



The Quaker

Liam McIlvanney

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Glasgow, 1969. In the grip of the worst winter for years, the city is brought to its knees by a killer whose name fills the streets with fear: *The Quaker*. He's taken his next victim — the third woman from the same nightclub — and dumped her in the street like rubbish. The police are left chasing a ghost, with no new leads and no hope of catching their prey. After six months, DI Duncan McCormack, a talented young detective from the Highlands, is ordered to join the investigation — with a view to shutting it down for good.

His arrival is met with anger from a group of officers on the brink of despair. Soon he learns just how difficult life can be for an outsider, for McCormack is an outcast in more ways than one. When another woman is found murdered in a tenement flat, it's clear the case is by no means over. From ruined backstreets to the dark heart of Glasgow, McCormack follows a trail of secrets that will change the city — and his life — forever . . .

Brilliantly crafted with great depth and nuance, *The Quaker* is an electrifying thriller that expertly captures the gritty atmosphere of paranoia and hopelessness in a city on the verge of a great upheaval.

The Quaker Details

Date : Published July 24th 2018 by Spiderline (first published 2018)

ISBN : 9781487003753

Author : Liam McIlvanney

Format : Paperback 320 pages

Genre : Mystery, Crime, Historical, Historical Fiction, Suspense

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From Reader Review The Quaker for online ebook

Maggie says

Set in the Glasgow of 1969 The Quaker shows a dark city beset by gang violence. Three women have been murdered. The police seem to have hit a wall & the media is giving them a hard time. Duncan McCormack- a detective doing great things in the Flying Squad is sent to the station trying to solve the case to see if everything has been done correctly & if the investigation should be scaled down. This was not a job that was going to make him popular!

Although Duncan had been unwilling to leave his previous investigation he soon becomes embroiled in the case of The Quaker he begins to believe that there may be more than murder involved, that it involves corruption in many levels.

This was an atmospheric read. Hopefully the behaviour & attitudes of the police has improved a great deal in the nearly fifty years that has passed from when this book was set. Glasgow has certainly got a better image nowadays! I found Duncan an engaging character, battling his own demons whilst trying to do the right thing. I'm looking forward to seeing how he gets on at the Met!

Thanks to netgalley & the publisher for letting me read & review this book.

Stephen Robert Collins says

First of all the copy I have has a completely different cover, a boring scene of wet park bench with few trees & few flat roof houses in the background not like this much better cover.

You know a book is going to be good when the author has both T.S.Eliot's 'East Coker' & The 'Silver Blaze' by Conan Doyle quotes.

Last year we had Ragdoll this year we have Quaker. This one of those sort of books that you just know its going to be corker. We have the voices of the victims telling you how they died. Touch of Lovely Bones. The DI Duncan McCormack is as popular as pig shit he has been called in to reassess a case that had three victims over a year & no fucking clue what hell the twats in charge with thumbs up their asses are doing. He been called the Police Grass.

Liam is Scottish writer who now lives in New Zealand where he is Professor of Scottish Studies at The University of Otago.

What makes this so good its no DNA all old school shoe leather & cigarette smoke. Middens do lot people today what a Midden is? Your outside Carsey, the local rat infested outside smelly toilet.

The police are rude, dangerous, if your a crook it is old days of good kicking.

This different he could just done modern crime but No he has moved it back to 1968-9 so do more set in early 1970s it makes it new yet old too.

A historical crime with old fag smoke, lots of whisky & Scottish Glasgow Gorbals working class feel you feel as if standing in the broken streets & clouds of coal dust smelly sweat & lots of cigarettes ends all gone now thank God.

For an American reader this like stepping into the Tardis with Jodie.

Best of all this only volume one & the next will be different as you see when get to the twisted corkscrew ending.

Kat says

This was really different from the usual police procedural / thriller type book and so much more. At first I wasn't sure if I was going to get into it but it just began to draw me in and I just couldn't put it down. Fantastic plot and characters it made for a 4+ read and would recommend it to anyone who loves a brilliant story.

Elaine Tomasso says

I would like to thank Netgalley and HarperCollins UK, HarperFiction for an advance copy of *The Quaker*, a standalone police procedural set in Glasgow, 1969.

