CORA Cork Open Research Archive
Cartlann Taighde Oscailte Chorcaí

Title	Doubles, shadows, sedan chairs, and the past: the ghost stories of J.S. Le Fanu
Authors	Coughlan, Patricia
Publication date	1989
Original Citation	Coughlan, P. (1989) 'Doubles, shadows, sedan chairs, and the past: the ghost stories of J.S. Le Fanu', in Allen, M. and Wilcox, A. (eds.), Critical Approaches to Anglo-Irish literature, (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe) pp. 17-39. isbn: 0-389-20790-X
Type of publication	Book chapter
Rights	© 1989 by Catherine Belsey, Patricia Coughlan, Seamus Deane, Gerald Fitzgibbon, Ruth Fleischmann, Margaret E. Fogarty, John Wilson Foster, Eamonn Hughes, Tom Paulin, Michael Kenneally, Walter T. Rix, Nicholas Roe. All rights reserved.
Download date	2026-11-03 09:40:34
Item downloaded from	https://hdl.handle.net/10468/17696

UCC
University College Cork, Ireland
Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh

relation to life, by its imitation of and ths its increasing distance from life.

I began with three terms extracted from the texts. They were change, art and death. As a solution to the problem of change the poems I have considered variously celebrate death, then art, and finally art-as-death. I have wanted to suggest that while death is not a very positive solution to anything, the notion of 'art' is not a solution either, but one of the problems.

Possibly, however, change is not a problem after all. Perhaps the time has come for us to repudiate immobilising concepts of art and of criticism, and to commit ourselves to the celebration of change.

DOUBLES, SHADOWS, SEDAN-CHAIRS AND THE PAST: THE 'GHOST STORIES' OF J. S. LE FANU

PATRICIA COUGHLAN

Man has not been able to describe himself as a configuration in the *episteme* without thought at the same time discovering, both in itself and outside itself, at its borders yet also in its very warp and woof, an element of darkness, an apparently inert density in which it is embedded, an unthought which it contains entirely, yet in which it is also caught. The unthought (whatever name we give it) is not lodged in man like a shrivelled-up nature or a stratified history; it is, in relation to man, the Other: the Other that is not only a brother but a twin, born not of man, nor in man, but beside him and at the same time, in an identical newness, in an unavoidable duality. This obscure space so readily interpreted as an abyssal region in man's nature, or as a uniquely impregnable fortress in his history, is indispensable to him: in one sense, the shadow cast by man as he emerged in the field of knowledge; in another, the blind stain by which it is possible to know him. In any case, the unthought has accompanied man, mutely and uninterruptedly, since the nineteenth century. Since it was really never more than an insistent double, it has never been the object of reflection in an autonomous way . . . For though this double may be close, it is alien, and the role, the true undertaking, of thought will be to bring it as close to itself as possible; the whole of modern thought is imbued with the necessity of thinking the unthought . . . of ending man's alienation by reconciling him with his own essence, of making explicit the horizon that provides experience with its background of immediate and disarmed proof, of lifting the veil of the Unconscious, of becoming absorbed in its silence, or of straining to catch its endless murmur.

Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things*

Le Fanu's supernatural stories number about twenty-two, and are dated between 1838 and 1871. This paper starts from the premise that these haunting-tales form a coherent *oeuvre*, and deserve to be discussed as one. I shall not engage in a lengthy commentary on individual stories, but shall proceed by identifying and interpreting some of the stories' most striking and frequently recurrent narrative

motifs. These are: the domestic interior and its furniture; the *doppelganger* and shadow; and landscape as the locus of an otherness which is frequently apprehended as a buried layer of the past. Within the body of Le Fanu's haunting-tales these motifs form a constellation of significance; I shall try to suggest where it lies by discussing a few representative instances in each case, and generalizing from those. My purpose is to suggest that this body of work is not adequately described as a scattered series of slight, whimsical contributions to the genre of the Victorian ghost-story, but rather that it has a unity of purpose and meaning and that it may represent Le Fanu's most significant achievement. I propose that it would be more appropriately interpreted as being in the European genre of the metaphysical and psychological *nouvelle*, a genre whose characteristic strategy is to frame — within supernatural plots of various kinds — important questions about the concept of the self and the constitution of what is called reality.

Le Fanu began writing in a literary climate which was extremely receptive to the influences of German Romanticism. Recent German literature was enthusiastically and copiously translated and discussed in Irish periodicals in the 1830s.[1] It is likely that its peculiar combination of the perspectives of science and occultism had a strong, though equivocal, influence on Le Fanu. The boundaries between the two were then far less clearly drawn than in later periods. Subjects in the trance cast by hypnotists using the newly discovered 'animal magnetism' seemed to reveal the possible existence of other personalities within the self, and in fact the development of psychology towards the discoveries of the psychoanalysts did happen as a curious combination of rational and avowedly surrational inquiry. The status of dual or multiple personality and of apparent haunting and visionary experiences of all kinds remained uneasily undefined throughout Le Fanu's period: such experiences might be attributed to electrical or magnetic activity in the body, or to otherworldly intervention in the traditional way. These issues were discussed by James Clarence Mangan and by Henry Ferris in the *Dublin University Magazine* in 1841, 1842 and 1845.[2] The *D.U.M.* articles arose chiefly from the work of Justinus Kerner, author of *Die Seherin von Prevorst* (1829), an investigation of a 'ghost-seeress', a case of alleged psychic experiences in a German town. Le Fanu indeed invents a scientist, the pompous Dr Hesselius, somewhat along the lines of Justinus Kerner the 'ghost-craftsman', to introduce a batch of his later haunting-stories in the guise of case-histories: the superb 'Carmilla', as well as 'Green Tea' and 'The Familiar', is framed in this way. Hesselius's limitations are clear to

the reader, and though he is himself quite confident of the validity of his point of view, he is fairly savagely undermined by irony. Seen against the psychological experiences they claim but fail to account for, Hesselius's positivist explanations compound the problematic nature of the mind and thus represent a formal analogue to the smooth surfaces in the troubling of which I discern the chief project of these stories. The most important feature of Le Fanu's work in this genre is his insistence on keeping open the question of the origins or causes of psychological malaise, and not letting it collapse into glib explanations, whether moral or medical. In this indeterminacy lies one of the greater strengths of Le Fanu's haunting-stories; he knew that 'to explain was to explain away', as Beckett puts it, and therefore frequently gives a plurality of explanations, which cancel one another out. It seems clear that this indeterminacy represented his own real state of mind before the phenomena of apparent hauntings; this is evident in the questionable status enjoyed in his novel *Uncle Silas* by Swedenborgianism, another tradition combining the occult and the scientific.[3]

Like the German tale-writers, Le Fanu uses legend and folktale motifs quasi-allegorically, to go behind the apparently calm face of contemporary assumptions about the psyche and explore states of discontinuity, intolerable psychological strangeness (such as is captured by the notion of ghosts), and especially the fragmentation of the self. Le Fanu repeatedly and very effectively uses the motif of the double or shadow, a motif which was brought to prominence in Jean Paul Richter's *Siebenkas* (1796) and Adalbert Chamisso's *Peter Schlemihl* (1814), as well as in a large number of Hoffmann's stories. This motif is particularly expressive of some of the psychological concerns of the first and second generations of Romantics. Le Fanu's repeated use of it reveals his capacity to introduce highly individual variations on those themes.

