ALL THOSE
TERRIFYING HISTORIES SERIES

Kenneth Cavalcanti (ed.)

Tales about Ghosts and Spirits That Keep on Haunting Us

feat. a lot of strange characters born by our primal fears

Horror Stories
You Don't Want to Read About

INTEGRAL

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#6

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Haunted by the Spirits of the Disappeared

Ghost stories are some of the most popular tales all over the world. They appeared milleniums ago and they keep on fascinating everybody. Why?

Scientists—anthropologists and not only—say that these stories are intriguing because of our primitive fears of, for example, the dark or of being alone. Also, the relation with the spirits of the dead people is a key of understanding this psychological processus. The idea is that our mind "lives" în different Universes at the same time. We belong "Now" and "Here" but we may be clones of disappeared people from "Sometime" and "Somewhere". Which is our real "Home"? The same happens to the people we frequently connect with. Who are they, eventually? Do we really know them? Which is their real "Home"? Briefly, they are the Ghosts, the Phantoms, the Spirits, the Specters, the apparitions of "dead" persons which are believed to appear or become manifest to the living, typically as a nebulous image.

Almost always these scary Visitors are linked to tragical events from the past. A large number of examples can be immediately quoted: "The gardens are said to be haunted by the ghost of a child who drowned in the river"; "A headless ghost walks the castle at night"; "According to tradition, a strange ghost walks through the corridors of the house at night" a.s.o.

The "ghost" may appear of its own accord or be summoned by magic. Linked to the ghost is the idea of "hauntings", where a supernatural entity is tied to a place, object or person. Ghost stories are commonly examples of ghostlore.

Colloquially, the term "ghost story" can refer to any kind of scary story. In a narrower sense, the ghost story has been developed as a short story format, within genre fiction. It is a form of supernatural fiction and specifically of weird fiction, and is often a horror story.

While ghost stories are often explicitly meant to be scary, they have been written to serve all sorts of purposes, from comedy to morality tales. Ghosts often appear in the narrative as sentinels or prophets of things to come. Belief in ghosts is found in all cultures around the world, and thus ghost stories may be passed down orally or in written form.

A widespread belief concerning ghosts is that they are composed of a misty, airy, or subtle material. Anthropologists link this idea to early beliefs that ghosts were the person within the person (the person's spirit), most noticeable in ancient cultures as a person's breath, which upon exhaling in colder climates appears visibly as a white mist.

The campfire story, a form of oral storytelling, often involves recounting ghost stories, or other scary stories. Some of the stories are decades old, with varying versions across multiple cultures. Many schools and educational institutions encourage ghost storytelling as part of literature.

In 1929, five key features of the English ghost story were identified in "Some Remarks on Ghost Stories" by M. R. James. As summarized by Frank Coffman for a course in popular imaginative literature, they were:

- The pretense of truth
- "A pleasing terror"
- No gratuitous bloodshed or sex
- No "explanation of the machinery"
- Setting: "those of the writer's (and reader's) own day"

The introduction of pulp magazines in the early 1900s created new avenues for ghost stories to be published, and they also began to appear in publications such as *Good Housekeeping* and *The New Yorke*

Ghosts in the classical world often appeared in the form of vapor or smoke, but at other times they were described as being substantial, appearing as they had been at the time of death, complete with the wounds that killed them. Spirits of the dead appear in literature as early as Homer's *Odyssey*, which features a journey to the underworld and the hero encountering the ghosts of the dead, as well as the Old Testament in which the Witch of Endor calls the spirit of the prophet Samuel.

The play *Mostellaria*, by the Roman playwright Plautus, is the earliest known work to feature a haunted dwelling, and is sometimes translated as *The Haunted House*. Another early account of a haunted place comes from an account by Pliny the Younger (c. 50 AD). Pliny describes the haunting of a house in Athens by a ghost bound in chains, an archetype that would become familiar in later literature.

Ghosts often appeared in the tragedies of the Roman writer Seneca, who would later influence the revival of tragedy on the Renaissance stage, particularly Thomas Kyd and Shakespeare.

