



# **The Halloween Lectures: Fifteen Fiendish Years of Vampires, Werewolves, Witches, Wizards, Monsters, Movies, Tudors, Tricks and Treats**

*William B. Robison III*

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Is this serious history? If you have gone as far as checking out the cover, preface, table of contents, or some other indicator of what is in a book enticingly entitled *The Halloween Lectures*, then surely you have asked that question already. But your inquiry poses a dilemma for the author. If he answers “yes,” half of you figuratively will put the book “back on the shelf.” If he answers “no,” the other half of you will put it back. So, he will answer “sort of” and hope that all of you will read it instead of all of you putting it back. Not satisfied with that answer? Then here is a further explanation. William B. Robison, Professor of History at Southeastern Louisiana University, has delivered the More-or-Less Annual Halloween Lecture each year since 2001 during Fanfare, a month-long celebration of the arts, humanities, and social sciences held every October. It is the final installment of the Then and Now Fanfare History and Politics Lecture Series—sponsored by the Department of History and Political Science—which provides educational and entertaining lectures about history and politics suitable for a general audience of faculty, staff, students, and community people. The essays in this volume are based on Robison’s lectures, which in turn are based on serious historical scholarship, a fair amount of it his own. He is a serious historian, that is, he makes a living teaching and writing history. At the same time, he is not an overly “serious” serious historian, which is to say that while he takes the proper practice of the historical discipline very seriously indeed, he does not take himself very seriously at all. One of the main reasons Robison does history for a living—probably the most important—is that it is fun. He also likes teaching history and is willing to do just about anything to get students to both take it seriously and enjoy learning it. Students who have fun learning keep doing it. Students who keep learning history make better citizens and more critical thinkers. And, if he is lucky, they laugh at his jokes. Usually, though not always, the subject of the More-or-Less Annual Halloween Lecture is related in some way to All Hallows Eve and/or the popular cultural phenomena associated with it: vampires, werewolves, witches, wizards, Nostradamus, monster movies, Frankenstein, the Puritan war on traditional Christian holidays. Otherwise, it is about the Tudors or Stuarts in England, Robison’s actual area of scholarly expertise, though he finds some way to relate even that to the occasion, for example, by discussing the Gunpowder Plot of 1605, which led to Guy Fawkes Day (November 5) becoming a more popular mid-autumn holiday in England than Halloween. Of course doing an annual lecture on Halloween has consequences. First of all, it requires that there be tricks. Therefore, each year there is a prequel to the lecture, i.e., some sort of gimmick, stunt, or other tomfoolery. Since the prequels are an integral part of the program, this book includes relics of them in the form of scripts and links where readers may find audio and/or video for many of them. The second requisite thing is treats. Therefore, at the end of each lecture Robison throws candy to the audience, though no remnants of that aspect of the program have survived. The principle artifacts extant are the lectures themselves, reproduced as accurately as possible in the essays here. Robison notes, “They were fun the first time around—for me and, I think, the audience (maybe it was just the candy)—and I hope that they will be both educational and entertaining again. Each of these lectures also has what might be considered a moral at the end. Just consider all of this my contribution to good citizenship and critical thinking. The only question now is whether I will win the Nobel Prize for Literature or Peace. Maybe both.”

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