



Ghost Story

Peter Straub

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In life, not every sin goes unpunished.

GHOST STORY

For four aging men in the terror-stricken town of Milburn, New York, an act inadvertently carried out in their youth has come back to haunt them. Now they are about to learn what happens to those who believe they can bury the past -- and get away with murder.

Ghost Story Details

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Author : Peter Straub

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From Reader Review *Ghost Story* for online ebook

Kimberly says

Although GRs marks this as my second read, it's actually my third. (I read this one as a teenager for the first time). One of Straub's best books, imho. Still, this is not one that promises instant gratification, or perfect closure. It's a multi-layered novel, that leaves a lot to the imagination of the reader. Personally, I enjoy a bit of ambiguity in my horror--often what one can imagine is even more terrifying than what is put down on paper.

A "classic" read in every sense of the word.

Recommended to fans of horror, everywhere!

Dirk Grobbelaar says

An intelligent and ambitious novel, *Ghost Story* has received some well deserved acclaim. That is, however, not enough. Not even **close**. This is a book that should be re-introduced to a whole new generation of readers. It really is that good. Stephen King himself lists it as one of the best horror novels of the 20th century (refer *Danse Macabre*).

I will not go into plot details at this stage, since these can be had by reading the book synopsis. Instead, in general terms, I'll try and explain just why this book should be on the reading list of any self respecting horror fan.

First of all, this is not a novel that offers up cheap thrills and quick scares. The terror, sometimes expected, often unexpected, is measured out in **precise** and **exact** quantities. Lovingly so. Mister Straub has managed to weave into *Ghost Story* an absolutely breathless sense of inevitability and futility. It still remains one of the most *atmospheric* dark tales I've read.

Secondly, it is a pretty complicated story: dense and epic. It's a story about terrible things that happen to people and the secret lives people lead. The cast is also fairly big. Think you know what's going on around here? Think again.

Lastly, Peter Straub is arguably one of the best wordsmiths out there. He *can* write.

Comparisons with Stephen King's 'Salem's Lot' are inevitable: the small town setting; the terror that comes to town. I read the two novels almost back to back and will be hard pressed to pick a personal favourite, although the "antagonist" in Straub's book is much more complicated. In both novels, a great amount of time is spent on creating breathing, flesh and blood, characters. This, of course, makes the terror more palpable when it comes. And does it come!

Often subtle, the **Horror** element takes on interesting shapes in Mister Straub's capable hands. Things aren't quite what they seem, and isn't it marvellous? Looking for a thrilling read that will ever so slowly freeze your blood without attempting to shock with gratuitous gore and schlock tactics? Then line up, Dr Rabbitfoot has your medicine right here!

Lou says

A few words i found by Stephen King about this novel

"Probably Ghost Story by Peter Straub is the best of the supernatural novels to be published in the wake of the three books that kicked off a new horror "wave" in the seventies—those three, of course, being Rosemary's Baby, The Exorcist, and The Other. The fact that these three books, all published within five years of each other, enjoyed such wide popularity, helped to convince (or reconvince) publishers that horror fiction had a commercial potential much wider than the readership of such defunct magazines as Weird Tales and Unknown or the paperback reissues of Arkham House books.*"

This was a real haunting good read, the story drives you crazy in places with characters perceptions of reality being played with by the supernatural. This is my first Straub novel and he writes a plot well and makes you feel you are there amidst the snow filled town slowly falling apart day by day. The story paces well and does not let down, the tale was reminiscent of Something Wicked This Way Comes by Ray Bradbury. The review is @ more2read also with a video2watch interview with Peter Straub.

Bill says

First off, let me say that this is a very good story, and it had its scary moments. But I think I have some sort of problem with Peter Straub's writing. I can't quite put my finger on it but at times it seems long winded and confusing. Where with Dan Simmons and Orson Scott Card their words just seem to effortlessly flow into my mind, I find there are times when I need to reread Straub's sentences. This doesn't happen a whole lot, mind you, but it got annoying when it did, and I was glad to finally finish it. But hey, that's just me. I figure Straub simply doesn't "click" with me so I think it would be unfair for me to criticize this novel. I've read Shadowland (it was OK) and Mystery (found the ending terribly unsatisfying) and felt I should read this, his "best" work.