The German Romantic tale not only used contemporary psychological experiment and study but also had, particularly in its form, another source of inspiration, from outside official literary tradition: the folk or fairy tale. In Chamisso's highly influential *Peter Schlemihl* (1814), for instance, the story of the man who barters away his shadow to a devil-figure then lives to regret it, is narrated in a naive and whimsical style which handles marvels of all kinds deadpan. Yet the effect of the story is very remote from that of genuine folktale: it is evident to the reader that allegory is intended, and that one is called upon to consider whether it is political, moral or epistemological, or a combination of these. The clarity and apparent simplicity of the folktale provided these writers with a

narrative means of breaking the moulds of existing literary forms, and therefore of implicitly challenging the prevailing psychological assumptions embedded in those forms.[4] Further, in folklore marvels and metaphysics — magic journeys and feats, demonic lovers and bargains, haunting-plots of all kinds — was found a rich source of images of disturbance and strangeness, which could be used metaphorically to explore the concept of the individual self, newly problematic in the post-Enlightenment period.

Le Fanu had the stimulus not only of foreign literary appropriations of folk and fairy tales but, in common with his Irish contemporaries of various ethnic backgrounds, he had the opportunity of direct contact with folk material. He put that opportunity to very good use, most obviously in the trio of folktale retellings he published in 1870 — 'Stories of Lough Guir', 'The Child that Went with the Fairies', and 'The White Cat of Drumguinniol'. But the whole body of his ghost stories shows deeply the impress of the folk material he assimilated, partly in his childhood and youth in Co. Limerick, and partly through his friendship with the Dublin folklorist Patrick Kennedy in the 1870s. Of his remaining eighteen or so haunting-stories, at least five contain a demonic bargain of some kind, four a demon-lover who tries whether successfully or not to carry off a young girl, and six an otherworldly double or shadow, generally malevolent. Many stories combine several of these with one another and with other recurring story motifs.

That material underwent certain transformations in its assimilation into his fiction, as folklore necessarily must in being drawn into literature. The analysis of those transformations may be made to lead towards the formulation of pertinent questions about Le Fanu. The primary way in which the transformation of folk story material can be seen in Le Fanu is in the relations between the level of *discourse* in his work, and the level of *story*, or between *sjuzhet* and *fabula*, as it has been formulated by modern narrative theory.[5] On the one hand we have the narrator communicating with the reader, both rational and modern people, sophisticates, probably city-dwellers, certainly middle-class. On the other, there is the world of the stories: removed in place and generally also in time from that implied reader. Far from attempting to conceal this gap, Le Fanu frequently thematizes it in his stories. Here is an example from the opening of 'Ultor de Lacy' (1861):

> In my youth I heard a great many Irish family traditions, more or less of a supernatural character, some of them very peculiar, and all, to a child at least, highly interesting. One of these I will now relate, though the translation to cold type from oral narrative, with all the aids of animated human voice and countenance, and the appropriate *mise-en-scène* of the old-fashioned parlour fireside and its listening circle of excited faces, and, outside, the wintry blast and the moan of leafless boughs, with the occasional rattle of the clumsy old window-frame behind shutter and curtain, as the blast swept by, is at best a trying one. (*BGS* p. 444)[6]

This passage contains a constellation of features important in Le Fanu's work. It proposes two sets of contrasts which are of the greatest importance for any interpretation of the story which it introduces. First, there is the opposition between the present occasion of narration and reception, and those of a posited original occasion: for the reader, from animated and excited faces to cold type and solitary passivity; for the writer, from past to present, youth to maturity, listener to narrator. The circumstances of oral narration are presented as an idyll of participatory communality, and the impossibility of recreating them as a sad loss. But within this passage there is also another opposition: between the warm company within and the winter wind outside. This is the tension characteristic of Romance and Gothic fictions of various kinds. As David Punter says in *The Literature of Terror* (1980):

> Most ghost stories implicitly propose two alternate members of the audience, the second being by definition someone who is more credulous and thus more scared than oneself. This shadowy double is the residual form of Gothic's hypothetical previous audience, those people, conveniently located in the past but more probably in the lower depths of society, from whose fears Gothic is supposed to have arisen.[7]

This amalgam of safety and fear is, however, imputed by Le Fanu to both the kinds of audience he describes. It is true that the appropriation of Irish folklore by the institution of literature raises ideological problems; but Le Fanu's use of Irish folklore characteristically avoids the condescension sometimes shown to it by his contemporaries. He is aware of its difference from literature and its otherness from him and his class, but clearly he finds in it a mode of vision alternative and analogous to his own, which enables him to frame problems pressing to him too. It is evident not only from his use of so many folktale types and motifs but also from his reworking of the Earl of Desmond legends in 'Stories of Lough Guir' (1870) that he understood this material as a *langue* which carried an understanding of the world, and not as a quaint collection of outlandish or nugatory superstitions.

But in the passage quoted, though there is a doubleness, a dialectic of threat and safety in both kinds of social framework des-

cribed, there is a difference in the apparatus of reassuring comfort. The fireside community of peasant oral narration is replaced by the more abstract and mediated order and sophistication of the bourgeois reader who feels safe enough to seek the sensation of fear in literature, and remains confident of his or her capacity to keep it within the proper bounds. The reader of Gothic and ghost stories is impelled by a half-shameful wish to transgress, to plunge virtually, but not actually, into strangeness. Hence the moralizing framework of most such stories, which is, however, no more than perfunctory and merely represents the putting away at the back of the mind of the temporarily prominent Other, rather as a very fancy party dress would be replaced in its drawer after a carnival occasion. Is Le Fanu's work any more than the pleasant diversion implied by this metaphor? Does he in fact preserve the security of the reader, by keeping his ghosts firmly in the realm of unreality? Or does he reveal that security as only a cover-up (in the sense of a corrupt deception)?

