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Phantasmagorial Notes and a Grammar of Ghosts

by August A. IMHOLTZ, Jr

Abstract

In 1868, Lewis Carroll published a long poem about ghosts under the title "Phantasmagoria," which was also the title of the book in which his 755-line poem appeared. He revised the poem and included it in his book *Rhyme? and Reason?* published in 1883. This article traces the meaning of the word "phantasmagoria" back to the very late 18th-century Belgian illusionist and magic-lantern impresario, Etienne-Gaspard Robertson, explains how Carroll's "Phantasmagoria" differs from Robertson's Phantasmagorie and what it might tell us about Carroll's belief in spirits, provides a grammar or explanation of the many kinds of ghosts who figure in Carroll's poem (including kobold, banshee, kelpie, spectre, and many others), and finally lists the major textual differences [for example, lines and stanzas deleted, added, or changed] between the 1868 and 1883 versions of the poem.

In 1869, while Lewis Carroll was already working on his famous sequel to *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, he brought out a collection of verse called *Phantasmagoria* after the title of the first, and longest, poem in the volume. Although the book was published by Macmillan, who of course published not only the two *Alice* books but most of Carroll's fiction, it looks like none of those. It is bound in blue cloth, unlike the red cloth which Carroll insisted be used for *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, and would use for *Through the Looking-Glass* and both *Sylvie and Bruno* novels as well.

It is 6 11/16 inches in height rather than the typical 7 ½ inches for the *Alice* books. Carroll had unsuccessfully solicited a frontispiece from the artist George du Maurier.¹ Instead of the roundel vignettes found on the covers of his other and more well-known works, “the front cover has a large representation of the Crab nebula in the constellation Taurus in gold. The back covers is similar except that the central design is Donati’s comet (‘two distinguished members of the celestial Phantasmagoria!’).”² [Carroll had discussed at length the ornamentation with Macmillan in his letter of Oct. 17, 1868.³] And perhaps most importantly, there are no illustrations within the book whatsoever! At first four hundred or so copies were printed and later another 1,200,⁴ but sales were hardly comparable with *Alice*. Fourteen years later, the title poem, and it is that which interests us here, and much else, was reissued in the volume titled *Rhyme? And Reason?*, this time accompanied by brilliant illustrations drawn by Arthur Burdett Frost. In Part I of this article we examine the name and nature of the poem “Phantasmagoria,” then in Part II provide a grammar of the ghosts and spirits enumerated in the poem, and in Part III list the major textual differences between two printings of “Phantasmagoria.”

Part I: “Phantasmagoria”–the poem and the word⁵

Unlike the hundreds, if not thousands, of books and articles written about the *Alice* books, on Carroll’s existentially haunting mock epic, *The Hunting of the Snark*, and even on his novels *Sylvie and Bruno*, very little attention has been paid by Carroll’s literary critics and biographers to his poem “Phantasmagoria”; this I find rather fantastic.

Professor Morton Cohen’s assessment of “Phantasmagoria” is quite balanced and more appreciative than some. He writes in his biography of Carroll that:

The initial poem, “Phantasmagoria,” is a long, deftly wrought narrative, inspired by Victorian darkness and the ghosts that inhabit it.

When it appeared, it proved Charles a master of witty verse fiction, sustained by entertaining language, meter, rhyme, and sound. He forges a tight story with numerous original twists. Charles provides a down-to-earth if appropriately eerie account of how his nocturnal creatures live and work. He reveals their *raison d' être*, delves into their thoughts, their feelings, their likes, their fears. In all, he produces a rounded 150 stanzas of five rhyming lines, the whole divided into seven cantos.

The tale is too orderly and rational to have much in common with *Alice*, although they have elements in common – puns for instance, as in the ghost who is an Inn-Spectre. But the narrative style, the incidents, the characters are quite different. Perhaps we can, however, detect a reverse relationship. Alice, the innocent child, travels through a world a world of irrational, undependable, rude, and brutal adults, trying to make some sense of the grown-up society she encounters; in “Phantasmagoria,” a small thing tries to disrupt a world that at least appears orderly. Here the “child” is petulant, rude, insensitive, and unmannerly and belongs to a hostile society. The *Alice* books and the ghost society in “Phantasmagoria” both strike at the foibles of human nature and question society’s mores.⁶

