

The Ghost Writer's Glossary

These words are useful synonyms for “ghost”:

Apparition: an “appearance” or sighting of a spirit or ghost.

Phantom: an insubstantial apparition; that is, something that can be seen but not felt—like a holographic image?

Poltergeist: a mischievous ghost or spirit; one who hides the silverware and rattles the plates just to declare his or her presence, not to be harmful.

Revenant: one that returns, the spirit of a dead person which returns to a place where it dwelled in life.

Specter: a ghost or apparition.

Spirit: the nonphysical part of a person; sometimes used to mean “soul,” sometimes used to mean “ghost.”

Spook: A ghost, apparition, or poltergeist.

An Index of Bogeymen and Cucuis:

Cucuis:

Xavier Garza, the artist who created the exhibit *Los Cucuis: Hispanic Folklore of South Texas*, describes a Cucui as “A fictional, supernatural being, monster, or ghost that is often used in stories to keep an unruly child’s behavior in line. Most of these tales teach a moral lesson such as ‘Don’t lie’ or ‘Never disobey your parents’ wishes.’”

The term *cucui* is primarily used in Mexican, Latin, and Hispanic cultures; the English term *bogeyman* is used in the same way: to frighten or threaten children. Usually pronounced “boogie-man,” it means a monstrous, imaginary figure, a terrifying person or thing.

Here are some well-known cucuis and bogeymen:

Bloody Mary (Mary Worth): a frequent slumber party and summer camp activity, it is said that she may be called by chanting her name three times and looking into a mirror while holding a candle.

bruja, brujo: witch, warlock.

chupacabra: (from the Spanish) a birdlike creature alleged to suck the blood of goats and other livestock—and occasionally small children.

el Cucui: When used in this way, as a name or title, el Cucui represents the darkness within the human soul, the speaker’s worst fears.

devil dancer: a handsome man who appears at a night club and dances with one woman. Later, she or others notice that he has hooves or chicken feet instead of human feet in shoes or boots.

diablero: a Mexican sorcerer; one who is able to cast spells.

donkey woman; woman with horse face: Men are said to see and follow an attractive woman who, when she turns to face them, has a deformed, animal-like face.

ghoul: an evil being said to rob graves and feed on corpses.

goblin: an ugly or grotesque sprite (elf or fairy) sometimes said to be evil or malicious and sometimes described as merely playful and mischievous.

headless horseman: This headless rider is seen from a distance, riding swiftly, his head sometimes tied to the saddle. Usually he was beheaded as punishment for some crime or act of cowardice.

la llorona: The “weeping woman” haunts the rivers of the Borderlands (Northern Mexico and Texas and other southwestern states), searching for her children whom she drowned.

lechusa: a large owl-like creature who can bring about evil or death by night, but which must disappear at daybreak.

vampire: a corpse believed to rise at night and suck blood from living persons.

wild man/wild woman: often alleged to live in thick forests or along rivers. Sometimes the wild person is said to have escaped from a slave trading ship or to have left civilized society by choice.

wolf boy (girl): a child lost as an infant and raised by wolves; often reported as being seen from a distance in an isolated location, such as the Devil’s River Lobo Girl.

werewolf: a legendary being of European tales who acquires wolf traits at each full moon, including fur, claws, sharp canine teeth, and a wolf’s reputed ravenous hunger for flesh.

What are some other cucuis and bogeymen that you know of? Give the specific attributes of each.

Other ghostly terms:

Ghost lights: unexplained lights viewed in fields, windows, or horizons. They fade or disappear when the viewer moves toward them.

Ghost surgery: the practice of performing surgery on another physician’s patient by arrangement with the physician but unknown to the patient.

Ghost town: a once-thriving community in which few or no people now live and work.

Ghost writer: one who writes novels or stories for a known writer or name.

Ghosts in nature: Did you know there are ghost crabs, ghostfish, ghostflowers, ghostflies, ghost moths, ghost plants, and ghost shrimp? See if you can discover how each got its name.