DI Duncan McCormack is sent to assess the work of *The Quaker* murder enquiry seven months after the last murder. The team is working hard but has still to find a suspect but when a fourth body is found McCormack joins the hunt and soon finds some leads.

I enjoyed *The Quaker* which is a police procedural with its roots in true crime. No Glaswegian of a certain age can fail to recognise *The Quaker* as a thinly disguised Bible John, the real life serial killer who murdered three women and disappeared. Almost fifty years later his identity and fate are still a mystery and the subject of much debate, making him fertile ground for fiction writers ready to spin their own ideas and theories with Mr McIlvanney being the latest.

The novel is slow to start in an investigative sense with the fourth body not turning up till about 40% in. This means that most of the first half is scene setting with very little happening. It's not as bad as that sounds because it gives Mr McIlvanney the opportunity to fully develop his characters and environment, in fact I don't think I've ever read a better or more detailed evocation of Glasgow in the sixties and it makes for a fascinating read as, although I was a child at the time, it brings back many memories. All that is missing is the black humour. Once the final body is found the action and tension ramp up as the author abandons his faction and moves to straight fiction. The plotting is imaginative and believable and widens to something much more than the hunt for a serial killer. This is the first time I've read Mr McIlvanney's work and I'm impressed.

Duncan McCormack is an interesting character. As a Highlander he's an outsider in the Glasgow City Police, but not as much as you might imagine as there was a long tradition of Highlanders joining up so it's more his nature, he's not very collegiate and the novel hints that he's gay which was illegal in Scotland at the time. When he joins *The Quaker* team as an assessor he's the outsider on the team as well and relations are necessarily strained. I thoroughly enjoyed the skirmishing which is well done and seems authentic and the way he gradually develops a good working relationship and trust with his main antagonist, DS Goldie.

The Quaker, while slow to start, is a good read which I have no hesitation in recommending.

Ron S says

Loosely based on events that took place in Glasgow in the late sixties, during a time of great change, a young detective with secrets of his own joins a floundering investigation into a series of murders.

McIlvanney is very good at establishing a sense of place and time, creating believable characters and dialogue that sounds more recorded than created.

Philippa says

A great deep chunky crime novel with several delightfully involved plots that get worked out very satisfactorily. McIlvanney has a knack for surprisingly poetic description that nevertheless works alongside the gritty Glasgow geezers. Excellent dialogue and characterisation.

I really liked the main character DI McCormack: his sensitivity, the difficult situation he finds himself in, and his secret. If anything, I'd have liked a bit more about his secret - it seemed too downplayed.

My editor's eye couldn't help but notice the phrase "Here's the thing" about three times, which seems to me more of a 21st century Americanism rather than authentically 1969 Glasgow, but I could be wrong.

Thebooktrail says

This isn't going to be on the Glasgow Tourist boards list of recommended reads anytime soon! Although it is apparently inspired by a real life event which took place in the 1960s. The scene setting and set up of the crime is neatly done - the scenes before a girl was found were especially creepy and the sense of dread and gloom reigned supreme throughout.

The Quaker gives connotations of a life gone by and the historical aspect was nicely done. The name brings fear to everyone in a city already on the edge and a murder mystery set at such a time was a new insight. The police do end up chasing a ghost and it was interesting to be in the corridors, on the streets etc when they grappled with the desperation of the chase.

A bit dark in places but then it is a crime novel. Glasgow in the 60s was not the place you'd want to be given this read but it was a good reading experience!

Jane Hunt says

Atmospheric and authentic are the best adjectives to describe this story. The menacing ethos of 1960s Glasgow is apparent on every page and is compelling.

The characters' prejudices and secrets vividly depicted make them realistic. The sinister undercurrent as people wonder when 'The Quaker' will kill again makes for a tense thriller. The murders are described in painstaking detail but not overly graphic, just enough to inform the plot and allow the reader to glimpse the horror of the crime.

Police procedural is the mainstay of the plot, but the suspense and supernatural impressions from the Quaker's victims add a twist that makes this even more chilling to read. McCormack is a complex detective, a loner he is dedicated to his job at the cost of his relationships.

The ending draws from all the clues laid earlier in the plot, it is convincing and clever and with a final sting in its tail.

