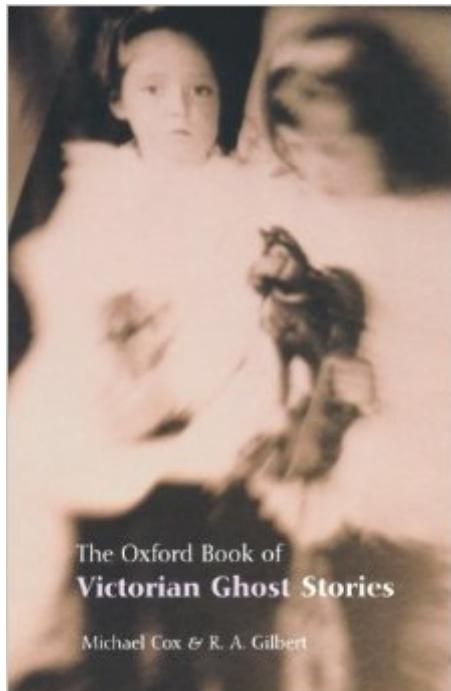


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The Oxford Book Of Victorian Ghost Stories



Synopsis

The Victorians excelled at telling ghost stories. In an age of rapid scientific progress, the idea of a vindictive past able to reach out and violate the present held a special potential for terror. Throughout the nineteenth century, fictional ghost stories developed in parallel with the more general Victorian fascination with death and what lay beyond it. Though they were as much a part of the cultural and literary fabric of the age as imperial confidence, the best of the stories still retain their original power to surprise and unsettle. In Victorian Ghost Stories, the editors map out the development of the ghost story from 1850 to the early years of the twentieth century and demonstrate the importance of this form of short fiction in Victorian popular culture. As well as reprinting stories by supernatural specialists such as J. S. Le Fanu and M. R. James, this selection emphasizes the key role played by women writers--including Elizabeth Gaskell, Rhoda Broughton, and Charlotte Riddell--and offers one or two genuine rarities. Other writers represented include Charles Dickens, Henry James, Wilkie Collins, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, and R. L. Stevenson. There is also a fascinating Introduction and a chronological list of ghost story collections from 1850 to 1910.

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Customer Reviews

For the sake of atmosphere, read "Victorian Ghost Stories" with a candle to light your way through its mysterious passages. A very large candle. There are thirty-five stories within its four-hundred-and-eighty-nine pages, and you must read them all before dawn. Actually, you should

savor this supernatural feast one story at a time. Its editors, who are both scholars of occult literature, collected the best of the best from the Golden Age of ghost story writing. If you are already a reader of the phantasmagoric, some of the anthology will be familiar, e.g. "An Account of Some Strange Disturbances in Aungier Street," "The Romance of Certain Old Clothes," or "John Charrington's Wedding." There are also lesser-known tales of vengeful ghosts, haunted houses, and "things in a dead man's eye," the latter courtesy of Rudyard Kipling's "At the End of the Passage." According to the editors' introduction, one of their aims for this anthology was to "map out the development of the Victorian ghost story from circa 1850...it is in the 1850s that the distinct, anti-Gothic character of the Victorian ghost story begins to emerge." Which is not to say that the Gothic emphasis on moldering sepulchres is altogether missing. Try "The Tomb of Sarah" by F. G. Loring, whose story begins with the memorial inscription: "SARAH. 1630. FOR THE SAKE OF THE DEAD AND THE WELFARE OF THE LIVING, LET THIS SEPULCHRE REMAIN UNTOUCHED AND ITS OCCUPANT UNDISTURBED TILL THE COMING OF CHRIST." Of course, the story's protagonist believes he has an excellent reason for disturbing the dead. Or in Sarah's case, the Undead. Make certain your candle is not burning low before you start "The Tomb of Sarah," or any of the other tales in this haunting collection. A sampling of the stories: "Father Macclesfield's Tale" (1907) by Monsignor R.H. Benson--This author was a lesser-known brother of the famed E.F. Benson, and private chamberlain to Pope Pius X. This story is narrated by a priest who is called to the death-bed of a man who could not tolerate the thought of annihilation. "The Kit Bag" (1908) by Algernon Blackwood--The private secretary of a criminal lawyer accidentally takes home the kit bag of a brutal murderer to pack up for a Christmas trip to the Alps. "An Eddy on the Floor" (1899) by Bernard Capes--The warden of one of His Majesty's prisons invites a young doctor to accept a post at the prison. The new physician soon learns that a certain empty cell was not only bolted, but screwed shut from the outside. All of the prisoners are afraid of it. "The Old Nurse's Story" (1852) by Elizabeth Gaskell--A young girl goes to work as little Rosamund's maid at Furnivall Manor, a very grand mansion located at the foot of the lonely Cumberland Fells. Rosamund's distant relative, eighty-year-old Miss Furnival is a proud, cold spinster with many secrets to hide. "At the End of the Passage" (1890) by Rudyard Kipling--A very atmospheric tale of four English Civil servants who are trying to cope with the dust, heat, and disease of an Indian summer. One of them admits that he can't sleep. In fact it terrifies him to even think of falling asleep. "John Charrington's Wedding" (1891) by E. Nesbit--A much-collected Victorian ghost story. It's bad enough when brides are accidentally locked into chests or pursued by demon lovers, but when the groom is overheard telling his fiancée, "My dear, my dear, I believe I should come from the dead if you wanted me!" watch

