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Ghosts Are Real

Delaney Otto

“Are ghosts real?” That is the question pondered by skeptics and believers alike. The skeptic searches for proof of their fiction, the believer for proof of their reality. Poltergeists, phantoms, shades; countless names, one whole being searched for like Bigfoot and aliens.

I can say, with wholehearted conviction, that they exist. Just not how you typically view them.

Ghosts are usually seen as the spirits of people left after they die. These are the results, usually, of a painful or untimely death. There are those who just wander, or those stuck in the moment of their demise.

I see ghosts as things we lost physically, but which stick around in the spirit. They’re lodged in our souls and no matter how hard you tug; you can’t pull them out. They are the memories you look back on fondly or hope to drown in the seas of your subconscious. They are the people and moments that come to you in dreams, the faint sense of *déjà-vu*, the body’s response to a stimulus you long forgot was connected to something that had such a profound effect on your flesh.

The smell of your grandmother’s perfume, something that clung to your clothes hours after you’d left her house; the sound of tires squealing on pavement, that shredding noise in your ears that wakes you from your nightmare. The sight of old, yellowed photographs that your parents dig through of your great-great-grandparents, young and smiling. The touch of a baby blanket you were swaddled in after you were born; the taste of cough syrup on your tongue, from when you were a sick child fighting against your mother’s medicine.

The senses bring up ghosts you thought were long forgotten—ghosts you forgot even existed. Yet, they persist, more than muscle

memory. They are tiny threads knitted into the fiber of your memory, your existence. You are a quilt of happenstances, random moments in time. You will never *not* be haunted.

The earth is haunted, too. Fossils, preserved remains, valleys and mountains carved from wind and water and time. Old forests we chopped down to make way for civilization, civilizations razed and rebuilt, structures of buildings turned into something else. A museum that was once a house is a case of possession, though I'm not sure who is possessing who. Is the spirit of the old house, the old inhabitants, the old memories possessing this new reality, this reinvention? Or is the modernized museum, seeking to immortalize the specter, possessing it, and making it show itself?

Musuems—museums are filled with ghosts. Clothing, tools, art, letters, armor; ghosts upon ghosts upon ghosts. These are the clear ones, the ones you cannot deny. This is where we seek out those old spirits, wondering what their stories are, what memories are soaked into these physical things. The soul of an artist is wrapped within each piece they create, purposefully made ghosts meant to outlast their creator. Other things, incidental things like shoes and tools, are meant to last a long time, to serve. Their longevity is not meant for witnessing—it is for using. To see them on display, not on the body or in the hands of someone, is to truly know what it is to be haunted. Haunted by what once was, *who* once was. The horror of the haunting is the pondering as to what happened to them. The fact that they no longer exist, but these things they used persist.

History is not a ghost. It is the ghost maker. The people it leaves behind, the things, the moments, the debris, are its ghosts. Wars, peace times, revolutions, and recessions. The dust of bombs, the bodies of soldiers and civilians, the old papers of treaties and laws, the statues, the memorials. All of it is the ghost that history is continually crafting. Culling, moment after moment, year after year, all of these events and moments in time. One day, we will be referred to as the past, as the long bygone era. We will be the ghosts of history, in due time. History is made every day, born each moment. It is the short-lived fly, the

ever-preserved fossil. Life and death wrapped into one, inseparable, conjoined. It is beautiful and it is terrifying.

Time, and its passing, is the reaper's scythe. Each day we make new ghosts. Who we were yesterday is gone forever. We can never regain them. We have their memories, their ideas, their dreams, and we carry them in our bodies, our hearts and our minds. We can never be rid of them, no matter how hard we try. So, we carry on, knowing who we are now is going to be tomorrow's ghost. And there's nothing we can do to stop that.

So we make our ghosts. We walk with them every day, every second. I create a ghost as I write this; once this is done, once I shut this laptop and go to bed, this will be a ghost. I kill my precious moments of time with the effort of crafting this. I do not regret it; I think I needed this. I fear death like any other person, and yet I spend what little time I have on earth writing. Each letter is a small phantom, coming to float along the other things I've written, all my other thoughts. Once you have a thought, it is just another ghost, rolling around in your skull with every other thought, emotion, feeling, urge, or other kind of spark between neurons.

Ghosts are real. We are all haunted houses.

Delaney Otto is a senior at UND pursuing a major in Communication and a minor in English. She enjoys horror, magical realism, fantasy, and happy endings. Along with writing, she enjoys music and art, and thinks that everyone should try creating something, no matter how small or simple. She has a growing pile of books she really needs to start reading.