

## INTRODUCTION: THE GHOSTS OF EARLY MODERN ENGLAND

Speaking in 1778, the famous man of letters and social commentator Samuel Johnson usefully summed up the uncertainty surrounding visions of ghosts in eighteenth-century England: 'It is wonderful that five thousand years have now elapsed since the creation of the world, and still it is undecided whether or not there has ever been an instance of the spirit of any person appearing after death. All argument is against it, but all belief is for it.'<sup>1</sup> Johnson was unwilling to credit every reported appearance of ghosts, yet he remained firmly convinced that the souls of the dead could and did revisit their former habitations. Johnson's faithful friend James Boswell endorsed his opinion, and members of Johnson's learned acquaintance also claimed personal experience of such otherworldly encounters.<sup>2</sup> Far from being idle tittle-tattle, Johnson considered the subject of ghosts to be 'one of the most important that can come before the human understanding.'<sup>3</sup> This book seeks to place Johnson's thoughts on this subject in a wider historical context. It will explore the ways in which ghost beliefs both fitted and clashed with the changing cultural landscapes of English society in the long eighteenth century, and with the daily lives of the men and women who lived in it. Through an analysis of ghost stories, which are understood here as complex expressions of ghost beliefs, this is a study in the imaginative force and flexibility of an idea, or rather a set of ideas, surrounding the nature, status and location of the dead, and the changing meanings attached to their appearances.

Particular ideas and beliefs have particular histories; they enjoy cycles of influence and are also subject to revision, transformation and rejection. In the case of ghosts, the religious, social and political transformations of early modern England presented a series of challenges to well-established explanations of what ghosts were and where they came from. Spirits of the dead were believed to visit the living on a regular basis in medieval England, and these episodes were closely associated with the theology and devotional practices of the Catholic Church. It was widely accepted that ghosts were the souls of the dead who returned to confess their sins to the living to speed their passage through the fires of purgatory. Clergymen

readily accepted reported visions of ghosts, and they were routinely overlaid with didactic messages to encourage the lay community to prepare their souls for the afterlife through repentance and holy living.<sup>4</sup> The mortuary culture and liturgical practices of late medieval England similarly encouraged the widespread conviction that the communities of the living and the dead were inseparable.<sup>5</sup> However, in the aftermath of England's Protestant Reformation from the mid-sixteenth century, the theology of ghosts was radically transformed. The doctrine of purgatory was abolished by Protestant reformers who deemed it both unscriptural and unscrupulous, since it had allowed the Catholic Church to exploit widespread fears of purgatorial pain for pecuniary gain.<sup>6</sup> The elimination of this middle place between heaven and hell meant that the theological rationale that explained *how* dead souls were able to return to earth was swept away. A number of Protestant apologists also advocated the complete eradication of ghosts from the eschatology of the English Church, because their Catholic opponents continued to perform miracles and exorcisms to articulate claims that theirs was the true faith. Nevertheless, this topic was hotly contested and many Protestant clergy and lay folk were not ready to abandon the possibility that some orders of spirit might yet appear in the material world. Within the theological strictures favoured by English Calvinists, it seemed increasingly illogical to argue that spirits were the souls of the dear departed. The doctrine of predestination taught that the fate of human souls in the afterlife was preordained, and since purgatory no longer existed the dead were stripped of independent agency. Instead, it seemed much more likely that humans were visited by ministering angels carrying out divine orders, or by the devil's minions who sought to tempt the faithful from the path of righteousness. In 1585 such speculations led Archbishop Sandys to confidently declare that 'the gospel hath chased away walking spirits'.<sup>7</sup>

The history of the *theology* of ghosts must, however, be distinguished from the history of ghost *beliefs*. Peter Marshall has recently produced an impressive survey of changing attitudes towards ghostly visions in Elizabethan and Jacobean society, which powerfully demonstrates how these episodes stubbornly refused to go away. Protestant opinion about the nature and existence of ghosts was clearly divided, and a flexible discourse of providentialism allowed large sections of the population to incorporate preternatural wonders within their religious world-views. Ordinary people also displayed too deep an emotional attachment to the dead to fully discount the possibility that departed loved ones might communicate with them once more.<sup>8</sup> Changes in the theological landscape thus had a profound, though by no means predictable, effect upon public and private conceptions of ghosts in post-Reformation England.

The long-term effects of these religious shifts will be examined in the pages that follow. Yet the meanings of ghostly appearances, and the existence of ghosts *per se*, were also challenged by the tenets of the so-called scientific revolution. The term 'revolution' is a somewhat imprecise way to describe the piecemeal incur-

sions that natural philosophers (or scientists) were making into Aristotelian and Ptolemaic teaching about the make-up of the material and immaterial worlds. Nevertheless, what *was* revolutionary was the emergence of a new epistemology – that is, a new way of thinking about the world. Typified by the work of Francis Bacon, natural philosophers insisted that received wisdom about natural, preternatural and supernatural phenomena had to be tested and proven by hard fact. The years 1660–1800 therefore represent a particularly significant phase in the history of ghost beliefs, since this period saw them put under the microscope as never before. The scientific laboratories of the Royal Society destabilized the traditional epistemological structures of early modern England by insisting that all new and known facts were authenticated by direct observation and empirical data. The principles of this new metaphysics also pervaded cultural life and literature thanks to the blossoming of a vibrant public sphere via a network of coffee-houses and the periodical press. Reports of ghostly visits and supernatural occurrences were consequently dissected and anatomized by enlightened philosophers, medical practitioners, ladies and gentlemen of fashion, and some of the leading lights of natural philosophy. Countless ghost stories were exposed as frauds, impostures or as mental delusions of the weak and credulous as a result of an obsessive drive to distinguish fact from fiction. The rapid commercial success of the middling and upper sorts also led to an attendant desire for social distinction, in which ghost beliefs were increasingly marginalized as the fantasies of the vulgar who had not been blessed by the light of reason. Couched in the rhetoric of Enlightenment, religious life seemed scarcely less corrosive of such notions, with many clergy arguing that miraculous signs and wonders were completely out of step with the age of reason, especially since the Protestant Church now appeared secure in its triumph over Catholicism. In light of these developments, it is hardly surprising that many historical narratives of eighteenth-century England and Europe have assumed the rapid demise of belief in the supernatural and occult worlds.

