

Visitors from beyond the Grave

Ghosts in World Literature

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LIES TOO GOOD TO LAY TO REST: THE SURVIVAL OF PAGAN GHOST STORIES IN EARLY CHRISTIAN LITERATURE

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ABSTRACT: Consideration is given to three traditional ghost stories that thrived in both pagan and early Christian literature: 'The Haunted House', 'A Ghost Locates a Lost Deposit' and 'The Mistaken Underworld Escort.' All three stories appear both in Lucian's *Philopseudes* on the pagan side and in the works of Augustine on the Christian side, and additionally in further works on both sides of the religious divide. As various passages in the New Testament and the works of the early Fathers make clear, the concept of the ghost was incompatible with Christian belief. Accordingly, we ask why such stories continued to thrive, nonetheless, in Christian writings. We advance a tentative two-part answer: first, the stories were just too deeply ingrained in popular culture, and indeed just too entertaining, to be relinquished; secondly, the stories served surreptitiously but reassuringly to confirm belief in the soul's survival of death even as, at explicit level, their Christian re-tellers tried, in different ways, to argue the ghosts out of them. We proceed to investigate the various sorts of theological accommodation made.

KEYWORDS: Lucian, *Philopseudes*, New Testament, early Fathers, tradition.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter looks at three well loved, traditional ghost stories from the ancient world. Their distinctive motifs-set aside, the three story-types in question have several things in common with each other: they are all found in at least two pagan examples and two early Christian ones; and in each case we owe one of the pagan examples to Lucian's *Philopseudes* or *Lover of Lies* and one of the Christian ones to St Augustine¹. That these stories should appear in Christian texts at all is initially surprising in itself. According to Christian tenets, the manifestation of ghosts on the surface of the world and in the realm of the living should have been an impossibility, since the souls of the dead were all supposed to be fully confined within the underworld until the Day of Resurrection. The traditional ghost stories that had thrived in pagan culture should accordingly have had no currency in this new religious context. But they were just too good, too ingrained in popular lore and in popular imagination to let go. And so they continued

¹ For Lucian's *Philopseudes* see Müller 1932, Schwartz 1951, Ebner *et al.* 2001, Ogden 2007.

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to be told, with Christian authors making a range of variously strained theological accommodations for them².

The notion that the souls of the dead should be confined, or imprisoned, in the underworld (sometimes in their tombs, or the sea) until the Day of Resurrection, whereupon they are to be aroused by a clarion call, is adverted to several times across the New Testament, for example in Luke, John, 1Corinthians, 1Thessalonians, 1Peter and Revelation. Admittedly, the emphasis in these passages tends to be on the eventual point of release rather than on the provisional confinement itself³.

More lucid expressions of the notion are found in a pair of contemporary Church Fathers, Hippolytus of Rome and Tertullian, both of whose careers spanned the late second and early third centuries AD. Writing in Greek, Hippolytus gives us a vivid image of Hades as a dark, sunless place in which the souls of the righteous and the unrighteous alike are detained until the time that God will determine. It is a guardhouse for souls, and angels (supplanting Cerberus, we may think) serve as its guards⁴. Tertullian too, writing in Latin, discusses the apparent manifestations of ghosts in the world of the living at some length in his *On the Soul* of ca. AD 200. These are not the souls of the dead themselves but demons, and those demons specifically that had been responsible for the deaths of the individuals concerned in the first place. They masquerade as their souls, as sometimes becomes explicit when a possessing demon is interrogated during exorcism, and it claims to be the soul of its host's ancestor, or of a gladiator. And just why does a demon do this?

In doing this it makes it its chief concern to exclude the truth we declare, so that we may not find it easy to believe that all souls are gathered into the underworld, and so that they may interfere with our belief in the day of judgement and the resurrection... Moreover the Lord, speaking through Abraham, established it well enough that the way out of the underworld lies open for no soul at all, in the parable of the poor man at peace and the rich man in lamentation. He said that no messenger could be dispatched back from there to tell us about the organization of the underworld⁵. On this occasion at

² For ancient ghosts in general, see Headlam 1902, Wendland 1911, Collison-Morley 1912, Jobbé-Duval 1924, Bevan 1926, Dingwall 1930, Preisendanz 1935, Hickman 1938, Cumont 1945, 1949, Waszink 1954, Nardi 1960, Vrugt-Lentz 1960, Hansen 1980, Russel 1981, Kytzler 1989, Gager 1992, Felton 1999a, Ogden 1999, 2001, 2008, 2009, 2014, Stramaglia 1999, Nagy 2004, Luck 2006, Lugli 2008.

³ Lk. 16. 19-31 (the parable of Lazarus and the rich man), Jo. 5. 28-29, 11. 24, 1Cor. 15. 52, 1Thess. 4. 13-17, 1Pet. 3. 19, Rev. 20. 5, 11-13.

⁴ Hippol. *Contra Platonem de causa universi*, PG 10. 796.