As far as the story goes, I was a little disappointed that there weren't more Chowder Society ghost stories within the main story, which I was expecting. I thought the characters were well drawn, though. I very much enjoyed Ricky, Sears, Lewis and John, and would love to sit in on more Chowder Society sessions.

So...overall, did I like it? Welllllll....yeah. If you like Peter Straub you will love this.

Matt says

When I was a kid, I had a long list of fears. A short summary would include: tornadoes; big dogs; bullies; the basement; fire; music class; swimming lessons; spiders; cat burglars; and girls. As I got a bit older, say around middle school and high school, that list changed. Some items remained (girls, the possibility of being forced to sing in public), some fell away (tornadoes, big dogs, swimming), and some new fears were added (school dances, acne, various other complex social interactions).

Now, as an adult, the list has changed entirely. I don't fear the weather, or the water, or women (though I still

do not understand them). And I'm not afraid of the many, *many* things that the local and national news tells us to fear. I'm not scared of airplane crashes, murderers, or terrorist attacks. This is not because I am brave, which I am certainly not, or because I am idiot, which is debatable; rather, my limited understanding of probabilities allows me to rest assured that I am far likelier to die in a car crash because I am texting, than I am to plummet earthward in a Boeing 747, and that the mounting nights of pizza and hard drinking are more lethal to my person than a sociopathic killer just escaped from the county asylum on a dark and stormy night.

The simple fact is that for most of us, all the terrorists and all the murderers and all the faultily-constructed planes in all the world are not nearly as likely to hurt us than uncontrolled cell growth within our own bodies. Sure, I get a little jittery when my plane hits turbulence; and yes, I sneak around my own house with a baseball bat every time I hear a bump in the night. But truthfully, the only thing that really scares me is cancer.

That kind of fear, though, based solidly in statistical reality, is almost too much to bear. It's impossible to live your life constantly thinking about that possibility, that probability, lingering up ahead in the future.

We need distractions. So we distract ourselves with other fears. Not just terrorists, airplanes, and killers, but sex offenders and immigrants and razor-studded apples on Halloween and China's emergence as an economic powerhouse. This is not to say that these fears are baseless (well, the fear of immigrants and China are), but we're talking about probabilities. Can these things be dangerous? Yes. Are they statistically likely to be dangerous to you? No.

These fears, though, play an important psychological role by diverting our attention. And this is not a new phenomenon. Human beings have always been scaring each other. I venture that Neanderthals in their caves would gather round the fire and swap stories about a legendary woolly mammoth with a taste for blood, even though they were more likely to die from an infection caused by scraping a knee on a rock.

Peter Straub's *Ghost Story* plays with this idea of spook stories. At its center are four old men – Lewis Benedikt, Sears James, Frederick Hawthorne and John Jaffrey – who have a haunted past; in order to cope with this past, they get together and tell ghost stories to each other. Scaring each other becomes cathartic.

I could go on with the plot, I suppose, but one of the pleasures (or frustrations, depending on your nature) of this book is how you gain understanding gradually, as the story unfolds. For instance, the novel opens with a brief prologue in which a man we do not know has apparently kidnapped a child we do not know. These scenes won't pay off for many hundreds of pages, and to say anything more ventures into spoiler territory. Besides, the plot is relatively dense, and if I tried to explain it, I'd probably get it wrong anyway.

Suffice it to say, the *thing* or *things* that is haunting our four main characters has returned to the small town of Milburn, New York. And it didn't come for the maple syrup festival.

I'll leave it to you to discover the rest.

What I appreciated about *Ghost Story* was that it understood the nature of fear. Fear is that moment when you think something is about to happen; it is that part in a horror movie when the main character is about to open the closet door, and you, the viewer, start to duck your head beneath the blanket. When something finally jumps out of the closet, and the main character starts running, and you scream and spill popcorn, that's not fear. That is the release of tension.

