

3.7 Arthur Burdett Frost



Figure 106 - Arthur B. Frost

3.7.1 Life

Arthur Burdett Frost was born in Philadelphia in 1851. His father John was a historian, biographer, and professor of literature. At the age of fifteen Frost became the apprentice of an engraver. The man thought that Frost had no talent for drawing and discouraged him from pursuing his studies. Fortunately Frost did not follow the advice and, when his friend Charles Heber Clarke – a.k.a. Max Adeler – asked him to illustrate *Out of the Hurly Burly*, he accepted. The book was an anthology of amusing stories and was published in 1874.³⁴⁰

³⁴⁰ Sources: *Encyclopaedia Britannica Online*, s. v. “**A.B. Frost**”. [http://www.britannica.com/pros.lib.unimi.it/EBchecked/topic/220889/A-BFrost](http://www.britannica.com/pros/lib/unimi.it/EBchecked/topic/220889/A-BFrost). (accessed February 28, 2014); *Lambiek Comidopedia*, “A.B. Frost”. http://www.lambiek.net/artists/f/frost_ab.htm (accessed February 28, 2014); *The Alphabet of Illustrators*, “Arthur B. Frost”. <http://www.fulltable.com/vts/aoi/f/frost/menu.htm> (accessed February 28, 2014); Cohen, Morton Norton, Wakeling, Edward, eds., *Lewis Carroll and His Illustrators: Collaborations and Correspondence, 1865-1898*, New York, Cornell University Press, 2003.



Figure 107 - Arthur B. Frost, *Out of the Hurly Burly* (1874)

In 1875 he started contributing to the *New York Graphic* and the following year he was hired by the publishing house Harper & Brothers. In 1877 he spent a year in London to study drawing and, in the meantime, he continued to contribute to the *New York Graphic* and to other magazines and periodicals such as *Harper's Weekly*, *Scribner's Monthly*, *Collier's*, *St. Nicholas Magazine* and *Punch*. He also realised some illustrations for Mark Twain and Charles Dickens. As pointed out by the editors of *Lewis Carroll and His Illustrators*, "Frost was one of the first American artists to succeed in England."³⁴¹ In effect, Frost's work was noticed by Lewis Carroll, who asked him to draw some illustrations for his collection of poems *Rhyme? and Reason?* (1883).

Frost came back home in 1878 and he decided to attend the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts. There, he became interested in the photographic experiments of Eadward Muybridge³⁴² from which he took inspiration for his first sequential story, *Our Cat Eats Rat Poison* (also known with the title *The Fatal Mistake*), published in 1881.

³⁴¹ Cohen, Morton Norton, Wakeling, Edward, eds., *Lewis Carroll and His Illustrators: Collaborations and Correspondence, 1865-1898*, New York, Cornell University Press, 2003, p. 37.

³⁴² Eadward Muybridge was an English photographer who, thanks to his pioneering work in photographic studies of motion and in motion-picture projection, had an important impact on the development of modern photography and the art of the cinema. He started his experiments in photographing motion in 1872. He stops them for a while until 1877 when he also started to lecture about his results. These lectures were illustrated with a zoopraxiscope, that is, a lantern he developed that projected in rapid succession onto a screen images from photographs printed on a rotating glass disc, producing the illusion of moving pictures.

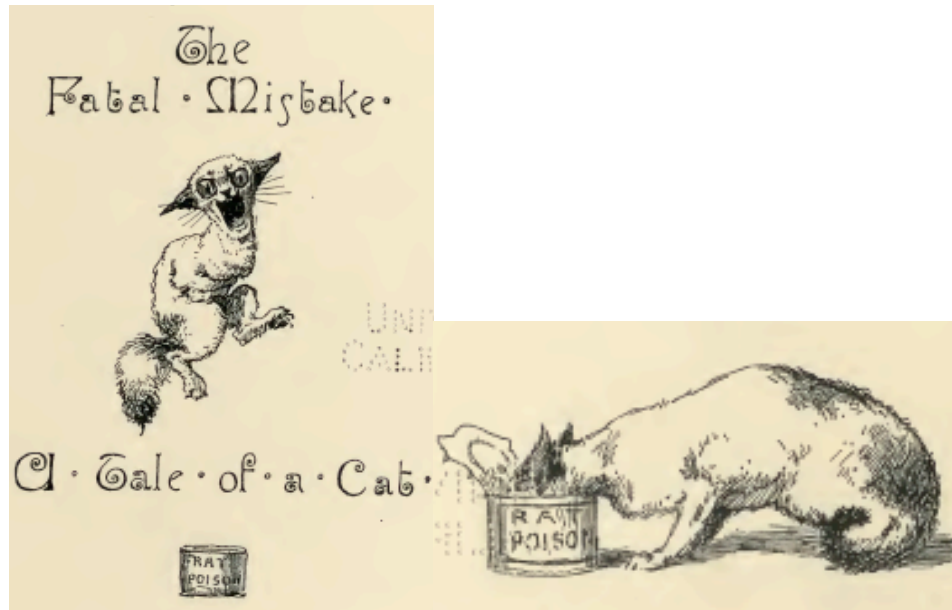


Figure 108 - Arthur B. Frost, *Stuff and Nonsense* (1884)