⁵ Lk. 16. 26.

any rate one might have thought that it could have been allowed to bring about belief in Moses and the prophets (Tertullian, *De an.* 57 = MWG no. 112)⁶.

Of course, this tenet discomfited the Fathers when they had to account for the Witch of Endor's apparent success in raising the ghost of Samuel, as endorsed by the first Book of Samuel?

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

Let us turn to the first of our traditional stories, 'The Haunted House', the parallel and related motifs of which are laid out in Table 1 (there is not the opportunity to advert to them all in the following discussion). The earliest extant full telling of the story is found in a letter of the younger Pliny, of ca. AD 107. Here a derelict and abandoned house in Athens was haunted by a ghost in the form of a filthy and emaciated old man, with hair and beard unkempt. His appearance was preceded by the sound of the clanking of the chains on his hands and feet. The house's former occupants had been deprived of sleep and brought to sickness and death by fear of the ghost. Upon arriving in Athens the philosopher Athenodorus was attracted by the cheapness of the rent being sought for the property, and then intrigued by the explanation for it, and so keenly took the house on. He determined to spend the night alone in the house, working with his writing tablets and a lamp. In due course the rattling of the chains was heard and the apparition manifested itself before him. It beckoned him with its finger, as if summoning him (this is a nice narrative misdirection on Pliny's part: readers are surely intended to imagine that the ghost is summoning Athenodorus to join it in death). Unruffled, Athenodorus eventually followed the ghost, taking his lamp with him. It escorted him to the house's inner courtyard and disappeared. Athenodorus marked the spot of its disappearance with grass and leaves. The next day he advised the city magistrates to dig at the point indicated, and a rotting skeleton bound in chains was found beneath. The bones were gathered and given due burial by the state, and henceforth the house was liberated of its ghost⁸.

⁶ Cf. Waszink 1947 *ad loc.* and Nock 1950.

⁷ 1 Sam. [= Septuagint 1 Reg.] 28. 3-25 (cf. J. AJ 6. 327-42). See, for example, the agonies at Just. Mart. *Dial. Tryph.* 105 Marcovich = PG 6. 721 and at Jo. Chrys. *In epistolam ad Titum commentarius* 3.2 = PG 62. 678. Christian responses to the Endor episode are reviewed at Smelik 1979 and Greer and Mitchell 2007.

⁸ Plin. *Ep.* 7. 27. 5-11 = MWG no. 320. For discussions of this story-type see above all Felton 1999a, Stramaglia 1999: 120-169 and Ogden 2007: 205-224. See also Radermacher 1902: 205-207, Wendland 1911, Müller 1932: 93-98, Herzig 1940: 26-27, Schwartz 1951: 53-54, 1960: 80-118, 1975/6a, 1975/6b, Sherwin-White 1966 on Pliny *ad loc.*, Schwartz 1969, Römer 1987, Ebner *et al.* 2001: 44-5, 178-9, Nagy 2004. For the central motif cf. Thompson 1932-1936 no. E235.2.

The tale-type was flourishing in both the Greek and Roman worlds from long before Pliny wrote, for it underpins the central and eponymous piece of comic business in Plautus' *Mostellaria* ('The Haunted House'). Plautus' Latin comedy, ca. 200 BC, was a loose adaptation of a lost Greek original, *Phasma* ('Ghost'), composed in the late fourth or early third century BC by Philemon. In the scene in question the tricky slave Tranio tries to keep his master Theopropides, who has returned unexpectedly after a long absence, from entering his house, to save the skin of the young master, who is carousing with prostitutes within. Tranio tells Theopropides that his family abandoned the house seven months before. One night he had left the lamp burning, and the young master had cried out after a dead man visited him in his sleep. The ghost explained that it was Diapontius, a guest 'from across the sea' (this is in fact the meaning of his name). Some sixty years previously Diapontius had visited the house's former owner only to be murdered by him in it, for his gold. The host had then stuck his body in the ground without due burial inside the house itself. The ghost had been compelled to dwell on in the house, instead of in the underworld: Orcus had refused to admit it, because Diapontius had died before his time. The ghost then declared that the house was consequently cursed and unholy, and bade the occupants depart. Tranio goes on to suggest that Theopropides may have doomed himself simply by touching the house while knocking on the door, and thereby, it is implied, contracting the contagion of death. Theopropides cries out in alarm that the dead are calling him to Acheron alive. And when a voice calls for Tranio from inside the house the slave too pretends to be terrified that the dead man wants his own soul: conceits that help us to understand the supposed initial significance of the gesture made by Pliny's ghost⁹.

