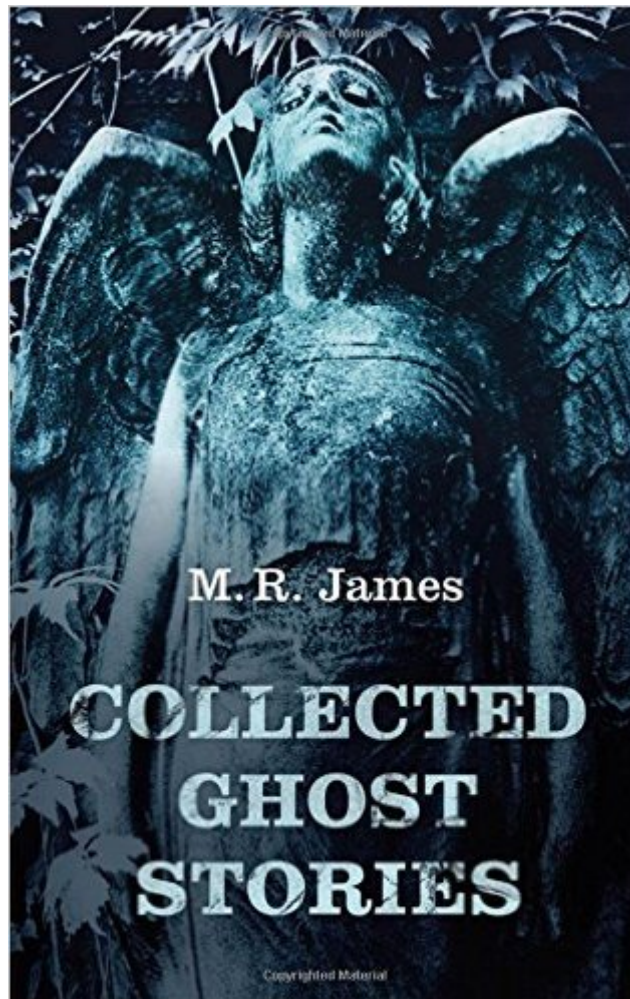


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Collected Ghost Stories (Oxford World's Classics)



Synopsis

'I was conscious of a most horrible smell of mould, and of a cold kind of face pressed against my own...' Considered by many to be the most terrifying writer in English, M. R. James was an eminent scholar who spent his entire adult life in the academic surroundings of Eton and Cambridge. His classic supernatural tales draw on the terrors of the everyday, in which documents and objects unleash terrible forces, often in closed rooms and night-time settings where imagination runs riot. Lonely country houses, remote inns, ancient churches or the manuscript collections of great libraries provide settings for unbearable menace, from creatures seeking retribution and harm. These stories have lost none of their power to unsettle and disturb. This edition presents all of James's published ghost stories, including the unforgettable 'Oh, Whistle and I'll Come to You, My Lad' and 'Casting the Runes', and an appendix of James's writings on the ghost story. Darryl Jones's introduction and notes provide a fascinating insight into James's background and his mastery of the genre he made his own.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Some of the subtlest ghost stories ever written and all the more chilling for that. James never piles on the horror as, say, Lovecraft does but plants fears in your mind that will keep you from sleep: whispering voices, the touch of a cold hand in the darkness, an unseen cat brushing your legs. James's fictional world, which owes something to Dickens, was based on the world he lived in, of Cambridge scholars exploring old libraries or churches or country houses. In such places, there

are secrets hidden for centuries, only waiting for the careless unbeliever to open the door behind which they are lurking. Try some of the classics like 'Casting the Runes' or 'The Treasure of Abbot Thomas' or, better, splash out on the Collected Stories. The quality is very high, with no more than three or four inferior ones in the whole book.