In practice of course, the apparent decline of ghost belief was far from clear cut. The story that remains untold, and the one that forms the core of this book, describes how ghost beliefs negotiated these obstacles, retaining both vitality and relevance in a period of large-scale social, economic, religious and political change. If ghost stories and other occult phenomena were subjected to closer scrutiny as a result of the new empirical philosophy, the networks of gentlemanly science were not uniformly hostile to such reports, especially when they were attended with credible circumstances and substantial witnesses.<sup>9</sup> Enlightenment obsession with unseen and invisible powers in fact ensured that ghost stories could sometimes command widespread fascination, since they had the potential to reveal hidden secrets about the orders of God and nature. Even if individuals were unwilling to admit belief in the physical reality of ghosts, the *idea* of ghosts, of an existence beyond the human and domestic, played a significant role

in the construction of personal identities. The ghosts of gothic fiction and sublime poetry complemented explorations of the interior self, satisfied longings for individual immortality, and provided fuel for the creative imagination. Contemplation of ghost stories helped to frame particular questions that lay at the heart of polite society, and which in turn cultivated the human mind, which was the cornerstone of Enlightenment endeavour. In many ways then, ghost stories expressed the priorities and preoccupations of eighteenth-century life and thought.

On a day-to-day basis, ghost stories also have important things to say about the character of religious life and spirituality, and about the lifestyles, social mores and emotions of ordinary men and women. They similarly provide important insights into the psychological side effects of enlightenment, consumerism and imperialism. The wider historical import of these tales lies in the access they can provide to the thoughts and concerns of people who might otherwise remain hidden from the restricted gaze of the historian. The central aim of this book is to reinsert ghost beliefs and ghost stories into the imaginative and material histories of the long eighteenth century and to suggest that they played a significant role in forging the distinctive character of English society in these years. Ghost beliefs must then be rescued from the realm of *superstition*, since this term implies a stasis and discordance with the prevailing historical forces that characterized eighteenth-century English society – something that is simply not borne out by surviving evidence. This study reconstructs the diverse public and private contexts in which ghost stories performed as legitimate and effective social narratives by focusing on the places, spaces and circumstances in which they featured. Ghost beliefs and the ghost stories through which they were expressed were then a vital part of the eighteenth-century cultural experience.

Post-1770s England has been identified as the golden age of gothic fictions, and the literary significance of English ghost stories in eighteenth-century culture has been explored in some depth.<sup>10</sup> By contrast, the historical import of these narratives remains underexplored. This historiographical gap is no mere oversight and must be attributed in large part to the commanding influence of Sir Keith Thomas's canonical text, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*. Thomas offered a brilliant and comprehensive survey of why men and women of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries believed in ghosts. So convincing was his thesis that people stopped seeing ghosts in the eighteenth century because they 'were losing their social relevance' and were rendered 'intellectually impossible' by the progress of Enlightenment thought and practice that few have dared to challenge his conclusions.<sup>11</sup> Although the quality of Thomas's work has since the 1970s given legitimacy and impetus to historical studies of a wide variety of popular belief, paradoxically, it may have proved a deterrent to more in-depth historical investigations of ghost beliefs in eighteenth-century England. Alongside Thomas, Ronald Finucane has briefly examined eighteenth-century ghost beliefs as part of a broader chronological span, but neither account has done much to dethrone

the prevailing characterization of this period as a time of dwindling belief in the preternatural world, dominated instead by discourses of empiricism, desacralization and rationalism.<sup>12</sup> This historiographical neglect provides a central motivation for this study, since the decline of ghost beliefs has been both overstated and mistimed. Historians have neglected the variety and fragmentation of learned opinion surrounding the reality of ghosts, as well as the complex attitudes towards ghosts that surfaced among different religious, social, gender and age groupings in this period.

Historians of eighteenth-century England frequently assume a disjuncture between the idea of ghosts and the civilizing missions of Enlightenment thought, the commercial and colonial emphasis of Georgian society, and the growing desire for social distinction implicit in new developments in art, philosophy and literature. The few historians who have addressed the status of otherworldly phenomena in this chronology have largely rejected its significance. Lorraine Daston and Katherine Park described an emerging cultural opposition between the enlightened and the marvellous, with the former triumphant and the latter characteristic of vulgarity and ignorance.<sup>13</sup> According to such narratives, belief in the interventions of the divine and of ghostly messengers was deemed to be in conflict with the central Enlightenment focus on man as a perfectible being and as the essential motor of social development and progress.<sup>14</sup> At one level, historians are of course correct to identify some clash between ghost stories and the new intellectual currents that circulated in these years. Ghostly interventions undermined the self-regulating mechanisms of the natural world and questioned overly optimistic views of man and nature, reminding contemporaries of the omnipotence of God and of the fragility of the human condition. By highlighting inconsistencies in historical discourses of enlightenment and desacralization, ghost beliefs deserve a more sophisticated interpretation as sites of cultural contestation. Indeed, the sheer volume of ghost stories that was produced and purchased between 1660 and 1800 suggests that a reassessment of these narratives is long overdue. Furthermore, the familiar expectation that ghosts intervened amongst the living to regulate social mores and to publicize and punish moral abuse locates these preternatural phenomena as essential accompaniments to the historical developments of eighteenth-century life, restraining the worst extremes of empiricist and materialist thought, and combating the immoral excesses of an increasingly consumer-orientated society. As the fundamental expression of ghost beliefs, ghost stories must be recast both as essential complements to processes of so-called modernization, and as notable evidence of counter-currents in eighteenth-century thought. It will become clear in the chapters that follow that ghost beliefs were geographically and socially diffuse, incorporated multiple meanings, surfaced in diverse contexts, and were subject to ongoing revision, rationalization and transformation between 1660 and 1800. Ghost stories were important barometers of cultural change that add balance and complexity to characteriza-

tions of eighteenth-century society as a secularizing, rational and anti-miraculous monolith.

Borrowing from the sociological terminology of Max Weber, it was Bob Scribner who associated the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries with accelerating the process of disenchantment begun by the Protestant Reformation. Scribner and Keith Thomas both noted the exceptions and ambiguities in this thesis, and recent revisionist work by Jonathan Barry, Stuart Clark, Marion Gibson, Peter Lake, Michael Questier, Jane Shaw and Alexandra Walsham has further enhanced our understanding of how Protestantism fostered its own lively brand of signs, miracles and wonders.<sup>15</sup> Nonetheless, with the exception of Owen Davies and Ronald Hutton, who have examined the vitality of witchcraft beliefs in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, such a comprehensive reassessment has yet to be attempted for the eighteenth century in general and for ghost beliefs in particular.<sup>16</sup> This is partly due to the traditional and somewhat artificial division of labour between historians of early modern England, who tend to study the period up to 1640 or 1700, and historians of the eighteenth century, who have tended to shape their narratives in anticipation of nineteenth-century economic, social, political and religious change. As a result, important continuities between these two chronologies have been obscured and the eighteenth century has all too often been regarded as a very different world from that which went before, and to which the heyday of ghost beliefs, and supernatural beliefs more generally, supposedly belonged.