The most elaborate pagan account of the tale is found in Lucian's satirical *Philopseudes* ('Lover of Lies') of the ca. AD 170s. The overall action is much the same as with Pliny's tale, but the location of the action has now moved to Corinth. Here the Pythagorean philosopher Arignotus tells how he learned of a long abandoned and derelict house, from which a terrifying ghost was chasing away any occupant. At once he took up his Egyptian spell books, picked up a lamp, and ventured into the house on his own by night. As he read, the ghost materialised. In appearance it was evidently much like Pliny's: it was squalid, had long hair and was 'blacker than the dark.' The ghost attacked Arignotus from all sides, even deploying a series of animal transformations, turning into a dog, a bull and a lion (the reincarnation-minded Pythagorean might well have appreciated the soul's ability to this). But Arignotus gained mastery over the ghost by uttering one of his Egyptian spells and drove it down into the ground in the corner of the room, taking a note of the place of its disappearance. The

⁹ Plaut. *Most.* 446-531 = MWG no. 116.

next morning Arignotus brought a team of diggers to the house, who duly found a mangled corpse beneath. It was given due burial, and the house ceased to be troubled¹⁰.

We pass into the Christian era now for our next telling of the tale, which we find in Constantius of Lyon's AD 480 *Life of St Germanus*. After a long day's travel (region unspecified) the priest Germanus and his entourage looked for a place to spend the night and came across an abandoned house with a ruined roof in which they proposed to stay. Two old locals tried to discourage them by warning them that the house was haunted in terrible fashion, but the warning had the opposite effect to that intended and rather enthused Germanus for the project. The house was duly occupied, and a clerk engaged in reading out scripture for the party, when Germanus fell asleep. Thereupon the clerk saw a ghost rise up before him, whilst the walls of the house were beaten upon by stones raining down. He called to Germanus, who woke at once and called upon the ghost to confess its identity and the reason for its presence, invoking the name of Christ. Thereupon the ghost laid aside its terrifying appearance and spoke with humble voice. It explained that its person and his companion had been responsible for many crimes. They now lay unburied and had taken to disturbing people, because they themselves could not find rest. The ghost asked Germanus to pray to God for the two men, so that they might be received and be given peace. Germanus took pity and commanded the ghost to show him the place where the two bodies lay. As Germanus carried a candle, the ghost led him to the most inaccessible part of the ruined house, and showed him where they were (apparently under collapsed debris, rather than in the ground). The following morning Germanus called in the locals, and they pulled the debris away to reveal two mangled bodies bound in iron chains. The limbs were unchained, clothed in linen and given due burial. A prayer of intercession was made, and rest was secured for the dead. Thenceforth the house was re-occupied without any trace of its former terrors¹¹.

The role of the ghost-delivering hero of moral and intellectual conviction has passed effortlessly and unsurprisingly from the philosopher appropriate to pagan times to the priest (and indeed saint) appropriate to Christian ones. But otherwise there is a sense that Constantius is playing with the elements of the pagan story-type without being fully sure what to do with them: we have someone reading (as in Pliny and Lucian), but the reading fails to fortify them against the terror of the ghost; we have the hero falling asleep, which leads us to expect that he will experience the ghost as a dream vision (as in Plautus), but no, he has to wake up before he can perceive it. And this lack of sureness extends, of course, to the handling of the ghost itself. In regard to this the key motifs of the pagan

¹⁰ Luc. *Philops.* 30-31 = MWG no. 115.

¹¹ Constantius *V. Germ.* 2. 10 = MWG no. 321.

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story remain in place: the bodies are restless because they lie unburied within the house they haunt, and due burial is once more the solution. But Constantius' unease with the theology of all this is palpable in his rather awkward attempt to overlay a second explanatory model for the manifestation of the ghosts: they were sinners in life and continued to be sinners in death too, and it was this fact that, for some reason, was keeping them out of the underworld. This explanation does not make any better sense in Christian theological terms than the original pagan one does, but it at least has a more Christian feel, if only by virtue of invoking the concept of sin and by virtue of calquing the notion that sinners should ultimately be excluded from Heaven itself after Resurrection.

In the late sixth century AD Gregory the Great was rather more determined to render his own version of the tale more compatible with Christian tenets. His hero is now a prince of the Church, Datus, bishop of Milan, who, whilst en route to Constantinople with his retinue, stopped off at Corinth (a venue shared with Lucian's tale). Initially having difficulty in finding a house to accommodate them all, he eventually located a large and long-empty one that seemed suitable. The locals tried to deter him from it on the basis that a devil (*diabolus*) was living in it. This of course gave Datus all the more incentive to take up residence. As he was duly taking his rest in it in the dead of night, the 'ancient enemy' made his attack, imitating, with loud voice, the roars of lions, the bleating of sheep, the braying of asses, the hissing of snakes and the squealing of pigs and shrew-mice. Datus roused himself and rebuked the devil, shaming it with the point that it was reduced to imitating pigs and shrew-mice, whereas it had once sought to imitate God. The devil withdrew from the house in its embarrassment, leaving it free from horrors¹².

