



Bodies: Sex, Violence, Disease, and Death in Contemporary Legend

Gillian Bennett

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Because they are so often told as news, contemporary legends force us to reevaluate life as we know it. They confront us with macabre, fantastic, horrific, or hilarious characters and events that seem to come straight out of myths and folktales, but are presented as present day events. The difficulty is that it is not at all easy to decide whether these often disturbing stories should be treated as reliable or dismissed as fantasy.

The legends explored in this book are some of the most bizarre, gruesome, and politically sensitive stories in the contemporary legend canon. At any moment a body may be invaded by noxious creatures, deliberately infected with deadly disease, or raided to provide donor organs for sick foreigners. These are "winter's tales," the stuff of nightmares.

In this book Gillian Bennett traces the cultural history of six legends, well-known in Europe and America from medieval times to the present day. Appearing in broadsides, ballads, myths, ancient and modern legends, novels, plays, films, television shows, and stories told in the oral tradition, these legends are not just silly tales which can be dismissed as trivial and untrue. They reveal much about the concerns and fears of everyday life and demonstrate the limits of knowledge and power in the modern world.

Gillian Bennett is the author of *"Alas, Poor Ghost!": Traditions of Belief in Story and Discourse* and *Traditions of Belief: Women and the Supernatural* and coauthor of the standard legend bibliography and reader. She lives in Stockport, United Kingdom.

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