## Histories of the Supernatural

Thanks to the work of Peter Marshall, Jean-Claude Schmitt and Nancy Caciola, a more respectable historiography of ghost beliefs is now emerging for medieval and early modern Europe, but this has not extended to include the long eighteenth century in England.<sup>17</sup> This neglect provides another justification for the present work and a further reason for the current marginalization of ghost beliefs in historical studies of this period, which have been subsumed thus far under the well-heeled historiography of witchcraft. Keith Thomas classified belief in ghosts as an allied belief of witchcraft and too few historians have distinguished between the two categories, even though contemporaries frequently did so. To explain both the persistence and cessation of belief in supernatural wonders historians have employed regional and national comparisons. Yet the category of the supernatural must itself be broken down to appreciate the important differences between the phenomena generally included under this heading.

Whilst concepts of gender will feature in this study and played a part in fashioning responses towards ghost stories, discussions of female physiology and psychology are less relevant in explaining the intensity and longevity of ghost beliefs than they

are in delineating attitudes towards witchcraft.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, the need to separate the historical trajectory of ghost beliefs from that of witches is further demonstrated by the work of Ian Bostridge, which has reinforced the association between the early eighteenth century and the flagging influence of witchcraft beliefs on the public stage. Bostridge also described how the Witchcraft Act was removed from the statute books in 1736 amidst heated religious and political squabbles between opposing Tory and Whig politicians.<sup>19</sup> Debate over the existence and nature of ghosts did take on significant political overtones at various intervals over the course of the eighteenth century and became tainted with popish associations in contemporary polemic. But these beliefs were not exclusively linked to a dwindling Tory or High-Church faction and were variously adopted and appropriated by men and women from a variety of political and confessional backgrounds. Moreover, the repeal of the Witchcraft Act was intimately linked to the legal and criminal context of witchcraft accusations that again marks a key distinction from the status of ghost beliefs. It was never a crime to believe in ghosts, or to claim to have seen and conversed with one, and ghost beliefs provided no direct justification for torture, trials or executions, or for outbreaks of informal persecution.

Owen Davies's work has highlighted the persistence of popular belief in witchcraft beyond the 1736 repeal: the criminal associations of witchcraft remained intact, with individuals and communities attempting both to prosecute and persecute suspected witches for material crimes into the nineteenth century and beyond.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, as the examples of John Webster and Francis Hutchinson demonstrate, distaste for the idea of witchcraft, for the material consequences of its punishment and for its polemical associations created greater hostility towards the idea of witchcraft among educated men and women in the years 1660–1800 than did the idea of ghosts. Both Webster and Hutchinson publicly dismissed the legitimacy of witchcraft whilst affirming that ghost stories retained important spiritual meanings. If diabolical witchcraft was conceived of as an inversion of right religion, then ghost stories by way of contrast were more flexible and could be fashioned more easily as orthodox supports of Restoration and eighteenth-century Anglicanism and Methodism. These key differences help to explain why ghost beliefs deserve an independent historiography from that of witchcraft, since they were less offensive to the educated and to the clerical ministry and thus enjoyed a longer shelf life, in various forms of public discourse.

In the field of witchcraft studies, the new social history of the 1960s has led to a flood of micro-histories, extending and complicating understandings of the chronological, geographical and social spread of witchcraft beliefs, presenting the ideas of ordinary people and introducing feminist discourses to transform historical understandings of this phenomenon. Historical conceptions of ghost beliefs have not developed along such lines and have only been studied for the eighteenth century in outmoded intellectual terms that neglect the variety and fragmentation of scholarly opinion and that lay a heavy emphasis on the impact of natural phi-

losophy in exploding the legitimacy of ghost stories. Michael Hunter and Stuart Clark, among others, have outlined the limitations of this functionalist approach, and the complementarity of natural philosophy with deeply-held convictions about the intervention of otherworldly forces is now commonplace. The response of natural philosophers and medics to the realm of ghost beliefs supports the contention that the scientific and preternatural arenas could be mutually reinforcing. Nonetheless, exclusive focus on intellectual responses to ghost beliefs relies too heavily on the presumed chasm between learned and unlearned conceptions of the spirit world. Thus, whilst Peter Burke's suggestion that the eighteenth century witnessed the divergence of high and low cultures remains credible, the presumed conflict between the 'great' and 'little' traditions requires qualification since it oversimplifies fluid social categories, downplays important cultural interactions and neglects the agency of the more marginalized social groupings.<sup>21</sup> This study will highlight a two-way process of cultural exchange by refusing to correlate the labels of 'sceptic' and 'believer' with hierarchies of wealth and social status. Such a standpoint is essential in explaining how and why real-life experiences of ghosts were repeatedly translated from speech communities into manuscript and into diverse printed forms. The production and consumption of ghost stories highlights important exchanges between different social groups, and between local and national cultures.

Finally, historical interpretations of ghost beliefs have been heavily influenced by literary scholars, who identify the late eighteenth century as a crucial moment in the evolution of the ghost story. The explosion of gothic fictions and dramatic representations of ghosts has been interpreted as part of a wider reassessment of attitudes towards the preternatural world, in which the decline of serious belief in ghosts was replaced by an appreciation of ghost stories as aesthetic spectacles. This thesis will be contested by analysing the ambiguous relationship between fact and fiction in these tales. Fictional ghost stories must also be positioned within a wider historical framework to appreciate the multiple contexts in which the figure of the ghost was configured. The simple reduction of ghost stories to the category of frivolous entertainment seriously neglects the complex cultural meanings attached to them.

## Ghosts and the Preternatural

Before proceeding any further, the type of ghosts that haunt this text must be defined more carefully. In order to distinguish the particular meanings attached to ghosts, I am not concerned here with anonymous angelic or evil spirits such as are generally involved in cases of witchcraft and demonic possession. Instead I have followed contemporary terminology in defining the eighteenth-century ghost, and my object of study, as 'A spirit appearing after death.'<sup>22</sup> Most often,

these ghosts were well known or related to those who saw them. The term 'ghost' was most often used in this period to refer to the familiar spirit of a dead person, but there was also significant crossover with the words 'apparition' and 'spectre'. According to Samuel Johnson's *Dictionary* of 1755, 'spectre' referred to 'a walking spirit' or an 'appearance of persons dead'.<sup>23</sup> Where these terms were used to refer to the spirit of a dead person, they are included in this study. The shifting vocabulary of ghosts will form an important part of the chapters that follow.