Muybridge made his most important photographic studies of motion from 1884 to 1887 under the sponsorship of the University of Pennsylvania. These consisted of photographs of various activities of human figures, clothed and naked, and horses, which were to form a visual compendium of human movements for the use of artists and scientists. Many of these photographs were published in 1887 in the portfolio *Animal Locomotion: An ElectroPhotographic Investigation of Consecutive Phases of Animal Movements*. *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, s. v. "Eadweard Muybridge". <http://www.britannica.com/pros.lib.unimi.it/EBchecked/topic/399928/Eadweard-Muybridge>. (accessed February 28, 2014).



Figure 109 - Arthur B. Frost, *Stuff and Nonsense* (1884)

Frost's work was published in three albums: *Stuff and Nonsense* (1884), *The Bull Calf and Other Tales* (1892) and *Carlo* (1913).

From 1906 to 1914 Frost and his family spent a period of time in France at Giverny. There, despite of an eye illness which damaged his perception of colours, Frost continued to work. Back in the USA, he moved to Pasadena where he died in 1928.

3.7.2 Phantasmagoria

In the paragraph devoted to John Tenniel, I have remarked that, according to critics, the Alice books have remained indissolubly tied up with his original illustrations, despite the fact that different artists have subsequently illustrated Carroll's classic stories. As far as their author is concerned, it may be suggested that also his fame has always been bound up with the adventures of young *Alice in Wonderland*, and the sequel, *Through the Looking-Glass*. Consequently, Carroll's other books have often been neglected or undervalued, and *Phantasmagoria* is quite an evidence of this critical lack of attention.

Phantasmagoria is a poem divided into seven cantos which tells the story of the encounter between a man named Tibbet and a friendly but inexperienced and clumsy ghost. The poem was published for the first time in 1869 in a collection entitled *Phantasmagoria and Other Poems*. At that time the poems in the collection were not illustrated. *Phantasmagoria* reappeared in 1883 when Carroll wrote *Rhyme? and Reason?*, a book published in London by MacMillan. Actually, in *Rhyme? and Reason?*, only *Echoes*, *A Game of Fives*, the last three of the *Four Riddles* and *Fame's Penny-Trumpet* had not been published before. Carroll commissioned the illustrations of the book to Arthur Burdett Frost. Frost realised drawings for all the poems in the collection, with the only exception of *The Hunting of the Snark*, which was accompanied by the original illustrations realised by Henry Holiday for its first publication. According to the editors of *Lewis Carroll and His Illustrators*, the originality of *Phantasmagoria* consists in the fact that the poem "is not about people dealing with and fearing the idea of ghosts – quite the opposite: it is about ghosts themselves and the troubles they encounter in trying to do their proper jobs of haunting houses."³⁴³ Actually, the title would make readers think about a completely different kind of story. As far as this issue is concerned, it could be relevant to consider what the Victorians knew under the name of phantasmagoria.

In the essay "Gothic Transformation in *Pictures from Italy*", Victor Sage states that "the idea of calling up spirits from the darkness seems to be at the heart of the

³⁴³ Cohen, Morton Norton, Wakeling, Edward, eds., *Lewis Carroll and His Illustrators: Collaborations and Correspondence, 1865-1898*, cit., p. 38.

phantasmagoria”,³⁴⁴ and he identifies two distinguishing features of this kind of optical illusion, namely the conjuring of spirits and the similarity with dreams. The concept of the raising of spirits is fundamental also for Marina Warner who pinpoints that the term phantasmagoria comes from the Greek and its meaning is “assembly of phantasms”.³⁴⁵ The phantasmagoria is deeply rooted in the development and the improvement of the magic lanterns, that is optical devices which started to be used for entertaining purposes in the XVII century. In turn, magic lanterns can be considered as the result of the improvements of the ancestor of the modern photographic camera, the *camera obscura*. Its operating principle was quite simple: “through a pinhole pricked in the wall of a sealed darkened room, the ‘real’ image of the outside world will appear reflected upside down opposite the aperture, cast by the rays of the Sun moving in straight lines through the pinhole.”³⁴⁶ The *camera obscura* had been known since Aristotle’s time and before the invention of the telescope it was used for astronomical observations. It was Leonardo da Vinci, in the XVI century, to suggest that this device could be used also for other aims, thus opening the way to those experimentations which were to improve it. The major enhancements were due to the Jesuit Athanasius Kircher, who is generally considered as the father of the magic lantern, although there are still no certainties about who had invented it indeed. Kircher applied to the basic principle of the *camera obscura* some innovations such as smoking lamps and various kinds of lenses and slides. He also tried to illuminate the interior of the *camera obscura* with gems or crystals to refract the rays of the sun in order to create unusual tricks of light. Kircher was interested in optical effects and in fact, in 1644, he wrote *Ars magna luci et umbrae*, “his *magnum opus* on optics, reflection, refraction, projection, and other possibilities of light”.³⁴⁷ In the projections that he made in the Jesuit College in Rome in the 1640s it was already possible to observe one of the distinguishing features of the future phantasmagoria, that is, the connection with dreams and imagination. Analysing Kircher’s projections Marina Warner remarks:

