

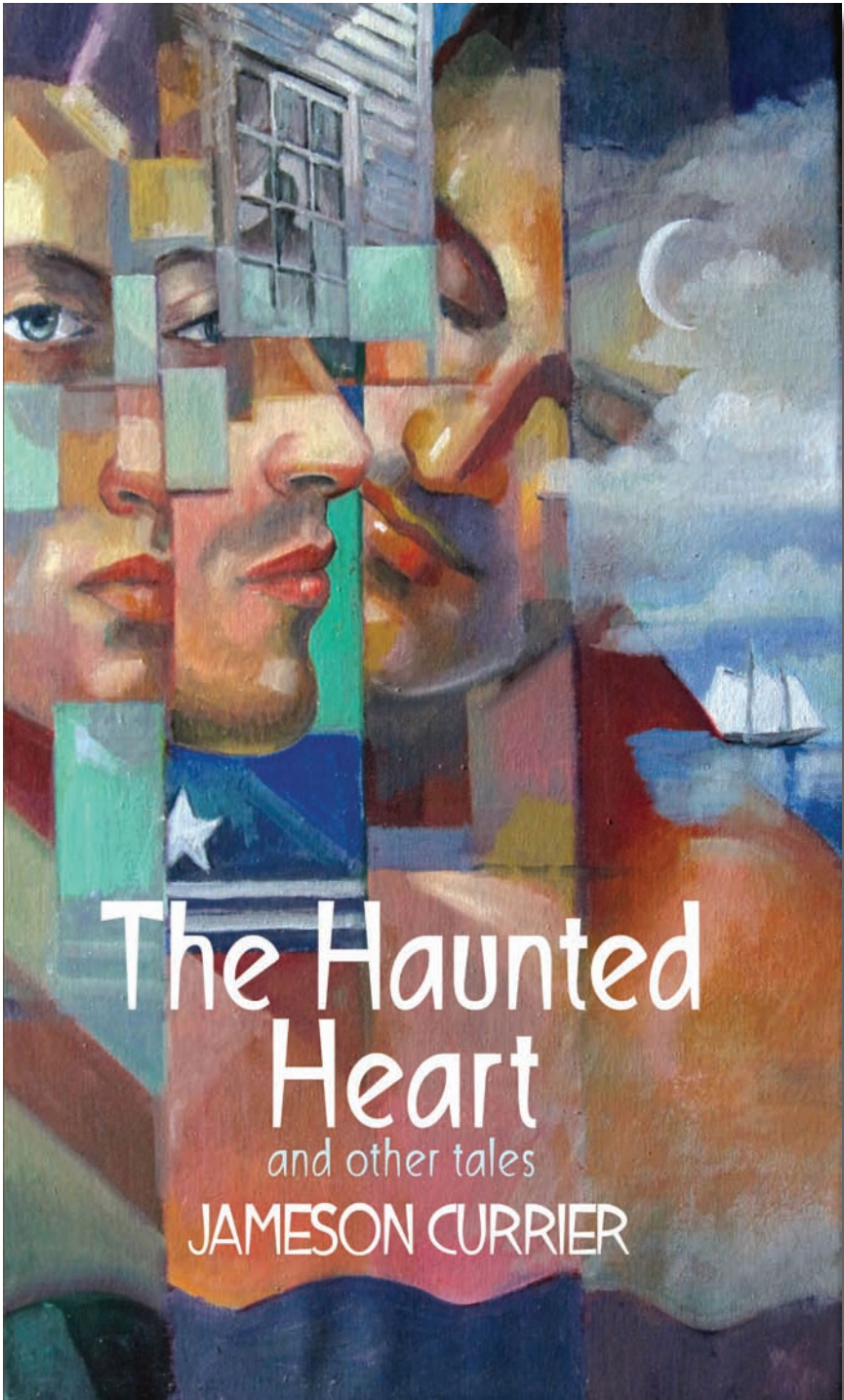


Ghost Stories

by
gay authors

a recommended
reading list
compiled by

Jameson Currier



The Haunted Heart

and other tales

JAMESON CURRIER

Black Quill Winner: Editors' Choice-Best Dark Genre Fiction Collection

The Haunted Heart and Other Tales

by Jameson Currier

Twelve stories of gay men and the memories that haunt them.