And yet I think there is a little more to Carroll’s *joie d’esprit* than Professor Cohen acknowledges. Let’s start with the word “phantasmagoria” itself. It looks Greek and it’s true that the first half – phantasm – is the stem of the Greek noun phantasma, meaning “an apparition or phantom,” which itself derives from the verb phantasioō, meaning “to bring images before one’s eyes”⁷ but it was never joined with agora (“assembly place”) in Classical Greek. The second part of the word phantasmagoria perhaps then derives, as the *Oxford English Dictionary* suggests, from the French “-gorie” as in allegorie.⁸

The word was coined, according to Margaret Cohen⁹, by the Belgian

impresario and sometime balloonist pioneer Etienne-Gaspard Robertson in 1797 to characterize the ghostly public magic lantern performances he staged. He instilled horror, fear, and utter pandemonium among his spectators. Here is how Marina Warner describes an early presentation of his Phantasmagorie (Phantasmagoria in English):

Robertson used a projector, the Fantoscope, dispensed with the conventional theatre's raised stage, the puppet box, and the proscenium arch, and concentrated his lighting sources and effects in the projector itself by placing it behind a large flat screen, like a theatrical scrim. He also mounted his newfangled magic lantern on rollers, so that when, concealed behind the screen, he pulled back from the audience, the image swelled and appeared to lunge forward into their ranks. With a true impresario's flair for catching the mood of the public, Robertson deliberately excited screams and squeals...

The recent Terror furnished him with the inspiration for some deadly special effects: the severed head of Danton, adapted from his death mask, was projected on to smoke, and then gradually faded away, changing into a skull as [it] did so.¹⁰

And one of his later magic lantern shows, full of ghosts and devils and other fantastic creatures, begins with this stirring prologue:

Citizens and gentlemen! It is ...a useful spectacle for a man to discover the bizarre effect of the imagination when it combines force and disorder; I wish to speak of the terror which shadows, symbols, spells, the occult works of magic inspire...I have promised that I will raise the dead and I will raise them.¹¹

Robertson's horrific magic lantern shows, in all their terror-evoking effectiveness, were brought to England in the early 1800s and imitators multiplied to continue and improve upon ersatz otherworldly experiences in their dioramas, panoramas, and stereoramas. And they persisted for quite

a long time. Carroll wrote to his sister Elizabeth in July of 1851 that he intended to attend one of the dioramas.

The connection between Robertson's "Phantasmagorie" and Carroll's poem "Phantasmagoria," seems first to have been noted by Elizabeth Sewell in the appendix of her posthumously published work *Lewis Carroll: Voices from France*. She mentions the attraction Robertson's Phantasmagorie and its imitators held for the generation before and immediately after Carroll's birth. But having raised the spectre of Robertson in the background to Carroll's poem of the same title, she does not go far enough. She concludes, alas:

This is as far as I can take this possible path opened up by Lewis Carroll's Phantasmagoria, that narrative in which a parade of variegated specters is presented to the drowsy imagination of a down-to-earth, run-of-the-mill bourgeois Englishman, on whom Carroll bestows the very undistinguished name of Tibbets.¹²

Carroll's poem, I think, is quite the opposite of Robertson's Phantasmagorie. It is deliberately playful rather than artfully threatening, light-hearted rather than serious, evocative of laughter rather than horror, and elicits smiles from the reader rather than screams of fear. Several Carroll biographers and commentators have suggested that "Phantasmagoria" offers clear evidence of Carroll's interest in the paranormal. For example, consider Derek Hudson's view: "The poem, for all its flippancy, does not disguise, but perhaps serves to emphasize, a persistent interest in the supernatural..."¹³, which in my view goes too far.

However interested Carroll became in the paranormal in later life, if he sincerely believed in it and accepted it in the late 1860s, he hardly would have made fun of the whole spectrum of spectres the way he does in "Phantasmagoria." Grounds for Carroll's inclination, problematical to some minds, to what we would today call "parapsychology" are founded mainly

upon his Dec. 4, 1882 letter to James Langton Clarke. Here one sees not only an essential openness to unexplainable things, as unexplainable as that may be, but also his disbelief in the intervention of spirits into our world, which is the whole point of the poem in however ineffectual a way such intervention is portrayed:

“...but trickery will *not* do as a complete explanation of the phenomena of table-rapping, thought-reading, etc., I am more and more convinced. At the same time, I see no need as yet for believing that disembodied spirits have any thing to do with it. I have just read a small pamphlet, the first report of the Physical Society, on “thought-reading.”¹⁴

Part II: A Grammar of Ghosts

In Canto IV the ghost visitor gives a brief account of his origin:

My father was a Brownie, Sir:
 My mother was a Fairy,
 The notion had occurred to her,
 The children would be happier,
 If they were taught to vary.

