



Beatrice's Spell: The Enduring Legacy of Beatrice Cenci

Belinda Jack

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A fascinating study of a Renaissance tragedy that has haunted artists and writers through the ages.

Beatrice Cenci was executed under papal decree in Rome in September of 1599. She was said to be sixteen, and hauntingly beautiful. Her crime was the murder of her father, a member of one of the great Roman families, but his cruel treatment of Beatrice, including incestuous rape, moved the people of the city to take her side. Weeping crowds lined the streets, and a special mass is still held in Rome on the anniversary of her death.

Beatrice's patricide, occurring at a time when Papal Law was a farce played out in the service of the rich and the powerful, became an object of fascination for writers and artists who saw in the young woman an incarnation of their own intimate torments. Through Belinda Jack's exquisite understanding of literature, history, and psychology, we discover how Shelley, Hawthorne, Melville, Artaud, and others fall under Beatrice's spell in their writings and their lives, often at the price of damaging their reputation and even their sanity. Storytelling and literary criticism come together in this beautifully researched work, revealing the fragility and passions of those great masters of literature and art who tried to discover in Beatrice's motives the meaning of their own lives.

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