³⁴⁴ Sage, Victor, “Gothic Transformation in *Pictures from Italy*”, in Hollington, Michael, Orestano, Francesca, eds., *Dickens and Italy: ‘Little Dorrit’ and ‘Pictures from Italy’*, Newcastle upon Tyne, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009, pp. 144-156, pp. 145-146.

³⁴⁵ Warner, Marina, *Phantasmagoria: Spirit Visions, Metaphors, and Media into the Twenty-First Century*, cit., p. 147.

³⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 137.

³⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 138.

The images have a striking feature in common: the projections are almost always supernatural creatures, with looming devils and dancing skeletons predominating. Such supernatural subject-matter was chosen, as it went without saying, to illustrate the powers of the new machines of illusion. The subjects are fantastic: they cannot be seen with the eye of the body, except in representations by artists, and they give that frisson of grotesque, designed to excite fear as well as pleasure. These are images on a supernatural lexicon. They depict beliefs about the supernatural – or what could be called hallucinations.

These illustrations of magic lantern images reveal an intrinsic, unexamined equivalence between the technology of illusion and supernatural phenomena: Kircher projected souls in hell, leering devils, the resurrection of Christ, and other products of imagination, not observation. [...] it is possible to say that the paradox of darkness visible illuminates the peculiar icasms that are thought to belong to the mind's eye.³⁴⁸

The ancestor of the magic lantern created by Kircher was subsequently studied and improved by the Dutch Christiaan Huygens. He built and sold the magic lantern as we know it today. The optical device became popular throughout all Europe and, except for slightly variations, its operating principle has always remained the same. The magic lantern was an optical box made of wood, metal, copper or cardboard whose shape could be cubical, round or cylindrical. It projected images painted on glass slides in a dark room on a white wall prepared on purpose. The slides could be fixed or animated, that is, connected to a mechanical device which could allow the movement of the drawn subjects.³⁴⁹

The magic lantern was then exploited in the phantasmagoria whose invention is generally ascribed to Étienne-Gaspard Robertson. He started to stage his “Gothic moving

³⁴⁸ Warner, Marina, *Phantasmagoria: Spirit Visions, Metaphors, and Media into the Twenty-First Century*, cit., pp. 138-139.

³⁴⁹ Mannoni, Laurent, *La grande arte della luce e dell'ombra. Archeologia del cinema*. Traduzione dal francese di Sergio Toffetti, Torino, Lindau, 2000, (*La Grand Art de la lumière et de l'ombre. Archéologie du cinéma*, Paris, Éditions Nathan, 1994), pp. 48.49.

picture show, under the name of 'Fantasmagorie'³⁵⁰ in France in 1798. He made some changes to Kircher's magic lantern, creating and patenting the phantoscope. This was a magic lantern of bigger dimensions enlightened with an oil lamp called *quinquet*. The lamp was connected to a concave mirror and a mechanism made the lens movable. The device had wheels to be approached or distanced from the screen, thus creating striking and unusual effects.³⁵¹ In order to achieve a more realistic impact, the phantoscope was hidden during the shows so that the audience could only see the projected images and not the device from which they were created. Generally the representations focused on the projection of the little image of a spirit who quickly became bigger and bigger. People were very frightened because it seemed that the ghost could seize them. Robertson's projections, however, did not include only ghosts, but also devils, witches, skeletons, mad women in white, bleeding nuns, contemporary Gothic motifs, shades of the dead in the underworld, scenes from the temptation of Saint Anthony, dreams and nightmares. As observed by Marina Warner, the phantasmagoria had an important impact on people, who were not used to those kinds of images, and on the future development of the cinema:

The intrinsic subject-matter of phantasmagoria turned to spectral illusion, morbid, frequently macabre, supernatural, fit to inspire terror and dread, those qualities of the sublime. It foreshadows the function of cinema as stimulant, and prepared the ground for the medium's entanglement with hauntings, possession, and spirit visions. Above all, phantasmagorias gave the impression of vitality far more beguiling than even the miniaturized intricacies of panoramas and peepshows; magic lantern slides, pricked transparencies, and other illusions flickered and fluttered in the candlelight, and conveyed a feeling of time passing – the daylight castle changed into a haunted ruin by the snuffing of a lamp – but the images projected by phantasmagorias swelled and shrunk, as well as shifting with tricks of the light, and so created an illusion that they possessed that quality of conscious life: animation.³⁵²

³⁵⁰ Warner, Marina, *Phantasmagoria: Spirit Visions, Metaphors, and Media into the Twenty-First Century*, cit., p. 147.