out!"The Body-snatcher" (1884) by Robert Louis Stevenson--"To see, fixed in the rigidity of death and naked on the coarse layer of sack-cloth, the man whom he had left well-clad and full of meat and sin upon the threshold of a tavern, awoke, even in the thoughtless Fettes, some of the terrors of the conscience." Two medical students venture into a graveyard to find a subject for dissection."Thurnley Abbey" (1908) by Perceval Landon--The new owners of Thurnley Abbey invite one of their friends to stay overnight, without telling him that he will be sleeping in the haunted bedroom. Believing the creature that appears at his bedfoot to be a hoax, the angry guest tears it apart bone by bone.

I have to say these sorts of stories have gotten me through grad school... Though I own more than one Victorian horror anthology, this was my latest acquisition and undoubtedly high ranking amongst my favorites...most of the time I'd study all day and just want something relaxing to read a 20 minute getaway and since most of the stories are short enough to not be imposing and if you have quite an imagination about you, you'll enjoy the ornate details which will carry you back to a more decadent era filled with mystery... I felt thoroughly entertained by the eloquence and detailed verbal imagery. I was able to sustain myself through yet another day...The book is a compilation of many authors such as sir Arthur Conan Doyle... it is a nice medley... so you'll always have a "surprise me" trust me you will not regret this buy.. If you want a break from the politics, economics, social structure of the world around you to your private little sanctuary... then just turn on a few candles on a chilly autumn evening and prepare to be delighted with any one of these tales...

This is an exceptional anthology of Victorian ghost stories; all are short stories which are easily read in a brief sitting. The book serves as a remarkable spyglass into another era, one wholly foreign to our own. I enjoy each creepy tale and find the mix of authors to be effectively selected and simply organized. A truly fun read. Recommended.

Victorian ghost stories, though elegant and often well written, are a bit unpalatable to the modern reader for a few reasons. Trudging through 35 of these little novelties is a bit like eating a half pound of caviar - an acquired taste is piquant only in small doses and too much at once leads rapidly to indigestion!Here are the issues with Ghostly Tale Victoriana:1) Complete predictability. Victorian readers were a lot like pro wrestling fans; they know exactly what they like, they expect any given example of the medium to gratify those expectations, and novelty of any sort is equivalent to heresy. A villain must be punished; the saccharine little bourgeois family moving into the haunted manse

must escape unharmed. The loved one who appeared mysteriously when far away has to have died, etc. These recycled tropes create not only linear simple plots but also a rather numbing similarity in how examples can be categorized. To wit, herein we have 4 "tragic spectacle re-enacted" tales (aka VCR hauntings), 6 supernatural vengeance tales, 5 loved one expiration viewings, 5 ghostly premonitions of death etc. We have a few unusual tales but these are few and far between. 2) Lack of psychological nuance. Unlike the Gothic story, Victorian ghost tales have to happen to normal people with carefully restrained passions and balanced temperaments. This requirement of tight constraint for the protagonists not only makes for dullish characters, but it also means the events occurring in the tale often have no internal meaning to the character. (Compare for example "The Yellow Wallpaper" or "The Turn of the Screw" Gothic rollercoasters in which the possible insanity and / or unreliable narration of the protagonists creates ambiguity and metaphor. No such subtleties here - spooky things happen to bland dull decent chaps who react with prudence and probity. 3) Minutiae Uber Alles. Victorians had a deep passion for country landscapes, architecture, interior design, and couture. It is a rare tale indeed herein that escapes some rather lengthy discourse on one or more of the above topics. If you are the typical reader, this may get more than a bit tedious. 4) Quaint Rather Than Scary. The combination of familiar tropes, predictable linear plotting, staid minimally developed characters, absence of metaphorical content, and much ado about drapery and shrubbery drains whatever minimal spookiness might be found here away very quickly. Ultimately there is some fine writing here (Gaskell, Le Fanu, M.R. James, Blackwood) and some of the more Gothic-leaning tales are fun (Stevenson, James) but ultimately this collection loses impact a bit too quickly. The similar Oxford Book of English Ghost Stories is a lot more entertaining because it brings in different eras, and the Oxford Book of Gothic Tales is even more fun for the reader. Victorian novels are well worth the price of admission, Victorian mystery and detective stories are gems, but Victorian ghost stories are too limited in design and effect to make reading 35 of them much entertainment.

A enjoyable diversion . I thoroughly recommend this book. The atmospheric mood varies with each story and it's author. This is but one of the many charming aspects that will draw the reader into these fine stories.

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