Thus Gregory is able to keep his theology intact by removing the ghost (and consequently its corresponding corpse) from its own ghost story. But the replacement devil retains the original ghost in gratifyingly close embrace, when we bear in mind Tertullian's contention that apparent ghosts are in fact demons, and too often the demons responsible for the death of the person concerned in the first place. Furthermore, whilst the supplanting devil is given no physical description (indeed it is not actually specified that it manifests itself visually), its mode of attack by means of a succession of animal noises surely reaches back into the pagan past of the suppressed ghost, as can be seen when we compare the series of animal transformations by Lucian's ghost (which, were it not for the comparative evidence of Gregory's tale, we might have dismissed as a mere satirical embellishment on Lucian's part). Gregory's readers could remain doctrinally pure, but their enjoyment of his story surely continued to depend upon their awareness of the ghost in it.

¹² Greg. Mag. *Dial.* 3. 4. 1-3 = MWG no. 322; cf. Petersen 1984: 175-177.

Before we leave this particular story-type, let us look at a partial refraction of its motifs in the tradition of St Ambrose of Milan and the brother martyrs Gervasius and Protasius (the Milanese connection is suggestive, given that Gregory's Datus too was bishop of Milan). In his *City of God* of AD 426 Augustine indirectly mentions that Bishop Ambrose discovered the bodies of the martyrs by means of a dream. Crowds gathered, the emperor himself coming too, and all were then able to witness a miracle when a blind man touched the martyrs' (shared) coffin and recovered his sight. At first sight there is no hint of our story-type in Augustine's brief words, but the more elaborate account of the discovery of the martyrs' bodies in Jacobus de Voragine's *Golden Legend* of AD 1263-1267 may lead us to look at them again¹³.

Jacobus' *Lives of Gervasius and Protasius* (a single narrative) tells how the brothers had been martyred at Milan by Count Atasius in the Neronian era for refusing to sacrifice. Philip had secretly recovered their bodies and buried them in their house in a stone coffin, together with an account of their martyrdom. More than three centuries later St Ambrose was praying in the church of Sts. Nabor and Felix when two handsome youths, dressed in white, manifested themselves and prayed with him. Ambrose prayed that, should this be a true vision, he should see it again. And he did so twice more. On the third occasion St Paul also manifested himself and told Ambrose that he would find the two bodies if he dug down beneath the place he currently stood, together with the account of their martyrdom. The bodies were duly discovered in perfect condition, and exuding a sweet odour. A blind man who touched their coffin recovered his sight. Jacobus specifies that Ambrose was between sleep and wakefulness when he saw the first vision, but was very much awake for the second two. Here, to all intents and purposes, we have our ghosts, but the narrative rides roughshod over theological concerns by simply asserting that the vision of the martyrs was a 'true' one¹⁴.

Has the Jacobus version taken the etiolated elements of Augustine's account and synthesized them with motifs borrowed from our story-type, which was evidently still very meaningful almost a millennium later? Or did the tale of Gervasius and Protasius boast these motifs (and perhaps more of them) from the story-type almost from the first, and were they consequently already known to Augustine? In the latter case, Augustine will have bowdlerised the tale and effectively purged it of its ghosts. There are two reasons for thinking the latter may be the case: first, as we shall see, Augustine has been known to neutralize pagan ghost stories. Secondly, it may well be that we see refractions of an original Gervasius and Protasius ghost story in both Gregory's and Constantius' versions

¹³ Aug. *Civ. Dei* 22. 8.

¹⁴ Jac. de Vor. 85. For the text see Graesse 1850, and for an English trans., Ryan 1993.

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of our story-type. Gregory gives us a Milanese connection in choosing a bishop of Milan for his hero, whilst Constantius, somewhat pointlessly, awkwardly and puzzlingly, presents us with a pair of ghosts and a pair of bodies, albeit ones that belong to individuals of a more reprehensible nature than the two martyrs. The tales of Gervasius and Protasius become strikingly immediate for those visiting the Church of St Ambrose in Milan today, for the eponymous saint's own body is on open display beneath the church's altar, where it is flanked by the (uncoffined) bodies of Gervasius and Protasius.

Of course, the story-type continues to flourish in the modern era, in which (a sign of the times, no doubt) it gives rise to not the merest anxiety for its challenge to Christian tenets: we think, for example, of Oscar Wilde's *Canterville Ghost* (1887) and Bram Stoker's *The Judge's House* (1891).

Table 1: The motifs of the traditional Haunted House story

	Plautus	Pliny	Lucian	Constantius	Gregory
TEXT	<i>Mostellaria</i> 446-531 (MWG 116)	<i>Letters</i> 7. 27. 5-11 (MWG 320)	<i>Philopseudes</i> 30-31 (MWG 115)	<i>Life of St Germanus</i> 2. 10 (MWG 321)	<i>Dialogues</i> 3. 4. 1-3 (MWG 322)
DATE	ca. 200 BC (Plautus); IV-III BC (Philemon)	ca. AD 107	ca. AD 170s	AD 480	late VI AD
City	Athens	Athens	Corinth	--	Corinth
Long-deserted and/or derelict house	deserted for 7 months	unoccupied house, advertised for rent	long uninhabited, roof in disrepair	abandoned and decaying house	empty for many years
Effects of house's terrors	Theopropides scuttles away	ghost keeps people awake, induces sickness and death	ghost drives people from house in terror	--	--
Hero of oral and intellectual conviction	--	Athenodorus, philosopher (Stoic)?	Arignotus, Pythagorean philosopher	Bishop Germanus	Bishop Datus
Hero's nameless entourage	--	vague entourage	--	several men, including a clerk	vague entourage
Hero motivated by challenge	--	Athenodorus welcomes challenge	(motif latent in Arignotus' eagerness)	Germanus welcomes challenge, as if the house is charming	Datus does duty

