

Ghosts

Sometimes, like many others, I have seen, heard or felt passing phenomena that seemed distinctly unusual, but somehow sentient, in situations where I knew I was alone, or even at spots I knew not to be reasonably accessible.

I consider myself insensitive to things we are pleased in our ignorance to call occult, though very occasionally I fleetingly perceive such things unexpectedly and in prosaic circumstances. In my fifty-eight years I have had eight such encounters.

It is worth pointing out that these perceptions are entirely independent of intellectual conviction. I am a trained scientist. I make no assertion that these happenings are anything other than natural phenomena, with the concomitant potential to rational analysis. Until noon on Friday 28 March 1997 I was an atheist, and consciously certain that the supernatural did not exist in any form. And yet the manifestations I describe both predate and postdate my conversion to Christ. If the events I describe are merely psychotic, then they are both very diverse and very sporadic delusions.

September 1974

NN710565

The first apparently supernatural experience I had was in the first few days of my Undergraduate Mapping Project on the Northern flanks of Schiehallion mountain in Central Scotland.

The afternoon weather was sunny with a cool breeze. I walked off the Blair Athol Facies and onto the altered arenitic facies on the heather moor to its West, perhaps three hundred meters South-West of the prominent crag Cnoc An Fhithich.

There was what seemed to be a small, shallow disused quarry with a solitary small birch growing from its western edge. The floor of the depression was strewn with large angular boulders amidst the heather: Dangerous to negotiate. The air was still. As I entered the quarry the wind rustled the birch, which had its early autumn leaves, and I felt a chill of nameless dread suffuse my body. It was one of only two places I have ever found hateful in this seemingly meritless way. I saw nothing. The place was outwardly calm and beautiful. After a perfunctory examination I left the place briskly.

Autumn 1975

NS957447

I was returning to Glasgow on a train from Birmingham. There is a spot immediately West of the railway embankment, just fifty meters South of the uttermost limit of Carstairs Junction where in those days an apple-green cast-iron sewer crossed the field on a steel trestle.

I had often seen this unremarkable structure before, but on this particular afternoon I clearly saw the body of a young male wearing a blue anorak and black flannels hanging by the neck from the pipe and slowly gyrating. The figure was wholly opaque, and ambiently-lit. The ligature appeared to be a 13A black electric flex. No-one else was visible in the field. The back garden of a street of semi-detached houses overlooked the pipe. The weather was calm and overcast.

No other passenger appeared to see this. I wondered if I should pull the communication cord. Since the young man seemed already dead, I decided to wait until I alighted.

At Glasgow, I reported the event to the Police, and some officers from a station in Bridgetown drove me to the spot in a car, and returned via New Lanark. I cannot remember why we went there. We found nothing, and I have heard nothing of this affair throughout the intervening years.

Summer 1976
NS576639

I was again travelling by train, a routine morning commute from Crookston to Glasgow Central.

There was an interesting disused wooden station with a long-stopped station clock at Shields Road, and wooden stairs up to the street. The pertinent point about this location is that not only did trains never stop at Shields Road, but also the wooden access stairs were closed off from the street at their top by a wall, which in those days was of wooden boards.

One morning at around 0815 I was startled to see the lower legs of a woman wearing a knee-length skirt calmly climbing these stairs. She was about half-way up and the top half of her body was obscured by a wooden valence. The legs were wholly opaque and ambiently-lit. The weather was calm and sunny. The other passengers in the crowded train appeared unmoved, and I reported this apparition to no-one, as there appeared to be nothing suspicious about it (trespass on a railway was a misdemeanour in both England and Scotland, but this did not concern me).

Over thirty years later, I learnt from the Internet that Shields Road station was reputedly haunted by the wraith of a woman, though several seem to think that the Shields Road station in question is the nearby Glasgow Underground stop.

December 1994
SK000021

A few days after moving into my new house in Bloxwich I was sitting in the lounge when I heard a strong female sigh in the adjoining vestibule.

I asked my Wife, who was in our bedroom ten meters away if she had sighed. She said not. I saw nothing.

The lounge itself often, but not usually, smells strongly of cigar smoke. No-one has smoked in my house at any time during our occupancy.

