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# Best Ghost Stories Of Algernon Blackwood (Dover Mystery, Detective, & Other Fiction)



## Synopsis

A woman of snow . . . a midnight caller keeping his promise . . . forests where Nature is deliberate and malefic . . . enchanted houses . . . these are the beings and ideas that flood through this collection of ghost stories by Algernon Blackwood (1869-1951). Altogether thirteen stories, gathered from the entire corpus of Blackwood's work, are included: stories of such sheer power and imagination that it is easy to see why he has been considered the foremost British supernaturalist of the twentieth century. Blackwood's ability to create an atmosphere of unrelieved horror and sustain it to the end of the story is almost unsurpassed. "The Willows" — which has been called by H. P. Lovecraft the finest supernatural story — is a typical example of Blackwood's art: slowly and surely Blackwood draws the reader into a world of shadows, nuances, and unearthly terror. Blackwood was also a master at evoking feelings of mysticism and cosmic experience; dealing with such ideas as interpenetrating levels of existence and pantheistic elemental powers, he expanded the content of supernatural literature enormously. But even the more traditional elements of horror stories such as ghosts and haunted houses are handled with such energy and feeling that they rise far above their predecessors. Drawing on serious Oriental thought, modern psychology, and philosophy, Algernon Blackwood introduced a sophistication to the horror story that — with few exceptions — it was devoid of before. The results are stories that are not only guaranteed to chill, but stories that have something to say to the intelligent reader.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"If a ghost is seen, what is it interests me less than than what sees it?" Thus Algernon Blackwood describes his fascination with human beings' ability to sense invisible powers and stirrings in the universe, a fascination he developed most famously in his stories about mystical, ineffable encounters with nature. This collection, selected by renowned scholar of the supernatural, E. F. Bleiler, is an excellent sample of Blackwood's work, including 12 of his best ghost stories and a crime story as well. Blackwood is acknowledged today as the author who made the ghost story into a respectable literary form.

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Blackwood is one of my favorites for creepy story telling. I will say, I bought this book thinking 'the occupant of the room' was included, and it isn't, but that's my own fault. Willows, Wendigo, and the listener are here and they are great. But be warned, this isn't a comprehensive collection.

algernon blackwood (1869-1951) was one of the best writers of weird tales that ever lived. this book collects many of his best stories. the willows and the wendigo are bonafide classics. most of the

others in the book are very good as well. another great blackwood story collection is the book "incredible adventures". an h. p. lovecraft favorite. at his best algernon blackwood is one of the best.

Well curated selection of works from one of the masters of the genre. Definitely a wonderful collection of supernatural stories.

The anthology contains strongly atmospheric, imaginative tales by a writer who is shamefully not better known. Rather than call these tales "ghost stories", I would say they are groundbreaking, genre-blurring masterpieces of science fiction and the supernatural. What I found innovative in these stories is that the supernatural element is itself a part of the characters. The integration of the supernatural element into the characters allows them to participate on a new level in the stories. Supernatural phenomena are thereby no longer external "scares", and attain a deeper and greater meaning. These are thought-provoking stories, and as you can see from this review, it is hard to describe them without using compounded, hyphenated adjectives. The stories have unpredictable and engrossing plots. Some of them are long enough to be called novellas. They deal with supernatural forces but I don't know that these forces are ghosts. Certainly they are spiritual, but not ghosts. "The Willows" deals with deadly supernatural beings trapped in an island and which utilize willows to manifest themselves. "Ancient Sorceries" is the inspiration for the movie "Cat People", but is truly a story about a village of satanic witches. "Ancient Lights" is about wicked fairies that waylay a traveler. These descriptions are simplistic and in fact the stories are more interesting than that. All I can say is that everyone should give these a chance. They won't be disappointed.