Love this book and, as with any collection, thought a specific listing of all thirty included short works might be helpful to potential buyers. Canon Alberic's Scrapbook; Lost Hearts; The Mezzotint; The Ash Tree; Number 13; Count Magnus; 'Oh, Whistle, And I'll Come To You, My Lad'; The Treasure Of Abbot Thomas; A School Story; The Rose Garden; The Tractate Middoth; Casting The Runes; The Stalls Of Barchester Cathedral; Martin's Close; Mr. Humphreys And His Inheritance; The Residence At Whitminster; The Diary Of Mr. Paynter; An Episode Of Cathedral History; The Story Of A Disappearance And An Appearance; Two Doctors; The Haunted Doll's House; The Uncommon Prayer-Book; A Neighbor's Landmark; A View From A Hill; A Warning To The Curious; An Evenings Entertainment; There Was A Man Dwelt By A Churchyard; Rats; After Dark In The Playing Fields; Wailing Well; Stories I Have Tried To Write

M.R. James represents, for me, the nexus of two of my interests: the literature of England-Between-the-Wars, and ghost/horror fiction. I have read most of James's stories many times, and my enjoyment of them has actually increased with each re-reading. I read with interest of the publication of this book, but wondered if I really needed to buy it, since I already had all of James's stories -- or so I thought! I was delighted to discover that this collection actually contains several stories which I had never seen before! That fact alone made the book well worth my having. In addition, there is superior annotation which clarifies many points concerning the stories I knew. And, on top of all that, this edition is very nicely printed and bound! A real treasure for a number of reasons!

First published in 1931, Collected Ghost Stories is a collection of most of M.R. James much revered stories. These stories were all first written for publication in magazines or for his famous Christmas readings, and were subsequently collected into four separate volumes: Ghost Stories of an Antiquary (1904), More Ghost Stories (1911), A Thin Ghost and Others (1919), and A Warning to the Curious (1925). Three stories that were published in magazines following the first publication of this work, and do not appear in this reprint; they are: The Experiment, The Malice of Inanimate Objects, and A Vignette. James' skill for conceiving and presenting ghost stories seems to have

developed at relatively young age, and his reading of some of his stories at King's College at Christmastime was a quite popular event. But ghost stories were, unfortunately, not James' priority; he was an antiquarian, and much respected one at that. He was also a noted linguist, paleographer, medievalist and biblical scholar--fields that all influenced his stories. While it is safe to say that these ghost stories are among the best ever written, their style and subject matter are still a matter of taste. So it is difficult to categorically recommend this book, but I doubt that any lover of ghost stories will be able to put this book down without difficulty after sampling but a story or two.

Born in 1862, M. R. James was a Victorian with a love of ghost stories. Many of the tales in this collection were meant to be read aloud at Christmas or New Year gatherings; it shows in their conversational tone. There are 33 stories in over 400 pages- with 48 pages of notes. I've never before seen endnotes in fiction, but I found them helpful. The author makes many references to places and events in England that an American would likely not understand, and the many colloquialisms of the time sometimes baffled me until I looked in the back of the book. I read right through this book, which turned out to not be the right way of approaching it. Read one after the other, they tended to run together and lose their effect. These stories would be best read one or two in an evening, perhaps read out loud- preferably by firelight. But it was a library book, so I persevered. 'Ghost stories' is not really the right name for a lot of these stories. Many of them feature not ghosts but demons, things that go bump in the night, haunted or bespelled pictures, rooms, binoculars, hills and other inanimate objects. James seemed to have a peculiar horror of animate fabric, as it features in several tales, in the form of evil curtains, pillowcases, blankets, etc., which sounds silly but when it comes down to it, would you want to confront drapes that form into a human shape and try to smother you? For the main part (although there are a couple of exceptions) the horror in these stories is not of the modern variety where the gore is splattered across the pages. James creates a sense of disturbing unease, a feeling that puts the hair on the back of your neck up, the sense that something is really NOT all right, and that if one is smart, one will get the heck out of that house/cemetery/library before the thing you don't really see becomes visible. Highly enjoyable, but take your time reading it.

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