On Haunted NC:

Tales of the Paranormal in Our Own Backyards

Kayleigh Turner

UNC Charlotte

November 29, 2011

ELED 3223

<http://kayleighturnerckp.weebly.com>

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Content Knowledge Project

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Ever had a chill run down your spine in the dead of night in a place with an interesting history? While the existence of paranormal activities is highly debated, an interest in the unknown is indisputable to many who are not afraid to embrace the mysterious history behind places that lead to ghost stories. Ghost stories, then, are the product of imagination and history, a human creation that initiates feelings that bring the history deeper, and make it come alive again. But what does it take to create a ghost story? Is it a tale of historical woes, the death of an important identity, or a topographical area whose climate leads to low rolling fog and interesting light anomalies, careful consideration of these factors will attempt to either debunk, or prove these ghost stories once and for all (or will it?).

Ghost stories can be traced back through different forms for hundreds of years. From the presence of a spirit or god from ancient times, to reported hauntings of colonial times, a sense of the paranormal is difficult to dispute. How then, do ghost stories come to be? Whether a direct result of the imagination, a perfect combination of weather and topography, or an inspired location, ghost stories are real, and an investigation of these potential causes will attempt to sort them out. Maybe then, the next time a ghost story is heard, the ideas in this paper will prove beneficial in the evaluation of the story’s legitimacy.

In an interview with M. B. Avery, I questioned her about a supposed haunted location near Denver, North Carolina, referred to by locals as Vesuvius Furnace. It was interesting to learn that her fifth grade class had recently taken a field trip there, to learn about the current state of the former plantation. Vesuvius Furnace now operates as Vesuvius Vineyards, hosting wedding receptions, corporate dinners, birthday parties and class reunions (Thompson & Lineberger III, 2011).

When I asked M.B. if the current owners made any mention of the ghosts, she referred me to photograph hanging on the wall in the front room of an orb caught above the furnace on the property, stating that was the only mention given. An interesting fact given however was that the current owners do not allow overnight visitors, perhaps offering some sort of testament to the haunted history of the home (Avery, 2011). Yes, it was age appropriate for the fifth grade class trip to lack the former lure of Vesuvius; it was fascinating to M.B. and myself that the owners of the house would not utilize their fame as being haunted to capitalize on economic gains as well. Regardless, M.B., still quite interested in the ghostly aspect of Vesuvius, had some interesting history to tell in our chat.

When questioned if she had, had any paranormal experiences at Vesuvius, M.B. stated that while her and her father were working on the restoration of the home, they entered the basement, while the power off, with flashlights to look for the breaker box. The basement contained chains and other former slave punishment tools, so it was already quite eerie. Then, according to M.B., a light bulb in the basement started glowing as bright as day, with the power in the house still shut off. M.B. and her father high-tailed it out of the basement, and would not return without a full party in tow (Avery, 2011). This incident explains a snippet of M.B.’s history with Vesuvius, but I was also interested in her history with the paranormal in general. M.B. tells me she is and has been interested in the paranormal since her first experience when she was only eleven years old. When asked about the Hollywood appeal of the paranormal, M.B. scoffs, stating,

“I do not appreciate the Hollywood version. It’s just too overdone!” (Avery, 2011).

To further justify M.B.’s stories, I asked her if she knew of anyone else that had ever had paranormal experiences while at Vesuvius. M.B. introduced me to her mother-in-law who told me a story of accompanying her husband, M.B.’s father-in-law while they were working on the upstairs front room on the left side of the house, also referred to as the “death room.” This room is the location where important bodies laid in state for mourning. While painting this room during the renovation, only present with her husband, the couple heard the door of his work van open slowly. No one else was present at the house, the van was parked behind the house, locked, and his keys were in his pocket. After going to investigate and shutting the door to the van, the couple resumed work. However, a few minutes later they heard the front door open and slam shut, again, while no one else was present on the roped off renovation site. Needless to say, the couple quickly left, and did not return without M.B.’s father and his work crew, in the daylight (Avery, 2011).

History about Vesuvius Furnace is surprisingly slim to those other than locals. This could likely be related to the economical aspect of the location today, as it hosts wedding receptions and benefits from the fruits of paid laborers (no longer slave workers), through Vesuvius Vineyards. While the benefit to downplaying the paranormal activity is beneficial for the current owners, the house stood vacant for quite some time before the business aspect overcame it. There is something to be said in regards to the hidden paranormal sense of the home today, as it could benefit financially from haunted tours, the refusal to do so is interesting. Another aspect I found fascinating from my correspondence with M. B. was that class field trips are taken to Vesuvius Furnace in the fourth and fifth grades. This aspect may contribute to why the ghostly aspect is not as present, however it brings to question whether or not the true history of the home is being brought to light, or only the parts that allow for correspondence with the objective and curriculum, surrounding local history. It is difficult for an outsider to ever truly know.