The genealogy provided by the ghost is, however, at least according to the logic of St. Thomas Aquinas (the 13th century Angelic Doctor of the Roman Catholic Church), quite impossible; a major category mistake in fact. Angels or spirits of their various orders, to use biblical and neo-scholastic philosophical terminology, can no more mate and produce offspring than a pot of glue and a Knight of Malta could. Later the ghost identifies himself as a Phantom [Canto IV, stanza 9, line 4]; so clearly, there is an element of play in the ghost’s grasp of nomenclature of spirits.

Here then from an etymological point of view is a grammar or explanation of

the catalogue of spirits one finds in the stanzas of “Phantasmagoria.” Much is derived, and often abridged, from the great *Oxford English Dictionary*. The sequence of the entries is: word, etymology, definition, selective examples of usage illustrating the meaning, and instance of the word’s usage in Carroll’s *Alice* books.

GOBLIN

Etymology: [French. gobelin (recorded only from the 16th century; but in the 12th century Ordericus Vitalis mentions Gobelinus as the popular name of a spirit which haunted the neighbourhood of Évreux). Perhaps from medieval Latin. cobalus, covalus; Greek. kobalos, a rogue, knave, kobaloi = wicked sprites invoked by rogues.]

Meaning: A mischievous and ugly demon.

Selective illustrative quotations: 1574 J. STUDLEY tr. Bale's Pageant Popes 73b, They sturred up walking spirits, bugs, goblins, fierye sightes, & diuers terrible goasts & shapes of thinges. 1600 FAIRFAX Tasso IX. xv. 162 The shriking gobblings each where howling flew, The Furies roare, the ghosts and Fairies yell. 1667 MILTON Paradise Lost II. 688 To whom the Goblin [Death] full of wrath replied. 1742 COLLINS Ode to Fear 2 And goblins haunt from fire or fen, Or mine or flood, the walks of men.

Carroll Other Reference: Found in chapter VI of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*.

GHOST

Etymology: [Common West German: Old English. gást = Old Frisian. gâst, Old Saxon. gêst (Dutch. geest), Old High German. (Middle High German., modern German.) geist: Old Teutonic. *gaisto-z.]

Meaning: An incorporeal being; a spirit. local ghost = Latin genius loci. Circa 1600.

Selective illustrative quotations: SHAKESPEARE. Sonnets lxxxvi, That affable familiar ghost, Which nightly gulls him with intelligence. 1618 BOLTON Florus I. xiii. (1636) 39 When they beheld the purple-cloathed Senatours sitting in their chayres of state, they worshipt them at first as gods or locall ghosts.

Carroll Reference: Found in chapter I of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*.

KELPIE

Etymology: [Of uncertain etym.; Gaelic. calpa, cailpeach, bullock, heifer, colt, has been suggested, but positive evidence is wanting.]

Meaning: The Lowland Scottish name of a fabled water-spirit or demon assuming various shapes, but usually appearing in that of a horse; it is reputed to haunt lakes and rivers, and takes delight in, or even to bring about, the drowning of travelers and others.

Selective illustrative quotations: 1747 COLLINS Pop. Superst. Highlands 137 Drowned by the kelpie's wroth. 1792 BURNS Let. to Cunningham 10 Sept., Be thou a kelpie, haunting the ford or ferry. 1805 Walter SCOTT Lay of the Last Minstrel, VI. xxiii, But the Kelpy rung, and the Mermaid sung, The dirge of lovely Rosabelle.

BANSHEE

Etymology: [A phonetic spelling of Irish. bean sídhe; Old Irish ben síde 'female, or woman, of the fairies or elves.']

Meaning: A supernatural being supposed by the peasantry of Ireland and the Scottish Highlands to wail under the windows of a house where one of the inmates is about to die. Certain families of rank were reputed to have a special 'family spirit' of this kind.