'The Quaker' is not an easy read, the dialogue and complexity of Glasgow society at this time needs to be understood to get the most of this story.

I received a copy of this book from Harper Collins - Harper Fiction via NetGalley in return for an honest review.

William says

4-stars

This is a very good crime novel, set in the Glasgow area, and packed with the sights, language and culture of the late 1960s. The prose is very good throughout, and the pacing is mostly very good.

As usual with my reviews, please first read the publisher's blurb/summary of the book. Thank you. This book was provided to me in return for my (always) honest review. Thank you

McCormack is dropped into a serial murder case in Glasgow, on secondment from the Flying Squad. He's expected to wind down the unproductive investigation of three murdered women, and close it out, so he's hated by all the detectives and police still involved. It also turns out he was part of the cock-up of the investigation of the first murder, but he forms an uneasy alliance with a Detective Sergeant.

To present a period detective story like this without cliché is difficult, but McIlvanney handles it well. At no time did the story feel too familiar or contrived. The main characters are well drawn.

My only complaints are that the old histories, and some of the descriptions of the city areas and the crime scenes are a bit overwrought, and this affects the overall pacing of the book. However, I did not feel the need to skim ahead - always a plus in my book!

This is a promising debut for the McCormack character, and a confirmation that McIlvanney is a very talented writer.

I will be reading more of his work.

There are many almost-quotable phrases in the book; here are two better ones:

There were photographs of three women, the familiar before-and-after shots. You couldn't look from the oblivious smiles to the sprawled bodies without your stomach dropping. Without feeling personally guilty.

They were passing the Gorbals. Or where the Gorbals once stood. Now the Gorbals was a great bald prairie of mud. A single gas-lamp stood like a stunted tree and behind it rose the high flats, storey on storey, towers crowding each other with their broad square shoulders. They seemed to block out the light. He had to press

his cheek against the window and crane right up to see the hard flat top of the nearest tower.

Full size image

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Liz Mistry says

The Quaker is one of those novels that, if you're a Scot of a certain age, immediately transports you back to your childhood. Based on the factual tale of Glasgow serial Killer Bible John, McIlvanney encapsulates the dread and the shock that permeated Scottish society at that time. The regular identikit photo's emblazoned across the front page of The Daily Record, the whispered conversations and speculations that occurred at the school gates, in the shops and in pubs. Bible John was Scotland's Bogeyman of the sixties and the very name is still enough to instil a shiver of fear in even the most hardened of crime reader.

McIlvanney also, in what I found to be an enticing parallel mirrored the frustrations of the Bible John investigative team who stumbled against dead end after dead end with the later investigation to find the more prolific killer, The Yorkshire Ripper.

It was this very human element that made the novel great for me. McIlvanney's acute awareness of human frailty, emotions and resentments brought the characters to life. McCormack's 'double life' as a newcomer to the investigation was intriguing and the voice of the victims was refreshing. Too often in serial killer novels we forget the voice of the victims. In The Quaker we were not allowed to do this as McIlvanney gives voice to them at regular intervals - spotlighting lives lost and the consequences of this loss on their families and communities.

A great read that was a slow boiler to begin with but by a third of the way through, picked up pace and delivered a crescendo of an ending.

Bev Taylor says

u may see my review on lovreading

i did a pre-publication review for them

enjoy!

bev

Sandy says

Great, gritty tartan noir. Set in 1960's Glasgow, it's harkens back to the time of a city controlled by gangsters who control the cops. Or some of them anyway. In steps a young DI determined to nail a killer while

protecting a secret that could land him in prison. Descriptive passages & dialogue full of local vernacular ensures you are transported to another time in this atmospheric read. Just when you think you've got it figured out, the author saves the best twists for last. Smart, well paced story with a sympathetic MC. I look forward to the next book in this series.

Lou says

Liam McIlvanney is not an author I had any knowledge of before discovering "The Quaker". I usually am aware of crime/thriller/mystery writers and fantasy authors even if I haven't read anything by them. Apparently he is an award-winning author so that certainly got my attention.