Hero proposes to encounter the ghost alone in the house by night	--	Yes	Yes	Germanus goes in with very few men (<i>paucissimi</i>), including clerk	Yes
People attempt to restrain hero from reckless project	(Tranio attempts to dissuade Theopropides)	--	Arignotus' host	--	locals
Hero reads or writes	--	Athenodorus writes	Arignotus reads from Egyptian books (uses spell from them against ghost)	Constantius has his clerk-companion read from scripture	--
Hero uses a lamp	(ghost appears after Tranio leaves lamp burning)	Athenodorus writes by lamp, which he then carries to follow ghost	Arignotus reads by lamp	Germanus follows ghost with candle (or ghost leads way with candle?)	--
Description of the ghost	(named Diapontius)	old, emaciated, filthy, long beard, unkempt hair, chains and fetters	squalid, long hair, blacker than the dark	of terrifying appearance	(demon identified with the Devil)
Aural nature of terrors	(creaking door)	ghost clanks chains (repeatedly)	(ghost transforms self into dog, bull, lion)	ghost rains down stones on wall of house	demon produces animal noises (lion, sheep, ass, snake, pig shrew)
Ghost threatens to take hero down to Hades	'The dead are calling me to Acheron alive'	the ghost's beckoning finger (narrative misdirection)	--	--	--
Hero faces ghost down	--	Yes	Yes	Yes, with exorcistic technique	Yes
Hero marks the spot where the ghost goes down	--	Yes	Yes	Yes	--
Next morning hole is dug, remains discovered	(Diapontius' body is there to be found)	Yes	Yes	Yes	

A GHOST LOCATES A LOST DEPOSIT

We pass on to our second traditional story-type, which we might entitle 'A Ghost Locates a Lost Deposit'. This is found first in Herodotus' well known story of Periander and Melissa (ca. 425 BC). Herodotus tells how Periander, the tyrant of Corinth (the historical figure ruled ca. 627-587), needed to return a deposit to a guest-friend that his wife had buried before he had accidentally killed her. To find its location he sent a messenger to the Oracle of the Dead (*nekuomanteion*) at the Acheron to call up her ghost and ask it where she had put it. The ghost duly appeared but refused to divulge where the deposit lay on the basis that it was cold, for the clothes with which Melissa had been buried had not been burned properly, so that it could not have the use of them in the underworld. Periander accordingly tricked all the women of Corinth into parading out for a festival at the sanctuary of Hera in their finest clothes, but had his guards ambush them and strip them, whereupon he burned the clothing in a pit with a prayer to Melissa. The ghost was satisfied with this lavish replacement offering, and revealed the location of the deposit when consulted a second time. (The tale notoriously contains some further lurid details, which need not concern us here¹⁵).

Here there are essentially two tale-types in one: one in which a dead person is recalled to life (or returns to life of their own accord) to find for the living a precious object only they had known the location of (the deposit story-type); and one in which a ghost makes appeal for a precious item of clothing that has somehow failed to accompany it to the underworld. It is the former tale-type that concerns us here, though, as it happens, the second pagan narrative of interest, Lucian's, also combines both types, albeit in a different configuration. Again, in the *Philopseudes*, Lucian has Eucrates tell how he had been comforting himself by reading Plato's book on the soul (i.e. the *Phaedo*) on the couch seven days after the death of his wife Demaenete. As he did this he realised that Demaenete was sitting on the couch next to him. He embraced her and started to weep, but she stopped him and reproached him because, whilst otherwise completing her funeral perfectly, he had failed to burn one of her golden sandals for her. He had not been able to find it, and the ghost now told him that it was lying hidden under a chest, where Demaenete had thrown it off. As they continued to talk, their Maltese lapdog barked from underneath the couch, and the ghost disappeared at once. The sandal was subsequently retrieved from under the chest and duly burned. In this story the themes of the recovery of the lost item

¹⁵ Hdt. 5. 92 = MWG no. 150; cf. Hornblower 2013 *ad loc.* For the accidental killing, see Hdt. 3. 50-53. For discussions of this story-type see Müller 1932: 91-93, Schwartz 1951: 52, Stern 1989, Ebner *et al.* 2001: 57-59, Ogden 2001: 54-60, 2004, 2007: 195-204. For the central motif cf. Thompson 1932-1936 no. E451.2.

and the rectification of inadequate burial are rolled into one rather more neatly than they are in Herodotus¹⁶.