³⁵¹ Minici, Zotti, Carlo Alberto, a cura di, *Magiche visioni prima del cinema. La collezione Minici Zotti*, Padova, Il Poligrafo, 2001, p. 304.

³⁵² Warner, Marina, *Phantasmagoria: Spirit Visions, Metaphors, and Media into the Twenty-First Century*, cit., p. 148.

Both Victor Sage and Laurent Mannoni explain the precise etymology of the word phantasmagoria, saying that the term comes from two the Greek words *phantazo* and *agoreuo*, which respectively mean ghost and to speak. As a consequence, we could define the term phantasmagoria as a speech about ghosts,³⁵³ or also as a speech with ghosts, a definition which conveys the idea of a verbal/visual text. In effect, Robertson's "fantasmagorie" were based on the idea that there could be a sort of interaction between the audience and the ghostly images he projected. As already pointed out, Carroll's *Phantasmagoria* deals with the encounter between Mr Tibbet and a ghost. The two protagonists start a dialogue in which the phantom tells Mr Tibbet about the society of ghosts, showing him that it is not so different from human society. It may be suggested that Carroll's poem actually is more grotesque than Gothic because it arouses laugh and fear at the same time. The readers were aware that they would not be offered the traditional kind of phantasmagoria they were used to simply looking at the cover of *Rhyme? and Reason?*, where the grotesque figure of a funny spirit is portrayed. This may also suggest that *Phantasmagoria* had a central role in the collection and maybe this is why Carroll chose to put it at the beginning of the book. Perry Nodelman includes book covers in what he defines as the overall qualities of a picturebook and observes that "we can and do tell books by their covers; we use the visual information we find there as the foundation for our response to the rest of a book."³⁵⁴ The same is said by Maria Nicolajeva and Carole Scott in *How Picturebooks Work*. They use the term paratext instead of Nodelman's overall qualities, and they state that the narrative in a picturebook starts on the cover, whose function is "to affect our understanding of the book."³⁵⁵

³⁵³ Sage, Victor, "Gothic Transformation in *Pictures from Italy*", in Hollington, Michael, Orestano, Francesca, eds., *Dickens and Italy: Little Dorrit and Pictures from Italy*, cit., p. 146; Mannoni, Laurent, *La grande arte della luce e dell'ombra. Archeologia del cinema*. cit., p. 157.

³⁵⁴ Nodelman, Perry, *Words about Pictures*, cit., p. 49.

³⁵⁵ Nikolajeva, Maria, Scott, Carole, *How Picturebooks Work*, cit. p. 245.

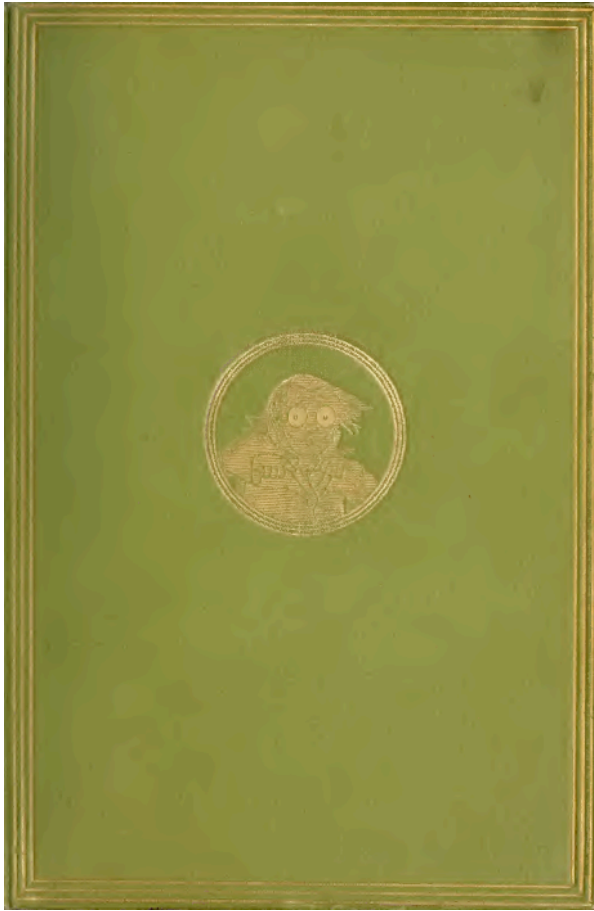


Figure 110 - Arthur B. Frost, *Rhyme? and Reason?* (1883)

As far as the illustrations of the poem are concerned, the word-picture dynamic is once again symmetrical and enhancing, but also complementary because the drawings fill the text's gaps, allowing the readers to create a mental image of the clumsy ghost encountered by Mr Tibbet. Frost is also able to recreate the original effect of Robertson's "fantasmagorie" because his ghosts really seem to be ethereal and transparent figures coming out from the darkness. The connection between the early phantasmagoria technique and the development of the cinema, as well as the connection between Muybridge and Frost, and the grotesque quality of his drawings, are all elements that will converge and enhance my appreciation of the work of Tim Burton.