The reason I always liked the first *Friday the 13th* film is because it recognized this distinction. The whole

movie was people being watched and stalked by something faceless and nameless and left to our imaginations. There is very little running through the woods, which is good, because chase scenes aren't scary. In the 7,000 sequels that followed, the distinction was lost; the killer was known, was given shape and form, and all that was left was to run.

The most elegant metaphor I can think of to explain this is lovemaking. Please, bear with me. A good ghost story (like *Ghost Story*) is like that Spanish or Italian lover with the sensitive eyes and velvety voice, the one who drank wine from your navel and has nothing but time to devote to all manner of foreplay. This Spanish or Italian will taunt and tickle and tease and sing you a lilting love-song in Spanish or Italian that you can't understand before finally bringing you to that place you want to go. A bad ghost story is like a drunk high-school student pawing at you in the backseat of a Honda Civic, concerned only with the end-release.

Oh, I'm sorry. Did I say the "most elegant" metaphor? Because I meant to say crass and vaguely disturbing.

Ghost Story takes its time reaching the climax, and this is a good thing. As long as things are still a bit unclear, as long as you can't quite see around the next corner, the novel retains tension. I'm not saying it will scare you. It won't make you scream aloud, for the simple reason that, unlike a movie, you can look away at any time and stop the action. However, there are parts that will give you the creeps; and there will be parts where your eyes will try to cheat by skipping ahead; and there is a chance, if you read this before bed and take a slug of Nyquill, you will have odd nightmares.

What I liked about *Ghost Story*, other than the fact it was like a Spanish or Italian lover, is that it made a real attempt to stay grounded in reality. Obviously, when you are dealing with ghosts, there is a paranormal or supernatural element involved. The more things tilt towards those elements, the less scared I become, for the simple fact that I can no longer relate to the world being described.

To that end, Peter Straub makes an enormous effort to give his characters backgrounds and back-stories and meaningful traits. He grounds the most fantastical elements by devoting equal time to the human element. I'm not saying that he achieves supreme psychological depth with each person, but he certainly surmounts the confines of his genre (and goes far beyond you might expect in a book titled *Ghost Story*).

One of my favorite aspects of *Ghost Story* is its sense of place. Straub spends a lot of time making the hamlet of Milburn into a character. You get to know its layout, its history, its local hangouts, and you meet dozens and dozens of its denizens. Indeed, you meet so many, you might want to keep a list (this will come in handy when attempting to recall who is sleeping with who, and who just died).

Ghost Story is horror with a literary bent. Sure, there are some lines of dialogue that land with all the grace of me dropping *War and Peace* on my toe. But that's to be expected. For the most part, the level of the writing defies the primitiveness of its subject. You see this not only in the care taken with the characters (both main and supporting), but with the story's complex structure, which involves numerous flashbacks and stories-within-stories.

Of course, as with any ghost story, there has to be a "Boo!" moment. At some point, the mysteries start to resolve themselves, the enemy takes shape, and our heroes must find a way to kill it. I'll admit, my attention started to wane towards the end, once the explanatory dialogue started flying (and there is a lot of explaining to do). Eventually, there is a final battle between good and evil, human and not-human, and it is suitably over-the-top and gory, for those that expect that sort of thing, and when the dust settles all the puzzle pieces come together to form a whole.

It satisfies, I suppose, but is not nearly as interesting as the long, detailed, creepy road that led to that point.

Kimberly says

One of the best written stories I've ever come across!

2015: Still a classic....

Maciek says

I don't think one can truly rate *Ghost Story* as a novel without acknowledging the fact that it's a literary homage to the classics of the genre. Indeed, two characters bear the surnames of Hawthorne and James.

This is my introduction to the work of Peter Straub. Having read *The Talisman* and *Black House* which he co-authored with Stephen King I was anxious to know how he writes on his own, and *Ghost Story* came recommended by virtually everyone who has read it.