The *One Thousand and One Nights*, sometimes known as *Arabian Nights*, contains a number of ghost stories, often involving jinn (also spelled as djinn), ghouls and corpses. In particular, the tale of "Ali the Cairene and the Haunted House in Baghdad" revolves around a house haunted by jinns. Other medieval Arabic literature, such as the *Encyclopedia of the Brethren of Purity*, also contain ghost stories.

The 11th century Japanese work *The Tale of Genji* contains ghost stories, and includes characters being possessed by spirits.

In the mid-16th century, the works of Seneca were rediscovered by Italian humanists, and they became the models for the revival of tragedy. Seneca's influence is particularly evident in Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy* and Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, both of which share a revenge theme, a corpse-strewn climax, and ghosts among the cast. The ghosts in *Richard III* also resemble the Senecan model, while the ghost in *Hamlet* plays a more complex role. The shade of Hamlet's murdered father in *Hamlet* has become one of the more recognizable ghosts in English literature. In another of Shakespeare's works, *Macbeth*, the murdered Banquo returns as a ghost to the dismay of the title character.

In English Renaissance theatre, ghosts were often depicted in the garb of the living and even in armour. Armour, being out-of-date by the time of the Renaissance, gave the stage ghost a sense of

antiquity. The sheeted ghost began to gain ground on stage in the 1800s because an armoured ghost had to be moved about by complicated pulley systems or lifts, and eventually became clichéd stage elements and objects of ridicule. Ann Jones and Peter Stallybrass, in *Renaissance Clothing and the Materials of Memory*, point out, "In fact, it is as laughter increasingly threatens the Ghost that he starts to be staged not in armor but in some form of 'spirit drapery'." An interesting observation by Jones and Stallybrass is that "at the historical point at which ghosts themselves become increasingly implausible, at least to an educated elite, to believe in them at all it seems to be necessary to assert their immateriality, their invisibility. [...] The drapery of ghosts must now, indeed, be as spiritual as the ghosts themselves. This is a striking departure both from the ghosts of the Renaissance stage and from the Greek and Roman theatrical ghosts upon which that stage drew. The most prominent feature of Renaissance ghosts is precisely their gross materiality. They appear to us conspicuously clothed."

Ghosts figured prominently in traditional British ballads of the 16th and 17th centuries, particularly the "Border Ballads" of the turbulent border country between England and Scotland. Ballads of this type include *The Unquiet Grave*, *The Wife of Usher's Well*, and *Sweet William's Ghost*, which feature the recurring theme of returning dead lovers or children. In the ballad *King Henry*, a particularly ravenous ghost devours the king's horse and hounds before forcing the king into bed. The king then awakens to find the ghost transformed into a beautiful woman.

One of the key early appearances by ghosts was *The Castle of Otranto* by Horace Walpole in 1764, considered to be the first gothic novel. However, although the ghost story shares the use of the supernatural with the Gothic novel, the two forms differ. Ghost stories, unlike Gothic fiction, usually take place in a time and location near to the audience of the story.

The modern short story emerged in Germany in the early decades of the 19th century. Kleist's *The Beggar Woman of Locarno*, published in 1810, and several other works from the period lay claim to being the first ghost short stories of a modern type. E. T. A. Hoffmann's ghost stories include "The Elementary Spirit" and "The Mines of Falun".

The Russian equivalent of the ghost story is the *bylichka*. Notables examples of the genre from the 1830s include Gogol's *Viy* and Pushkin's *The Queen of Spades*, although there were scores of other stories from lesser known writers, produced primarily as Christmas fiction. The Vosges mountain range is the setting for most ghost stories by the French writing team of Erckmann-Chatrian.

One of the earliest writers of ghost stories in English was Sir Walter Scott. His ghost stories, "Wandering Willie's Tale" (1824, first published as part of *Redgauntlet*) and *The Tapestried Chamber* (1828) eschewed the "Gothic" style of writing and helped set an example for later writers in the genre.

Historian of the ghost story Jack Sullivan has noted that many literary critics argue a "Golden Age of the Ghost Story" existed between the decline of the Gothic novel in the 1830s and the start of the First World War. Sullivan argues that the work of Edgar Allan Poe and Sheridan Le Fanu inaugurated this "Golden Age".