Schelling defined the uncanny as 'anything which ought to remain in secrecy and has become manifest'.[8] That 'ought' sounds like a moral imperative, but in the discourse of psychoanalysis it is revealed rather as the conscious mind's suppression of anxiety, which it may choose to call moral. Ludwig Binswanger describes the uncanny as:

> . . . the original existential anxiety, which now 'has emerged'. The feeling of uncanniness is aroused by anything that causes that anxiety to emerge, anything that is apt to shock us out of our familiarity with 'world and life', as the (unwonted) recurrence of the similar, the *Doppelganger* . . . Through defensive measures, the existence tries to protect itself against the emergence of the Uncanny. Through them, it still finds some foothold in 'care', worrying, bargaining, being cautious, even though this caution serves exclusively to ward off the Uncanny, and completely spends itself in the service of the Uncanny.[9]

In the fiction of Le Fanu's period what we might call the order of the conscious mind is represented, in literary terms, by formally realistic works. Such narratives normally address themselves to the present, in time, and the proximate, in space. They make a claim to rationality in plotting and characterization and proclaim their distance from the enchantments of Gothic, folk and fairy tale, which they tend to represent as belonging to outgrown phases of mental development. As the name implies, realism sees itself exclusively as the form which confronts and holds the mirror up to actual social conditions, and aims to marginalize all other kinds of narrative and treat them as fantasy and decoration: the folktale as

a toy for children, the ghost or horror story as mere entertainment. This is not the place for an extended justification of the seriousness of Gothic and romance narrative, a matter which has in any case been well explored in many recent discussions (for instance David Punter's *The Literature of Terror*, already mentioned). The old dismissal of it as a flight from social obligation has been replaced by a more mediated view which acknowledges the role of non-realist narrative forms in interrogating the status quo by tacitly rejecting its claims to full rationality. It is now possible to discern, as it was not in the period of realist dominance, in the practice and forms of other kinds of fiction, a challenging representation precisely of that which is excluded by realism, namely what Freud calls 'the dark, inaccessible part of our personality'.[10] He adds that it can mostly be known negatively, as a kind of shadow to the conscious part: a notion which is a challenge to the concept of the unitary and consciously structured personality on which realist narrative depends.

To use a metaphor: let us say realism is a house, in good order, with secure doors and windows, and fully furnished with wardrobes, cupboards, curtains, pictures, and hangings. In this well-regulated house is, however, a poltergeist, who (which?) bangs things around while no-one is in the room; on its walls are shadows or stains, suggestive of blood, which do not disappear in better lighting or when painted over. Strangers whom no-one remembers admitting wander about familiarly in the passageways, entering bedrooms and rummaging in drawers. The inhabitants are alternately scornful and terrified; they end by moving house. This is inconsequential (it is incidentally a plot-summary of Le Fanu's 'Authentic Narrative of a Haunted House' (1862)), and if one likes logic, and good sense, and finality, it is also somewhat irritating. In this metaphor the shadows, stains, traces, inexplicable noise, and puzzling visitors stand for horror and supernatural fiction, which do not so much set themselves up as alternatives to realism, as loiter darkly in its interstices, as if waiting to pounce. One might add (at the risk of making this building dangerous) that the idea of the fully conscious and rational personality is the house, and the stains and shadows represent its neuroses and dreams. In the 'Authentic Narrative' the head of the family takes all rational steps to try to solve the mystery:

> I had . . . a most careful examination made to discover any traces of an entrance having been made by any window into the house. The doors had been found barred and locked as usual; but no sign of any thing of the sort was discernible. I then had the various articles — plate, wearing apparel,

books, &c., counted; and after having conned up and reckoned every thing, it became quite clear that nothing whatever had been removed from the house . . .
(*BGS*, p. 427)

But counting the spoons (a good example of Binswanger's *sorge*, care, fuss, worry) is quite comically the reverse of appropriate; something has been *added* to the house not taken away from it. The other world of the unconscious is always already within (on the level of *fabula*, of course, the crime has already been committed in the house before they arrived).

It will be noticed that his idea of shutting in and shutting out is also present in the 'Ultor de Lacy' passage. The 'shutter and curtain' and the 'clumsy old window-frame' are set up as barriers between within and without, between the controlled environment and the Other, the uncanny, for which the sound of the wind is a metonymy. What Binswanger calls 'the self-protection of the existence' is represented in Le Fanu by the domestic interior. Le Fanu is very interested in furniture. Most of it is a good deal more substantial and elaborate than this, but its function in the stories in general does not differ from that of this 'shutter and curtain': to shut fear out, or sometimes in. Its solidity and weight stands for that of the protagonists, for their status in the world and their confidence of its continuance; for their initial or outward certainties, and against the past, retribution, moral debt. Furniture: great curtained beds, deep winged chairs, wainscot and wooden panelling, ponderous oak or mahogany dressing-chests, and old family portraits. All are at once possessions and signs of their owners' claim to permanence and control, and all become the ground of the undoing of control and the mocking of permanence.

Nearly all Le Fanu's protagonists are inhabitants of a time which the reader can call the past — typically the eighteenth, but sometimes the seventeenth century — and they are also almost invariably members of the landed gentry. But in their emphasis on domestic interiors the stories carry very definitely the impression of their contemporary readers', rather than their characters', social context. The original possessors of those great beds and chests and ancestors' portraits did not need to have them so obsessively noticed and described; they are there for the Victorian middle-class reader, for whom the domestic interior had a particular importance, as noted by Walter Benjamin in his essay 'Louis Philippe or the Interior'. Discussing the period beginning with 1830, he says:

For the private citizen, for the first time the living-space became distinguished from the place of work. The former constituted itself as the

interior. The office was its complement. The private citizen who in the office took reality into account, required of the interior that it should support him in his illusions . . . From this sprang the phantasmagorias of the interior. This represented the universe for the private citizen. In it he assembled the distant in space and in time . . . The interior was not only the private citizen's universe, it was also his casing. Living means leaving traces. In the interior, these were stressed. Coverings and antimacassars, boxes and casings, were devised in abundance, in which the traces of everyday objects were moulded. The resident's own traces were also moulded in the interior. The detective story appeared, which investigated these traces . . .[11]

At first glance the interiors in Le Fanu seem no more than a canny move to satisfy this bourgeois taste for grand antiques and 'pieces'. This is a deceptive impression. It can be shown that Le Fanu's interiors are as far as possible from mere decor. They have been fabricated for subversive purposes. (Max Ernst's delightful 'novel in collage', *Une Semaine de Bonté* (1934), with its grand rooms in which skeletons and monsters of equivocal gender and species ooze and peer out of heavy plush sofas and from behind brocade hangings, provides an analogy to this subversion.)