Let us turn now to the Christian reflexes of the deposit story-type, and first to that found in the fourth-century AD *Apophthegms of St Macarius*. This tells how at Scetis St Macarius had come across a woman weeping because her husband had died unexpectedly whilst holding a deposit, and without telling anyone where he had put it. The owner of the deposit was now taking the woman and her children as his slaves as recompense for his lost money. Macarius asked the woman to escort him and his retinue of brothers to her husband's tomb. Once she had done so, he sent her home. As the brothers prayed, Macarius summoned up the ghost of the husband and asked it where he had put the money: 'Under the leg of the bed', came the reply. Macarius then demanded of the ghost, 'Go back to sleep again now until the day of the Resurrection'. He then turned to the brothers and averred to them that it was not he that had performed this miracle for his own sake, but God that had done the deed for the sake of the widow and the orphans. He then sent the brothers back to the woman to tell her where the deposit lay, and she was able to liberate herself and her children from her creditor¹⁷.

So, a Christian sage is seen to flout the fundamental tenet of his faith in calling up a ghost in pagan fashion. The author's guilty anxiety about this shows through in the fact that he has the woman removed from the scene of the summoning, for all that she might have drawn solace from encountering her husband's ghost: it would not do to have lay people exposed to such heretical activities. And it shows through of course also in Macarius' wholly hypocritical demand to the ghost that it will not rise again until the day of Resurrection.

No less than four texts recount a version of this story-type featuring St Spyridon, who, historically, was Bishop of Trimithus in Cyprus, and took part in the council of Nicaea (AD 325). Three of these texts run along identical lines: Rufinus' *Ecclesiastical History* of ca. AD 402-403; Sozomenos' *Ecclesiastical History* of ca. AD 440-443; and the *Acts of Metrophanes and Alexander* of perhaps the seventh century AD, which is summarised for us by Photius. These tell how Spyridon's virgin daughter Eirene had been keeping a deposit for an acquaintance but had died, leaving Spyridon with no knowledge of it. After her death the distraught creditor laid siege to him, begging for his money back. Eventually Spyridon went to his daughter's grave and called to her in her grave, asking where the deposit was. She replied from the grave, telling him where, and the money was duly found and returned to its owner. Here

¹⁶ Luc. *Philops.* 27 = MWG no. 326.

¹⁷ *Apoph. S. Mac.*, PG 34. 244-245 = MWG no. 327.

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the tiniest tweak has made the traditional ghost story acceptable for Christian ears: the ghost is addressed and replies, but it does not rise and appear. The girl's soul remains firmly in its tomb, in its personal bit of the underworld, and speaks from there¹⁸.

The fourth Spyridon text, Socrates' *Ecclesiastical History* of ca. AD 440, broadly resembles the other three in its set-up, whilst specifying that the deposit was actually an item of jewellery, but it differs markedly in its handling of the problem of the ghost. Here we are told that Spyridon approached his daughter's tomb and called upon God to show him her promised resurrection in advance of the proper time, which He duly did, allowing the daughter to return to life and reveal the location of the deposit. So here Socrates has saved the ghost of the pagan story-type by the momentous feat of advancing the Day of Resurrection for her alone: the mountain is brought to Mohammed¹⁹.

Finally, Augustine too gives us a version of the story-type. In his *De cura pro mortuis gerenda* of ca. AD 422 he recounts a tale he heard in Milan (that city again!) of a man who was being maliciously pursued for his dead father's debt, although he had in fact paid it off without his son being aware of it. But his dead father appeared to him in a dream and told him where to find the receipt for the paying of the debt. There is no escaping the ghost here, even if it is dream-bound. However, Augustine tells the story not to endorse it but in order to debunk it: it decorates his argument that visions of dead people in dreams should no more be interpreted to constitute ghostly visitations than should visions of living people. And I say 'decorates' advisedly: the tale is hardly needed to prove the point, and it is evidently carried over for its own engaging nature and entertainment value²⁰.

THE MISTAKEN UNDERWORLD ESCORT

Our final story-type might be entitled 'The Mistaken underworld Escort' (its motifs are laid out in Table 2). The first manifestation of it is found in a fragment of Plutarch's *On the Soul* (ca. AD 100) preserved by Eusebius and Theodoret. This tells how one Antyllus, recovering from a faint on what was supposed to be his deathbed, declared that he was not destined to die from his present illness after all. His soul had been taken down to the underworld by 'escorts', but upon arrival they had been rebuked by their master: they had brought the wrong man, Antyllus, instead of the neighbouring cobbler Nicandas. Antyllus did indeed

¹⁸ Ruf. *HE* 10. 5; Soz. *HE* 1. 11. 4-5; Phot. *Bibl.cod.* 256 Henry = PG 104. 112, summarising the *Acta Metrophanis et Alexandri*.

