

sixpence, and were carpeted – the seats not the floor. To such heights of extravagance they sat down. Presently, after some very moral observations from an old gentleman in trouble with a dying child (he said ‘choild’) the curtain dropped and the roof of canvas was drawn aside, in order to let in the struggling daylight and save the flaring naphtha cressets. Instantly upon the return of the lights Celie and Cleg became the sole centre of attraction – a doubled courtier in tights, with an unruly sword which scraped the curtain, having no chance whatever in competition with their grandeur. Cleg folded his arms with a proud disdain and sat up with a back as straight as an arrow.

‘Glory be – if ‘tisn’t Cleg Kelly wid the Quane of Shaeba!’ said a compatriot in the pit. (The house was divided into pit and carpet.) And this was the general opinion. It was the proudest moment of Cleg’s existence to date, as he himself said.

Celie sat all the while demure as a kitten and smoothed her gloves as if she had been in church. Several Knuckle Dusters passed Cleg the private wink of the society, but none dared intrude on that awful dignity of responsibility. Besides, none of them were ‘on the carpet’, and Heddle of the Silver Rings possessed a quick eye and a long arm.

The curtain went up. This time it was a haunted room. A haunted clock ticked irregularly in the corner, and the villain sat alone in his quite remarkable villainy on a solitary chair in the middle of the room. It was very dark, owing to the murky cast of crime all around. Suddenly the gentleman on the chair shouted out the details of his ‘croime’ at the pitch of his voice, as if he had been the town crier. He told the audience how much he regretted having left his victim weltering in his gore, whereupon the aforesaid victim abruptly appeared, ‘weltering’, it is true, but rather in a white sheet with the lower part of which his legs appeared to be having a difficulty.

The villain hastened to rise to the occasion. Once more he drew his sword, with which he had been making gallant play most of the time. Again he informed the next street of his ‘croime’. Then he pulled a pistol out of his belt and solemnly warned the Spectre what would happen if he did not clear out and take his unruly winding-sheet with him. But the spectre appeared to be wholly unimpressed, for he only gibbered more incoherently and fluttered the bed-quilt (as Cleg called it) more wildly. The villain continued to exhort.

‘He’s an awfu’ blatherumskite!’ said Cleg, contemptuously. He knew something of real villains. He had a father.

Again the spectre was impressively warned:

‘Your blood be upon your own head!’ shouted the villain – and fired the pistol.

The ghost remarked, Br-r-r-r! whoop! – went up to the ceiling, came down again wrong side up; and then set about gibbering in a manner more freezing than ever. Whereupon the villain seized his crime-rusted sword in both hands and puddled about in the spectre’s anatomy, as if it had been a pot and he was afraid it would boil over. But soon he satisfied himself that this was not the game to play with a spirit so haughtily indifferent. And with a last wild shriek of despair he cast the sword from him on the floor.

‘Ha, baffled! foiled!’ he remarked, clasping his hands suddenly upon his brow: ‘COL-LD FIRE is USELESS!’

This was summing up the situation with a vengeance, and tickled Celie so much that she laughed joyously – whereat the audience clapped and cheered with appreciation, and Cleg rose to come out.

‘What comes after that?’ said Celie, who was quite willing to stay to the end.

‘After that the devil gets him. We needna wait for that!’ said Cleg, simply. He had an exceedingly healthy and orthodox belief in the ultimate fate of illdoers. But he did not choose that his goddess should witness the details.

# SCHRÖPFER’S GHOST SHOW AT THE COURT OF DRESDEN, 1774

HAUKE LANGE-FUCHS

A little-known description of a ‘ghost show’, with projection on smoke, given by the legendary German conjurer Johann Georg Schröpfer (1739–1774) appears in a contemporary English book, William Wraxall’s *Memoirs of the Courts of Berlin, Dresden, Warsaw, and Vienna, in the years 1777, 1778, and 1779*.

In the summer of 1774 – probably August – Schröpfer was invited to give a show in Dresden at the palace of Prince Karl of Saxony, former reigning duke of Courland. Wraxall, having visited the court of Frederick the Great in Berlin, stayed a few days in Dresden in November 1777, and was presented to the Prince in the same great gallery of the palace in which the famous show had taken place three years before. Wraxall states: ‘As many persons of the first rank and consideration in this country were present, the principal circumstances attending it, are well known and remembered.’ The Prince asked Schröpfer to conjure up the ghost of his late uncle Johann Georg – called Chevalier de Saxe and one of the many natural sons of Friedrich August I, Elector of Saxony and King of Poland – who had died in February 1774. Wraxall writes:

On the appointed night; for Schrepfer naturally preferred darkness ... the company assembled. They were nineteen in number, of whom I personally know several (probably Stallmeister von Bischoffswerder, Kammerherr von Hopfgarten, Minister von Wurmb, Kammerherr von Heynitz, Oberst Fröden, and Herr von Poncet). ... When they were met in the great gallery of the palace, the first object of all present was to secure the windows and doors, in order equally to prevent intrusion or deception. As far as precaution could effect it, they did so, and were satisfied that nothing except violence could procure access or entrance. Schrepfer then acquainted them, that the act which he was about to perform, would demand all their firmness; and advised them to fortify their nerves by partaking of a bowl of punch, which was placed upon the table. Several of them, (indeed, as I believe, all except one or two) thinking the exhortation judicious, very readily followed it; but, the gentleman from whom I received these particulars, declined to profit by the advice, ‘I am come here,’ said he to Schrepfer, ‘to be present at raising an apparition. Either I will see all, or nothing. My resolution is taken, and no inducement can make me put any thing within my lips.’ Another of the company, who preferred his presence of mind, placed himself close to the principal door, in order to watch if any one attempted to open or force it. These preparatory steps being taken, the great work began with the uttermost solemnity.

Schrepfer commenced it, by retiring into a corner of the gallery, where kneeling down, with many mysterious ceremonies he invoked the spirits to appear, or rather to come to his aid; for it is allowed that none were ever visible. A very considerable time elapsed before they obeyed; during which interval, he laboured apparently under great agitation of body and mind, being covered with a violent sweat, and almost in convulsions, like the Pythoness of antiquity. At length, a loud clatter was heard at all the windows on the outside; which was soon followed by another noise, resembling more the effect produced by a number of wet fingers drawn over the edge of glasses, than any thing else to which it could well be compared. This sound announced, as he said, the arrival of his good or protecting spirits, and seemed to encourage him to proceed. A short time afterwards a yelling was heard, of a frightful and unusual nature, which came, he declared, from the malignant spirits, whose presence, as it seems, was necessary and indispensable to the completion of the catastrophe. The company were now, at least the greater part, electrified with amazement, or petrified with horror; and of course fully prepared for every object which could be presented to them. Schrepfer continuing his invocations, the door suddenly opened with violence, and something that resembled a black ball or globe, rolled into the room. It was invested with smoke or cloud, in the midst of which appeared to be a human face, like the countenance of the Chevalier de Saxe; much in the same way, it would seem, that Corregio or Hannibal Carrache have represented Jupiter appearing to Semele. From the form issued a loud and angry voice, which

exclaimed in German, ‘Carl, was wolte du mit mich?’ ‘Charles, what wouldst thou with me?’ ‘Why did you disturb me?’

Language, as may be supposed, can ill describe the consternation produced among the spectators at such sight. Either firmly persuaded that the appearance, which they beheld, was spiritual and intangible; or deprived of resolution to approach and attempt to seize it; they appear to have made no effort to satisfy themselves of its incorporeal nature. The Prince, whose impious curiosity had summoned his uncle’s ghost, and to whom, as the person principally responsible, the spectre addressed itself; far from manifesting coolness, or attempting reply, betrayed the strongest marks of horror and contrition. Throwing himself on his knees, he called on God for mercy; while others of the terrified party earnestly besought the magician to give the remaining proof of his art for which they now were anxious, by dismissing the apparition. But Schrepfer, though apparently willing, found, or pretended to find, this effort beyond his power. However incredible, absurd, or ridiculous it may be thought, the persons who witnessed the scene, protest that near an hour elapsed, before, by the force of his invocations, the spectre could be compelled to disappear. Nay, when at length Schrepfer had succeeded in dismissing it; at the moment that the company began to resume a degree of serenity, the door, which had been closed, burst open again, and the same hideous form presented itself anew to their eyes. The most resolute and collected among them, were not proof to its second appearance, and a scene of universal dismay ensued. Schrepfer, however, by reiterated exorcisms or exertions, finally dismissed the apparition. The terrified spectators soon dispersed, overcome with amazement, and fully satisfied, as they well might be, of Schrepfer’s supernatural powers.

Schröpfer never disclosed the nature of his proceeding (his ‘apparition apparatus’ is said to have been later in the possession of von Bischoffswerder who used it at the court of Berlin to influence the narrow-minded King Friedrich Wilhelm II). Nobody told Wraxall that a magic lantern was used, and he was still wondering about the matter:

I must frankly reply, that I can neither give any satisfactory solution of it, nor have I heard any attempted, except the obvious one of human credulity and terror, operated upon by imposture and deception ... Nineteen men, met together for the avowed purpose of seeing an apparition, and believing that it is in human power to render a departed spirit visible, are already half subdued to any thing, however gross. That it was a deception, no man of sound understanding will doubt; but how it was managed or produced, the persons who were duped, have not yet discovered ... We must be content therefore to resolve it into German credulity or superstition, and congratulate ourselves on our superiority to such puerile terrors.

## NOTE

1. Von Poncet left his own account of the events.