As mentioned in the first paragraph, *Ghost Story* is a homage to the old masters who paved the road of fright for future generations. Peter Straub himself says that "[Ghost Story] started as a result of my having just read all the American supernatural fiction I could find". It is noticeable; the first part is largely a reworking of *The Turn of The Screw*. The theme of a story within a story is everpresent, as the work deals with a group of old men who tell themselves ghost stories on regular meetings. Shades of Lovecraft, Poe and Hawthorne brood in the corners of the rooms they sit in.

The men find themselves terrorized by terrible, realistic nightmares. Terrible things start happening in the small, sleepy town of Millburn.

They remember the crime they had committed years before...and wonder if the time of retribution has finally arrived.

What's not to like? Several things. first of all, the pace: the book is monstrous slog. A chore to get through. Straub switches between several narrative viewpoints (much like Stoker in *Dracula*) and the plot plods frequently and slows down so much that reading soon becomes a challenge. There's no doubt that Straub is a great writer - some of his passages I've read several times, because I simply enjoyed them so much - but he becomes lost in what he tries to do, the references he includes so subtly vanish in the detail he describes so voraciously.

The protagonists discuss ghost stories they tell to each other, but for some reason refuse to talk about the one they all share even when darkness has fallen upon their city. Instead of trying to scheme how to fight or at least delay the danger, they remain passive. No one fights back. No one thinks of moving away and running from the deadly force. The passivity, the stupidity of their actions drastically slows down the plot and kills any tension that might have emerged. It would be understandable if the novel featured only one protagonist who witnessed these events and who would be afraid to entrust his story to others (in fear of being considered insane) - but *Ghost Story* features a group of men who believe each other, and do *nothing*.

The theme of a town besieged by malevolent forces or beings has been done previously, most notably by Peter Straub's fellow writer and friend Stephen King in *Salem's Lot*. Straub acknowledges the influence: "I wanted to work on a large canvas. '*Salem's Lot* showed me how to do this without getting lost among a lot of minor characters. Besides the large canvas, I also wanted a certain largeness of effect."

However, while *Salem's Lot* was swift, fast-paced and competent in dealing with the theme, *Ghost Story* doesn't quite deliver. The town of Millburn is described as a small town, but it completely lacks any awareness and interaction. The characters seem to be detached from reality - everyone walks everywhere, and there's little mention of pop culture - music, television and such. The novel is supposed to take time in the 1970s, but for all we are shown it might just as well be the 1870s.

Last, the Evil with a capital E. While the concept of the Evil is really interesting, the Evil is really inconsistent and incompetent. There's no sense of looming presence of Evil, ready to fall upon the heads of innocent people and end their lives at any moment, like in *Salem's Lot* or *Phantoms*. Evil seems to be employed when it is needed by the narrative, and then pushed back, only to be called again later. I don't want to spoil anything, but the nature of the Evil and its actions don't follow any pattern of logic and reason. Evil is at times omniscient and capable of incredible power, only to have its abilities reduced to humanlike status, and then go back to the supernatural and all-powerful again. Evil capable of everything is boring - why, it'd take a snap of fingers to eliminate a human being, much like a child breaking a twig in two - but one might wonder why the author chose to grant his menace that privilege, only to take it back...and then allow it to be all powerful again, several times.

Overall, I'm sad to say that *Ghost Story* doesn't live up to the hype that surrounds it. While it is a complex, multilayered work, a homage to the creators of the genre, it's not very compelling and in fact is pretty easy to put down and leave unfinished. The concept, the *idea* of the novel - the premise, the prose, the situations - everything works, but not as a whole. I think I like the idea of the book better than the book itself - Peter Straub tends to be meandering and repetitive. There are sections of *Ghost Story* that are narrated brilliantly, but there are sections that are stale and uninteresting. For each flash of suspense and atmosphere, there's a whole lot of mundane and ordinary. The *idea* of the novel deserves five stars, but I can't give the novel itself more than three - I liked it, but I liked analysing the text more than reading it. Nevertheless, Peter Straub is an ambitious writer who's much more "literary" than most horror authors - his prose and style easily rivals the so-called "serious" writers - and I most certainly will read his other novels.

Rebecca McNutt says

I know that *Ghost Story* is just a little mass-market paperback but I don't care, I really enjoyed it. It was brilliantly written, the characters were complex, the imagery was vibrant but not overwhelming and the story was creative and original.