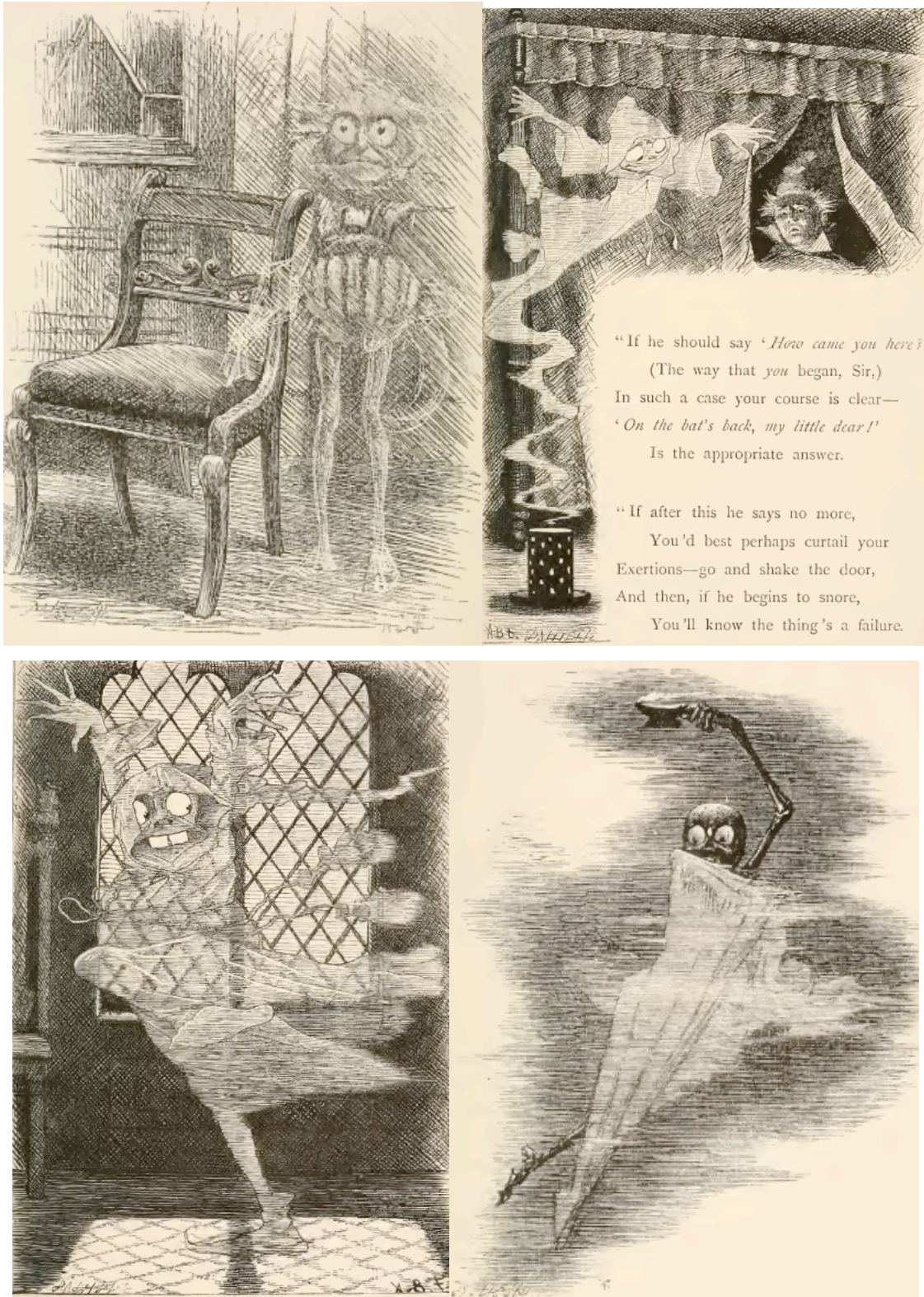


Figure 111 - Arthur B. Frost, *Phantasmagoria* (from *Rhyme? and Reason?*, 1883)