Selective illustrative quotations: 1810 Walter SCOTT Lady of the Lake III.

vii, The fatal Ben-shie's boading scream. 1876 M. E. BRADDON Joshua Haggard's Daughter, II. 67 As if she had heard the family banshee shrieking at her.

BROWNIE

Etymology: [denominative from BROWN, with somewhat of diminutive force: compare with the Old Norse *svartálfar* or dark elves of the Edda. A 'wee brown man' often appears in Scottish ballads and fairy tales.]

Meaning: A benevolent spirit or goblin, of shaggy appearance, supposed to haunt old houses, especially farmhouses, in Scotland, and sometimes to perform useful household work while the family were asleep.

Selective illustrative quotations: 1802 Walter SCOTT *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* Introduction, 41 The Brownie formed a class of beings, distinct in habit and disposition from the freakish and mischievous elves. 1847 Charlotte BRONTË *Jane Eyre* xxxvii. (D.) You talk of my being a fairy, but I am sure you are more like a brownie.

PHANTOM

Etymology: [Anglo-Norman and Old French, Middle French, French *fantosme* (French *fantôme*; also in Anglo-Norman as *fantome* and (apparently after *fantasme* PHANTASM n.) as *fantaime*, *fantame*, *fantisme*, and in Middle French as *phantome*, in Middle French, French as *phantosme*, and in French as *phantôme*) illusion, delusion (1160 in Old French as *fantosme*), supernatural apparition, spectre, ghost (1165), something merely imagined, a hallucination (15th cent.; now obsolete), ineffectual person or thing (1644), mental image of an object (1690; now obsolete), ... an unrecorded post-classical Latin form **phantagma*, probably from an unrecorded Greek (Ionic) form **phantagma* (compare modern Greek (Lesbian) *fándama*).

Meaning: A thing (usually with human form) that appears to the sight or

other sense, but has no material substance; an apparition, a spectre, a ghost.

Selective illustrative quotations: 1693 G. SMALLRIDGE in Dryden translation of Plutarch Lives (rev. ed.) IV. 484 The Phantôm which appear'd to Brutus. 1715 POPE Temple of Fame 8 A Train of Phantoms in wild Order rose, And, join'd, this Intellectual Scene compose. 1746 T. SMOLLETT Tears of Scotland 31 The pale phantoms of the slain Glide nightly o'er the silent plain. 1843.

Carroll Reference: only "phantomwise" in acrostic poem.

SPECTRE

Etymology: [French. spectre (16th cent., = Italian. spettro, Spanish. and Portuguese. espectro), or Latin spectrum, f. spectare to look, see.]

Meaning: An apparition, phantom, or ghost, especially one of a terrifying nature or aspect.

Selective illustrative quotations: 1605 Z. JONES (title), A Treatise of Specters or straunge Sightes, Visions and Apparitions appearing sensibly unto men. 1703 POPE Thebais 133 Swift as she pass'd, the flitting ghosts withdrew, And the pale spectres trembled at her view. 1813 Walter SCOTT The Bridal of Triermain, II. Interlude 1, How should I, so humbly born, Endure the graceful spectre's scorn?

KOBOLD

[German. kobold, kobolt (dial. kob(b)elt, kubbelt), Middle High German. kobolt (chowolt) = Middle Dutch. cobout (cobbout, coubout, Dutch. kabouter); ulterior etymology uncertain. Hildebrand, in Grimm, favours an original *kobwalt, f. kobe house, COVE n.1 + stem of walten to rule, WIELD; cf. Old English. cofgodas, -godu as renderings of Latin. lares and penates.]

Meaning: In German folklore: a. A familiar spirit, haunting houses and rendering services to the inmates, but often of a tricky disposition; a brownie. b. An underground spirit haunting mines or caves; a goblin or gnome.

Selective illustrative quotations: [1635 Thomas HEYWOOD *Hierarchy of the Blessed Angels*. IX. 568 The Parts Septentrionall are with these Spryts Much haunted..About the places where they dig for Oare. The Greekes and Germans call them Cobali. Ibid. 574 Kibaldi.] 1830 Walter SCOTT *Letters on Demonology and Witchcraft*, 121 The Kobolds were a species of gnomes, who haunted the dark and solitary places, and were often seen in the mines. 1849 A. J. SYMINGTON *Harebell Chimes* 11 Witch, kobold, sprite ... and imp of every kind

WRAITH

Etymology: [Of obscure origin.]

