



## Three John Silence Stories

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## **Three John Silence Stories** Algernon Blackwood

One of the former British writers of supernatural tales in the twentieth century, Algernon Blackwood (1869–1951) wrote stories in which the slow accumulation of telling details produced a foreboding atmosphere of almost unendurable tension. Blackwood's literary renown began in 1908 with the publication of a highly successful collection of stories, *John Silence — Physician Extraordinary*, featuring a "psychic doctor."

This volume contains the first three of the John Silence stories: *A Psychological Invasion*, *Ancient Sorceries*, and *The Nemesis of Fire*.

## **Three John Silence Stories Details**

Date : Published (first published September 8th 1908)

ISBN :

Author : Algernon Blackwood

Format : Kindle Edition

Genre : Horror, Short Stories, Fiction, Historical, Historical Fiction, Fantasy, Supernatural, Classics

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# From Reader Review Three John Silence Stories for online ebook

## Bill Ramsell says

Wonderful stories! Vengeful mummies, ghostly ghastly friars of darkness! Great stuff.

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## Paddythemic says

whenever Lovecraft wanted to send a chill through his soul he'd read Algernon Blackwood...

The Psychical Invasion -

"Beyond a somewhat childish understanding of 'spiritual wickedness in high places,' you probably have no conception of what is possible once you break-down the slender gulf that is mercifully fixed between you and that Outer World. But my studies and training have taken me far outside these orthodox trips, and I have made experiments that I could scarcely speak to you about in language that would be intelligible to you."

Ancient Sorceries -

"It was just after sunset and the tumbled old buildings traced magical outlines against an opalescent sky of gold and red. The dusk was running down the twisted streets. All round the hill the plain pressed in like a dim sea, its level rising with the darkness. The spell of this kind of scene, you know, can be very moving, and it was so that night. Yet I felt that what came to me had nothing directly to do with the mystery and wonder of the scene."

The Nemesis of Fire -

"And, for your safety," he said earnestly, "imagine now—and for that matter, imagine always until we leave this place—imagine with the utmost keenness, that you are surrounded by a shell that protects you. Picture yourself inside a protective envelope, and build it up with the most intense imagination you can evoke. Pour the whole force of your thought and will into it. Believe vividly all through this adventure that such a shell, constructed of your thought, will and imagination, surrounds you completely, and that nothing can pierce it to attack."

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## stormhawk says

John Silence is a sort of psychic Sherlock Holmes, an investigator and solver of spiritual conundrums. Each of these tales highlights a different aspect of spiritual warfare, ghostly apparitions, a mysterious village, and a warning not to meddle in things unknown.

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## Tonk82 says

Tras darle un vistazo a Carnacki, me pareció que era momento de hacer lo propio con John Silence, detective sobrenatural de uno de mis escritores favoritos, Algernon Blackwood.

Realizó 6 historias en total, aunque en bastantes ediciones se tiende a dividir en 2 volúmenes: Three John Silence Stories, y Three more John Silence stories. Este es el primero de ellos.

Es muy curioso como cada uno de los 3 tiene una estructura y narrador totalmente distinto.

- A Psychological Invasion / Una invasión psíquica (1908) (\*\*\*\*) : La presentación de Silence es francamente interesante. Nunca vamos a conocerle a fondo, y buena parte de su vida y lo que aprendió se nos oculta, pero tiene cierta personalidad simpática aquí. El narrador no es alguien activo en la historia.

El hecho de que todo el caso se desencadene por Cannabis es un tanto gracioso hoy en día, pero la segunda mitad del relato es magnífica. Silence emplea para su investigación un perro y un gato, y es tremendamente obvio el aprecio y respeto que Blackwood tiene por esos animales. El climax es una secuencia muy bien llevada con esos tres personajes, y la presencia de los animales le da un toque muy peculiar.