Irish author Sheridan Le Fanu was one of the most influential writers of ghost stories.. Le Fanu's collections, such as *In a Glass Darkly* (1872) and *The Purcell Papers* (1880), helped popularise the short story as a medium for ghost fiction. Charlotte Riddell, who wrote fiction as Mrs. J. H. Riddell, created ghost stories which were noted for adept use of the haunted house theme.

The "classic" ghost story arose during the Victorian period, and included authors such as M. R. James, Sheridan Le Fanu, Violet Hunt, and Henry James. Classic ghost stories were influenced by the gothic fiction tradition, and contain elements of folklore and psychology. M. R. James summed up the essential elements of a ghost story as, "Malevolence and terror, the glare of evil faces, 'the stony grin of unearthly malice', pursuing forms in darkness, and 'long-drawn, distant screams', are all in place, and so is a modicum of blood, shed with deliberation and carefully husbanded...".

Famous literary apparitions from the Victorian period are the ghosts of *A Christmas Carol*, in which Ebenezer Scrooge is helped to see the error of his ways by the ghost of his former

colleague Jacob Marley, and the ghosts of Christmas Past, Christmas Present and Christmas Yet to Come. In a precursor to *A Christmas Carol* Dickens published “The Story of the Goblins Who Stole a Sexton“. Dickens also wrote “The Signal-Man“, another work featuring a ghost.

David Langford has described British author M. R. James as writing “the 20th century's most influential canon of ghost stories”. James perfected a method of story-telling which has since become known as Jamesian, which involved abandoning many of the traditional Gothic elements of his predecessors. The classic Jamesian tale usually includes the following elements:

1. a characterful setting in an English village, seaside town or country estate; an ancient town in France, Denmark or Sweden; or a venerable abbey or university.
2. a nondescript and rather naïve gentleman-scholar as protagonist (often of a reserved nature).
3. the discovery of an old book or other antiquarian object that somehow unlocks, calls down the wrath, or at least attracts the unwelcome attention of a supernatural menace, usually from beyond the grave.

According to James, the story must “put the reader into the position of saying to himself, 'If I'm not very careful, something of this kind may happen to me!'“ He also perfected the technique of narrating supernatural events through implication and suggestion, letting his reader fill in the blanks, and focusing on the mundane details of his settings and characters in order to throw the horrific and bizarre elements into greater relief. He summed up his approach in his foreword to the anthology *Ghosts and Marvels* (Oxford, 1924): “Two ingredients most valuable in the concocting of a ghost story are, to me, the atmosphere and the nicely managed crescendo. ... Let us, then, be introduced to the actors in a placid way; let us see them going about their ordinary business, undisturbed by forebodings, pleased with their surroundings; and into this calm environment let the ominous thing put out its head, unobtrusively at first, and then more insistently, until it holds the stage.”

He also noted: “Another requisite, in my opinion, is that the ghost should be malevolent or odious: amiable and helpful apparitions are all very well in fairy tales or in local legends, but I have no use for them in a fictitious ghost story.”

Despite his suggestion (in the essay “Stories I Have Tried to Write”) that writers employ reticence in their work, many of James's tales depict scenes and images of savage and often disturbing violence.

Montague Rhodes James (August 1, 1862–June 12, 1936) was an English author, medievalist scholar and provost of King's College, Cambridge (1905–1918), and of Eton College (1918–1936). He was Vice-Chancellor of the University of Cambridge (1913–1915).

Though James's work as a medievalist and scholar is still highly regarded, he is best remembered for his ghost stories, which some regard as among the best in the genre. James redefined the ghost story for the new century by abandoning many of the formal Gothic clichés of his predecessors and using more realistic contemporary settings. However, James's protagonists and plots tend to reflect his own antiquarian interests. Accordingly, he is known as the originator of the “antiquarian ghost story”.

