

# Apparitions of the Dead

By Lacy Collison-Morley

Among the tall stories in Lucian's *Philopseudus* is an amusing account of a man whose wife, whom he loved dearly, appeared to him after she, had been dead for twenty days. He had given her a splendid funeral, and had burnt everything she possessed with her. One day, as he was sitting quietly reading the Phædo, she suddenly appeared to him, to the terror of his son. As soon as he saw her he embraced her tearfully, a fact which seems to show that she was of a more substantial build than the large majority of ghosts of the ancient world; but she strictly forbade him to make any sound whatever. She then explained that she had come to upbraid the unfortunate man for having neglected to burn one of her golden slippers with her at the funeral. It had fallen behind the chest, she explained, and had been forgotten and not placed upon the pyre with the other. While they were talking, a confounded little Maltese puppy suddenly began to bark from under the bed, when she vanished. But the slipper was found exactly where she had described, and was duly burnt on the following day. The story is refreshingly human.

This question of dress seems to have been a not infrequent source of anxiety to deceased ladies in the ancient world. Periander, the tyrant of Corinth, on one occasion wished to consult his wife's spirit upon a very important matter; but she replied, as she had doubtless often done when alive, that she would not answer his questions till she had some decent clothes to wear. Periander waited for a great festival, when he knew that all the women of Corinth would be assembled in their best, and then gave orders that they should one and all strip themselves. He burnt the clothes on a huge pyre in his wife's honour; and one can imagine his satisfaction at feeling that he had at last settled the question for ever. He applied to his wife once more with a clear conscience, when she gave him an unmistakable sign that she was speaking the truth, and answered his questions as he desired.

That small household matters may weigh heavily upon a woman's conscience, even nowadays, is shown by the following interesting story, which may well be compared with the foregoing. In July, 1838, a Catholic priest, who had gone to Perth to take charge of a mission, was called upon by a Presbyterian woman. For many weeks past, she explained, she had been anxious to see a priest. A woman, lately dead, whom she knew very slightly, had appeared to her during the night for several nights, urging her to go to a priest and ask him to pay three shillings and tenpence to a person not specified.

The priest made inquiries, and learnt that the deceased had acted as washerwoman and followed the regiment. At last, after careful search, he found a grocer with whom she had dealt, and, on being asked whether a female of the name owed him anything, the grocer turned up his books and informed him that she owed him three shillings and tenpence. He paid the sum. Subsequently the Presbyterian woman came to him, saying that she was no more troubled.

The spirits of the worst of the Roman Emperors were, as we should expect, especially restless. Pliny\* tells us how Fannius, who was engaged upon a Life of Nero, was warned by him of his approaching death. He was lying on his couch at dead of night with a writing-desk in front of him, when Nero came and sat down by his side, took up the first

book he had written on his evil deeds, and read it through to the end; and so on with the second and the third. Then he vanished. Fannius was terrified, for he thought the vision implied that he would never get beyond the third book of his work, and this actually proved to be the case.

Nero, in fact, had a romantic charm about him, in spite of, or perhaps because of, the wild recklessness of his life; and he possessed the redeeming feature of artistic taste. Like Francis I. of France, or our own Charles II., he was irresistible with the ladies, and must have been the darling of all the housemaids of Rome. People long refused to believe in his death, and for many years it was confidently affirmed that he would appear again. His ghost was long believed to walk in Rome, and the church of Santa Maria del Popolo is said to have been built as late as 1099 by Pope Paschalis II. on the site of the tombs of the Domitii, where Nero was buried, near the modern Porta del Popolo, where the Via Flaminia entered the city, in order to lay his restless shade.

Caligula also appeared shortly after his death, and frequently disturbed the keepers of the Lamian Gardens, for his body had been hastily buried there without due ceremony. Not till his sisters, who really loved him, in spite of his many faults, had returned from exile were the funeral rites properly performed, after which his ghost gave no more trouble.