Jameson Currier modernizes the traditional ghost story with gay lovers, loners, activists, and addicts, blending history and contemporary issues of the gay community with the unexpected of the supernatural.

"Jameson Currier's *The Haunted Heart and Other Tales* expands upon the usual ghost story tropes by imbuing them with deep metaphorical resonance to the queer experience. Infused with flawed, three-dimensional characters, this first-rate collection strikes all the right chords in just the right places. Equal parts unnerving and heartrending, these chilling tales are testament to Currier's literary prowess and the profound humanity at the core of his writing. Gay, straight, twisted like a pretzel... his writing is simply not to be missed by any reader with a taste for good fiction."

Vince Liaguno, *Dark Scribe Magazine*

"I am completely amazed by the range of ghost stories in this collection. These are awesome ghost stories, and the literary connections to gay life are deep and complex."

Chad Helder, *Unspeakable Horror* and *The Pop-Up Book of Death*

"Currier's characters are sumptuous, his plots are freshly twisted and his prose magnificent. A perfectly chilling collection of tales from one of the modern masters of the genre. Powerful stuff, indeed."

Jerry Wheeler, *Out in Print* and *Out Front Colorado*

"Jameson Currier is a story teller who weaves his tale around you until you genuinely care about the characters. He has the ability to capture dialogue with an almost journalistic objectivity; this places you in the scene as an eavesdropper, making you part of the story. He is one of the few writers who can be equally literary, erotic, dramatic and damn funny, sometimes all in the same sentence. His collection of ghost stories, *The Haunted Heart*, allows him to showcase these abilities in original stories that are not intended to frighten so much as entertain. There are a multitude of ghosts here, not just the spirits of the dead that you would expect, but the ghosts of abusive relationships, bad decisions, personal flaws, and the ever-present ghost of AIDS that forever hovers in the lives of gay men."

Sean Meriwether, author of *The Silent Hustler*

"Currier's writing is flawless and his knack for conveying emotion, with both the spoken words and thoughts of his characters, is unparalleled. Fans of the author have come to expect that his work isn't exactly light or escapist, which makes it all the more affecting."

Chris Verleger, *Edge*

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GHOST STORIES

by gay authors

a Recommended Reading list

compiled by

Jameson Carrier

author of *The Wolf at the Door*

and *The Haunted Heart and Other Tales*

During the eight years that I worked on the gay-themed ghost stories that became *The Haunted Heart and Other Tales*, I read a number of classic and contemporary ghost stories and horror anthologies and was impressed by the hidden history of how gay authors helped to shape this genre. The list below, organized chronologically, reflects ghost stories and novels written by gay men and which include gay male characters, gay themes, and/or gay interpretations. I encourage readers to contact me at jimcurrier@aol.com regarding additions or omissions to this reading list. Please note that this is not a comprehensive list, but a selected and suggested one for discussion and further research. I have also not included the contributions of lesbian authors to the ghost story genre in the hopes that another author will do so, nor have I included the gay vampire tale within these recommendations—that is a genre of its own and which has grown in recent years at warp speed and lie beyond the scope of this list.

Black Spirits & White, A Book of Ghost Stories by Ralph Adams Cram. (Forgotten Books, 2009). Cram (1863-1942) was an author, lecturer, and architect, and designed many ecclesiastical and collegiate buildings. Douglass Shand-Tucci's two volume biography of *Cram, Boston Bohemia*, published in 1996, alleged that the architect and his circle were closeted homosexual men who demonstrated their sexuality through their designs. Cram was a well-traveled man, fascinated by the supernatural, and in 1885 published a collection of ghost stories, *Black Spirits and White*, and it is possible, with many of these stories constructed as "tales of two men agoing ghost-hunting," to imbue a hidden sexuality to these tales in the same manner as Cram's architecture is now regarded. Two particular favorites are "In Kropsberg Keep" and "Sister Magdalena."