About 1015 Sunday 23 April 2000
V974870

I was walking in the graveyard of Muckross Abbey in County Kerry. It had been raining but it was clear and overcast. Later the cloud parted to give glimmers of sunshine. As often on Consecrated Ground, I felt very relaxed and content. I expected (and indeed experienced) nothing untoward. I was idly reading the epitaphs when something prompted me to lookup, but without alarm, and look toward the ruin.

Very fleetingly a black robed figure stood in an archway and disappeared within a second of my perceiving it.



Muckross Abbey that Sunday

About 1600 Friday 3 May 2002
SS585873

As I have previously remarked I am occasionally sensitive to ambience. I have always felt very relaxed and soothed within the precincts of Lilleshall Abbey and several other places.

The second place that made my flesh creep is described here.

On the last day of our Gower holiday my Wife stayed in the car at Caswell whilst I walked alone half-a-mile West to The Brandy Cove. The beautiful sandy inlet was calm and quiet in the cool, windless Spring sunshine. I was alone and felt utterly vulnerable, an unusual emotion for me, but more intense than beside the Birmingham Canal at the old Chance Works, which is merely eerie.

As I entered the cove I felt cold and very ill at ease and though I lingered to photograph and maybe find evidence of lead mining, I was glad to walk back out.

It is fair to add that I was already aware of the Brandy Cove's evil reputation, though former prisons, gibbets, and other places of popular dread do not usually affect me.



The Brandy Cove that Friday

About 1000 Wednesday 3 January 2007

SP202543

Discounting the strange sounds and smells of my own house, this is the only inexplicable experience I have had outwith a Celtic country, but clear and somewhat disturbing.

I had driven to Stratford-upon-Avon with my Wife Jana and my nephew Sug-Min. I parked the car in the large tourist car park on the East bank of the Avon, on the opposite bank to The Memorial Theater.

There is a pleasant tarmacadamed avenue walk along the bank to the Chain Ferry and beyond to a creosoted wooden building, maybe seven hundred and fifty meters from the cafe near where I parked. This path is about three or four meters wide and shaded everywhere by mature deciduous trees. The weather was damp but bright and at about ten in the morning the light beneath the trees was excellent.

The river borders the track on one side, and open lawns on the other.

I walked alone almost to the wooden structure at the end of the path, and as I retraced my steps Northward a middle-aged couple passed me heading South. Then a lone pallid woman of about thirty dressed in black from neck to foot in the Early Victorian fashion passed following them at a distance, walking along the path on its Eastern edge. She leered at me in an unpleasant, knowing way as she approached. We did not exchange greetings. The woman was entirely solid and ambiently-lit in plain sight.

I walked a hundred meters further and as at Muckcross something made me look back, and without either expectation or alarm.

The middle-aged couple were still walking in the distance. The black-clad woman had completely disappeared.



Near to the Place in Stratford

0500 Friday 17 September 2010
SC389771

I was asleep in Room 101 of The Hydro Hotel in Douglas, the chief town of The Isle of Man.

The night was damp but calm and the room dimly illuminated by the street lamps of Queen's Promenade. Most of the esplanade's catenary lights had been extinguished. The only sound was of waves lapping distantly upon the shingle, and the rustle of the cabbage palms.

A long mirror was visible over the dressing table immediately opposite and to my left.

As I lay awake the mirror suddenly seemed to reflect the interior and windows as they would be in broad daylight. Something about the reflected furniture and the street outside was adjusted in detail. A man in Seventies disco dancing garb walked silently across and into the mirror, which then reverted to darkness, showing only specks of light from the street.



The Scene from Room 101 at Dawn

Any call upon rational analysis (if this is a pleonasm, forgive me) summons the application of anthropocentric and nomothetic paradigms to agencies that may or may not be amenable.

When we say that intensity diminishes as the square root of distance, or indeed that the celerity of light is constant, we utter only transient dogma that inhuman creatures, or posterity, if any, are not obliged to recognise, much less to honor.

To their schemes and schema, if any, we are alien and we are alike as transient, as illusory and as controversial as they to us.

What we suppose ghosts or nebulously describe as local auras are for all we know a metafauna who trespass our world largely or wholly innocent of it, content to pass us by and repose as infants in God's Good Hand.