Just as the concept of ghosts must be separated from that of witches, so the term *supernatural* must be carefully distinguished from *preternatural*. *Supernatural* refers to something above the power of nature, whereas *preternatural* denotes something irregular, or out of step with the natural way of things. This distinction is especially important for understanding the fluctuating legitimacy of ghost stories in intellectual discourse throughout the long eighteenth century, which took place amidst wrangles over the correct identification and classification of natural and spiritual phenomena. Preternatural wonders should be located somewhere in between the natural and supernatural worlds, as something out of the ordinary, yet potentially explicable by a combination of natural law and divine agency. The ghosts of this book hovered on the boundaries of these categories, but the most frequent descriptions and pictorial representations of ghosts suggest that, by and large, they should be classified as preternatural phenomena, as they were by Samuel Johnson.<sup>24</sup> Ghosts usually appeared in familiar human form, sometimes in the clothes they wore when alive or more often in the winding sheets in which they had been buried. Contemporary advances in optical instrumentation and chemical knowledge destabilized the iconography of ghosts and slowly rendered some of them incorporeal and shadowy substances. Yet, in spite of this, ghosts were rarely described or depicted as transparent. Instead they were regularly invested with human qualities, and were thought capable of moving material objects and of inflicting physical harm upon the living. Similarly, those who were confronted by ghosts believed that they could inflict material damage by shooting or stabbing the spirit with conventional weapons.<sup>25</sup> Ghosts were thus thought to possess a curious hybrid of divine qualities and human characteristics, which must be partly explained by their intimate association with the physical processes of death and decomposition. The prominent position of ghosts within contemporary mortuary culture ensured that they retained important affinities with the natural world; indeed they provided an important bridge between the natural and preternatural worlds. These associations help to explain why ghostly phenomena were important objects of study for natural philosophers, and why reports of their appearance inspired morbid contemplations about death and immortality.

## Ghost Beliefs and Ghost Stories

How do historians access the question of belief? This perennial historical problem is one to which scholars have offered a variety of solutions, all insightful but none comprehensive. By their very nature, personal beliefs are ephemeral, elusive and almost impossible to reconstruct on a large scale from the sources available to the historian. The material that does survive in the form of diaries, for example, is usually weighted to reflect the views of literate, middle- and upper-class men and neglects the histories of more marginalized social groups whose literacy skills were less developed or who found little leisure time or need to record their own thoughts and feelings in writing. In order to combat this bias and to gauge the depth and social diffusion of ghost beliefs, I am not going to focus solely on the rich canonical literature of the period in which a few eminent individuals debated the reality of ghosts, but on a whole gamut of genres and texts in which ghost stories cropped up and that were accessed by men, women and children of all kinds. Guided by the pioneering work of Bernard Capp, Margaret Spufford and Tessa Watt, who have done so much to underline the importance of the cheap print market for delineating the attitudes and beliefs of even the poorest sections of early modern society, my analysis begins at the least expensive end of the print market, with the ghosts of ballad and chapbook fame.<sup>26</sup> From the most widely disseminated texts, my study extends through to the most expensive and socially exclusive works.

Eighteenth-century England saw a great proliferation in the publication and purchasing of ghost stories in a wide diversity of forms and genres, but my decision to examine this inclusive spread of texts also has methodological implications. By juxtaposing different kinds of texts and audiences, I want to emphasize the place of eighteenth-century ghost stories as sites of cross-over and interaction between oral and literate communities, and between different confessional, gender and age groupings. The physical production, dissemination and consumption of ghost stories will also be used to highlight the mixed marketplace that existed for these publications. This study therefore approaches the question of belief through narrative, and it combines close textual analysis with a broad conception of historical change. Concepts drawn from socio-linguistic theory and from the sociology of literature are therefore crucial to this discussion. Focus falls on why ghost stories were told, the ways in which they were manufactured and disseminated, how they performed as texts and how they tried to shape the imaginations of consumers. Readers must be granted a degree of autonomy in constructing independent meaning from the written word, but these meanings were inevitably influenced by the text itself, which was the product of dynamic interaction between market-conscious writers, commercially-minded publishers and reader expectations.

By focusing on the production, circulation and consumption of ghost stories, I also hope to avoid a reductive analysis of *elite* and *popular* ghost beliefs. The same

texts could appeal to mixed audiences, and many ghost stories were collective productions that highlight mutual exchange between different social, religious and gender groupings in a chronology that has often been associated with the distancing of high and low cultures, the fragmentation of Protestant denominations and the separation of male and female activities into public and private contexts.<sup>27</sup> These publicly-instituted narratives therefore had important affinities with the beliefs, experiences and attitudes of the society that they represented. Relevant here is Pierre Bourdieu's concept of the field of cultural production, in which the value of a cultural product is determined by the way it fits with the interests and preoccupations of the society in which it is produced.

Given that works of art exist as symbolic objects only if they are known and recognized, that is, socially instituted as works of art and received by spectators capable of knowing and recognizing them as such, the sociology of art and literature has to take as its object not only the material production but also the symbolic production of the work.<sup>28</sup>

In the words of Kevin Sharpe and Steven Zwicker, 'we are what we read'.<sup>29</sup> The ghost stories of eighteenth-century England were constructed from the raw imaginative materials available to their authors. In so far as these texts were intended for commercial success, they had to connect with the expectations and tastes of readers rather than simply reflecting the views of an isolated and culturally dissonant individual. As Terry Eagleton has argued, a text is not valuable in and of itself. Readers determine its value in relation to their own ideals and preferences.<sup>30</sup> The relationship between text and society, between ghost stories and ghost beliefs, was characterized by symbiosis and mutual exchange. Ghost stories are therefore understood in this book as *things*, as desirable material products, but also as imaginative resources that linked up to the mental processes and narrative habits of daily life. These texts reflected the complex and often contested nature of ghost beliefs, but they also shaped them afresh in line with the priorities of public and private discourse. The imaginative and physical production of ghost stories, the techniques used to entice and persuade readers, and the reception, recycling and raw statistics of publication success are thus of central importance. The changing status of ghost beliefs will be studied through the material culture of individual texts and also by assessing the importance of the diverse literary genres in which ghost stories appeared. I want then to support Lennard Davis's contention that there are important, if complex, connections between literary genres and historical change.<sup>31</sup> The migration of ghost stories between different categories of literature therefore reflects shifts in the way that they were conceived in wider society.

