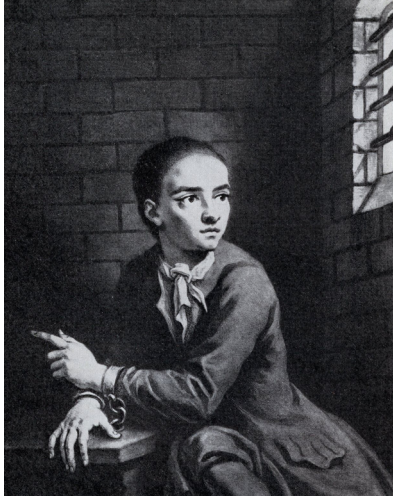


Celebrity and the Story of Jack Sheppard



In 1839, W. Harrison Ainsworth and George Cruikshank published a “newgate” or crime novel called *Jack Sheppard*.

“Within just weeks of its first installments, in *Bentley’s Miscellany*, the novel had given rise to a full-blown mania, generating a great wave of pamphlets and abridgements, plays and street shows, prints and cartoons, and related baubles and souvenirs” (Buckley 426).

“Press responses to the mania were negative and even fearful, many clearly mystified by its strength and pervasiveness. Initial literary reviews were exceptionally violent” (Buckley 427).

“... the most numerous and fanatic devotees were ... the young, ‘masterless’ men who constituted much of the city’s growing industrial labor force” (Buckley 427).

JACK SHEPPARD’S BIOGRAPHY

Born in 1702 in London’s East End, Jack Sheppard was bound as an apprentice carpenter to Owen Wood in 1717, but, within five years, was stealing from clients and robbing houses.

He was famous for escaping from prison. His final escape from Newgate prison’s “Castle” was a spectacular feat of physical strength and ingenuity.

On Nov. 16, 1724, he was executed in front of 30,000 spectators. He was 21 years old.

“Before execution, [Sheppard] was visited in prison by William Hogarth and James Thornhill, who produced well-known portraits of him, and by John Gay, who may have had him in mind when writing *The Beggar’s Opera* (1728), Narratives of Sheppard’s exploits and life were extraordinarily popular at the time of his death, and remained in popular consciousness long after. Hogarth played upon such familiarity by using Sheppard as the obvious model for the idle apprentice of his most popular moral progress, *Industry and Idleness* (1747)” (Buckley 430).

CRUIKSHANK’S ILLUSTRATIONS

“Ainsworth’s novel was only one element in a much larger, though not incoherent, multimedia production, and the primary mode of that production ... was pictorial illustration” (Buckley 432).

“...not only is the style of the plates derived from what was literally to be seen on the London stage in the 1830’s, but the plates themselves ... were ... reenacted on the stage” (Hill 437).

“By the end of 1839, *Jack Sheppard* had been dramatized in at least six different versions on the London stage, not to mention the provinces” (Hill 447).

“By the fall of 1840, the craze had begun to lessen ... There would be no comparable cultural mania ... until Du Maurier’s *Trilby* (1895)

prompted a comparably pervasive rage” (Buckley 429).



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