Meaning: An apparition or spectre of a dead person; a phantom or ghost.

Selective illustrative quotations: 1786 Robert BURNS 'When Guilford good' viii, Chatham's wraith, in heavenly graith,...cry'd, 'Willie, rise!' 1808 Walter SCOTT *Marmion* VI. Introd. 146 In realms of death Ulysses meets Alcides' wraith. 1861 E. S. KENNEDY in *Peaks, Passes and Glaciers* Ser. II. I. 170 She...died broken-hearted... Afterwards, in the still of the evening,...the damsel's wraith would enter the dairy department.

FAIRY

Etymology: [Old French. *faerie*, *faierie* (mod.F. *féerie*), f. Old French. *fae* (modern French. *fee*) *FAY*]

Meaning: One of a class of supernatural beings of diminutive size, in popular belief supposed to possess magical powers and to have great influence for good or evil over the affairs of man.

Selective illustrative quotations: c**1393** GOWER *Confessio Amantis*. II. 371 And as he were a fairie. c**1450** in Wr.-Wülcker 571 *Cavni, fayryes*. **1563** FULKE *Meteors* (1640) 68b, Those round circles..that ignorant people affirme to be the rings of the Fairies dances. **1583** SEMPILL *Ballates* xxxv. 210 Ane carling of the Quene of Phareis. **1650** BAXTER *Saint's R*. II. (1654) 270 Hags (or Fairies) that is, such as exercise familiarity with men. **1743** William COLLINS *Epistle to Sir Thomas Hanmer* 98 Twilight fairies tread the circled Green. **1813** SHELLEY *Queen Mab* 167, I am the Fairy Mab. **1832** W. IRVING *Alhambra* I. 128 She is small enough to be a fairy, and a fairy she may be for aught I can find out.

Carroll Reference: in chapter IV of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*

PIXIE

Etymology: [Origin uncertain; perhaps from PUCK + -SY suffix. English Dialect Dictionary at Pixy records use overwhelmingly from southwestern England, which accords well with early use of the word. Any connection therefore seems unlikely with Shetland Scots pisk small thing or creature, naughty child, frequently as a term of endearment.

Meaning: In folklore and children's stories: a supernatural being with magical powers, typically portrayed as small and human-like in form, with pointed ears and a pointed hat.

Selective illustrative quotations: **1659** C. CLOBERY *Divine Glimpses* 73 Blind-zeal-sick soul! in Charity i'll judge Thee pixie-led in Popish piety. **1793** S. T. COLERIDGE *Songs of Pixies* i, Whom the untaught Shepherds call Pixies in their madrigal. Fancy's children, here we dwell. **1821** Walter SCOTT *The Pirate* II. x. 246 If a Pixie, seek thy ring, If a Nixie, seek thy spring. **1832** A. E. BRAY in *Description of Devonshire* (1836) I. x. 172 The pixies are certainly a distinct race from the fairies,..[they] will invariably tell you (if you ask them what pixies really may be) that these native spirits are the souls of infants, who were so unhappy as to die before they had

received the Christian rite of baptism.

FAY

[ad. Old French. *fae*, *faie* (Fr. *fee*) = Portuguese *fada*, Spanish. *hada*, Italian. *fata*: *fata* fem. sing., from Latin. *fata* the Fates, pl. of *fatum* FATE.]

Meaning: One of a class of supernatural beings of diminutive size, in popular belief supposed to possess magical powers and to have great influence for good or evil over the affairs of man

Selective illustrative quotations: 1393 GOWER Conf. I. 193 My wife Constance is fay. 1746 COLLINS Dirge in Cymbeline Poems (1771) 97 The female fays shall haunt the green. 1839 PRAED Poems (1864) I. 177 Be she a Fiend, or be she a Fay, She shall be Otto's bride to-day. 1873 G. C. DAVIES Mountain, Meadow, and Mere xiv. 113 Which needed but little imagination to transfer them into fays and water sprites.

POLTERGEIST

Etymology: [German *Poltergeist* (early 16th cent., frequently in Luther's writings) *poltern* to make a loud noise or uproar, to rumble, to thud (15th century; ultimately of imitative origin) + *Geist* GHOST n.]