Should a phantom smile at me with a salacious or seemingly malign gaze perhaps she only wonders whether the subject, clearly a zoological specimen, will react with horror, comedy or indifference to her visage. Or perhaps, like an idiot, she is lost in private reverie or the apprehension of some otherworldly object. Maybe she has the levity to fear an unfulfillable proposition, or the gravity to hope for epiphany. Only an egotist would presume her attention, just as only the vainest, or the youngest, of savants would aspire to define universal law.

Hamlet assured "There are more things in Heaven and Earth, Horatio, Than are dreamt of in your philosophy", or so a sage prompted him.

The walk of the ghost is of course a favorite device of European classical drama. He is summoned whenever promise or portent promotes the plot, his oracular powers serving a counterpoint to the retrospective limits of human projection, and his immortal form an awful frame.

All ages abhor speculation. This is true whether it concerns the highest scientific or artistic endeavors or the basest cunning of mercantile parasitism. Narcissus lost his soul through a mirror.

Our forefathers believed that many or all of the things they saw were fabulous, put there to teach lessons to men. We consider that all or most things are self-subsistent, fortuitously present and without signal.

Saul proscribed sorcery. And yet The First Book of Samuel tells us that upon the eve of battle Saul summoned the shade of Samuel by the agency of The Witch of Endor.

The witch begged Saul not to make her summon the dead to descry the future but the apostate king demanded to know the impending resolution.

The dead prophet rose and told Saul that the king had lost the favor of The Lord because he had forborn to slay the Amalekites, that he would die upon the morrow; and that Israel should be delivered into the hands of the Philistines.

This archetypal tragedy has inspired some of the greatest feats of European art and music.

Image is in the eye of the interpreter. The numerous graphical renditions of the Endor encounter range from he melodramatic to the forensic to the crapulently domestic, as exemplified below:-



"Saul and the Witch of Endor"

William Sidney Mount 1828

http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/5/5a/Mount-saul_and_the_witch_of_endor.jpg



"Saul and the Witch of Endor"

Matthias Stom 1635

http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/0/0a/Saul_and_the_Witch_of_Endor_%28Stom%2C_1635%29.jpg



"Saul with his Servants at the Fortune-Teller of Endor"

Rembrandt van Rijn 1657

<http://www.museumbredius.nl/tekenars/pics/t06-rembrandt.jpg>

Rabbis and theologians have spent the last three thousand years debating whether this apparition was really the spirit of a dead Samuel, or an illusion conjured by God, or a demon, or a hallucination, or a trick of the witch. Controversy continues, and literalists have even drawn attention to the strategic impossibility of David's evolutions during the available time frame stated.

All this guesswork misses the point. To the Heroics and their Semitic contemporaries nature and supernature were a unity, so if a snake spoke to a woman or the fields gave up their dead it was no wonder.

We hold the ideographic and the nomothetic in antithesis.

Or as Spengler more elegantly wrote it is the difference between "Classical and Oriental, idol and dogma". Judaism early fled the contradiction between idol and dogma, Islam never confronted it, and Christianity has sought a synthesis but with mixed success. Modernism affects to see neither.

As Moderns we may of course doubt the letter, especially the efficacy of witchcraft or some of the military aspects of the Endor narrative. We may even question the agency of God Himself. But we accept with gratitude the undecayed bequest of The Old Men who sought to teach their children the hard consolation of the Lessons that confounded their own cognitions.

I could tell you that odd and separate images are like Polar nunataks rising above a primal fabric of interdependent structures hidden beneath a young and formless sea of glacial ignorance.

And yet the very nature of such analogy is to reduce perception to law, for despite our best cares the tendency of correlation is to crystallise to formula.

By all means frame laws, rules and formulae: Our civilisation would be impossible without them. But remember that a single exception confounds the rule, which latter is a construct of man, whilst the exception originates elsewhere.

My encounters, always of course unbidden, suffer by comparison with the heroic apparitions of ancient lore. They are chronologically and chorologically quotidian. Perhaps they are scientific rather than literary specters, showing in substance what they lack in assertion.

They arise with all the banality of conflict, or as the chance interception of some wild animal who flees to hide.

George Herbert wrote "A man who looks on glass, On it may stay his eye, Or if he pleaseth through it pass, And then the heaven espy".

For the laws of nature are also mere analogy in the language of man, as assuredly as our world dies forgotten as a dream dies at the break of day. This is neither pessimism nor fatalism for he who awakes is alive.