The Complete Short Stories of Oscar Wilde (Dover, 2006). While film portrayals of Sir Simon de Canterville, the title spirit of Wilde's popular and comic ghost story "The Canterville Ghost," have depicted the spirit as theatrical, flamboyant, and effete, a hidden homosexuality to this character cannot be easily discerned in the story, but a more obvious gay subtext is evident in Wilde's haunting and poignant fairy tale "The Happy Prince," about the platonic friendship between a statue and a swallow. The spirit of the Prince, who died young and is now embodied in a statue that overlooks his kingdom, witnesses the suffering of his former subjects and enlists the help of the Swallow to rectify these social injustices. In the end, when the Swallow dies and the statue is melted down to make another, the Prince and the Swallow are reunited in Heaven. Fairy tales, like ghost stories, are links to cultural myths and folklore. Wilde (1854-1900) was also a pioneer of modern speculative fiction with *The Picture of Dorian Gray*.

Ghost Stories of Henry James (Wordsworth Editions Ltd, 2008). Volumes and volumes have been written on Henry James (1843-1916) and his sexuality and his literary output, and it's possible to give gay interpretations to many of his psychological ghost stories. "The Jolly Corner" concerns a man witnessing his alter ego as he regards his vacant property, an allegory in which the ghost represents the narrator's (and the author's) repressed homosexuality and "how he might have led his life." "The Real Right Thing" also crackles with sexual ambiguity. A friend and an author's wife struggle over an author's commemoration when the friend begins a biography and the spirit of the author hovers over the work. The biographer is overcome with the task, "waiting for the evening very much as one of a pair of lovers might wait for the hour of their appointment." "Owen Wingrave" concerns the last scion of a military family who decides to abandon his calling and embrace pacifism. After fierce family opposition and disinheritance, Owen agrees to spend a night in a haunted room of the family mansion Paramore—a room in which an ancestor was found dead "without a wound" after accidentally killing his son while disciplining him. This volume also includes James's novella, *The Turn of the Screw*, and the ambiguity over the sexuality and relationships of Peter Quint and Miss Jessel will be forever debated.

The Temple of Death: The Ghost Stories of A.C. and R.H. Benson (Dover, 2007). There has been no evidence that the Benson brothers Arthur Christopher (1862-1925), Edward Frederick (1867-1940), and Robert Hugh (1871-1914)

were all gay, though each son of the Archbishop of Canterbury has been the subject of literary speculation. The literary output of each brother included ghost stories, many of whose themes relied on the conflict of Christianity with earlier pagan religions. In “The Blood-Eagle” by R.H. Benson, published in 1903, two youths stumble upon a ritual gone awry, and in “The Closed Window,” by A.C. Benson and published in 1903, two gentleman cousins are drawn to a room in a haunted tower. In “The Slype House,” by A.C. Benson and published in 1904, a frail young man, educated in the black arts, summons spirits in his lonely, elder years. “The Grey Cat” by A.C. Benson and published in 1903 can be read as a religious allegory of the fear of a young boy succumbing to homosexuality, and “The Traveller” by R.H. Benson and published in 1903, about a priest who hears the ghostly confession of Thomas Beckett’s murderer, can be imprinted with the hindsight of the Archbishop’s homosexuality. It is also possible to imbue a gay subtext to the gentlemanly relationships found in two stories by A.C. Benson published posthumously in 1926, “The Uttermost Farthing” and “Basil Netherby,” also published as “The House at Trehale.”