One local group that is interested in proving the presence of ghosts in North Carolina, and especially in the Denver/Lincolnton area focused on in this paper is Dark Realm Research. This ghostly group is family owned, and have two published productions available, presenting their work as highly legitimate. The group defends their films stating that they are based on providing the facts about the historical area in question, and adding to the interest with potential proof of spectral energy, thus resulting in a documentary, as opposed to a Hollywood blockbuster with outlandish special effects (Ravencroft, 2009). Snippets of their videos can be watched on their website and other popular video media sites such as www.Youtube.com (Johnathan, 2011). Though one viewing these films with a skeptical eye may question the true legitimacy, it is hard to ever truly prove or disprove an event based on a belief, or the use of special effects by anyone not present for the taping. Regardless, of belief, a lot can be said about Dark Realm Research, as this small town business is not knocking down Hollywood doors looking to sell their story. What appeals about this group that should be considered even if not for their riveting special effects therefore, is for their effort in revealing the history and potential hauntings of an area for what they arise from, history.

This viewpoint on the importance of a location’s history is proven through further analysis of Dark Realm Research which turns toward the webpage editor for this group, who draws interesting attention to why the group, is interested in locating ghosts. Mention is made of media popular shows that set out to prove if there is or is not a ghost present, without truly delving into the all important question of why a ghost may be present at all.

“**Sometimes specters need to tell the story. Ghosts feel that they should let the living hear the stories of old. When ghost let the living know the stories, they want the living to understand them and learn from that story” (Ravencroft, 2009).**

**The editor, Joshua Ravencroft continues with this attitude by defining *fetter attachments* as items that a ghost was attached to when living, such as a personal item that had strong emotions related to it, or a location they were brutally murdered in (consider the basement of Vesuvius Furnace) (Ravencroft, 2009). This is an interesting prospect to consider, as items can be easily removed from a location, potentially ridding the haunted area of the paranormal, and thus solving a ghostly problem. If this information is true, why then, are there not television shows that focus on finding the source of the attachment in the attempt to reveal a ghostly presence. It is with this information and through the investigation of groups like Dark Realm that provides the reason for understanding why a ghost may be haunting is so important. This evidence may also correspond with the haunting of more “famous” ghosts, and the historical pieces of a location that allow for ghost stories to arise from the history of a place alone.**

**In the investigation of the topography of an area in relation to haunting, Dark Realm continues to offer a solution, stating that some specters are able to transfer their energy into a misty fog, referred to as an *echo mist*. This mist is controlled by the specter, and may account for the association of fog and misty conditions popular in ghost stories. Dark Realm continues by offering potential reasons for why such fetters may appear, for example as a warning to the living to not go somewhere, as that is where their life was taken from them. Fetters are not always offering friendly warnings, however, often fetters are haunting because their life was taken from them brutally and they embody their energy onto the location of their death, taking out their anger on the living. The term *ectoplasm* is introduced, as the substance ghosts use to take on a form that arises from fear evoked from the living in a release of energy through a chill down the spine or heightened sense of anxiety (Ravencroft, 2009). This instance could be responsible for the doors slamming if either of M.B.’s parents-in-law were emitting a release of fearful energy while present in the death room. A specter could then gather form through the release of fear to create force to move objects, such as doors.**

It can be said then, that Vesuvius Furnace and other similar experiences with the paranormal are fueled by the imagination, the media, and fear. A local North Carolina author and graduate of UNC, recommended to me by M. B. Avery, Daniel Barefoot has learned to capitalize on such driving forces of the paranormal. Barefoot writes travel guides, biographies and haunted tales focusing on North Carolina. In three books, Barefoot covers all 100 counties of North Carolina, detailing a ghost story for each. These books are titled: *Seaside Spectres*, *Piedmont Phantoms*, and *Haints of the Hills* (Lincoln County Historical Assn., 2009). It is interesting though, that Barefoot capitalizes on the economic prospect of the paranormal, while potentially dissuading the belief that ghost stories may be sensationalized from topographical features, which is what his three North Carolina titles focus on. Despite the contrast provided from this evidence, some mention of national or locally significant historical characters may be present in his books, citing a relation to the partially media related aspect of what would have been considered “historical celebrities,” and thus contributing to another factor of the existence of ghost stories. In close examination, however, while Barefoot’s books are incredibly popular and captivating, some credibility may be lacking if an attempt was led to prove such ghost stories true (Blair, 2011).