Meaning: A ghost or other supernatural being supposedly responsible for unexplained physical disturbances such as loud noises and the movement of objects.

Selective illustrative quotations: 1848 C. CROWE Night Side of Nature II. vi. 238 (heading) The poltergeist of the Germans, and possession. 1863 Quarterly Review July 193 It seems a suspicious circumstance that the old-fashioned visible ghost has in these modern séances been almost entirely superseded by the *Poltergeist* or noise-making spirit. 1871 E. B. TYLOR Primitive Culture II. 176 Vampires appear in the character of the poltergeist or knocker.

GHOUL

Etymology: [a. Arab. ghūl, from a verbal root meaning 'to seize'.]

Meaning: An evil spirit supposed (in Muslim countries) to rob graves and prey on human corpses.

Selective illustrative quotations: 1831 CARLYLE *Sartor Resartus* (1858) 180 Two immeasurable Phantoms, Hypocrisy and Atheism, with the Gowl, Sensuality, stalk abroad over the Earth. 1841 LANE *Arabian Nights* I. 36 The term 'Ghool' is applied to any cannibal. 1855 THACKERAY *The Newcomes* I. 312 Ghouls feasting on the fresh corpse of a reputation

FETCH

[Of obscure origin. Although Grose assigns the word to the north of England, there seems to be no other evidence that the simple noun was ever in popular use elsewhere than in Ireland. The supposition that it is shortened from FETCH-LIFE, or some equivalent compound of the verb-stem, would plausibly account for the sense.]

Meaning: The apparition, double, or wraith of a living person.

Selective illustrative quotations: 1787 Francis GROSE *A Provincial Glossary*, Fetch, the apparition of a person living. N[orth Country]. 1825 J. BANIM *Tales O'Hara Family*, The Fetches, In Ireland, 'a fetch' is the supernatural facsimile of some individual, which comes to ensure to its original a happy longevity, or immediate dissolution; if seen in the morning, the one event is predicted; if in the evening, the other. 1830 Walter SCOTT *Letters on Demonology and Witchcraft*, vi. 177 His...fetch or wraith, or double-ganger.

ELF

[Old English. ælf masc. = Old High German. alp (MHG., modern German.

alp nightmare, Old Norse. álfr (Da. alf) elf:-- old Teutonic. *albo-z; a parallel type *albi-z (cf. Swedish. elf, Danish. elv) appears in late West Saxon. *ylf. (The modern German elf is believed to be adopted from English; Middle High German had elbe a female elf.) Some have compared the Teutonic word with the Sanskrit. rbhu, the name given to the three genii of the seasons in Hindu mythology.]

Meaning: The name of a class of supernatural beings, in early Teutonic belief supposed to possess formidable magical powers, exercised variously for the benefit or the injury of mankind. They were believed to be of dwarfish form, to produce diseases of various kinds, to act as incubi and succubi, to cause nightmares, and to steal children, substituting changelings in their place. The Teutonic belief in elves is probably the main source of the medieval superstition respecting fairies, which, however, includes elements not of Teutonic origin; in general the Romanic word denotes a being of less terrible and more playful character than the 'elf' as originally conceived. In modern literature, elf is a mere synonym of FAIRY, which has to a great extent superseded it even in dialects. Originally elf was masculine, ELVEN feminine; but in 13th and 14th c. the two seem to have been used indifferently of both sexes. In modern use elf chiefly, though not always, denotes a male fairy.

1610 SHAKESPEARE. *Tempest* V. i. 33 Ye Elves of hils, brooks, standing lakes and groues. 1635 1651 HOBBS *Leviathan* (1839) 699 When the fairies are displeased with any body, they are said to send their elves, to pinch them. 1700 DRYDEN (J.) That we may angels seem, we paint them elves. Robert HERRICK *Hesper*. (1869) II. App. 477 Come follow, follow me You fairie elves that be.

1866 Charles KINGSLEY *Hereward the Wake*, xv. 193 You are an elf and a goddess. 1875 B. TAYLOR *Faust* I. i, Then the craft of elves propitious Hastes to help where help it can.