Algernon Blackwood (1869-1951) was a fascinating writer. Although he wrote in other forms-novels, children stories, and an autobiography, for example-it is his horror/supernatural stories that have most endured. His "The Willows" (included in this anthology) is often singled out as the best English-language supernatural story. His writing career was long, spanning about 1905-1945, with peak productivity about 1910. Because of this long career, his earlier and later works have a noticeably different "feel," the earlier works having a decidedly Edwardian cast. Taking 1910 as the benchmark, Blackwood's writing falls about halfway between the pioneers in the horror/supernatural genre (Mary Shelley, John Polidori, et al) and the present. Blackwood lived for extended periods in the US and Canada, but most of his writing occurred in England, his birthplace. He left no stylistic direct descendant, though Lovecraft is often mentioned. If there is a single theme connecting Blackwood's supernatural writings, it is the Platonic idea that "ordinary" reality is but a façade.

Behind this façade lie other realities, awesome, but imperfectly accessible to the human mind. Of course many religions share this idea. But whereas their "other reality" is vastly superior to the one we know, Blackwood's is grimmer and darker. Blackwood serves up this idea in several flavors: 1) alien creatures from another dimension (The Willows), 2) elementals or animistic spirits (Glamour of the Snow, The Transfer, Ancient Lights), 3) devil-worshipping monks (Secret Worship), 4) people and entire towns with secret lives (Ancient Sorceries), 5) conventional ghost stories (The Empty House, The Other Wing, Keeping His Promise), 6) Jekyll/Hyde duality (Max Hensig). A few stories, such as The Wendigo, are hard to characterize, seemingly falling into several of the above. To what extent must a writer actually believe his/her ideas to be effective? Does a ghost-story writer need to believe in ghosts? Not consciously perhaps, but on some level almost certainly. Apropos of this, much has been made of Blackwood's Sandemanian background. An extreme Calvinistic sect, the Sandemanians place great emphasis on sin and perdition. In adult life Blackwood appeared to reject these teachings, and turn to other religions. (In fairness to that religion: the great Michael Faraday appeared to be a contented life-long Sandemanian.) Yet, it is probable that highly emotional ideas, learned early in childhood, can never be completely expunged. Such ideas, in one form or another, appear to become permanent dwellers of the persons psyche. Attempts to expunge them only result in the temporary breaking of the bonds these ideas have with other parts of the mind. The ideas themselves however refuse to stay isolated, and constantly strive to form new meaningful connections. It is possible that this striving can become a great source of creativity. This ceaseless striving may also explain some inconsistencies in Blackwood's works. Consider: the effectiveness of his masterpiece, The Willows, lies in its premise of an intelligence so utterly alien that "it has nothing to do with us." Vastly powerful and amoral, this intelligence cares nothing about mankind and mankind's affairs. While it is not expressly hostile, neither can it be propitiated in any known way. As a result, humans are reduced to utter insignificance. Yet toward the end of the story this intelligence is seemingly "propitiated" by a human "sacrifice." How so? If human lives are nothing to this intelligence, why not 10,000 victims - or none at all? Could Old Testament ideas of sacrifices and burnt-offerings be intruding? Does this anthology really contain all the best ghost stories of Blackwood? Yes, by and large, it does! However, Blackwood was quite prolific, so it would be very easy to compile a second anthology nearly as good as the first. (Perhaps Dover can be convinced of the merits of this.) Two personal favorites that I would like to see included in such a collection are "The Strange Adventures of a Private Secretary in New York," a kind of werewolf story in which the lycanthropy appears to be induced by chemical experiments - and "The Doll," quite possibly the inspiration for Chucky. (Rev. A, Feb. 2004)

Engrossing (but not gross) stories on encounters with inexplicable supernatural phenomena. It's hard to describe the exact effect of these stories. They're not, to me, chilling or creepy. I might say "mystifying." The supernatural elements have a large cosmic feel. The stories are written with great restraint.

The author wrote in a style more typical of his time than now but the stories are well told and met my expectations. He had the knack of creating an eerie atmosphere without too much conventional description. The Wendigo is a favorite tale of Blackwood's and is contained in this collection.

"Willows" and "The Wendigo" are exemplars of this genre of story telling. Great choice if you're looking for a change of pace in your reading habits

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