

gory Hell

The Urth list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 03 Nov 1997

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John Bishop — 03 Nov 1997, 10:11

Others besides Wolfe have pointed out that medieval and early modern daily experience was violent and gory; no one in 1100 would find the idea of Satan grilling sinners over a fire a step too far from local practice. The stretch was that it didn't end! The Economist magazine had an article which pointed out that murder rates in 13th century England were ten times that of today's Detroit.

Unless we remember this, we'll lose some of the meaning and connotations of old stories. As a parallel idea, for us textiles are cheap because machine-made. In the past, every yard of cloth represented a vast investment of hand labor (even if it was cheap labor), and clothes were expensive. When you read stories from the past, think of clothes in general and shoes in particular as being like cars--necessary and costly, to be maintained and conserved, and an item of public display and status competition.

So when Princess A. gives servant B. her cast-off dress, that's not demeaning and cheap--it's a big gift, and shows great favor.

-John