Mike (the Paladin) says

Not a Straub fan, but this is a good book. One of the better "ghost stories" out there (in spite of the fact that it's not exactly a story about a ghost per-se).

This is actually one of the "scariest" books I've read so far as atmosphere and actual emotional scare goes.

The villains of the piece are while not exactly "new" used in a different way than you'll see elsewhere. It might be said that the book rests on the simple idea that one reaps what one sows...though that is a huge oversimplification and doesn't give any inkling as to the amount of sleep you may lose...or how much your electric bill may go up from leaving the lights on all night.

One caveat, don't be put off by the opening scenes in this book (some would be and some wouldn't). They could lead one to believe it's a totally different kind of book than it is... I myself almost put it down getting the wrong impression from the way it opened.

If you like horror, I'd say try it. This is a genuinely scary book.

UPDATE

I just re-read this and thought I'd say a bit more about it. The general idea behind this book is one that has been dealt with by many writers (King among others, I mention him as he's worked with Straub). (view spoiler)

Here the protagonists are not really, "bad guys" but people who are human, people who have pasts. In the case of *The Chowder Society* a very BIG past. The thing is that they like other humans who have come in contact with (view spoiler)

I read this a long time ago and remembered I liked it. What I didn't recall was how well the book does what it does. It's a long book and told from multiple points of view (even changing from third person to first person) yet never flags, never drops the interest. After I read this book I went right out and grabbed another Straub book...it just didn't grab me like this one did (in spite of the fact it won an award and other readers do love it). This book made my "favorites" and I wanted to take a few seconds to recommend it...again. Probably more I could say but why? Just read the book and cut out the middleman. Enjoy.

Steven Kent says

I lived on horror novels when I was in college--and I acquired a good collection of my favorite horror novels in hardback.

When I finished school, I sold my *The Shining*, my *The Stand*, all of my horror books except one. There was one novel with which I could not part--Peter Straub's "*Ghost Story*."

Ghost Story, set in upstate New York, unwinds brilliantly. It begins with the frigid voices of old men swapping ghostly stories, then settles back and unwinds as the demons of these old men's stories come to possess the world of the present.

This is a book that starts slow, wrapping itself around the reader. You, like the characters in the book, think that you can easily escape for the first hundred pages. But the narrative tightens and you soon learn that escape was always an illusion.

This is a book that combines the chill of the New York winter with the arthritic helplessness of old man nightmares. It plays shamelessly with reality. The devices Straub incorporated in this book are so subtle that

they had to be corrupted or ignored entirely when a movie was made based on this book.

I have read this book several times now, and I firmly believe it is the *The Brothers Karamazov* of the horror book world.

If you want to read some of the best writing that horror has to offer, read *Ghost Story*.

Apatt says

“SF/F/H”, the holy trinity of genre fiction, my neck of the woods for reading. I read a hell of a lot of sci-fi (SF), I read about a couple of fantasy (F) titles a year, but I've been neglecting the horror fiction (H) genre in recent years. The reason is that besides Stephen King I don't tend to hear much about exciting new horror titles. Sci-fi and fantasy books win the prestigious Hugo and Nebula awards and I am always aware of the winners. As far as I know the equivalent award for horror fiction is the Stoker Award and somehow people don't seem to talk about them very much. Anyway, to cut a long story short I miss reading horror fiction and want to get back to it.

Ghost Story is Peter Straub's best known and most popular book, I remember reading it in my teens when it was on the bestsellers list, I remember liking it but for the life of me cannot remember any of the details. Having just reread it this is not so surprising as this is quite a complex story and the title is somewhat misleading. The book is divided into several parts with a nonlinear timeline. It starts off intriguingly with a 24 pages prologue about a man who has kidnapped a strange little girl, but the kidnapper is more afraid of the kidnappee than the other way around. The girl seems to take it all in stride and may, in fact, not be a girl at all. After this prologue the story goes back to a few years earlier where a group of for elderly gentlemen meet on a regular basis to share ghost stories which may or may not be true. They call themselves “The Chowder Society”, apparently there is some kind of therapeutic value for them in telling these stories; there has been an undertone of fear in this little club since one of their members died under mysterious circumstances at a party while in the company of an actress who disappeared.