James's ghost stories were published in a series of collections: *Ghost Stories of an Antiquary* (1904), *More Ghost Stories of an Antiquary* (1911), *A Thin Ghost and Others* (1919), and *A Warning to the Curious and Other Ghost Stories* (1925). The first hardback collected edition appeared in 1931. Many of the tales were written as Christmas Eve entertainments and read aloud to friends. This idea was used by the BBC in 2000 when they filmed Christopher Lee reading James's stories in a candle-lit room in King's College.

Influenced by British and German examples, American writers began to produce their own ghost stories. Washington Irving's short story *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow* (1820), based on an earlier German folktale, features a Headless Horseman. It has been adapted for film and television many times, such as *Sleepy Hollow*, a successful 1999 feature film. Irving also wrote “The Adventure of the

German Student" and Edgar Allan Poe wrote some stories which contain ghosts, such as "The Masque of the Red Death" and "Morella".

In the later 19th century, mainstream American writers such as Edith Wharton, Mary E. Wilkins Freeman and F. Marion Crawford all wrote ghost fiction. Henry James also wrote ghost stories, including the famous *The Turn of the Screw*. *The Turn of the Screw* has also appeared in a number of adaptations, notably the film *The Innocents* and Benjamin Britten's opera *The Turn of the Screw*.

... Belief in ghosts is found in all cultures around the world and thus ghost stories may be passed down orally or in written form. And they continue to *live*!

The Secret of the Yamauba. Old Japanese Tales about Cannibal Phantoms and Other Mysterious Spectres

In ancient Japan, samurai would play a game: *The Hyakumonogatari Kaidan*. They would sit in a circle of one hundred candles and every time someone told a story, one candle would be blown out. Once the final candle was blown out, the room would be plunged into darkness and a ghostly figure would appear.
The Yamamba look like harmless old women, but are actually terrifying mountain *yōkai* that consume human flesh. One of their oldest legends is from the Konjaku Monogatari:
Once upon a time, a Buddhist priest was caught out in a storm but luckily passed by a lonely hut. A kind old woman invited him inside, welcoming him with food and a warm fire. As welcoming as she was, she gave the priest a strange warning: "No matter what, do not look in the back room!". Unable to overcome his curiosity, the priest failed to heed the old woman's warning. As soon as she stepped out to gather more firewood, the priest peeped through a crack in the door. To his horror, he discovered the room filled with half-eaten corpses. The priest realized that the old woman was a Yamamba, luring unsuspecting travelers into her home only to shred them to pieces for her next meal. He fled from the hut as fast as he could and never looked back...

Yamauba, Yamamba or Yamanba are variations on the name of a *yōkai* found in Japanese folklore. Yōkai (or ghost, phantom, strange apparition) are a class of supernatural monsters, spirits, and demons in Japanese folklore. The word *yōkai* is made up of the kanji for "bewitching; attractive; calamity" and "spectre; apparition; mystery; suspicious". They can also be called *ayakashi, mononoke* or *mamono.*

Yōkai range diversely from the malevolent to the mischievous, or occasionally bring good fortune to those who encounter them. *Yōkai* often possess animal features (such as the *kappa*, which looks similar to a turtle, or the *tengu*, which has wings), yet others appear mostly human like kuchisake-onna. Some *yōkai* look like inanimate objects (such as *tsukumogami*), while others have no discernible shape. *Yōkai* usually have spiritual or supernatural abilities, with shapeshifting being the most common. *Yōkai* that shapeshift are called *bakemono* (or *obake*). Japanese folklorists and historians explain *yōkai* as personifications of "supernatural or unaccountable phenomena to their informants". In the Edo period, many artists, such as Toriyama Sekien, invented new *yōkai* by taking inspiration from folk tales or purely from their own imagination. Today, several such *yōkai* (e.g. Amikiri) are mistaken to originate in more traditional folklore