In the hall was placed, as was customary in those times, the sedan-chair which the master of the house occasionally used, covered with stamped leather, and studded with gilt nails, and with its red silk blinds down. In this case, the doors of this old-fashioned conveyance were locked, the windows up, and . . . the blinds down, but not so closely that the curious child could not peep underneath one of them, and see into the interior.
(Le Fanu, 'Mr Justice Harbottle', *BGS*, p. 270)

What the child sees in the 'interior' of the chair is the story's retributive ghost, waiting for the appointed hour of the judge's death, presumably in order — fittingly enough — to carry him off in his own sumptuous vehicle. Earlier in the story old Harbottle has had a grisly dream-trial while he waits, dozing in his carriage, for his drinking-companions. In both cases the terror intrudes upon him even though he has shut himself up in the security of his private domain. Neither his house nor his carriage turns out to be proof against the invasion, which lies in wait *within* the very conveyance which is the sign of his exalted status. Such heavy wooden pieces as these are rather like the symbolizing of law and conformity in another contemporary non-realistic fiction, Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* (1850), by objects such as the iron-bound and studded prison-door, the brazen-clasped bible lying on its oak table, and the great suit of armour in the Governor's hall which distorts in its depths and hugely magnifies the scarlet 'A' worn by Hester Prynne.

In both cases the signs of apparent order and authority are revealed as a sham. Le Fanu's Judge Harbottle is cruel, arbitrary and corrupt, and clearly deserves his fate. The real interest of the story, however, does not lie in the moral come-uppance he gets, but rather in the projected sense of the infestation of a series of apparently secure interiors by alien energies, variously manifested.

These interiors are ostensibly domestic and material. On the level of the story, they are settings and possessions; but on the level of discourse the reader is impelled by the persistent foregrounding of what seem like mere details of decor, in tale after tale, to discover in them the trace of a theme. The concept of the interior has a domestic, but also a psychic, referent. Within is within the conscience, the mind, the consciousness, as well as within the cupboard, the chest, the bed.

The beds in Le Fanu are nearly always great curtained ones, like the one in 'Carmilla', down the length of which eerily slithers the heroine's vampire sweetheart; or the high majestic one in 'Madam Crowl's Ghost' on which the doll-like wicked old lady reclines, all dressed up to die; or the enormous one in 'Schalken the Painter' (1839) in the gloom of which the predatory figure of the plutocrat Death awaits the lovely Rose Velderkaust:

> Abundance of costly furniture was disposed about the room and in one corner stood a four-post bed, with heavy black cloth curtains around it; the figure frequently turned towards him with the same arch smile; and when she came to the side of the bed, she drew the curtains, and, by the light of the lamp, which she held towards its contents, she disclosed to the horror-stricken painter, sitting bolt upright in the bed, the livid and demoniac form of Vanderhausen. (*BGS*, p. 46)

This early story brilliantly frames the problem in relations between surface and depths or appearance and reality. It is set in the studio of the seventeenth-century Dutch realist painter Gerard Douw, a highly successful painter of still-lifes, interiors and commissioned portraits. The historical Douw's pictures were famous for having a highly polished finish, a quality for which they continued to be prized until the Impressionists began to stress the uses of indeterminacy.[12] Le Fanu makes him smug about his profession and firm in his dealings with his niece: she may not marry his indigent pupil, Schalken, but must be preserved for a better match. The suitor Douw favours turns out to be Death, clinking with gold but bluish-white about the face, presumably with putrefaction. The story shows the bourgeois solidity of Douw's paintings as the true expressive form of his acquisitiveness: and sure enough, in Schalken's

horrific vision of the doomed girl in Death's chamber at the end, he finds she has led him

> . . . to his infinite surprise, into what appeared to be an old-fashioned Dutch apartment, such as what the pictures of Gerard Douw have served to immortalize. (*BGS*, 46)

Earlier on, Douw has pooh-poohed Rose's objections to the ugliness of Vanderhausen-Death by reading her a moral lesson about not being taken in by mere appearances:

> A man may be as ugly as the devil, and yet, if his heart and actions are good, he is worth all the pretty-faced perfumed puppies that walk the Mall. (*BGS*, p. 39)

For the reader this is full of ironies, verbal and other ('as ugly as *the devil*'): Douw proves himself to be taken in — and in part wilfully — by the most pleasant and substantial apparent good of the suitor's gold and fine clothing (a high surface polish, one might say). In the darker depths of the story, Rose is the victim of Douw's own hopeless sensual infatuation with material wealth. She is the price paid by Douw for his financial security. Her horrified lover, Schalken, is the author's stalking-horse, innocent and powerless witness of the business.

Le Fanu opens the story with the description of a painting, which the narrator says is the record of Schalken's haunted vision. This picture is double, like all pictures: a representation *of* something, but also an object, part of the furnishings, a family heirloom of the narrator's. The events of the *fabula* (story) are framed within this painting, unfolding from it and leading back to it at the end. Thus there are two descriptions of Rose, smiling and silent. Veiled and carrying a lamp, like a Truth-figure in traditional iconography, she leads Schalken towards the dreadful vision in the church crypt, which is itself done up like a Douw painting. But by the end the image of Rose, Schalken and the bridegroom Death has ceased to be a flat, possessable thing: the initial tableau with figures, complete with coyly mysterious gesture, has been invested with an intense and terrifying alien energy:

> By the light of the lamp . . . she disclosed . . . the livid and demoniac form of Vanderhausen. (*BGS*, p. 46)

Just as death waits inside the curtained bed, so, as often in these tales, the images apparently safely fixed on canvas can take on a power related in some obscure way to the past, either of the individual or of history, and return upon the protagonist.[13] At the very beginning of 'Schalken' the narrator talks urbanely about 'the

curious management of lights' as 'the chief apparent merit' of the painting, but adds:

> I say *apparent*, for in its subject, not in its handling, however exquisite, consists its real value. (*BGS*, p. 29)

And from then on the tone alters from suavity to intense horror, as the detached 'pleasure in lights', or in fine surface gloss, is peeled away.