The Complete Saki by H.H. Munro (Penguin, 1988). It’s possible to give almost anything Hector Hugh Munro (1870-1916) wrote a gay interpretation. His witty and macabre stories satirized Edwardian society and culture. Munro never married and his biographers have hypothesized he was homosexual. His pen name “Saki” refers to a cupbearer or a beautiful boy. Included in his oeuvre are a few ghost stories with characters exhibiting stereotypical features of how gay men were depicted in the literature of the era. Framton, the frail gentleman caller of “The Open Window” (1911), after hearing the tragic tale of the missing hunting party, quickly informs his host of his own needs for “complete rest” and “avoidance of exercise.” And the ghost of a miser haunts a friend who borrowed money in “The Soul of Laploshka” (1910).

All Soul’s Night by Hugh Walpole (Macmillan, 1933). Walpole (1884-1941) was a prolific writer and a key member of the exclusive homosexual coterie in 1930s London, which included Noel Coward and Ivor Novello. Among his ghost stories are three classic ghost stories: “Mrs. Lunt,” “The Tarn,” and “A Little Ghost,” the latter which was first published in 1922 and collected in 1933. “A Little Ghost” is narrated by a man grieving over the sudden loss of his “greatest friend” and is visited by the spirit of a young girl in a house on the coast of Glebeshire.

The Collected Ghost Stories of E. F. Benson edited by Richard Dalby (Carroll & Graf; 3rd edition, 2002). Benson (1867-1940) was a prolific writer and the author of the popular Mapp & Lucia series featuring Emmeline “Lucia” Lucas and Elizabeth Mapp. H.P. Lovecraft spoke highly of Benson’s horror stories in his essay on the genre, “Supernatural Horror in Literature.” Benson never married and like his brothers his homosexuality is unproven and often disputed, but it is possible to find some gay subtext in his ghost stories, notably “Bagnell Terrace,” published in 1925, about two bachelors who live near each other in an enclave of London who are haunted by the spirit of an Egyptian.

The Life to Come: And Other Stories by E.M. Forster (W.W. Norton & Co, 1987). Forster was the noted British author of *Howard’s End*, *A Room With a View*, *A Passage to India*, and *Where Angels Fear to Tread*. Like his gay-themed novel *Maurice*, this collection of short stories was published after Forster’s death, and includes two superb ghost stories with gay subtext. “Dr. Woolcott,” written in 1927, finds a young invalid being seduced by a handsome ghost, and “The Classical Annex,” written in 1930-1931, revolves around a lusty supernatural entity, having survived since ancient Grecian days, wrecking havoc on the Bigglesmouth Municipal Museum and seducing the curator’s son.

Creatures of Circumstance by Somerset Maugham (Heinemann, 1947). Maugham (1847-1965), author of *Of Human Bondage* and *The Moon and Sixpence*, had affairs with both men and women. Maugham’s collection of short stories, *Creatures of Circumstance*, published in 1947, contained the gem of a ghost story, “A Man from Glasgow,” wherein an olive grower recounts a haunting to another man and is set within a bar near Gibraltar.

The Delicate Prey and Other Stories by Paul Bowles (Random House, 1950). Included in Bowles collection was the story “The Circular Valley” about the Atlájala, a genderless spirit with the ability to slip into the body of humans and animals, including several friars, bandits, and an unhappy couple. Bowles (1910-1999), part of Gertrude Stein’s literary circle, was a composer and a writer, notably of the novel *The Sheltering Sky*, about an American couple drifting across North Africa who bore resemblances to the author and his wife, Jane Bowles.

Collected Stories by Tennessee Williams (New Directions, 1994) Williams (1911-1983) came to prominence with his memory play, *The Glass Menagerie*, and subtitled his play about Zelda and F. Scott Fitzgerald, *Clothes for a Summer Hotel*, “A Ghost Story.” Included in Williams’s *Collected Stories* is his short story “The Mysteries of the Joy Rio,” a haunted tale of a gay man’s lost youth set in the balcony of a dilapidated movie theater, written in 1941 and published in 1954.

The Gay Haunt by Victor J. Banis, writing as Victor Jay (The Borgo Press, 2007). A reprint of Banis’s erotic novel from 1970, about a gay man trying to “straighten” himself out by marrying his boss’s daughter and who is visited by the spirit of his dead lover.