The setting also had an impact on my decision to read the book. It is based in Glasgow and I have found in the past that some of the very best crime novels are either based in Scotland, written by a Scot or both. I live just over the border into England and I know the location well which was appealing to me too.

Set in Glasgow in 1969, Liam McIlvanney's "The Quaker" is loosely based on the murders of the real – and never caught – serial killer "Bible John", who is believed to have raped and strangled three women after meeting them in the city's Barrowland Ballroom. DI Duncan McCormack is drafted in from the flying squad to review Glasgow CID's failing investigation. A parallel narrative concerning safe-cracker Alex Paton, who travels home from London to take part in an auction house heist, is skilfully dovetailed as the plot thickens and McCormack gets drawn deeper into both cases.

This is the first book in the DI Duncan McCormack series and was an excellent opener in my opinion. I will be keeping my eyes peeled for the #2 and plan to go back and read other McIlvanney novels. A solidly crafted and satisfying detective novel with a claustrophobic atmosphere that lingers throughout. Recommended for fans of gripping, gritty thrillers.

Many thanks to HarperCollins for an ARC. I was not required to post a review and all thoughts and opinions expressed are my own.

Kate Vane says

Most crime novels start with a murder. This one begins with a failed investigation. Glasgow in 1969 has been terrorised for months by the serial killer known as The Quaker, who has murdered three women after meeting them at the Barrowlands dance hall. The police have a description, a witness, numerous tip-offs from callers. Hundreds of men have been interviewed and eliminated from the enquiry. Women live in fear. Then the killings stop.

DI Duncan McCormack, a high flyer from another team, has been assigned the task of assessing what went wrong in the murder investigation. This immediately sets him apart from his colleagues. When another body is found, he is in an invidious position, mistrusted by the officers he needs to work with to solve the crime.

McCormack is an outsider in a city which is all about tribes. Catholic or Protestant, Glaswegian or Highlander, Gaelic or Scots, Freemason or not. It is also a city in flux – as the inner-city tenements are being demolished and people clamour to move out to the new towns of the west coast.

This is overwhelmingly a world of men and the novel asks interesting questions about the nature of masculinity, but it also has haunting interludes from the women who died, telling their stories in their own words. The Quaker is a novel steeped in the mood of a city and its people, with a very distinctive voice.

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I received a copy of The Quaker from the publisher via Netgalley.

Read more of my reviews on my blog katevane.com/blog

Paromjit says

McIlvanney draws on the true crime history of Bible John in his creation of The Quaker, a bible quoting serial killer roaming the streets of Glasgow in 1968-69. He has killed three women feeding the climate of fear and horror infesting the city. The police have no clue as to his identity, and the media have turned against the police, painting them as a laughing stock of uselessness. DI Duncan McCormack is riding high in the Flying Squad, having just nailed an important member of John McGlashon's criminal gang. He is ordered to go in to Glasgow's Marine Station, to write a report on DCI George Cochrane's investigation, close it down as it seems The Quaker has stopped.

Glasgow is engaged in slum clearances and big redevelopment projects amidst the harshest of winters. McCormack faces a battle amidst the rampant hostility aimed at him from the Glasgow police team, getting no credit for his past successes. The murdered women are given a voice in the narrative. There are a number of factors they have in common, a secret boyfriend, have children, danced at the Barrowland Ballroom and menstruating at the time of their death. Alex Paton is a peterman involved in big heists, he comes to his childhood home of Glasgow for a planned auction heist. McCormack finds himself leading the investigation when, out of the blue, another woman, Helen Thaney is murdered with a similar MO. However, there are key differences, enough to raise doubts whether it is The Quaker, but an arrest has the senior police wanting to close down McCormack looking into Thaney's murder any further. McCormack is not a man to give up, as he gets closer to the truth, even when he is threatened with revelations about his personal life being made public.

This is a wonderful piece of historical crime fiction set in a crime ridden Glasgow of hard men and gangsters, and the prejudices of that period. McCormack makes an appealing central figure, caught between the hatred of the Glasgow police, although eventually begins to form a close partnership with DS Goldie, and the demands of his superiors. He is not a man to take the path of least resistance, even if it costs him dear, justice is far more important to him. I hope we hear more from him, and that this is the first in a series. Many thanks to HarperCollins for an ARC.
