



The Mysteries of New Orleans (The Longfellow Series of American Languages and Literatures)

Baron Ludwig von Reizenstein, Steven Rowan

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"Reizenstein's peculiar vision of New Orleans is worth resurrecting precisely because it crossed the boundaries of acceptable taste in nineteenth-century German America and squatted firmly on the other side... This work makes us realize how limited our notions were of what could be conceived by a fertile American imagination in the middle of the nineteenth century." -- from the Introduction by Steven Rowan

A lost classic of America's neglected German-language literary tradition, *The Mysteries of New Orleans* by Baron Ludwig von Reizenstein first appeared as a serial in the *Louisiana Staats-Zeitung*, a New Orleans German-language newspaper, between 1854 and 1855. Inspired by the gothic "urban mysteries" serialized in France and Germany during this period, Reizenstein crafted a daring occult novel that stages a frontal assault on the ethos of the antebellum South. His plot imagines the coming of a bloody, retributive justice at the hands of Hiram the Freemason -- a nightmarish, 200-year-old, proto-Nietzschean superman -- for the sin of slavery. Heralded by the birth of a black messiah, the son of a mulatto prostitute and a decadent German aristocrat, this coming revolution is depicted in frankly apocalyptic terms.

Yet, Reizenstein was equally concerned with setting and characters, from the mundane to the fantastic. The book is saturated with the atmosphere of nineteenth-century New Orleans, the amorous exploits of its main characters uncannily resembling those of New Orleans' leading citizens. Also of note is the author's progressively matter-of-fact portrait of the lesbian romance between his novel's only sympathetic characters, Claudine and Orleana. This edition marks the first time that *The Mysteries of New Orleans* has been translated into English and proves that 150 years later, this vast, strange, and important novel remains as compelling as ever.

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