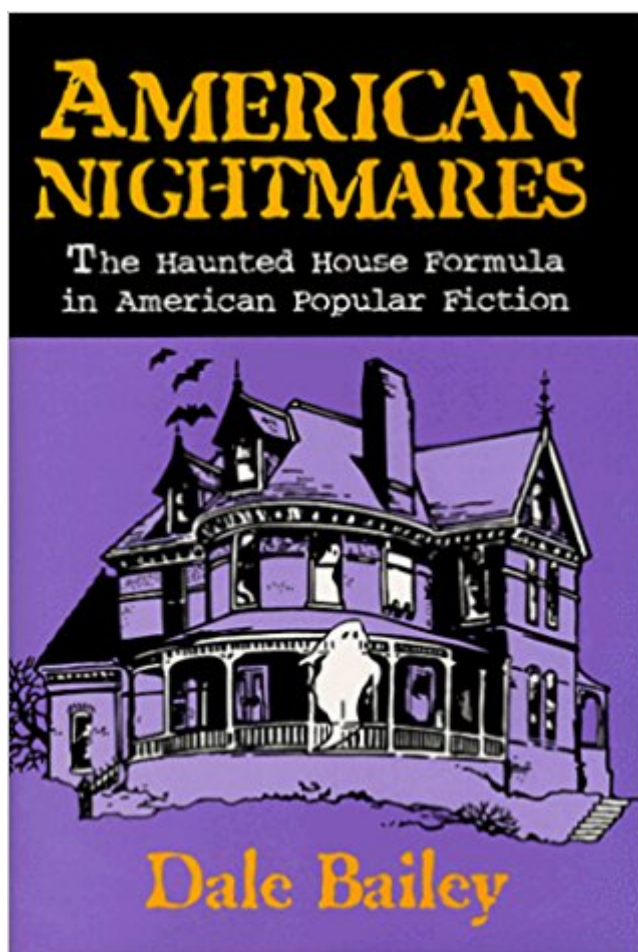


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# American Nightmares: The Haunted House Formula In American Popular Fiction



## Synopsis

When Edgar Allan Poe set down the tale of the accursed House of Usher in 1839, he also laid the foundation for a literary tradition that has assumed a lasting role in American culture. The House of Usher and its literary progeny have not lacked for tenants in the century and a half since: writers from Nathaniel Hawthorne to Stephen King have taken rooms in the haunted houses of American fiction. Dale Bailey traces the haunted house tale from its origins in English gothic fiction to the paperback potboilers of the present, highlighting the unique significance of the house in the domestic, economic, and social ideologies of our nation. The author concludes that the haunted house has become a powerful and profoundly subversive symbol of everything that has gone nightmarishly awry in the American Dream.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Dale Bailey teaches at the University of Tennessee. His short fiction, nominated for the Nebula Award by the Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of America, has appeared in The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction, Amazing Stories, The Year's Best Fantasy and Horror, The Best from Fantasy & Science Fiction, and elsewhere.

First of all, this is NOT light reading. It's pretty much a textbook. The good news is: That's exactly what I wanted. The chapters are dry, as you might expect. What make this book really work -- if you're researching the genre for any reason -- are the insights... a far deeper exploration of why

people are drawn to the stories they are. I especially liked the explanation of why some people give Ouija boards a try, and why some people keep going back to them, even when they say they know (and believe) the dangers. If you're looking for a book that gives you a simple formula for writing ghost stories, you can probably extrapolate it from this book. However, it's a very academic book that covers far more than "first, put the people in the haunted house, then scare them, then get them out of the house despite all odds." This isn't light reading, but if you're looking for an in-depth textbook to more fully understand this genre in print, storytelling, and video media, this is a superb choice. Vincent Price would approve.

A skittery but delightful examination of some of the best known haunted house fictions in American writing. This is not written by an academic for other academics though there is an underlying thesis which requires Bailey to separate 'haunted houses' from other forms of horror (some may find this well-taken and others may find it contrived.) That said, this is a very enjoyable read for people who prize the genre. As a note, Bailey references Stephen King's *Danse Macabre* throughout the book -- if you have not yet read King's exploration of the broader horror landscape, I would highly recommend that to you.

An academic-style (yet very readable) analysis of an overlooked genre, with chapters devoted to Jackson's *Haunting of Hill House*, Anson's *Amityville Horror*, Marasco's *Burnt Offerings* and King's *Shining*. A very enjoyable work.

Item came just as described

Bailey writes as you wish all academicians wrote (most, unfortunately, write tortured prose convulsing in theory, all scribbling madly toward tenure); Bailey is a much-needed exception: his prose is accessible; his criticism insightful; his observations often humorous. Dig this penetrating summation of Poe: "...three-fifths genius and two-fifths sheer fudge, that raving lunatic of American letters, that drunken pedophile dying in his Baltimore ditch." *American Nightmares* is a keen examination of the haunted house story and how it is inherently an American tale, how it is, in fact, a direct and dire result of our everyday obsessions with the American Dream. Bailey takes obvious delight in examining such pop icons as *The Haunting of Hill House*, *The Amityville Horror*, *Burnt Offerings*, and *The Shining* (and as he does, you can almost hear the wailings and gnashings of teeth from ivory towers across the country). In short, this book is a highly readable, vastly

entertaining pop culture manifesto. It's a must-read for any horror aficionado, highly recommended for anyone interested in American lit, and suggested for all entertained by good prose and refreshing insight.

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