LEPRECHAUN

Etymology: [Written *lupracán*, *lugharcán*, *lugaracán*, in O'Reilly Irish. Dictionary, Supplement.; in the body of the Dictionary it is spelt *leithbrágan*, doubtless by etymologizing perversion, the sprite being 'supposed to be always employed in making or mending a single shoe' (*leith* half, *bróg* brogue); O'Reilly also gives *luacharman* as a synonym. In some modern Irish books the spelling *lioprachán* occurs. All these forms may be corrupted from one original; cf. Middle Irish *luchrupán* (Windisch Glossary), altered form of Old Irish *luchorpán*, from *lu* small + *corp* body.]

Meaning: In Irish folk-lore, A pigmy sprite 'who always carries a purse containing a shilling'.

Selective illustrative quotations: 1818 LADY MORGAN Florence Macarthy (1819) I. v. 289 There, your honor, them's my cordaries, the little Leprehauns, with their cathah heads, and their burned skins. 1860 All Year Round No. 38. 282 A little, lisping, attenuated falsetto voice, such as you would fancy would have proceeded from an Irish leprechaun. Comb. 1883 W. BLACK Shandon Bells xvii, This little red-haired leprechaun-looking Andy.

TROLL

Etymology: [Old Norse and Swedish. *troll*, Danish. *trold* (whence Danish. *trylla*, *trylde*, Swedish. *trolla* to charm, bewitch, Old Norse. *trolldómr* witchcraft).

(Adopted in English from Scandinavian in the middle of the 19th century; but in Shetland and Orkney, where the form is now TROW (in 1616 *troll*), it has survived from the Norse dialect formerly spoken there.)]

Meaning: In Scandinavian mythology, One of a race of supernatural beings formerly conceived as giants, now, in Denmark and Sweden, as dwarfs or imps, supposed to inhabit caves or subterranean dwellings.

Selective illustrative quotations: 1616 Dittay Sheriff Court Shetland 2 Oct., The said Catherine for airt and pairt of witchcraft and sorcerie, in hanting and seeing the Trollis ryse out of the kyrk yeard of Hildiswick. 1856 Ralph Waldo EMERSON English Traits, Ability Works. II. 34 The Scandinavian fancied himself surrounded by Trolls – a kind of goblin men, with vast power of work and skilful production. 1865 BARING-GOULD Werewolves iv. 40 In the Hrolfs Saga Kraka, we meet with a troll in a boar's shape, to whom divine honours are paid.

Part III: Two Versions of the Phantasmagoria Poem

The 1869 version of Phantasmagoria consists of 755 lines in 151 stanzas in seven cantos; the 1883 numbers 750 lines in 150 stanzas also divided into seven cantos. In his diary entry for 19 May 1883 Carroll noted: “I have now arranged in pages the whole of the Volume of Poems, (which I think of calling *Rhyme? And Reason?*), having had to write in, as padding, three stanzas at page 4, beginning “Houses are classed...”¹⁵ Carroll makes no comment at that time, however, on the stanzas which would be deleted – see the discussion below.

The following stanzas, the first line of which is given below following its Canto and page number, are not to be found in the 1869 version but were added by Lewis Carroll to the 1883 revised version.

I, p. 4 “Houses are classed, I beg to state,

I, p. 4 “This is a ‘one-ghost’ house, and you

I, p. 5 “In Villas this is always done—

I, p. 5 “That Spectre left you on the Third—

II, p. 11 “If after this he says no more,

II, p. 12 “By day, if he should be alone—

III, p. 22 I bore it—bore it like a man—

VII, p. 53 “No need for Bones to hurry so!”

VII, p. 54 “If Tibbs is anything like me,

VII, p. 54 “And if Bones plagues him anyhow—

VII, p. 56 So with a yawn I went my way

The following lines are revised as indicated between the two editions of 1869 and the first edition of 1883. The first line in stanza five of Canto II “But if the wretch says nothing more” becomes “If after this he says no more” in the 1883 edition. The first line of stanza seventeen of Canto II “In fact we’re simply cut up small” becomes “That simply means ‘be cut up small” in the 1883 edition. The ninth stanza of the 1869 edition reads:

“The remedy, *he says*, is port,
 (Which he compares to nectar)
 And, as in the inns where it is bought
 Have always been his chief resort,
 We call him the ‘Inn-Spectre!”