The next part of the book tells the story of Donald Wanderley, the child kidnapper from the prologue. He is a nephew of the dead club member of the Chowder Society and an author of a horror novel. After publication of his book he took a temporary job teaching at Berkeley, there he meets and falls madly in love with a mysterious beautiful girl. They get on famously, make wedding plans and one day she just disappears; next thing he knows she meets his brother David in another town, they fall in love and soon David dies under mysterious circumstances. The girl disappears again.

Ghost Story is not a whodunit, but it is not really about ghosts (though a few do show up). The story is quite a complex but not at all hard to follow. A creepy atmosphere pervades the entire book and the reader what is going on with the disappearing girls and the dead people they leave behind. It is meticulously written by Straub. The supernatural element often has a hallucinogenic feel to it and the climax is quite rousing. The characters are well drawn but not particularly memorable. I find that Straub's storytelling is not as taut as it could be and the pacing drags a little in the earlier parts of the book; too many scenes of the old gents pottering around grumbling. His brand of horror is subtle and often psychological, there is very little in the gore department.

If you are looking for an elegantly written, unusual and complex horror story this is for you, but how many people are looking for such a thing?

If you are reading this in October this would be a great Halloween read.

Sandy *The world could end while I was reading and I would never notice* says

EXCERPT: Still in South Carolina, he thought that a highway patrolman was following him: the police car was twenty yards behind, keeping the same distance whatever the man did. He thought he could see the state cop speaking into his radio; immediately he cut his speed by five miles an hour and changed lanes, but the police car would not pass. He felt a deep trembling in his chest and abdomen: he visualised the police car gaining on him, turning on its siren, forcing him to the side of the road. Then the questions would begin. It was about six in the afternoon, and the freeway was crowded: he felt himself being drawn helplessly along with the traffic, at the mercy of whoever was in the police car - helpless, trapped. He had to think. He was simply being drawn on towards Charleston, pulled by the traffic through miles of flat scrubby country: suburbs were always visible in the distance, miserable collections of little houses with frame garages. He could not remember the number of the freeway he was on. In the rear view mirror, behind the long row of cars, behind the police car, an old truck sent out a tall column of black smoke through a chimney-like pipe beside the engine. He feared the patrolman cruising up beside him and shouting: 'Get over!' And he could imagine the girl shouting, 'He made me come with him, he ties me onto him when he sleeps!' The southern sun seemed to assault his face, grind at his pores. The patrolman swung out into the next lane and began to draw up toward him.

- Asshole, that's not your girl, who is that girl?

Then they would put him in a cell and begin to beat him, working on him methodically with nightsticks, turning his skin purple. . .

But none of that happened.

ABOUT THIS BOOK: In life, not every sin goes unpunished.

GHOST STORY

For four aging men in the terror-stricken town of Milburn, New York, an act inadvertently carried out in their youth has come back to haunt them. Now they are about to learn what happens to those who believe they can bury the past -- and get away with murder.

MY THOUGHTS: I started to read Peter Straub after he co-wrote *The Talisman* with Stephen King. He is an author I run hot and cold on. *Ghost Story* is hot. It is a book that I reread every few years, and I always seem to find bits where I think, 'Damn! I don't remember that. . .'

Ghost Story is a book that builds up slowly, so don't expect your chills from the first page, but it doesn't take long before you realise that something bad is coming. . .

Straub's plotting and characters are intricate and exquisite. His writing is descriptive. You are there.

If, like me, you still make sure that your wardrobe door is firmly closed before you go to sleep at night, then this is a book that you will enjoy. ????

THE AUTHOR: Peter Straub was born in Milwaukee, Wisconsin on 2 March, 1943, the first of three sons of a salesman and a nurse. The salesman wanted him to become an athlete, the nurse thought he would do well as either a doctor or a Lutheran minister, but all he wanted to do was to learn to read.