3.8 Charles Addams



Figure 112 - Charles Addams

3.8.1 Life

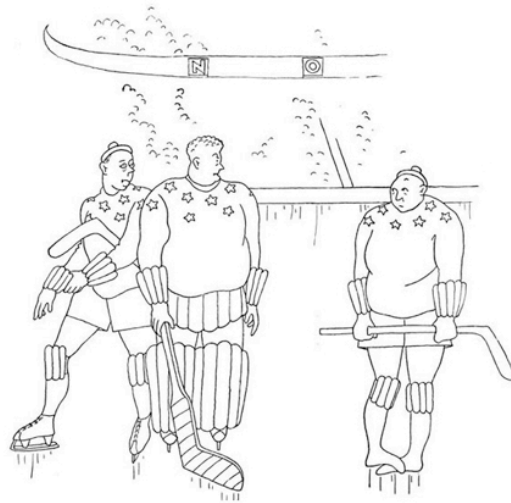
Charles Samuel Addams was born in 1912 in Westfield, New Jersey.³⁵⁵ From an early age he had shown an appreciation for the macabre and a deep fascination for coffins, skeletons, and tombstones. At the age of eight he was arrested, because he had drawn skeletons all over the walls of a Victorian house. Addams also liked jokes and scaring people. “We had a dumbwaiter in our house,” he recalled in an interview years later, “and I’d get inside on the ground floor, and then very quietly I’d haul myself up to grandmother’s floor, and then I’d knock on the door, and when she came to open the door, I’d jump out and scare the wits out of her.”³⁵⁶

³⁵⁵ Sources: Charles Addams’s biography in *Tee & Charles Addams Foundation* <http://www.charlesaddams.com>. (accessed February 28, 2014); “Charles Addams”. In *The Biography Channel Website* <http://www.biography.com/people/charles-addams-9176280>. (accessed February 28, 2014); Pace, Eric, “Charles Addams Dead at 76; Found Humor in the Macabre”. In *The New York Times*, September 10, 1988. <http://www.nytimes.com/1988/09/30/obituaries/charles-addams-dead-at-76-found-humor-in-the-macabre.html>. (accessed February 28, 2014); “Charles Addams: The Man behind the Macabre”. In *The Addams Family: The Broadway Musical* www.theaddamsfamilymusical.com/StudyGuide.pdf. (accessed February, 28, 2014); Miserocchi, H. Kevin, *The Addams Family: An Evolution*, San Francisco, Pomegranate, 2010.

³⁵⁶ Pace, Eric, “Charles Addams Dead at 76; Found Humor in the Macabre”. In *The New York Times*, September 10, 1988. <http://www.nytimes.com/1988/09/30/obituaries/charles-addams-dead-at-76-found-humor-in-the-macabre.html>. (accessed February 28, 2014).

His father, Charles Huey Addams, was a piano company executive. He had originally studied to become an architect and encouraged his son to draw and take up art studies. In effect, Addams started to draw cartoons for the Westfield High School paper. There he graduated and then, from 1929 to 1930, attended the Colgate University in New York. He left it for the University of Pennsylvania, where he stayed until 1931. Subsequently, he came back to New York City and he enrolled at the Grand Central School of Art. He attended the art school just for one year but he decided to stay in New York because his dream was to work for *The New Yorker*³⁵⁷ magazine. In the early 1930s he found a job at MacFadden Publication firm. He did lettering, photo retouching and other incidental art chores for the *True Detective Mystery Magazine*. In 1933 Addams submitted a cartoon to *The New Yorker*. This cartoon –generally known as “I forgot my skates” because of the caption – was accepted and published and it obtained a great success. Two years later, in 1935, *The New Yorker* hired Addams as a regular cartoonist.

³⁵⁷ “*The New Yorker* is an American weekly magazine famous for its varied literary fare and humour. The founder, Harold W. Ross, published the first issue on February 21, 1925, and was the magazine editor until his death in December 1951. *The New Yorker*’s initial focus was on New York City’s amusements and social and cultural life, but the magazine gradually acquired a broader scope that encompassed literature, current affairs, and other topics. *The New Yorker* became renowned for its short fiction, essays, foreign reportage, and probing biographical studies, as well as its comic drawings and its detailed reviews of cinema, books, theatre, and other arts. The magazine offered a blend of reportage and commentary, short stories and poetry, reviews, and humour to a sophisticated, well-educated, liberal audience. [...] In 1985 *The New Yorker* was sold to the publisher Samuel I. Newhouse, Jr., this being the first time in its history that the magazine’s ownership had changed hands. William Shawn was the magazine’s editor in chief from 1952 to 1987, when he was succeeded by Robert Gottlieb, formerly a book editor and executive at Alfred A. Knopf publishers. In 1992 a Briton, Tina Brown, formerly editor of *Vanity Fair*, replaced Gottlieb. Under Brown’s editorship, cosmetic changes to the magazine’s traditionally conservative layout were introduced, coverage of popular culture was enhanced, and more photographs were published. In 1998 Brown left the magazine and was replaced by staff writer David Remnick. *The New Yorker* continued to attract leading writers and remained among the most influential and widely read American magazines.” *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, s. v. “**The New Yorker**”. <http://www.britannica.com/pros.lib.unimi.it/EBchecked/topic/412609/The-New-Yorker>. (accessed February 28, 2014).



“I forgot my skates.”