The New York Years: Stories by Felice Picano (Alyson, 2000). Most of the stories in this collection comprised Picano’s 1983 collection *Slashed to Ribbons in Defense of Love*, including the short story “Hunter,” which first appeared in a 1980 issue of *Drummer*, about a writer who goes to an artists’ colony in the Hamptons and is visited by the phantom of a gay poet, who seduces him.

Cabal by Clive Barker (Poseidon Press, 1988). The prolific and popular Barker publicly came out as gay in 1995. In this novella, set in the wilds of Canada, a man encounters shape-shifters called “Nightbreed.” Readers, critics, and fans have embraced the book for its queer metaphors. Two of the heroes in Barker’s fantasy novel *Imajica* (Harpercollins, 1991) are gay as well; when one dies of AIDS, his soul takes refuge in his lover’s body.

A Visitation of Spirits by Randall Kenan (Grove Press, 1989). Kenan’s debut novel is narrated by the ghost of a young gay man and revolves around four generations of a black family in rural North Carolina. “Clarence and the Dead,” the opening story of Kenan’s short fiction collection, *Let the Dead Bury the Dead* (Harcourt, 1992), finds the spirit of a woman inhabiting a young boy with disturbing consequences.

Fidelities by Richard Hall (Viking, 1993). Included in the author’s collection was the short story “Country People,” which explores gay history and prejudices through the supernatural events in an adult-education classroom. Hall (1926-

1992) focused almost exclusively on issues of gay identity and community in his short stories, plays and other writings.

Dancing on the Moon: Short Stories About AIDS by Jameson Currier (Viking, 1993). Included in the author's debut collection of fiction was "Ghosts," a tale of an exploration of a young man who summons up the ghost of his recently departed lover as a way to overcome the grief of losing him to AIDS. The story was also included in the author's collected AIDS fiction, *Still Dancing: New and Selected Stories* (Lethe Press, 2008).

Unfinished by Jay B. Laws (Alyson, 1993). Laws wrote these stories as he was battling AIDS and they center around a hearing-impaired gay man who moves into a haunted San Francisco apartment. The stories unfold via visitations by three Dickensian ghosts offering accounts of their deaths. The final story, "Gravity," is a heartbreaking account of the diminishing of the physical body of a patient.

A Quilted Heart by R.M. Vaughan (Insomniac Press, 2000). A mystery novel and a tale of "gay obsession, jealousy, and love" which begins when a police inspector finds a body in the empty swimming pool of an old house in Quebec's Eastern townships. The house holds many secrets, including a hidden manuscript and the ghost of a gay love triangle.

Trysts: A Triskaidecollection of Queer and Weird Stories by Steve Berman (Lethe, 2001). Berman's collection of thirteen stories includes the "Beach 2," about a man dealing with his sexuality who consults an Ouija board and a ghost who spells out his desires. "Left Alone" finds a gay man yearning for the ghost of his lover. "His Paper Doll" is a voodoo doll story in which a gay boy pieces together his fantasy guy. Several stories take place in the "Fallen Area," an urban land where strange creatures lurk in abandoned office buildings.

The Hour Before Dark by Douglas Clegg (Leisure Books, 2003). Clegg, one of a number of popular horror writers who are openly gay, tells the story of a man who returns to his New England home and joins his gay brother and sister in unraveling the mystery of their father's death.

Black Shapes in a Darkened Room by Marshall Moore (Suspect Thoughts, 2004). Moore infuses his dark tales with a macabre sense of justice. In “Hurricane Season,” a gay man who believes his dead mother is trying to kill him by way of natural disaster communicates with his late sister via an Ouija board in order to escape death, and in “Simon Says” a gay man eulogizes his lover who had the ability to talk to ghosts on the telephone.

Specimen Days by Michael Cunningham (Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 2005). The first of three novellas which comprise this novel by the author of *The Hours* is the subtle ghost story “In the Machine” set in the early 1900s in New York City. Revolving around a deformed twelve-year boy who works in a factory, gay themes are non-existent, save for the influence and cameo of poet Walt Whitman.