People read ghost stories for a number of different reasons, which was reflected in the myriad ways that authors, printers and publishers catered for divergent consumer interests by varying the format, content, linguistic structure, typeface,

illustration, length and price of these publications. The role of the printing industry is foundational to this study since it configured ghost stories in a wider range of printed forms than ever before, including cheap ballads and chapbooks, sermons, extended religious tracts, medical treatises, scientific journals, educational treatises, newspapers, periodicals, national histories, folkloric collections, local histories, novels, poems, drama and working-class autobiography. Such diversity highlights the fluidity of the idea of ghosts as well as the persistent social relevance and flexibility of ghost stories that migrated between traditional texts and new literary genres.

Refinements of the formal techniques of printing also enabled texts to be produced more cheaply and distributed more widely than ever before, and the physical circulation of ghost stories in eighteenth-century England certainly benefited from these advances. However, the impact of the volume and variety of printed ghost stories for delineating perceptions of ghosts is nonetheless ambiguous and the proliferation of these narratives was not a straightforward reflection of serious belief in the existence of ghosts. As Walter Ong has argued, the technology of print could also be a 'time-obviating and otherwise radically decontextualising mechanism.'<sup>32</sup> In this sense, the positive benefits of the commercialization process to which ghost stories were subjected in these years must be regarded with a degree of caution. By translating these essentially oral narratives into printed forms and thus distancing them from the original contexts that often secured their legitimacy, the enshrining of ghost stories in print may have helped in the long term to undermine the authenticity of these narratives as their key formulas became more familiar, less extraordinary and increasingly vulnerable to manipulation.

This tension between the physical production of ghost stories and the ways in which they influenced belief will be addressed by examining how authors and publishers intended readers to believe the essential truth of ghost stories. Advocates of reader-response theory have demonstrated the plurality of ways in which individual readers appropriated the same texts, and yet the assumed relationship between narrative and belief has persisted as one of the key modes of historical enquiry in recent years. As Eamon Duffy, Ian Green, Peter Lake, Alexandra Walsham and Tessa Watt have demonstrated, it was the presumed connection between the printed word and the shape of lay piety that led Protestant churchmen of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries to engage with a whole variety of cheap printed wares.<sup>33</sup> As the main body of this book will illustrate, this technique was still current in the eighteenth century, although the messages with which these texts were inscribed were updated to suit contemporary need and the popularity of printed sermons provided an alternative outlet for this process of instruction and modification.

Since this study relies heavily on textual analysis of ghost stories, it is imperative to emphasize that contemporaries perceived the relationship between text

and belief to be a dynamic and affective one. Indeed, the ghost stories examined here display important techniques that were intended to fascinate, persuade and instruct potential readers. As Chapter 2 describes in more detail, the ghost stories of cheap print were especially notable for incorporating dialogue, a high density of circumstantial detail and character analysis – techniques usually associated with oral forms of communication. This methodology may well have been favoured to keep printed ghost stories as close as possible to their original oral contexts and to allow them to flow back into speech by facilitating the public performance of these narratives in the local alehouse or in domestic settings. The frequent and dramatic use of visual imagery in printed ghost stories is also suggestive of the way in which readers were expected to interpret these texts. As if fresh from the grave, striking images of ghosts in winding sheets regularly accompanied many of the narratives studied here and they helped to underline the serious, contemplative meaning of the text. Indeed, as Roger Chartier insists, such images were intended to engage ‘the unfailing adherence of the beholder and, even more than or better than the text that it accompanied, to induce persuasion or belief’.<sup>34</sup> Walter Ong’s proposition that print radically distanced the reader from the original context of the narrative and allowed the authenticity of the text to be questioned must then be qualified. The ghost stories that feature in this study are especially illustrative of the interdependence of the spoken and the written in eighteenth-century print culture and this mixture was intended to inculcate rather than to suspend belief. Adam Fox’s description of the ways in which print overlaid and reinforced the authority of speech and oral culture firmly underpins this study.<sup>35</sup>

Of course, the extent to which ghost stories had the potential to encourage or discourage belief depended on access to these narratives and, in the case of printed ghost stories, on levels of literacy and reading practices. Adam Fox and Roger Chartier have most recently demonstrated that access to print culture cannot be quantified by counting the number of people with the ability to read and write. The sources available to the historian inevitably render this a flawed task, but such a strict definition of literacy also neglects the myriad ways in which early modern men and women were able to engage and interact with printed texts. Thanks to the work of Bernard Capp, Margaret Spufford and Tessa Watt we now know more about the widespread practice of communal reading in early modern England than ever before.<sup>36</sup> The ghosts of ballads and chapbooks lent themselves to public readings whilst taverns, alehouses, fairs and markets provided the spaces in which these readings were carried out. In the eighteenth century, access to print was facilitated by the proliferation of booksellers in the capital and in provincial centres, by the establishment of circulating libraries and subscription libraries across Britain, by a sophisticated second-hand book trade and by the informal but regular habit of borrowing and lending books, pamphlets and textual ephemera to friends, family and neighbours.<sup>37</sup> New technologies of print and new modes of dissemination fostered new kinds of reading practices, with fictional novels

and poetry encouraging habits of private reading. Moreover, as John Brewer has illustrated, circulating libraries provided a reliable source of entertainment and instruction for large numbers of men and women who were captivated by such texts.<sup>38</sup>

The early modern period in general and the eighteenth century in particular thus witnessed a series of mini-revolutions in reading practices. However, following the recommendation of Margaret Spufford and on the understanding that ghost stories were desirable commodities, this study will also take account of reading tastes as well as reading habits and abilities. The specialization of the print market enabled ghost stories to appeal to diverse tastes and audiences. The ghosts of novels and verse were designed to shape private sensibilities, and in the second half of the eighteenth century publishers increasingly catered for a youth market, encouraging the habit of childhood reading and of polite parents interacting with their children as readers. The prominence of ghost stories among this literature will be an important focus of the final chapter. Although this study emphasizes diverse constructions of ghost stories in printed texts, I recognize that the vast majority of ghost stories that were published in this period originated in oral communities and, as Walter Ong has argued, 'Writing can never dispense with orality.'<sup>39</sup> Where possible I have traced the ways in which these narratives spread through oral channels, emphasizing the performative aspects of this mode of transmission and the heightened persuasive force of face-to-face storytelling.