Figure 113 - Charles Addams, “I forgot my skates” (*The New Yorker*, 1933)

In 1940, thanks to the cartoon “The Skier”, Addams gained worldwide attention and fame. From 1943 to 1946, he served in the Army. Back in New York, Addams resumed his work at *The New Yorker*, to which he continued to contribute cartoons for the rest of his life. His works had a great success and started to be collected in anthologies – *Drawn and Quartered* (1942), *Addams and Evil* (1947), *Homebodies* (1954), *Nightcrawlers* (1957), *Black Maria* (1960), *The Groaning Board* (1964) – and displayed in various formats at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Fogg Art Museum, the Rhode Island School of Design, and the Museum of the City of New York.



Figure 114 - Charles Addams, “The Skier” (*The New Yorker*, 1940)

In 1951 he divorced from Barbara Day, whom he had married in 1943. He married Barbara Barb in 1954, but they divorced two years later. Addams's cartoons reached an even broader public when they became the basis for *The Addams Family*. The 1960's television comedy series was widely broadcast also in the following years, and it is still popular. In 1980 he married Marilyn "Tee" Matthews. The wedding took place in a pet cemetery, showing that Addams had a penchant for the macabre in his life as well as in his work. In 1985 the couple moved to a property that they had bought in Sagaponack, New York. They affectionately named it "The Swamp". Today it is the location of the Tee and Charles Addams Foundation.

In the 1980s, Addams's work comprised 12 book collections and had been exhibited at institutions like the Fogg Art Museum, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and the Rhode Island School of Design. He had also received the Humour Award from Yale, an honorary doctorate from the University of Pennsylvania and a special award from the Mystery Writers of America Association. His works were also reproduced on cocktail glasses, canapé plates and other artefacts. Explaining Addams's popularity, the critic John Mason Brown wrote in *The Saturday Review* that he "invites us to enter a world which has nothing to do with the one in which we live except that, in the most glorious, undeviating and giddy fashion, it turns all of its values topsy-turvy."³⁵⁸ Addams died in 1988 killed by a heart attack while he was in his car just outside his apartment building. "He's always been a car buff, so it was a nice way to go,"³⁵⁹ his wife said. After his death, Robert Gottlieb, the editor of *The New Yorker*, stated that "Charles Addams has been someone whose work we instantly identify as central to *The New Yorker*. In my own case, this has been true for more than 40 years, and I can't imagine the magazine without him."³⁶⁰

³⁵⁸ Pace, Eric, "Charles Addams Dead at 76; Found Humor in the Macabre". In *The New York Times*, September 10, 1988. <http://www.nytimes.com/1988/09/30/obituaries/charles-addams-dead-at-76-found-humor-in-the-macabre.html>. (accessed February 28, 2014).

³⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

3.8.2 A Weird Family

On April 6, 1938 Addams's cartoon "Vibrationless, noiseless, and a great time and back saver. No well-appointed home should be without it" appeared in *The New Yorker*.



Figure 115 - Charles Addams, "Vibrationless, noiseless, and a great time and back saver. No well-appointed home should be without it." (*The New Yorker*; April 6, 1938)

The cartoon represented a turning point in Addams's artistic production because it was characterised by a dark style which was to become his distinguishing feature. In addition to this, some of the characters depicted in the cartoon were to become part of Addams's weirdest and most popular creation, the Addams family.

As observed by H. Kevin Miserocchi, despite the fact that the Addams family has always been in the mind of his creator, it was actually born only in 1963. In that year, in fact, Addams signed a contract with the Filmways TV Productions, Inc., which had

decided to produce a TV series based on his famous cartoons. *The Addams Family* was televised from 1964 to 1966 and included a total of sixty-four episodes. The Filmways TV Productions also asked Addams to write down some descriptions of the characters in order to have a clear image of them and to know how to put them on the screen.

Obviously Addams used his cartoons to provide the Filmways TV Productions with the requested descriptions, but depicting his characters in words, in a sense he made them three-dimensional. He gave his characters specific psychological traits which, looking at his cartoons, the beholders could only guess. Addams's contribution to the TV series was not limited to the detailed portrayals of his main characters.

[...] He maintained sole control of his creation. He designed and painted the sets, wrote the scripts, cast each story, and costumed his characters in clothing of his own design. On occasion, dialogue or story line could and would be suggested, but Addams's interpretations, right down to camera angles, were uniquely his own.³⁶¹

It could be suggested that this is the reason why the TV series succeeded in preserving all the distinguishing features of the original cartoons realised by Addams.



Figure 116 - Charles Addams
(*The New Yorker*; December 24, 1949)

³⁶¹ Miserocchi, H. Kevin, *The Addams Family: An Evolution*, cit., p. 13.



Figure 117 - Charles Addams
(The New Yorker; January 24, 1948)



"It's the children, darling, back from camp."

Figure 118 - Charles Addams, "It's the children, darling, back from the camp."
(The New Yorker; August 30, 1947)



"Now, remember, you can have him as long as you feed him and take good care of him. When you don't, back he goes."

