



An Essay on the History and Reality of Apparitions - The Stoke Newington Daniel Defoe Edition (AMS Studies in the Eighteenth Century)

Daniel Defoe

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Defoe's prefatory comments to "An Essay on the History and Reality of Apparitions" (1727) indicate a split between ignorant belief and profane disbelief in spirits in the long eighteenth century, but also establish for the reader the author's intention of reconciling the religious with the supernatural through an argument based in 'solid Foundation'. In this text, Defoe utilizes three criteria - reason, religion, and rhetoric - both to prove the existence of apparitions and to educate his reader in how to distinguish real spirits from tricks of the imagination, folk tales from true accounts of visitations. He draws upon colloquial, historical, and Biblical examples in his demonstrations, and in attempting a reasoned defense of the existence of apparitions, engages the Enlightenment rationality and rhetoric of Thomas Hobbes and Joseph Glanville. Recognized as a statement of Defoe's rational and religious philosophies, "An Essay on the History and Reality of Apparitions" is also regarded by some critics as an important antecedent to the spiritualism of the Gothic novel. Among the valuable secondary tools included in this edition are critical headnotes that contextualize Defoe's Essay within Biblical Christianity, Puritanism, occult thought, and other spiritual themes of the period. The headnotes also analyze Defoe's wider views on Catholicism, dreams, paganism, and witchcraft, and assess the Essay through consideration of literary topics including humor, rhetoric, and narrative style. Scholars familiar with Defoe's supposed use of pseudonym will find the attributive history of the Essay useful, and the "Bibliography of Works Consulted Before 1731" provides a list of contemporary resources invaluable to any reader studying the Essay, "Defoe's Political History of the Devil" (also published by AMS Press), and other spiritual and philosophical literature of the period. This carefully prepared volume conforms to the highest standards of textual and editorial scholarship and returns a scarcely available title to readers in a definitive edition, essential to any research collection of Defoe's works.

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