fairly inevitable, and that was something of a shame. I found myself hankering for real madness, the kind Ken Russell portrayed in his version in extremis of Aldous Huxley's "The Devils of Loudon."

When you marry God you must inevitably believe in the Devil and fear his snares. An obsession with light is also an obsession with the dark. This could have been a stunning novel, from the incredible opening line ('Those whom God wishes to destroy he first makes mad') to the richly picked setting, with its faded frescoes and falling-down halls. But Karnezis never quite takes advantage of the environment. The nuns roam their little kingdom and it is a purgatory unpurged, an antiquated ante-room, an unventilated convent. In such circumstances you would expect an eventual bang rather than this book's final whimper.

Jane says

The Convent is the story of six nuns who inhabit a decaying convent in a remote region of Spain in the 1930s, and what happens when a baby suddenly turns up on the convent steps. The clue to the narrative is given in the very first line: "Those whom God wishes to destroy he first makes mad." It's a simple story told in 214 pages; but like all good literary fiction, there's a lot more to the novel than meets the eye.

And this is very good literary fiction. The writing is characterized by lightness of touch and a fluid, understated style that pulled me through the story at high speed. The way the psychology of the characters is brought out in a few scattered paragraphs is just beautiful. Panos Karnezis also has a way of starting and ending chapters that has me wanting to hang on to this ARC for further study.

I was slightly unsettled by what was going on underneath the story. If this was the author's intention--and he hides himself so well that it's very hard to tell what his intention is--he succeeded completely. I couldn't make up my mind whether he was showing what the introduction of sin could do in a place of good, or whether he was laughing at everything the religious characters stood for. I suspect the latter. The novel is rife with images of decay, corruption, foulness and bestiality, although not once are these themes made explicit. They just sit there, waiting to be discovered; everything that Karnezis describes has a surface and an underneath. And of course there is also the convent's almost total isolation from what we'd call civilization; I'm always attracted by themes like this.

The Convent screams "book club"--it's the sort of novel that will provoke discussion, and yet it's not at all "difficult." An exemplary piece of writing. Recommended.

Lazyreader says

The plot seemed to be interesting at first but turned out to be somewhat predictable with rather predictable ending. The story took a long time to develop and at times it got so slow, it was painful to read. I finished the book, but felt no emotional attachment to the characters and was relieved that it now is done....

I usually like this kind of books, and could not understand what was missing here. Finally, I think I get it: it feels that all characters somehow detached from the story, existing in separate dimensions. It's like author does not even get emotionally attached to them. He describes them, describes their past and present, the events take place and story develops....but there is no real zest in it, no Karnezis's belief in the life he is writing.

Diane says

In a remote area somewhere on the Spanish Sierra lies the Our Lady of Mercy convent. The Catholic convent was built in the 1600s, and many years later (1930s), the school for novices has closed its doors because of lack of interest. Now only six nuns remain at the crumbling convent. When a well worn suitcase with a baby boy inside is found on the steps on the convent steps, the delicate balance of convent life that the nuns have come to known is set to turmoil.

Of the six nuns, only two are hoping to keep and raise the mysterious newborn. Mother Superior, Sister Maria Ines, names the baby Renato, believes that his arrival is a sign from God. She has a dark secret past, and is sure that the baby is God's way of letting her know that her past sins are forgiven. Bit by bit the secrets are revealed, and when strange happenings begin to occur around the convent, the simple life of prayer and work is upset and the forces become divided. One nun even believes that the baby was sent by Satan and, Mother Superior becomes paranoid that others at the convent do not have the best interest of the baby in mind.

Although none of the nuns talk about their past to each other, each has secret reasons for choosing to enter the convent. It seemed that none of the nuns chose convent life so that they could devote their life to God, but rather at the time, convent life for at least a few of these nuns seemed to have been their best option in life at the time.

Overall I liked this novel. I loved the setting, the mystery element (even though it was easy to unravel), and I liked the writing as well. What disappointed me was the fact that the reader really only got to know two of the six nuns: Mother Superior and Sister Ana. The only male in the story was Bishop Estrada, and he was pretty much a non entity. The Convent is a short novel, just 212 pages, but I think the character development could have been expanded just a bit. If you enjoy a quick read, a story with long buried secrets fully revealed, and an unambiguous ending, then I suggest you add this one to your list of future reads. It did make me research other stories about convent life, as the setting was terrific.

