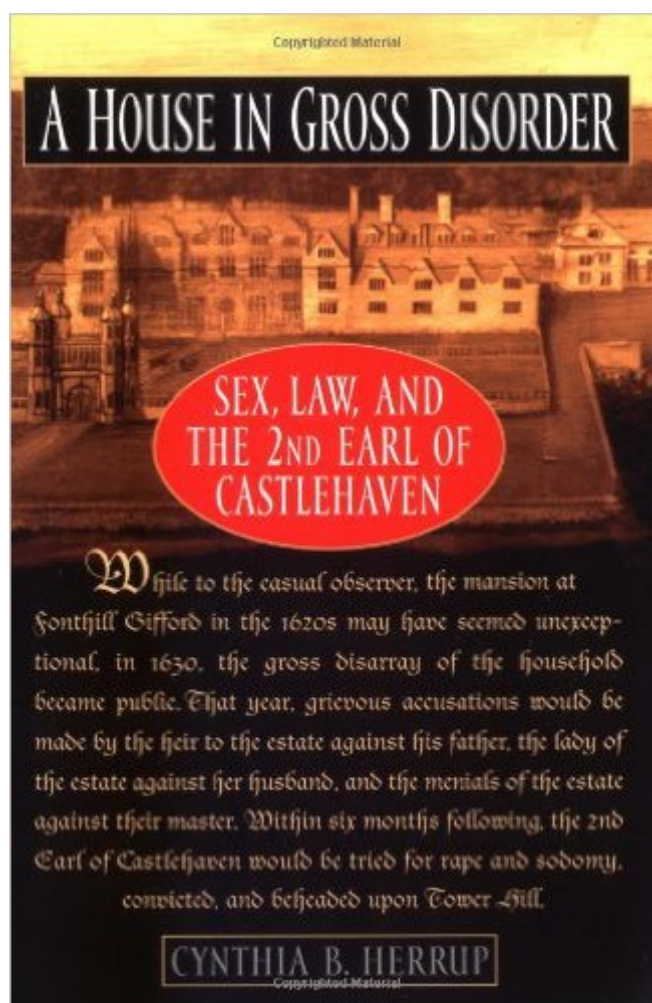


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A House In Gross Disorder: Sex, Law, And The 2nd Earl Of Castlehaven (Sex, Law, And The Second Earl Of Castlehaven)



Synopsis

Sex, privilege, corruption, and revenge--these are elements that we expect to find splashed across today's tabloid headlines. But 17th century England saw a sex scandal that brought disgrace to the ruling class and ended with the beheading of an earl. In *A House in Gross Disorder*, Cynthia Herrup presents a strikingly new interpretation of the case of the 2nd Earl of Castlehaven and of the sexual and social anxieties it cast into such bold relief. Castlehaven was convicted of assisting in the rape of his own wife and of committing sodomy with his servants. But more than that, he stood accused of inverting the natural order of his household by reveling in rather than restraining the intemperate passions of those he was expected to rule and protect. Herrup argues that because an orderly house was considered both an example and endorsement of aristocratic governance, the riotousness presided over by Castlehaven was the most damning evidence against him. Avoiding simple conclusions about guilt or innocence, Herrup focuses instead on the fascinating legal, social and political dynamics of the case and its subsequent retellings. In riveting prose, she reconsiders a scandal that still speaks to contemporary anxieties about sex, good governance, and the role of law in regulating both.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Within *A House in Gross Disorder: Sex, Law, and the 2nd Earl of Castlehaven*, Cynthia Herrup's objective is to "reshape the accepted narrative" as well as our understanding of why the 2nd Earl of Castlehaven was, in 1630, tried and convicted in of rape and sodomy. Further, she

analyzes the various interpretations of Castlehaven's trial, each framed for particular audiences and purposes, (150) with successive retellings of Castlehaven being reflections of contemporaneous societal concerns. Additionally, Herrup argues studies of legal cases often give either too much or too little consideration to the interrelationship of law and society. (153) Law is a construct of society and neither are independent of one another. By tracing the earliest accounts of the trial through correspondence between courtiers and gentry, Herrup concludes the trial was about more than the indicted crimes, it was about disrespect between father and son, abuse of power between husband and wife, and dangerous shifts of authority between master and servant. (119) Instead, reacting to the subversion of the Earl to his servants, the Crown was forced to reaffirm a properly ordered status quo: a patrician in full control of his house. Indeed, Herrup advocates reestablishment of normative societal roles was the true motive of the trial and conviction. The instability of Castlehaven's house endangered the mastery of the king over the commonwealth. Over the following three centuries, Herrup posits, writers have used the example of Castlehaven in arguments about cuckoldry, tyranny, degeneracy, redemption, marital abuse, marital reform, toleration, and homophobia.

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