-Ancient Sorceries / Antiguas brujerías (1908) (\*\*\*\*\*) : Brillante. Aquí es otra persona la que cuenta a Silence todo su caso durante el 95% del texto... con el detective solo indicando lo que realmente ocurrió al final del mismo. Es un ejercicio de estilo estupendo, donde escuchamos la extraña historia de un hombre que decide espontáneamente bajarse de un tren y pasar la noche en un pueblo que no conoce.

He leído alguna crítica seminegativa diciendo que Blackwood dice muy pronto de que va el tema y que el misterio se diluye por ello. Yo creo que esta hecho a propósito y es totalmente coherente con la resolución final que se propone. Es una de esas historias donde el foco está en su atmósfera febril, lo extraño del entorno, y las implicaciones personales y emocionales de ese pueblecito, mas que en los hechos puros y duros.

-The Nemesis of Fire / La némesis de fuego (1908) (\*\*\*1/2) : Cuenta con una primera mitad tremendamente efectiva, y esa ambientación en una plantación y los bosques es sensacional. Va muy en la línea del Sherlock Holmes de El perro de los Barkervilles y similares.

Pero hay dos cosas me resultan bastante decepcionantes: a) La machacona insistencia del narrador en decir lo magnífico y perfecto que es John Silence (a Blackwood se le fue la mano ahí, es totalmente innecesario) y b) Lo mas o menos convencional que resulta todo en su parte final, supongo que en gran medida porque es una temática que nunca me ha cautivado demasiado. En general, tiene todo un tono de aventura ligeramente clásica muy agradable.

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## **J.G. Keely says**

When reading many of the weird horror writers of the early Twentieth Century, one sometimes gets the sense that it's not that the situations were really that horrible, but that the protagonists thrown into them happen to be rather skittish, lily-livered, and needing only the slightest nudge to push them off the edge in the first place. Lovecraft's heroes, in particular, can be rather touchy fellows.

So there has been a desire to explore what it might be like to see a more strenuous and competent individual trapped in the same situation. After all, we get glimpses of these characters, such as the denizens of

Innsmouth, the magic-working cultists, and Lovecraft's *Tale of Charles Dexter Ward*, where it is clear that it's possible for people to get a better grip on the paranormal world, and even to use it to their own advantage.

Of course, these days, the pendulum has swung rather to the other end, and you're likely to see shotgun-toting sorcerer heroes who shoot at Cthulhu with rocket launchers, until the term 'psychological horror' is no longer remotely applicable. It's not that characters should be defeating the elder menace, any more than they should 'defeat' a hurricane, but it is interesting to see a character with a greater penchant for survivability.

Paranormal investigation has quite a long history in literature, with sorcerers and priests capturing and exorcising ghosts and other spirits, but the modern notion of the non-denominational specialist has a much more recent origin: the Theosophical movement of the Victorian period.

During this time of high colonialism, Europe was bringing back myths, practices, and ancient texts from every corner of the Earth, and then trying to get them all to match up into some kind of metapsiritual tradition. Predictably, the whole thing was a nonsensical, poorly-researched mess, and thus, wildly popular. Clubs were started up, seances were held, and charlatans rooked old ladies out of their inheritance. Blackwood, himself, was a member of the most notorious of these societies: the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn.

So, by the time he got around to creating his fictional investigator, the whole thing was all rather tired, which is quite clear in the stories, for Mr. Silence is constantly taking pains to separate himself from that 'other class' of psychics who make extravagant promises and talk about possessing a 'gift'.

So it's interesting that one of the first full-time paranormal investigators in fiction (that I'm aware of) is already somewhat subversive and on the edge--but then, as a calm, rational figure after the style of Dupin and Cuff, he's somewhat out of place with charismatics and wealthy eccentrics.

Blackwood here retains his unfortunate habit of sometimes over-explaining or giving us information more than once, but for that, the stories are well-devised and contain some quite interesting cosmological hints. Oddly enough, two of the three stories in this collection take the most profound interest in the ways of cats and their relationship to the spiritual realm which, while perfectly interesting, didn't seem to profit from re-examination, particularly not within the same brief collection.