In Le Fanu the large-scale horrors of Gothic, the Gothic of Maturin, Lewis or Radcliffe, are absent. Terror in his work is a domestic matter, usually set back, to be sure, by a couple of generations, and mostly located in the countryside, whether of Ireland or Cumberland, but without the cosmic sweep of *Melmoth the Wanderer*, and eschewing exoticism of setting. The strangeness in his work is achieved by other means, and has largely different effects or purposes: it is to be met, as we have seen, inside the house, beneath the apparently straightforward surface and within the self.

This invasion may come from within, like the ghost sitting in the sedan-chair, or it may break or creep in from without by rationally inexplicable means. Another of the forms it takes is what Binswanger calls 'the unwonted recurrence of the similar', as in the motif of the double. The motif or device of the double has a long history in the tale-telling of many periods, but in its modern forms the tradition was instituted in German literature at the end of the eighteenth century; the word *doppelganger* was coined to name it by Jean Paul Richter. The double motif can take various forms.[14] The best known is that in which a character encounters a person exactly resembling him, but apparently with another quite independent existence. If one can isolate the main idea underlying the motif in its nineteenth-century versions, it is perhaps that the self is non-unitary and does not therefore present a single smooth surface to experience. This basic and highly subversive notion is usually masked or framed by an ethical motivation of the double's appearances and influence — as for instance in the case of the conscience-double, which accuses and retributively hangs about the protagonist — but it remains deeply disturbing to realist characterization, which depends on the notions of coherent and progressive personality development and full moral consciousness. The concept of the double has been suggestively compared to the hypothesis of the 'sleeping-soul', considered by Locke: that a man's complete unconsciousness of this thought while asleep may make him in effect into two separate entities.[15] Locke decisively rejects

the idea of such a profound difference existing within the personality, but its close relationship to the fundamental hypotheses of psychoanalysis is obvious. The conscience-double, the gruesome phantom-double, and the Mephistophelean sidekick-double all embody the unsettling notion that whether by wickedness, or suffering, or as a result of a moment of inattention to some social or moral taboo, the self may undergo a process of fragmentation, and be ever after impossible to reunify. There is a brilliant social variant of this essentially psychological motif in Dostoevsky's early novel *The Double* (1846), which anatomizes the condition of rationalized bureaucratic man in the city. Wilde combined the legend of eternal youth with a double motif in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891). Le Fanu shows interest in several varieties of doubling, with a particular emphasis on sibling- or cousin-doubling, on the Faust-Mephistopheles type, and on phantom doubles. His doubles are peculiar within the tradition of the motif in being often complementary halves of a notional pair rather than the more usual mirror-images; but they are perhaps all the more eerie for that. (He does have one highly effective use of the similar and supplanting double: in 'Mr Justice Harbottle', when the wicked judge is given a dream-trial and condemned by a dream-judge called Chief Justice Twofold.) Le Fanu's repeated use of doubles within the family — whether contemporary, or extended by the deployment of revivified ancestors, such as Carmilla — again reveals his stress on domesticity, and may even recall the Freudian emphasis on the family as ground for legendary reenactments. The first modern masters of the motif, Hoffmann, and Chamisso, were fond of using the shadow — also a folktale motif — or the reflection in a mirror as doubles. Le Fanu shows some suggestive traces of this, too; there is a very eerie one at the end of 'The Drunkard's Dream'. The drunkard's wife sees, on the night of her husband's death,

> two persons, one of whom she recognized as her husband, noiselessly gliding out of the room. (*GSM*, p. 173)

The narrator suggests it may have been his shadow,

> but she told me that the unknown person had been considerably in advance of the other, and on reaching the door, had turned back to reveal something to his companion . . . (*GSM*, p. 173)

What he reveals is presumably the way to the other world. This seems to draw on the primitive idea of the soul-double, as the

> wraith or visible counterpart of the person, seen just before or just after, or at the moment of, his death.[16]

The double as used in nineteenth-century literature might be

called, then, a submerged unconscious part of the personality; or sometimes

> the insubstantial shadow of the truth, which a man prefers to reality.[17]

In Justinus Kerner (the 'ghost-craftsman' paraphrased extensively by Mangan in the *Dublin University Magazine*) it is used to embody 'the essential truth of affinity, of the predestined marriage of like souls'.[18] But what in Kerner is positive and uplifting, suggesting a cosmic harmony, in Le Fanu can combine desire and destruction. In 'Carmilla' (1872), which we shall consider at more length, the fairhaired Laura is wooed and preyed upon by the darkhaired vampire Carmilla. But though Carmilla is seen at story level to arrive from somewhere else — ostensibly — to the reader the elsewhere she represents is a hidden Other within the heroine and her father's house. She turns out to be the original of an old family portrait (a favourite motif of Le Fanu's) and she woos the innocent and bemused Laura with the promise of a common and mutual transformation in being:

> 'You are afraid to die?'
> 'Yes, everyone is.'
> 'But to die as lovers may — to die together, so that they may live together. Girls are caterpillars while they live in the world, to be finally butterflies when the summer comes; but in the meantime there are grubs and larvae, don't you see — each with their peculiar propensities, necessities and structure. So says Monsieur Buffon, in his big book, in the next room.' (*BGS*, p. 297)

Carmilla is the Other of desire. This is rare in Le Fanu; his other treatments of demonic-lover plots — such as 'Laura Silver Bell' or 'Ultor de Lacy' — do not attempt to show the lover to the *reader* as tempting, only to the object of seduction; in fact he goes out of his way to make those devil-figures clearly repulsive, and to show the victims as bewitched. The explanation for the extraordinary vividness and power of the character of Carmilla — unsatisfactory as her motivation would be if this were formal realism — may lie in Le Fanu's adaptation here of the *doppelganger* motif.