On the night of the day of Galba's murder, the Emperor Otho was heard groaning in his room by his attendants. They rushed in, and found him lying in front of his bed, endeavouring to propitiate Galba's ghost, by whom he declared that he saw himself being driven out and expelled. Otho was a strange mixture of superstition and scepticism, for when he started on his last fatal expedition he treated the unfavourable omens with contempt. By this time, however, he may have become desperate. Moreover, irreligious people are notoriously superstitious, and at this period it would be very difficult to say just where religion ended and superstition began.

We have one or two ghost stories connected with early Greek mythology. Cillas, the charioteer of Pelops, though Trœzenius gives his name as Sphærus, died on the way to Pisa, and appeared to Pelops by night, begging that he might be duly buried. Pelops took pity on him and burnt his body with all ceremony, raised a huge mound in his honour, and built a chapel to the Cillean Apollo near it. He also named a town after him. Strabo even says that there was a mound in Cillas' honour at Crisa in the Troad. This dutiful attention did not go unrewarded. Cillas appeared to Pelops again, and thanked him for all he had done, and to Cillas also he is said to have owed the information by which he was able to overthrow Œnomaus in the famous chariot race which won him the hand of Hippodamia. Pelops' shameless ingratitude to Œnomaus's charioteer, Myrtilus, who had removed the pin of his master's chariot, and thus caused his defeat and death in order to help Pelops, on the promise of the half of the kingdom, is hardly in accordance with his treatment of Cillas, though it is thoroughly Greek. However, on the theory that a man who betrays one master will probably betray another, especially if he is to be rewarded for his treachery with as much as half a kingdom, Pelops was right in considering that Myrtilus was best out of the way; and he can hardly have foreseen the curse that was to fall upon his family in consequence.

With this story we may compare the well-known tale of the poet Simonides, who found an unknown corpse on the shore, and honoured it with burial. Soon afterwards he happened to be on the point of starting on a voyage, when the man whom he had buried

appeared to him in a dream, and warned him on no account to go by the ship he had chosen, as it would undoubtedly be wrecked. Impressed by the vision, the poet remained behind, and the ship went down soon afterwards, with all on board. Simonides expressed his gratitude in a poem describing the event, and in several epigrams. Libanius even goes so far as to place the scene of the event at Tarentum, where he was preparing to take ship for Sicily.

The tale is probably mythical. It belongs to a group of stories of the grateful dead, which have been the subject of an interesting book recently published by the Folk-Lore Society. Mr. Gerould doubts whether it really belongs to the cycle, as it is nearly two centuries earlier, even in Cicero's version, than any other yet discovered; but it certainly inspired Chaucer in his Nun's Priest's Tale, and it may well have influenced other later versions. The Jewish version is closer to the Simonides story than any of the others, and I will quote it in Mr. Gerould's words.

"The son of a rich merchant of Jerusalem sets off after his father's death to see the world. At Stamboul he finds hanging in chains the body of a Jew, which the Sultan has commanded to be left there till his co-religionists shall have repaid the sum that the man is suspected of having stolen from his royal master. The hero pays this sum, and has the corpse buried. Later, during a storm at sea he is saved by a stone, on which he is brought to land, whence he is carried by an eagle back to Jerusalem. There a white-clad man appears to him, explaining that he is the ghost of the dead, and that he has already appeared as stone and eagle. The spirit further promises the hero a reward for his good deed in the present and in the future life."

This is one of the simplest forms in which the story appears. It is generally found compounded with some other similar tale; but the main facts are that a man buries a corpse found on the sea-shore from philanthropic motives. "Later he is met by the ghost of the dead man, who in many cases promises him help on condition of receiving, in return, half of whatever he gets. The hero obtains a wife (or some other, reward), and, when called upon, is ready to fulfil his bargain as to sharing his possessions," not excepting the wife. Some of the characteristics of the tale are to be found in the story of Pelops and Cillas, related above, which Mr. Gerould does not mention.