When kindergarten turned out to be a stupefyingly banal disappointment devoted to cutting animal shapes out of heavy colored paper, he took matters into his own hands and taught himself to read by memorizing his comic books and reciting them over and over to other neighborhood children on the front steps until he could recognize the words. Therefore, when he finally got to first grade to find everyone else laboring over the imbecile adventures of Dick, Jane and Spot ("See Spot run. See, see, see,"), he ransacked the library in search of pirates, soldiers, detectives, spies, criminals, and other colorful souls. Soon he had earned a reputation as an ace storyteller, in demand around campfires and in back yards on summer evenings.

This career as the John Buchan to the first grade was interrupted by a collision between himself and an automobile which resulted in a classic near-death experience, many broken bones, surgical operations, a year out of school, a lengthy tenure in a wheelchair, and certain emotional quirks. Once back on his feet, he quickly acquired a severe stutter which plagued him into his twenties and now and then still puts in a nostalgic appearance, usually to the amusement of telephone operators and shop clerks. Because he had learned prematurely that the world was dangerous, he was jumpy, restless, hugely garrulous in spite of his stutter, physically uncomfortable and, at least until he began writing horror three decades later, prone to nightmares. Books took him out of himself, so he read even more than earlier, a youthful habit immeasurably valuable to any writer. And his storytelling, for in spite of everything he was still a sociable child with a lot of friends, took a turn toward the dark and the garish, toward the ghoulish and the violent. He found his first "effect" when he discovered that he could make this kind of thing funny.

As if scripted, the rest of life followed. He went on scholarship to Milwaukee Country Day School and was the darling of his English teachers. He discovered Thomas Wolfe and Jack Kerouac, patron saints of wounded and self-conscious adolescence, and also, blessedly, jazz music, which spoke of utterance beyond any constraint: passion and liberation in the form of speech on the far side of the verbal border. The alto saxophone player Paul Desmond, speaking in the voice of a witty and inspired angel, epitomized ideal expressiveness. Our boy still had no idea why inspired speech spoke best when it spoke in code, the simultaneous terror and ecstasy of his ancient trauma, as well as its lifelong (so far, anyhow) legacy of anger, being so deeply embedded in the self as to be imperceptible. Did he behave badly, now and then? Did he wish to shock, annoy, disturb, and provoke? Are you kidding? Did he also wish to excel, to keep panic and uncertainty at arm's length by good old main force effort? Make a guess. So here we have a pure but unsteady case of denial happily able to maintain itself through merciless effort. Booted along by invisible fears and horrors, this fellow was rewarded by wonderful grades and a vague sense of a mysterious but transcendent wholeness available through expression. He went to the University of Wisconsin and, after opening his eyes to the various joys of Henry James, William Carlos Williams, and the Texas blues-rocker Steve Miller, a great & joyous character who lived across the street, passed through essentially unchanged to emerge in 1965 with an honors degree in English, then an MA at Columbia a year later. He thought actual writing was probably beyond him even though actual writing was probably what he was best at.

DISCLOSURE: I own my rather battered copy of *Ghost Story* by Peter Straub. All opinions expressed in this review are entirely my own personal opinions.

Please refer to my Goodreads.com profile page or the 'about' page on sandysbookaday.wordpress.com for an explanation of my rating system.

This review and others are also published on my blog sandysbookaday.wordpress.com

Becky says

BAIT AND SWITCH.

"Peter Straub's classic bestseller is a work of "superb horror" (The Washington Post Book World) that, like any good ghost story, stands the test of time -- and conjures our darkest fears and nightmares."

Oh, this book was conjuring my worst fears alright... Just not in the way that was probably intended.

I'm quitting you, book. You know why? Because you're fucking boring. Because I dread picking you back up. Because you're not in the least bit scary to me, if you don't count the horror and dread I have of actually contemplating trudging along to the finish line with you.

By all accounts, the second half is where all the awesome happens. I just bet.