Carmilla is of an age with the heroine. They share, and have shared before Carmilla arrived, the same dreams. They do not resemble each other physically, but are presented as like two halves of a pair: Carmilla's dark colouring is the pendent to Laura's fairness, her vivacity to Laura's meekness: and her predatory nature to Laura's submissive one. It is never made clear in the story whether Carmilla is conscious of her vampire being; there are hints that she well understands it and is deceitful and cunning, and also

indications that she is quite unaware of it, and is its prisoner. This uncertainty is one of the finest effects in the tale, and raises it well above the normal crude simplicity of vampire plots. It would seem that what Le Fanu is investigating is the recesses of consciousness; Carmilla and Laura are twin fragments of a complete personality, which it is somehow difficult to join or keep together. This effect recalls the lost shadows and reflections of the German Romantic writers: the reflection, for instance, which, in Hoffmann's story 'The Lost Reflection', the hero Erasmus Spikker leaves behind in sunny sensuous Italy with the demonic lover Giulietta while he goes back to his wife and baby in Germany. The point is that Carmilla stands for the suppressed, or perhaps unrealized, half of Laura. The story frames reality within unreality: because of the apparent remoteness from everyday social life of the supernatural and particularly of the vampire tale, Le Fanu could give Carmilla's seduction speeches an extraordinary directness. The sexual pleasure she promises to Laura involves an exquisite mutual yielding up of consciousness. This is to enable the metamorphosis from grub to butterfly: a clear metaphor for the attainment of adulthood, the state Laura, motherless and childishly dependent on her father, fights shy of. Pursuing this strand of interpretation, one might find that to give herself over to Carmilla's desires and learn to share them is Laura's best bet. One might, that is, but for the cross-strand which links Carmilla on the other hand to death, and makes 'when the summer comes' a moment in the other world. It is revealed at the dénouement that such moments are chimerical, and that the reality of Carmilla in her tomb is as follows:

> The limbs were perfectly flexible, the flesh elastic; and the leaden coffin floated with blood, in which to a depth of seven inches, the body lay immersed. (*BGS*, p. 336)

The peculiar version of the double motif which Le Fanu sets up in 'Carmilla' can be paralleled elsewhere among the stories. In 'Ultor de Lacy' there are two sisters: one fair, one dark; one saved, the other doomed to a demon lover (this time male, but also, like Carmilla, of the race of historical ghosts). The saved one, Alice, has nocturnal visions of the seduction of the doomed one, Una. When she confesses her fears, Una replies dismissively:

> 'Dreams, Alice. My dreams crossing your brain; only dreams, dreams. Get you to bed, and sleep.' (*BGS*, p. 464)

In 'The Haunted Baronet', the protagonist, Sir Bale Mardyke, has a kind of double in his kinsman Philip Feltram, illegitimate

descendant of a woman wronged by an earlier Mardyke. In the course of the story the weakling Philip finds the strength, by means of an uncanny communicating with the past, to reverse Sir Bale's initial domination of him. Bale and Philip, like Laura and Carmilla, appear to the reader as two halves of a self which have somehow come adrift from each other: feeling and yielding in Philip, harshness and moral stupidity in Bale.

There is also another kind of unfixing of the bounds of the self in 'The Haunted Baronet'. At the beginning of the story there is a frame-passage set in the local village inn, all good English cheer and honest country folk. The wronged and drowned woman of a past generation is alluded to, but it is never made quite clear that the wrong really does belong to the past: the present Sir Bale seems to carry in the people's mind the guilt associated with his ancestor's evil deed. It seems that he is not quite fully an individual, but as well as being himself, in some sense *is* also his ancestor.

The two cousins in 'The Murdered Cousin' (1838) represent a variation on the double-motif: one girl is murdered by the villains in mistake for the other. This sinister and intriguing device was, significantly, dropped by Le Fanu in the later, more famous and more sentimental version, *Uncle Silas*. It is suggestively similar to the dénouement of 'Carmilla', in which also one half of a notional composite self must be sacrificed for the life of the other.

There are other Le Fanu stories which adapt rather differently the *doppelganger* motif, notably 'The Familiar' and 'Green Tea' (1869). Both are among Le Fanu's most skilled and brilliant work, both set in cities and in or near the present of narrator and original readers. This, especially 'Green Tea' (which uses Swedenborgian material) is as near as Le Fanu comes to a version of the motif which would explore the psychology of doubling at an individual level, in the characterization, in the realist manner.

Normally in his haunting-tales there is a large gap between the understanding of the characters, at story level, and that of the reader-narrator couple: if we take 'Carmilla' as an example, we can say that Laura and her father can only interpret the events of the story as a demonstration of the existence of vampires, whereas it is open to the reader to construe the material more metaphorically and find other, quite different meanings in it: that the Carmilla figure embodies Laura's fear of maturity, for instance, and that though Laura (the narrator) is quite unconscious of the fact, Carmilla represents a part of her, Laura's, self. In these stories it is as if the psychology of the protagonist is objectified, whether in a double-motif of some kind, or in the domestic interior, or, as we shall see, in the landscape. Le Fanu shows little interest in producing the effect of depth, or interiority, in characterization; his haunted characters do not reflect on their condition, or if they do we are not told about it. Instead their whole houses, or demesnes, become the ground of their inner conflicts, the stages of which are represented by haunting-episodes of growing intensity. A classic example of this is 'Squire Toby's Will', in which the protagonist has cut his elder brother off from his inheritance and is haunted by a type of conscience-double, in the shape of a dog, which attaches itself to him and follows him everywhere. Finally he has it shot by his gamekeeper. On story level, to him and his servants, the dog resembles his dead father, who thus seems to be accusing him; but to the reader, it seems the embodiment of the guilt he feels but will not acknowledge.

In Le Fanu the past, both personal and historical, leaves stains or traces in the world, or in our consciousness of the world (two things not easy to separate). Such traces are initially encountered as a residue, but actively lead back into that past. This is the case in 'Sir Dominick's Bargain' (1872), in which the 'rusty stain in the plaster of the wall's is made the starting-point of the story, which thus reverses the normal chronology and gives the ending first.

> 'Do you mind that mark, sir?' he asked . . .
> 'That's about seven or eight feet from the ground, sir, and you'll not guess what it is.'
> 'I dare say not', said I, 'unless it is a stain from the weather.'
> ' 'Tis nothing so lucky, sir,' he answered . . . (*BGS*, p. 433)

And so the story is unfolded by the 'sharp-featured man' first encountered 'in the dark recess, deep in the shadow' of the castle window, as flashback from the present time of the detached frame-narrator who is an English visitor on business in rural Ireland. 'The Haunted Baronet' provides another more striking version of this stain-motif. The unwilling but desperate Sir Bale crosses the lake to seek the man he thinks is a gipsy fortune-teller. He is told he will find his way through the woods by scrutinizing the surface of a

> broad druidic stone, that stood like a cyclopean table on its sunken stone props, before the snakelike roots of the oak. (*BGS*, 133)

