



Ghosts: A Haunted History

Jen Baker

To cite this article: Jen Baker (2017) Ghosts: A Haunted History, *Folklore*, 128:3, 326-328, DOI: 10.1080/0015587X.2017.1308684

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0015587X.2017.1308684>



Published online: 17 Aug 2017.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 7



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

and even if it ignores the substantial regional variations among the upland South, the delta, and the coastal plain. Like many pre-industrial economies, much of the South was mired in poverty. Of course, elites had access to foods that were out of reach of most of their neighbours, but even they were limited by what the South could produce. Even when industry eventually arrived, much work was either low-paid, non-unionized factory labour or extractive production. As Ferris recounts in detail, these extra-culinary forces, including programmes of research or uplift, are crucial to how the food culture of the South developed.

Not simply the southern food culture as a form of regional identity and local economies, but images and imaginings of cuisine come to define the region to outsiders, alternately charmed and repelled. As Ferris recognizes, region is not only a psychological state, but it becomes a marker in a national context. The prevalence of foodstuffs—catfish, watermelon, cornbread, okra, or barbeque—serves as a basis for tourism and produces a profound nostalgia. As becomes clear in the telling, the foodways of the South are dramatically distinctive in American culture, with certain locations, such as Miami, Memphis, or Charleston, having a magnetic draw because of their restaurants as well as their recipes. Part of the appeal of the South in the American imagination is through its cuisine, and organizations, such as the Southern Foodways Alliance, not matched in any other region in its vigour or rigour, support this point. At least until the decimation of Hurricane Katrina, New Orleans was the great American culinary destination, only rivalled by the coastal centres of New York and San Francisco.

As Ferris understands well, it is not only the grand restaurants that matter, but the civil rights revolution, and the reaction to it, played out in restaurant spaces. It was no accident that the stirrings of the civil rights movement occurred at lunch counters in Greensboro and elsewhere. One might plausibly claim that the civil rights movement in Atlanta revolves around two restaurants: Paschal's and the Pickrick, both well known for their fried chicken, but different in many other ways. Paschal's was the home—a welcoming and sociable Third Place—for generations of Atlanta African-American activists and politicians and their white friends. As Coretta Scott King remarked, 'Paschal's is as important a historical site for the American civil rights movement as Boston's Faneuil Hall is for the American Revolution' (271). In sharp contrast, the Pickrick, located near the Georgia Institute of Technology campus, had its own darker civil rights legacy. Lester Maddox, its owner, refused to serve African-American customers even after the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, brandishing an axe-handle on one memorable occasion, until forced to shutter the restaurant after a court decision. This act of defiance eventually propelled Maddox into the Georgia Governor's mansion. In time, Congressman John Lewis, a prominent veteran of the Civil Rights movement, suggested that the Pickrick, along with Paschal's, deserved to be stops on a civil rights trail. Fried chicken could unite the races, even if both groups resented the connection.

Ferris's volume is profound in its recognition of the multiple ways in which food builds and separates a society, creating social boundaries, nutritional harms, and everyday routines. In an obvious sense, people cannot exist without choices of producing, preparing, and consuming food. But this is also true in a more subtle and consequential way. Health, economics, and politics depend on the agricultural and culinary choices of a region. Ultimately, this, rather than heaps of facts and reams of anecdotes, is what *The Edible South* has to teach us. Dig in.

Gary Alan Fine, Northwestern University, Evanston, IL, USA

© 2017 Gary Alan Fine



Ghosts: A Haunted History. Edited by Lisa Morton. London: Reaktion Books, 2015. 208 pp. Illus. £16.00 (hbk). ISBN 978-1-78023-517-2

In the last decade a number of academic and popular publications touching on the subject of the ghostly and on the pervasive influence of such manifestations of the afterlife across histories and

cultures have appeared. Some of the key works, such as *The Haunted: A Social History of Ghosts* by Owen Davies (2007), *The Ghost Story, 1840–1920: A Cultural History* by Andrew Smith (2010), *Spectres of the Self: Thinking about Ghosts and Ghost-seeing in England, 1750–1920* by Shane McCorristine (2012), *The Spectralities Reader: Ghosts and Haunting in Contemporary Cultural Theory* edited by María del Pilar Blanco and Esther Peeren (2013), and *Co-habiting with Ghosts: Knowledge, Experience, Belief and the Domestic Uncanny* by Caron Lipman (2014), have engaged, often extensively, with the dominant intellectual debates and social contexts of the spectral. While Lisa Morton makes reference to some critical scholars and actors in the history of the ghostly, her avoidance of the oft-quoted and sometimes laborious critical theory that tends to inform approaches to the spectral makes her latest monograph, *Ghosts: A Haunted History*, refreshing in many ways. The pseudo-encyclopedic approach has its advantages for those looking for a fairly comprehensive overview and introduction, and allows readers to make their own connections without labouring the point, while providing space to prompt further thinking. Her sources are wide reaching and inclusive, and the book is demonstrative of the author's extensive knowledge of the subject.