In the town of Masaeki, Nishimorokata District, Miyazaki Prefecture (now Ebino), a *yamahime* would wash her hair and sing in a lovely voice. Deep in the mountains of Shizuoka Prefecture, there's a tale that the "yamahime" would appear as a woman around twenty years of age and would have beautiful features, a small sleeve, and black hair, and that when a hunter encounters her and tries to shoot at it with a gun, she would repel the bullet with her hands. In Hokkaido, Shikoku and the southern parts

of Kyushu, there is also a *yamajijii* (mountain old man), and the yamauba would also appear together with a *yamawaro* (mountain child), and here the yamauba would be called *yamahaha* (mountain mother) and the yamajijii a *yamachichi* (mountain father). In Iwata District, Shizuoka Prefecture, the *yamababa* that would come and rest at a certain house was a gentle woman that wore clothes made of a tree's bark. She borrowed a cauldron to boil some rice, but the cauldron would become full with just two go of rice. There wasn't anything unusual about it, but it was said that when she sat to the side of it, the floor would creak. In Hachijō-jima, a *dejji* or *decchi* would perform *kamikakushi* by making people walk around places that should not exist for an entire night, but if one becomes friendly with her, she would lend you lintel, among other things. Sometimes she would also nurse children who go missing for three days. It's said that there are splotches on her body and she has her breasts attached to her shoulders as if there was a *tasuki* cord. In the Kagawa Prefecture, yamauba within rivers are called *kawajoro* (river lady) and whenever a dike is about to break due to a great amount of water, she would say in a loud weeping voice, “My house is going to be washed away”.

In Kumakiri, Haruno, Shūchi District, Shizuoka Prefecture (now Hamamatsu), there are legends of a yamauba called *hocchopaa* and it would appear in mountain roads during the evening. Mysterious phenomena, such as the sounds of festivals and curses coming from the mountains, were considered to be because of this hocchopaa. In the Higashichikuma District, Nagano Prefecture, they are called *uba*, and the legends there tell of a *yōkai* with long hair and one eye, and from its name, it is thought to be a kind of yamauba.

In the tales, the ones that were attacked by *yamauba* were typically travelers and merchants, such as ox-drivers, horse-drivers, coopers, and notions keepers, who often walk along mountain paths and encounter people in the mountains, so they are thought to be the ones who had spread such tales.

Yamauba have been portrayed in two different ways. There were tales where men stocking ox with fish for delivery encountered yamauba at capes and got chased by them, such as the *Ushikata Yamauba* and the *Kuwazu Jobo*, as well as a tale where someone who was chased by the yamauba would climb a chain appearing from the skies in order to flee, and when the yamauba tried to make chase by climbing the chain too, she fell to her death into a field of buckwheat, called the “Tendo-san no Kin no Kusari”. In these tales, the yamauba was a fearful monster trying to eat humans. On the other hand, there were tales such as the *Nukafuku Komefuku* (also called “Nukafuku Kurifukk”), where two sisters out gathering fruit met a yamauba who gave treasure to the kind older sister (who was tormented by her stepmother) and gave misfortune to the ill-mannered younger sister. There's also the “ubakawa” tale, where a yamaba would give a human good fortune. In Aichi Prefecture, there's a legend that a house possessed by a yamauba would quickly gain wealth and fortune, and some families have deified them as protective gods.

Depending on the text and translator, the Yamauba appears as a monstrous crone, “her unkempt hair long and golden white ... her kimono filthy and tattered”, with cannibalistic tendencies. In one tale a mother traveling to her village is forced to give birth in a mountain hut assisted by a seemingly kind old woman, only to discover, when it is too late, that the stranger is actually Yamauba, with plans to eat the helpless Kintarō. In another story the yōkai raises the orphan hero Kintarō, who goes on to become the famous warrior Sakata no Kintoki.

Yamauba is said to have a mouth at the top of her head, hidden under her hair. In one story it is related that her only weakness is a certain flower containing her soul.

In one Noh drama, translated as, *Yamauba, Dame of the Mountain,* Konparu Zenchiku states the following: “Yamauba is the fairy of the mountains, which have been under her care since the world began. She decks them with snow in winter, with blossoms in spring ... She has grown very old. Wild white hair hangs down her shoulders; her face is very thin. There was a courtesan of the Capital who made a dance representing the wanderings of Yamauba. It had such success that people called this courtesan Yamauba though her real name was Hyakuma”.