



Violent Victorians: Popular entertainment in nineteenth-century London

Rosalind Crone

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We are often told that the Victorians were far less violent than their forebears: over the course of the nineteenth century, violent sports were mostly outlawed, violent crime, including homicide, began to decline, and bodily punishments, including hanging, were increasingly hidden from public view. They were also much more respectable, and actively sought orderly, uplifting, domestic and refined pastimes. Yet these were the very same people who celebrated the exceptionally violent careers of anti-heroes such as the brutal puppet Punch and the murderous barber Sweeney Todd.

Violent Victorians tackles this incongruity head on, drawing attention to the wide range of gruesome, bloody and confronting amusements and pastimes, patronised by ordinary Londoners, that did not conform to the values of respectability which we so often claim characterised Victorian culture. From the turn of the nineteenth century, graphic, yet orderly, 're-enactments' of high-level violence, with foundations in fact and fiction, flourished in travelling entertainments, penny broadsides, popular theatres, cheap instalment fiction and Sunday newspapers. This book explores the ways in which violent representations siphoned off much of the actual violence that had hitherto been expressed in all manner of social and political dealings, thus providing a crucial accompaniment to schemes for the reformation of manners and the taming of the streets, while also serving as a check on the growing cultural hegemony of the middle class.

Violent Victorians will appeal to scholars in a range of disciplines, from history and literature, to cultural studies, media studies and criminology, as well as anyone with an interest in the Victorian period or in the function of violent entertainments.

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