Figure 119 - Charles Addams, "Now, remember, you can have him as long as you feed him and take good care of him. When you don't, back he goes." (*The New Yorker*; November 20, 1948)

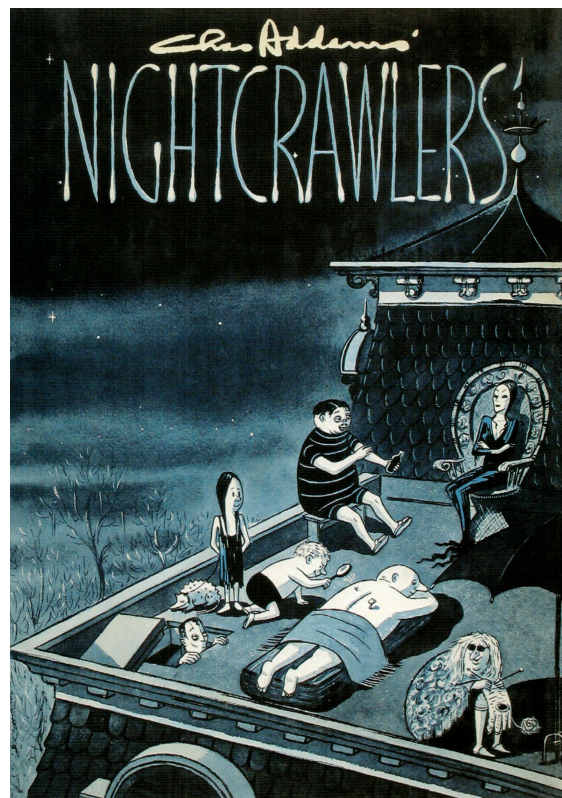


Figure 120 - Charles Addams, *Nightcrawlers*
(Book jacket; 1957)



Figure 121 - Charles Addams (*The New York Times*; October 29, 1982)

In Addams's drawings the message is conveyed mainly, if not exclusively, by the images. The captions which accompany the cartoons are short descriptions, whose function is to contextualise the image. In many cases, Addams's cartoons do not have any caption and so it is up to the beholder to fill in the missing gaps. For this reason, the word-picture dynamic in them is particular and complex because it is complementary and counterpointing at the same time. When drawings are accompanied by captions, in most cases the text-image interaction is also contradictory, because there is no correspondence between them. This element arouses irony in the beholder and shows Addams's penchant for the grotesque. His taste for the macabre and for Gothic motifs is also evident in the choice of colours. As noticed by Nodelman, in fact, if the use of colour "helps to create

the atmosphere, then so, obviously, does the absence of color”.³⁶² As a consequence, it is not a coincidence that the great part of Addams’s cartoons is realised in black and white. When colours are used, the aim is always to create a gloomy atmosphere.

In writing the descriptions for the TV series, the great challenge for Addams was to put together characters who had appeared in different times and places in *The New Yorker*, and change them into a family. H. Kevin Miserocchi notices that “Charles Addams set out not to create a family but rather to suggest how society as a whole might interpret characters bent on the darker side while living lives similar to those embracing the light.”³⁶³ However,

After years of witnessing their delightful wickedness on the pages of magazines and Addams books and advertisements of all types, the press began referring to the characters as ‘Addams’ family of ghouls’ and the exquisite home in which they performed their once-act plays as ‘the Addams house’. Charles Addams’s name became synonymous with all aspects of his work and the world he created. Addams himself began to refer to his characters as ‘Addams’ Evils’.³⁶⁴

It may be suggested that the great popularity and success which this weird family has always obtained since it was not a family at all, is due to the fact that it represents, although in a grotesque and macabre way, the most important values that a family should have, that is, unity and cohesion. This is also evident in the characters’ descriptions provided by Addams, where, for example, Morticia is depicted as “the real head of the family and the critical and moving force behind it”,³⁶⁵ as a woman with a “fierce family loyalty”, and Gomez is a man who “tries hard to be father and teacher to the children.”³⁶⁶ What makes the Addams Family grotesque is the fact that its members’ behaviour is the exact opposite of what beholders would expect from them.

³⁶² Nodelman, Perry, *Words about Pictures*, cit. 67.

³⁶³ Miserocchi, H. Kevin, *The Addams Family: An Evolution*, cit., p. 10.

³⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

³⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 62.

It has been justly remarked that

Strong family values are evident throughout Charles Addams's depictions of the family from the dark side. They hang together; they feel secure with one another; they have rules and morals that keep the family unit intact. Sure, the logs they burn in the fireplace are carved to look like men; they moon bathe instead of sunbathe; they prefer gazing at the sweeping vista of a cemetery rather than sunlit rolling hills; they take their outings in Central Park in the dead of night. The point is, they do these things together. They might be scary, weird, creepy, and macabre, but the Addams Family is our secret envy.³⁶⁷

³⁶⁷ Miserocchi, H. Kevin, *The Addams Family: An Evolution*, cit., p. 16.