Across the seven chapters, which are framed by an introduction and brief reflective conclusion, Morton offers both diachronic and synchronic glimpses into the sometimes corresponding, sometimes disparate, forms ghosts assume. The first chapter focuses on one of the few clearly delineated aims: questioning 'what exactly a ghost is'. As expected, she does not provide a definite answer, but addresses this fundamental query in order to consider—as she does throughout—how humanity has attempted to answer that question. Chapters Two and Three span from antiquity to the eighteenth century to take its reader on a fast-paced tour of pre-modern examples of ghosts and varied thanatological belief systems via mythology, pagan sacrifices, Shakespearean tragedy, and religious art. Although the collection, perhaps unavoidably, has a strong Western tone, there are examples from across the globe throughout. Chapter Four considers the 'hungry ghosts' of the Eastern world, and the impact that Eastern performances of the supernatural, economies of ghosts, and landscapes of the spectral may have had on Western cultures. In Chapter Five, Latin America and the Southern Hemisphere are considered more briefly, with great geographical leaps from festivals such as Mexico's *Días de los Muertos* (Day of the Dead) and its wider influence to figures such as the Jamaican *duppies*, to the liminal 'Dreamtime' spaces of the Australian Aborigines—and how white Europeans corrupted or influenced these facets. Whilst the facts and stories to arise from this chapter were undeniably varied, there seemed little obvious connection between them, and thus little fluidity to Chapter Six, which provides an overview of the different approaches in (mainly Western) esoteric scientific circles and the motivations and technologies that encompassed their pursuits. Chapter Seven does, however, work to bring many of the strands and commonalities together by discussing the adaptation and appropriation of the ghost in popular media and culture, with a brief nod to less obvious forms such as videogames and music. The structure of the whole volume is perhaps the most fragile aspect. No individual chapter is structured chronologically. Each is collected geographically or thematically, and displays a tendency to flit across times and cultures using a nevertheless enjoyably creative, stream-of-consciousness approach to ghosts and their ephemera. While this has benefits in that it emphasizes the trans-cultural pervasiveness of certain elements, the vast and varied references to ghost belief, the forms of ghosts, and the representation in literature and culture, it can at times feel like a paradoxically organized but erratic survey. Most chapters provide little in the way of concluding thoughts, and the conclusion itself is often vague and elusive, although Morton proposes that a willingness to believe, even for the most sceptical, is inextricable from our love of good story-telling.

Although it is not labelled as such, Morton's monograph is a comparative survey of 'culturally shared notions' (12). The choice of examples is often clearly dictated by their correspondence between the material form of the ghosts, the sounds they make, the stories we tell about them, and the means by which we attempt to document and classify them in differing contexts. For the amateur enthusiast, or for the student new to ghost studies, Morton undoubtedly supplies the reader with an introductory look at the ephemera of 'ghosts'. The work provides brief references from different places and times to the etymology, and to the rituals, customs, and

festivals associated with them; the burial practices that can help delineate belief systems and therefore how ghosts were responded to; the meaning or explanations for their presence; how different belief systems merged to create certain ghosts; materiality; the technologies of ghost-seeking; the psychological interest; ghost tourism and the economy of the dead; major events that have provoked mass-ghost seeing; the topography of spirits; and much more. All of this is complemented by an abundance of visual material such as paintings, engravings, photographs, and advertisements, which, although viscerally stimulating, were mostly illustrative rather than a means for further discussion. The conversational tone is accessible and creative, and examples range from the obscure to the popular. For those already familiar with the subject matter and desiring a more critical engagement, *Ghosts: A Haunted History* is perhaps a bit light. While the study is undoubtedly broad—mentioning a vast number of primary sources—it is not particularly thorough, providing very little in the way of analytical discussion and comparative research, except at a surface level. Nevertheless, the book offers an enjoyable and appealing tour of the spectral realm and its extensive reach.

Jen Baker, Bristol University, UK
© 2017 Jen Baker