The Dust of Wonderland by Lee Thomas (Alyson, 2007). A late night call summons a father to New Orleans because his son has been beaten and is in a coma. Not long after arriving in the Big Easy, the father becomes haunted by the spirit of his gay lover, the former owner of a popular gay club called Wonderland.

Capote in Kansas: A Ghost Story by Kim Powers (Avalon, 2007). This novel focuses on the relationship between Truman Capote and Harper Lee during the time of writing *In Cold Blood* and *To Kill a Mockingbird* with Capote haunted by both the victims and the killers of the true-crime event in Holcomb, Kansas.

Vintage: A Ghost Story by Steve Berman (Lethe, 2008). A reprint edition of the author’s 2007 young adult novel about a lonely gay teen searching for love and a reason to live following a suicide attempt. Walking an empty stretch of New Jersey highway on an autumn night, he meets a strange and beautiful boy who looks like he stepped out of a dream. The novel was a finalist for the Andre Norton Award.

Second Thoughts: More Queer and Weird Stories by Steve Berman (Lethe, 2008). Berman’s second collection of weird tales includes the ghost story “A Rotten Obligation,” about a corpse haunting a hustler.

In the Closet, Under the Bed by Lee Thomas (Dark Scribe, 2009). Fifteen horror tales, many of which find gay male protagonists battling supernatural forces. Among the standouts are “An Apiary of White Bees,” about a man who discovers a hidden vault of prohibition alcohol and its haunted effects, and “I’m Your Violence,” about a detective investigating the gruesome murder of a pedophile who inherits a violent, revengeful spirit while searching for the murderer. A finalist for awards from the Lambda Literary Foundation and the Horror Writers Association.

The Haunted Heart and Other Tales by Jameson Currier (Lethe, 2009). Twelve modern ghost stories blending queer history and contemporary issues of the gay community with the unexpected of the supernatural. The collection includes the author’s stories “The Woman in the Window” and “The Bloomsbury Nudes.” Winner of the 2009 Black Quill Award from Dark Scribe magazine.

Pumpkin Teeth: Stories by Tom Cardamone (Lethe, 2009). An avid fan of weird and horror stories, Cardamone also includes “The Next Bardo,” a haunting tale set in a gay bar. This debut collection of stories was a finalist for the Lambda Literary Award.

Martyrs & Monsters by Robert Dunbar (Dark Hart, 2009) A collection of terrifying tales which incorporates gay characters in its stories set in a haunted tenement. A finalist for the Bram Stoker award from the Horror Writers Association.

The Wolf at the Door by Jameson Currier (Chelsea Station Editions, 2010). The author’s novel about the haunting of a gay-owned guesthouse in New Orleans.

Fiction Anthologies:

Several anthologies of gay horror and speculative fiction have been published since the 1990s. One of the earliest was *Embracing the Dark* (Alyson, 1991), edited by Eric Garber, and includes the story “Manor” by Karl Henrich Ulrichs, a ghostly gay vampire tale that predates Dracula by more than a decade. Ulrichs (1825-1895) is credited as one of the founders of the modern gay activist movement when he proposed that some people are born with a “soul” or character of the

