



Ghosts: A Haunted History

Lisa Morton

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From that cheerful puff of smoke known as Casper to the hunkiest potter living or dead, Sam Wheat, there is probably no more iconic entity in supernatural history than the ghost. And these are just recent examples. From the earliest writings such as the *Epic of Gilgamesh* to today's ghost-hunting reality TV shows, ghosts have chilled the air of nearly every era and every culture in human history. In this book, Lisa Morton uses her scholarly prowess—more powerful than any proton pack—to wrangle together history's most enduring ghosts into an entertaining and comprehensive look at what otherwise seems to always evade our eyes.

Tracing the ghost's constantly shifting contours, Morton asks the most direct question—What exactly is a ghost?—and examines related entities such as poltergeists, wraiths, and revenants. She asks how a ghost is related to a soul, and she outlines all the different kinds of ghosts there are. To do so, she visits the spirits of the classical world, including the five-part Egyptian soul and the first haunted-house, conceived in the Roman playwright Plautus's comedy, *Mostellaria*. She confronts us with the frightening phantoms of the Middle Ages—who could incinerate priests and devour children—and reminds us of the nineteenth-century rise of Spiritualism, a religion essentially devoted to ghosts. She visits with the Indian *bhuta* and goes to the Hungry Ghost Festival in China, and of course she spends time in Mexico, where ghosts have a particularly strong grip on belief and culture. Along the way she gathers the ectoplasmic residues seeping from books and film reels, from the Gothic novel *The Castle of Otranto* to the 2007 blockbuster *Paranormal Activity*, from the stories of Ann Radcliffe to those of Stephen King.

Wide-ranging, informative, and slicked with over fifty unearthly images, *Ghosts* is an entertaining read of a cultural phenomenon that will delight anyone, whether they believe in ghosts or not.

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