In the 1883 edition those lines are changed to:

“Port wine, he says, when rich and sound,
 Warms his old bones like nectar :
 And as the inns, where it is found,
 Are his especial hunting ground,
 We call him the *Inn-Spectre*.”

The first two lines of stanza ten of Canto III in the 1869 version are:

I bear as well as any man
The washiest of witticisms;

become in the 1883 edition:

I bore it – bore it like a man –
This agonizing witticism !

In stanza 2 of Canto VII the initial words of line two are changed from Thought I to I sobbed.

And the following stanzas occur in the 1869 edition but are omitted from the 1883 one:

- 1) Canto II, p. 16 the stanza beginning: I said “That rule appears to me”
- 2) Canto VII, p. 56, the stanza beginning A Quaker friend accosted me —a
- 3) Canto VII, p. 57, the stanza beginning “The ghost’s not grave.” I said, “but gay ;

In every case the changes wrought in the first edition of 1883 are improvements on the original lines; Carroll had refined his ear, perhaps because of the composition of the Snark.

Florence Becker Lennon, who was not only a Carroll biographer but also a minor poet in her own right, thought Carroll’s verse in this poem was sometimes rather poor. She takes as an instance of his questionable performance the following stanza:

Oh, when I was a little Ghost,
A merry time had we!

Each seated on his favorite post,
 We chumped and chawed the buttered toast
 They gave us with our tea.

The *Saturday Review of Literature*'s critic, William Rose Benét, said of that particular "Phantasmagoria" stanza "You will note the perfection of the versification." Lennon then proceeds to comment on Benét's comment on the stanza:

It is smooth and easy reading to be sure—it rhymes, it scans—but perfection is a strong word from a poet. Even if Mr. Benét rejects Yeats's dictum that a sound, especially a vowel, should never follow itself in poetry (we, each), he can hardly justify the same vowel sound in three consecutive syllables (we, each, seated), with no sound pattern to account for it. Carroll heard consonantal patterns, which give his verse movement, but the lack of subtle music comes from his innocence of vowel sequences.¹⁶

And yet there are indeed many clever lines and creative rhymes in the poem which make for easy and enjoyable reading, for example:

"(If that's a snuff-box on the shelf,"
 He added with a yawn,
 "I'll take a pinch) – next came an Elf,
 And then a Phantom (that's myself)
 And last a leprechaun."

NOTES

- 1 Cohen, Morton N. and Anita Gandolfo. *Lewis Carroll and the House of Macmillan*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987) p. 68.
- 2 The *Lewis Carroll Handbook* edition edited by Sidney Herbert Williams, Falconer Madan, and Denis Crutch (Hamden, Ct: Dawson, 1979) p. 50.
- 3 Cohen, Morton N. and Anita Gandolfo. pp. 68-70.
- 4 Hudson, Derek. *Lewis Carroll: An Illustrated Biography*. (New York: Clarkson N. Potter, 1977) p. 152.
- 5 The *Lewis Carroll Handbook* errs in saying on p. 50 “the word Phantasmagoria was invented in 1802 and seems to mean a Gathering of Ghosts.” The word means nothing like that.
- 6 Cohen, Morton N. *Lewis Carroll: A Biography*. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995) pp. 243-244.
- 7 Liddell, Henry George and Robert Scott. *Greek-English Lexicon*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968) p. 1919.
- 8 *Oxford English Dictionary*, online edition at <http://dictionary.oed.com>
- 9 Cohen, Margaret. *Profane Illumination: Walter Benjamin and the Paris of Surrealist Revolution*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993) p. 232.
- 10 Warner, Marina. *Phantasmagoria: Spirit Visions, Metaphors, and Media into the Twenty-first Century*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006) p. 147.
- 11 Ibid. p. 149.
- 12 Sewell, Elizabeth. *Lewis Carroll: Voices from France*. (Lewis Carroll Society of North America, 2008) p. 191.
- 13 Hudson. p. 186.
- 14 Cohen, Morton N. [editor] with Roger Lancelyn Green. *The Letters of Lewis Carroll*. Vol. II. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979) pp. 471-472.
- 15 Wakeling, Edward. *The Diaries of Lewis Carroll*. Vol. 7. (Clifford, Herefordshire: The Lewis Carroll Society, 2003) p. 531.
- 16 Lennon, Florence Becker. *The Life of Lewis Carroll*. (New York: Collier Books, 1962) p. 300.