

# I'll Take Manhattan Short Guide

## I'll Take Manhattan by Judith Krantz

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# Characters

In Maxi Amerville, Krantz has attempted to create a heroine in the mold of Scarlett O'Hara, a woman who has many flaws but is, ultimately, so charming as to win the affection of women and love of men. Unfortunately, Maxi is distinctly unlovable.

Krantz is reduced to mentioning, repeatedly, how her physical presence has an unsettling effect on men, which does little to endear her to female readers. Maxi's flaws are very irritating, as she is selfish, spoiled, egotistical and insensitive to every other character in the novel. Her momentary pangs of doubt or uncertainty are so brief and self-centered as to be unappealing, and her struggle to overcome the mounting odds against her magazine fail to win much admiration because she starts with so much and struggles so little before the final triumph. When faced with financial problems, she is forced to sell her beloved apartment, but luckily it is in Trump Towers and she gets, on the same day she needs it, a check for six million dollars from Donald Trump himself. Later, one of her brothers comes up with a gift of money which solves all her problems.

Maxi's brothers are both given handicaps so that Maxi is thrust into the active role in the attempt to save her father's magazine empire. The elder, Toby, is going blind. The younger, Justin, is a reclusive world-travelling photographer, and a homosexual, which adds a few exciting incidents which do little to advance the plot but fill some pages. Other than these characteristics, there is little to give them any identity or memorable quality.

Uncle Cutter, the villain, is given nothing to redeem or humanize him, so that he too becomes a cardboard figure, a force which Maxi must oppose. Only Maxi's mother, the beautiful and elusive Lily, is presented with that mixture of appealing and unpleasant which was so successful in earlier novels. Lily is capable of love, but she also betrays her husband with his brother in a lustful, self-indulgent affair. She redeems herself by attempting to open communication with her daughter and by facing the truth of Cutter's evil with dignity and strength.

Finally, it is revealed that she confessed the truth to her husband years before his death, so that they shared a 100% Manhattan marriage of mutual support and trust.

Krantz is most irritating in her presentation of secondary characters. She creates several potentially interesting and unique young women who work in the magazine empire and possess intelligence, discipline and the requisite good looks of a Krantz heroine, only to write them out or submerge them in the rush of the story. Yet, in their brief glimpse, these women remain more appealing than the story's heroine.

Nina Stern becomes Zachary Amerville's mistress, and although she functions in only two short scenes, readers have no trouble approving of their affair or understanding why Zachary begins the relationship.



It is in Maxi's love interest that Krantz's failure to create an interesting and plausible character is most damaging. Rocco Cipriani is described as being unbearably attractive, and the complexities of the love story are all geared to reuniting these two who married young, divorced soon after, and have remained subconsciously in love ever since. In the early part of the book Rocco is given some of the appealing mixture of characteristics which Krantz has used in her heroes before, but the formula fails because he appears so seldom in the novel.



## Social Concerns

Maxi Amerville, in searching for a unique new approach for the magazine she is launching, buys copies of all the women's magazines on sale and discovers that, without exception, they seek to make their readers feel guilty for being overweight or plain or unmarried or imperfect mothers, wives and lovers. Despite the fact that Maxi herself suffers from few of these problems, being rich, beautiful, desirable and singularly unguilty about her several failed marriages, she resolves to create a magazine which will encourage women to be happy with themselves just the way they are.

This is an unexpected discovery in a novel which unabashedly celebrates the life of a rich, spoiled and self-indulgent young woman. Krantz has created an escapist fantasy for women who struggle to make ends meet, who hold down boring tedious jobs, who are aware of the lack of glamour in their own lives and so seek it vicariously in such fantasy fiction.

## Techniques

A book like *I'll Take Manhattan*, which enjoys such popular success and such critical failure, presents a puzzle to intelligent analysis. Unlike *Princess Daisy* (1979) or *Mistral's Daughter* (1982), where the formula was evident and the flaws inherent to the success, here there appears to be no redeeming factors, no basis for the broad appeal, no enduring or insightful themes, no endearing or unique characters. Thus, the nature of the appeal must be the escape it offers from the boredom of ordinary life. Maxi's life is not ordinary. Krantz sacrifices all elements of plausibility and even likability in Maxi in order to surround her with possessions, environments, and activities reserved for the very rich and the very hedonistic. Through Maxi, readers can vicariously enjoy all the forbidden and expensive fruits of wealth, without gaining a pound or feeling the slightest twinge of guilt.

## Themes

Krantz is indebted to Hamlet for the essential conflict in the novel, which begins with the shocking announcement that Maxi's mother has married her father's brother just a short while after that beloved man's death, and ends with the revelation that the uncle murdered the father. Krantz, however, is not as interested in the tortured search for revenge as the motivation for such evil, which she identifies as unswerving envy of the younger, less successful brother for the older. Envy, suggests Krantz, is a slow poison which destroys an otherwise promising individual.



# Copyright Information

## Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults

Editor - Kirk H. Beetz, Ph.D.

Library of Congress  
Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults

Includes bibliographical references.

Summary: A multi-volume compilation of analytical essays on and study activities for fiction, nonfiction, and biographies written for young adults.

Includes a short biography for the author of each analyzed work.

1. Young adults—Books and reading. 2. Young adult literature—History and criticism. 3.

Young adult literature—Bio-bibliography. 4. Biography—Bio-bibliography.

[1. Literature—History and criticism. 2. Literature—Bio-bibliography]

I. Beetz, Kirk H., 1952

Z1037.A1G85 1994 028.1'62 94-18048 ISBN 0-933833-32-6

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Printed in the United States of America First Printing, November 1994