I want to suggest then that, although the two were not coextensive, important connections existed between eighteenth-century ghost stories and ghost beliefs. Further proof of the affective impact of ghost stories on the eighteenth-century imagination surfaces in contemporary complaint literature. John Locke in his *Essay Concerning Humane Understanding* most forcefully articulated the particular success of these narratives for instilling ghost beliefs in the minds of young children. Locke's rejection of the concept of innate ideas underlined the perception that eighteenth-century ghost beliefs were manufactured rather than inherited. Locke's disapproving commentary also identified one of the major sources of narrative reproduction and dissemination in the storytelling of servants.<sup>40</sup> Familiar echoes of Locke's concerns persisted throughout the eighteenth century and intensified in its closing decades when good parenting manuals advised conscientious mothers and fathers to ban ghost stories from the vocabulary of servants and thereby save their children from a lifetime of fear and credulity. According to Locke and a whole host of educational reformers who were influenced by his work, youthful introduction to frightening and dramatic tales of ghosts stirred human emotions, clouded reason and judgement and made an indelible mark on the fancy. A stream of working-class autobiographies at the close of the eighteenth century similarly attested to the formative influence of ghost stories recounted in childhood, emphasizing the importance of spoken and printed ghost stories in cementing belief in the real existence of ghosts and the

scenarios in which they could be expected to materialize. Indeed, the history of ideas, and the history of ghost beliefs in particular, can be understood as a history of what people remember and it seems that ghost stories exerted an especially potent force upon the memory.

## Thinking with Ghosts

Given that ghost stories wielded an important influence on the individual and collective imagination, it is important to outline the kinds of messages that were inscribed in them. Underpinning this study is the assumption that ghost beliefs were intimately connected with the mortuary culture of eighteenth-century England. They expressed important emotional and spiritual meanings for individuals and communities that were confronted with their own mortality or with that of loved ones. As dramatic representations of immortality, ghost stories diluted the finality of death by extending the ritual process of mourning and by bridging the physical and conceptual gap between this world and the next. By haunting familiar places and people they reinforced structures of social memory and provided an important source of cultural continuity. Almost inevitably, eighteenth-century ghost stories say something interesting about attitudes towards death and towards the dead, and yet historians who have focused on these themes have treated these narratives as curious remnants of popish and pagan superstition or have disregarded them entirely. Ralph Houlbrooke's *Death, Religion, and the Family in England, 1480–1750* offers a cohesive and insightful survey of the evolutions of early modern death culture, and yet he makes only brief reference to ghost beliefs.<sup>41</sup> Clare Gittings linked the mortuary culture of eighteenth-century England to discourses of individuality and yet, instead of tracing the connections between ghost beliefs, interiority and the persistence of the personality after death, she dismissed them as 'superstitious practices' with no contemporary relevance.<sup>42</sup> Throughout this book I will outline the ways in which ghost stories linked up to diverse anxieties and expectations surrounding death and the imagined fate of the dead beyond the grave. As material products, the ghost stories of cheap print and the vivid woodcuts of ghosts in winding sheets that accompanied them must be understood as a form of *memento mori*, as visual and textual reminders of the fragility of human life and the social levelling that it entailed.

By way of contrast, the poems of the Graveyard School in the mid-eighteenth century present a sense of revulsion and morbid fascination with the dead that was focused through the lens of ghost stories. Philippe Ariès's sweeping generalization that the eighteenth century saw a physical and imaginative distancing of death must also be revised in light of the dramatic physical representations of death furnished by ghost stories.<sup>43</sup> Ariès's assertion that death was tamed in the Enlightenment age focused too heavily upon intellectual discourses of death.

The evidence of ghost stories suggests that terrifying ideas of death were at best displaced, but not subdued. Ruth Richardson's insightful work has highlighted the liminality of death in the eighteenth century and the centrality of the human corpse to the mortuary culture of this period. According to Richardson, people 'believed and feared that the dead could return' and she also identified consistent desires to preserve and identify the dead.<sup>44</sup> In so doing, Richardson's work suggests that the complex patchwork of beliefs that surrounded death in this period has not been sufficiently elucidated. The relation of ghost stories to this social history of death is thus an important contribution.

By locating ghost beliefs and ghost stories within the social history of death, this study owes a debt to the pioneering work of Peter Marshall who has explored the role of ghost beliefs in fashioning cultural responses towards the dead in Elizabethan and Jacobean England. Marshall's work is also foundational to the present study thanks to his analysis of how ghost beliefs integrated with the complex formation and fragmentation of religious identities in Reformation England. This study is both a continuation of and a departure from Marshall's work in its examination of the relevance of ghost beliefs to theological debates and processes of confessional formation between 1660 and 1800. Particular attention will be paid to the ways in which traumatic memories of civil war radicalism helped to refashion ghost stories as more orthodox supports of the Church of England. These narratives also fitted more easily with the changing theological emphases of post-Restoration Anglicanism, figuring strongly in polemical attacks upon supposed atheists and Sadducees, and complementing efforts at parochial renewal from the 1690s.

The spiritual meaning of ghost stories was the most consistently expressed context in which they were recommended to readers in the years 1660 to 1800. Ghost stories were used to encourage but also to offset anxieties about the ambiguous process of salvation, and to promote good devotional habits. These stories also responded to the particular challenges of religious life in these years. Reported visions of ghosts lent succour to formal doctrines of the soul's immortality, bodily resurrection and the authority of the Trinity. They also furnished fresh evidence of the workings of the Holy Spirit, which was particularly important against a growing chorus of attacks from rational dissenters who were seeking to exorcise revelation from spiritual life. The rejection of miraculous signs and wonders and all things supernatural by rational dissenters has led historians to overlook the theological significance of ghost stories, or to suggest that they represented an essential perversion of eighteenth-century spirituality. Of course, elements of contemporary rhetoric support these findings. Yet evidence from grass-roots level, from published sermons and tracts, also suggests that ghost stories were tacitly accepted or openly encouraged by Anglican and dissenting ministers who used connections between ghost beliefs and the religious faith of the laity to promote good devotional practice. This study therefore represents an important contri-

bution to historical assessments of eighteenth-century religion. The consistent association of ghost stories with orthodox defences of the Trinity also suggests that these narratives might sit closer to the mainstream of Protestant theology and worship than has so far been allowed. Indeed, Samuel Johnson's definition of a 'ghost' in his 1755 dictionary included reference to 'The third person in the adorable Trinity', whilst 'Ghostliness' was described as something with 'spiritual tendency' that was decidedly 'not secular'.<sup>45</sup>