What then can be credited as the true source of the origin of ghost stories? It is clear a mixture of willingness to believe in the unknown, the aspect of fear, and history are important aspects of historical haunting. What then, does Hollywood use to create the multi-million dollar blockbusters time and time again? Special effects, hardly realistic plot lines, and money. These characteristics draw in consumers time and time again interested in a good scare that they know is based completely on a wacky idea that arose late one night in some writer’s mind. Citizens that attend Hollywood horror movies miss out on one of the greatest aspects of a ghost story, the history. It is clear then why M.B. and Dark Realm Research dislike the media frenzy resulting in a positive economic turnout for unrealistic stories from Hollywood, and it is likely Daniel Barefoot is not the greatest fan either. In ghost stories, history is very important, money is not everything, and depth of true or even potential knowledge is power.

A potential explanation for the powerful presence of Hollywood in ghostly matters in America can be seen by comparing the juxtaposing viewpoints of America to Mexico. Each year in Mexico, and in areas of the United States bordering Mexico, ritual ceremonies are performed over a three day period to honor the deceased relatives of family members, and celebrate their life (Miller, 2009). From an American standpoint, the footage of ritual traditions can be misleading, as skulls are utilized, and dances are performed and homage paid to the visiting ghosts of dead family members. This tradition makes more sense if one is to consider life and death as the ancient Aztecs did,

“Instead of fearing death, they embraced it. To them, life was a dream and only in death did they become truly awake” (Miller, 2009).

This viewpoint is not found too commonly among Americans today outside of the church. Even within churches though, fear of death is often a common topic. Do ghost stories exist in Mexico then? Perhaps a more open and welcoming view on death would result in the lack of ghost stories, which would certainly impact the economic surplus of Hollywood horror movies. This point proves just how important the media is in daily life to Americans and other citizens of other cultures all over the world.

While the Aztecs were perfecting their mourning techniques approximately 3,000 years ago (Miller, 2009), the Celtics were celebrating their new year during the festival of Samhain nearly 2,000 years ago (“Halloween,” 2011). This festival resulted in the importance of the night before All Saints Day, referred to as All Hallows Eve, and eventually Halloween. The Celtics believed that on October 31st each year, the spirits of the dead were unleashed onto the living world to cause all sorts of commotion and even had the power to damage the season’s crops. The Celtics also believed the priests of the day, referred to as Druids were better able to make predictions, because the separating line between the spiritual and earthly world was blurred. In this evidence, ghosts prove to be both haunts and helpers, as they were known for causing terror, while their presence allowed for planning for the future (“Halloween,” 2011). This belief closely resembles a blend between the Aztec belief of the aid of ghosts, and the American belief of the potential terror of ghosts.

This blend then, is quite a responsible explanation for the differing origins and viewpoints present across the nation, as well as across the state, (illustrated by Daniel Barefoot especially). This research proves that ghost stories arise from all three analyzed sources; the historical past, topographical elements, and economical gain of a location are all responsible. The historical aspect of a ghost story can go further than just the history of the location, however, as proved through the examination of two of American history’s most important influences, the Celtics coming from around England, the mother country, and the Aztecs, one of the world’s oldest societies, responsible for the first calendar and other intellectual feats that were before their time. Due to the contributions of these two societies on American belief throughout the time America has been a country, it could be argued that history is the most prevalent aspect of a ghost story.

It is important to consider, though, that without the overdone Hollywood contribution to ghost stories and horrific tales, that the history could likely fall through the wayside, and not be as important. While this is saddening for history buffs to consider, the media hype of the paranormal is an important aspect of its continuing popularity, and the presence of opportunity for small groups such as Dark Realm Research or Daniel Barefoot novels to exist. Therefore, it could also easily be argued that the Hollywood aspect that utilizes the topographical contributions and echo mist of areas to produce cinematic ghostly glories with is the most prevalent aspect of a ghost story as well.

Regardless of the true origin, belief or truth of a ghost story, there are undoubtedly three major components necessary: a vibrant history, an interesting presence in the topography, and enough interest to market a related product to maintain interest for ghost stories to live on. While in the age of Hollywood, paranormal frights sell, ghost stories are in their heyday, and they lack any signs of stopping. It is important to realize that any location could contain fetters or spectral energy that could take form from your fear if you only just believe. The research necessary to draft and write this paper resulted in many a night of unending interest as well as many a night of having to stop because the stories were too real. Despite any paranormal experience or lack thereof, an interest exists, all one has to do is explore it. Are you brave enough?

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