Pausanias has a story of one of Ulysses' crew. Ulysses' ship was driven about by the winds from one city to another in Sicily and Italy, and in the course of these wanderings it touched at Tecmessa. Here one of the sailors got drunk and ravished a maiden, and was stoned to death in consequence by the indignant people of the town. Ulysses did not trouble about what had occurred, and sailed away. Soon, however, the ghost of the murdered man became a source of serious annoyance to the people of the place, killing the inhabitants of the town, regardless of age and sex. Finally, matters came to such a pass that the town was abandoned. But the Pythian priestess bade the people return to Tecmessa and appease the hero by building him a temple and precinct of his own, and giving him every year the fairest maiden of the town to wife. They took this advice, and there was no more trouble from the ghost. It chanced, however, that Euthymus came to Tecmessa just when the people were paying the dead sailor the annual honours. Learning how matters stood, he asked to be allowed to go into the temple and see the maiden. At their meeting he was first touched with pity, and then immediately fell desperately in love with her. The girl swore to be his, if he would save her. Euthymus put on his armour and awaited the attack of the monster. He had the best of the fight, and the ghost, driven from

its home, plunged into the sea. The wedding was, of course, celebrated with great splendour, and nothing more was heard of the spirit of the drunken sailor. The story is obviously to be classed with that of Ariadne.

The god-fearing Ælian seeks to show that Providence watches over a good man and brings his murderers to justice by a story taken from Chrysippus. A traveller put up at an inn in Megara, wearing a belt full of gold. The innkeeper discovered that he had the money about him, and murdered him at night, having arranged to carry his body outside the gates in a dung-cart. But meanwhile the murdered man appeared to a citizen of the town and told him what had happened. The man was impressed by the vision. Investigations were made, and the murderer was caught exactly where the ghost had indicated, and was duly punished.

This is one of the very few stories in which the apparition is seen at or near the moment of death, as is the case in the vast majority of the well-authenticated cases collected during recent years.

Aristeas of Proconesus, a man of high birth, died quite suddenly in a fulling establishment in his native town. The owner locked the building and went to inform his relatives, when a man from Cyzicus, hearing the news, denied it, saying that Aristeas had met him on the way thither and talked to him; and when the relatives came, prepared to remove the body, they found no Aristeas, either alive or dead. Altogether, he seems to have been a remarkable person. He disappeared for seven years, and then appeared in Proconesus and wrote an epic poem called *Arimispea*, which was well known in Herodotus's day. Two hundred and forty years later he was seen again, this time at Metapontum, and bade the citizens build a shrine to Apollo, and near it erect a statue to himself, as Apollo would come to them alone of the Italian Greeks, and he would be seen following in the form of a raven. The townsmen were troubled at the apparition, and consulted the Delphic oracle, which confirmed all that Aristeas had said; and Apollo received his temple and Aristeas his statue in the market-place.

Apollonius tells virtually the same story, except that in his version Aristeas was seen giving a lesson in literature by a number of persons in Sicily at the very hour he died in Proconesus. He says that Aristeas appeared at intervals for a number of years after his death. The elder Pliny also speaks of Aristeas, saying that at Proconesus his soul was seen to leave his body in the form of a raven, though he regards the tale as in all probability a fabrication.

The doctor in Lucian's *Philopseudes* (c. 26) declares that he knew a man who rose from the dead twenty days after he was buried, and that he attended him after his resurrection. But when asked how it was the body did not decompose or the man die of hunger, he has no answer to give. Dio Cassius describes how, when Nero wished to cut a canal through the Isthmus of Corinth, blood spurted up in front of those who first touched the earth, groans and cries were heard, and a number of ghosts appeared. Not till Nero took a pickaxe and began to work himself, to encourage the men, was any real progress made.

Pliny quotes an interesting account, from Hermotimus of Clazomenæ, of a man whose soul was in the habit of leaving his body and wandering abroad, as was proved by the fact that he would often describe events which had happened at a distance, and could only be known to an actual eyewitness. His body meanwhile lay like that of a man in a trance or

half dead. One day, however, some enemies of his took the body while in this state and burnt it, thus, to use Pliny's phrase, leaving the soul no sheath to which it could return.