The adoption of ghost stories by leaders of the early Methodist movement accentuated points of dissension between fragmented Protestant groupings. But the recasting of these narratives as attacks on atheists and immorality and as vehicles for anti-Catholic and patriotic propaganda also highlights important points of confessional unity. Anti-Catholic emphases of eighteenth-century ghost stories are especially significant since they suggest that ghost beliefs were no longer perceived as popish survivals but were now thoroughly suffused with the priorities of Restoration and eighteenth-century Protestantism. Changing theories of providential intervention will also be explored, since the idea of a transcendent divine power that rarely intervened in the natural world had a significant influence on the way that ghost stories were perceived. The place of special or particular providences has been somewhat underestimated within this schema and within historical assessments of eighteenth-century spirituality. These findings add a new dimension to the revisionist work of Anthony Armstrong, William Gibson, Jeremy Gregory, Donald Spaeth and John Spurr, who have rightly debunked the idea that the Church of England was disengaged from the spiritual priorities of the laity, as well as emphasizing the common interests of orthodox and dissenting Protestants.<sup>46</sup>

Peter Marshall, Jean-Claude Schmitt and Malcolm Gaskill have shown how assumptions about the providential intervention of ghosts were manipulated to encourage lay piety, but also to achieve specific practical objectives.<sup>47</sup> Understood as expressions of divine displeasure, ghost stories publicized instances of social injustice, exposing secret murderers, deceitful executors and adulterous spouses. Ghosts continued to protest against these crimes in the long eighteenth century, but they were also vehemently opposed to usury and to expressions of atheism or irreligion, instances of which were thought to be particularly rife in these years. Indeed, ghost stories were increasingly fashioned to articulate anxieties about the evils of eighteenth-century economic life. Functioning as important expressions of anti-consumerist rhetoric, ghost stories can be linked to a neglected aspect of the economic history of this period that is usually dominated by descriptions of a burgeoning imperial economy and the luxury goods that were increasingly imported onto the British market.<sup>48</sup> As I emphasize throughout this study, the primarily oral roots of ghost stories allowed them to be utilized by men and women of differing social backgrounds. Disgruntled servants and abused, neglected or abandoned wives and fiancé(e)s regularly manipulated belief in preternatural

phenomena to gain revenge on masters, husbands and lovers. The persistence of these practices and the attention that they received show how the revelations of a ghost could do considerable damage to personal reputations, sometimes leading to arrests or even executions. Pervasive belief in the providential agency of ghosts allowed the female and servant voice to be authorized outside of purely domestic contexts, thus highlighting the interrelationship of public and private discourses. Ghost stories were not simply harmless or entertaining tales and could be both affective and effective. The narrative act itself must then be understood to have important imaginative and material consequences. In this context, this study reinforces and extends the work of Bernard Capp and Laura Gowing by figuring ghost stories as weapons of the weak and dispossessed.<sup>49</sup>

If the perceived imminence of the holy sustained the legitimacy of ghost stories for some, new philosophical arguments also emerged to justify the telling and retelling of ghost stories in more secular frames of reference. The newly-established periodical press forged an innovative association between ghost beliefs and codes of gentlemanly behaviour, emphasizing how contemplation of these narratives was an important exercise for the creative imagination, helping to instil values of moral fortitude and civic virtue. These philosophical discourses had a transforming influence on the status of ghost stories as instruments of instruction and sources of entertainment. The truth or falsity of ghost stories gradually became less significant than the moral lessons that they taught, helping to explain how ghost stories gradually shaded into the genres of poetry, drama and novels. Imaginary ghosts had appeared in print for centuries but the configuration of ghosts in new literary genres intensified this process of fictionalization in the eighteenth century. By eroding the true-to-life status of these narratives, ghost stories were subtly displaced from the particular settings and contexts that lent them meaning and the idea of ghosts was reformulated and internalized as an imaginative tool with which to frame thoughts about personal immortality and morality.

This process was however both gradual and inconsistent. Real and imagined ghost stories coexisted for much of the period studied here and, as Terry Eagleton points out, insistence on a sharp distinction between fact and fiction had more relevance for twentieth-century audiences than for eighteenth-century readers.<sup>50</sup> The relationship between truth and fiction must then be understood as one of instability and ambiguity and this was especially true in the eighteenth century, where influential discourses of domesticity brought the idea of fiction closer to the human life-world and where the novel was distinguished 'by being more often related to real life'.<sup>51</sup> As Raymond Williams points out, poems, plays, novels and other literary texts were first and foremost social products, growing out of and responding to the ideas, anxieties and preoccupations of a particular society at a particular moment in time.<sup>52</sup> The process of fictionalization and invention bore close relation to the narrative practices in

which people took part during everyday life and thus Lennard Davis's assertion that 'certain social forces manifest themselves fairly directly on literary works' has particular relevance.<sup>53</sup> Samuel Taylor Coleridge recognized the importance of this fit between fiction and reality in preserving the element of belief in fiction, enabling the reader to sanction 'a willing suspension of disbelief'.<sup>54</sup> If ghost stories did not always offer particular truths, they could confidently claim to articulate more general truths that were intimately related to the experiences of social life. Indeed, inscribed in these narratives were important cultural reactions against the narrow rationalism of empirical philosophy, against the geographical and social dislocations of imperial expansion. The ghosts of verse, prose and drama did not fatally undermine the *possibility* of ghosts, yet these texts were less interested in the objective reality of ghosts than with their wider significance. Fictional representations allowed ghosts to be subtly relocated to safer, sophisticated and more aesthetically pleasing spaces where educated readers could contemplate the meanings of ghost stories from the comfort of their armchairs. As Roger Chartier has insisted, the subtle shifts engendered by novels and extended works of prose and poetry made the practice of reading 'more private, freer, and totally internalized'.<sup>55</sup> In this sense, the reality of ghosts was displaced, domesticated and relocated to the interior imagination – but not rejected. Indeed, the very uncertainty about the real or imagined status of ghosts was essential to the drama and performance of these texts.

## Structure

The long eighteenth century is a fresh chronology within which to study the changing status of ghost beliefs and an unusual periodization in which to attempt a cultural history of this nature. The years 1660–1832 are primarily associated with political landmarks in English and subsequently British history, namely the restoration of King Charles II in 1660 and the Great Reform Act of 1832. Although the shape and status of ghost beliefs was certainly influenced by the political settlement of Restoration England, my starting point of 1660 is justified by the religious, social and intellectual changes that accompanied this political watershed, and in which the legitimacy of ghost beliefs was revived as part of myriad attempts to extinguish painful memories of civil war and republican government.

I have covered a period of one hundred and forty years in this study partly due to the nature of the source material available, but primarily to capture for the reader a sense of the non-linear, ongoing and cyclical process by which ghost beliefs and ghost stories were degraded, re-appropriated and transformed in public and private discourses. The theory of survivals articulated by Ronald Hutton is therefore of limited value in explaining the persistence of ghost beliefs post-

1660, which owed less to the dwindling mental landscapes of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries than to the specific religious, social, political and economic realities of eighteenth-century England.<sup>56</sup> It was the contested cultural atmosphere of the years 1660 to 1800 that made men and women willing and able to negotiate a place for ghost beliefs. Although the evidence presented in this study has some projections into the early nineteenth century, the years immediately following the outbreak of the French Revolution mark a more natural break in the cultural history of eighteenth-century England than the legislative manoeuvrings of 1832.