However, I am curious to see what else Blackwood might do with the character, particularly if he manages to put him into more sticky situations. So far, we've seen him competent and self-controlled--often the real danger comes from whether he will be able to save the other characters from themselves before it's too late--but I'm curious to see what Silence is capable of, when pushed.

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### **arg/machine says**

Classic adventures of John Silence, paranormal investigator. In the public domain, with a free electronic copy [here](#).

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### **Melinda says**

I am on my Algernon Blackwood quest, and this is book four. John Silence is independently wealthy and of a philanthropist, so goes away for five years and comes back as a Psychic Doctor who only takes cases that interest him. This book contains three of those cases: A Psychological Invasion, Ancient Sorceries and The Nemesis of Fire. John Silence is a man who is strong, honorable and good. He has learned all about the light and the dark sides of our world, as well as those other worlds where evil clays live. He has somehow been inoculated against the dark, so he can help people who have gotten into trouble with things they should not have messed with. He will not take any compensation for his services, even though he is highly professional, gets good results and everyone respects him.

These three stories were drastically different. The first is my favorite if I had to choose. The second starts slow, but finishes with a bang, and the third is interesting, as it is told from the POV of his assistant, Mr. Hubbard, instead of the Doctor. The third story is much more like the first, in that it sucks you into the mystery quickly and doesn't let you go until the last pages.

Blackwood's prose style is almost tangible to all five senses. He gets so close to mastering it with onomatopoeia and other cadence techniques that he uses that I believe that the experience of Blackwood being read orally by an amazing sexy voice would be the perfect thing to do - like adding a platinum setting to a pigeon's blood ruby. The voice would bring out the texture, the cadence, the sounds and the tones that Blackwood intentionally writes in his prose. His greatest example of this is in *The Willow*.

These three stories are fun, well written, and a great example of their genre. I love John Silence as a character. Highly recommended.

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### **Lois Bujold says**

More in my exploration of Edwardian paranormal detective/investigator tales. These stories had a little more interior depth than the Carnacki tales, just read. In part this is a structural effect. The Carnackis were framed as tales-told; we did not see any further into the speaker-adventurer's head than what he chose to say out loud to his circle of friends after the fact, and the thus-distanced auditor-transcriber had little more personality than a tape recorder. We don't see into Silence's head, either; like Holmes with Watson, Dr. John Silence also has his somewhat self-effacing fanboy companion who tells the story, although this one at least is an immediate eyewitness and participant, and has opinions and thoughts of interest. Not enough for me to remember his name a few days later, though. Hubbard? Hibbing...? Ah, well.

I also read the companion volume containing the next three Silence tales, apparently completing the set.

Ta, L.

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### **Nancy Butts says**

I like these quaint, antique stories of "psychic detective" John Silence much more than I do some of Blackwood's other ghost stories. I think the charm of these tales lies precisely in their old-fashioned air. Silence reminds me of a cross between Sherlock Holmes and Lamont Cranston [the Shadow].

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## Wreade1872 says

I am a bit prejudiced against John Silence before i read this. Firstly i have read some story with him in it about a werewolf, wasn't a fan, also i already like some of his supernatural detective rivals so it was always going to be hard for him to break into an already crowded field. And he doesn't quite manage it.

I also noticed that for some reason each of the three tales uses a different perspective. The first story, has Silence himself as the point of view character, the second, has really no reason to be in this collection as its just random guy telling tale to people which include Dr.Silence and the last goes with the more common Watson-esque assistant as the P.O.V. character.

This is neither as delightfully weird as Carnacki, the Ghost Finder or as pithy and likable as The Secrets of Dr. Taverner.

While there were times in each of the stories it approached a 4-star the writing just kept going and they always felt more drawn out than necessary. In addition while the writing is quite descriptive it isn't as vivid as Lovecraft or similar authors.