No one can help being struck by the bald and meagre character of these stories as a whole. They possess few of the qualities we expect to find in a good modern ghost story. None of them can equal in pathetic beauty many of those to be found in Myers's *Human Personality*. Take, for example, the story of the lady § who was waked in the night by the sound of moaning and sobbing, as of someone in great distress of mind. Finding nothing in her room, she went and looked out of the landing window, "and there, on the grass, was a very beautiful young girl in a kneeling posture before a soldier, in a General's uniform, clasping her hands together and entreating for pardon; but, alas! he only waived her away from him."

The story proved to be true. The youngest daughter of the old and distinguished family to which the house had belonged had had an illegitimate child. Her parents and relations refused to have anything more to do with her, and she died broken-hearted. The lady who relates the story saw the features so clearly on this occasion that she afterwards recognized the soldier's portrait some six months later, when calling at a friend's house, and exclaimed: "Why, look! There is the General!" as soon as she noticed it.

One really beautiful ghost story has, however, come down to us. Phlegon of Tralles was a freedman of the Emperor Hadrian. His work is not of great merit. The following is a favourable specimen of his stories. A monstrous child was born in Ætolia, after the death of its father, Polycrates. At a public meeting, where it was proposed to do away with it, the father suddenly appeared, and begged that the child might be given him. An attempt was made to seize the father, but he snatched up the child, tore it to pieces, and devoured all but the head. When it was proposed to consult the Delphic oracle on the matter, the head prophesied to the crowd from where it lay on the ground.

Then comes the following story. The early part is missing, but Erwin Rohde, in an interesting article, has cleared up all the essential details. Proclus's treatises on Plato's Republic are complete only in the Vatican manuscripts. Of these Mai only published fragments, but an English theologian, Alexander Morus, took notes from the manuscript when it was in Florence, and quoted from it in a commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews. One of the treatises is called *πως δει νοειν εισιεναι και εξιεναι ψυχην απο σωρατος*. The ending in Phlegon proves that the story was given in the form of a letter, and we learn that the scene was laid at Amphipolis, on the Strymon, and that the account was sent by Hipparchus in a letter to Arrhidæus, half-brother of Alexander the Great, the events occurring during the reign of Philip II. of Macedon. Proclus says that his information is derived from letters, "some written by Hipparchus, others by Arrhidæus."

Philinnion was the daughter of Dernostratus and Charito. She had been married to Craterus, Alexander's famous General, but had died six months after her marriage. As we learn that she was desperately in love with Machates, a foreign friend from Pella who had come to see Demostratus, the misery of her position may possibly have caused her death. But her love conquered death itself, and she returned to life again six months after she had died, and lived with Machates, visiting him for several nights. One day an old nurse went to the guest-chamber, and as the lamp was burning, she saw a woman sitting by Machates. Scarcely able to contain herself at this extraordinary occurrence, she ran to the girl's mother, calling: 'Charito! Demostratus!' and bade them get up and go with her to

their daughter, for by the grace of the gods she had appeared alive, and was with the stranger in the guest-chamber.

“On hearing this extraordinary story, Charito was at first overcome by it and by the nurse’s excitement; but she soon recovered herself, and burst into tears at the mention of her daughter, telling the old woman she was out of her senses, and ordering her out of the room. The nurse was indignant at this treatment, and boldly declared that she was not out of her senses, but that Charito was unwilling to see her daughter because she was afraid. At last Charito consented to go to the door of the guest-chamber, but as it was now quite two hours since she had heard the news, she arrived too late, and found them both asleep. The mother bent over the woman’s figure, and thought she recognized her daughter’s features and clothes. Not feeling sure, as it was dark, she decided to keep quiet for the present, meaning to get up early and catch the woman. If she failed, she would ask Machates for a full explanation, as he would never tell her a lie in a case so important. So she left the room without saying anything.