When he carries out the instructions and stares at the stone

> it seemed not as if a shadow fell upon the stone, but rather as if the stone became semi-transparent, and just under its surface was something dark — a hand, he thought it — and darker and darker it grew, as if coming up towards the surface, and after some little wavering, it fixed itself motionlessly, pointing, as he thought, towards the forest. (*BGS*, 135)

Perception has the task of interpreting such scars and traces. In 'Ultor de Lacy' (1861) the sardonic demon wooer can dematerialize before one's glance, passing back into the ancient building he inhabits: figure becoming one with ground, which means that ground must hold figure always eerily *in potentia*:

> As Larry gazed, the figure somehow dissolved and broke up without receding. A hanging tuft of yellow and red ivy nodded queerly in place of the face, some broken and discoloured masonry in perspective took up the outline and colouring of the arms and figure, and two imperfect red and yellow lichen streaks carried out the curved tracing of the long spindle shanks. Larry blessed himself, and drew his hand across his damp forehead, over his bewildered eyes, and could not speak for a minute. It was all some devilish trick; he could take his oath he saw every feature in the fellow's face, the lace and buttons of his cloak and doublet, and even his long finger nails and thin yellow fingers that overhung the cross-shaft of the window, where there was nothing but a rusty stain left.
>
> (*BGS*, p. 456)

Earlier in the story, the reverse happens: the apparently quite real castle fades away in the moonlight when the bewildered priest tries to visit it.

> At last, sure enough, he saw the castle plain as plain could be . . . but when he emerged at the top, there was nothing but the bare heath . . . In a few minutes more he was quite close, all of a sudden, to the great front, rising gray and dim in the feeble light, and not till he could have struck it with his good oak 'wattle' did he discover it to be only one of those wild, gray frontages of living rock that rise here and there in picturesque tiers along the slopes of these solitary mountains. (*BGS*, p. 452)

But for the tone, this would resemble nothing so much as Lewis Carroll's 'Mad Gardener's Songs' ('he looked again, and found it was a hippopotamus'), another apparently naive Victorian 'alternative' text.

But though the disappearing castle and the appearing ghost are motivated (sketchily, as usual, at the end) as historical retribution, the interest of such spellbinding moments in these stories surely does not lie in such motivation. When their editor, E. F. Bleiler (everywhere else a sensitive commentator) says they contain

> a hidden, often diabolic morality, that will suffer evil to go unavenged or unbetrayed (*BGS*, 'Introduction', p. viii)

he reverses the real interest of the matter. The numinous Other in nature and the past — the final motif we shall identify — usually functions retributively, it is true, at the level of *fabula* (story material). The haunted protagonists *are* evil, in the majority of cases. But the reader of more than one or two stories quickly sees that the working out of each individual damnation is hardly the point. Le Fanu's many repetitions of the same story-material confirm this perception; M. R. James was quite right to say that whatever the cause of such repetition, it was not poverty of invention.[19] The pleasure in the reading comes rather from the perception of larger patterns of psychic investigation than from the moralization of phantoms.

Le Fanu's construction of the Other in landscape and history owes a good deal to the influence of folklore, and is best examined by starting from the 1870 'Stories of Lough Guir'. This piece opens with a prefatory reminiscence by the narrator, in which he recounts his first hearing of the tales. The structure of this reminiscence is important: it presents the past as three successive levels, in a pattern strikingly replicated at least twice more in these stories. The most recent stratum is that of the writer's boyhood, when he says he first heard the stories, from a named source, Miss Anne Baily. The second is that of the Whig and convivial past of the Baily family, as implied by the great drinking-cup, engraved 'the glorious, pious, and immortal memory'. The third stratum is that of the Earl of Desmond, paradigm of the old ruined Norman-Irish aristocracy whose rule was supplanted by the English claim to sovereignty.

In his folklore existence this Earl subsumes atleast two, and probably more, figures fromactual history (the chief two are Gearoid Iarla, the fourteenth-century Desmond who is also an important Irish poet, and the last Earl, around whom gathered the resistance in Munster to the Elizabethan conquest of Ireland).[20] It appears at first that Le Fanu was evidently thinking of this last Earl, because he describes the castle beside the lake as

> a stronghold of the last rebellious Earl of Desmond, which defied the army of the lord deputy . . . (*GSM*, p. 145)

Yet the stories he then retells concern the Earl as a magical and otherworldly figure; the recession through the three stages of the past leads not just from his own childhood in this countryside to the 1688 Revolution, and thence to the Tudor conquest, but farther back, to a landscape from which the action of history has been elided.

The lake is the central symbol of this group of stories:

> And beneath its waters lie enchanted, the grand old castle of the Desmonds, the great earl himself, his beautiful young countess, and all the retinue that surrounded him in the years of his splendour, and at the moment of his catastrophe. (*GSM*, p. 145)

Out of those waters, it is said, he can emerge every seven years and attempt converse with the human world. The 'catastrophe' here mentioned is identified in this frame-narration as that of Desmond's political and military defeat; but within the first of the tales themselves, 'The Magician Earl', a quite different version is given, in which his imprisonment within the lake waters has been caused by his necromancy. Thus the reader is left with two incompatible versions of events, one history, one romance. Irish history being the echo-chamber it is, all this must, of course, have implications for Le Fanu's own political position, since, as Disraeli puts it in *Sybil*, ruins are 'the children of violence, not of time' and the picturesque is the Siamese twin of politics; but it is not as easy as it might initially seem to work out these implications.[21] It is not my intention here to try, but I shall point out that the 'Stories of Lough Guir' taken in its totality, frame-passages and all, does preserve both versions without deciding between them: in Le Fanu, hauntings take place apparently for preference in the best-furnished houses, and the past is always returning, usually retributively, on the present.

The threefold layering of the past which opens 'Lough Guir' strongly suggests a homologous layering of the self and of the landscape. We find it again in 'The White Cat of Drumguinniol' (1870), where, once again at the threshold of the *fabula* (which concerns the retributive haunting of a family by the ghost of a wronged woman), the reader's eye is led along the scenery, through personal childhood memory ('I have myself seen') and historical reference (the rapparees), to an otherworld entrance (the liss):

> I have myself seen the old farm-house, with its orchard of huge mossgrown apple trees. I have looked round on the peculiar landscape; the roofless, ivied tower, that two hundred years before had afforded a refuge from raid and rapparee, and which still occupies its old place in the angle of the haggard; the bush-grown 'liss', that scarcely a hundred and fifty steps away records the labours of a bygone race . . . (*BGS*, p. 409)

In this dream-vivid landscape (which is always the same one, lovingly reconstructed over and over again in Le Fanu's stories) everything is encrusted, the trees 'mossy', the tower 'ivied', the liss 'bush-grown'. But these sedimentary layers, too, can be penetrated, as can those of the personal and historical forgetfulness whose action they mime, and as can the thick coverings and concealments of plush and tapestry and oak chests. The feline ghost (perhaps an albino double of Poe's contemporary black cat, who also likes to sit on dead men's faces) recurs through the generations and it seems cannot be eluded, even by the innocent.

