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The Legend Of Spring-Heeled Jack



Synopsis

WINNER of the 2013 Katharine Briggs Award This book uses the nineteenth-century legend of Spring-Heeled Jack to analyse and challenge current notions of Victorian popular cultures. Starting as oral rumours, this supposedly supernatural entity moved from rural folklore to metropolitan press sensation, co-existing in literary and theatrical forms before finally degenerating into a nursery lore bogeyman to frighten children. A mercurial and unfixed cultural phenomenon, Spring-Heeled Jack found purchase in both older folkloric traditions and emerging forms of entertainment. Through this intriguing study of a unique and unsettling figure, Karl Bell complicates our appreciation of the differences, interactions and similarities between various types of popular culture between 1837 and 1904. The book draws upon a rich variety of primary source material including folklorist accounts, street ballads, several series of "penny dreadful" stories (and illustrations), journals, magazines, newspapers, comics, court accounts, autobiographies and published reminiscences. The Legend of Spring-Heeled Jack is impressively researched social history and provides a fascinating insight into Victorian cultures. It will appeal to anyone with an interest in nineteenth-century English social and cultural history, folklore or literature. Karl Bell is Senior Lecturer in History at the University of Portsmouth.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Initial reports of incidents in London from 1837 to 1838 transform as to the details of the entity being encountered, from a white spectral bull until his eventual humanizing in Richmond. He goes on to be mutated and reported through every media available, including the oral tradition, but his legend is

never truly tamed to the modern mind. This barometer of the cultural psyche, showing something in his manifestation of the people of that particular district, Spring-Heeled Jack never shakes off the odour of the supernatural. In this definitive treatment of the legend, Karl Bell provides academic rigour while still being accessible to a general reader. The flavour that he generates of the era through the media and accounts that span across the elite-plebian spectrum show an appreciation of the Victorian mentality and circumstance that would be invaluable to anyone seeking to immerse themselves in the period. Boydell press should undoubtedly produce an everyman paperback version of this great book and bring the ebook copy inline with market prices, the current seemingly academic-only model. As a publisher they should consider the current JSTOR Aaron Swartz debate and whether they are a service for the greater good. Basic economics should be able to provide a convincing case for far greater sales number at a modestly reduced price point.

The book looks fascinating and I'd like to read it but it's \$95. How can a book possibly cost \$95?

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