¹⁹ Soc. *HE* 1. 12.

²⁰ Aug. *De cur. pro mort. ger.* 13.

survive, but Nicandas soon contracted a fever and died on the third day of it²¹.

Lucian's version of the tale in his *Philopseudes* is more elaborate and more satisfactory, for all its satirical nature. His Cleodemus tells how he lay abed on the seventh day of a fever, when a young man in white stood before him and escorted him down to Hades through a chasm. There he had a tour of the punishments of Hades' famous great criminals, Tantalus, Tityus and Sisyphus, before being brought to a courthouse. Pluto, presiding, and reviewing the names of those destined to die, flew into a rage with the escort: 'His life-thread is not yet complete, so off with him! Bring me Demylus the smith! For he is living past his spindle'. (There is a suggestion that the escort had misheard a name, Cleodemus and Demylus both sharing the *dēm* syllable). Cleodemus joyfully ran up back to the world of the living and announced to all that the neighbouring smith Demylus would die, and soon after the mourners were heard wailing for him²².

One might wonder whether this particular story-type constituted the same kind of challenge to Christian tenets as the two previous ones we have considered: it might be thought that the ghosts observed remain where they should be, in the underworld, and are merely the recipients of a visit from the land of the living. And indeed in 2Corinthians Paul himself speaks of a man in Christ that had been snatched away to paradise fourteen years ago, 'whether in his body or without his body', where he had been given a secret message²³. However, the restoration of the sick man to life does entail the return of his soul or, in effect, ghost from the underworld. There was enough ambiguity here to license different responses amongst Christian thinkers. Augustine offers his own reflection on the story-type in the *De cura pro mortuis gerenda*. He tells the tale of a reasonably well-off landowner called Curma, who lived on the outskirts of his own Hippo. He fell sick and became catatonic, being preserved from burial by only the gentlest breeze in his nose. When he finally awoke, he said at once, 'Someone should go to Curma the blacksmith's and see what's going on there'. The blacksmith was found to have died at the moment at which he had awoken. The landowner explained that whilst below he had heard the order being clarified, that it should rather be Curma the blacksmith that should be brought. During his brief sojourn in the underworld, he recognised some people he had known whilst they were alive, and he now saw them being treated in accordance with their just deserts. He was also shown paradise, and before he was dismissed back to the

²¹ Plu. fr. 176 Sandbach (περὶ ψυχῆς Book 1), *apud* Eus. *PE* 11. 36. 1 and, in part, Theodor. *Graec. affect. cur.* 11. 46; trans. at Ogden 2007: 172-173. For discussion of this story-type see Müller 1932: 88-91, Schwartz 1951: 49, Ebner *et al.* 2001: 48-49, 176-177, Ogden 2007: 171-194. For the central motif cf., broadly, Thompson 1932-1936 no. F102.

²² Luc. *Philops.* 25, trans. at Ogden 2007: 56-57.

²³ 2Cor. 12. 2-4.

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world of the living he was told, 'Go, have yourself baptized... if you wish to be in that place of the blessed.' Augustine's objection is the same again: he might have been tempted to believe in the journey of Curma's soul to the underworld and back to meet the ghosts, had Curma not also reported parallel dreams in which he had encountered people still alive, including members of the local clergy and even Augustine himself²⁴.

By contrast Gregory the Great, in his *Dialogues*, felt able to endorse the general possibility of premature visits to and returns from the underworld and refers to a number of cases known to him. He could not, however, contemplate the possibility of God presiding over errors in his management of the afterlife. Such anticipatory visits by souls, he contends, are rather deliberately contrived by God in his compassion, so that those doubting the torments of Hell can be brought to a delivering state of belief in timely fashion. He proceeds to record the experiences of a distinguished man name Stephanus, as reported to him, supposedly, by the man himself. He had died whilst staying in Constantinople, and was taken down to Hell, where he saw the torments for himself. He was brought before a judge, but the judge protested that the wrong Stephanus had been brought: he had required rather Stephanus the blacksmith, who lived next door to him. His soul was restored to his body, and the blacksmith died in the same hour. It is noteworthy that, despite Augustine's introductory protestations about God's infallibility, the motif of the mistaken escort proudly remains in his Stephanus story, and receives no qualification there. Why spoil a well-established and much-loved tale?²⁵

CONCLUSION

Our conclusion is announced in our title and has been repeatedly adverted to along the way: these ghost stories continued to thrive in the Christian era, despite their religious unacceptability, by virtue of the fact that they were just too good to let go²⁶. And so a varied range of accommodations was made for them, with the ghosts effectively being written out of their own stories in different ways. But we can hardly doubt that even the most pious of Christian consumers knew full well that they were still reading and enjoying ghost stories. And perhaps it was the message ostensibly denied that continued to be the important one. After all, the most crucial claim of all to establish was the soul's actual survival of death, and this is something that the good old-fashioned ghost story did rather well. We might bear in mind that in the mid second century AD one of the very earliest

²⁴ Aug. *De cur. pro mort. ger.* 12. 15 Zycha = PL 40. 602, trans. at Ogden 2007: 173-174.

