



Raising Spirits: How a Conjuror's Tale Was Transmitted across the Enlightenment (Palgrave Historical Studies in Witchcraft and Magic)

Jonathan Barry

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Despite Enlightenment scepticism about the supernatural, stories about spirits were regularly printed and shared throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This case-study in the transmission of a single story (of a young gunsmith near Bristol conjuring spirits, leading to his early death) reveals both how and why successive generations found meaning in such accounts. It shows the workings of an expanding national print culture, but also the continued importance of locality, oral culture and manuscript copying, especially among the newly educated. It offers an insight into the culture of Anglican clergy, spiritual autodidacts, evangelical preachers, pioneering astrologers, mesmerists and spiritualists, revealing the on-going appeal of Bible-based providentialism. Initially told as a warning-lesson against meddling with the demonic, the story also appealed to those keen to uphold the existence of spirits, and to various groups who themselves wished to communicate with spirits, while its portrayal of a doomed youth attracted sympathy.

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