

## PREFACE

WHILE I WAS DOING GRADUATE WORK IN CLASSICS AT THE University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, I was introduced to one of the most famous ghost stories from antiquity, Pliny the Younger's tale of a haunted house at Athens. One of the requirements in the program was a course on Latin composition, and our professor, Larry Stephens, had assigned Pliny's story to illustrate the different uses of the imperfect and perfect tenses in a narrative. I had little talent for Latin composition; with apologies to Dr. Stephens, I must admit that I found the supernatural content of the story far more interesting than the technicalities of Pliny's excellent prose style, and I was soon wondering whether there were many more ghost stories like Pliny's surviving from Greece and Rome. As it turned out, there were a great many ghost stories of all kinds. I wanted to write a dissertation on the topic, but as the amount of available material could easily have filled an encyclopedia, I decided to concentrate only on the haunted-house stories. For this book, the dissertation has been greatly revised and expanded to include other types of haunting as well.

There are still many kinds of ghost story excluded from this study. Some people may be disappointed to find that tales of necromancy, of spirit possession, of trips to the underworld, and of witchcraft are not discussed in any detail in these pages. The ghost of Darius from Aeschylus's *Persians*, invoked by his people after their defeat by the Greeks, is mentioned only in passing. The witch Erictho from Lucan's *Pharsalia*, who compels a corpse to speak in what must be the most gruesome necromantic scene ever written, does not make an appearance here. Nor does the wounded werewolf from Petronius's *Satyricon*. The shades of the dead who inhabit the White Isle, too, are absent. Instead, this book focuses on hauntings, cases of revenants and apparitions that come back from the dead of their own accord, appearing to people of this world in order to warn them of danger, to prophesy, to take revenge, to request proper burial, or simply to comfort the living.

Although this study of ghost stories originated as a dissertation written

in fulfillment of a Ph.D. in Classics, in its current form the book is intended to appeal not only to classicists but to a wider audience, including folklorists and students of English literature and, ideally, anyone interested in a good ghost story. To make this book accessible to nonclassicists, I have moved nearly all of the Greek and Latin passages into the notes and have provided my own translations of them for the main text.

I am grateful to many people for their assistance and patience during the writing of this book. I thank my original dissertation committee, particularly Kenneth Reckford and George Houston, for allowing me to write on a folkloric topic and for their careful direction. I owe a particular debt to Bill Hansen, who for years now has been a mentor to me concerning folklore in classical literature. I would also like to thank Adrienne Mayor for bringing many of these ghost stories to my attention, Don Lateiner for spending so much time discussing crisis apparitions with me, and Sylvia Grider for generously allowing me to preview her paper on haunted houses in literature and culture. Jeff Carnes, Dave Johnson, Marybeth Lavrakas, Joan O'Brien, Shawn O'Bryhim, and Lisa Splittgerber read the manuscript at various stages, and I am very grateful for their valuable comments and suggestions. I thank the Center for Hellenic Studies in Washington, D.C., for a fellowship that allowed me the time and resources to concentrate on parts of this book during the summer of 1996. Thom Thibeault of Southern Illinois University provided technical support during the final stages of writing. I am particularly grateful for the expert guidance of several people associated with the University of Texas Press, including Ali Hossaini, Jim Burr, Leslie Tingle, and copyeditor Sherry Wert.

Finally, I wish to thank my family and friends, without whose encouragement, support, and patience this book would not have been completed.