My focus on English rather than British ghost stories requires justification given the current historiographical trend towards integrating the histories of England, Wales, Scotland and Ireland in a period that, according to Linda Colley, witnessed the forging of the British nation in both political and cultural terms.<sup>57</sup> The first and most practical reason for my concentration on England is due to the sheer volume of ghost stories that circulated in this period. An analysis of British ghost stories in the long eighteenth century is a worthwhile project but one that lies beyond the scope of this present study. The methodological difficulties of synthesizing English, Welsh, Scottish and Irish ghost stories are, however, more foundational to the chosen structure of this study. For much of the period under study here the union of Britons was of a largely political nature and significant differences in the religious and cultural contours of England, Wales, Scotland and Ireland persisted throughout the eighteenth century. Although Linda Colley was right to emphasize the common Protestantism of many Britons as a point of unity, particularly during the period of Protestant ascendancy in Ireland, the vitality of Scottish Presbyterianism as well as Episcopalian and Catholic Highland support for the Jacobite risings of 1715 and 1745 mark important points of disjuncture with the prevailing religious cultures of eighteenth-century England. Since this study emphasizes the links between ghost stories and the specific confessional formations and theologies of English Protestants, there is a danger of drawing too many similarities between the four kingdoms. Furthermore, a British survey may run the risk of obscuring the rich tradition of folk tales that was particularly evident in Ireland and Wales, with the latter maintaining a peculiar hybrid between ghosts and fairies throughout this period.<sup>58</sup> That said, ghost stories from Ireland, Scotland and Wales have been included when they were printed in England and are therefore assumed to have particular relevance. The exchange of ghostly tales within Britain was especially marked in the second half of the eighteenth century, no doubt facilitated by the rapid expansion of printing presses throughout the four kingdoms. The ghost stories of James Hogg are particularly interesting for the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and highlight important cultural affinities within the Border regions, rather than a straightforward division between Scottish and English beliefs and tastes. Nonetheless, this period also witnessed the importation of ghost stories from Europe and

from a wide variety of colonial ports, underlining the point that English cultural identity was not simply shaped by a sense of Britishness. Any straightforward analysis of British ghost stories would therefore be somewhat artificial, neglecting the complex processes of cultural formation and oversimplifying important distinctions in the narrative traditions of England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales and their regions.

This text has been organized in a largely chronological fashion stretching from the late seventeenth century to the turn of the nineteenth century. This lengthy time-span incorporates a sense of both continuity and change in the shape of ghost beliefs, and in the shifting form and content of ghost stories. As already stated, this is not a story of progressive disenchantment, and I hope readers will share my own understanding of the non-linear nature of the transformations, recycling and redefinitions to which ideas about ghosts were subjected. Different chapters introduce the different genres of print in which ghost stories surfaced, which reflects the emphasis of this study on patterns of production, circulation and consumption. This approach suggests the points at which particular genres became more influential than others. Chapters have also been organized to juxtapose polemical representations of ghosts with the everyday relevance of these narratives. Chapters 1 and 2 cover the years 1660 to 1700. They should be read as two halves of a whole since they introduce the central dichotomy that runs throughout this study: the ghost story as a desirable material product, but also as a flexible imaginative resource. Chapter 1 examines the rehabilitation of ghost stories within the intellectual context of England's political and religious Restoration. This chapter focuses upon the legacies of the civil war and interregnum, and it identifies a process of de-confessionalization, in which the traditional confessional allegiances of ghost stories were significantly eroded. This process enabled ghost stories to be closely linked to the institutional fortunes of the Church of England, as they were appropriated as vehicles of clerical reform. Chapter 2 examines how and why these clerical strategies may have been successful, focusing on ghost stories within the buoyant marketplace of cheap print. This chapter addresses the question of access to ghost stories, and examines how a variety of authors and publishers constructed ghost stories to persuade and entice readers. Discussion focuses on the material culture of cheap printed ghost stories, the mixed audiences to which they appealed, and the interrelationship of oral and literate cultures.

Chapters 3 and 4 cover the first half of the eighteenth century. Chapter 3 presents a detailed exploration of a ghost story from Canterbury, and the ways in which it was configured in oral communities, in manuscript and in a whole variety of printed texts. This particular ghost story is positioned as an important bridge between local and national cultures, and as a site of debate and exchange between learned and unlearned conceptions of ghosts. This is the only chapter of the book based on a detailed case study, and it is valuable for tracing interpretations of the

same narrative over a long span of time. This chapter also addresses the complex relationship between fiction and reality in the eighteenth-century ghost story. Chapter 4 situates reactions to the Canterbury ghost in a wider context, tracing the impact of Enlightenment thought, and assessing the influence of discourses of politeness through the periodical press. These developments are linked to the migration of ghost stories into new fictional spaces. The fit of ghost stories with notions of interiority, the sublime and romanticism are also discussed.

Chapter 5 tracks the fluctuating status of ghost stories through the lens of confessional tension and political change in the second half of the eighteenth century. The role of ghost stories in forging moments of confessional conflict and unity between Methodist and Anglican ministers are explored, alongside the revived relevance of ghost stories in anti-Catholic and loyalist discourses leading up to the French Revolution. The attitudes of other Protestant groups towards ghosts are also traced to provide a more complete picture of the links between ghost beliefs and confessional identities. Polemical rejections of ghost stories are also contrasted with pastoral appropriations at parish level. The final chapter of the book provides a detailed examination of ghost beliefs and ghost stories within everyday life in the closing years of the eighteenth century. Discussion focuses upon the importance of memory, identity and landscape in shaping individual attitudes. The narrative spaces opened up by the physical processes of commercial and imperial expansion are also analysed here. Finally, the fortunes of ghosts are explored within discourses of romanticism and by reference to a growing corps of antiquarian literature which had an important effect upon the views of the polite classes. What emerges from this study is a sense of the flexibility of ghost stories, and the ways that these narratives were adapted to suit a rapidly changing cultural climate. The disjuncture of these narratives with certain trends in eighteenth-century life and thought is undeniable, but at the same time ghost stories complemented the particular themes and problems of English society in these years. Though by no means comprehensive, I hope that the present study will go some way towards reasserting the historical value of ghost stories, and to enhancing understandings of the contested cultural landscapes of English society in the age of reason.