I slogged along to almost the halfway point, through weirdness and references-I-feel-like-I-should-know-but-don't-because-they-haven't-been-explained-yet and tedious-tedious-irrelevant-detail and 260+ pages of nothing-has-actually-happened-yet-except-for-some-boring-old-farts-dying...OH-THE-HORROR! and now I'm done. I've given almost an entire month to this book. The only thing it's given me back was confirmation that Straub's books just aren't for me. Shame.

Edward Lorn says

First and foremost, I would like to thank Jessica (Hopelessly Devoted Bibliophile) for this awesome addition to my collection.

Back in 1995, my family and my fifteen-year-old self moved from California to Alabama. The week we arrived in Alabama (Mobile area) Hurricane Opal decided to make landfall. Most of our stuff was still on the back of my brother-in-law's flatbed trailer. The most important items lost (for me, at least) was my mother's book collection. Whilst in California, Mom called her master bedroom's walk-in The Great Book Closet. This grand space was stocked with more than 450 first editions of some of the best horror literature ever written. These books were gifts from friends, family, and co-workers, but mostly they came from one person in particular—my mother's best friend Andrita. Sadly, all the books Andrita ever bought my mother were lost to water damage. Not only was my mother 2,000 miles away from her lifelong friend but she'd also lost most of the collection Andrita helped her build. 22 books survived, but *Ghost Story* was not one of them. Freakishly enough, I would lose those final 22 books another 9 years later when Hurricane Ivan came through Montgomery, Alabama and flooded my storage shed. To date, I have replaced all 450 books (my mother kept record of all her gifts and purchases, and I've been working off the contents in her ledger for the past ten years) aside from three. With Jessica's gift, I only need to replace two more. Thank you so much, Jessica.

So there's your E. History Lesson of the Day. After receiving Jessica's gift, I decided to reread *Ghost Story* so that I might give it a proper review. Here is that review:

For this reread I chose the audiobook narrated by Buck Schirner. All too often, literary horror is read in a cheesy, over-the-top fashion. These narrators seemingly want to be Vincent Price, but only Price could pull off Price without sounding like a bit of rejected B-movie voiceover. Buck Schirner is damn good at what he does. His performance is highly recommended. If you dig earhole stimuli, stimulate your earholes with this audiobook.

Now for the book itself. *Ghost Story* is one of the greatest literary horror novels ever written. The prose is gorgeous and the writing flows. The characters are varied and exquisitely drawn, believable and nearly tangible. The horror is achieved through mounting dread and rarely relies on gore to disturb, leaning more toward creatures with twinkling yellow eyes slowly climbing the stairs toward their victims, or a creepy child staring through a window. I've always found subtle horror far scarier than violence and gore. Moreover, it's what I don't see that truly frightens me, as my imagination is more terrifying than anything another author could imagine. This is the essence of *Ghost Story*. This is where the novel succeeds the most. The subject matter is insidious. It burrows. Digs. Nests.

I will admit, however, that *Ghost Story* is a chore to get into. It's the epitome of a slow burn. You will be tempted to put the book down, but I beg of you, push through the tedious opening chapters. Everything makes pay off by the end, and every word is needed. I don't know many horror novels of this length of which the same can be said.

In summation: *Ghost Story* is a novel better read if you know nothing about it. It's a bit of terror that worms into you and takes roots. One of the truly nightmare-inducing additions to horror literature. If you're a fan of the genre, do yourself a favor and read this book. Tell Gregory Bates that E. sent ya.

Final Judgment: Best read while snowed in.

Carol says

"What was the worst thing you've ever done? I won't tell you that, but I'll tell you the worst thing that ever happened to me.....the most dreadful thing." That's how Peter Straub's *GHOST STORY* begins.....

Something's going to happen to the whole town of Milburn, and *The Chowder Society* members with their spooky stories and premonitions are right in the middle of "it"

For Ricky Hawthorne, his law partner Sears James and friends Edward Wanderley, Lewis Benedikt and Dr. John Jaffrey, their nightmares all began on the same day, October of 1929....and what happened on that day was the beginning of the evil presence.....

Not *the* scariest book I've ever read, (*then we all have our own definition of scary*) but a darn good *GHOST STORY!*