²⁵ Greg. Mag. *Dial.* 4. 36 de Vogüé = PL 77. 382-384, trans. at Ogden 2007: 174-175.

²⁶ And indeed such ghost stories continued to thrive throughout the medieval era: see, e.g., Schmitt 1994 and, for a convenient collection, Joynes 2001.

Fathers of the Church, Justin Martyr, had appealed to what was for him the reality of the manifestation of ghosts in the realm of the living as proof not only of the soul's continued existence, but also of its continuing perceptual abilities: 'Necromancies, divinatory observations effected through uncorrupted boys, the evocations of human souls, the so-called dream-senders, together with the mages and assistants [*paredroi*] and all that is done by people that know about these things – all this should persuade you that souls enjoy perceptual abilities after death too'²⁷. The point is well made too by the fourth-century AD *Homilies* attributed to Clement of Rome. Here Clement supposedly tells how in his youthful desperation to be reassured of the soul's survival of death he planned to travel to Egypt and find a mage there upon whom he could prevail, with a great deal of money, to evocate a soul for him in an act of necromancy, on the pretence that he wanted to consult it on business. But the real purpose would have been simply to learn whether the soul was immortal by his observation of it. He was, however, deterred from such a course of action by a philosopher friend who warned him that a life of guilt and impiety would lie ahead for him, whether or not he was successful in his enterprise: 'For they say that God is hostile to those that disturb souls after their dissolution from the body'²⁸.

Table 2: The motifs of the Mistaken Underworld Escort story

	Plutarch	Lucian	Augustine	Gregory
TEXT	F176 Sandbach (<i>περι ψυχῆς</i> book 1), <i>apud</i> Eusebius <i>Praeparatio Evangelica</i> 11. 36. 1 and Theodoret <i>Graecarum affectionum curatio</i> 11. 46	<i>Philopseudes</i> 25	<i>De cura pro mortuis gerenda</i> 12. 15 Zycha = <i>PL</i> 40. 602	<i>Dialogi</i> 4. 36 de Vogüé = <i>PL</i> 77. 382-384
DATE	ca. AD 100	ca. AD 170s	ca. AD 422	late VI AD
Narrator specifies his close relationship with the victim of the mistake	Antyllus, the speaker's present host	the speaker Cleodemus himself	Curma, a man baptised by Augustine	Stephanus, a distinguished friend
Victim's illness	illness (with Nicandas dying of fever)	fever	illness	illness

²⁷ Just. Mart. *Apol.* 1. 18 = *MWG* no. 323.

²⁸ [Clem. Rom.] *Hom.* 1. 5 = *MWG* no. 325.

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	Plutarch	Lucian	Augustine	Gregory
TEXT	F176 Sandbach (<i>περὶ ψυχῆς</i> book 1), <i>apud</i> Eusebius <i>Praeparatio Evangelica</i> 11. 36. 1 and Theodoret <i>Graecarum affectionum curatio</i> 11. 46	<i>Philopseudes</i> 25	<i>De cura pro mortuis gerenda</i> 12. 15 Zycha = PL 40. 602	<i>Dialogi</i> 4. 36 de Vogüé = PL 77. 382-384
DATE	ca. AD 100	ca. AD 170s	ca. AD 422	late VI AD
Victim's body appears to be (almost) dead and is threat of cremation or burial			Curma preserved from burial merely by the light breeze in his nose	Stephanus preserved for want of an available undertaker
Victim recognizes individual dead people or witnesses their punishments		Cleodemus sees the punishments of the great criminals Tantalus, Tityus and Sisyphus	Curma observes the appropriate fates of dead people he had previously known	Stephanus sees the torments of the dead in which he had previously failed to believe
Escort brings the victim before a king or judge figure, who orders the mistake corrected	a master (<i>kyrios</i>)	Pluto (?), a king-figure presiding over a court	(a vague interlocutor only is mentioned)	a judge (<i>iudex</i>)
Error due to a confusion between individuals of similar names	<i>Antyllus</i> and <i>Nicandas</i>	Cleodemus and <i>Demylus</i>	Curma and Curma	Stephanus and Stephanus
Victim is a man of wealth and dignity	<i>Antyllus</i> , the wealthy host of a dinner party	Cleodemus, the leisured associate of the rich <i>Eucrates</i>	Curma, a reasonably well-off landowner	Stephanus a distinguished man
Person truly destined to die is a hammering craftsman	<i>Nicandas</i> the cobbler	<i>Demylus</i> the smith	Curma the smith	Stephanus the smith
Victim returns to life just in time to predict the death of person truly destined to die	<i>Antyllus</i> predicts the death of <i>Nicandas</i>	Cleodemus predicts the death of <i>Demylus</i>	Curma predicts the death of his namesake, effectively	Stephanus predicts the death of his namesake, effectively