Felice says

Convents, like colleges and country estates are perfect microcosms to play out Big Ideas in novels. Authors

can fill these snow globes up with characters and unleash the drama without a lot of real world constraints. These are controlled, understandable environments that are always knocked for a loop by the arrival of an outsider. We all bring a common knowledge of their workings so readers go in understanding that the outsider will threaten the status quo and in general bring out the best and worst in people. In The Convent by Panos Karnezis it is a baby left on the convent doorstep that is the catalyst for change.

Our Lady of Mercy is a crumbling convent hidden away in rural 1920's Spain. It's a six person land that time forgot. Mercy is a close-knit, self sufficient community. Sister Maria Ines is the Mother Superior. When a novice finds an abandoned baby outside of the convent Sister Maria is determined to keep the child. In that baby she sees a sign of forgiveness from God for her sins of long ago. Is this a miracle? Is it an offer of temptation? Her desire/vision is not shared by everyone else at the convent. It isn't long before the interloper has divided the Sisters.

Karnezis tells the story of the Sisters in a straightforward style. The old deceptively simple straightforward style in beautiful language. As the left behind worldly emotions of these women intrude on their cloistered lives and the unraveling begins, Karnezis creates a fascinating and moody page turner. There are some details left unexamined, the baby's mother for instance, that keep The Convent from being the novel it could be but on the whole I was impressed. Karnezis is a strong storyteller who is adept at masking the heroes and villains and keeping the reader engaged.

Christiana Hadji says

Δ?ο τρ?α πραγματ?κια που πρ?πει να γνωρ?ζει κ?ποιος σχετικ? μ' αυτ? το ατμοσφαιρικ? μυθιστ?ρημα μυστηρ?ου που διαδραματ?ζεται σε μια γυναικε?α μον? της Ισπαν?ας του Μεσοπολ?μου:

Πρ?τον, ο συγγραφ?ας ε?ναι ?λληνας αλλ? ζει στο Λονδ?νο και γρ?φει στ' αγγλικ?, οπ?τε πρ?κειται για μετ?φραση (?κουσα ?τι ο Καρν?ζης γρ?φει στ' αγγλικ? και κατ?πιν κ?νει ο ?διος την ελληνικ? μετ?φραση, αλλ? αυτ? δεν διευκριν?ζεται πουθεν? στην συγκεκριμ?νη ?κδοση). Αυτ? με απογο?τευσε στην αρχ?, καθ?ς προτιμ? π?ντα να διαβ?ζω το αυθεντικ?.

Δε?τερο, ο Καρν?ζης γρ?φει εξαιρετικ?. Η πλοκ? ?χει τον σωστ? ρυθμ? ?στε να κρατ?ει τον αναγ?στη σε συνεχ? αγων?α, το γρ?ψιμο κυλ?ει νερ?κι, και η αν?πτυξη των χαρακτ?ρων με ?φησε εντυπωσιασμ?νη. Ο συγγραφ?ας καταφ?ρνει να μας μεταδ?σει την κλειστοφοβικ? οπ?κοσμη ατμ?σφαιρα του απομονωμ?νου μοναστηριο? και των μοναχ?ν που το κατοικο?ν, πλ?κοντας ταυτ?χρονα μια συλλογ? απ? αριστοτεχνικ? σμιλεμ?νους χαρακτ?ρες. Κρ?μα που ο Καρν?ζης δεν γρ?φει στα ελληνικ?, πραγματικ? πιστε?ω πως ?χει πολλ? να προσφ?ρει στην ελληνικ? λογοτεχν?α.

Τρ?το και λιγ?τερο σημαντικ?, για κ?ποιο λ?γο που μου διαφε?γει εντελ?ς, ο μεταφραστ?ς επιμ?νει να μεταφρ?ζει το "καθαρτ?ριο" (purgatory) ως "πουργατ?ριο", η οπο?α ?χει γ?νει πλ?ον η καινο?ρια μου πι? μισητ? λ?ξη μετ? την "κολονοσκ?πηση".