opposite gender; He also popularized the term “Urning” which in Britain became known as “Uranian,” and was an early term for homosexuality. *Grave Passions: Tales of the Gay Supernatural* (BadBoy, 1997), edited by William J. Mann, included fiction by M. Christian, Perry Brass, Thomas S. Roche, and Felice Picano. *The Ghost of Carmen Miranda and other Spooky Gay and Lesbian Tales* (Alyson, 1998), edited by Julie K. Trevelyan and Scott Brassart, includes several ghost stories including the title story by Don Sakers and “The Haunting of Room 110” by Michael Price Nelson. *Queer Fear* (Arsenal Pulp, 2000), edited by Michael Rowe, helped define the genre of “queer horror” and includes stories by Douglas Clegg and Michael Thomas Ford. A sequel, *Queer Fear II* (Arsenal Pulp, 2002), also edited by Michael Rowe, included stories by Marshall Moore and Michael Thomas Ford. *Bending the Landscape: Horror* (Overlook, 2001), edited by Nicola Griffith and Stephen Pagel, was a volume of gay and lesbian horror stories in the multi-volume series. *Shadows of the Night: Queer Tales of the Uncanny and Unusual* (Southern Tier, 2004), edited by Greg Herren, included short stories by Richard Hall and Greg Wharton. *Wilde Stories 2008: Best of the Year’s Gay Speculative Fiction* (Lethe, 2008), edited by Steve Berman, was the first edition of an annual series and included ghost stories by Lee Thomas and Jameson Currier. The 2009 edition also included stories by Thomas and Currier and the 2010 edition includes the ghost stories, “Death in Amsterdam” by Jameson Currier and “Tío Gilberto and the Twenty-Seven Ghosts” by Ben Francisco. *Unspeakable Horror: Shadows from the Closet* (Dark Scribe, 2008), edited by Vince A. Liaguno and Chad Helder, cemented the queer horror genre by winning the Bram Stoker Award from the Horror Writers Association for Superior Achievement in an Anthology.

Nonfiction

Also of interest is *Queer Hauntings: True Tales of Gay and Lesbian Ghosts* (Lethe 2009) by Ken Summers. Summers, who maintains a Web site at Moonspenders.com, has compiled a global reference work of historical gay and lesbian ghosts and locations haunted by queer spirits.

My thanks to Steve Berman and Tom Cardamone for steering me toward some of the stories included in this reading list.

"Jameson Currier writes with venomous wit and a huge heart.

The Wolf at the Door is the tale everyone should be reading on the beach this year."

Lewis Whittington, *Edge*

The Wolf at the Door

a novel by Jameson Currier

When a death occurs at Le Petite Paradis, a guesthouse in the French Quarter of New Orleans, the spirit world becomes unsettled, or so Avery Greene Dalrymple III, the co-owner believes. The son and grandson of Southern evangelists, Avery is also an overworked and overwrought middle-aged gay man, a cynical "big-time drinker and sinner" fairly certain he can maintain a family of "other deviants and delinquents stumbling along Bourbon Street" to keep him company. But Avery is also the only person in contact with the spirit world on his property—ghosts from the house's origins during the 1820s—and he must use the history left behind from another ghost—a gay man from the 1970s—to find a way to restore peace to his household and rejuvenate his faith.

"Currier is one of the few writers who can be equally literary, erotic, dramatic and damn funny, sometimes all in the same sentence."

Sean Meriwether, *The Silent Hustler*

"I love, love, love this book and I love New Orleans and I love Jameson Currier's skill. Put that all together and you have one 'helluva' read."

Amos Lassen, *Eureka Pride*

"Marvelous! Currier's writing is up to his usually high standards, which means that he can make you smile and scare the crap out of you in the same paragraph. And I believe his work here to be his richest, most personal and heartfelt yet. More than being a good ghost story, *The Wolf at the Door* is one gay man's spiritual journey. Though he's been looking mostly in the bottom of bourbon bottles, Avery's search for spiritual belonging – finding God in ghosts – is as universal as it gets, and Currier brings it to life with both wit and wonderment. Blending philosophy with good old-fashioned scares, Currier makes the impossible look effortless. The ending, which I won't spoil for you, actually brought a catch to my throat and a tear to my eye."

Jerry Wheeler, *Out in Print*

"A masterful blend of genres that comes together like succulent literary gumbo. Currier's crew of querulous aging queens, offbeat beautiful boys and assorted oddball friends constitute an endearing found family of queers, while the author's historical flashbacks conjure the Big Easy's atmospheric past."

Richard Labonté, *Bookmarks*

The Wolf at the Door

by Jameson Currier

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cover painting by Bryan Cunningham

Jameson Currier



The Wolf at the Door

“I can believe anything
provided that it is quite
incredible.”

Oscar Wilde