The other place where this recession into time and space is rehearsed is in 'The Haunted Baronet', a story I have already mentioned in connection with the double motif. Several of Le Fanu's most important motifs are so skilfully interwoven in this story that it is difficult to unpick its fabric sufficiently to trace any one; so the discussion of landscape and memory will involve us again in traces, doubles and shadows.

When Sir Bale needs reliable racing tips, and ready cash with which to bet in order to save his estates, his half-double, half-sibling Philip Feltram leads him, as we have seen, to a source of both. To get there Bale must cross the lake and enter the forest. This forest, which is usually of aboriginal oak, makes repeated appearances in Le Fanu.[22] Sometimes it has suffered or is suffering denudation, which is the result and sign of evil-doing of some kind.[23] Many of these forests contain — are — the forest of the past. Sir Bale's version is the abode allegedly of the gipsy[24] but in fact of the malevolent ancestor who thereafter haunts him and is (once again, *to the reader*) a version of himself. Even before Bale's wife polishes up the old portraits near the end of the story and reveals this ancestor, he is throughout described as if he partook of an existence in some other dimension: part-human, part-avian predator.

To reach the forest Sir Bale must cross the lake. This he is extremely reluctant to do, for reasons he does not state in so many words, but which to the reader are both clear and full of metaphorical implication. The village people believed the lake is haunted by the drowned woman; but to Bale it represents another kind of barrier: he has not visited the woods on the far side since childhood, when they were his playground. His adult life has (outside the bounds of the story, as always in Le Fanu) been one of profligacy, dissipation and brutality; the crossing of the lake constitutes a confrontation with that earlier, innocent self, and hence within the landscape of Sir Bale's psyche it is truly a haunted and fearful place. Here again the personal and the ancestral past are made to coincide, as are the outer and inner scenery. When eventually he is forced by his pressing debts to make the journey, the landscape prompts in him an outpouring of reminiscence:

> He looked round him as if in a dream. He had not been there since his childhood. There were no regrets, no sentiment, no remorse; only an odd return of the associations and fresh feelings of boyhood, and a long reach of time suddenly annihilated. The little hollow in which he stood; the three hawthorn trees at his right; every crease and undulation of the sward, every angle and crack in the lichen-covered rock at his feet, recurred with a sharp and instantaneous recognition to his memory.

'Many a time your brother and I fished for hours together from that back there, just where the bramble grows. That bramble has not grown an inch since, not a leaf altered . . .' (*BGS*, p. 131)

This hints that crossing the lake has led Bale into another dimension: a place which is changeless. In Irish folklore, lakes, like caves in hills, are frequently seen as otherworld entrances. Throughout 'The Haunted Baronet', the lake seems to Bale to menace him: he feels imprisoned in this ancestral landscape:

'There's nothing so gloomy as a lake pent up among barren mountains . . . We fancy the shore must look very pretty from a boat; and when we try it, we find we have only got down into a pit and can see nothing rightly. For my part, I hate boating, and I hate the water; and I'd rather have my house . . . at the edge of a moss . . . and an open horizon . . . then be suffocated among impassable mountains, or upset in a black lake and drowned like a kitten . . .' (*BGS*, p. 74)

For Philip, by contrast, the lake becomes a source of energy: he returns from his near-drowning in it as a changed man, who seems to have been invested with uncanny powers. After this event, when Bale sees him one evening standing on the steps of the house, in the evening sun, he is

throwing a long shadow that was lost in the lake. (*BGS*, p. 129)

— a shadow that connects him with the other world of whose existence he now partakes, and to which he eventually brings Bale, through the agency of their common ancestor. When Bale asks him who is the source of the money he suddenly has to lend, he replies:

'A friend, who is — *myself*.'
'Yourself! Then it is yours — *you* lend it?' . . .
'Myself, and not myself,' said Feltram oracularly; 'as like as voice and echo, man and shadow.' (*BGS*, p. 118)

The lake in this story is a repository of the past and of guilt, inherited ancestrally and also perhaps incurred individually, though this is not clear. Together with the ancient house beside it, the fells surrounding it and the forest at the other, magical side of it, the lake forms the focus of the reader's and the narrator's attention. This landscape symbolically objectifies human consciousness; in it all the fragments of the Mardyke family are unified: Sir Bale, thinking himself safe behind the wainscot and stone of the great house; his malevolent ancestor, waiting within the forest and on the old canvas to be released into power; and Philip, who goes to encounter, within the lake waters, the slighted woman from whom he is descended. He undergoes there a transformation, fulfilling the

prediction that he will 'but go in weakness to return in power (*BGS*, p. 94). This is evidently an inspired metamorphosis in Le Fanu's imagination of the Earl of Desmond's folklore life in the otherworld beneath Lough Guir. He, too, has undergone a transformation, and his life beneath the lake is structurally analogous to all those states of strangeness within the everyday which one encounters in various guises everywhere in Le Fanu: the Swedenborgian realm of the newly dead in *Uncle Silas*; the 'summer' of 'Carmilla' in which girls shall be butterflies; the aural wraith-life of Una de Lacy after her departure with her demon-lover (when she has dwindled to a voice singing in the glen). Those depths of the past and the Other are so profound, but also so completely subject to the laws of human history, that even the sound-stain of this ghost-voice will eventually wear away:

The apparition has long ceased. But it is said that now and again, perhaps once in two or three years, late on a summer night, you may hear — but faint and far away in the recesses of the glen — the sweet, sad notes of Una's voice, singing those plaintive melodies. This, too, of course, in time will cease, and all be forgotten. (*BGS*, p. 465)

Le Fanu's stories are haunted, then, not by phantoms from the realm of metaphysics, but by the various projections of otherness within the complexity of personality. Far from being amused essays in a trivial genre, they are forerunners of the revolutionary hypotheses of twentieth-century thought about human identity; forceful intimations of 'the element of darkness' described by Foucault as 'the unthought', revelations of the 'obscure space' in man, a tracing of 'the blind stain by which it is possible to know him'.