“But early on the following morning, either because the gods so willed it or because she was moved by some divine impulse, the woman went away without being observed. When she came to him, Charito was angry with the young man in consequence, and clung to his knees, and conjured him to speak the truth and hide nothing from her. At first he was greatly distressed, and could hardly be brought to admit that the girl’s name was Philinnion. Then he described her first coming and the violence of her passion, and told how she had said that she was there without her parents’ knowledge. The better to establish the truth of his story, he opened a coffer and took out the things she had left behind her—a ring of gold which she had given him, and a belt which she had left on the previous night. When Charito beheld all these convincing proofs, she uttered a piercing cry, and rent her clothes and her cloak, and tore her coif from her head, and began to mourn for her daughter afresh in the midst of her friends. Machates was deeply distressed on seeing what had happened, and how they were all mourning, as if for her second funeral. He begged them to be comforted, and promised them that they should see her if she appeared. Charito yielded, but bade him be careful how he fulfilled his promise.

“When night fell and the hour drew near at which Philinnion usually appeared, they were on the watch for her. She came, as was her custom, and sat down upon the bed. Machates made no pretence, for he was genuinely anxious to sift the matter to the bottom, and secretly sent some slaves to call her parents. He himself could hardly believe that the woman who came to him so regularly at the same hour was really dead, and when she ate and drank with him, he began to suspect what had been suggested to him—namely, that some grave-robbers had violated the tomb and sold the clothes and the gold ornaments to her father.

“Demostratus and Charito hastened to come at once, and when they saw her, they were at first speechless with amazement. Then, with cries of joy, they threw themselves upon their daughter. But Philinnion remained cold. ‘Father and mother,’ she said, ‘cruel indeed have ye been in that ye grudged my living with the stranger for three days in my father’s house, for it brought harm to no one. But ye shall pay for your meddling with sorrow. I must return to the place appointed for me, though I came not hither without the will of Heaven.’ With these words she fell down dead, and her body lay stretched upon the bed. Her parents threw themselves upon her, and the house was filled with confusion and

sorrow, for the blow was heavy indeed; but the event was strange, and soon became known throughout the town, and finally reached my ears.

“During the night I kept back the crowds that gathered round the house, taking care that there should be no disturbance as the news spread. At early dawn the theatre was full. After a long discussion it was decided that we should go and open the tomb, to see whether the body was still on the bier, or whether we should find the place empty, for the woman had hardly been dead six months. When we opened the vault where all her family was buried, the bodies were seen lying on the other biers; but on the one where Philinnion had been placed, we found only the iron ring which had belonged to her lover and the gilt drinking-cup Machates had given her on the first day. In utter amazement, we went straight to Demonstratus’s house to see whether the body was still there. We beheld it lying on the ground, and then went in a large crowd to the place of assembly, for the whole event was of great importance and absolutely past belief. Great was the confusion, and no one could tell what to do, when Hyllus, who is not only considered the best diviner among us, but is also a great authority on the interpretation of the flight of birds, and is generally well versed in his art, got up and said that the woman must be buried outside the boundaries of the city, for it was unlawful that she should be laid to rest within them; and that Hermes Chthonius and the Eumenides should be propitiated, and that all pollution would thus be removed. He ordered the temples to be re-consecrated and the usual rites to be performed in honour of the gods below. As for the King, in this affair, he privately told me to sacrifice to Hermes, and to Zeus Xenius, and to Ares, and to perform these duties with the utmost care. We have done as he suggested.

“The stranger Machates, who was visited by the ghost, has committed suicide in despair.

“Now, if you think it right that I should give the King an account of all this, let me know, and I will send some of those who gave me the various details.”

The story is particularly interesting, as the source of Goethe’s *Braut von Korinth*. In Goethe’s poem the girl is a Christian, while her lover is a pagan. Their parents are friends, and they have been betrothed in their youth. He comes to stay with her parents, knowing nothing of her death, when she appears to him. As in the Greek story, her body is material, though cold and bloodless, and he thinks her still alive. He takes her in his arms and kisses her back to life and love, breathing his own passion into her. Then the mother surprises them, and the daughter upbraids her for her cruelty, but begs that she and her lover may be buried together, as he must pay for the life he has given her with his own.