**'The air, soft and cool caressed his cheek like the touch of a great furry paw.'**

These are very cat orientated stories :) , ironically the only one not be cat-centric was the one with an Egyptian connection, bit of a missed opportunity that ;)

One final note, Silence is described as this really great kind guy always out to help people blah, blah, but then i noticed this line

**'By some means which I never could fathom, John Silence always contrived to keep the compartment to himself.'**

Oh wow thats a great use of your mystical abilities, hogging the train carriage!, ass :lol .

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## Emmeline Conway says

I'm honestly not sure what to rate this collection.

The second- the cat town one- was bizarre- Silence did nothing but listen to the story and then explain what had happened (sorta) at the very end. It was almost as if Blackwood had an idea that he just added Silence in at the beginning and the end in order to make it fit in the John Silence story collection.

I did however enjoy the last one. Although the fanboying got old fast. We get it, Silence is always so calm, cool and collected- just ask him out already.

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## Kathryn says

My least favorite Blackwood so far. These stories did not have the intensity I've felt from his other short stories, though there were moments of unease. I found these stories to be very dated, which might sound funny considering the author but I never had this feeling with any of his other works. Blackwood definitely used some common fears and myths popular in his time as plots for these stories. I get the feeling that these stories were more for public consumption and then maybe he went and worked on The Willows or something else that would not necessarily have been as popular at the time but maybe I'm wrong about what was popular then.

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## **Iami Menotu says**

Very beautiful writing. Full of pseudo science and prejudices of the Victorian era. More of adventure than horror

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## **Herman Gigglesworth says**

John Silence is insufferable from the first few pages. He's smug about his knowledge of psychic "vibrations". The way he expresses his disdain for Christianity would make even many anti-religious people want to blow a raspberry at him. Especially when he espouses something similar to Spiritualism, which was prone to hoaxes (e.g. the Fox sisters, all those mediums that Houdini debunked, etc.). "If you knew anything about magic. . ." that you just made up, Algernon Blackwood. Sometimes the characters make fun of "superstitious" servants, which is hypocritical when you live in a ghost story.

The stories occasionally have decent atmospheric descriptions that adds to the horror. This fades quickly when Dr. Silence gives a lecture or pages upon pages are spent on mundane pet behavior.

"A Psychological Invasion" features a comedian who lost his sense of humor, because. . .he took weed and had a bad trip. Seriously, the drug is identified as "Cannabis Indica". The story would be much shorter if Dr. Silence thought of the obvious mundane solution: Tell the comedian to stop eating those special brownies, and he'll be back to normal. Instead, what happens is that a cat and dog are used to sense a ghost in the house.

"Ancient Sorceries" is a better, because Dr. Silence has little to do with it. The protagonist doesn't like being crowded on a train, so he goes to an inn where he seems to enter a dream world that seems to be satisfying at first. Unfortunately for him, the villagers are devil worshipers, and he has to flee before he gives in to them. John Silence tells him that this vision may be a memory of a past life where he practiced witchcraft.

"The Nemesis of Fire" looks like an early Lovecraft story at first. A mansion appears to be always hot, and fires often break out in one room. Servants see strange lights in the woods, and even the animals refuse to go there. It turns out that Miss Wragge stole something important to an Egyptian mummy, and part of the mummy's curse involves summoning fire elementals to attack anyone who violates its tomb. She returns the item to the mummy, but is burned to death. Dr. Silence and company take her corpse and put it in a bed for some reason.

(No, the Wragges are no relation to Captain Wragge from the much better book No Name by Wilkie Collins.)

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## **Jim Bradford says**

At first I didn't love this book. The first story is interesting enough, but the second one struck me as greatly lacking that special 'something' that makes Algernon Blackwood's writings so great. All was redeemed, however, in the glorious tale spun in the third story of the book. Gripping, fantastical, and unexpected - this is what makes Blackwood so great. I can't wait to crack open the next three John Silence stories.

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